

Fort Hunt Oral History  
P.O. Box 1142  
Interview with Werner Michel by Brandon Bies  
McLean, Virginia  
April 2, 2009

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Today is Thursday, April 2nd, 2009. This is an oral history interview by the National Park Service as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. We are here interviewing Mr. Werner Michel here at the Parkway Headquarters in McLean, Virginia. This is Parkway Historian Brandon Bies also joined by Parkway Ranger David Lassman. And we're also joined by two volunteer researchers, Dan Gross [phonetic] and George Coin [phonetic]. And with that, Mr. Michel, if we could start, as we mentioned earlier, with your real basic background information, such as when and where you were born?

WERNER MICHEL: Okay. Well, I'm a retired Army colonel and also retired from the Senior Executive Service [00:58] in the Office of Secretary of Defense [01:00], but I had very humble beginnings, as I was born in Landau [01:12], Germany, L-A-N-D-A-U, which is in West Germany [01:17] fairly close to the French border. And my family had been living there for hundreds of years; and when I was very young -- and I remember this -- we were still occupied by French forces, by the French army from World War I [01:47]. And they finally left in 1930. This is 12 years after the end of World War I [02:00]. The general attitude of the population -- my father had fought in the German army in World War I [02:16] -- population was very -- basically, very nationalistic, very pro-German, very anti-French because -- possibly because the nearer you get to the border or the boundary, the more intense this kind of feeling seems to occur.

INT: That's interesting because when I interviewed your cousin Fred, he said the exact same thing.

WM: He did?

INT: Yeah, he mentioned about the animosity towards the French because of them being occupying forces.

WM: Yeah. And at this time, Germany was [03:00] in very, very -- economically, very depressed. The Saar [03:07] region appeared to be lost to the French, and the political life seemed to ever become more -- lean towards extreme solutions, either of the -- towards the left or towards the right. I must say, in our area, I think the people were basically very moderate. But I do remember, as a very young boy, seeing in the streets Hitler Youth [03:58] fighting with [04:00] people they thought were Communists [04:02], and so there were a lot of these kind of disturbances going on. And economically, the situation wasn't very healthy, as I said, and my father was in the wine business, which was the prevalent economic basis in that area. It's a wine -- the major wine-producing area, that and the Moselle [04:44]. This is the Rhineland [04:46], of course -- or the Rheinpfalz, as they say in German, which is the Palatinate [04:54]. And the major product [05:00] is wine and tourism and that sort of thing; it's always the case with minor manufacturing activity in between. So then in 1933, if you recall, the president -- Germany had a parliamentary system at the time, and they'd had one election after another. It was very unstable politically, very depressed economically. So the president of Germany, who at that time was old retired General Hindenburg [05:48], and he in 1933 asked Hitler [05:54] to form a new government. There was no [06:00] anticipation that this -- what would happen; and as a matter of fact, many people in my family thought this is -- it's not going to be a bad thing because perhaps we can get some kind of an economic recovery going in this country. But, as it turned out, shortly after Hitler [06:28]

came to power, he issued a decree, which literally -- what they called it was "gleichschaltung," which meant that they were -- all political organizations were dissolved. And they -- their largest political party, basically [07:00], was the Social Democratic Party [07:01], which is a very moderate party, and there was the Zentrum, the Centre Party [07:09], which was made up to a -- quite an extent by people who were Christian or Catholic. And this party was very conservative. And then you had several parties, splinter parties, on the right, such as one which was called Stalhelm, the Steel Helmet [07:42], which was made up by -- primarily of World War I [07:47] veterans. And there were these right-wing parties and ran all the way over to the -- to the Nazi [07:56] party, which was more extreme [08:00]. And this gleichschaltung that Hitler [08:04], he completely -- he dissolved all parties. And from then on, he said there would only be one Germany, and it will be run by the National Socialist -- the NSWP, the National Socialist Workers Party [08:32]. Well, it wasn't -- as it turned out, there was nothing Socialist [08:37] about it. It was not -- didn't have much to do with workers. But immediately, then, they became -- this new government became anti-Semitic [09:00]. And by accident of birth, I was born Jewish and was brought up in a Jewish household. And we -- my father said, "This doesn't concern us. I got an Iron Cross [09:17]. I fought in the War. I'm a good German. All our ancestors were -- lived here in Germany." So they didn't pay too much attention to this thing. And they said it -- basically it's -- this is a -- in any kind of an evolutionary system or almost revolutionary, there are going to be excesses because the storm troopers beat up particularly if they found anyone who was -- whom they didn't like [10:00], they settled old scores, and that's what I think. And they particularly would pick on people of the Jewish faith. So they had -- right in the

beginning, they took -- particularly Jewish people into what they called protective custody, what is known as *schutzhaft*, protective custody. They didn't have concentration camps yet. They had places where they put these people, and they'd be beaten up and come back and they'd say, "I know. I had an uncle who is rather severely beaten, and he came back and he just didn't want to talk about it." And then they started economic boycotts of Jewish stores [11:00]. And as I was telling you on that trip out here, my grandfather had an antique business -- antique shop, and they -- immediately, the Germans -- the Nazis [11:18] came up with these vitriolic propaganda statements, and they -- one of them was the Versailles Treaty [11:33], which ended World War I [11:36], was really not caused by the loss of the war by Germans but by the -- what they called the *Dolchstoß Legende*, the Legend of the Stab in the Back [11:51], that the Germans had been stabbed in the back by elements, Communists [12:00], Jews, and other undesirable elements of the population. So they -- in my town there was a Jewish member of the city council, and they were immediately -- all Jewish civil servants, or civil servants who happened to be Jewish, were immediately thrown out of their positions and they were no longer allowed to serve on governmental bodies. And at this -- the whole thing permeated the political, economic, and the cultural aspects of society. So things didn't improve, and my father's efforts, economic efforts, were [13:00] -- just were really unsuccessful. And he -- as time went on, he wasn't able to run his business anymore, even early on, '34, in 1934. And I remember in '34, by this time I was in what they call *viauschwulle* [phonetic], which is sort of like a high school, and they would march us -- and by this time, the students were already wearing Hitler Youth [13:41] uniforms. And you had the *Jungvolk*, which were the boys between six and 11, and at age 11 or 12 they

went into the Hitler Youth [13:58]. There was an organization [14:00] for every sector of German society. There was the organization of national Socialist [14:09] lawyers, national Socialist doctors, and immediately, if you didn't meet their qualifications, if you were half-Jewish or had an uncle who was Jewish, you were not allowed to join these or you were thrown out of them. So in 1935, we were thrown out of the German school system, and they organized in my town a special -- what was really a one-room school for all of us who had been ejected [15:00] from the regular German governmental school system. And a lot of my friends -- most of my friends were not Jewish; they were just German boys like we were, and we played together. As a matter of fact, they came into my home and some of them were wearing their Hitler Youth [15:21] uniforms. But we were still friends for a while, until their parents told them not to -- not to be seen anymore with these dreaded people, you know. So in '34, when the situation became already somewhat difficult, it was arranged a -- I don't know which organization, it must have been an American-Jewish organization [16:00] -- arranged for my sister to come to this country. And she was taken in by a family in St. Louis [16:09]. And then in '35, and after I was -- after we were thrown out of the school system, and they had what they called the Nuremburg laws [16:21], and the Nuremburg laws specifically were aimed at hastening the expulsion of Jews from the -- from German society. For instance, they were not allowed from then on to use swimming pools where there were Aryans [16:50]. You were not allowed to be seen with [17:00] Aryan people. And it was -- any kind of contact was -- between German and the Jewish citizens of Germany was frowned upon. So soon my father thought maybe -- you know, he began to change his mind and -- about what was going to happen, where he'd been very optimistic before he became very

pessimistic. And, I mean, it seemed like a big pogrom against anyone who happened to be Jewish. So he also -- he wrote a letter applying -- having me sent over. And I have a big folder at home with all the documentation [18:00]. And they wrote back, this group of -- first of all, there was a group of -- it was a Jewish association, which was -- had been organized to support and understand the urgency of the situation. And they were -- they had their headquarters in Berlin [18:36] in Germany. And they had sub-offices in larger cities such as Mannheim [18:44] and Stuttgart [18:45], and Frankfurt's [18:47] one. And they wrote back -- he applied, he said, "And my daughter was sent over. How about my son? Can we send him over?" And they -- the first response was, "We [19:00] -- you know, it's very hard to get anybody into America because they're having their own domestic problems." And so the first time they wrote back and said, "We don't have any -- I'm afraid to tell you, but we have no room for your son at this time." Well, my father kept after and my mother both, my mother played a very important role in this. And they kept rewriting and appealing, and finally in early '36 -- 1936, they said, "Yes, it may -- we may have -- after all, we may have room for your son." And they said -- so and then there's more correspondence [20:00] -- and I'm giving you the gist of this -- and they said, "He has to appear at the American consulate in Stuttgart [20:09]." And remember, I didn't speak any English at all. So I go to Stuttgart and I go to this consulate and I get interviewed. And the only thing I remember is there was a typewriter there, and it said "Underwood" [20:29] on it. And so I came home and looked in a dictionary for the word "Underwood," in a German-American dictionary -- and I found nothing. Unterholz -- I don't -- I said, "What does that mean?" Underwood [20:52]. Anyway, they gave me a -- what they called a children's pass [21:00], I guess the equivalent of a passport. But it

says "kinderausweis," children's identity document, in effect. You have to forgive me. I'm not as fluent as I used to be as I get older. My mind is beginning to drift off to Underwood [21:32] now. Anyway, then they said, "We found another family also in St. Louis [21:44] who is willing to accept your son." And they sent us an instruction booklet. And this booklet of instructions said you're -- oh, first [22:00] we got the instructions to report to Hamburg [22:04] and -- by train, take a train to Hamburg, and your son will be leaving on the steamship New York [22:20] of the Hamburg-America line [22:21], which was one of -- was at that time the major steamship company. And they -- and then this instruction booklet said, "But we encourage all families not to accompany their children to the -- to the harbor in -- or to Hamburg [22:50] because we -- we're -- we don't want this to become too public. We don't want this to become a [23:00] -- too well known. So please say your farewells at home because hopefully you will get to see your children within reasonably short time." Well, my mother took me to Mannheim [23:21] on the local train, and then she put me aboard the express train to Hamburg [23:30]. And she told me to just keep smiling. I think those were her last words that she told me. So anyway, I go to Hamburg [23:44] and we were met by people from the local Jewish charity, and they made sure we were all accounted for. And we went aboard ship [24:00] on the -- I'll never forget -- on the 26th of November 1936. And we -- it was a very stormy trip. And they sort of segregated us, and I know they had a couple of foreigners who were sitting with us as we were trying to eat, and the crockery was flying all over the place, of course. And -- but the sailors were German, and they were all really very good guys and very friendly and very helpful, very sympathetic. We landed in New York [24:51] on the 4th of December 1936, and I was met by [25:00] a representative of --

what do they call it? It's a Jewish charitable organization. The Joint Distribution Committee [25:17], I think, is their name. You've heard of it, haven't you?

INT: The HIAS?

WM: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society [25:26], also.

INT: Yes.

WM: But this is the Joint Distribution Committee [25:30], who's been in existence for many, many years because so many people of my background have found refuge here in this country. Well, anyway, I was one day in New York and then they put me on the Pennsylvania Railroad [25:53] train and -- on a Pullman [26:00], and I will never forget how glorious it felt to be in that upper berth. And it had little blue lights in that -- that were on all night. You know, it was an overnight trip to St. Louis [26:16], and I was met by my new family in -- when I arrived in St. Louis. And it was a wonderful family, and the mother -- the wife of the -- of the family, she was a crackerjack. She was very dynamic, and she was very anxious for me to get into school. So they -- she didn't realize that I spoke no English, so they put me into this [27:00] -- the Eugene Fields School [27:01], which was the elementary school. And they put me in seventh grade, and it didn't work at all because I didn't understand a thing of what was going on. So they decided to give me an aptitude test, and not only didn't I speak any English, but I flunked the aptitude test. They -- it's one of those things where you're supposed to put blocks in there, and I wasn't able to follow any instructions. So they decided to keep me in school but put me in kindergarten. So here I was, a guy going on 13 sitting in kindergarten, and there were all these small tables and one big chair, which was mine. And I can just see [28:00] the very anxious demeanor of the parents when they came to pick up their

children, that there's this big guy sitting there and here's my little six-year-old. So -- but that was the -- by the way, complete immersion in the language is the greatest way of learning another language, and that's essentially how I learned English. And I stayed in kindergarten, I don't know, maybe four, five, six weeks, and then I was in first grade. I worked my way up the grades. And I graduated from Eugene Fields School [28:50] then, in 1939, 1940. And I entered [29:00] high school. My -- by the way, my mother had been able to come over here in late 1938 and my father never made it over here. And he was arrested and he -- eventually he died in Auschwitz [29:19]. And my grandmother was also taken away by the Germans; and she, by this time, was 88 years old when she was taken away. And she died in a camp in France, where they -- the French, under Marshal Petain [29:41], cooperated completely with the Germans. They did everything the Germans told them to do, and they put my grandmother -- she'd been through a lot. She -- when my mother left Germany [30:00], they put my grandmother in a retirement facility in a somewhat larger town near where we lived. And on this infamous Kristallnacht [30:17], they set fire to this -- to this place, and somehow she was able to get out. And at that time, she was 86, and in -- she went -- she made her way to Mannheim [30:37], which is a larger town. And she was taken in by a Jewish family, and then I remember this. A couple of days after the war started in 1939, we got a postcard from her; and it should have been censored [31:00], but it wasn't. Somehow, the censor -- by this time -- the Germans put a big stamp with a German eagle on any document -- and to show that it had been censored. So the -- she wrote in there in her German script that the situation was terrible, but she was hoping to -- that she'd be all right. She was in Mannheim [31:31] and the family that she was with was okay. But she didn't realize that

six months later, after the Germans invaded France, they made the French take these remaining Jews -- there were very few of them -- and they moved them in freight cars to this camp in the Pyrenees -- in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains [32:00]. Ironically, I found the place about nine years ago, where this camp had been, and it -- that's where she -- she only lived there two months afterwards because she caught typhoid [32:20]. So she -- my grandmother died there. And --

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

INT: That's okay. We're here. We're back, rolling again.

WM: I am too verbose.

INT: Yeah.

WM: Anyway, my mother came here and unfortunately, we were -- we were very poor. And so my sister had just graduated from high school and had gotten a scholarship and she had to turn it down to go to work to help support my mother. And I had the newspaper route and I delivered the Saturday Evening Post [00:46] and worked at a drive-in theater. And so we didn't have a very good [01:00] existence there. And then my sister married a very prosperous merchant there in St. Louis [01:12] and my mother and I then -- we were living with my sister then. We were renting out -- we took in boarders, basically, to help pay the rent. And then my sister got married and -- to this very successful businessman. And I was in high school and I was in my second year, and my brother-in-law called me in and he said -- I had been working for him during vacations [02:00]. He had a wholesale dry goods -- what they called dry goods business in those days, which was children's dresses, linens, and things like that. And he would take -- and I'd work there at

-- during a -- during my vacation. And then he called me, and I was in my third year of high school; and he said, "You know what? I think you're wasting your time in high school. Come to work for me, and there's no limit to what you can accomplish." And for some reason, I accepted this wonderful offer, which paid me 30 cents an hour. So I brought home \$12 a week to my mother. But then he -- I went [03:00], complained. He said, "I don't know what you're complaining about." He said, "You're really -- so far, you haven't shown any great potential." And he says, "But I tell you what I'll do. I'll pay you overtime." And overtime at that -- by law was, instead of 30 cents, I got 45 cents an hour. So I got to work 60 hours a week, whatever it was. So in the meantime, the war had broken out, and the National Guard [03:36], the Missouri National Guard, had been called to active duty like all National Guard. And they replaced it with something called the Missouri State Militia Reserve Force [03:50]. And it was called [04:00] the First Missouri Infantry Reserve Military Force [04:01]. We met in a -- in an old National Guard [04:10] armory, and I was an enemy alien [04:14] by this time because the war had started, and I had to register as an enemy alien. And I went to this First Missouri Reserve Force [04:29], and I said, "Could I join?" I wanted to do anything that I could. And they said, "But you're an enemy alien [04:41]." And -- but they said, "We'll make an exception." So I became a private. And we were issued shotguns. That's all. And we drilled. That's all we did was march up and down inside this empty armory [05:00]. And once in a while, we'd go into a state park and do some mock drilling, none of which was really, strategically, very sound.

INT: You were -- and you were 18 at the -- were you 18 at this point?

WM: What's that?

INT: How old were you at this point?

WM: I was 17.

INT: Okay.

WM: Sixteen or 17. This was 1942 or early '43. In the meantime, I hated what I was doing in this terrible, dead-end job. And so I went to the draft board and I said, "Is there any way that I can get into the service?" And they told me after a while -- I don't -- I think initially [06:00], they said, "No, you're an enemy alien [06:01]. Forget it." So -- but then they came back and said, "If you volunteer to be drafted, we'll take you." So I said, "Yes, this afternoon." He gave me a date, and I showed up at Jefferson Barracks [06:21], which is - - was at that time an Army post. I think the -- what did they call it? The great -- the Corps of Jefferson [06:41] when he sent Lewis and Clark [06:44], they started the Jefferson Barracks [06:46]. It's located right on the Mississippi River [06:50]. Anyway, I was -- I got to -- I was drafted there and sent to Fort Knox [07:00], Kentucky and took basic training there in what was then known as the Armored Force Replacement Training Center [07:08]. AFRTC, Armored Force. And I think General Devers [07:24] had been the head of it. He was a famous armored -- and then a General Scott [07:33] had it. I took basic training, which was wonderful training, very demanding physically and mentally, as well. And they really hounded us up and down those Kentucky hills and so forth. And then they sent me -- I won't go into details. I did catch [08:00] scarlet fever there, which took about a month. They put me in the hospital for a month, but I got -- I seem to have survived that. So I came out and they put me into radio operator training, and I became a Morse code [08:17] radio operator. And I completed that. I was sent to Camp Chaffee [08:25], Arkansas, where the 16th Armored Division [08:30] was training.

And they were going through about their third time of basic training. They were always training somebody else to go overseas. And they would remain there. And the commanding general was a General Green [08:53], and the reason I remember the name [09:00] is because many years later I ran into his son, who is also a General Green [09:04], of course. And he was the assistant division commander where I was a battalion commander; this is many years later. And I said, "You know, there must -- I must be getting very old when I work for two generations of generals in the same family."

Anyway, they called us all together in a -- in the stadium, and the general got up and said, "I've asked all of you together here so I can tell you what is happening." He says, "I had the highest hopes that we would be in Europe by now. However," he said, "We have to go through another training cycle [10:00]." And I never heard this ever again, but the -- why, everybody booed because they were psychologically so anxious to get going to wherever they were going. And so all these -- all these people in the stadium, 15,000 of them, just booed. They were just so disappointed. So we kept on -- we kept on training. And I was called in first. The company commander said, "You're doing a very good job." I was in the 5th Tank Battalion [10:36], radio operator for the operations officer, and the company commander called me in and he said, "You know, you're one of the better guys here. And have you ever thought about going to OCS [10:53]?" And you know, I knew nothing about it. I didn't know [11:00] -- he said, "You might do pretty well." He said, "Why don't you apply for OCS [11:07]?" So I put in an application and this is -- this is now in June, July of 1944. And I went before some kind of a board, and they asked you all these questions. What would you do if you were in a foxhole and suddenly an enemy tank ran over your foxhole? What would you do now? So I -- evidently, I passed

because I was sent to OCS [11:49].

INT: What was your answer? Get out of the foxhole?

WM: Get out. But anyway, they asked kind of hypothetical questions [12:00]. And shortly thereafter, I was approved to go to OCS [12:08], and I reported to Fort Benning [12:11] in early -- in August. It was beastly hot, both at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas [12:21] -- I might add, we lived in tarpaper shacks, black tarpaper, so -- which only increased the heat and humidity in there. You couldn't sleep at night. It was -- there were no fans; air conditioning had not been invented yet. So anyway, I go to Fort Benning [12:47] and we start a pre-OCS [12:57] training, which lasts about [13:00] --

INT: We're going to be -- Vince is going to be without --

WM: So anyway, we were in this pre-OCS [13:09] phase, and some of that included bayonet drill. And I remember there was the bayonet instructor was known as the Iron Major. His name was Bronkhorst [phonetic] [13:31]. I can't forget his name for some reason. And he would be up on this platform with a rifle and a bayonet, and he'd call a candidate up and he would say to the candidate, "You're kidding me!" because he had a terrible German accent. "Kidding me!" And he -- the candidate would sort of look like, "What do you [14:00] -- what do you -- what do you mean by this?" And he'd say, "Yes, just think that I'm a Jap." You know, you -- he says, "Kill me!" And then he would rip the rifle right out of this guy's hand and throw him off the platform. So anyway, he would -- he was an unforgettable creature. And I -- as I understand it, that was his big contribution to the war effort was teaching bayonet. Anyway, OCS [14:34] got started and we -- he was very demanding at the time. It was a 17-week course, and you went to ever-higher responsibilities, supposedly. You started out as a squad leader and then you were

supposed to be a platoon leader. And finally, you'd get to be [15:00] a company commander at various types of -- some would be attack problems, some would be defense problems. In my case, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. I didn't want anyone to see me. And I had a very tough time initially. And another aspect at that time was you rated each other. And -- but what it meant is at the end of each exercise, you had to sit down and fill out a form and say -- I think he was a lousy platoon leader. So the thing didn't go too well. And I was trying to just fit in, when suddenly one time I found on the bulletin board [16:00] -- this is near the end of the course, and I hadn't gotten really any major assignment. And it said, "Night attack of an infantry rifle company." Infantry rifle company in the night attack. And I was briefed by the TAC officer, and he said, "It'll be absolutely pitch dark, and you are to seize the objective and then reorganize -- you're supposed to fix bayonets. It -- that's the last final phase in the night." In those days, in the classical night attack. And so what we did, I had a real wonderful exec officer who played my exec in this -- for this -- for the purposes of this exercise [17:00]. And so we started out and we -- and in the night attack, you go in single file and you physically hold on to the man in front of you. And there was nothing you could see except when you looked -- we went up this -- what was obviously a clearing in the forest there in Fort Benning [17:24]. And if you looked real close, there were telephone poles. So my instructions were guide on this telephone pole, but hold on. Don't ever let go. Just hold on to the man in front of you. So we started on this exercise; and initially, everything is really going very well and we're all in this single file and you go up to what was called the probable line [18:00] of deployment. And that is where you finally, then, go into the final attack. So as we were going up this incline, this hill, and you can't see

very much, suddenly somebody throws a grenade, and it's a tear gas grenade. And so we all say, "Gas!" You pass the word back. And we all put on these gas masks. The only problem was that the eyepiece had fallen out of my gas mask. So I was a recipient of a lot of tear gas, and I went -- I went crazy. And I tried to get rid of the guy in -- holding on to me, and he wouldn't let go. Nobody would let go [19:00]. And we went up and finally we made it through the gas. We went into the PLD, the probable line of deployment, overran the objective, and by this time, it's about 2:00 in the morning. So now the TAC officer calls us together and says, "This is a tough problem." And he said, "I'd like to take -- the company commander was Candidate Michel, and I'd like him to give us a briefing on what happened." So I'm now in a quandary. I said -- if I tell them that I almost panicked because my gas mask broke, what am I going to do [20:00]? They'll throw me completely out of the course. So I went to my exec. This guy was a former Army sergeant. He'd had several years' service. He says, "Don't volunteer a damn thing. Don't say anything." So I go into this briefing and I tell them about what had occurred. And he -- I ended up and said we overran it. Everybody held on to everybody else. We didn't lose anybody. And he said, "Okay, good." He says, "Now, I'll give -- I'll tell you what my observations were." And he said, "You know, every class has one difficult problem, and this is probably the most difficult that you have." And he said, "Many times we have absolute failures [21:00]. They -- people don't hold on to each other. They lose control. They -- there's an absence of leadership." He said, "Tonight, none of this happened. This is absolutely one of the best exercises I've ever observed." He said, "You did a great job." And I kept my mouth shut. And -- but about 10 days later we were commissioned. Okay. All my classmates -- Class 382 [21:39]. I

mean, they turned -- by the way, they turned out almost a class a day in those -- in -- at the height of the war. And I might just briefly get off that topic for a moment [22:00]. This was now in the fall of '44. And by this time, the Americans had broken through the Falaise Gap [22:11] and had -- and there was a great deal of optimism; and as I understand it, General Eisenhower [22:21] thought that -- you know, they thought the war would be over by Christmas and so forth and so on. And they hadn't -- of course, anticipated the Battle of the Bulge [22:31]. So -- but in the meantime, what they had done from a personnel standpoint because, let's face it, OCS [22:41] is a supply and demand situation. If you have a lot of losses of platoon leaders, you need more platoon leaders. And so as we had so much success suddenly, they reduced the number of classes. And instead of one a day [23:00], they had maybe two a week or three a week. And we lost, through attrition, some candidate that did some minor thing wrong and he was gone. And so our bunks, our beds, they had -- we had more room each time as these guys disappeared. Anyway, I made it and was commissioned, and all my -- the fellows that I graduated with, they were -- they were gone and they -- and I'm sure they became rifle platoon leaders. Either they went to Europe or I think many of them went to the Far East. They held me there for about two weeks doing -- working for the Post S-2, Post Intelligence Office [24:00]. I should have realized then my life was going to change. Then I was assigned -- I got my assignment to Camp Joseph T. Robinson [24:12], Arkansas. So I had come from Arkansas to OCS [24:19] and I left as a second lieutenant and I went back to Little Rock, Arkansas, which is where Joseph T. Robinson [24:27] was located. And I was there about -- I taught -- this was a basic training camp, and I taught machine gun technique of fire, hand grenades, personal hygiene. We had a lot of

people who didn't have a background of a lot of hygiene, who didn't even wear underwear. They were -- they came out of the hills somewhere [25:00]. And I was there about -- just about two months when I got a call to see the battalion commander, a lieutenant colonel. His name was Hidalgo [25:16]. He was from Puerto Rico. And when I came in there, he'd come from a line outfit, which had been in the Aleutians [25:29], either Attu [25:33] or someplace like that, or Kodiak [25:37]. Anyway, he called me in and he said, "Lieutenant, whom do you know in Washington?" And I said, "Colonel, I don't even know anybody here." So he said, "Well," and he pulled out a set of orders [26:00]. He said, "I've got these classified orders, and you are to leave for a place called Camp Ritchie [26:07]." And I said to myself, I said, "Why would I be going?" He said, "Well, that's some kind of a special camp, I understand, where they send linguists -- do you speak any languages?" And I said, "Yeah, I speak German." "That's it. That's why you're going. Get going." So I went to a -- I got on the train in Little Rock, and I think we went to Baltimore, and we were picked up there by a bus or something, or we may even have taken a train. I think in those days the Western Maryland Railroad [26:52] ran right through Hagerstown [26:58], and we may have been picked up there [27:00]. I reported in to Ritchie [27:02], which was an old National Guard [27:05] installation, and the significant part of it -- of Ritchie [27:12] was that you went into these -- into this gate, and then there were some temporary buildings, and then there were permanent, small buildings, which were little, small classrooms, as I found out. And I was assigned to this notorious Class 29 [27:43]. By this time, by the way, the war was almost over. It was -- I think we reported in in March, March '45 [28:00]. The war was almost -- was in its last phases. Anyway, we were -- we were trained to be what was -- the MOS was called 9316,

which is interrogation officer German. And they were training people there to be interrogators and interpreters and translators, a varying degree of knowledge of German. And they also, I think, taught -- I think they taught -- they may have taught some Japanese there. I'm not sure anymore. But we were -- and we were -- it was a high-intensity course, and we -- they taught us all these German acronyms, the German Army, the German Wehrmacht [28:57], had acronyms [29:00] the likes of which we hadn't -- you know, the -- for instance, they had the MG-42 [29:12], which was their 1942 -- there was a high rate of fire machine gun. And they referred to it as the overgewehr [phonetic], which means it made it sound like diarrhea. They called it the diarrhea gun. Overgewehr -- and that's off the subject. Anyway, we learned to identify all German uniforms, and the Germans had all kinds of badges, tabs, rank insignia. We learned German tactics. We even got [30:00] a little bit of photo interpreter training so that we could learn to use a stereo pair when you looked at an aerial photograph. But basically it was interrogation. And the curriculum was so well done that -- was so well constructed that you had to follow a certain thrust. And the idea was that you would then be able -- the prisoner was then to tell you what you needed to know in order to answer an essential element of information. In other words, an EEI, as we call it, essential element of information [31:00]. So in other words, if you want all of us -- the Germans were going to counterattack, what -- now what are the indicators of a counterattack? Amassing of troops, the amassing of artillery behind the lines, the attack aircraft, greater numbers of attack aircraft, which are to support that. River crossings, and that's how engineers would -- and so you -- if you did your job in these practice interrogations, the guy would tell -- he would end up -- you would ask him, "Now, how's the artillery over there?" And he

says, "Well, we've got lots of artilleries." And we'd say, "How about bridging equipment [32:00]?" "Yeah, well -- there's this small river." And you'd -- and they would tell you if you were successful in your interrogation.

INT: We're going to take a little break right now because the tapes are about out, so I need to -- believe it or not, we've already gone through an hour. So we're --

WM: This thing -- we'll be here after two weeks. Will I get a promotion or something?

INT: If you're lucky, you'll be a --

[End of Tape 1B]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

INT: Today is Thursday, April 2nd, 2009. This is an oral history interview as a part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. We are here interviewing Mr. Werner Michel, veteran of military intelligence, among other things, during World War II [00:20]. This is the second in a series of interviews. This is Brandon Bies of the National Park Service. We're also joined by David Lassman of the National Park Service and we'll be joined by Vincent Santucci over the phone. And joined by two Fort Hunt Oral History Project volunteers, Dan Gross and George Coin. And with that, Mr. Michel, if you want to pick back up with a little bit more at Camp Ritchie [00:49]. You said you had a few more things to tell us about that.

WM: Well, one of the things that I recall is the commander of -- when I was there [01:00], was an Army colonel by the name of Banfill [01:06]. And he decided to be more productive, that instead of working the normal hours, that we would work seven days a week and get off on the eighth day instead of -- in other -- in other words, one week we were off on Monday; the next week we were off on Tuesday; and so forth. And that was called Ban-

Day. I think he's gone down in history. That's his major contribution to military history. And I understand he ended up as a brigadier general in the Air Corps. Anyway, I was talking about [02:00] the curriculum and how excellent it was and how demanding the interrogations were, very demanding as I recall. And then we had one particular practical exercise, which was a night problem. Oh, by the way, we had to read a lot of maps, of course, and German documents, German manuals, field -- German field manuals and that sort of thing. But we had one field exercise, and those were usually held at -- Camp Ritchie's [02:49] located virtually on the Pennsylvania-Maryland border. And this exercise took place near Gettysburg [03:00], and as I recall, we went to Little -- it was on the battlefield, actually. It was called Little Round Top [03:10], I think. We went up there, and we were dropped off from a truck, and we were supposed to find our way back to Camp Ritchie [03:22]. And somehow, we did it; but I understand a lot of the students there before us, they used to go in to see the nearest farmer, who were all familiar with what was going on there. And they would -- they were lost, obviously, and they'd say -- and they'd -- the farmer would already know. "Oh, you're from Camp Ritchie [03:51]? Well, you -- this is how you get back to Camp Ritchie." So anyway, this was a good exercise, and it was on Little Round Top [04:00] is where they dropped us off. We had to go up to the knob there, which is part of the -- I think of the National Park Battlefield [04:11] of Gettysburg [04:15]. Then we got -- I don't -- I don't have any real knowledge of what the intentions were for us as far as we didn't go into any corps or Army level. We were simply interrogators at the tactical level is what we were trained for. But in the meantime, the war had ended.

INT: Yeah, I'll just -- I'm going to put this on mute. I'm on a conference call. They're

interviewing a veteran.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Vince, you're on [05:00].

WM: So I can't tell you a lot about -- there were no CIA [05:12] or OSS [05:14] people there that I recognized, at least. Even though some that went overseas with me eventually did end up working for CIA [05:25]. But we were -- and I said, we were a motley crew of people who were interpreters, translators, and interrogators.

INT: Of your class, was your class entirely officers, or were there enlisted men in your class as well?

WM: I think we -- that there was a mixture. I think that the -- I think we essentially got the same training. And I might say that this is where -- the first time [06:00] I got to meet my cousin. I wasn't even aware where he was in this country and so forth.

INT: Had you met Fred [06:07] in Landau [06:08]?

WM: Yeah.

INT: You knew him in Germany?

WM: Yeah, we knew each other. We lived just a few blocks apart.

INT: But in the United States [unintelligible]?

WM: But we hadn't seen each other then -- since then. And as a matter of fact, it's sort of a humorous anecdote because I got a -- I -- we were all issued a little pigeonhole box, and you'd find if somebody wanted to talk to you or interview you or mentioned something. So I got one of these one day. This is from my memory, anyway. Fred [06:46] may not remember it this way. But I found a note telling me to report to the library, so I go. And it told me when to report, so I go there [07:00]. And there's this very angry sergeant who says, "Michel, you -- where in the hell has this manual been? You took it out -- took out

this manual." I said, "I didn't know." And he says, "Well, God damn it, give it back." And I said -- I looked and I saw it was a sergeant, and I said, "Oh, I'm wearing the lieutenant bar." I said, "Who are you looking for?" And he looked up and he saw my -- saw I was a commissioned officer. And he, of course, was very apologetic. And he says, "Aren't you Corporal Fred Michel [07:49]?" And I said -- "Frederick Michel" -- and I said, "No, I'm Lieutenant Werner Michel." And so then I looked up Fred and that's how [08:00] --

INT: So that's how you found him?

WM: That's how I remember it, anyway. Anyway, then we got orders -- and please interrupt me if you have any other questions -- but we got orders to go to Camp Shanks [08:16], New York.

INT: I -- if you don't mind, maybe I will ask a few more if you're finished with Camp Ritchie [08:22] in your story.

WM: Yes.

INT: Maybe we'll ask a few more Camp Ritchie stories --

WM: Okay.

INT: -- prior to going to that. Who -- what do you remember about your instructors at Camp Ritchie [08:33]?

WM: The instructors?

INT: [affirmative]

WM: I thought they were excellent without any exception. I felt they were -- it was a -- they assumed you were a fairly intelligent human being; otherwise, you wouldn't be there. And so I was very impressed with the level of instruction [09:00].

INT: Were -- did you get the impression that the instructors had professional interrogation experience? Had they been folks who had already been to the ETO [09:10] and had done interrogation?

WM: I think there probably were some among them. I don't know any factual. I couldn't explain any more about this, but I have to assume because wherever you went in the Army, at least, you always found some non-coms and officers who had returned from combat. Southwest Pacific [09:37] or they'd been in North Africa [09:40]. I remember I ran into North Africa. As a matter of fact, when I went through basic training, our first sergeant, he compared us to the people he'd met in World War I [09:54], and he thought we didn't measure up.

INT: Another few questions [10:00] about Ritchie [10:03]. Did your -- when you got your orders to ship out, did your entire class ship out as one, or did you all receive your individual assignments to go --

WM: No, we all -- there was a whole group. I still have the orders. I've shown them to this volunteer over here.

INT: Dan, do we know if there were any 1142 [10:27] veterans in Werner's class?

WM: Well, Fred Michel [10:34], of course.

INT: Well, but -- and it -- was Fred in your class?

WM: Yes.

INT: Oh, he was?

WM: Yeah.

INT: Okay.

WM: He was in my class.

INT: Yeah, they were. I don't remember the names right now, but I can look that up.

INT: Which leads me to the next question. When you were at Camp Ritchie [10:52], had you ever heard of this other interrogation center known as P.O. Box 1142 [11:00] --

WM: No.

INT: -- at that time? Obviously, afterwards --

WM: No.

INT: Okay. So that -- so when you were at Camp Ritchie [11:06], your understanding was that you were being trained to eventually be shipped overseas to do interrogations?

WM: Yeah.

INT: Okay.

WM: And that's what happened, actually. And then when we -- now, here's -- when we finally -- we went to England, we went on the Queen Elizabeth [11:28], I remember. And the war was over, and they were still looking for mines floating around, but that was absolutely nothing. And we made the trip in six days, I think, very fast. Too, we landed in Scotland, in Greenwich [11:50], and I remember they put us aboard a train, and that took us to a place called Hursley Park [11:58], where all of us got together [12:00]. And we waited, being shipped out then to France, which we knew that was going to happen. And we were taken over to Le Havre [12:23] in France. We stayed in Hursley Park [12:27] about nine or 10 days or something like -- I remember it was terrible because they gave us meat and beans rationed. These were the C rations [12:41], and they gave them to us morning, noon, and night. So we -- so it was very difficult living with the other guys in the same [unintelligible] hut because their metabolism [13:00] would cause problems. And as they -- another side anecdote, we had a -- one of the fellows I

graduated with, his name was Fritz Niebergall [13:20], and he was -- he's on one of the rosters. Fritz Niebergall was German. He was not a Jewish refugee. He was not Jewish, but he was -- had been born in Germany. And so we -- so we were sitting here, always eating those wretched beans. And the -- how did we get these beans? It was given to us. We went through what they called a chow line, you know. And the chow line was manned by German prisoners, and they had on the back big "POW" [14:00] and they wore cast-off -- or they still wore German uniforms, but they had big "POW." And so we had been told to speak German all the time amongst ourselves because you're going to go into situations where you will be doing interrogation. So we're there, miserably eating those things -- eating those miserable things is what I'm trying to say. And suddenly, one of the Germans comes over, a German sergeant, and he clicks his heels and says, "Kann ich eine Frage stellen?" -- "Can I ask a question?" -- and Niebergall [14:53], who was sort of a hoaxman, said, "Natürlich." Of course [15:00]. And this German sergeant says, "Ya, sind Sie Deutsche oder sind Sie Amerikaner?" -- "Are you Germans or are you Americans?" And Niebergall [15:13] says, "What do you think? Was glaubst du? What do you believe?" And he says, "Well, I think you're Germans." And Niebergall says, "Natürlich, of course we are." So then this guy says, "[speaks German]." We were all officers in the shipment. We were separated from our own enlisted, by the way. And he said, "How did you become American officers?" And Niebergall [15:52], who was never at a loss for words, said, "We were all in the Afrika Corps [15:56] and when we were captured in Tunisia [16:00], the Americans were so impressed with us that they offered us commissions." So they -- little did we know, you know, we were so angry about these meat and bean -- these bean things, and we had contemplated complaining to the camp

commander, who was quartermaster, captain or a major. But instead, the Germans who were these prisoners, all -- they all submitted a request to the American camp commander that they be given commissions in the American Army. So that's just a little humorous anecdote for our stay in Hursley Park [16:52]. So then we went on a ferry over to Le Havre [16:58], and from Le Havre [17:00] we went to something called MIS rear, Military Intelligence Service [17:06] rear. And we stayed in a -- I think it was the town Étampes [17:16], which was sort of an American Army camp. And then we were there -- we weren't there very, very long. We were there maybe five days, six days, and then they put us on a train for Germany. And that took us to MIS [17:43] forward, military intelligence forward, and this was located near [18:00] -- I'm trying to think of it now. It's near Wiesbaden [18:06], near the town of Wiesbaden, which is a spa in Germany. And it was -- as a matter of fact, it was called Bad Schwalbach [18:17] was the name of it. That's where MIS [18:21] forward was located. And at Bad Schwalbach -- by the way, there was a big SS [18:30] hospital there for SS prisoners. And then we were quartered in a German hotel there. The Duke of Nassau [18:42], I remember now. And then we were interviewed by representatives of various divisions, who were looking for replacements. They were going home [19:00], and we were to replace and work in prisoner of war enclosures and interrogate prisoners and war crimes suspects and that sort of thing. So I was -- I was interviewed by the 9th Division [19:19] representative -- a captain, who himself had been a -- he'd been commissioned at Ritchie [19:30]. He's -- that one class I was telling you about, where they -- just a single class in 1944 where they took sergeants and commissioned them. And we jocularly referred to all those people as third lieutenants because they had never gone through OCS [19:56]. They hadn't been in

ROTC. They were just [20:00] -- apparently, the Army was in dire need of linguists and interrogators, and so -- but then they stopped this program before it ever really got -- and it was only one class, that I understand, because I have a friend who worked for me in my detachment who became a colonel in the reserve later on. He stayed in the reserve, and he told me about the third lieutenants. He's the one who told -- I didn't know they used that term. And anyway, I was interviewed by this captain, and he said, "You'll have the 270th IPW team, which should be with the 60th Infantry [21:00]." So I -- from Bad Schwalbach [21:08], which was a headquarters at that time, we drove down to the town of Ingolstadt [21:16], where the POW [21:19] camp was. And I took over the 270; they had about five or six enlisted men who were all born in Germany or who were very, very knowledgeable in German. And I worked for the 60th Infantry [21:47]. It was, as I told - - as I told you on the way over here, was commanded by Colonel Westmoreland [21:58], who later became Chief of Staff of the Army [22:00] and was commander in Vietnam [22:04] for several years. Anyway, so I went over -- went into the cage, the prisoner of war camp, and that was a bombed-out German ordinance depot, as I was told. And we had about 80,000 to 100,000 prisoners there. And you know, you -- how do you run a prisoner of war camp? How do you organize something like that? So you work through the Germans, and the guy who ran the camp internally was a German signal corps officer by the name of Newman [22:53]. He had -- N-E-W-M-A-N, he had an English name and he spoke fluent English. Of course, he was fluent in German too [23:00]. And so what we would do, we would task him with producing these people for interrogation. And they cooperated with us, and they were -- they were particularly -- I was going to say subservient. They did anything we wanted them to do. So during -- so we would

interrogate these people; and at the time, I remember we were looking for these Malmedy Massacre [23:35] SS [23:36] who had been -- there was a very, very intense search for anyone who might have been involved in that -- where they executed 120 or so American soldiers who had given up, who had surrendered [24:00]. And the -- well, the German I talked to, General Dietrich [24:07] later on, he's the head of the 6th SS Panzer Army [24:13], I had later on a special task of going to Camp Dachau [24:20], which you've been to, I understand. And that's where they held -- where all the suspects were being held. And Dietrich [24:34] was the commander of the 6th SS Panzer Army [24:38], and I'm trying to think of the name of the commander of the real -- I would say the real trigger guy. And he was an obersturmbannfuhrer -- he was a [25:00] regimental commander in the -- at first SS [25:06] regiment, which was the -- known as the Hitler -- or Adolf Hitler's [25:11] guard, [speaks German] Adolf Hitler. And his name was -- I can't think of his name right now. He was a rabid Nazi [25:25], and they sentenced Dietrich [25:30], I think, to 20 years or 25 years, and then they released him after about seven years. And this guy also was given -- none of them were -- initially, they were supposed to be executed, but then that was overturned. And, oh, his name I now remember. His name was Yoachim Peiper [26:00]. I don't know if you've ever heard the -- have you heard the name? Yoachim Peiper. And I interrogated both of them, only my purpose was -- my task was to go down to Dachau [26:20], down -- it was southeast from where I was located -- and establish beyond a doubt their identity, discharge them from the German Armed Forces [26:37], and arrest them as war criminals. And that's -- I did that with my detachment.

INT: And so what happened to them once they were arrested as war criminals? Were they sent

off with MPs to --

WM: Where they'd done what?

INT: What happened to them when --

WM: Well, they were held in -- see, they [27:00] -- these were not considered primary war -- the primary ones were in Nuremburg [27:06].

INT: Okay.

WM: You know, who were they -- who were the -- Himmler [27:17] and Göring [27:19] and -- they all went to -- they all went to Nuremburg [27:22].

INT: So these folks did not --

WM: These were secondary-level, so now there -- the Russians, when they caught them, they just shot them. But we gave them a bona fide trial, and this fellow Peiper [27:39], I think he was released after seven or eight years. And then he moved to France and he was murdered there. Somebody -- I don't know whether it was -- who -- I don't think they ever found the murderer [28:00], but I think -- I thought they should have all been executed, but nobody listened to me at the time. Anyway, I had -- I had special tasks. Another task I had, for instance, was to go to a prisoner of war installation in Neu-Ulm [28:22]. You've heard of the town of Ulm, U-L-M, which has a magnificent cathedral, by the way; and which we avoided during the War. It stood there, never touched. And in the town of Neu-Ulm [28:41], which is just across the river. It was a prisoner of war enclosure for general and flag officers only. And they had over 500 German generals and admirals and Luftwaffe [29:00] generals there. And my job there was to determine if these people were fit for debriefing by the historical division -- your ancestors. The historical division of USFET, United States Forces European Theater [29:21]. Or to see

which ones were so tainted as Nazis [29:28] that they were not acceptable and would never be able to give us an objective description of what had happened. So that was -- and so I had essentially two detachments. I had one up in Engelstadt [29:58]. And I had the second one [30:00] in the small town [unintelligible]. And we supported the [unintelligible] regiment, and we did anything that the division chief of staff wanted. And for instance, one time I had to escort some Soviet [30:27] officers who were to address some prison -- they were in a refugee camp, but they were -- a goodly number of them, of course, had been in the Soviet [30:46] army. But they were not prisoners of war. We did turn over some Soviets [30:56] to the Soviets and some Hungarians to the Hungarians [31:00] and some of that was very sad, of course, because they obviously disappeared. But I had to -- in this particular case, there was this displaced persons camp. And these Soviet [31:17] officers came, and their ostensible purpose was to persuade these people to return to the Soviet Union [31:27]. And I was to escort them there, and I was to have an interpreter for me, a Ukrainian who spoke reasonably good English. And so we go into this camp, and the Soviet [31:53] officers had met me at the headquarters of the 60th Infantry [31:57]. And they drove in a captured [32:00] German sedan, an Opel, I remember. And they -- and I had a Jeep and my driver, and there were just two of us.

INT: Okay. Just hold on one second.

WM: Yeah.

[End of Tape 2A]

[Beginning of Tape 2B]

INT: We're good. No commercial interruptions.

WM: Anyway, we head to this camp, which is located near Engelstadt [00:10] also. And they

have all these Ukrainians, thousands of Ukrainians there, and Bielo Russians and whatever they were, and these Soviets [00:27] set up what must have been an American Army field table and set up a little desk. And they had a list there, they were going to come up and sign that they would voluntarily return to the Soviet Union [00:49]. And the problem really was that these people didn't really want to return to the Soviet Union. So these -- the Soviet [01:00] officers -- there was a major and there were two captains and I think a sergeant or something like that, they started this speech and they said, "Whatever you have done is forgiven. Marshall Stalin [01:19], the father, will forgive you for anything you may have done. So come here and sign up and you will be going back to the motherland." These guys got angrier. They wanted no part in this thing. They started throwing rocks, and pretty soon they started getting -- this mass of humanity started to come towards us. And so I mentioned to this major who spoke some -- I think -- I said, "I think we'd better [02:00] terminate." And we got -- we got it on the -- they all -- they overturned their vehicle. So he got into my Jeep and this two guy -- cohorts and we escaped from that camp. Anyway, so I -- we didn't -- I never did any strategic interrogations other than, as I said, for the historical division, just those debriefs, these journals.

INT: You said you were mostly trying to identify, to confirm -- you were mostly trying to confirm identities?

WM: In that -- where those generals were?

INT: [affirmative]

WM: Basically, we would identify them. And some of them were four-star, some of them were three-star, and one was -- that I remember distinctly [03:00] was the commander of

Lufttransport Mittelmeer, Air Transport Command Mediterranean [03:06]. And he started out, he said, with 1,400 Junkers 52s [03:15]. Do you remember what those were? They were like the Ford Trimotor [03:20].

INT: Enter the Trimotors, yeah.

WM: Right? And he said I ended up with three. He said they flew about 110 miles an hour, something like that. So he lost -- and then another one of those generals came to me to complain. He said, "Wir sind unter der Genfer Konferenz" -- "We're under the Geneva Convention [03:52]." And "[speaks German] [04:00] however, I think that under the Geneva Convention, the officers are separate from the enlisted men. But we are forced to cook our own food." And I said, "Es tut mir leid. I feel sorry for you." He said, "I want to complain about this, you know." And I said, "Well, that's your privilege, but however, I'm" -- I said, "I'm just here to determine who you are and what you did." And so I would only get a brief biography of these guys, who they were, and I remember we had General Milch [04:49], the head of the German Air Force [04:50]. And we had General Balck [04:55], who had headed Army Group B, I think [05:00], in -- on the Eastern Front [05:04]. Army -- Germans had these Army groups. And so I had a group of notorious -- these were all Army -- these were not SS [05:22] or anything, but we would -- of course, we were constantly looking for SS people. And we would look for wanted lists, and we would arrest -- we would go on raids, and we'd find some of these people who had -- who hadn't been picked up before. And basically, that was what we did.

INT: Now, we've -- we talked a little bit earlier today about how you had some association with Gehlen [06:00], although you never meet him. Could you talk about how your involvement with that?

WM: Well, that is much later.

INT: Oh, is it? Okay.

WM: When I went to CIC [06:11].

INT: Oh, okay.

WM: If you're ready for --

INT: No way, what -- we can keep going chronologic. If you have more, yeah, I'd rather handle it chronologically.

WM: Well, I was -- you know, we went through a real political transformation there. We thought -- you know, we were allied with the Soviets [06:37]. And no one -- I mean, even at senior levels, I don't know what the awareness was of what the Soviets [06:49] were doing, even so a lot of people such as, I think, General Patton [06:53] early on thought that eventually [07:00] that the two allies would -- the alliance would break up and there would be a struggle between East and West. So -- and of course, this is what Gehlen [07:16] exploited, I think. And a lot of Germans that later on when I was in CIC [07:25], I worked with German -- I worked in counterintelligence against the Communist [07:32] party and against the East -- the East Germans. And I recruited agents in order to penetrate the Communist [07:50] party of Bavaria in Munich [07:52]. I was in Munich by this time. This is jumping ahead. And -- but the German attitude [08:00] was that we think Europe is lost and we think it's inevitable that the Soviets [08:08] are going to overrun Western Europe. And this was one of my big points when I recruited an agent, would be to say, "We can't -- we Americans are not here forever. What are you going to do about this?" And they'd say -- I worked with some young students from the University of Munich [08:36], and this is when I was CIC [08:41]. And they'd say,

"What can we do?" and I said, "You can -- for instance, you have to find out what the enemy is doing and what he's thinking about." And so that's one of my [09:00] ploys was to exploit the motivation of the East Germans and their fear -- I exploited their fear of the Soviets [09:13]. As a matter of fact, I have -- I recruited one guy who is a wonderful -- he was a very devout Catholic. And they were in this Catholic party, and he gave me a collection of his books. These are wonderful books. And he said, "Please take them because when the Russians come, all this will be destroyed." So this is -- this is before Gehlen [09:55]. I [10:00] probably should move ahead and tell you that I was -- I went to a conference. I was selected to go to a conference in Frankfurt [10:12] at headquarters, G-2, and it was about the terrible -- the terrible need for linguists. What can we do about this? And particularly in CIC [10:34], we have no linguists, and before I knew it, I was transferred to CIC and I was sent to the town of -- my first assignment was the town of Memmingen [10:50].

INT: Would this have been in 1945 still, or is it '46?

WM: No, this is '46. First, before then, I went into [11:00] -- the American occupation was running down. Instead of -- initially, we were going to keep 20 divisions there because Germany was no longer going to be -- you know, the Morgenthau theory [11:19] was that we were going to make an agrarian country out of this place, take the Krupps Steel Works [11:30], turn those into plowshares, right? Anyway, that didn't happen, but -- what? But they did see there was no longer a need for 20 divisions. So the military -- very strange. Policies can change overnight. I'm sure it [12:00] happens everywhere in government. And so they -- from 20 divisions, they went down to 16 divisions to 12 divisions to eight divisions; and finally, I think they kept -- the occupation forces were

reduced to something like three or four divisions, the 9th [12:22] being one of them. But to take the place of all these divisions, they said we're going to have a -- organize another element, and this was known as the United States Constabulary [12:36]. Have you ever heard of that? It was to be -- at full strength, to have 38,000 men in it. It never reached it. The head of it was Ernest Harmon [13:00], who had been Patton's [13:06] deputy. And he had his own train -- remember, that was General Patton's train -- and we knew Harmon [13:14] was coming. And so what happened, I was transferred to the constabulary. And what they did -- and the constabulary was filled up with all these replacements who had -- by this time, I'd been in Germany a year and a half. These replacements didn't know anything about Germany, didn't know what was going on. All they knew is "We'll teach these Germans a lesson." So they were -- they were -- they thought they were still in World War II [13:49]. And so what they did, I was in the 5th Constabulary Regiment [13:56], and we were [14:00] equipped with armored cars with 37-millimeter guns. We were equipped with trucks, and we -- and in the mountains, we even had a few mounted platoons on horseback. Don't ask me why. Anyway, I went on some raid -- we raided some German -- some German hotels and German places, looking for -- still looking for SS [14:39] men and so forth and so on. And luckily, then I was transferred to CIC [14:47]. And I was sent to Memmingen [14:53]. I reported into headquarters, which was in Munich [14:57], and I [15:00] went to Memmingen. And Memmingen, as I read in the book that you gave me the other day, "Blowback" [15:12], was on the rat line -- was a main stop on the rat line where they extricated Gestapo [15:23] and SS [15:24] men from Germany to get them out of Europe, Barbie [15:31] being one of them. And so I worked with informants, but I worked on what they call the internal desk, which was still focused

primarily on extremist political activities, right or left.

INT: Now, when you were in CIC [16:00] -- forgive me; this might be an obvious question -- but were you considered -- were you still in the military at that time?

WM: Yes.

INT: Okay. So --

WM: But we wore -- we wore civilian clothes sometimes, and we wore U.S.'s instead of rank insignia. And only the region commander wore uniform, and the rest of us were -- we were called -- we signed our reports as Special Agent. And so that was my first assignment. And I -- probably my first contact with or knowledge about Gehlen [16:55] activities were [17:00] when I had a walk-in -- that's a trade craft term, when somebody comes into your office and volunteers to become an agent for you. And I had a walk-in, and this fellow was German and yet he had a -- he spoke Russian fluently. And he had a background of working in what they called [speaks German], which was a code name for [speaks German]. [Speaks German] was the eastern -- was the collection of intelligence on the Soviets [17:55]. And [18:00] I had learned -- I just heard about this Operation Rusty [18:06] that this was -- they were -- that the situation with the Soviets [18:15] was becoming very tenuous, estranged, and adversarial; and that they were organizing an outfit called Operation Rusty [18:40]. And I learned more about it when I was transferred to Berlin [18:46] -- not Berlin, to Munich [18:48], to headquarters of the region. And initially, I was even -- for a couple of weeks, there was a Captain Eric Waldman [18:57], who was [19:00] the main liaison guy with Gehlen [19:05]. Am I right?

INT: Yep.

WM: And I met this Waldman [19:09] several times while I was in Munich [19:11], and I think he went on leave once, and he said would I go and visit. I went to Pullach [19:19] a couple of times. That's where Gehlen [19:22], of course, was located. I never met him.

INT: At this time, Gehlen [19:27] was back in --

WM: Germany.

INT: Okay. Because to my understanding, he was at Fort Hunt [19:33] for nine months from '45 to '46.

WM: He -- wasn't it -- almost for a year, wasn't it?

INT: Yeah, it was for almost -- for a year.

WM: Yeah.

INT: And then by mid to late '46, he returned to Germany to start gathering up individuals.

WM: And then this -- and we were told that Rusty [19:54] was in operation. This is when we started to collect seriously [20:00] on the Soviets [20:02] and Communists [20:03], and they said well, these are people that are working for another agency. And so it happened that many of them, a goodly number of these people, were scoundrels. They were -- they were involved in black market, and they were supposed to cross over into Czechoslovakia, which by this time was, of course, a -- in the Soviet [20:40] orbit and was -- and they'd be caught, either by the German -- what they called a bundesgrenzschutz, which is the border police, who picked these people up by the tons [21:00]. And then we would have to go get them out of jail and give them back to the -- to Rusty [21:08]. But there were so many of these. We didn't see any -- we thought it was a quantitative effort, not a qualitative effort. That was basically -- a CIC [21:23] agent's view of this Operation Rusty [21:26]. So -- but we -- of course, the CIA [21:34] was just beginning, so I

imagine they were trying as hard as they could because also, I think, there was a degree of parochialism involved. They were not too fond of what CIC [21:54] did. As a matter of fact, one time [22:00] I had a personal experience when I got a phone call in Munich [22:05]. Later on, I was called a resident agent for Munich -- for the Munich area, and my target was the Bavarian Communist Party [22:16]. And one time, I got this phone call from somebody who said he wanted to meet me at a restaurant. And to make a long story short, he was a CIA [22:29] agent who was trying to recruit me.

INT: So I guess he paid?

WM: He paid my lunch. So anyway, this guy that I met in Memmingen [22:44], I think he's the one who gave me this, which is a copy of an intelligence estimate, high-level intelligence [23:00], this obviously was meant to be read by the very senior leadership in the Wehrmacht [23:09]. And since it looks at the period from April '42 to December '44, it couldn't have ended up as a very optimistic view, in my estimation, because by December '44, the Soviets [23:32] were in East Prussia. They were in Hungary. They were entering Austria. And so this -- if he signed this in December -- this is Part A, he calls it, Evaluations of the Enemy Situation on the German -- on the East Front [24:00] in a large scale. And he -- it goes on and on and on. And he examines it -- and an Army group -- North Army Group Center [24:20]. And this one, this is Army -- Heeresgruppe Mitte, which is Army Group Center, of course. [Unintelligible]. So anyway, I was in CIC [24:43], and I returned. I had some very interesting experiences in CIC [24:55]. And when I came back [25:00] to the States in '48, I was, by the way, on one of the last trains before the Berlin [25:09] [speaks German]. I was on a train that was held up, but we were surrounded by a Russian -- a Soviet [25:19] rifle company, and they demanded

to get on board the train because, they insisted, we were transferring Fascists [25:29] from West Berlin [25:32] to West Germany [25:33]. And fortunately, we had a very good MP lieutenant. All they had on there was usually a military police officer, a lieutenant with perhaps three or four MPs, and here we are, staring at these 150 Russians with -- they stopped our train, took away the engine, and they just [26:00] -- and I was carrying some classified documents. And I was trying to figure out how I could get rid of those things. And I knew putting them in the toilet wouldn't help because they flushed right on the --

INT: On the train track.

WM: -- on the rails, on the tracks, you know. So anyway, we had some civilian employees of the Army aboard who were also on this thing, and some other civilian. And this Soviet [26:34] kept saying, "All I want is to get on train to see Fascists [26:42]. You give us Fascists, we let you go." And this MP said, "This is American soil, this train. You don't get on this -- you don't get on this train [27:00]." And after about seven hours or so, they let us go and we went on to Helmstedt [27:06], which was the border crossing point between East Germany [27:11] and West Germany [27:13]. And shortly thereafter, I had -- I had been targeted on, as I said, on Communists [27:26] and on Communist propaganda, which was -- I mean, they were just exploiting everything they could in Western Germany [27:41]. And for instance, they said in East Germany [27:46] everything is so good, people eat well; and in the West you're starving. And it wasn't quite that way, of course. But they were right one time [28:00] because temporarily Eisenhower [28:03] had made the decision, in order to be in compliance with the Geneva Convention [28:12], we had to feed prisoners of war the same as we fed our own troops,

the same level of calories a day. And it turned out that that was very impractical because there was this starving German population, and so they shortened the rations of everybody in order to meet at least a minimum. And so the Communists [29:00] exploited this. They held -- I remember a mass meeting, and they'd call these big mass meetings. And they'd only get about -- people were interested in surviving and getting ration cards and getting -- they were authorized 30 grams of meat a week. I mean, they would -- they were just literally starving. And for -- and American cigarettes were the common means of exchange in those days. For a carton of cigarettes, you could buy a woman, a car, or whatever it was. And so the Communists [29:57] exploited that, and at one time they did [30:00] -- they were fairly successful because they said, "Your rations were cut and ours were increased." So one of the things I was interested in is how do they finance this flood of propaganda that is coming into West Germany [30:23] and into Munich [30:25] particularly. And this one German who gave me these books, this wonderful man, he was the head of the German Publishers Association [30:36], so he knew all about newsprint and paper and how they would finance -- he came up with a theory, which I thought made good sense. He was a good Bavarian [31:00].

INT: We've only got about a minute or so left in this tape. I just want to ask a couple of quick questions, and then we'll let the tape run out and figure out where we're going to go next. You were talking about Operation Rusty [31:13]. We had mentioned earlier this morning, does the name -- did the name Captain John Boker [31:20] -- does that mean -- did that mean anything to you at the time?

WM: No.

INT: No? Okay. Because he was the --

WM: I only knew Eric Waldman [31:26]. He's the only guy I knew over there.

INT: Okay.

WM: And as a matter of fact, when I came back from Germany and I was an instructor at Holleberg [31:41] -- I taught German there -- I got a letter from the CIA [31:48]. And they invited me to join CIA, and I said, "What would I be doing?" And they said, "Well, you'd be teaching [32:00] at our school." And of course, I was interested in being in operations. And they offered me a GS-8 or something like that, or 9, and I said, "I'm a very senior first lieutenant. I'm about to make captain." I said, "I'm going to stay in here." So I went to this place --

[End of Tape 2B]

[Beginning of Tape 3A]

INT: Okay. Today is April 2nd, 2009. This is the third in a series of oral history interviews with Mr. Werner Michel. This is part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project by the National Park Service. We are here at the [unintelligible] headquarters of the George Washington Memorial Parkway [00:23]. My name is Brandon Bies with the National Park Service. I'm also joined with David Lassman of the Park Service, as well as over the phone by Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci. We're also joined here with volunteers Dan Gross and George Coin. And with that, Mr. Michel, we were asking -- you had mentioned a couple of names of folks that you were familiar with folks. I think you mentioned that some of them were in G-2. Bolling [00:54], is that one?

WM: General Bolling was G-2 of the Army [01:00]. He had also been a division commander, and so his name is -- was quite well known in, especially, my generation at that time.

INT: Is that who Bolling Air Force Base [01:19] was --

WM: I don't know.

INT: [Unintelligible] or is it a different Bolling [01:23]?

WM: It might be a different Bolling.

INT: Oh, it wasn't -- okay. Now, do we know that Bolling was with 1142 [01:33]? I don't know if we have any definite links to him. I don't know. I've run across his name --

WM: But I know General Seibert [01:42] was G-2 of USFET [01:45] when I was there. And I never met him, and at my level, yeah, I had no need -- I had no need to do any business with him [02:00].

INT: What about Colonel John Russell Deane [02:04]?

WM: Who?

INT: John Russell Deane?

WM: I knew Colonel -- I knew Colonel Deane very briefly. He was -- he -- I think he ran Rusty [02:21] for a while.

INT: From my information, he named Rusty.

WM: He named it -- well, I had another -- I had another -- when I was a colonel and I was the director of counterintelligence in DIA [02:38], he suddenly showed up as a three-star general. And he was director of DIA for a relatively short time. And I reminded him that I had met him once before, but I don't think he remembered me. He had no need to [03:00]. And I remember he called me up once and said, "Bring your staff with you." And I had three staff elements, one of which was Bill Hess's [03:17] [phonetic], and they were release and disclosure. They were the ones who cleared intelligence documents for release to Allied -- friendly countries. And they -- we would review -- his section would review these documents to see if there was any objection to clear. And there was a third

agency rule which meant that you didn't give the Germans any information on the Dutch and you didn't give the French any information on the Germans [04:00]. So I'm talking about NATO [04:01] now, because they -- they're -- we had a couple of very serious problems in the European theater [04:13] when precisely that happened, when somebody released information that the Germans found out about that they shouldn't have gotten. Deane [04:24], as I said, called me to his office, and he said, "Are you satisfied with the way things are going in your -- in your counterintelligence job?" And I said, "Not really. I think we could be doing more." And he said, "Well, I'm going on a trip." He said, "But while I'm gone, would you write down three options? One is you have the same budget you have now. One is you get a 25 percent [05:00] increase. And the third one is you get 100 percent increase." Well, if we opted for the 25 percent increase, and we submitted our report in great detail as to how we would use those resources. You don't go through that here, do you?

INT: Do --

WM: Do you have budgets?

INT: Oh, wow, budgets! Yeah, no, definitely no budgets. For us, it would be zero percent, 25 percent less, and then 50 percent less.

[laughter]

WM: No, anyway, I -- we wrote up this lengthy report, and I delivered it upstairs to the front office. And we had -- he said, "I need this right away." And we delivered it and he was still gone, and he never came back [06:00]. And he was replaced by another general. And one day that big folder came back and the general said, "I don't know what this is all about, but it has something to do with your office."

[laughter]

INT: A few other questions we've talked a little bit about --

WM: But Deane [06:23] was in Rusty [06:25]. We -- he was there. I think he was a lieutenant-colonel at the time.

INT: We've talked a little bit about Rusty. One of the operations that we deal with at P.O. Box 1142 [06:38] a lot was Operation Paperclip [06:41].

WM: Yeah.

INT: And are you familiar with Paperclip [06:44]?

WM: Yes.

INT: Were you involved in any way with Paperclip?

WM: Well, just tangentially. It was one day while I was heading my IPW [06:58] team still [07:00], I got word that Professor Messerschmitt [07:03] was living in Augsburg [07:05]. And it came from an MP officer. He said, "You might want to talk to him." And I said, "Yeah, I think I can spare an hour to talk to him." So I went and talked to him, and then I passed the word on to headquarters. And Paperclip [07:27] was in full swing at that time. And they said, "The British have already squeezed him dry." And so apparently there was no interest. I personally did not have any other cases of tracking down scientists or those kinds of people or those high-value [08:00] potential people [unintelligible]. So I knew about it, but it -- I had no need to work with it, so it really wasn't in my area of competence.

INT: Okay. Another couple of questions for you, which I'm asking more -- not so much for you to answer through your own personal experiences but just from your vast knowledge of the military intelligence system that you've learned throughout your career, and that is

trying to put Fort Hunt [08:37] in context of the larger operation that was going on.

Again, realizing that you didn't know that Fort Hunt existed --

WM: That's right.

INT: -- during the War. It was part of the CPM Branch, the Captured Personnel and Material Branch [08:54]. Did you -- did you work at all with the CPM Branch [09:00]? Does anything that you did have anything to do with CPM?

WM: No.

INT: No?

WM: No.

INT: Okay.

WM: I did in Vietnam [09:08], but not in -- not in that war.

INT: Okay. Do you -- do you get a sense again now, in hindsight and from talking with your cousin and with others about where 1142 [09:24] fit in to the overall configuration, the overall scheme of things in terms of military intelligence?

WM: Well, you know, I was -- I later on became inspector general for intel as a civilian in the Senior Executive Service [09:39], so I was an assistant to the Secretary of Defense, so I would -- the problem always was the SAP programs, the Special Access Program [09:55], and I arranged [10:00] -- that's probably my only contribution that I made, or major one, that we had the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and the Chief of Naval Operations come in. Each one was given about an hour and a half to discuss his close-hold special access programs and that sort of thing. And we did this twice a year. I scheduled it that way. And I sat in on it, and Weinburger [10:47] -- this is -- I was -- I worked for Weinburger, Carlucci [10:52], and Cheney [10:53] [phonetic],

and I left when Aspin [11:00] became Secretary of Defense because by that time I had had 17 years as a civilian. So I thought I'm 68 years old; I've had 47 years; I think it's time for me to fold my tent. Anyway, I would think -- I would -- being I wasn't -- I was supposed to keep the system honest. If, in my estimation, any close-hold program like this, like 1142 [11:40] -- first of all, you have the problem of access. Who should have access to this sort of thing? How is it going to be used at the most senior levels? What policy implications are there? I know I shut down a couple when I was inspector general [12:00] where, in the Army there were some Special Operations [12:07] types who thought they were above the rules. And I said no. The Secretary of the Army, the Chief of Staff of the Army, has got to know everything that's going on in his service. And then the Secretary of Defense has to know about it. So if I had -- if I had any reason to talk about that sort of thing, I would say that by all means, someone has to be accountable at the most senior level because he has to approve it. A good example, for instance, for these intercept operations, which had to go to the foreign surveillance court -- foreign surveillance court [13:00], and they would come through my office, and I had to countersign them. And then there were some of our strategic reconnaissance activities. For instance, the -- it was these SR-72s -- or 71 -- I'm always off one. SR-71s [13:29], some of their activities were highly classified, so I think you have to have accountability and yet you have to have access by those people who are going to -- are going to put these policies into effect.

INT: Because that's one of the things we've always grasped [14:00] or had a struggle grasping with 1142 [14:03] is how was the information disseminated? How did people get access to it? You know, the folks that we've dealt with, that we've connected to these oral

history interviews with, folks like your cousin and other interrogators, they did their work, they made their reports, and then they never saw that information again. They --

WM: Well, we never knew -- yeah, I mean, during all my time, there was never any feedback.

INT: Right.

WM: Downward. Everything flowed upward all the time, but nothing ever came down. And I had that same experience even in Vietnam [14:42]. And I remember NSA [14:46] had some intercept activities in Vietnam. Nobody could get in. That was -- they had barbed wire around their -- about their installations [15:00], and no -- it all flowed upward, went to Washington [15:08], nothing came down.

INT: And that -- that's where --

WM: That sort of human frailty of the thing, I think.

INT: I guess it's good to hear that 1142's [15:19] not the only time that's happened.

WM: No, no, I assure you it isn't.

INT: Because yeah, again, we've tried to figure out where did this information go? How was it used?

WM: That's right.

INT: It's very difficult for us to grasp really intelligence value of this information.

WM: But Dan here, he's given me a couple of books. I don't know what our policies would have been had there been a better understanding or a clearer understanding or clarity of seeing what Gehlen [15:58] and his mob were all about [16:00] because we were thinking about the security of the United States obviously, and what was he thinking about? He was thinking about reestablishing a German intelligence service which -- and the Germans, by the way, have -- they have the [speaks German], which is Gehlen's [16:30]

outfit. Then they have the [speaks German], which is their counterintelligence outfit. They have the same problem we do, that of how does information flow? And I think it's part of the beast that [17:00] you take a piece of key information and you bring it in, and what are you going to do? You're going -- I want to call headquarters. The admiral has to know about this right away, or the general has to know about it. So I think -- I think that's very true, and I'm afraid it's always -- it's part of a deficiency in our organizational schemes. And I mean, you then organize. For instance, I -- when I was in the Pentagon [17:37] there, I got even involved in intelligence support to drug -- to counterdrug operations, I mean, across the spectrum. Now, they have their own, and you work with -- during my day, you had to -- you didn't have the DEA [17:59]. You had the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs [18:00], the BNDD, and then you had customs. And I was on a -- I was -- I represented DOD [18:12] on a panel, and wherever we met, we'd meet at -- well, I belonged to several panels. I -- wherever we meet, you could find out that -- you'd come away with a conclusion that the most mortal enemies in the world is the customs against BNDD [18:40]. When one said yes, the other one said no. There was this -- they were ferociously -- I mean, all this parochialism. And we've had it -- we've had it in the military too, you know [19:00]. I think that's a --

INT: Yeah, I was just going to ask you if anybody else has any other -- I know we've got dozens of questions we'd like to ask.

WM: Speak up now or forever hold your peace.

INT: Right, but anything related specifically to Mr. Michel's perspectives on 1142 [19:13] and Ritchie [19:15] and those sorts of things?

INT: Just at lunch, you mentioned some things about one of your acquaintances over there that

drank too much, and that he was related somehow to the Gehlen [19:30] business closing?

WM: What's that?

INT: I said the fellow you're talking about yesterday at lunch who drank too much?

WM: Well, that was when I went -- this is in another incarnation, when I went over to -- during the Korean War [19:51].

INT: Oh, okay. I thought it was before.

WM: I was on my way to Korea [20:00], and one of my former German students was operations officer of the CIC [20:08] unit in Tokyo [20:12]. And I had just barely been in Korea [20:17] a week when I was pulled back. I was supposed to be in 8th Army CIC [20:23], but Ken Colbert [20:26], this foreign agent -- this former student of mine, had me brought back and he said, "I need you here in Tokyo [20:37]." He says, "We are still working on the Sorge case." Do any of you know what Sorge was? Richard Sorge [20:49] was the main successful Communist [20:57] agent who penetrated [21:00] German and Japanese intelligence. His cover was to be a German newspaperman, a journalist. And the party, the Comintern, the Communist International [21:20], ordered him, "Look, we've got enough people here." This is very early, just when Hitler [21:30] came to power. They told him to go undercover in Japan and act as if he were a pro-Nazi [21:42] German journalist, but report, of course, by radio to Moscow [21:50]. And he was successful beyond their wildest dreams [22:00]. He apparently knew about German plans to attack the Soviet Union [22:09]. He was aware of -- because he had access to the German ambassador. And they all thought he was a good Nazi [22:18], and all the time he -- anyway, the Japanese started to investigate him finally, and they interrogated him and broke him in the -- interrogated him and they executed him in 1944. Richard Sorge

[22:41], S-O-R-G-E. And Ken Colbert [22:47], the guy who brought me over to Tokyo [22:51], said, "You know, there's still some leads from that -- from that case, and I don't know [23:00] anybody who speaks German like you do. I want you to get to know the Germans. There are a lot of Germans living in Japan, and I want you to get to know them, and also the Soviets." So to make a long story short, I became the head of the Soviet Counterespionage Division [23:21] in the 441st Counter Intelligence Corps [23:30] detachment, which had about 1,400 people in it. We covered all of Japan, and we were targeted on North Korea [23:39] and -- North Koreans in Japan. And the CIA [23:46] was there and so forth. And we started to investigate -- well, I took over the section. I'm getting ahead of myself. And the man who headed the section is the guy you were talking about [24:00]. His name was Georgi Onoschko [phonetic]. He was an American Army major whose father had been in the Czarist Army [24:13], and they had escaped to the West after Lenin [24:20] took power. And he lived in Czechoslovakia for a while, and then he lived, I think, in Germany and then came in the Army in World War II [24:33] and had a silver star. He was in Southwest Pacific [24:36], I think it was in Okinawa [24:40] or someplace, but he had one weakness. He drank from morning until night. He controlled all our -- he was a single man who controlled all our sources that we had within the -- within the Russian community [25:00]. There was a Russian community because there was a -- what is it they call it? The Eastern Reich [25:08] Catholic -- the Eastern Reich -- there was an archbishop there of the Eastern Reich. And he was -- he's one of his sources. But when you went in to talk to him, he reeked. He would -- he would be chewing on mints all day, which was an indicator to me. So they relieved him and put me in charge. He was a major; I was a captain at the time. And we then defected

a Soviet [25:45] colonel while we were -- worked on it, which is another story, this guy named Rastvoroff [phonetic], who just died here [26:00] about a year and a half ago.

INT: Any other questions? Vince, do you have anything that we can relate back to 1142 [26:08]?

INT: Yeah, I just had three questions, and it might actually either be nothing at all or probably another tape at another time. And it's personal and an easy one. Mr. Michel, is there any difference in your mind between Operation Paperclip [26:29] and a program called Alsos [26:31]?

WM: What is that?

INT: Alsos?

WM: I don't know. How do you spell that?

INT: It's -- Vince, isn't it A-L-S-O-S?

INT: Yes.

INT: A-L-S-O-S.

WM: A-L?

INT: Yeah.

WM: Alsos [26:46]?

INT: [affirmative]

WM: No, I don't know anything about that.

INT: Okay. Were you aware of a program that we refer to as MIRS, Military Intelligence Research Section [27:00]? It was the evaluation of captured German documents that later on became another name and it was moved to Camp Ritchie [27:08]?

WM: Oh, it was?

INT: It was at Camp Ritchie at the -- it would have been at Camp Ritchie probably after you were there, just shortly thereafter, called the German Military Documents Section [27:19], or GMDS.

WM: No, all I know is the Berlin Document Center [27:25], where they had all the information, which was accumulated during the Nazi [27:37] period, which is -- some of that is just been released in the last couple of years, made accessible to scholars and research people. That's all I know about that.

INT: Okay. And during our research, we've come across to several references [28:00], somewhat obscure, regarding other kinds of intelligence facilities along with it called the George Washington Memorial Parkway [28:07]. There was a reference to a facility at the area known as Gravelly Point [28:13]. There is a reference to a facility that was housed out of what is called Collingwood [28:21] estate today. Are you aware of any of those or any other intelligence facilities along the parkway that may be of interest? And it doesn't have to do with 1142 [28:32] per se.

WM: I knew there was a facility across the river in the vicinity of Fort Washington [28:45]. There was a highly classified facility over there, but I don't know of anything of Collingwood [28:56] or any of these other [29:00] -- any other location or any other facility that might be located there.

INT: Can you speak at all about the facility near Fort Washington [29:11], what it was involved in?

WM: Well, it was -- it was a CIA [29:19] facility.

INT: Was it going on during World War II [29:22], or was this --

WM: No, this was after the War.

INT: Okay.

WM: It was after the War. It had nothing to do with 1142 [29:29] or -- it was one of their secure locations.

INT: Okay.

INT: Do you know anything at all about the procedures of repatriation of enemy prisoners after the War?

WM: Well, I think I mentioned this one incident where I had to [30:00] escort these Soviets [30:01] to a camp where they were trying to persuade Ukrainians and other Russians to return to the Soviet Union [30:16]. And of course, we did the same thing. We forced some Russian -- some Hungarians to go back to Hungary [30:28]. And I would think that they didn't come off very well after they arrived in the Soviet Union [30:38], the Russians didn't. Even though their -- overtly, they told us that these people should come back and they'd be -- they'd be treated well.

INT: Vince [31:00], do you have any other questions?

INT: No, I think that's great. Really appreciate it. That was an interesting discussion.

INT: Anything else? Okay. Well, we will finish things up and thank you very much for sharing. You have -- in your discussions of Camp Ritchie [31:20] were helpful and just getting an understanding of what all else was going on just after the end of the War. I mean, we have a lot going on at 1142 [31:29] at the end of the War, but to find out that there were all these other folks like yourself in Europe looking at German generals and looking for SS [31:39] folks involved in Malmedy [31:41] is all -- it helps us -- helps us understand the big picture a little bit better, so whether you might not think it, you've been very helpful.

WM: I don't know. Well, thank you for the opportunity of unburdening [32:00] myself in my later years.

INT: Absolutely.

[End of Tape 3A]

[Beginning of Tape 4A]

ESTER FINDER: This is an interview for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection. This interview is with Werner Michel, conducted by Ester Finder on June 9, 1998, in Alexandria, Virginia. This is a follow-up interview that will focus on Werner Michel's post-Holocaust [00:25] experiences. In preparation for this interview, I've listened to the interview conducted with the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation [00:30]. That interview was done on September 19, 1997. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that interview. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post-Holocaust [00:44] experiences. This tape is Number One, Side A. I wanted to ask you, what was your name at birth?

WM: My name at birth was actually Emil Michel [01:00], but my mother hated the first name Emil, which was after an uncle who had been injured in World War I [01:08], and she insisted on adding the name Werner, which was more acceptable to her.

INT: Are you known by any other names?

WM: During my Army days, because they mispronounced my last name as Michael, they shortened that to Mike. And so eventually, I became Mike Michel in the service.

INT: When were you born, and where were you born?

WM: I was born on September the 2nd, 1924 in Landau [01:46], Germany. It's a small town in

Western Germany.

INT: Can you tell me when you came to the United States and what were the circumstances under which you came?

WM: I came to the United States [02:00] in -- on December the 4th, 1936 after leaving Germany on November 26th ship, the USS New York [02:14], Hamburg America Lines [02:15]. Circumstances were that my parents had managed to obtain a place on what was eventually -- essentially the kindertransport, where a group of us children were assembled in Hamburg [02:38] and we came to the United States and dispersed to families all over the country. In my case, I came to St. Louis [02:48], Missouri, where I was taken in by a family.

INT: What was difficult for you about the transition to life [03:00] in the United States?

WM: It was quite a challenge. I came from a small town and was totally unprepared for the difference in culture. First of all, I spoke -- I had taken some French in school and not English. I had about two weeks of English lessons, which permitted me to say, "How do you do? I am fine," and that type of thing. And I was taken in by this family of very sophisticated people in a very large city, and I was here just a few days and they put me -- placed me, rather, in seventh grade in the Eugene Fields School [03:50] in St. Louis [03:52]. And it meant absolutely nothing to me. I was sitting there as if I were a deaf person [04:00].

INT: Okay. We're back now. We had a little technical problem. You were saying that you were sitting in school as if you were a deaf person.

WM: Well, what I meant is there was a lot of babble around me that I didn't understand. And evidently, the teachers and the family I lived with, the Landaus, understood this also, and

so they took me out of seventh grade. And, as I recall, they tried to give me an aptitude test, which I couldn't even follow the instructions. I failed that miserably. So they decided then to put me into kindergarten. So I was a 12-and-a-half-year-old to go into kindergarten. Not the most auspicious beginning, but it was a very good way of learning a language because essentially, they were immersing me in the -- in the language [05:00]. And I -- as I recall, I probably spent a month in kindergarten, and then two weeks in first grade, and subsequently moved up the various grades as my English improved somewhat. And as it turned out to be, I was probably -- mechanically, it was a good thing. It was psychologically not very good because I had no friends; and parents and teachers looked upon me with trepidation, I'm sure. But it was in -- about a year, I believe, I had caught up or I perhaps was a grade behind. I'm not certain anymore, but I had caught up essentially.

INT: You mentioned that you're from the town of Landau [05:53]. And the family that took you in, what was their name?

WM: Their name was Landau as well [06:00]. Milton Landau [06:02] was the name of the husband, and Emilia Landau [06:06] was the name of the wife.

INT: What was your status at that time when you first came to this country and then, in the next few years, your legal status, with respect to the United States government?

WM: I presume -- I had what the Germans called a kinderausweiss. It was essentially the equivalent to a passport, and I presume I was a legal immigrant and -- until the war broke out. Then I -- as I recall, I became an enemy alien because I was still a German citizen. You couldn't become a citizen until you were 21 [07:00].

INT: When you came to this country, did you have any contact with your family back in

Germany?

WM: I had contact with my sister who also lived in St. Louis [07:14]. I saw her about once a month or once every two months. She lived with another family. She'd come a year earlier or a year and a half earlier. And I had contact with my mother and grandmother. My father had gone to France in late 1936 and -- just about the time I left. And I had no contact with him directly.

INT: When the war began in this country [08:00] -- you know, in 1939, when you were in this country, the war began. Can you tell me what impressions you had of the American reaction to the conflict in Europe?

WM: Well, of course, in 1939 I was just -- I think I just graduated from the Eugene Field Grade School [08:24], had gone on to high school. The -- of course, we were all very concerned about our families who were left in Germany. And of course, as the Germans overran first Poland and, of course, we were aware of Czechoslovakia before that. And then in early 1940, when they overran the low countries and conquered France [09:00], we were -- I was personal -- on a personal basis, very concerned about my father. And we had lost contact with my grandmother, who had been very old and frail and who, as we subsequently found out, had died in late 1940 in Gurs -- at Camp Gurs [09:20] in France.

INT: Did you have the sense that the Americans really appreciated what was going on in Europe in the first years of the War before the United States became involved?

WM: My feeling -- and I'm trying to recapture it somewhat -- was that you had various levels of interest. You had the Jewish community, who was intensely interested; and then you had the more normal people, who probably [10:00] -- such as my fellow students in classes -- who barely understood it. I think it was a rather remote and distant experience

for them. And I think -- remember -- I remember reading in newspapers while they -- and then particularly in St. Louis [10:27]. It had an excellent newspaper. It gave good coverage to it. Still, I think that, as I recall, I had part-time -- I started little part-time jobs to turn a little money. I know that economically, the situation wasn't all that good, and -- for us, for people generally, in our society here [11:00].

INT: When the United States did become involved the war after Pearl Harbor [11:08], what impact did that have on you personally at that point in your life?

WM: Well, I -- personally, I had been in high school. And the needs of my mother were such that I had to leave high school and accept a job working for my brother-in-law in St. Louis [11:34] then. And I personally then wanting to do something, I was -- I couldn't enlist in the Armed Forces because I was an enemy alien at that point. But I joined something called the First Missouri State Reserve -- First Missouri Infantry State Reserve Force [11:52], which was a local -- sort of a [12:00] military force designed to replace the National Guard [12:03], which had been called up to active duty. And we drilled and were issued uniforms, but we were not a -- an active military force. And then in 1943 -- in July 1943, I was allowed to enter the Army. Even so, I was an enemy alien still.

INT: Did you go as a volunteer, or were you drafted?

WM: I had to agree to be drafted. I think that they called it to volunteer enlistment because of the unique status that I wasn't old enough to be a citizen, and yet I was an enemy alien status. I don't recall the specifics any longer, but I had to agree to be drafted.

INT: Once you did get drafted, can you tell me about your basic training [13:00], where and anything that comes to your mind about that episode?

WM: I was drafted at Jefferson Barracks [13:10], Missouri, which was an old, small Army post,

which had been there many years, I presume. And I was sent to Fort Knox [13:22], Kentucky, where I received basic training in tanks and armored -- what they called armored force at that time. And also received training, more specialized training, as a Morse code [13:37] radio operator. I remained there until early 1944, when I was transferred to the 16th Armored Division [13:49], which was located in Arkansas at Camp Chaffee [13:53], Arkansas. And from there, I was selected [14:00] to go to the Officer Candidate School [14:01] at the Infantry Officer Candidate School in Fort Benning [14:05], Georgia. I went there in July 1944 and graduated from the Officer Candidate School [14:12] as a second lieutenant, infantry, in December 1944.

INT: What talents and skills did you bring to the Army?

WM: Well, I'm not certain that I brought many skills, but I attempted various times to let them know that I spoke German and hoped that they would recognize this unique skill. But they were more interested in finding somebody who was an infantryman or a tanker or a tank driver or a gunner and that sort of thing. So initially, it took the system a long time [15:00] to discover that I might have some capability that might be of use. And in late -- in early 1945, while I was a lieutenant at the Camp Joseph T. Robinson [15:24] in Arkansas, again, I was called in by my commander, who wanted to know if I knew somebody in Washington [15:32]. And I said, "I don't even know anybody here." And he said, "Well, I've got special orders for you, sending you to a place in Maryland." It was -- this was Camp Ritchie [15:48], Maryland. And -- which was the military intelligence training center, where I subsequently -- in February 1945, I was sent to become [16:00] an interrogator for -- ultimately destined to interrogate German prisoners of war.

INT: While you were still in the States, before you went over to interrogate the prisoners of war, did you experience any anti-Semitism [16:17] in the military in this country?

WM: Certainly, there were individual cases, which latent anti-Semitism [16:31], and I recall one incident, which -- particularly in Officer Candidate School [16:38] -- officer candidate -- the course was extremely competitive. And especially at that time, when it appeared that the war was soon going to be ended, they wanted to reduce the number of incoming officers, so they made the course somewhat more difficult [17:00]. And they reduced the number of -- when we started out, it was 240 candidates, and we ended up with something like 115 or 120. So in other words, we had an attrition of over 50 percent. So it became apparent that people had to be -- people were thrown out for many, many reasons -- academic, physical, and so forth. And I found out that a group of them were saying that they should -- we had to rate each other as to what we thought of one another as officers -- potential for -- leadership potential and physical capabilities. And a group of three or four got together and said, "Why don't we select Michel and give him a very low rating [18:00]?" And it was obvious to me they had done this because I was Jewish. And there was another candidate who was -- whom I will never forget, who was not Jewish. He was -- as a matter of fact, he was Catholic -- he was from the Boston area -- who spoke out very openly. And he said, "I'm not going to be part of any of this." And that stopped this little conspiratorial effort very, very quickly. And as a matter of fact, the -- two of the three who attempted to get rid of me, that were themselves thrown out, not for any -- for this reason, but because they were academically not able to cope. And then there were -- at times when there was a Jewish holiday and you wanted to go to services, sometimes it was looked upon [19:00] as being very strange, particularly in

combat units where there were not too many Jewish soldiers. But I can honestly say I never saw any concerted efforts which might have been or which might have been orchestrated by the leadership in the Army indicating any overt anti-Semitism [19:34].

INT: Tell me about getting the assignment to go overseas and how you -- how you reacted to being sent back to your -- that was the mailman [20:00].

WM: That was the mailman. The people that -- who were at Camp Ritchie [20:07] with me were essentially -- many of them, I would say, probably half or 60 percent, had a similar background as myself. They were refugees. Some of them, of course, were German-Americans who came from the communities where there were a lot of Germans. But all of us were, of course, looking forward to going to Europe, returning to Europe, and I personally felt it very strange since I'd only left Germany approximately seven years -- seven and a half years earlier [21:00]. So, it was a feeling of -- very difficult to describe -- loathing on the one hand and yet a sense of urgency on the other hand to try to go back, particularly because we had not heard -- I had not heard anything from my father and my grandmother in a long time. So that, in essence, was my feeling.

INT: Before you were sent over to Europe again, how much did you know about what was really happening over there, specifically with respect to the Jews under Nazi [21:39] control?

WM: Well, I must say that I think there was a very limited information. We -- after the Kristallnacht [21:51] in November 1938, we all knew the horror had gotten worse and the difficulties of people [22:00] attempting to get out. But we had no -- we knew of the concentration camps. All of us knew of Dachau [22:09]. And we seemed to have gotten information that my father was in Oranienburg [22:15], which turned out to be erroneous.

He'd been taken to Auschwitz [22:20], of course. But we did not know the extent, nor did we want to believe, I think, the extent of what was -- of this orchestrated, systematic extermination of an entire people. And I think it was beyond our comprehension.

INT: Tell me about the trip back to your -- and your arrival, this time with the U.S. military.

WM: We went -- I went over on the [23:00] -- with this large group of people. And we first went to England and then France; and then as we arrived in Germany, the war was just -- was just ending. And I was assigned to the -- I was interviewed and assigned to the 9th Division [23:24], which was located at that time in Engelstadt [23:26], Germany, and took over command of the 270th IPW, interrogation of prisoner of war team [23:38]. And we worked in the prisoner of war camp in Engelstadt [23:43], Germany, where we had, oh, I would say, close to -- over 100,000 German prisoners. And we administered this and tried to -- our job was to identify those prisoners that [24:00] were of particular interest, either for debriefing because they had certain information, or those that -- or SS [24:08], Gestapo [24:09], or others on the wanted list -- on various wanted lists that had been published. In addition, we were responsible for monitoring activities in the surrounding counties around Engelstadt [24:31], [unintelligible] and [unintelligible] and several of the other counties in the area where we were to monitor whether, first of all, there were any resurgence of Nazis [24:45] and/or locating people on the wanted lists, such as county-level and state-level Nazi [24:55] officials, which we tried to locate [25:00] and round up. The Germans, of course, having such a highly centralized society with multiple levels of controls, where people had ration cards, they had to have a residence permit, they had to have -- any number of documents to prove who they were and that they were allowed to be in certain places at certain times, it was relatively easy if

you found someone who did not have that kind of documentation, to bring him in for questioning. And in essence, that was my function at that time.

INT: Can you share with us some of the personal experiences you had and some of the encounters you had at that time?

WM: As -- well, we, of course, arrested people on the wanted list [26:00]. There were literally hundreds of people that we brought in. Personally, I also was charged later on -- I took over another detachment further on south in a town called [unintelligible] in support of the 9th Division [26:16] in Augsburg [26:16], and my small team was charged with the debriefing of German general officers who were kept in a -- had been assembled in a camp in Neu-Ulm [26:34], Germany, and there were approximately 450 to 500 of these generals ranging from brigadier equivalent to field marshals that we had there. The purpose was to identify those that were -- could be used for historical purposes by the U.S. Army Historical Division [27:00] and who were not tainted as having been SS [27:07] or Nazi [27:08]. So we segregated those people. And it was a very fascinating experience that lasted approximately a month. In addition, I was involved in the apprehension of a number of other fairly significant Nazis [27:30], and later on I participated in interrogation of the case which became known as the Malmedy Massacre [27:40] when the -- during the Ardennes Offensive [27:46] by the Germans, the final offensive against the West. They had executed approximately 120 American soldiers [28:00] during the Ardennes [28:02]. And this -- these were units of the 6th SS Panzer Army [28:09], and -- under General "Sepp" Dietrich [28:12], who was -- and the notorious colonel, whose name, unfortunately, I cannot spontaneously recall, but I interrogated both of them. And Dietrich [28:30] had been a Nazi [28:33], had been a

member of the SS [28:37] humble beginnings in the 1920s, when he had organized bully-boys that would keep order in Nazi [28:49] rallies. And he had been a non-com, a noncommissioned officer, in the German Army in World War I [28:57], and had [29:00] - - he had worked his way up in the SS [29:05] and ended up as a four-star equivalent general. He was ultimately, as I understand it, sentenced for war crimes, but only served four or five years. The other colonel who was more directly in charge of the massacre was given a longer sentence, but he also only served, inexplicably, only I think eight or nine years; so not much came of that large mass trial, which was held in Dachau [29:46] - - at Camp Dachau, we called it.

INT: Did any of the people that you interrogated or caught [30:00] -- you know, all the people that you were working with, did they know of your Jewish background?

WM: I did not make it a point to flaunt my background. And I, as a matter of fact, made a point always to my people that worked for me to say that we were not here to exact personal revenge but that we were here to accomplish a mission for the United States government -- more specifically, for the United States Army -- because I had the very sad experience of a couple of people in my teams who were rather brutal to some SS [30:51] men that they were interrogating. And I pointed out to them if we resorted to violence [31:00], then we weren't any better than the people that we were interrogating, and I said we couldn't -- we couldn't do this, we weren't here for that kind of personal revenge.

INT: Did you experience any anti-Semitism [31:16] in post-war Germany?

WM: That's the strange thing. There wasn't any. I almost felt like congratulating a German if he ever admitted that he was an ideologically convinced National Socialist [31:38]. Usually the rationale one got was that they were forced to join, that they never realized

any of this was going on, that they themselves never observed anything. It was a [32:00] -- I would almost say a mass psychological loss of national memory is what one saw at that time. And I remember I have some photographs of a religious parade in this small town, and all the big Nazis [32:23] that we knew had identified were in the forefront -- [End of Tape 4A]

[Beginning of Tape 4B]

INT: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Werner Michel. This is Tape 1, Side B. I wanted to ask you to continue. You had been telling me about the Nuremburg trials [00:39] and your role in collecting the documents and assembling that kind of material. I wanted to know if you can tell me a little bit more about your involvement with Nuremburg [00:48] and if you were ever in the courtroom.

WM: First of all, I was never in the courtroom at Nuremburg. I was busy out in the field [01:00] doing my missions. However, we had gotten intelligence collection requirements on documents that were desired that -- to substantiate some of the charges. And of course, this collection of documents was going on all the time. We submitted some. I have no way of knowing which ones were ever used. I recall that I was essentially a field worker with a -- two small military intelligence detachments conducting interrogations, conducting checks in local areas, trying to locate people who were on the various wanted lists and trying to find documentation. I did, in one instance as I recall [02:00], in the town of Sandizell [02:03], we located some hidden -- the hidden documents of the National Socialist Motor Corps [02:11], known as the NSKK, Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps. And we found all their documents and we secured those and forwarded

them to higher headquarters for whatever need they -- and exploitation they could make of that. But as to whether these were of utility or some of the other documents that we found, I'm not able to make any kind of judgment in that regard.

INT: What were your thoughts about the success of the Nuremburg [03:00] and the Dachau [03:02] proceedings, the criminal proceedings, and the legacy or the impact of these proceedings?

WM: I think the trials themselves were very important for the simple reason that they established precedents that henceforth, countries and their leaders that would undertake to start a war or would start a violation of human rights and a violation of the land warfare, the Geneva Convention [03:43], would be held accountable. From that level and from the legal level, I think it was the Nuremburg trials [03:53] played invaluable role. From the standpoint of the impact [04:00] on the average German, I don't think it had that much impact at that -- at that particular time. The Germans said -- the man-on-the-street kind of response was if these people were guilty, truly guilty, they would have been taken out and should have been shot right away instead of all this interminable questioning day after day and week after week. Secondly, and this is probably more ironic, as I reflect, many of the Germans thought that at the conclusion of the -- of the Nuremburg trials [04:42], that this -- any thought of guilt was taken from their shoulders because now that the top echelon of the German government had been found guilty and taken care of, that they -- the rest of them had been [05:00] -- would not be guilty. And as a matter of fact, they thought of themselves somehow as victims as well.

INT: During your time in post-war Europe, attempts were being made to smuggle survivors into Palestine [05:19]. I was wondering how much you knew about these activities and if

you were in any way approached or if you were involved?

WM: I literally knew nothing about this effort, and I'm very glad that I didn't know about it because later on, in early 1947 or late 1946, actually, I was transferred to the Counter Intelligence Corps [05:51]; and one of our tasks, as I recall, was to try to [06:00] stop the interference with the -- I think there was a British consulate in Munich [06:05], and there was an allegation that the [unintelligible] was going to bomb the British consulate. And we were told to find the perpetrators -- the possible perpetrators, which we never located. But I must say that they must have had very good security because officially, from what I recall, there was little or no information available to American counterintelligence, at least in Southern Germany, about the effort to smuggle Jews into Palestine [06:43].

INT: Did you ever think about going to Palestine yourself at that time?

WM: Not at that time. Earlier, just before I left Germany in 1936, I belonged to the Habonim [06:57], which -- Zionist [07:00] group. But after that, I -- it never became a viable alternative for me. By this time, I was an Army officer, and I was very, very busy in my mission, and it just never -- I must admit I never thought about it again.

INT: What did the U.S. hope to accomplish in post-war Germany?

WM: Did you say the U.S.? If you remember, at the end of the War, the Morgenthau Plan [07:45] was to make Germany into an agricultural nation which would not have any industrial capability to make war again [08:00]. This, of course, proved to be impractical. And we also were going to keep large forces in Germany to assure that the Germans would have no opportunity to in any way interfere again in Europe. This also was impractical because the political will of the American people was not to keep many divisions and hundreds of thousands of soldiers on occupation duty in Germany. And by

-- I observed this tremendous flux of -- initially, they were -- we were going to keep, I think, 16 divisions. And this very quickly became 12 divisions, became eight. And finally, by early 1948, we'd [09:00] -- I believe we had a single division in Germany plus 30,000 men in what was known as the United States Constabulary [09:07], which was a - more or less a military police force, which was to assure that the Germans would not create any problems, any security problems, for us. Of course, coincidental with this, the problems with Soviet Union [09:31] began, and I was there during the -- at the beginning of the Berlin Airlift [09:39] when we suddenly realized that we had a new adversary to the east. So then we -- the Soviets [09:52] probably ironically did us a favor because NATO [10:00] became the consequence. And we rearmed again and sent new troops and new troop units back to Europe once again.

INT: In your work in Germany after the War, were you aware of any former Nazis [10:20] being employed by the Americans in anti-Soviet [10:26] activities? Or were you aware of any of the former SS [10:31] or Gestapo [10:32], whatever, being used in any other way by the American military or for the intelligence system?

WM: In 1946, as I recall it, we had an Operation Paperclip [10:50], which was to select certain [11:00] German scientists who had specific capabilities and skills and were experts in rockets and so forth. And these, I was aware, were brought to the United States. I did not work on that project by myself, even though I do remember that I interviewed Professor Messerschmidt [11:27] in Augsburg [11:30], Germany in early 1946. But he was not selected for this project. He was the only one that I ever came in contact with. I also became aware that the Germans were starting an intelligence service for the United States, and this was under General Gehlen [12:00], who had been the head of German

intelligence on the Eastern Front [12:06] and who employed also a large number of Russians and Ukrainians. I'm not sure of how many of those were tainted, though I think it's entirely possible that a large number of them were. I also recall that in about 1947, we started -- we began to issue visas to displaced persons to come to the United States, and we in the Counter Intelligence Corps [12:47] were charged with a visa screening process since we already had a number of missions. First of all, there was [13:00] the residual mission concerning former Nazi [13:05] activities, which, as time went on, received a lower and lower priority. The higher priority were the Soviet [13:16] attempts in East Germany [13:19] and their attempt to send intelligence agents to West Germany [13:24]. And then, of course, the Communist Party [13:27] in West Germany, which, of course, was extremely virulently anti-American. So, as it was, the least competent of our people were put into the visa screening. The visa screening process required people to document that they were not Nazis [13:52] when they wanted to go to the United States. However, we had no access to documents [14:00] from Estonia, Latvia, or Baltic -- the Baltic countries, Poland, which were under Soviet [14:06] domination at that time. And so usually these people would bring in certificates from other refugees; so they, in effect, certified each other as being clean and as not having been Nazis [14:22]. As you probably know, in retrospect, a goodly number of these people turned out to have been Nazis and in effect, even war criminals. But this became apparent only after we had access to documentation from the former Soviet Union [14:43].

INT: Did you have any problems reconciling the acceptance of some SS [14:57] and some Gestapo [14:58], whoever the government was -- the U.S. government [15:00] was going to accept? Did you have any trouble separating your personal feelings from your

professional responsibilities in that regard?

WM: As far as I recall, we -- I don't know of any cases where we specifically permitted someone who was in a -- who had been an overt SS [15:25] official. I'm aware, and I myself worked with a couple of people because I was in the human intelligence business of running informants and agents that were -- had had some Nazi [15:54] -- minor Nazi affiliation. I ran into [16:00] former German intelligence officers that I worked with and who provided us with some information, but my field was basically aimed -- later on, in '47-'48, was aimed at the German Communist [16:19] movement. And there were no former SS [16:28] or Nazis [16:30] that I was able to find. We were -- we were trying to find people within that movement that would cooperate with us, and I must say that I did not see any of those kinds.

INT: One moment. Okay. We're back. You had asked me to stop and you wanted [17:00] to tell me something off the record. And I'm going to ask you to tell me what you just told me off the record, on the record so we can resume. You had been talking about intelligence matters from reports that you got from people who were in German intelligence during the War.

WM: Yeah, I'm not sure this is germane, but in the -- as a matter of fact, in late 1946, as the mission of interrogation and area coverage was reduced, I was transferred to the U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps [17:45], and I was assigned initially to a -- they were organizing regions and sub-regions in the United States zone of Germany. And I was assigned to Memmingen [18:03] sub-region in Region 4, which was in Munich [18:07]. And my mission there initially was to essentially do what I had been doing before, was to cover the local area, determine if there were any extremist activities by either left-wing or

right-wing German activities. And during this time, I was approached by a number of former German intelligence officers. These people were very intent on telling me all about what was going on in the Ukraine and in Russia -- Soviet Union [18:48] or in France and in those areas, and they were of little utility to me because I was charged with finding out what was happening in the local area [19:00]. So I turned them over to that portion of our office, which was -- had the mission of monitoring foreign intelligence activities; and these people, of course, were of some utility to the --what we call the counterespionage people. I was in the counter-subversion area, or in the internal intelligence area. And one of these people, as I learned approximately 25 years later, was a German intelligence officer who had been stationed in Lyon [19:37], France, and had tried to give me all kinds of information about France. And I told him that it was no use to me, and told him I would turn him over to the others. Evidently, he worked for these others; and also, later on when he himself left the work, he turned [20:00] these activities over to former colleague of his whose name was Klaus Barbie [20:05]. And you probably know the rest. I never met Barbie myself, but I did know the German abwehr, or German intelligence officer who was not an SS [20:22] officer but a legitimate German intelligence office. And somehow, he is the one who then located Barbie [20:33], who became his sub-source, as I understand it. And upon his departure, Barbie became the main source for American counterintelligence and, of course, he later on was facilitated in moving to South America and subsequently brought back to France for trial [21:00].

INT: Is there anything else that stands out in your mind about your time in post-war Germany? Any other episodes that you haven't told me about?

WM: Of course, my mission was to work with Germans who had a -- had a normal -- a natural opposition to Communism [21:33] as time progressed. And when we wanted a -- we were, of course, very concerned about having an indigenous German political capability that could stand on its own feet. And so I worked with some very wonderful Germans who were not tainted. They were mostly -- very fertile field for me was the University of Munich [21:57]. These were university students [22:00] who subsequently became lawyers and doctors and so forth. One of the persons I worked with in this effort turned out to be a relative of mine. He was on the city council in Munich [22:20] at that time. He was half Jewish and had been in a concentration camp. I'm trying to -- it wasn't Oranienburg [22:32]. It was -- and it wasn't Bergen-Belsen [22:37]. It was -- I can't think of the one now. I will in a little while. But he was just an extraordinary human being who was ideologically a great human person who -- or [23:00] -- just the type of individual needed by Germany to start anew and to start a more just and open society. And those are the kind of people I really enjoyed working with, who were both convinced Democrats and also were opposed to the Soviet [23:20] totalitarianism, which was to be exported to the Communist Party [23:24] into Bavaria. Basically, that is how I ended my first assignment in Germany in June, July 1948, as the airlift commenced.

INT: How long was your first tour of duty?

WM: My first tour of duty in Germany started in the -- at the end of May in 1948 [24:00] and ended in June -- 1945, I mean -- and ended in June 1948. As a matter of fact, I made one of the last trips to Berlin [24:12] by train, which was halted by the Soviets [24:18]. And I was carrying some highly secret documents, and I was trying to determine how I was going to get rid of the documents before the -- we were sitting out in the midst of East

Germany [24:31] and surrounded by Soviet [24:35] soldiers with the fixed bayonets on their rifles. And I thought, well, that was very interesting experience, how I was going to eat those documents. But subsequently, after about eight or 10 hours, we were permitted to resume our travel to West Germany [24:56]. I was coming from Berlin [24:58] at that time [25:00].

INT: Why did you decide to stay in the military?

WM: I decided to stay in the military because I -- first of all, the experience in Germany gave me a sense of tremendous accomplishment. We were working for something we believed in and believed in very strongly. And so I was highly motivated, and it was very exciting. It was for a fellow who was 20 years old when he -- or 21 years old. It was -- the responsibility was enormous, and I thoroughly felt that I was doing something of use to my country and [26:00] also saw the reward of a job well done. So, I decided to stay in.

INT: What did you do when you left Germany?

WM: When I left Germany, I was transferred to the U.S. Army Counterintelligence School [26:20] at Fort Holabird [26:24] in Baltimore [26:26], Maryland and became an instructor there and taught German language and German political systems, which was sort of integrated into our instruction. In other words, the students who were there were all military personnel who were going to -- back to Germany to continue with the occupation. They had to know the German documents, the [speaks German], and the questionnaire, how you conducted an interview or an interrogation [27:00] in German in German. And I was there for two -- a little over two years, and I was supposed to return to Germany. In the meantime, American policy had changed -- or the U.S. Army policy

had changed -- and they said if you were born in Germany, we can't trust you in Germany. And they said German-born personnel cannot be assigned back to Germany. So I was assigned subsequently to the Presidio [27:41] of San Francisco [27:42], California. And that was in late 1949, and I remained in the Counter Intelligence Corps [27:54] unit -- that 115 Counter Intelligence Corps detachment [28:00], which governed - - or covered, rather -- the six western states of the United States for the U.S. Army. And I was stationed at the Presidio [28:12] until 1952, when I left for Korea during the Korean War [28:18]. I was there only very briefly and was brought back to Japan because of my -- strangely enough, because of my knowledge of German. The operations officer in Japan in the Counter Intelligence Corps [28:40] detachment there had been one of my German students earlier. And he said, "We need -- we urgently need someone of your background because there are remnants of the Sorge [28:55] case." And Sorge was a German [29:00] -- a Communist [29:02] agent -- a Russian agent who was active in Japan in World War II [29:09]. And it was believed that some of these activities still existed, and so that's why I was brought back to Tokyo [29:18] and spent three years in the Counter Intelligence Corps [29:24] in Japan, most of which was spent with the Soviet [29:32] -- as Chief of the Soviet Counterespionage section of the office in Tokyo.

INT: I want to back up for just one minute to San Francisco [29:49] and ask you what stands out in your mind about your experience in San Francisco? Anything happen to you [30:00]?

WM: Well, I met my wife there in San Francisco [30:04], and I also met an old friend of mine, Ernie Wyle [phonetic], who had been a boy with me in Germany who had been on the voyage of the damned, and it was wonderful renewing our friendship with him and his

wife, who had also come from Landau [30:24]. And it was very, very meaningful, both for meeting my wife and also for meeting these old friends from Germany.

INT: What stands out in your mind about your service in Japan?

WM: In Japan, as I said, I was chief of the Soviet Counterespionage Division [30:52], and I also [31:00] got to know that there had been a Jewish community there in Tokyo [31:07], which was an incredible group of survivors of people who had, first of all, fled. Some of them had fled from Czarist Russia to Mukden [31:20] in North China, and some of them had fled from the Soviet Union [31:22]. And these people had lived by their wits for many years, lived under the Chinese, under the Japanese, and some of them somehow made their way to Japan. Then there were of course -- were some Jewish refugees who had gone to Shanghai [31:43] and had subsequently come to Japan as well. So there was a group of people who -- flotsam and jetsam from all over the world, and I got to know a few of those. In addition [32:00], I was involved in a case involving -- concerning a Soviet [32:08] intelligence officer who was the chief of Soviet intelligence. And we had been observing his activities for some time, and in -- on January the 24th, I think it was, or 23rd or 24th --

[End of Tape 4B]

[Beginning of Tape 5A]

INT: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Werner Michel. This is Tape 2, Side A. And you had been telling me about your tour in Japan. When did you leave Japan?

WM: As I recall, I left Japan approximately February 1955, and my next major assignment, in essence, was in New York [00:37], where I was assigned to the Counter Intelligence

Corps [00:40] detachment there. And I remained there until 1957. I was integrated into the regular Army in the meantime, and the major significant activity [01:00] that I participated in there, essentially, was the flight from Hungary of thousands of refugees during the Hungarian Uprising [01:16] of October 1956. And I was in Camp Kilmer [01:21], New Jersey, where we processed many of these people. And my more specific job was to assure security and counterintelligence coverage for these people so that there would be no problems from -- since we were expecting possibly that Hungarian intelligence, and which was, of course dominated by the Soviets [01:49] -- or Soviet intelligence would use these people coming over here for their own purposes [02:00].

INT: Had you wanted to return to service stateside, and did you have any input at all as to where you were assigned?

WM: The way the system works, after approximately three years overseas in peacetime, one becomes -- one comes up for reassignment. And while -- during that time, we were allowed to put our preference -- make our preferences known, there was no assurance. And in my case, I really didn't want to go to New York [02:45], but that's destiny to send me to New York, in that case. And when I was integrated into the regular Army, as I said before, integrated into [03:00] the infantry, and they were not terribly interested in all the exotic things I had done before as a linguist and so forth and so on. They wanted me to become an infantry officer, so my next station in August 1957 was Fort Benning [03:24], Georgia, where I took the infantry course and the parachute -- attended the parachute school at Fort Benning, which I completed then in late 1958. And once again, I was assigned to Korea [03:43]. I had a year -- another year in Korea, then, as operations officer of the -- of an infantry regiment and as assistant chief of staff over the 7th

Division [04:00], which was located up north on -- near the Imjin River [04:04], north of Seoul [04:07]. It was a very interesting tour, marked by a lot of tough and cold weather experiences in the winters in Korea [04:21], and I was very glad to return to this country in the following year, in 1959, when I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division [04:36] in Fort Bragg [04:36], North Carolina. And there, again, I became an operations officer of a -- of the 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment [04:46]. And for the next two years, I was with the 82nd Airborne Division [04:54]. This was the interesting because we had numerous exercises [05:00] and maneuvers, including maneuvers in Puerto Rico and Panama and all over the United States. In the fall of 1960, I was then given the opportunity to attend the University of Omaha [05:20], and I had for many years worked on obtaining a -- trying to obtain a bachelor's degree, so I was -- I was able to attend what they call the final semester program and did get my degree and returned to the 82nd Airborne Division [05:43]; and no sooner had I returned, then I was selected for the Command and General Staff College [05:48] at Fort Leavenworth [05:48], Kansas. And I left for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in July 1961 [06:00]. And while I was there as a student, I, of course, met students from all over the world, including Austrians, Germans, Israelis. And when I graduated there, I was assigned to the faculty and taught tactics at the Command and General Staff College [06:23] from 1962 to 1965. The one significant experience there, or among several, that might be of interest here is that I was asked to sponsor the first German liaison officer appointed at Fort Leavenworth [06:47], a colonel -- a German colonel. And I sponsored him [07:00], and it was a very interesting experience, particularly when he found out my background. He was not the most sympathetic person, who as I recall initially, admitted that one -- in referring to the

treatment of the Jews, he said that one should have treated the opponents more correctly. I pointed out to him that the Jews in Germany were not opponents; they were -- had been citizens of Germany. And that took him aback. And over the time that I knew him, I was -- I think I was able to point out to him the horror of what Germany had done. Now, he had served in the German Army in World War II [07:58], so he must [08:00] have known what it was to have that happened. But we became, if not friends, we became good acquaintances. We went horseback riding together. We went and played tennis together. We played chess against each other. We were always in competition with each other, and it was a very interesting experience. I was also -- while I was there, I was selected to escort German generals because of my language capability, and I pointed out that previously, when I was stationed in New York [08:43], I took one of the first groups of Germans under -- in the newly-organized German armed forces on trips through this country. And that gave me opportunity [09:00] to meet these individuals and sort of evaluate what kind of people the Germans were using. And I must say some of them were very fine human beings. However, of course, I wasn't able to tell what they had been before.

INT: How long did you stay in the United States at that time?

WM: In 1965, my tour at Leavenworth [09:42] as an instructor ended, and I was assigned to a NATO [09:45] -- to a central Army group in Germany. And as it turned out, as the headquarters was right near Heidelberg [09:56], the central Army group [10:00], and we had military housing in Mannheim [10:05], which, of course, is not very far from the town of Landau [10:09], where I was born. I suppose it's significant that we had French, German, and American personnel on our staff. So, once again, it was a very unusual

opportunity to mingle with -- particularly with the Germans, who I found a very interesting group of people. And I had 18 -- approximately 18 months there. And before I was given command of an infantry battalion in the 3rd Division [10:52] on -- very close to the East German border. I commanded the 2nd Battalion of 15th Infantry [11:00] for another 18 months, until I was promoted to colonel. And I suppose I got to meet some interesting Germans there, one of them whom -- he was a German battalion commander. He turned out to have been a prisoner of war in a camp that -- in Engelstadt [11:22], and I had signed his discharge paper. And he was evidently most appreciative of this -- of the way we treated him because he has visited us here in the United States on several occasions. Secondly, I guess the second point, which is sort of ironic, is that the Germans made me the honorary commander of the 353rd Panzer Grenadier Battalion [12:00], which was co-located with us in [speaks German], as it's pronounced in German. And I couldn't help but reflect, as the Germans passed -- German soldiers passed in review in front of me, some of my feelings at that very moment. From Germany, then, I went to Vietnam [12:31].

INT: Don't go yet. I don't want you to leave Germany just yet.

WM: All right.

INT: I would like you to please expand on what you were just saying about what your thoughts were at the moment that they paraded before you.

WM: Well, it -- I thought I'd -- I just couldn't -- I could hardly grasp [13:00] the meaning of this moment when they were pinning this honorary pin on me and parading all these Germans in front of me. And I thought of myself, of the time 25 years earlier when I had left Germany on a -- on a train in 1936, I guess. And this was -- I guess it was 30 years

earlier, it was '67 when this occurred -- and it's early '68, actually, February. And I just -- to me, this was a very overwhelming moment, and I can't really put into words all the wild feelings that went through me and the [14:00] -- as I watched these steel-helmeted Germans passing in front of me, saluting me. It was indeed an unusual experience. I had -- apropos, I had also made a couple of visits to my hometown with my family. And, of course, as I was to do in many subsequent visits to Germany, I always went to the cemetery and looked at the place where our synagogue had once stood, where there was now a simple stone there. But I remembered one occasion, I stood in my -- in front of my old -- my grandfather's old home on Koenigstrasse. And I had my wife and two children with me [15:00]; and then we heard music and there was a parade coming down this very street. And for one brief moment, when I saw this parade -- and they have a number of parades -- they call themselves the flower city -- the garden city of the Palatinate in Landau [15:21]. But when I heard that marshal music, I suddenly had almost a feeling of terror, as we'd had when we saw the storm troopers. We used to march down the same street in front of similar band -- behind similar bands. And it was almost a catharsis for me to go back to this town, which now has lost whatever allure it might have had at one time [16:00]. It was just a nasty, small town, and I really don't -- really, I've gone back a number of times, but I've had only one other experience, which might be interesting. During a trip many years later, when I was in the Office of Secretary of Defense [16:24], and I had a day free, and I went back, drawn back by -- for some reason. And there, in the middle of the market square, was a black sergeant, American sergeant. And I went up to him and spoke to him in English because I'm -- and he told me he was stationed in Landau [16:51] with a unit. And I asked him where he was from, and he was from North

Carolina somewhere [17:00]. And he asked me where I was from, and I said I'm from this town. And he looked at me and he said, "Why would anybody want to be in this dumb town?" He said, "I hate every minute here." I've never forgotten this brief interlude with this American sergeant who was stationed with the HAWK Anti-Missile Battalion [17:23], which was on the outskirts of the town there.

INT: While you were in your hometown, did you see any of your former neighbors or anybody with whom you'd been a classmate?

WM: I saw one schoolmate who -- his father had been the chief of police and had been very decent to us. And he [18:00] -- I've lost track of him now, but I saw him a few times there. He'd become a dentist, and he was a very good person. And he had served in the German Army, and his brother had served in the SS [18:15]. And I saw him a few times, but we had -- we really didn't have very much in common. And I always -- in Landau [18:26], there is a memorial set up. It's called the Frank-Loebsches House [18:31]; it's named after the Frank family of Anne Frank's [18:35] family originally. It had come from there and this is -- this house was in very bad condition at the end of the war and has been rehabilitated now. And they've set aside, on the upper floor, several rooms where they have [19:00] the mementos of the Jewish community that was there. So I've gone there on a few occasions; but other than that -- and the cemetery. There is -- it's like going on an archeological expedition, almost. There are just no Jews there.

INT: During your tour in Germany this time, who knew you were Jewish, and did you experience any anti-Semitism [19:35]?

WM: I think it was pretty well known. As a matter of fact, when I was commander of the battalion, both of my battalion sergeants were Jewish. But they -- of course, there were

no -- were hardly any Jewish personnel. And we had no services up there in -- where we were stationed, no Jewish services, because [20:00] there were no Jewish chaplains there in that area. If there was anti-Semitism [20:09], I certainly didn't notice it. Of course, it would have been -- I was a fairly senior officer by that time, and it would have -- it would probably be difficult for me to have become aware of it in any case. So among my allied colleagues, I can't say that I found any anti-Semitism [20:37]. As a matter of fact, I became very friendly with some of the German officers, and they simply didn't bring up the topic very often. But they were certainly aware that I was Jewish, and I must say that they were quite correct. They [21:00] entertained us in their homes, and we entertained them. And of course, we had the same mission; we were under NATO [21:09]. And I went with them to Luxembourg and Brussels, where the headquarters of NATO was. But there was no evidence of -- any overt anti-Semitism [21:20]. As a matter of fact, I probably like to point out that I put my daughter in a German school. The American schools were quite substandard there. And one of my German colleagues helped me place my daughter in a German school, and she became bilingual. And she considers this to have been a very important experience, a very defining experience in her life. And she has spoken very often and very favorably about her experience [22:00].

INT: Did you ever at that time -- on that trip to Germany, was there ever any acknowledgement from any of the Germans that you met about responsibility for what happened during the war?

WM: I have some German friends that I met during the period when I was there before, and one of them is -- he's probably the last one I have contact with because the others have passed away. He was the head of the Bavarian senate, and his -- I have known him since

1946. And as I said, the people we selected to work with us, at least in my small unit, we made absolutely certain that they were not tainted. This man was in the Catholic Youth Movement [23:00], which was -- well, they were -- while they weren't overtly -- couldn't overtly oppose the Nazis [23:14], they were passive or tried to be passive. And you may have heard of the Scholl [23:25] sisters, or the brother and sister Scholl, who were at Munich University [23:30], who tried to put out some anti-Nazi [23:35] leaflets and they were beheaded. And this German that I know was a contemporary of theirs. And he rose up, became a very -- he was a burgermeister of a substantial town and later on became head of the Bavarian senate. We have been very close friends [24:00] ever since those days. And he has spoken a number of times -- as a matter of fact, he and his wife both one time we were talking. His wife said I will never forget when they came to take this family away in their apartment house in Munich [24:16]. And he said, "We did nothing. None of us -- we turned away. We didn't want to be -- we were so frightened and we were so passive, and we didn't find the strength to do anything in those days." And she said, "I've never forgotten this, and it will be with me the rest of my life." And so these people, of course, have been very unusual. As I said, most Germans of the current generation, they are -- they [25:00] -- thinking Germans, I would say, it would appear that they abhor what the previous generation did. And of course, we're now getting into the second generation after the war, not only the first. And then there are many others who -- the schools do not make a -- or have not in the past made a very conscious attempt to talk about the quote "guilt of the German." So it's probably quite human. They want to get away from that. They don't want to be reminded of it constantly. There is a small minority of Germans who -- one half of one percent, probably, who still keep this alive.

But I would say the rest of them, just like every -- anyone else [26:00], that's as if we here talk about what we did to the American Indians or to the blacks, who don't want to be reminded of these things.

INT: When your daughter was in school in Germany, did she learn anything about the most recent part of German history? Specifically, did she learn anything about World War II [26:23] and the Holocaust [26:24] while she was in school then?

WM: I would say very, very little. She -- of course, she was in grade school, and it probably wouldn't be fair to make a judgment on that basis. But we had her in -- when I was commanding this battalion, we were in a very remote area. And she went into a school, there were only three teachers for eight grades, and it was a rural -- a typical rural school, and most of the children were refugee children from East Germany [27:00] or from East Prussia [27:01]. And she really got to see a cross-section of what these people also had to surmount. But I can't make a meaningful judgment on whether they should have had more of a curriculum in grade school. I don't think they probably -- it would have -- would have been appropriate.

INT: How long were you in Germany, and where were you assigned next?

WM: I left Germany in February 1968 and went -- dropped my family off here in the United States and I went directly to Vietnam [27:47]. I spent a year in Vietnam on the staff at the -- in Saigon [27:54], most of it, but I -- my position required me [28:00] to be all over the country. So I got to see all of South Vietnam [28:05], from North to South, and returned. It was a -- professionally, an important experience. But it was very sad to see what that country had to go through; and it was also, from a standpoint of warfare, where they're in constant turmoil because our soldiers came and went. And that did not help

with an enlightened professional operation, I would say, from a -- so one learned a great deal of what not to do [29:00] over there, as well as what we should have done.

INT: What were your expectations when you were going to Vietnam [29:10], before you had actually been there? What did you expect that you would encounter?

WM: Well, I remember I was -- while I was still in Germany, I was asked to address a German -- group of German officers. They wanted -- they wanted to talk by an American officer on Vietnam [29:34], and this is before I left. And I said I expect that it was somewhat similar, or I expected it to be somewhat similar to -- it was in an allegorical sense, to the Thirty Years' War [29:50] in Germany from 1618 to 1648, when after the first 20 years, people had forgotten [30:00] what the war was really about. And the people who were the real victims were the farmers and the common people. And I have -- I think I was quite correct in that assessment, that to the Vietnamese, I think the ideological purposes were -- had become completely blurred. All they wanted was that -- just leave us alone. We don't want the Americans here. We don't want the North Vietnamese here. We don't want the South Vietnamese here. We would like to live like human beings. And I think I'm correct in that because the war had been going on, in essence, since the late-1940s. And the French left in 1955; and, in effect, we then -- in the eyes of the Vietnamese, we became the heirs of the French [31:00], which didn't help us any because the French were considered to be a colonial government. And, in essence, that's the -- I guess the -- from a human standpoint, would be my assessment that the danger or the terror or the inability of people to live as -- to live out their lives was sort of the overriding factor there. Even so, our aim was certainly laudable. We went in there with the very best intentions, but a democracy should not really get involved in protracted

warfare because our Congress [31:52] is not going to stand for boys from Iowa being killed [32:00] somewhere 10,000 miles away for years and years and years at a time.

And I think we did -- we have learned that lesson. This is why when we went into Desert Storm [32:11], it was over very, very quickly because the generation of military professionals that came out of Vietnam [32:20], like Colin Powell [32:22], certainly learned that lesson.

INT: Is there anything that sticks out in your mind about --

[End of Tape 5A]

[Beginning of Tape 5B]

INT: -- of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Werner Michel. This is Tape 2, Side B. And you had just been telling me about civilian disturbance intelligence, which was your assignment. Did you have any problems with that particular assignment in light of your personal history from your childhood in Germany?

WM: None at all because -- as a matter of fact, we had a number of Jewish personnel in our office. And I must say, this was only one of the responsibilities. We also had other counterintelligence responsibilities [01:00]. This was the one that was unusual to me because, as I said, I had been out of intelligence for a number of years. And the Army leadership also was very concerned that our activities be legal and proper. And so when some of these disturbances occurred, we, of course, wanted to be sure we were right, and we also wanted to be sure that we did not commit Army troops prior to their -- to the President's decision to commit Army troops. So we had to have good information on which to base a meaningful and intelligent argument. I also bring this up because in 1969

there were allegations that this -- that the Army had indeed been spying on civilians [02:00]. And Senator Sam Ervin [02:01] from North Carolina and his Constitutional Rights Subcommittee [02:09] ran this inquiry, and I became involved in this on the margin because the Secretary of the Army set up a board of inquiry to look into this, into the possibilities of violation by the Army intelligence command. And the specific allegations dealt with the Army intelligence activities surrounding the Democratic National Convention [02:38] in 1968. They -- I think it was called the Days of Rage [02:43]. I was not even in the country at that time when this occurred. Therefore, I suppose they selected me to be on this panel because I was not personally involved. There was no conflict of interest [03:00]. So I was the military member of this board of inquiry, which went to Chicago [03:04], and we interviewed intelligence personnel and persons from other agencies to determine whether there were legitimate grievances. And we found yes, indeed, that there had been some -- at the local level, unauthorized activities. But they were not on the floor of the convention, as has been alleged. At that time, there were also black activists. Jesse Jackson [03:42] came through with his mule train, and he took his mule train through a Polish neighborhood, which was probably not conducive to the best kind of situation, and Army intelligence had offered [04:00] to protect him. And there was a misunderstanding. They had not watched him, had to offer to protect him because he probably needed more protection than he needed watching at that point. And in any case, we completed our inquiry and reported to the Secretary of the Army. Also, I took part in the -- later on, in the establishment of what was -- became known as a Defense Investigative Review Council [04:29], which was a civilian control over investigative and counterintelligence activities. I served on the first working group

of this organization, which was set up to show that there was good civilian control and supervision over these kinds of activities. And it was necessary because [05:00] the Army's civil disturbance intelligence plan was too broad and permitted the collection of too much information on civilians that really wasn't necessary for the accomplishment of the mission. It was important, however, for the Army to know when they were committed, that they should have adequate information on which to go into Detroit [05:30] or go into Cleveland [05:31] so that they would not be completely blind when they went into these places. However, they -- as a result of our activities on the Defense Investigative Review Council [05:45], policies were implemented which set up clear and straight guidelines for the activities of Army, Navy, and Air Force counterintelligence people [06:00]; and these exist to this day, I believe.

INT: During your time with this work with the Pentagon [06:13], you said from '69 to '71, was also a time of the Kent State [06:18] shooting. Did that have any impact on what you were doing?

WM: The Kent State incident, I would emphasize, is a good example of what can happen when a poorly trained organization gets involved in civil disturbances. These were not Army soldiers. These were Ohio National Guard [06:43] people. These are -- these National Guardsmen come on active duty once every two weeks or once a month and are basically citizen soldiers. They were really not adequately trained [07:00] because, first of all, they should never have had live ammunition for that kind of a mission; they should have had riot training. And this is -- I'm glad you brought this out because this is a very important point and these people died needlessly who were killed there. In the professional military or in the Army and the Navy and Air Force, they -- primarily, in the Army and the

Marine Corps, they do receive riot training. And it's very important that troops understand the limits of what they're allowed to do. And today, we have many more constraints than existed at that time, and I'm sure that before -- I'm sure that the National Guard [07:53], too, has -- because I'm aware of the National Guard came up with strong training recommendation as a result of that sort of thing [08:00].

INT: Where were you assigned after the Pentagon [08:07]?

WM: Well, in 1971 I was asked to become -- I was interviewed by the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency [08:15], General Bennett [08:17], and I became director of counterintelligence for the Defense Intelligence Agency. And I completed my -- I was -- became aware that I would never be able to leave intelligence alive, and so I completed my military service there. I had three years in the DIA [08:42] there and retired from the active military service, then, in September 1974.

INT: What do you mean you would never be allowed to leave alive?

WM: Well, I was hoping to get back [09:00] to the infantry because it's -- in a career pattern, which one has to develop, if you have -- if one has two or three specialties, it's especially -- let's say in those days -- I don't know how it is today -- it was not very good for your career if you -- as a matter of fact, at one time in the -- when I reported here to Washington [09:30], initially, when I first came back into the infantry, they said, "We don't know what happened to your career, but it looks horrible. And if you want to go anywhere in this Army, don't you ever get another intelligence assignment." So I knew when I had gotten two consecutive intelligence assignments, I knew that all hope was lost, and that's what I meant by that [10:00]. So I became director of counterintelligence for the DIA [10:03]; and the significance of those three years was that, oh, I escorted some

Germans. I escorted the minister of defense for Austria on a trip; but more importantly, I also served on the Intelligence Evaluation Committee [10:19], which was -- this was during the Nixon [10:24] administration. And this Intelligence Evaluation Committee [10:30] was looking into domestic threats to the government, and I reported to the general counsel of the Department of Defense [10:47]. Melvin Laird [10:49] was Secretary of Defense at that time, and the guidance I got from Fred Buzhardt [10:56], who later on -- who was general counsel [11:00], who later on became counsel to President Nixon [11:03]. And he said, "Let's keep them at arm's length." And so I attended these meetings there, and we distanced ourselves from their missions and left that to the FBI [11:20] and other agencies because they were not appropriate. Most of the missions were not appropriate for the intelligence community within the Department of Defense [11:32]. And I, having been become quite aware of the limitations on what the military should do while I was serving the Army, this was very -- this was very clear and made clear to me by my superiors in the Office of the Secretary of Defense that when I represented the Department of Defense [11:57] over there that I should [12:00] be very, very careful not to accept missions which were not clearly stated as being within the purview of the Defense Department [12:12]. There were some -- I mean, they had some very unusual requests, what were students doing and that sort of thing. We said, "We have no information on that. That's not the Department of Defense [12:26]," and that kind of thing. So I retired, then, on 1 September 1974 and remained retired for two years.

INT: When you retired, what were your plans for your retirement?

WM: I had absolutely no plans. I was going to write, if anything. And really [13:00], I had worked so hard until the last day that I -- there are many people prepare themselves much

more adequately than I did, and I thought I deserved a little while to get my thoughts together. And I thought perhaps I could write something and do some research, and -- but in retirement, one finds one has less time than before.

INT: You said that you retired for two years. I'd like to know what you did for the years, and then I'd like to know what you did after those two years.

WM: In 1974 and '75, if you recall, after Watergate [13:47], under Senator Church [13:50], there were these Church Committee hearings into the possible -- into intelligence activities [14:00]. And it was decided to -- President Ford [14:11], I believe, issued an executive order. This is after the demise of President Nixon [14:17] -- an executive order all for intelligence activities to govern all intelligence activities across the spectrum of the government. Of course, the Department of Defense [14:29] is one of these activities, and this executive order specified that there was to be an inspector general organized in every Cabinet -- in every Cabinet-level intelligence activity. In other words, if the Commerce Department [14:49] undertook intelligence, they had to have an I.G. And in -- and thusly, the Department of Defense [14:56] was to have an I.G. also [15:00]. At that time, there was no I.G.; therefore, they directed that the department come up with an inspector general who would assure, and the legality and propriety of all intelligence activity and counterintelligence activity of the Department of Defense [15:20]. That would include the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the National Security Agency [15:25], Defense Intelligence Agency [15:27], and sundry other activities as well. The person who was charged with doing that came from the Watergate [15:38] staff, and he looked around for people to assist him. And somehow, someone gave him my name and he contacted me and I became his deputy in August -- is that almost -- August 1976. And he [16:00]

remained until July '79, and I remained as deputy. And when he left, he arranged -- and he suggested and recommended that I should be his successor. So I then became inspector general for Defense Intelligence [16:19]. And then in 1982, they changed the title and I became an assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Oversight, which was clearly our mission, the oversight of all intelligence activity, to make sure that activities were properly supervised, that they were management controlled, that there was a legal review to make certain that these activities were -- could withstand scrutiny, and that, for instance, if there were any clandestine activities [17:00], that the senior officials were briefed and gave their approval, and that these were conducted and were then looked at, at several levels. And that was very, very interesting, as you can imagine. So I stayed there until 1993, and on the 2nd of April 1993, I -- after 17 years in that job, I retired again.

INT: What have you been doing since?

WM: Since that time, I've been retired again. I did some volunteering down at the Jewish War Veterans [17:54]. I haven't done -- been down there in the last couple of months [18:00], but other than that, I've monitored the activities of my wife very closely and visited my children in parts of the United States. I have done a few other things. I've participated in seminars on national security and intelligence. I belong to the Army Historical Foundation [18:23], and activities of that nature, basically. And I'm trying to grow old gracefully while maintaining a little bit of tennis capability.

INT: Over your many years in the service as a civilian and as part of the service, you've seen some major changes in the way things have been organized and run. I'd like you, if you could, to take a few minutes to reflect on the changes you've seen [19:00] with respect to

the civil rights movement and how that has changed the military; and the women's movement and how that has changed the military.

WM: Well, I'd like to not limit myself to that alone, but I would like to say that I particularly saw integration in the Army; and I'm very proud to say that the United States Army, integrated on the orders from President Truman [19:35] in 1949, has provided a splendid and extraordinary opportunity for minority personnel, and women as well, to participate fully, including Jewish guys like me [20:00]. And as I probably told you when I -- I never ceased to marvel when I was on the staff of -- you know, I was on the staff of close to five secretaries of defense, but I particularly was tremendously impressed with Secretary Cheney [20:22]. And I'd be sitting at some staff meeting and there he was. And I said, "I wonder if they know there's a kid from Landau [20:32] sitting here." And it's amazing, when you look around at the spectrum of people, that no one really wanted to know where the origin, the background, the ethnic makeup. It was a true meritocracy, which is -- I think the highest objective any of us can hope for [21:00]. And I would say that the military is probably in the forefront, in spite of the warts and things that happen periodically. I think the military is a -- as a whole, has offered great opportunity, equality of opportunity, to minorities, to ethnic groups, to -- if you're -- they don't care if you're Jewish or black or whatever you are. If you can accomplish the task at hand, that's what they're interested in. Now, that doesn't mean that they're not human beings. There are also awful people of all ethnic backgrounds who are terribly difficult to deal with, and sometimes the system is so constrained that you [22:00] -- it's difficult to get rid of really unproductive -- people who are unproductive for various reasons. Personality that is abrasive or a man who has a severe psychological problem, it's up to our system. It gives

-- has so many safeguards built into it today that sometimes it's very difficult to make a quick personnel decision. So there are two sides to this coin. But all in all, I must say what we have done in the wisdom of our leadership has been tremendous in providing this kind of an opportunity. Is that good enough?

INT: You mention that you have children. I'd like to know how many children you have and what you told them, if anything, about your life in Germany [23:00] before coming to this country?

WM: I have two girls. One is here in this area, and the other one lives as of now in Augusta, Georgia. And she has two daughters, my two granddaughters, and they are both are very much aware of what happened. I've taken them to the cemetery in Landau [23:28] and shown them not only the ones who are buried there, but the ones who couldn't be buried there because they died somewhere else. And they -- both my children feel very Jewish. They're very committed. My granddaughters are very active in B'nai B'rith [23:54] and in Jewish activities, and I'm very [24:00] -- I'm very, very pleased with that. And my daughter has sponsored a German -- that daughter in -- that is in Augusta has sponsored a young German student from East Berlin [24:16], and she took him to Jewish services and gave him an appreciation of what it means to be Jewish. And he came from East Germany [24:31], where not only they didn't know anything about the Jews, but they didn't know anything about anything. They were kept very much in the dark on other than what had been told to them in East Germany [24:44]. So, yes, my children are very committed, and I'm very, very, very proud of them as well [25:00].

INT: How do you think your refugee experience has influenced the choices that you've made in your life?

WM: I think it -- of course, it's had a tremendous effect on me. First of all, of course, I know what it was to be poor, and I know what it was to be a refugee and to live with a family that -- of strangers. I also probably -- it drove me to particularly excel in the military. I'm not sure whether that's conscious or subconscious, but it's there. So in effect, it's had a strong -- it also [26:00] -- I feel a great debt to this country, and I wanted to serve this country. And I know that particularly when I was younger, I was probably much more -- oh, when one is young, one is much more idealistic, but that's what I really wanted to do was to serve as well as I could. And this country has repaid us in many, many ways, probably more than I could have expected.

INT: You said that your experiences from your childhood caused you to want to excel in the military. Can you elaborate what you meant?

WM: Well, I would say that when we left Germany [27:00], I particularly felt that the Germans made us all feel like we were sub-humans, that we were an unworthy species, if you will. And I think that's probably what it was, and that Jews couldn't be soldiers and Jews were cowards and Jews were everything bad, and I don't know whether -- as I said, some of this could well be subconscious. And so when I -- I'm probably -- must have impressed some of my -- when I was an enlisted man, some of my fellow soldiers that they probably thought I was half-crazed because I wanted to be a good soldier and they wanted nothing to do with the military. They wanted to get out of the military, and here's this madman who wants to be in the military.

INT: You've done so many things in your life [28:00]. What do you feel were your greatest accomplishments or your greatest contributions?

WM: That's very difficult to say, but I would say that my experiences gave me an

understanding for the underdog. And I don't think I ever forgot that, even during the days when being in counterintelligence was where we had a great deal of authority and power. And later on, when I was the inspector general for intelligence, it always lurked in the back of my mind that our activities in a democracy should be [29:00] -- should not be above the law and should be accountable. And if I helped in some way to do that, I worked -- I reported in my job in the Pentagon [29:13] [unintelligible], I reported to the President's Intelligence Oversight Board [29:17] and to the Secretary of Defense. And I hope that I was able to project to both of these gentlemen that we in the department were doing that within -- in compliance with our policies and that they could rest assured that we were doing our very best in that regard.

INT: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add or include before we conclude the interview today?

WM: I've said so many things and so much over this time. I can only say no [30:00].

INT: I thank you very much, and this concludes the interview -- the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Werner Michel. Thank you.

[end of transcript]

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