

Fort Hunt Oral History
P.O. Box 1142
George Washington Memorial Parkway
Interview with Donald Pritchard
by Brandon Bies, Vincent Santucci and George Weidinger
July 29, 2008

INTERVIEWER: We're just going to treat this like a normal conversation, except it's about stuff that you did 65 years ago. So we'll try to wrack your brain as much as we can. I'm going to give a brief introduction. My name is Brandon Bies. I'm with the National Park Service. This is an interview with Mr. Donald Pritchard here at Bay Village, Ohio. Today is July 29, 2008. This is an oral history interview by the National Park Service as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project, and I'm joined by Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci, fellow 1142 veteran George Weidinger, and two of Mr. Pritchard's sons. So with that, Mr. Pritchard, could you just real briefly tell us a little bit about your own background, like when and where you were born?

DONALD PRITCHARD: Okay. I was born in [01:00] -- I always say -- oh, I was born in New Philadelphia, Ohio, although I always say Dover. That's my favorite town. They're right beside each other and were always rivals like Pittsburgh and Cleveland all through high school and that stuff. So I was really born in New Philadelphia, although I claim I was born in Dover.

INT: And when was that?

DP: September 20, 1912.

INT: And you grew up in that area and went to school in that area?

DP: Yes, I went all through grade school. Yes. You want me to go along with -- okay, yeah.

INT: Sure. Yeah, if you want to just bring us [02:00] briefly through growing up and where you went to school and what you did after that.

DP: Okay. I went through the grade schools there in the school system, of course. And --

MALE SPEAKER: He was the editor of the yearbook in Dover High School, and he lettered in football in Dover High.

DP: Yeah.

INT: And when -- what year did you graduate from high school?

DP: 1931.

INT: 1931? And did you go in -- go to work after that, or did you go to college? What did you do afterwards?

DP: Well, my time then was about like the time right now. Times were tough for the kids getting out of school -- high school, there's just -- were no employment available at all. So we were out there trying to get [03:00] some kind of employment. Didn't matter what, it's just for something to do. It was very familiar to how it was right now.

MS: And you went to Ohio State [03:14] in 1931 after high school, from 1931 to 1933 went to Ohio State in Columbus?

DP: Yeah.

INT: What did you study when you were at Ohio State?

DP: Well, [laughs] I always had law in the back of my mind there, being an attorney, so I -- always looking forward to a law degree right from the word go. So I was -- a law degree [04:00].

INT: Okay. And after you went to college, what did -- what sort of job did you have in the -- in the mid- or late-1930s?

DP: What did I say? It was about the same as now.

INT: Okay.

DP: Almost identical. Just couldn't find employment of any kind.

INT: Okay.

DP: It was just impossible.

MS: Okay. You worked part-time at the Reeve's Steel Mill, though?

DP: Oh, yeah, anything like that. Well, if a week or two or something like that, trying to pick up a little time, a little manufacturing company [05:00].

INT: And was that the way it was up until the war broke out?

DP: Okay. That is correct. Now, when we -- I say we -- it's exactly very similar to now [unintelligible] having some experience along on those lines [unintelligible].

MS: Did -- you went to Bliss College in Cleveland [05:23] in the thirties part-time to -- when you worked at Dorsal's [phonetic] Restaurant, you were a chef at Mills Restaurant in Cleveland while you were going to law school?

DP: Yes, I was always trying to make a dollar or two here or there. The other things were -- they're exactly the same as now. It just wasn't -- jobs weren't available for anybody. I don't --

MS: But you worked at a -- you worked for the U.S. War Department [06:00] in 1940-1941 when you were in Cleveland [06:03]? I'm not exactly sure what you did for the War Department?

DP: That is right. Well, that was the first I got a job that that would be considered a permanent job, yeah. It was a -- it was a [inaudible].

INT: Do you remember what sort of work you were doing for the War Department [06:44] at that time?

DP: It was really office work right there.

INT: Just office work?

DP: Ordinary office work at that time [07:00] when I first got in the --

INT: Okay. I'm hoping that's their last pass.

INT: The War Department [07:08] in Washington [07:09]?

INT: Yeah, we're -- was that -- where?

MS: I think it was in Cleveland [07:12] he worked for the U.S. War Department.

INT: Okay.

MS: And he was appointed by the attorney general, Robert Jackson [07:17], to work in Cleveland at that time, and I think he, part of the time, worked for immigration while he was going to law school. And then in May of '42 is when he joined the Army. And he was going to law school, and they wanted to -- wanted him to go to the Army right away, but he was -- they said that they'd let him finish the first year in law school. So in May of '42, then, they let him -- then that's when he finished his first year and joined the U.S. Army, went to Camp Perry [07:42] at that time and then from there he went to the Pentagon [07:45]. And my mother also worked in the Pentagon for a general or something down there in 1943 or somewhere around there. Is that right, Pop?

DP: Yeah.

INT: And [08:00] so you -- were you drafted into the military, or did you -- did you volunteer sometime there during law school?

DP: No, no, I was drafted.

INT: Okay. But you put that off until you were done in your first year of law school? That's when you actually entered the military, in June of '42?

MS: May of '42.

INT: May of '42?

MS: Yeah.

INT: Okay.

MS: Because then he -- I think he asked them if he could stay for the first year rather than go in the middle of his year, and they let him stay until May. Is that right, Pop?

DP: Yeah.

INT: And did you then just go to normal boot camp? I think you said it was Camp Perry [08:42]? Was that just a normal infantry boot camp?

DP: Yes.

MS: No, they were married prior.

DP: What was that again [09:00]?

INT: I was wondering what -- were you trained in anything especially at Camp Perry [09:04], or was it just regular boot camp, just typical Army boot camp?

DP: Yes, it is typical, yeah.

INT: Typical boot camp? Okay. And so did you receive any other training after? Did you go somewhere else after Camp Perry [09:24]? Were you assigned -- before you went to Fort Hunt [09:26], were you anywhere else besides Camp Perry?

DP: Well, what was this again?

INT: Were you stationed anywhere else after you finished boot camp? Did you receive any other training, any other special training, prior to being assigned to 1142 [09:50]?

DP: Yeah, well, it gets a little foggy here [10:00].

MS: It says here he --

DP: Yeah.

MS: -- went to Camp Perry [10:08] training for paperwork, and then got an extension to

complete his quarter. He was stranded at Camp Perry because all of your buddies were processed, so then you left between June and January to report to the Pentagon [09:22] for Washington [09:23] for further training in Alexandria, Virginia [10:26].

INT: Okay. And so it sounds like in -- somewhere in that winter, maybe around January, is when you end up coming to Washington, D.C. [10:36]?

MS: June to January.

INT: From June to January?

MS: June to January and go back to Camp Perry [10:42] to train in Washington.

DP: That's correct.

INT: Okay. Do you remember this train? Was this -- was this actually at the Pentagon [10:50]? Were you stationed at the actual Pentagon [11:00]?

MS: I know he worked in the Pentagon [11:06]. I don't know if he actually was trained there, but he worked in the Pentagon. But I don't know of any details about it, what he did or if that was part of MIS [11:16] or he was doing the office work for MIS [11:19].

MS: Do you know, Pop, if you do MIS [11:21] work when you were in the Pentagon [11:23] in '43?

INT: I guess we want to know, did he go to Camp Ritchie [11:29] at all?

DP: We've got [unintelligible].

INT: Sure, oh, that's all right. Do you remember the name of a military training facility called Camp Ritchie [11:41]? Does that ring any bells?

DP: Yeah. Yes, it does.

INT: Do you know if you went there? It was -- it was in Maryland.

MS: That was the MIS [11:52] training.

DP: Yeah, yeah, I did.

INT: You did go to Camp Ritchie [11:56]?

DP: Yeah [12:00].

INT: Do you remember anything about your training there or what you were trained in at Camp Ritchie [12:07]? Do you remember anything at all about Camp Ritchie [12:32] in Maryland?

MS: Did you have some special training at Camp Ritchie [12:44], Pop, for 1142 [12:46]? Yeah, better ask another question [13:00].

INT: Okay. And that's fine. Don't worry about it. Well, what do you remember? What do you remember about when you first got to 1142 [13:10]? Do you have any -- what sort of things do you remember about it and why you were going there?

DP: Well, they didn't tell you much. You know, you just go in there and you find out when you get there if you found out then. So, I don't know if there's probably any answer I'd get. We'll see when we get there. Words to that effect.

INT: Did you go with a group of other soldiers, or were you just by yourself assigned? Were you with a group or just an individual [14:00]? And if you don't remember, that's okay. Well, how about -- what do you remember about what your job was going to be? What were you assigned to do at 1142 [14:27]?

MS: Well, he seems to respond to your requests.

DP: Yeah, I don't know.

INT: When you were at the 1142 [14:43], what did they -- what did you do there when you first got there? What were you doing at 1142? In Fort Hunt [14:51], what did you do there when you first started? At the 1142 [14:55], what was your job? Did you send

messages to Europe [15:00] or what? Mail?

DP: Well, I -- it would take a -- yeah, well -- yeah, we -- by code, we would send messages of various types to Europe to these organizations there. And then -- okay. And then by return code we got replies. It was -- yes. Yes, we sent messages to them of what was going on here, and what we wanted to know was going on there and vice versa, you know.

MS: What did you do exactly?

DP: Well, I worked with [Silvio] Bedini [15:57] there and [16:00] all these codes. He was a specialist in the codes, and the way he set up these codes in this whole [unintelligible], he would send them off in the -- but I couldn't really understand all of what's going on in a sense because of his codes but I still wrote them and we sent them over there and then we'd get it back and forth and so on.

MS: What did you do next in 1142 [16:42] when you were still in the Pentagon [16:44], Washington [16:45], Fort Hunt [16:46]? What did you do next?

DP: Well, it went along that way until [17:00] -- it went along that way until we -- ask me that question again.

INT: What did you do besides working with the codes? Did you do anything else besides code work?

DP: Well, in a sense, no. That was primarily our work.

MS: Did you do anything else before you went to Europe while you were in 1142 [17:53] here in America at Fort Hunt [17:56], Washington [17:57]? Did you do anything else before you left for Europe [18:00]? Or no, you're remembering anything else that you did?

DP: What was the previous question?

MS: When -- did you -- when you -- right before you went to Europe, you were just still

working in the Pentagon [18:24] and Fort Hunt [18:25] and 1142 [18:26] before you went to Europe? You remember that?

DP: Yeah.

MS: Yeah? What did you go to Europe for? What did they send you over there to do? You worked with the resistance over there in Europe?

DP: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we worked in -- with the resistance [19:00], yes. That's 1142 [19:04]. We had a lot to do with the -- our airlift, for example, gets shot down; it was not only our Air Corps but all of the allies--

MS: Yeah, when the Allies got shot down, what did you guys do at 1142 [19:44] for the airmen that got shot down?

DP: We would hook up with a [20:00] -- with a French Resistance [20:03] underground there and assist them in getting them back to their lines over.

INT: And when you were in Europe, what did you do? What was your job when you were in France?

MS: Did you debrief a lot of these people that were shot down and captured?

DP: Well, yes, that is true. You got all these questions going all directions here. I don't know what's going on there, but what was the previous question?

MS: Did you debrief and talk to these soldiers that were shot down?

DP: Oh, I see. Yeah, well [21:00], when these airmen were shot down, they were -- well, they were shot down. And we got a hold of them, and then they would find out, how they did it, who helped them and what methods did they use and how did they find anyone, how did you make your connections.

MS: You're talking about the Germans?

DP: No.

INT: Okay.

DP: No, no [22:00]. We're talking about -- always say the Germans. We were talking about -
- we're talking about Allies and that.

INT: Americans who had escaped?

DP: That's right.

INT: And were you doing this at 1142 [22:16] or just when you were over in Europe? Where
did you talk with these Americans?

DP: We [unintelligible].

INT: Did you debrief them at 1142 [22:45] or did you just debrief them in Europe, the
Americans who had escaped?

DP: Oh, we debriefed them [23:00]. They were shot down [unintelligible], eventually taken
prisoners of war by enemies, by the Germans and we --

MS: Did you send messages into the German camps with these people, sent information in?

DP: Yeah.

MS: You sent secret information in with the prisoners?

DP: Yeah.

MS: And then you got secret information [24:00] back from them, the prisoners?

DP: That's right.

INT: That's a really good question. The question is that were pilots briefed before they did
their flights that if you're shot down, take this information into the camp and give it to the
other prisoners? Was that done?

DP: I would say yes. [affirmative] Yeah.

MS: That's kind of inferred.

MS: Yeah, he talked a little bit to me about that months and months ago or a year ago, something like that. I don't remember the details, but yeah, stuff like that went on, he said. I don't remember the details. He didn't talk a lot about it, but somehow they sent information in and they told them what to do when they got shot down and that somebody would contact them or -- I mean, they knew ahead of time that people at camp [25:00] were around that they would get ahold of them with secret messages or something, but I don't -- he didn't tell me any details about how that worked. He might tell you now.

INT: Yeah. I mean, it's certainly a complex program. There was the escape portion and there was the evasion portion. Did you deal with both escape and evasion?

DP: Yeah.

INT: Yes? Okay. And so your work with the Resistance [25:26], did it involve debriefing of prisoners that were captured, or was it debriefing of pilots that were shot down that were not captured but were evading only, or both?

DP: Both.

INT: Both? Okay. Very good.

DP: But anyway, yeah.

INT: And do you remember where you -- where were you questioning the Americans who had escaped? Was that when you were in Europe, or did some of those Americans actually [26:00] come all the way back to 1142 [26:02]?

DP: Yeah, well, they came all the way back there, yeah.

INT: To 1142?

DP: Yeah.

INT: Okay. Another question for you, what do you remember about the escape devices that were being made? Do you remember anything about those? When things would be hidden in packages or disguised?

DP: Yeah. Yeah.

INT: What do you remember about that?

DP: Well, here we go. Silvio had a connection with that too -- Bedini [26:45]. Of course, it was getting confusing. What happened, when or then or how, so -- but yes, we were connected with it [27:00], some before and some after. Some during -- it gets a little bit difficult to remember when and how and why.

MS: What did the prisoners get in the mail when they were -- the American prisoners, when they were in -- they got mail, what did they get sent in the mail? What kind of escape information did they get in the mail? What stuff did you send them as far as anything to help them escape? What did you send them in the mail, the prisoners, the American prisoners? Did they get stuff in the mail to help them escape, Pop? What did they send them in the mail? What did they get in the mail?

DP: Yeah.

MS: What kind of things [28:00]? Did they send them transmission devices or radio parts, or what did they send them?

DP: Yeah, yes, we supplied with devices either to receive or to transmit, yeah.

INT: Yeah? How did that -- how did they get that? You mailed it to them?

DP: Yes, when they were sent to them with our assistance, yeah. We had --

MS: Remember you mentioned one time that they had fake heels in their shoes and they

would put things inside their heels?

DP: Yeah.

MS: That was one of the devices, right? They put things in their false heels like a James Bond movie?

DP: Yeah.

MS: Was there any other devices like that, like that they used [29:00] inside of fake radio tubes, mattresses, lunch boxes, or anything?

DP: Yeah. Well, when that was going on, yeah, it wasn't really my specialty, but it was going on, yes. We had a little bit of a finger in it.

INT: So these escape devices, the people who were making those were separate from you and Silvio Bedini [29:29]? You and Silvio Bedini and others were doing code work, and other people were making escape devices? Is that how it worked?

DP: Yes.

INT: Okay.

MS: And the question is, using his own words, what was his specialty?

INT: What was your specialty? What was the -- what were you assigned to do at 1142 [30:00]?

MS: When you were in France, Pop -- remember being in France?

DP: Yeah.

MS: What did you do -- what was your specialty in France and Europe with 1142 [30:18]? What did -- what were you supposed to do? What was your specialty there?

MS: Did you help mail stuff into the camps or sneak it in, or what did you do exactly?

DP: Oh, yes. Yeah, we sent in -- well, I see -- yeah, well, we would send materials that we want the ordinary [31:00] military -- they were all military people, but we didn't want

them to know what was going in on ourselves. And we had set up some special way to get our messages, packages, and what not sent in there --

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

MS: They did -- you did stuff at 1142 [00:05] that the regular military didn't know about.

DP: Yeah.

MS: Right.

INT: Do you remember how the packages got into the prison camps?

DP: Well, we were able to, shall we say, hook and crook get these things in there. Right offhand, can't tell you myself at this time, but we were able to get them in there without -- we got in, you know, by hook or crook.

INT: Did you ever find out if the Germans [01:00] ever found any of the packages? Did you ever hear if that happened?

DP: Sure. Oh, sure, we have but I can't tell you right offhand.

INT: Sure.

DP: Not that I don't want to tell you, but well, I'm sure they have but I just don't recall it.

INT: Okay.

MS: Do you remember what was in some of the packages that you sent to the prisoners?

DP: No, I can't. We're talking 60 years ago.

MS: Yeah.

INT: I have some pictures. Well, I don't know if you can see them okay. These are some escape devices. This is an x-ray of tobacco pipes in -- and hidden inside are little bits of things that are being sent to the prisoners [02:00].

DP: Yeah.

INT: Do you remember things like that, like smoking pipes that had devices hidden inside?

DP: [unintelligible] See this, I don't, no. This particular pipe there, yeah. Like I can't know but it would be along with part of our routine.

INT: So that sounds like something that would have happened, then? Okay.

DP: Yeah, yeah.

INT: Yeah, and there's some more pictures here. That -- those are just more of the tobacco pipes. And we're going to leave all these with you. You and your family can keep all these pictures. But these are all things -- those are more tobacco pipes from 1142 [02:55]. That's a chessboard.

DP: Yeah. Oh, yeah [03:00], brings back memories now. Yeah.

INT: Does it really? What do you remember about -- do you know what would be hidden inside a chessboard?

DP: [laughs] Right offhand, but the chessboard is very, very familiar, very secretive, yeah. It was the same with -- well, messages of various kinds of -- they were trying to get information one way or the other, so between the two, then messages are -- were hidden in there and --

INT: So they would hide messages in the chessboard?

DP: That's right.

INT: Okay.

DP: And then they -- when they went over there [04:00], they knew they were coming. We had already alerted them.

INT: Through the letters?

DP: Yes.

INT: Okay.

DP: Yeah, the -- most little things would be that way.

INT: And those are more of the tobacco pipes.

DP: Okay.

INT: And then the last picture is a group of baseballs and softballs.

DP: Yeah.

INT: Do you remember things going inside baseballs?

DP: That's right. Baseballs, soccer balls, and we'd also like the big -- you know, the big four- or five-foot balls [05:00]. You could put a lot of stuff there, different things in there.

You know, talk about --

INT: Like a medicine ball or something?

DP: Yes, yes, medicine ball.

INT: And you would send those over?

DP: Yes, we -- things discrete in there, yeah.

INT: Would they be deflated? Would they be smaller, or were you actually sending something that big through the mail?

DP: Yeah, well, there's nothing wrong with it. No, that part was just -- it's part of the program, you know, military program there -- part of the military system on both sides.

INT: Like for training?

DP: Yeah, that stuff.

MS: Like the Red Cross would send stuff? Yeah.

DP: Yeah.

INT: So it was no problem to send a medicine ball that was four feet wide?

DP: Yeah.

INT: And they would hide things in that?

DP: That's right. It wasn't that [06:00] -- that wasn't the purpose of the program, but this was on the QC, shall we say.

MS: Yeah, 1142 [06:08] intervened on their own.

INT: Right.

MS: And did this stuff without anybody knowing.

DP: Yeah. Yeah, with the -- this was the official program. It was 1142 [06:23].

INT: Do you remember who your commander was at 1142 [06:35], who your C.O. was?

DP: No. Offhand, I can't think of it, no. I don't recall. I can't, no.

INT: Do you remember the name [Robley] Winfrey [06:51]?

DP: Oh, yeah. Yes, I do.

MS: Let me ask you, Vince -- I think they were separated there over there. I just want to show him a picture.

INT: Colonel Winfrey [07:00], that sounds familiar?

DP: Oh, yeah. [affirmative]

INT: I'll let you go through the whole stack now, if you can. His is going to be one of the first group, I think. I'm going to write that one down.

DP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's -- they were all hidden discreetly, I think.

INT: You recognize that individual?

DP: Offhand, no.

INT: That's Colonel Winfrey [07:44]. So you remember the name?

DP: Yeah.

INT: So he was one of the C.O.'s in charge of the escape program. We were talking -- I'll show you some more pictures [08:00] of more escape devices to see if these ring any bells anymore. Any other escape devices like this?

DP: [affirmative]

INT: More board games?

DP: [affirmative]

MS: You want your glasses, Pop, or you can see without them?

DP: I got them over here.

MS: You want them?

DP: You see some glasses right there.

MS: I got them here.

DP: You got them. Yeah, I don't need them. I got them right here and he has them on -- how about here? Are there any glasses right here? No.

MS: Yeah.

DP: Well, he says he has them.

MS: You want these glasses?

DP: No, that's another pair. Let's see. That's not my regular ones.

MS: Yeah, I know you've got another pair. You know where they are, Donald?

MS: Here's a pair.

MS: Yeah, they're here, Pop. Thanks.

MS: I thought they'd need to be cleaned off.

MS: Yeah.

MS: I'll give them a scrub.

MS: You need those [09:00] to see better?

DP: Oh, yeah, these are better glasses than these.

MS: Okay.

DP: This is what I use, yeah, although I should've got them a while ago. I've got cataracts.

MS: Yeah, I know.

MS: Can you see that board game?

DP: Yes.

MS: What kind of stuff did they smuggle in there with that?

DP: I just can't put my finger on it. [unintelligible].

INT: Well, I've got some other things I can show you and see if maybe that brings back some memories.

DP: Yeah.

INT: Did they put money in devices?

DP: I would say yes. I would say yes [10:00].

MS: How about maps?

DP: Oh, yeah. Yeah, definitely.

INT: Do you remember the silk escape maps?

DP: Oh, yeah.

INT: They were -- you could crumple them up and make them real small?

DP: Yeah, yeah.

MS: We've got some of them.

INT: Oh, really?

MS: Yeah, that he brought back from the [unintelligible].

INT: That he brought back from France?

MS: Yeah, we did.

INT: Would you send them from 1142 [10:18], the silk escape maps?

DP: Yeah. Oh, yeah, we had a number of them. We used them over there also. It's trading devices with these -- they were [11:00] money for trading them with --

INT: Right.

DP: -- the natives there.

INT: With the French locals that were there? Okay.

DP: Yeah, they were kind of illegal barter as well, but that's the correct thing, yeah.

INT: Do you remember -- there's a few more things in this picture. This is a chess piece that's hollowed out.

DP: Yeah.

INT: And you would put something inside the chess piece?

DP: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And then there's playing cards that inside the cards there would be an escape map in between the pieces of the cards.

DP: Yeah, yeah, yeah [12:00].

INT: And then one of the -- just a couple more things to show. Do you remember this? This is a cribbage board, but that's an -- that's an x-ray of the inside of the cribbage board, showing a radio. That radio was hidden inside of the cribbage board. That's -- yeah, that's a cribbage board. And then you had mentioned about sending messages back and forth. This is a device that had a little radio [13:00] hidden in the inside. Do you

remember that they were -- if they were sending radios to American prisoners?

DP: I would say yes. Yes, that is true, yes.

MS: Did they send radio parts also, sneak radio parts in?

DP: I would say yes, parts and maps.

MS: I think you mentioned to me they were sneaking parts of radios in.

DP: Yeah, some of them. Yeah, we -- they would hide the real --

INT: Would you -- do you know how the radios were used? Would you get messages back at 1142 [13:55], or was that just for communication over in Europe by the prisoners [14:00]?

DP: Oh, I can't really answer that one way or the other.

INT: Okay.

DP: They could have been used both ways. I don't reveal where, one way [unintelligible] said it.

INT: Okay. Sure.

MS: Did they transmit information out of the camp, or did they receive information into the camp on the radio?

DP: I think it'd be either or both.

INT: There apparently were -- was a radio broadcast station that the British had in Europe where they were sending messages out, coded messages, by radio to the prisoners. Did you know anything about that?

DP: Offhand, I can't say that I did, no. We just heard about it, maybe [15:00], like talking here, you know. Just these specific activities that happened -- what are we talking about now, 60, 70 years ago?

MS: Yes.

DP: It's a little dim, but I know it went on, yeah.

INT: Do you remember the name Sergeant McTighe [15:28]?

INT: He was actually a -- he was an officer -- he was actually a lieutenant. He was an -- he did a lot of work with the radios at 1142 [15:48].

DP: Yeah. Uh-huh. What was that?

INT: I was -- do you remember the name Lieutenant McTighe [16:00]?

DP: There's something familiar about it, but it's not -- I can't -- [negative] I can't.

INT: Do you remember any names of anyone else that you worked with at 1142 [16:26] besides Silvio Bedini [16:28]? The names of any other -- of the other Army staff?

MS: Do you remember when you were in France, any other people that you worked with, Pop [17:00]? Any names of any other officers? No? You remember the name of anybody else you worked with?

DP: No.

MS: No? No names of other officers?

DP: Offhand, no.

INT: But you remember working with Silvio Bedini [17:22], right?

DP: Oh, yeah, very, very closely. In fact, we lived together, what, the first portion of the program. It was a neat set-up.

MS: Anybody else you lived with or worked with every day? You remember their names?

DP: It's -- I [unintelligible] like that. I can't just say.

INT: Did you live in the Creamery [17:51]?

DP: For a while, yes. Yeah. Yes.

INT: Did you work in the Creamery [17:59] or did you work in the Warehouse [18:00]?

DP: I really worked in the Creamery [18:05], yeah.

INT: Okay.

DP: Part of the time -- it was around a little bit.

INT: Did you know Lloyd Shoemaker [18:16]?

DP: I got a book right behind you there. He's there.

MS: Did you know him other than the book, though?

DP: Oh, yeah, he was a [unintelligible] guy. I not only knew -- yeah -- no, I didn't see that.

Not only knew him, but he -- actually, he'd written later on, several letters, or maybe on the phone. We used to call back and forth. See, when I came -- when he came into the camp there, I tucked him into bed and found a place for him and so forth, so yeah, I knew Lloyd [19:00] quite well. He wanted to be a detective writer of some kind. From the beginning, he used to go out and want to go down to the police department there in Fort Ritchie [19:21], just hang out with the police, pick up information, how they operated out of each department. Interested in that, yeah.

INT: What did you think about Shoemaker [19:37] writing this book? Did you think it was a good idea?

DP: Well, I would -- I would say I was not for the book, no. I was always a quiet guy. I mean [20:00], I didn't certainly need for it, you know, publish it, so I wasn't for it, no. Oh, yeah, I see. [affirmative] Oh, yeah, I remember. I knew him quite well.

INT: When we met with Silvio Bedini [20:21], he gave us a pretty strong opinion about why he felt that it was important not to talk about activities at 1142 [20:33]. Have you thought about that yourself, why it might be good not to talk about?

DP: I would say yes, I don't think that's not necessary for the general public to know what was

going on. No, I'm not for the publication of all that stuff myself [21:00].

INT: Do you -- do you think it still has current value today?

DP: Well, I don't know whether it does or not. It could -- I would say the less said, the better.

Put it that way, yeah.

INT: Do you remember, at 1142 [21:37], signing a secrecy agreement or anything swearing you to secrecy, or was that just understood?

DP: I don't know. I can't say [22:00]. I don't know.

INT: Were you briefed on the secrecy? Were you told this is top secret, don't tell anyone? Do you remember what they told you about the secrecy? If -- did they tell you how secret everything was?

DP: Oh, yes. You know, we were aware of that, yeah. Yeah. It was [inaudible].

MS: Did they tell you that you can't talk?

DP: Right offhand, I can't [unintelligible]. By this time, why [23:00], if you didn't know that you shouldn't talk, which was pretty difficult.

MS: Did they -- when you were in the camp, did they monitor all your mail that you got and that you sent back?

DP: Well, when I was there in camp, yeah, they did say you couldn't send anything in and you couldn't send anything out. In fact, we couldn't even make a phone call. You couldn't -- it was -- in fact, it was a 25-cent -- 25-cent phone call. It wasn't available.

MS: And you couldn't call and you couldn't receive mail? You couldn't send mail out, do you know [24:00]?

DP: No.

MS: No communication?

DP: My wife, who had come down there to live, to work at the Pentagon [24:11], she -- she worked with the Pentagon, and she couldn't -- she couldn't call me.

MS: And she couldn't write to you either, could she? You couldn't get any mail in or out?

DP: No.

MS: Yeah, my mother worked for the general in the Pentagon [24:42]. Even -- she couldn't even -- no mail in, no mail out, no phone calls, no nothing, with any of these guys.

INT: So they were married at the time but couldn't live together?

MS: Yeah, that's about right.

INT: So you -- did you -- did you live on post your entire time there [25:00]? Did you live at 1142 [25:01] the entire time?

DP: Well, that was [unintelligible] the entire time, I would say no. You know, we started out at that little -- at least she -- I lived -- well, we rented, or she rented, anyhow, an apartment down there right behind 1142 [25:45] where she lived, and she was able to -- she had lived there [26:00]. It was permitted and it was nice living with her. During the day, of course, we worked there at 1142 [26:24] but --

INT: Sure. Did your wife know at all what you were doing?

DP: No.

INT: Okay.

DP: No, I never told her. She didn't ask, so there was never any -- she was never curious. [unintelligible] go and tell her, but she didn't care [27:00], you know. She wasn't [unintelligible] that way.

INT: Do you remember anything else you want to share about 1142 [27:16]?

DP: Not offhand, nothing, no. [inaudible] the stuff that I have to share with you. I don't

realize it. Thought you'd be interested at this point in just [unintelligible].

INT: But we're interested in just about everything. I can assure you that.

DP: [inaudible]

INT: We have about two minutes left on this tape. Just a -- just a general question. Do you remember any sort of cooperation with the British program [28:00]?

DP: Not with me, no; but there was cooperation, but as far as -- I don't know anything about it. I know it -- but that's off the limit.

INT: Okay. Do you remember if there were any British at 1142 [28:15]? Any British officers ever come to help train?

DP: Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge.

INT: Okay.

DP: At least not where I was.

INT: Were you aware of anything related to the OSS [28:34]?

DP: No. No, I had no connections at all.

INT: Do you know if the OSS [28:47] ever came to Fort Hunt [28:49] while you were there?

DP: No, I can't say.

INT: No? Okay.

DP: No, not --

INT: Were there any women at all that you can recall [29:00] that were involved with Military Intelligence Service [29:03]?

DP: At that time, no.

MS: Were there some women in France that worked with the underground with you that helped you escape with those silk maps?

DP: Well, they -- that wouldn't be. But that's not what he's asking me.

INT: No. Were there any American Military Intelligence Service [29:27] women that you were aware of?

DP: No.

INT: What about in France? Did you work with any American women in France?

DP: No.

INT: No?

INT: And you said not at that time. Did you mean during the war?

DP: I don't know what the question was.

INT: I'm sorry.

DP: [unintelligible] okay, go ahead. That time --

INT: Yeah, we're just about out --

INT: Okay. Well [30:00], we'll take a break right now for a little while because we're out of -- we're out of tape, so we'll call it quits for right now.

DP: How long?

INT: And whatever -- and if -- and if you just want to call it quits, that's fine. If we want to take a little break --

MS: Now, if you want something to drink --

DP: Oh, it's his talk here. You can call it quits for the day or what?

INT: Well, whatever you want to do. We -- if you want to --

MS: If you want to take a little rest, we can be available for a few more hours.

[End of Tape 1B]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

INT: This is the second in a series of interviews with Mr. Donald Pritchard, a veteran of P.O. Box 1142 [00:10]. This is an interview as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project with the National Park Service. This is Brandon Bies, historian with the National Park Service. I'm joined by Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci. Also with fellow Fort Hunt [00:26] veteran George Weidinger and with two of Mr. Pritchard's sons. We're here in Bay Village, Ohio on July 29, 2008. Mr. Pritchard, just a few more questions for you about 1142 [00:42]. When you were at Fort Hunt [00:46], do you remember people coming to be trained in codes or anything like that? Was there training going on at Fort Hunt [00:56]?

DP: Yeah, I was a [01:00] --

INT: Did you do any of the -- did you train people?

DP: In a sense, yeah. I wasn't a code writer and so forth, but I did assist in the business. Why, I could [unintelligible] Silvio [01:27]. I worked with Silvio. In conjunction with him, I would say yes. But as far as my own self as a code writer, no.

INT: Did you devise any codes, or did Silvio [02:00] come up with all of the codes?

DP: Silvio was the guy that came up with the codes. I would work with him when -- whatever he said, if I could get him, but he was the code man.

INT: And what sort of work did he have you do? Were you just copying what he told you to write down?

DP: In a sense, yes. Yeah.

INT: But did you understand the codes? Did you -- I mean, could you -- if a letter came in in code --

DP: No, I would say no, no. I was not that proficient, no.

INT: So if a coded letter came in from a prisoner, from an American prisoner, a coded letter comes in, would it go straight to Silvio Bedini [02:50] then?

DP: I can't answer that. I would -- if I had to say yes or no [03:00], I'd say yes.

INT: Okay.

DP: I mean, since -- as far as I know, [inaudible] to this, so I don't want to get in there, yeah. Okay. As far as I know, it'd go to him, yeah.

INT: Okay. Do you -- do you remember about how frequently letters would come in, coded messages would come in from Americans? How often did that happen?

DP: What was that question again?

INT: How often would you get a coded message back from an American prisoner? Would they -- would it happen every day or once or twice a month?

DP: I would say varied. It was [unintelligible] time [04:00].

MS: Do you want a pillow under your leg, Pop?

DP: I don't know what I want [unintelligible].

MS: Do you want a pillow under here?

DP: Yeah. No, I don't think it will do any good.

MS: Okay.

DP: I just can't seem to [unintelligible] -- for a minute.

INT: Okay.

DP: It's easier with him here.

INT: Go ahead.

DP: Of course, on the other hand, they're yelling fire [phonetic]. Your idea there, I see. Okay.

INT: Did the --

DP: Yeah, or buzz this red light down here. I want pain pills of some kind.

MS: Okay. Okay. Yeah, that's it. Just press the button.

DP: How much longer did you say it was going to be?

INT: When it [05:00] --

DP: Our interview?

MS: Why don't we go ahead and end it at this point?

INT: Yeah, I mean, if -- whatever you guys want us to do.

DP: Okay. I would like if it was over now.

INT: Okay.

MS: Yes.

DP: Always wanted to do it some other time or in a [unintelligible], but --

[end of transcript]

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