

Fort Hunt Oral History  
P.O. Box 1142  
Interview with Silvio Bedini by Brandon Bies and Matthew Virta  
Bethesda, Maryland  
October 15, 2007

INTERVIEWER: How about over -- can you hear me better over here?

SILVIO BEDINI: Huh?

INT: Can you hear me better over here?

SB: Yes, I do.

INT: Great.

INT: You all set?

INT: Yeah.

INT: All right, we're rolling.

INT: We're going to start the interview now.

SB: Yeah.

INT: And I'm going to give a real brief introduction, and then we'll just start asking some questions, like we have before. Today is October 15th, 2007. This is an interview as part of the Fort Hunt [00:35] Oral History Project with the National Parks Service, and we're here interviewing Mr. Silvio Bedini, a veteran of P.O. Box 1142 [00:42]. We're also here with his children, Peter and Leandra. This is Parks Service Historian Brandon Bies. Also, National Parks Service Historian Matthew Virta. So, with that, we'll go ahead and get started. And the first information [01:00] I have to ask you is, can you just tell us when and where you were born?

SB: Yeah. I can tell you that exactly. I was born in an old farmhouse on North Sidham [phonetic] Road in Ridgefield, Connecticut [01:13], one night in January. It was a stormy January 17th, and my mother was in labor, and she wanted a doctor, and my

father said, "To hell with the doctor, he's not going to come, because it's really stormy." Anyway, so, my mother was in labor on the second floor. My father was down on the first floor. I don't know what he was doing, but I can imagine -- anyway, then, finally, the doctor arrived. He was sort of an inebriate. He's a country doctor [02:00]. He didn't have a car. He drove a horse. Do you drive often? He didn't drive a -- so, he finally arrived, and so, then, you know, he was just very happy that -- and I was fine. I seemed to have all the necessary parts. They checked me over. And so, that was the end of that, except that, then, the rapa [phonetic] began, and ended up -- my mother insisted that I should be named after her father, Sebastian. My father was as insistent that I should carry the line of Antonio, his father. That went on for years. It never really got resolved, until I -- I guess, I -- well -- oh, no. It did get resolved. My father had a favorite [03:00] Italian author called Silvio something. He was an anarchist in Italy. And he admired him very much. So, to disrespect my mother, he named me Silvio when the time came, just to spite her.

INT: What year were you born in? January 17th --

SB: 1917.

INT: 1917.

SB: January 17th. Benjamin Franklin's [03:33] birthday.

INT: And so, I understand from previous conversations that at a rather young age, you became interested in code [03:43] writing. Can you tell us a little bit about that story?

SB: Yeah, that's not -- a reaction -- water, water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink

INT: We're getting -- [04:00] we'll get you a glass right now. It's on its way.

SB: Okay. Well, anyway, the question? Oh, how did I get involved in code [04:13] writing.

Well, there's a story, if you want to hear it.

INT: Yeah, that'd be great.

SB: I was 9 years old. I read a lot. I used to walk from school to the library to pick up books, and then, to the corner. Sit on the fence to wait for the bus to take me home. I used to do this all the time, especially in the winter. And, sure enough, in due course, I ended up with one side of my back fatter than the other. It was called a cold abscess. And so, this meant surgery. That's hospitalization. And for about [05:00] -- let's see, four weeks at home. At the age of 9, there isn't much you can do. I happen to be a reader, and I loved the stuff in the library. So, I had some of the kids bring me stuff from the library. And then, of course, I couldn't stop it. But the teachers got the bright idea, "Why don't we send him his homework?" So, they would bring me my homework, and pick it up. And it never failed. I always -- so, I had no choice. And so, at any rate, I used to like to read the stuff that the library had. And all of this, by the way, is true to the last degree. But there was a magazine. The name, I can't remember. It was a very fine writing for children. Writuke [phonetic]? It was one of them. I can't remember now. [06:00] I got a prize in it at the same time that I wrote for it. And at the end of one issue, there was a -- on one page, there's an advertisement from the Hood Glover Company [phonetic]. And I imagine you can find a copy of that, too. They had an advertisement for any child -- not child, anyone who can solve the answer, "What is cryptography?" And that was -- so, cryptography, I mean, to a kid of my age, it didn't mean much. I don't know if we had a dictionary at home. Anyway, I thought, "Oh, what the hell?" I mean, what have I got to lose? So, I started playing with it. And little by little -- not because I had the sources, but I found about cryptography [06:57]. Then, I started finding a book or two in the library

[07:00], a library book, and thought -- and these started with children's books, and with [unintelligible] books. And I got fascinated. "This is crazy." So, it started out, and then, was -- not realizing that a child of 9 or 10 could do this, I sat down and had the librarian send a letter to the Library of Congress [07:27] asking for a copy, a list, of all the books they had on cryptography [07:34]. They had no idea of my age, or anything. Weeks passed. Eventually, I got this stack, which I still have, from the Library of Congress [07:46], this bibliography of every book that they had at that time. So, I mean, just was overpowered. So, that was too much for me [08:00].

INT: Would you like a drink?

SB: Yeah. Anyway, what the --

LEANDRA BEDINI: Do you want some tea, or --

INT: Oh, I'm fine. As long as we're not blocking the refrigerator --

LB: No, of course.

[audio break]

SB: What happened?

INT: It happened to me.

SB: I found that the library had a couple easy books for young people about codes [09:00].

And then, that's when I found out that codes and ciphers are supposed to be the same.

And so, I went to their bibliography, and I started going all the way through. And then, I found things -- damn, just a second -- I was finding things in newspapers. Newspaper articles. I'd cut them out, and paste them. And so, meanwhile, I waited to hear from the -- oh, no trouble -- I forgot all about it, and all of a sudden, here comes the present. A nice box, and a pencil. And I still have them. At least one. I lost one a while ago. And

they're stamped with the Seal of Connecticut [09:50]. And so, that's how it all began.

And I never stopped.

INT: And so, did you just kind of dilly-dally with codes [10:00] and things as you were growing up from that point on?

SB: Yes, in a way. Of course, depending on the girlfriend and her intelligence and capacity to respond, that could happen. And so --

INT: So, you actually wrote coded letters back and forth to your girlfriends?

SB: To selected ones. Some. And of course, I couldn't cipher without their realizing it.

INT: And so, then, you -- could you tell a little bit about where you went to college? You went to college before World War II [10:48]?

SB: Oh, yeah, Columbia [10:50], yeah. I was employed in 1935. And so --

INT: What did you study [11:00]? Did it have anything to do with codes [11:03] or anything like that?

SB: There's nothing like that at all. But I was going to go into literature, the study of literature. And -- this is 1935. And so, I had enrolled, and so on, and -- but I had courses in mathematics, and the biggest bastard in the world, named John Nolska [11:35] [phonetic], happened to be my advisor. And also, the head of the mathematics department. So, you can imagine my dilemma. Oh, yeah. I'm being hung by a -- what do you call it? And it took a while, but I found another professor who loved to drink. John Henry Hobart Lyon [12:00], the head of the English department. And so, he was a bit of a funny sort of a guy. But anyway, so, I had managed to change my advisor. So, John Nolska [12:15] never got over that, for somebody to give him up. And so, that's the way that went. So -- well, what do you go from there?

INT: So, what year did you graduate college in? 1938?

SB: I would have. I didn't, because what happened -- no, not 1938. Wait a minute. I went in 19 --

INT: You were there from 1935 until the war.

INT: You were in college until the war started? Because you started in 1935.

SB: Yeah [13:00], and I was in college in 19 -- when did the war start?

INT: '41.

INT: In '41. December of '41.

SB: Yeah, I was in college in '41. And for personal reasons, I volunteered. And -- just the military. And then I got in the Air Force [13:26]. At Chicopee Falls [13:30]. And the intelligence officers' office. And I didn't pay very much attention, have much to do with cryptography [13:45]. Oh, before that, I should say, I decided that since it's in the military, maybe I could do something with cryptography [13:54]. So, I tried. I tried the navy. They didn't work with the navy [14:00], because they wanted too much training and typing. So, then I went to the Army, and they had a course of 20 lessons they gave, mail-order lessons. And so, I took that course, did very well, and the thing is that they would assign me to someplace. And I was not about to be assigned. So, I gave that up. And so, at just that time, something happened in my life that made me decide that I went to the Air Force [14:42]. And I enrolled, and just how I ended up in the Air Force [14:48]. And it's just quite accidental, and coincidental. It wasn't until years, years later that I realized [15:00] that my professor, with whom I had discussed these things, realized my interest. And it so happened that he was related to three high-placed officers in the Army. And at the time, they were looking for something they couldn't find, a

cryptographer [15:29]. And somehow or other, I got mentioned. And he mentioned my name, I guess. And lo and behold, here I was at Chicopee Falls [15:40], and one afternoon, I got a call. It was a call to the commander's office. I had to get all my stuff together, be packed up, and ready to go to Washington [15:59]. So [16:00], they flew me to Washington airport -- and from there, they drove me to Washington, and drove me to 1142 [16:11].

INT: So, about how long were you at Chicopee Falls [16:15] for? For a year or so?

SB: What?

INT: How long were you at Chicopee Falls [16:20]?

SB: Oh, I had the date -- it's -- I had the dates. I don't remember now.

INT: But you weren't really doing anything specific with cryptology [16:37] there?

SB: No. No, it so happened I was in an MIS-X [16:44] office at the Chicopee Falls [16:46]. It had nothing to do with cryptography [16:50].

INT: Do you remember what they were doing there?

SB: Well, it's an Air Force [16:56] base. Nothing special. And we [17:00] were still flying planes out to -- over the war, I can't remember. And it was a very pleasant place.

INT: So, then, at some point, you found out -- you were transferred to Washington [17:17].

SB: Yeah.

INT: Had you ever heard of this place called 1142 [17:20]? Did you know about it beforehand?

SB: No, no. I heard of Washington. I had heard vaguely of MID -- or MIS [17:35], but that's all. I'd never heard of military intelligence, you know -- that's not the order, until I got there. And then, what happened is -- in this limousine. And I remember the night. They

drove me for miles into the woods, and dumped me off at a guard's [18:00] office, and there, they conducted an agent's own barracks [phonetic], and showed me a bit. And thus began life at 1142 [18:15]. And -- that I was in MIS-Y [18:15] at that time, because there was no MIS-X [18:31]. So, I was added to the sense there [phonetic], MIS-Y [18:37], for months. Over three months. Going crazy, because my knowledge of German [18:46] is about as much as my knowledge of Yugoslavian. And, anyway, so, I survived it. And then, one day, we saw [19:00] that stuff -- there's a building on that place that had been emptying. But then, suddenly, there was a lot of activity. It's a building they called the Creamery [19:09]. And suddenly, there was a lot of rebuilding and so on. And then, suddenly, my orders came in, and they moved me there, and there I was. The first cryptographer [19:23] of the U.S. Army.

INT: And so, you spent about three months as a translator --

SB: Yeah.

INT: Did you work directly with any prisoners, or just looking at documents?

SB: Yeah, I worked with prisoners and some documents. But not that it was anything to do with cryptography [19:45].

INT: I think -- did you mention before that you would sometimes -- they would take prisoners out to dinner?

SB: Oh, yeah. Yeah, this was what happened -- was a standard procedure. And I guess the Germans [19:59] did the same thing [20:00]. When some of the high officers -- especially high officers, seemed to be amenable to questioning, and to retrieval [phonetic], they would be selected with one or two of the Americans. And sometimes, an officer and an enlisted man. And then, of course, the prisoner, and take him to a



restaurant, give him a wonderful meal, and no question, no qualms. Nothing, be very [unintelligible].

LB: Can we take a break?

INT: Sure. We're going to take a little break right now.

[audio break]

SB: Okay. I should explain that the Creamery [20:58] was being used for the writers [21:00], for the cryptographic [21:04] work. Not the shipping, or any of the other things. And so, it's worked out this way. There's one corner down here that the commander, John Starr [21:20] and his staff. And then, in the middle were the writers. We had a number of writers at the same time. It could range from one to whatever. And then, we had typers. I just -- you asked that I make a definition between writers and typers. Because writers had to know how to write badly, and it was a requirement. They couldn't write well. And I would be the last one to check, and -- so that the -- then the writers [22:00], the typists, and then, there would be an area in which the completed work would be submitted. It has to pass through, to be sure it had everything it was supposed to have before it got to me.

INT: Right. Did you say they had to write poorly because it had to be as if it's coming from common people?

INT: I was going to ask the same question. When you say, "Write badly," do you mean poor handwriting, or poor grammar?

SB: Everything. Poor handwriting, poor language, inability to express properly. I mean, how can I tell you? Oh [23:00], some of those letters. And we had real masters who got there somehow [phonetic]. And it would depend on the family. And --

INT: So, you would try to write a letter from the same education level that the family would be?

SB: Absolutely. Because if -- you wouldn't want to make a mistake. You could easily make a mistake by writing poorly, or well, for the family. And this is one of the things that we were, from the very beginning, very careful about. And it's easier to write better, than to write poorly. When you try to write poorly, it never comes out right. So -- so, anyway, this is where we were. And this wing that sticks out was mine. One was my typist [24:00]. The other was my own office. Then, it's my door. And then, there is storage, and so on. In other words, this was pretty much the space that I used. And it was off-limits to anybody. In other words, this is -- even this, that [phonetic]. Because this is where the great creations arrive of those out of here [phonetic]. And so --

INT: So, who had access to that area besides you?

SB: My secretary and my commander. That's all.

INT: And Rigor Mortis [24:52], right?

SB: Yeah, and Rigor Mortis, yeah. Absolutely, yeah. Especially the floors [25:00]

INT: And so, you had said, a few minutes ago, that when you first got to 1142 [25:08], this building was not being used for anything?

SB: No.

INT: When you first got to 1142 [25:18], the Creamery [25:18], you said it was not being used for anything? It was --

SB: No, it was empty, yeah. It had been empty for a long time. It had been -- before that, it had been a hospital for the CCC [25:31]. And so, it had been sort of a -- and here's a building that wasn't being used. And suddenly, the Army needed one that had access, or

no access, so it was perfect.

INT: So, you were one of the first people to have an office there, to move in to that building?

SB: I was the first. I mean, you had, first of all [26:00], you had the commanding officer, John Starr [26:03] -- well, there was the White House, oh -- what the hell is the building? The Pentagon [26:14] staff and then, John Starr [26:22]. And Then from John Starr [26:27] it broke down into the different divisions. We had a division for training, we had a division for writing, and so -- and then, we had -- of course, we had, like, communication, with -- we had a close thing with the shipping, because if we were sending packages [27:00], we had to have -- I mean, if we were sending, we -- if we were sending packages, and saying we're sending -- or, whatever. I mean, there is a close relationship, which was over here, called the Warehouse [27:19]. The name is stupid. But this -- so -- was the -- what would you call it? I need --

INT: [inaudible] That's the communication section, right? Communications?

INT: You're referring to the communications section?

SB: Yeah.

INT: So, the Creamery [27:46] was just for communications section?

SB: Yeah, yeah.

INT: When you -- you said you were, you know, some of the first people to move into the Creamery [27:54]. Had MIS-X [27:59] been located somewhere else [28:00], prior to that? Or was this the very first operation at 1142 [28:05]?

SB: That was the first operation. And I was the first to be employed on the staff -- in that area, except for, naturally, of course, Colonel Starr [28:26], and his second is Craden Churchill [28:30] [phonetic]. And then came me. And then, there were a number of

officers.

INT: What about --

SB: High ranking.

INT: What about Winfrey [28:42] [phonetic]? Where did Winfrey fall in all of this?

SB: He was over here. He was the Warehouse [28:49]. He was really -- you've got to listen to this. He really was, overall, MIS-X [28:59]. Even we [29:00] did not really realize, at that time, that he was the top guy, because he was one of those people who did a tremendous amount of work, wonderful job, and was -- sort of obscured himself. But he was there for absolutely everything. Everyone. He was a wonderful, wonderful man. But he was over Colonel Starr [29:26], he was over Colonel Wolfe [29:28], and so that -- he's over, including the communication section.

INT: So, Winfrey's [29:37] office was not in the Creamery [29:41], then?

SB: In that sense, no, no. He was in the Warehouse [29:46]. He kept his office in the Warehouse [29:48].

INT: Okay.

SB: Yeah.

INT: But you said Starr's [29:51] office was in the Creamery [29:54].

SB: Yeah, yeah. Somebody told me that he had passed away.

INT: Who's that? Starr [30:00]?

SB: Yeah.

INT: Yes.

SB: No.

INT: Winfrey [30:05]?

SB: Yeah.

INT: Yes, he passed away.

SB: How soon -- how long ago?

INT: I don't know for -- I think within the last 10 years. Maybe about 10 years ago.

SB: Well, I miss -- I say, I would miss him [phonetic]. Was it a few years ago. Last time I was here --

INT: And I'm not certain on that. We can double-check.

SB: Yeah. I really don't -- check the paper, the -- Google, or something. I should find out, because I'm so sure -- either I'm losing my mind -- because I was so sure I was in touch with him so recently. As a matter of fact, I have letters. I could swear.

INT: There -- we've been trying to search for other folks who were involved in the X program [30:53]. And there's one gentleman who was an officer who's still living. His name was [31:00] Edmund Carpenter [31:03]. Does that ring a bell to you? Carpenter [31:04]?

SB: First name?

INT: Edmund. Edmund Carpenter II [31:11].

SB: I would probably know him.

INT: Okay. He's still living, and we haven't spoken to him yet, but he was an officer with the X-program [31:21].

SB: Which part? Do you know?

INT: I don't know.

SB: Yeah.

INT: [inaudible]

INT: I need to take another break to flip that tape. So we can take another break for a few

minutes.

LB: Did you get a shot of the plinth [phonetic]? I saw that you were going to --

INT: Maybe we can hold that up.

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

INT: Before we go on any further, can I just hold this up, so we can show this to the camera?

SB: Yeah.

INT: And this is the document that you were just talking about, in terms of where the offices were, and everything?

SB: Yeah.

INT: Okay, great. Good, all righty. Great, thank you.

SB: How about the -- he or --

INT: Sure. So, who was your direct -- who did you report to directly? To Starr [00:39], or to someone below Starr?

SB: Say that again?

INT: Who was your immediate commander? Who did you report to?

SB: I reported to Churchill [00:52] and Starr [00:54] only. Nobody else. And, of course, to Winfrey [00:59], but I didn't know that, yeah [01:00].

INT: And your rank, at this time, was master sergeant?

SB: No. There's something very curious about that. I made master sergeant the day the letter was identified.

INT: Which letter?

SB: The letter of the colonel. Now, there's something I want to talk to you about. Is anybody

writing this story?

INT: Believe it or not, we're going to try -- I know Vince had mentioned to you before, we're going to try to give you the opportunity, maybe later this week, to talk to Clark [01:41] on the phone.

SB: Yeah.

INT: Would you like to do that?

SB: Yeah.

INT: And so, that's one of the stories that we're trying to follow up on.

SB: Yeah, I'll tell you, I would love to write that story. It's -- my part of the story. And [02:00] photographs for Clark [02:04], and the association -- he in the house world wars [phonetic], or I don't know. Any part that deals with it is very important. People don't realize, until that day, how important that was. Until I heard what he said, that that was what started the war.

INT: Would you like to tell a little bit more about that now?

SB: I suppose I could. But I -- the thing is, take a look at Shoemaker's [02:46] work; it was overlooked. Overlooked everywhere. I had overlooked it. I had read it. And it didn't mean that much to me. And [03:00] then, it gave me nightmares when I stopped to think that here we had something that we had ignored. So, I think there's a very wonderful, dramatic story that I could present in any media that you want for this.

INT: Can you explain a little, what about this letter, and what was overlooked?

SB: I could talk about Colonel Johnson [03:32]. Maybe I shouldn't. Maybe that day, his [unintelligible] was empty, or he ran out of the bottle [phonetic]. He, by the way, was one of the wealthiest men in the world, the head of the MIS-X [03:58]. He had married

this woman [04:00], who was a very famous woman. She was so loaded with money. He was a nice man, I mean, there was nothing wrong with him, except he had nothing to do. I mean, he was just the head. And so, I don't know what to tell you about him, except that you can't say anything against him. But the fact that so many people saw that writing -- and somewhere, there's a picture of it -- didn't she made it look --

INT: It might be. And are you -- which letter are you talking about?

SB: The one that -- by -- the colonel had sent his mother [05:00].

INT: This is the letter from Clark [05:04]? From --

SB: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And this is the one that was sent -- it ended up going through MI9 [05:10] first, didn't it?

SB: Yeah, that's the one. I'd like to get the full account of this story, and all the illustrations. It would make a terrific story, I think, on both sides of the Atlantic. I would love to do it. I think it's my territory.

INT: I think so.

SB: You know, I'm trying to be neutral and negative [phonetic]. Anyway --

INT: Maybe we'll talk a little bit more about the Clark [05:48] letter the next time we see you, because maybe some more recollections will come up when you talk to him on the phone.

SB: Oh, sure, yeah, yeah.

INT: So, we'll save a little bit of that for later.

SB: Yeah.

INT: I guess the next question [06:00] is, you had mentioned, a little bit earlier, that there were -- were there three sections of MIS-X [06:09]? You mentioned there was the code [06:11] writing, and then there were the packages, and then there was training. Are they -



- is that how MIS-X [06:18] was divided?

SB: What was the last one?

INT: Training. Training.

SB: I didn't get the word.

INT: Briefings, training.

LB: Teaching.

INT: Teaching.

INT: Instruction.

INT: Instruction.

LB: Dad?

PETER BEDINI: I'm not sure if his hearing aid's working or not.

LB: Yeah, sometimes he tries to -- yeah. The training that you did for the pilots.

SB: Oh, that, yeah. We hadn't talked about that.

INT: Thank you.

SB: That was on the [unintelligible] [07:00].

INT: So, was that one of the main sections of MIS-X [07:05]? Training?

SB: Well, yes and no. Sometimes it's done in the camps. And in -- when they were captured, after they were captured, and some of them, on their way -- some was done at 1142 [07:39]. So, the training was sort of, like, it was sent three ways, as I remember. And the first part -- John Wolfe [07:50], I think his name was, was in charge. He was a man that we'd barely see, but he was in charge. I just saw [08:00] -- oh, yeah. And they set it up here. And they sent classes here. And we used to have -- after they finished sending all the classes of the military, that were to be trained, then they started sending lesser people,

like the -- I don't know, was it called the MIA?

INT: For the personnel recovery agency? The people who recovered prisoners?

SB: Yeah, no, these were GIs who were sent -- who were just GIs [09:00], but who were selected, because they were more intelligent, better quality, I don't know. And so, we had classes of those. And then, of course, we've got the great class, that they'll never be forgotten. That's the class of marine lieutenants. And they were so funny -- they made - - somewhere, I have a copy that I know I can release to you. It's called "Almost E." They wrote their own cryptographic [09:40] system. And this is the whole write-up of how you would do it. And it could be very, very funny, if you never heard me and heard that. And it did assert revelry [phonetic]. And so, I mean, there's no [unintelligible]. I [10:00] thought I would split my sides laughing, because they took it all the way down. It was just great. And here I was, yelling at them, I mean these are lieutenant colonels, and they are defying me. I mean, when you have a class of about 40 marines, even if they were just general marines -- I mean, one is bad enough.

[laughter]

So, anyway, when you've got -- took off on me, I took off on them. And then, I heard, "Clack, clack, clack," coming down the hall. And I thought, "Jesus Christ." And instead of Jesus Christ, it was Churchill [10:54], my boss. And he walked on his heels. He was a Harvard [11:00] man. I mean this. This is totally true. They walk on their heels, don't they? And you, this -- and I didn't even have to turn, because he came in, and he really gave it to them. It was the most inspired talk, ad-libbed, that I had ever seen in my life, or heard, ever. And told them what their responsibility was, and they had assumed. And he took us out of there, and they had a -- they sort of walked out like dogs with their tails

behind them. All of them. And as a matter of [unintelligible] -- oh, [12:00], we had fun. Sometimes.

INT: So, these training classes, what was being taught? For example, what were this group of marine lieutenants, what were they being taught?

SB: What would they be what?

INT: What were they being taught? What were they learning?

SB: Oh. I think they were going through the whole military system thing. This would be as sort of an addition that was added, because -- how can I say this -- this was something that -- I'm having so much fever, and so many fuels [phonetic], for so long, that my whole nips are coming off [phonetic].

LB: Here's some water [13:00], right there, dad.

SB: [unintelligible] yeah.

INT: Would you like something to drink?

SB: No, I got to deal with it. But, anyway --

INT: Ask him if there were pilots --

SB: What did I say -- oh, I was -- this was just a supplement to what a soldier is supposed to learn in the field, and the circumstances, if he were caught. This is the whole point. And as a matter of fact, there are manuals somewhere. I had them. And they'd study -- yeah. And so, anyway, there were manuals that were put together as a consequence. But --

INT: Were the marines pilots?

SB: They what?

INT: Were the marines [14:00], were they all pilots?

SB: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. They all's were general. Some were, some were not. And some

just ordinary. And I think that if you look through this military publication, well, you can tell by the identification, things that are available. But, quite a few things, yes. They had many manuals for just about everything. And these were sort of vessels [phonetic].

LB: Do you want to know what he taught them?

INT: Yeah.

LB: Just ask -- just say, "What did you teach them?"

INT: What did you teach them?

SB: Huh?

INT: What did you teach the marines?

SB: What did I --

INT: What were you teaching the marines?

SB: Oh, well [15:00], I had gotten to the point where I knew anything about -- why did they have to do this? They had taken the oath of this, this, and this, and that was all. And then, you know, you go on from that. And I tried to explain to them that this has that included. And I tried to be nice about it. But the worse they got, the worse I got. And pretty soon, our voices are raised -- are raised down the hall. Oh, boy. And, I don't know.

LB: Ask him what the content --

SB: It's one of those things.

LB: What content --

INT: What sort of content were you teaching them?

SB: Oh -- how to behave. Things not to do [16:00]. Things not to -- to avoid. Appearances of this, that, and that. I didn't do -- the idea that you must remain as -- I was going to say,

“Innocuous.” That isn’t the word I want. It’s -- they must have been obscure as any.

INT: Inconspicuous?

SB: That’s the word I want. Yeah. And so, it -- yeah. And, you know, we had our routine out. Had the --

LB: Ask him if he [unintelligible] --

INT: Excuse me. Yeah, that’s what I was going to ask him.

INT: Did you teach them any code [16:53]? Any code or ciphering [16:56]?

SB: To who?

INT: The marines.

SB: Did I [17:00]? I don’t know how to take that. I mean -- I don’t quite understand how to answer that --

INT: Were you teaching them how to send letters home?

SB: Oh, yes, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LB: Talk about that.

SB: I taught them the whole spiel.

INT: Can you talk about that a little bit?

SB: Well, I mean, I told them everything I could tell them about what they could do, and couldn’t do, and shouldn’t do. And things to be careful of, to avoid conspicuousness. I guess that’s the word. And that sort of thing. But --

INT: Did [18:00] you teach -- besides the marines, did you teach other groups?

SB: What?

INT: Were there other classes? Other groups that you also taught?

SB: Oh, yeah, I taught a lot of groups, yeah. Yeah. And it was that, according to the marines,

who were -- had a sort of -- actually, a -- something --

LB: [inaudible]

SB: Well, they were perky; they was more perky than usual, and -- than the others.

LB: Ask him --

SB: And --

LB: -- kinds of things regarding the ciphers [18:44].

INT: What kinds of things about the ciphers [18:50] did you teach?

SB: What kind of what?

INT: What information or lessons about the ciphers [19:00] did you teach?

SB: What kind of something about ciphers?

INT: Information about ciphers.

SB: Yeah.

INT: What did you teach them?

SB: Well, the same thing they gave everybody else. When you're talking about ciphers [19:19], you're talking about codes [19:21], and you're talking about cryptography [19:22]. And what makes me mad as hell is the word "Code [19:26]." These are not codes. As a matter of fact, you should know that the colonel's letter to his mother was not a code or cipher [19:42]. It was a transpond-something. In other words, there's a different kind of cipher [20:00]. In other words, ciphers are the ones where you move one letter to replace another. A code [20:07] is where you take a whole word or sentence, and then, there's one called SYL, or, it's called S-Y -- no, transposition. And -- yeah, transposing. And that is where you have two letters the same -- like, for instance, here's your letter L. You double the L, like he did, and that appears as one letter. And the

person reading it would realize that that's supposed to be one letter. And that is what he sent. "Uncle Sam" were two words that didn't fit. They didn't fit. And so, they knew that, you know, we're here [21:00] [phonetic]. That's what did it. So, this is why I want to write a -- because that kind of cipherring [21:09], now, is almost totally lost. It's ancient, used for many years. But it would be nice to write about the fact that this is this. So -- want to know -- the thing that gets me is how the hell an Air Force [21:27] colonel learned about how to do it.

INT: And the Air Force [21:34] colonel --

SB: Oh -- keep talking. Finish.

INT: -- right, so, he wrote in the British System [21:40].

SB: Yeah.

INT: Is that what they call -- I may have this wrong. Was it called the "Five four," or the "Four five system?"

SB: No. Yeah --

INT: British numbers --

SB: I remember the British System [21:53].

INT: British have a --

SB: If I remember how they -- this was the [22:00] Collien System [22:01] [phonetic]. It was three sections, as I remember. And -- but this --

INT: Transposition.

SB: "'You're old, Father William,' the young man said." I sure am, I can't remember. I can't remember right now.

INT: So, this was the British Number Three?

SB: Yeah.

INT: Okay.

SB: That's it, because they had the three sections. It's the only one they had. They tried -- the fourth guy who came up with that, which wasn't original with them at all [phonetic]. And they beat him to death to get another system out of him. I can remember talking to him. And he talked to me. And I didn't know what to tell him [23:01]. How to get another system, how -- I have no idea. Anyway, finally, I guess they retired him somewhere, and --

INT: Well, you --

SB: I've been in sort of a hopeless situation.

INT: Was that Winterbottom [23:17]?

SB: No.

INT: Okay.

SB: No, he's an official officer.

INT: So, this was a British person, then?

SB: Yeah. Yeah.

INT: Where did you talk to him? At 1142 [23:28]?

SB: No. It was a phone conversation. No, I never met him. But --

LB: How many systems --

SB: Also, I'd like to know, has there been anything written about what the British have been doing since the end of the war, as to codes [23:54] and ciphers [23:54]? Have they published anything?

INT: I'm not sure. I'm sure they have [24:00], but I'm not yet an expert on that.



SB: That would be wonderful to see if they have any publications, like we have publications.  
And --

INT: Did you just use the British System [24:19], or did you come up with your own systems?

SB: Didn't use the British -- oh, at first, I had to use the British System [24:27], because nobody else knew that. But I did do that -- but it was very painful. And so, this is why I hurried to develop something which we could use. And -- now, this was easiest for me. For many years, since I was a small child, as I told you, I had been collecting newspapers articles [25:00], everything. So, I had a lot of information. And, you know, it's easy, going back through these and finding something that I would apply. And this is what I worked out.

INT: when you got a letter that was sent to you from a prisoner, did you immediately know what system was used, or did it take a while to figure out?

SB: No, I would know. You mean, nationality?

INT: Right. Just, which system of cipher [25:40] you had to use. Did -- were all the letters the same?

SB: Yeah.

INT: Or did some prisoners use different ciphers [25:48]?

SB: Yeah, yeah. No, there would be no problem, no.

LB: Try that again.

SB: So, that's -- we used the same ciphers [26:00] in all the projects. Also, we did a lot of work -- unsuccessful -- in Japan [26:08], and Japan-occupied areas, which was a lot of fun. For instance, did you know that you could take an egg, a raw egg, and write your message on the outside, boil it, write the message on the outside, and send it? When they

got it, if you boiled it, the messages come up. Did you know? You did know that.

INT: The -- only because you told me last time I was here. But I'm glad you said it again.

SB: Okay, yeah.

INT: But I want to know how many eggs made it all the way to Japan [26:47] without breaking.

SB: That's a problem.

[laughter]

Maybe Japanese eggs, I guess -- and there were other things like that, with bamboo. And I had collected a lot of stuff [27:00]. But it was hopeless for the Japanese, because they never got anything delivered through. So --

INT: So, again, to go back, the first letter you received was from Clark [27:15], and it used the British System [27:18].

SB: Yeah.

INT: At what point did you start -- did you get letters in the British System [27:25] for a while, or did they immediately switch to the system that you were teaching?

SB: No, I had to use the British System [27:38]. It was deadly, but it had to be.

INT: When did they switch systems?

INT: Do you know how long it took for them to switch to your system?

SB: How long it what?

INT: How long did it take for them to switch from the British System [27:57] to your system [28:00]?

SB: Well, it's hard to know. I know that we sort of rushed into it, because our people just -- the American mind is not attuned to the British [unintelligible], and so that, as soon as we

could, we got our men trained. And they loved the idea that, you know, something easier.

INT: So, help me understand. Were there Americans being trained at 1142 [28:45] who then went out and trained other people? How did everyone find out about your system?

SB: Only those who were trained in it [29:00].

LB: Where were they trained?

SB: And their families.

INT: Where were they trained at?

SB: Either we trained them at our camps. Or, we'd train them in the -- at the -- let's see. Well, we trained them at our camps, primarily. And it's -- I -- that's an interesting question. Well, we had training camps. And --

INT: I don't know if you can see this. This is a list of the numbers of people trained by the X-Program [29:58] during the war [30:00]. And the number of people in the Air Corps [30:06] trained is 352,000. It says -- I should say, they were briefed. Then, there's a smaller number of Air Corps [30:20] intelligence officers trained of 250. Does this make any sense to you?

SB: Yeah. What you'd have to do is to break down the meaning of those phrases. When it says, "Air Corps [30:56] intelligence officers trained [31:00]," okay. Air Corps -- no, I thought I said something else. It depends on -- how can I tell you -- it seems to me that it depends. They can be trained on something, as what we're doing now. Or, we can start next week, and I'll give you the same general training, or part of training, or something, based on that. In other words, it doesn't have to be the same thing. Having a version of it -- I -- that needs [32:00] definition, I think, very much so.

INT: Because, you see, they use different words. Here, they used, "Briefed," and here, they used, "Trained." And it's a much larger number who were briefed.

SB: Yeah, yeah. Right. Yeah. Well that's exactly, I think, what I'm saying. Is -- you asked -- get a definition of those words. And then, you've got it.

INT: I was hoping maybe you could give me the definition of those words.

SB: I wasn't involved [laughs].

[End of Tape 1B]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

SB: A bunch of soldiers from the same camp, who are sent to the same place of detention, may have among them more than one cryptographic [00:25] system. And no -- now, had no knowledge of the fact, of each other. That has happened. And very often -- not that -- it doesn't happen that often. But it can be a very useful source of confirmation [01:00].

INT: So, you're saying that sometimes, there would be different types of systems being used within the same camp --

SB: Within the same camp.

INT: -- at the same time?

SB: Yeah, exactly, yeah. That has happened, and it's a good thing.

INT: So, did the American prisoners within the camp, did they know who the other code [01:31] users were, or no?

SB: No, no. I think they kept their own privacy. Unless there was reason for them to do so. But --

INT: Can you talk a little bit [02:00] more about your background -- how did you learn the British Three System [02:10]?

SB: With great difficulty.

[laughter]

Unbelievable. I should tell you that I flunked every course in arithmetic and mathematics through school. I never passed one. I had to take them all over. As a matter of fact, I had to start begging one of my teachers at night to get a passing grade. And I managed to make it. So, consequently, I have no mathematical skill at all [03:00]. And, what can I tell you? I just --

INT: Where were -- were you -- you were in the Army, though, right?

SB: Yeah, I -- yeah. Yeah.

INT: Did you learn the British System [03:18] at 1142 [03:18], or before --

SB: Oh, no, no. I learned it -- well, I had known it -- wait a minute. That's a curious question. Did I learn it at 1142 [03:34]? The British System [03:36], I learned it at 1142 [03:42]. Yeah. Because -- yeah.

INT: So, you did not know any military code [03:54] systems prior to coming to 1142 [03:58]?

SB: No. I did not [04:00]. I'm just trying to think now. The only ones I knew were the old standard ones that we had on a record, just so, and a course on history, and so that -- but the British -- I mean, it's hard to believe that -- I tell you -- we used different systems. But, of course, they're very loyal to their own history. And that's the reason for it.

INT: How did you learn the system? Was another person teaching you?

SB: Pardon?

INT: How did you learn the British System [05:00]? Did -- was there a British instructor?

SB: No, I learned it through the group -- my officer, Churchill [05:15], and I, together, studied with a -- one of the British people who taught it, as it were. And this is how we learned

it. And as a -- we were not very happy. We were so unhappy with it, but so pleased with the fact that we agreed with each other, that it's just so bad. But, bad in the sense that it has so much to it that I guess it's not necessary that [06:00] -- I -- anyway, so, it could be cleaned up. On the other hand, the trouble with it is it had tradition. It had a whole Williams -- sort of a history to it. And so, that's the real one reason. So, also, the British -- considering the history of the British, Queen Elizabeth [06:40] had -- two of her cryptographers [06:42] had their heads chopped off. I mean, the British have a lot of experience with cryptography [06:49] in different ways. And so, the -- what had -- what can I say [07:00]? But I -- we were cutting new ones in the field. And this is one of the things that I think is coming new into the field. You look at things from a new point of view, and that helped.

INT: Did the system that you came up with -- was that at all similar or based on the British System [07:33], or was it totally different?

SB: The ones I came up with were so simple. I know, she can get me a glass of water. Oh, it's going [phonetic] -- excuse me [08:00]. Reading my mind, Leandra.

LB: What?

SB: I got water. If you have it, you wish to stop.

LB: I think another 10 minutes [inaudible] -- starting --

SB: I've never had the water with the --

LB: Thickener. Thickener.

INT: The thickener.

SB: Thickener. Have you ever had it? No?

INT: Am I missing something good?

SB: Yeah.

[laughter]

LB: It's like nectar, it -- or syrup consistency.

INT: Oh, okay. Is it, like, really sugary?

LB: No, it just helps him swallow it.

INT: Oh, okay.

LB: So we get him some [09:00] regular water with sugar in it to make it with sort of coffee.

INT: Got it --

LB: And they put it in the aspirator --

SB: Leandra?

LB: Yeah?

SB: You would have enjoyed the session I had with the new nurse this morning, before you came. She was teaching me how to swallow.

LB: Oh.

SB: And what to do with my tongue.

LB: [laughs]

SB: And to find places to put it. And it's so damn funny. And we finally had to give up, because she didn't know any better than I did. And she had charts all made up.

LB: Oh, really?

SB: And that trouble is just why I'm here. Because I have trouble swallowing. Something wrong with my [unintelligible] [10:00] -- I never could [phonetic] --

INT: [unintelligible]

SB: I'm so sorry that you could not put that -- my picture of my dog in your exhibit. Have

you found it yet?

LB: Joanne thinks she found it [11:00].

INT: She has a very small pumpkin [phonetic].

LB: And get that very --

INT: It'd be great if we could borrow it and scan it, that --

LB: Oh, sure, sure.

INT: Because that was the first story he told me three years ago, when we first started, kind of, trying to get some information from him over the phone. All he had told me was about Rigor Mortis [11:20] -- about Rigor Mortis in the boat [phonetic], and it was the sad sack --

LB: The sad sack, yeah. Tell him, I think we have the photo of the -- we have the photo.

INT: It sounds like they may have found the photo of Rigor Mortis [11:33].

SB: Really? You're going to frame it in glass [phonetic]. I don't -- who found it?

LB: I think Joanne, actually.

INT: Joanne might have found it.

SB: Yeah. There should be several.

LB: Okay.

SB: And he's sitting on the doorstep.

LB: Okay.

SB: And I had a small camera that my aunt, on my birthday [12:00], sort of told me, sort of thought of me, she bought a camera for five bucks that she gave me. And when you take pictures, it's just about what you get, you know? A \$5 picture. And this is the one I have of Rigor Mortis [12:21]. So -- I want another one.



LB: Okay, we'll get one.

SB: I never found out what happens to you if you have too much of that.

[laughter]

LB: Nothing.

SB: Nothing?

LB: It's good for you. You get better.

SB: Yeah.

INT: What do you remember about radio codes [12:55]?

SB: Azio [phonetic]?

INT: Radio. Like the BBC [13:00].

SB: Say it again?

INT: Messages being sent over the radio.

SB: Oh, well, I thought -- I got -- are you saying --

LB: What do you know?

SB: Huh?

LB: Tell about it.

SB: Do they know?

INT: About whether he should --

LB: Oh.

INT: We know that it was -- that there were coded [13:29] messages sent over the BBC

[13:34].

SB: Oh. Yeah.

INT: To -- so, what can you tell us about that?

- SB: I can't tell you much about that. That's -- incidentally should be "Enciphered" [13:48], not "Encoded." Yeah.
- INT: I'll note that correction.
- SB: I guess the British did that.
- LB: Did you do it?
- SB: We knew it [14:00], but that was the British.
- INT: Did you or other people at 1142 [14:11] tell the British what to encipher [14:18] in the radio messages?
- SB: Say that last part?
- INT: The radio messages.
- SB: Yeah.
- INT: Who told the British what to put in them, what the message would be?
- SB: That's a difficult one, because it depends on what the situation was that the British wanted to report. Whether they wanted American -- news about American activities -- I really can't answer that one. But [15:00] the -- I can say that there was activity in radio, secret radio communications, between both America and the British, and German [15:32]. Did I mix that up enough for you? So, what I'm trying to say is that everybody played ball. Everybody had the game. Some were more successful than others [16:00], and I don't know how much you know.
- INT: Could American prisoners send radio messages? Could they transmit, or could they just listen?
- SB: What's the name of the program?
- LB: Hogan's Heroes [16:28].

SB: What?

INT: Hogan's Heroes [16:30]?

SB: Yeah, yeah. That program. To my mind, there's never been any mistake or error in any program; I've seen them all, again and again. That is a perfect program, to tell you. And -- except, what you don't get there are the devices or the methods themselves [17:00], which also -- they -- I know there's somebody who was involved with the Hogan's Heroes [17:17] who was part of 1142 [17:18], had to be; there's no question. Now, that's a statement. That's an opinion. Okay? Because I've watched that show intimately.

LB: We have one on Netflix at home right now. We can get --

SB: That show, probably. And I say that. Every time I see it so far, that -- this is a --

INT: Were you -- in your position were you [18:00] involved with the radio messages?

SB: Oh, I listened to them.

[laughter]

INT: That's funny.

SB: What else do you need to know?

LB: I think he's all red on the end of [phonetic] --

INT: I do, too.

INT: I think we'll let you think on this until Thursday.

SB: Okay.

INT: And we'll let you go eat your lunch now.

SB: Oh, okay. I can --

INT: It's the least we can do.

SB: Yeah, yeah. All right.

INT: All right, should we tell him --

[end of transcript]

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