

Fort Hunt Oral History
P.O. Box 1142
Interview with George Weidinger by Brandon Bies and Vincent Santucci
November 29, 2007

BRANDON BIES: Okay, we're going to go ahead and get started here this morning. This is an interview for the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. We are here in the home of Mr. George Weidinger, in his home just outside of Cleveland, Ohio. Today is November 29, 2007. This is National Park Service Historian Brandon Bies, as well as George Washington Memorial Parkway Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci, and we're going to go ahead and get started with our interview. And George, if you could just start off with the most basic of basic information, could you give us your full name and your date and place of birth?

GEORGE WEIDINGER: Sure. My name is George Weidinger. I was born in Vienna, Austria [00:56], in June 24, 1923, and was baptized in a Protestant [01:00] church, which was Swiss Confession. The church was downtown, by the way, and we lived in the suburbs in a place called Hietzing, where I went to school. Unfortunately, in school one of the subjects is religion, and my professor happened to be a Lutheran minister. So in order to get good grades, I had to go to his church on Sunday. In addition to that, we had a live-in cook which was Catholic, so at times she would take me to her church during the day. Then I'd have to go to church on Sunday to the Lutheran Church. On March 1938, Austria was taken over by the Germans, Hitler's [02:00] invasion, called the Anschluss [02:03]. The day after the Anschluss, I went to school, which was called the Real Schule. It was a technical high school. I was told I could no longer go there, and, of course, to my surprise, I said, "Why not?" And they told me because I was Jewish. Unbeknownst to me, my parents had converted, both having been Jewish, to being Protestant, but it was never told to me. But it was a thing that was done in many cases in Europe merely for

survival, be they economically or whatever it was. So I no longer could go to school. I was 15 years old.

BB: So you didn't know up until you were age 15 that [03:00] your actual background was Jewish.

GW: Exactly. Exactly. I had no idea. I imagine that my parents had some Jewish friends, but it was never discussed, never was -- you know. So it was a big surprise to me, and, of course, not being able to go to school, the question was, what am I going to do with my time.

BB: Before we get to that, because I definitely would like to talk about that, could we back up just a little bit and could you just tell us just a little bit about information about your family, your parents?

GW: Sure.

BB: I know you mentioned last night that you had a brother.

GW: Right.

BB: If you'd just mention a little bit about that.

GW: My father was sales manager for an American company called the Arco Paint Company, which was based in Cleveland, Ohio. My mother ran a bridge stube [04:00], which is a place in a hotel where people would come and play bridge in the afternoon and in the evening. So consequently, my parents were mostly busy. I also had a 4-year-old brother named Peter, so that he and I were alone much of the time, under the eyes of our live-in cook, which actually brought me up.

BB: And your father, you mentioned yesterday, your father was in the First World War [04:35].

GW: My father was in the First World War. I believe he had no rank whatsoever. However, at that time, as the war started, he was sales manager for the Standard Oil Company. He made an enormous amount of money, and he bought a [05:00] villa -- I think it is a 16-room villa -- in the outskirts of Vienna [05:05], where I was born. In those days in order to survive, I guess, in the Army, because he had money, he would send Turkish cigarettes to the captain, and my father, who was a private, had a sergeant as an orderly, and that's how it was done in those days. Probably today as well. I don't know what money can do in today's Army, but that's how it was done.

BB: And he served in the Austro-Hungarian?

GW: Right. He never went to the front or anything like that. However, as we lost the war, he also lost all his money. He was not a good businessman, per se. The story has it that, as an example [06:00], he made 1,000 gold dollars a month, and that was a lot of money in those days. When he did lose his money, he had the option to buy a trainload of Persian rugs. He didn't do that. He had the option to buy a trainload of copper. He didn't do that. And I remembered, as a child, crayoning [spelled phonetically] on pieces of paper that said "1 trillion." In other words, money wasn't worth anything. He started an ice cream factory in Vienna [06:43], and nobody would eat ice cream. It is called probably "ice" rather than "ice cream," which is what people are eating over there now. So after [07:00] Hitler came in and I couldn't go to school, a man hired me and tried to teach me to become an auto mechanic.

BB: So you were about 15 years old?

GW: Fifteen years old. My job was to get up at 5:00 in the morning and to wash cars that were in the same building as the apartment where I lived, and from there I would go to a store

that this man owned, a parts store for bicycles and automobiles, and I would have to open the store. And then actually three months later, this owner of the store told me that he took a job in Germany with the German Luftwaffe [07:53] as a lubrication engineer. I asked him what was going to happen to the business [08:00], and he told me, "You're going to run it." And don't forget, this was without pay. This is merely to teach me, you know, the business, so that I would have some trade when I would come to the United States. My dad applied for a visa, by the way, in, I think it was, March or April of '38, and it took a very, very long time. It took till August of '39 to get the visa. There was a problem with quota. My father was born in Zombor, Hungary, which later became Yugoslavia, which meant that he was on the Yugoslav quota, which was very, very small, and we were on the German quota, my mother, my brother, and I. When we [09:00] -- we actually lived with the Germans a year and a half, which included such things as Kristallnacht [09:09]. You probably remember what that was.

BB: If you recall that and you'd like to talk about it --

GW: Not having been Jewish, per se, it was a big surprise to me at what was going on, but every temple, synagogue, in Vienna [09:30] was burned. The one in our district, I think, was totally destroyed. And my parents had a very, very good friend who, at one point in time, came to our apartment with a large amount of money and asked that my parents -- asked if my parents would keep it for him. He was being sent to Dachau [10:00]. His name was Fred Schnabel [10:03]. He eventually came back from Dachau and became the chief interrogator at the Nuremberg trials [10:14]. Other than that, my recollection is that the mansion across the street from our apartment building was chosen by the highest-ranking SS Standartenfuhrer as their headquarters in Vienna [10:36], and the mansion

was owned by a Jew who owned a 1938 Buick, which was quite an automobile at that time in Vienna. And I do remember when the SS moved into the mansion, opening all the windows and throwing all the furniture out the window [11:00], and, of course, confiscating the car. After the owner of the store left for Germany and I was alone, this SS man and his chauffeur came to my store and said that he needed the transmission oil changed, but he said he needed the car back at 5:00; there was going to be a big parade. And, of course, I was not trained. I jacked up the car, drained the oil, and found out that there really wasn't any good oil available to replace it, but a big can of oil which, in November, was frozen solid. In order to get this into a liquid -- oh, by the way, the Standartenfuhrer came back at 5:00, said, "Is my car ready?" And I said, "No, it isn't [12:00]." He said, "How would you like your parents in a concentration camp?" which obviously left a deep impression. So I had to pick up this big can of oil and carry it across the street to the mansion, where there was a large room with many of the SS men sitting there with their boots off, warming their feet, and we put the can on this wood-burning stove in order to heat it up. I then had to carry it back and pour the liquid oil into the car, and that was the end of the incident. But it certainly was very, very frightening to me. Other than that, I really don't remember anything happening to my family. As we lived in the outskirts [13:00], the condition was much different than for Jews living downtown Vienna [13:07]. They had much harsher treatment. They were cleaning sidewalks with a toothbrush and things like that. And, of course, many, many were sent to concentration camps during Kristallnacht [13:24] time. One incident I remember where they rounded up Jews and ran them -- and walked them into a, what we'd call, basketball court where people would, you know, exercise. And they would make them

lay down on the floor, and they stacked them up like 11 high, so that all the ones on the bottom were dead eventually. I remember that incident [14:00].

BB: Do you know why they did that?

GW: Well, it was Hitler's [14:07] idea to exterminate the Jews completely, get rid of, you know.

BB: So the SS, they just did that just for fun?

GW: Absolutely. I mean, that was their order by Himmler [14:22] to exterminate them.

Unfortunately, if you go back in history, there was a meeting outside of Paris in 1934 where there was a discussion about what to do. All the representatives, including the American, went there to play polo or golf or whatever they did, and nothing was ever done. But if, at that time, countries, all countries, would have taken 10,000 Jews, the 6 million wouldn't have died [15:00]. It's that simple. But that's what happened. When we finally received our visa in August of 1938, my father had to go to Budapest to wait for his visa. My brother and I left five days after my mother left for Yugoslavia to visit friends, and we went to Trieste, Italy, where supposedly the next day we would board the ship. It was called the SS Saturnia [15:41], an Italian ship. As we got up the next morning and walked towards the dock, the ship was being towed away. And I just looked at my notes. It was for mechanical reasons, which, of course, was not true. It was that Mussolini [16:00] could not decide whether to join Hitler [16:04] in the war or stay neutral or what to do. So my brother and I obviously had no place to stay overnight, so we went to a Swedish mission, where they provided us with a bed. But we had to scrub floors, and I believe part of the thing was to pray, and my brother said, "This is really not for us," so we left the Swedish mission the following day, slept on the beach for a couple

of nights, went to the fruit market, which was an open-air market, and stole fruit to eat. And a couple of days later, a Jewish organization took us in, provided us with a bed and bread and milk. Now [17:00], that was quite a large dormitory, and people from all over Europe were there, going into directions all over the world. There were old people going to Shanghai, to South America, wherever. We were stuck there for five weeks, and the big worry was that I believe the rule said that after issuance of the visa, you had to enter the United States within six months, and it was not sure as to when we could leave. We were out of money, and Mr. Howard Wise [17:45], who was the president of the Arco Paint Company, did send us funds to survive.

BB: Where was your mother this whole time?

GW: My mother was in Yugoslavia for eight days and then joined us in Trieste [18:00]. In the meantime, my brother -- my father is in Budapest, waiting for his visa. We arrived in the United States Columbus Day 1939, and in Cleveland, October 13, 1939. My father was on the last ship out of Europe in December of 1939. As I mentioned, I started to work two weeks after we arrived at a lamp factory where I met my future wife, and we are now married 65 years.

BB: Real quick, before we get into the United States, your trip, so you left Europe sometime in September [19:00] of '39?

GW: Right.

BB: Okay, and you -- do you know what ship you came on?

GW: The SS Saturnia [19:08]. It left Trieste, went to Genoa. There was a tremendous storm in the Mediterranean, and everybody on board was sick. I remember we had a cabin way at the bottom of the ship, and when we woke up in the morning, our trunks were floating

in a foot of water. There was water in the cabin, and the trunk was just floating in it. It was a diesel-powered ship, a tremendous smell, and everybody was sick. By the time we got to Lisbon in Portugal, we got off the ship and we could hardly walk from all this motion sickness.

BB: Was that the ship that you brought all these items with you [20:00]?

GW: Oh, no. While we were still in Vienna [20:05], we applied to the Germans to export, to send to America, some of our belongings. A list was submitted, which included, as an example, silverware, flatware, and also we had a couple of beakers that were made out of silver, with old coins on top, and we got permission to ship all that, and that was packed into a van, a shipping van. As we arrived in the United States and opened it, we found out that while this thing was in Hamburg, Germany, the Germans opened it and stole all the silver. Nothing that I ever applied for, you know, that is [21:00] lost. There is no compensation for that. Now, other than that, in Cleveland, we had -- as my father arrived in December, we had a meeting with Mr. Howard Wise [21:21], the president of Arco Paint Company, who advised us that we owed him \$3,000 and that he was not going to give us a job. He said, "Looking back, in 10 years from now, you will realize that it was the right decision," and he was absolutely correct. My brother, being a graduate engineer from the University of Vienna [21:50], was able to get a very good job immediately, and the \$3,000 was repaid within a year. So [22:00] when my dad arrived here, he got a job with a company called the Master Builder Company, which is like a concrete additive thing for builders, and he worked in the stockroom. And believe it or not, at age 53 he was the happiest man in the world just to be here. No question about it. As I mentioned, I met my wife at the lamp factory. I worked there probably for six months or so and then

went into many other industries, including being an apprentice in a machine shop. From there graduated to an industrial engineer, production control manager, and eventually wound up in purchasing, as a purchasing manager [23:00].

BB: When did you learn, as with the rest of your family, to speak English? Did any of your family speak any English whatsoever?

GW: My father obviously spoke very good English, and so did my mother. However, I didn't speak a word, even though English was being taught in school where I went. I believe there were three required languages. German, English, and French was mandatory, and then you had option to take Spanish and Italian. But when I came to this country, I didn't speak a word of English. However, as soon as my dad arrived, he told us that we were not allowed to speak German anymore. And sadly to say, I find that today, today's [24:00] refugees or immigrants, especially Russian, do not practice that. They do not Americanize as we did, and they still speak Russian, by the way, which is very, very sad to me. My mother, after my dad's death in 1948, became the manager of a place called the Civilian Exchange where very wealthy people would donate their art objects, and my mother would sell these, and the money would go to charity. The place was started by one of the very rich families in Cleveland, the Corning family, not part of Corning Glass, but extremely rich [25:00]. Where else do we go from here?

BB: This has been great so far. I guess if you want to at this point, unless you think there is any more you'd like to share about your time in Vienna or your treatment by the Nazis before you left.

VINCENT SANTUCCI: You mentioned yesterday about hiding money in the lamp.

GW: The only other incident that I can remember is that a friend of my parents by the name of

Fred Schnabel [25:32], when he did ask my parents to hide the money for him, that this money was hidden in a part of a very large chandelier which, by the way, must have probably had the height of five feet or more than that, and it had a big globe on the bottom, and [26:00] on loosening the bottom, you could then put the money into this globe. At one point in time the SS came to search the apartment, and it was very, very difficult, as a 15-year-old, knowing the money was up there. Of course, I had to make sure I was not looking at that, because obviously they were watching us. Nothing was found. The man came back from Dachau and the money was returned. Other than that, I really have very little recollection. Maybe when I worked for this store which sold bicycle parts and automobile parts, eventually [27:00] I had to buy to replenish the parts as they were sold, and that meant going on a bicycle from the outskirts of Vienna [27:12] to downtown Vienna. The place where I bought these parts were on the street near the City Hall. It was a very, very long ride, and, of course, you had a backpack and carried the parts there. Other than that, I really don't remember much. Years later when my wife and I went back to Vienna [27:37], we did visit the elementary school where I went to school in Hietzing and went into the same classroom as where I actually have a picture of me sitting in the front row when I was a child, and she took a picture of [28:00] me sitting in the same row.

BB: Oh, wow.

GW: Yes. It was quite interesting. We lived in Vienna [28:12] very close to what is known as Schoenbrunn, which was the summer residence of the emperor. When I go back to Vienna, I do visit, usually, the home where I was born, and it is now a children's daycare center. It's run by the Catholic Church. They eventually bought the home, and it's in as

good a shape as when we left it that many years ago.

BB: When you came to the United States, did you already have -- did your parents already have family members who had already come to the United States?

GW: None. No, we have no other family whatsoever [29:00] in the United States, so that the family that I enjoy now, which we created with my wife, is -- you know, that we have no -- I have a cousin in Paris still alive, who is one of the editors of Le Monde newspaper, and I have a cousin in England who was born in Budapest and eventually left Budapest, but unfortunately, both his parents and his sister were shot by the Nazis on the bank of the Danube. So he is all alone.

BB: So you did have some extended family [30:00] members who did not get out of Europe then?

GW: Well, eventually, yeah, the cousin in England and the cousin in France are all that's left. However, I have records of some of family members that lived in Yugoslavia, were put in a concentration camp in Yugoslavia, and eventually wound up in Auschwitz and died there. I have records of that.

BB: That's about all that I have in terms of questions relating specifically to life before the United States.

GW: Now we can go into --

BB: In fact, we'll probably be just about ready to flip the tape here.

VS: We probably have about two [31:00] or three minutes, but I can either flip it now or --

BB: Well, let me see if I can think of just a couple more quick questions to take up the time, and then it will be an even -- an even break. So you said you worked for a machinist shop and then went to a few other locations.

GW: Right.

BB: Were you working in one of these jobs when the war started, when the United States entered the war?

GW: I worked for a advertising company which made the outdoor billboards, and I started there and prepared the zinc plates which were photographed and then used as the printing media, and I remember that that company did -- was awarded a contract to make black light dashboards [32:00] for airplanes, for fighter planes or military aircraft. And all of the artists that worked there were all German, and when they came --

(End of Tape 1A)

(Beginning of Tape 1B)

BB: You -- yeah, if you want to just -- and if you don't mind just starting that part over.

GW: Sure.

BB: You said that they got a contract for working --

GW: They got a contract for black lights, dashboards or whatever they call it for military aircraft, and all of the artists working there were, in fact, German and saluted each other with "Heil Hitler" [00:29] every morning when they came to work. I was fired because I was an alien.

BB: And they didn't want aliens working on defense contracts?

GW: Well, I guess that was the rule, yeah, or whatever. But it was strange to me that those people would be working on a military contract, but that's, I guess --

BB: And that was right here in Cleveland.

GW: Right. Continental Lithograph Company [00:57] was the name of it. And from there [01:00] I went to a company called Motch and Merryweather Machinery Company

[01:06], where I started as an apprentice, working on a drill press first and then worked my way through every machine that was in the shop. I think the last machine that I worked on was called a planer, which was a very difficult machine to run, and I enjoyed that the most. I was then inducted into the Army in May of 1943.

BB: May of 1943. Okay. So the war had already been going on, or the United States entering the war had already been going on for a year or so.

GW: Exactly.

BB: Prior to that date, May of '43, did you have any interest in joining the U.S. military?

GW: I tried to join the Marines and was not accepted because I was an alien. Now [02:00], the rule was that if you would be drafted as an alien, that you would be shipped no farther than your induction center, which was Fort Hayes, Columbus, Ohio. However, I was shipped out of there, not being a citizen, to Camp Stewart [02:22], Georgia, where I then became a citizen in Savannah, Georgia, while I was in the service.

BB: Oh, okay, okay. I guess another important -- I should get back -- were you married to Nina at this point?

GW: Absolutely. I married in November 11, 1942, and drafted in May of '43, so I was just recently married. While I was in Camp Stewart [02:56], Georgia, I tried my best to [03:00] either get discharged or to get transferred into military intelligence, knowing that a linguist was needed and they were looking for us. However, the general at Camp Stewart [03:20] said, "Nobody leaves this camp, because 75,000 people is what I need here." So I worked at company headquarters, and I believe in supplies, just recordkeeping and office work, but I felt quite unhappy not using what I thought was, you know, a good skill.

BB: And so you were assigned to an actual regiment there at Camp Stewart [03:51]?

GW: 795th AAA Headquarters Battery [03:55]. Eventually I contacted [04:00] a Lieutenant Erich [T.] Abels [04:04], and I remember I have a copy of the letter. It's addressed to Alexandria, Virginia, not knowing, obviously, where he was, and as it turned out later, he was at Fort Hunt [04:19].

BB: Do you remember how you got his name?

GW: He was the son of a man who worked with my father in Vienna [04:30] for the Arco Paint Company. That's how I knew him. His sister was in Cleveland and married an American.

BB: So all you knew was that he was in the military.

GW: He was a lieutenant. He was in the Air Force. I imagine he enlisted long before then. I don't remember how long he was in the Army. But he was the one that arranged for me [05:00] to be interviewed by two officers that came to Camp Stewart [05:06] looking for linguists. So as soon as that interview took place, I was then transferred to Fort Hunt [05:18] in November of 1944.

VS: A clarification. You said "Army" and you said "Air Force." We're talking about Army Air Corps?

GW: Yes, he was in the Air Force -- Air Corps.

VS: Army Air Corps.

GW: Yes, Army Air Corps.

BB: So you ended up at Fort Hunt [05:37] in November 1944. Were you at Camp Stewart [05:43] then for the better part of a year?

GW: Yes.

BB: Or more than a year?

GW: Definitely, yes.

BB: Was the regiment that you were in, the antiaircraft artillery regiment, were they permanently assigned to Camp Stewart, or were they going to be rotated overseas at some point?

GW: Oh, I imagine we were being trained to be [06:00] sent overseas. But I really have no idea. I tried to look it up on the computer as to what happened to the 95th [06:12], and so far I haven't found anything as to what happened to them. But as I arrived at Fort Hunt [06:20], my only recollection is that my wife joined me in Alexandria, Virginia, and we lived at 311 South Washington Street, where an Army captain who was the medical officer at Fort Hunt would pick me up in the morning from Alexandria, take me to Fort Hunt, and bring me back in the evening. He came from the Pacific [07:00], I remember, where he ran a hospital. I remember his complaint was that he was a captain, he should obviously have been a colonel, running a hospital. And that came up later on as my service ended at Fort Hunt [07:25], and I was going to be transferred to a prisoner-of-war [07:31] camp. At that point in time it was obvious -- I was a PFC by the act of Congress. As you remember, if you were a private and you were in the Army 60 days or whatever, you automatically became a PFC. Again, as an interpreter at a prisoner-of-war [07:55] camp, that position would have been that of an officer, and so I would have filled [08:00] that job as a PFC, and Captain Cory [08:04] could relate to that, you know. So at one point in time the orders were already cut for me to go to Arizona. He put me in Walter Reed Hospital.

VS: What was the full name of the medical officer? Do you remember his full name?

GW: C. I. Cory, C-O-R-Y, Cory [08:25].

VS: And he was the medical officer?

GW: At Fort Hunt [08:28]. Right.

VS: Did you know that?

BB: From previous conversations, yes. In fact, you sent us at least one photograph of him, right?

GW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

BB: Yes, I remember on the DVD.

GW: Captain Cory [08:40] had malaria, contracted malaria in the Pacific, and he was a true gentleman, true gentleman. He would sometimes, as I understand it, visit Nina in Alexandria, knock on the door and say, "Could I come in [09:00]?" and he'd bring a bottle with him, and he'd just sit there and talk and have a couple of drinks. Malaria really got to -- I mean, he was suffering from it, you know. But we're still trying to find him, a record of him, and I think that once you give me the websites, I'm going to look for that.

BB: Yes, absolutely.

GW: Other than that, I worked as a monitor at Fort Hunt [09:32], and I remember being in a very, very small room. The small room had a recording device, and I think I spent a good many hours per day there, so that the job was, in a way, strenuous, even though you're just sitting there listening.

BB: Sure. It's probably mentally strenuous.

GW: Exactly [10:00]. And I think I was assigned probably two or three cells to monitor, and then, of course, as a prisoner was going to be interrogated, I would be switched over to

the interrogation room, listen to what the interrogation was, and then I would listen to what he would say to his orderly, going back into his cell, you know.

BB: So you remember monitoring both room conversations with one prisoner talking to another --

GW: Exactly.

BB: -- as well as the actual interrogations?

GW: Right. I remember doing that. However, I can't say that I remember pushing the button to record something that was of extreme interest. I don't remember that. I may have recorded dozens of conversations [11:00] that then they went into another section at -- I don't know what it was called, but to review, to listen to the conversation and determine whether there was something there of interest.

BB: Okay. There was a section at [P.O. Box] 1142 [11:20] that was known as the Evaluation Section [11:23].

GW: Exactly. Evaluation, right. I remember one time actually being in touch with a prisoner of war [11:33] as he arrived at Fort Hunt [11:36], and my impression was that he was filthy dirty. Just a glimpse at seeing that prisoner. I don't know why I happened to be there, but I remember the incident at one time, that I saw a prisoner arriving.

BB: And when you say that he was filthy and dirty [12:00], does that -- did you infer from that that he was coming straight from the front?

GW: Yes.

BB: That he very recently had been captured?

GW: Right. Yes, because otherwise he wouldn't have looked like that. I think he had a very shabby uniform and whatnot. But he must have been of some value. Otherwise, he

wouldn't have been at Fort Hunt.

BB: And this particular prisoner, you remember, he was still in his military uniform?

GW: Absolutely. Yes.

BB: He wasn't in a prisoner garb or anything like that.

GW: No, no, as he arrived in his German uniform. Oh, yes. Now, having remembered all of this stress, sitting in this room, I do remember that at one point in time I was asked to become a courier. That meant issuance of a special courier pass, which I have a copy of [13:00]. I remember that in the morning I would be given a large leather bag, which was locked with a lock, and that it would be handcuffed to my wrist prior to me getting on a bus which then took me to the Pentagon [13:28]. I also had a special pass which meant that nobody could touch that bag as I entered the Pentagon, until I got to my destination and they unlocked the handcuff and took it off of me. Now, what I did all day at the Pentagon [13:53], I have no idea, other than at the end of the day [14:00] an armed guard came with, I remember, the .45 on his hip. And he would escort me. I would pick up all wastebaskets in the room and carry them to the incinerator with the armed guard, and that was it. I would then go back to Fort Hunt [14:34], and I would imagine that it was early enough that Captain Cory [14:41] would then take me home to Alexandria, because I don't remember sleeping in a barrack at Fort Hunt. I must have had a bunk, because obviously, you know -- I don't know how many people lived off the post [15:00] as I did, but surely when I got there, the day I got there, I didn't have a room in Alexandria, so I must have had a bunk. The picture that I have of those few people I really can't say that I remember even talking to them. But obviously, you know -- somebody else had the same picture or a similar picture.

BB: A very similar one, yes, and some of the people in that one -- one of the pictures I'm thinking of had Carlo Weiss [15:39] --

GW: Exactly. He is in there.

BB: -- and Lawrence Schuette [15:41], I think, was another one.

GW: Yes, exactly. Yes. Professor Koch [15:45], K-o-c-h.

BB: Yes, yes.

GW: Yes. Very similar picture. So I -- you know.

BB: You don't particularly even remember any of those individuals that well?

GW: I don't [16:00]. I don't, except in my memory sticks the fact that they were all political escapees from Europe. They had fantastic backgrounds. Each one of them had a real story, you know. They came from all over Europe.

BB: So the only folks at 1142 [16:24] that you have a very distinct memory of are the medical officer, Captain Cory [16:30] --

GW: That's right.

BB: -- and then did you work at all with this Lieutenant Abels [16:35] while you were there?

GW: No, not at all. In fact, I never saw him at Fort Hunt [16:39].

BB: Oh, you never even saw him there.

GW: No. No, no. He was just instrumental in getting me transferred.

BB: Okay. So other than Captain Cory [16:48], Captain Cory is the only real person that you have a distinct memory of there.

GW: Exactly.

BB: You don't remember if you had a specific commanding officer or a sergeant that you reported to?

GW: Nothing. And I don't remember [17:00] that somebody said to me, "This is top secret. Don't talk to your wife about anything." I don't remember that.

BB: Did you speak with your wife about it, though?

GW: Probably. But I don't think it was a conversation where we, "What did you do?" No. No, I don't think I would say, "Oh, yeah, I listened to something and was it" -- no, I don't think that was -- so not remembering, I am sure that I was told, "This is top secret," you know. So I don't think I came home and there was a discussion. I really don't think so. But I'm amazed at the vets that I met, though, that have this vivid memory of what they did. Just amazing to me.

BB: And some of them were [18:00] there for -- we've spoken with some veterans who were there for almost three and a half years. That was their entire World War II career from --

GW: Yes, which is a lot different than the short stay that I had.

BB: Right. Right. But don't think for a second that what you're saying -- I mean, what you've already shared is very, very useful, and we're going to pick your brain a whole lot more here, for sure. But definitely some of what you've shared are things that we've never heard from other people, certainly the courier to the Pentagon [18:33], but also most of the room monitors who we've spoken to usually remember listening in on maybe just the room conversations, but not the interrogations.

GW: I see.

BB: And so we'd like to talk a little bit more about that, about what you might remember.

GW: The interesting thing to me is that obviously, even though I was Viennese, I must have listened to [19:00] conversations by prisoners that came from all over Germany, and there are all these different dialects, you know, like Prussian or -- you know, and I'm amazed

today, having forgotten most of my German. I mean, if I go back to Vienna [19:19] now, it will take me a couple of days before I get -- you know, recollect some of this German.

But I'm really amazed that I was able to listen to all that.

VS: Sure.

BB: So with --

VS: No problem.

BB: Let's see, so your two jobs that you remember most vividly were monitoring and then being a courier. Was the courier job an every-single-day job? I mean, did you switch --

GW: For two weeks.

BB: Oh, for a two-week period, okay.

GW: If I remember [20:00], it was two weeks, to get me out of the environment of being closed in --

BB: Kind of as a break.

GW: Exactly. Exactly. Yes. It had nothing to do with skill or anything else. It was just a body to do the job and to get me out of the monitor environment, which, I guess, was stressful. Have you heard any other monitors saying that they were stressed sitting in that small room?

BB: Some people have certainly said that, if anything, it could be very dull at times.

GW: Yes, yes.

BB: But also we've gotten that impression from a few folks because you're just intently -- our impression is you're just intently listening this entire time for a great deal of time, and you really never know what you're going to end up hearing.

GW: Exactly. Yes. And then, you know, looking back now, when I look at the photograph of

[21:00] the so-called microphone in the ceiling, how antiquated this thing is. Imagine today [laughs]. You can listen to what somebody's saying across the street, you know.

BB: Right, with something about that big.

GW: Exactly. So a low conversation in the cell was very difficult to, you know, to hear, very difficult. But I have no idea what would happen if I had to go to the bathroom. Do I call somebody at the Control Center [21:39]? And by the way, that's interesting. This board, the picture that you have of the control board, where they gave assignments to monitors. That was very interesting.

BB: Do you remember that at all?

GW: No. I saw it in the picture. No, I never saw it. Never saw it [22:00].

BB: Sure, go right ahead.

VS: Brandon will probably get to this. It's just I'm curious. I don't want to forget to talk about it. You said that you had seen this one German prisoner come in, you know, that looked disheveled, and I wanted to follow up a little bit about that. Do you remember there being MPs escorting him, and perhaps was he in shackles or --

GW: No, not in shackles. I think it was merely a standard receiving procedure. In other words, the guy -- a prisoner would be brought in. There is a certain routine they go through -- like eventually they take his uniform, probably take a shower, and they hand him some prisoner clothes. I think it was a very, very short period that I just happened to see this guy.

VS: Was he being taken off of a vehicle?

GW: He was in a room [23:00]. [inaudible] in a room, yes.

VS: Was he the only German prisoner that you saw?

GW: Yes. Yes.

BB: So your whole time there you don't remember -- this is the only German prisoner that sticks out.

GW: Exactly.

BB: You obviously listened to lots of them, but you never saw --

GW: Right. Never saw.

VS: Did you know about any other types of prisoners there of other nationalities?

GW: No.

BB: Italians, Japanese?

GW: No, for sure I only knew of German. When they started talking about Japanese, I said, "I want to go home."

BB: Oh, really.

GW: Oh yes, because --

BB: But you remember that conversation when you were there, the issue, the discussion --

GW: They were going to bring Japanese prisoners here, and I said, "You don't need me." You know, what am I going to do with Japanese prisoners? Yes, I knew they were coming, but I have no idea as to who was there [24:00].

BB: And without jumping ahead too much further, just to help us out, when did you leave Fort Hunt [24:07]?

GW: August 1st. When I left Fort Hunt, Captain Cory [24:13] put me in Walter Reed Hospital. I have the dates here as to when he put me there, but I left the service August 1, 1945. I was honorably discharged August 1st.

BB: Okay. So you probably would have left Fort Hunt [24:30] a month or so before that.

GW: Yes.

BB: But sometime probably -- it's still early summer 1945?

GW: I -- the think the thing you sent me has the date on there.

BB: We'll have to check. In fact, I have that right here. We'll check that in a few minutes during the break. We've got probably about five or seven more minutes left of the tape. There's a lot of specific questions that I'd like to get into on the next tape about the monitoring and the [25:00] courier, but just, I guess I want to start picking your brain a little bit more. So when you were at 1142 [25:09], you traveled back and forth every day from Alexandria.

GW: Right.

BB: And you figure at some point you probably lived on post, at least at the beginning.

GW: The first, I'm sure, week, two weeks, I have -- don't think I have a record that I could look up when Nina came to Alexandria, and we rented the room.

BB: When you first were assigned to Fort Hunt [25:42], I know you said you don't remember a secrecy talk or anything like that, but do you remember, were you ever briefed on what this facility was, or was it very obvious to you right off the bat what it was?

GW: I don't think anybody told me anything [26:00] other than, "You speak German. You're going to be a monitor. Here's the room. You sit, and here is what you're going -- you're going to listen to this." I think that's all there was. I don't think there was a discussion of what is this place. I don't recall that.

BB: Did you ever feel like your background, although you did not have much of an education -- you still had a very technical background, having worked in all these machine shops and whatnot. Did you feel that that had any -- your background, your familiarity with

mechanical --

GW: None. None. Only the fact that I spoke German. And you know what was also interesting, being a machinist, and they needed machinists on the home front to produce war material. I kept on saying, "Why am I [27:00] in Camp Stewart [27:01] in an office when I should be running a machine?" What I found out is that the Army had an evaluation procedure where they test you, and my stronger point than being a machinist was that, working in an office. I didn't know that. Later on in life, though, in my career, it is true. As a purchasing manager and all that, yes, I'm much better at that than just being a machinist.

BB: But you don't remember that -- the room monitoring conversations, you didn't feel that you were specifically chosen; that if somebody in the German army had also been a machinist --

GW: Not at all. I don't think I was given an assignment of a [28:00] particular cell based on that this prisoner is, you know, technically in a certain -- no. No, just listening to a German conversation.

BB: I have a lot of specific questions to get to on the next tape. Vince, do you have any -- well, we've got about two minutes or so of tape left.

VS: During the time you were there, did you recognize or understand that there were Navy operations there as well?

GW: Not at all. Not at all.

VS: Okay. So you never listened in to, monitored any sort of naval discussion of German naval --

GW: I was not aware of the fact that they -- no, Navy was never mentioned.

BB: In terms of the U.S. personnel, you only remember US Army or Army Air Corps.

GW: Army. Right.

BB: Do you remember there being Army Air Corps people there?

GW: No [29:00].

BB: Okay.

VS: But MPs, how about MPs?

GW: No. No. Only those guys that are in that picture say, "Oh yeah, I met them." But other than that, no.

VS: I don't know if we've discussed it, when you received orders that you were actually going to go to Alexandria, did it have specific instructions on how to get to 1142 [29:27], or when did you first hear "1142?"

GW: I need to have the paper. I can get it and look at it as to what the instructions are. I don't think it said "Somebody will pick you up" or something like that. It just says, I think, "You're transferred to Fort Hunt [29:48]."

BB: Well, maybe that's a good stopping point. We can take a little break. If you want to go and look and refresh your memory --

GW: Yes, I can look at that paper and see what they [30:00] -- what the order, in fact, said. But I don't recall it was a hush-hush, like you don't know where you're going.

BB: Okay, great.

GW: I do remember, though, the place to Fort Hunt [30:16] was called Private Drive. If you go up to Mount Vernon, on the right-hand side there was a drive, and there was a sign there, if I remember, Private Drive.

BB: Really. Just off to the side of the --

GW: Off the side of the road.

BB: Okay. Well, we'll call it quits right now. I'd like to pick back up with that, though, when we come back.

(End of Tape 1B)

(Beginning of Tape 2A)

BB: This is the second in a series of recorded taped interviews with Mr. George Weidinger here at his home outside of Cleveland, Ohio. Today is November 29, 2007. This is part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. Mr. Weidinger is being interviewed by myself, Brandon Bies, of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, as well as Parkway Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci, and again this is the second in a series of tapes. We'll go ahead and pick right back up where we were last time. In fact, actually maybe we'll just go ahead -- right before we turn the cameras on, you were starting to talk about a story that you remembered hearing at some point regarding Peenemünde [00:52].

GW: There was a story that one of the great achievements of P.O. Box 1142 [01:00] was the fact that we discovered a site which was called Peenemünde, where Hitler [01:09] was building the V-2 rockets, and having found that site, I believed that created the bombing of the site. So I felt very good knowing that that is one of the achievements of P.O. Box 1142 [01:30].

BB: You don't remember particularly if you yourself heard any of those conversations?

GW: No, I do not. I wish I could say that I remember pushing the recording button at a particular conversation that seemed to be extremely interesting, but -- I'm sure I recorded many conversations, but nothing that is outstanding [02:00] that would pinpoint a particular big achievement.

BB: Okay. That's a good segue into something that I'd like to focus on a little bit, is if you could walk us through what your job really was, from the best that you can remember, as a monitor. Would you mostly be taking notes and just occasionally record a conversation, or was it --

GW: I don't think I took any notes.

BB: Oh, really.

GW: I think it was a matter of going into the room, being contacted by the Control Center [02:39] and assigned cells. I may have written down the cell numbers or whatever was given to me. And I would then switch from one cell to the other, because in many cases there wouldn't be any sound. They may have been sleeping. There may have been no conversation [03:00]. When there was a conversation, obviously you then had to listen intently to find out what they were talking about, and as I mentioned, some of the conversations were very low voice and very difficult to understand. But I would think that at the end of the day then those recordings that were generated by me were turned over to the Evaluation Center [03:34], who then listened to what was recorded.

BB: [affirmative] You said you would have been assigned a couple of rooms at a time?

GW: Maybe three.

BB: Oh, really.

GW: Yes.

BB: And so you would just flip back and forth.

GW: You would switch from one to the other and listen whether there was any activity.

BB: Okay. Were there ever scenarios where maybe there was activity going on in two or all [04:00] three of the rooms at one time?

GW: Yes, it could well be.

BB: Would somebody else have to assist --

GW: No.

BB: -- or would you just flip back and forth?

GW: I would have to decide which was an interesting conversation and which wasn't, you know. I don't know specifically what they would be talking about, but if it was just chitchat, it obviously was nothing that was important to record.

BB: Do you ever remember or recall prisoners ever realizing that they were being bugged?

GW: Certainly. I'm sure that -- well, bugged. I'm sure that after the interrogation, he would tell his orderly that he told them a bunch of lies, you know, and I'm sure that the [05:00] evaluation then followed up on that and maybe confronted the prisoner.

BB: But do you think the prisoners ever knew that hidden in their room was a microphone somewhere, or did they ever discover the microphone?

GW: I would say sometimes, but I would say rarely. I think they were not aware, because otherwise they wouldn't have had any conversations that would have been of interest, and there obviously were.

BB: Do you ever remember if you got the sense that they might have been making up information? For example, if they thought maybe they were being listened in on, would they ever make something up or say something gross or disgusting or something?

GW: No, but I'm sure that the two people, whether the orderly with whoever was the general or field marshal, would discuss [06:00] knowing he was going to be interrogated, what he may say or may not say. I'm sure there were discussions about that. And I'm sure that the evaluators were able to pick up on that and, at the next interrogation, use that

information.

BB: So as you said earlier, you would listen in in the rooms both before, and you would sometimes also listen in on the same people after they had been interrogated.

GW: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think that was very important to find out what he would say to his orderly about the interrogation.

BB: When you used the phrase "orderly," did you mean the other prisoner that was in the room?

GW: Well, I assumed at that time, if I remember correctly, that a field marshal would be in the cell [07:00] with an orderly. It could have been that it was another high-ranking officer, but I don't recall that. I thought it was pretty much isolated as a field marshal or as a general.

BB: And then so that general would be housed with their own orderly or assistant or whoever.

GW: Right. Yes.

BB: Okay, so would they ever -- do you know, would they ever interrogate the orderly?

GW: Not interrogate him, but they might confide in him.

BB: And so you also listened in on the interrogations themselves.

GW: Absolutely.

BB: Do you remember anything about how -- first of all, who, from the American perspective, who was conducting these interrogations? Do you know, were all the [08:00] interrogating officers, were they all officers, or would they ever have enlisted men conduct an interrogation?

GW: You know, that is a good question, because in all of the literature that I have received from you, it was always mentioned that the interrogators were officers, and I'm not so

sure this is true. I mean, there is barely a mention of enlisted men doing anything, if I am correct, after I've read what you have given me. But obviously there were enlisted, like myself, a PFC, you know.

BB: Sure. So you don't have a specific recollection, but you have a general hunch that there were enlisted men who may have been doing some of the interrogations?

GW: I never even thought about, other than it was an interrogator.

BB: Okay, you didn't think of them as an officer.

GW: I had no idea as to who was conducting it, you know [09:00].

BB: From what you listened in on, can you share anything about how an interrogation might have been conducted?

GW: Not really. I imagine that it was pretty much low key. I think the interrogators that were doing the job at that time which then spoke up so vehemently at the reunion as to the present methods, which is all wrong, and I just wonder, were they really trained interrogators, or they were just good, smart people that used -- highly intelligent people, that used their -- maybe due to their [10:00] upbringing or whatever it was, did not -- well, one guy got reprimanded for losing his cool with [Wernher] von Braun [10:09]. Somebody told me this on the phone, I think, "I am the one that got reprimanded." He was told that, "Next time you lose your temper or something, you're going to get court-martialed."

BB: That sounds familiar. I can't remember who, though.

GW: Mandel [10:24], I think, could have been --

VS: Yes, or Fred [Frederick J.] Michel?

BB: Yes, I can't remember. We've definitely been told --

GW: One of them did tell me that, that, "I was the one that" -- you know. So therefore

VS: It was Henry Kolm [10:40].

BB: Yes. So but from what you recall as a monitor, the interrogations were not physical. And they were -- were they more friendly than anything else --

GW: Absolutely. Absolutely.

BB: -- as opposed to antagonistic or anything?

GW: No. No, I don't think ever antagonistic [11:00]. I think their strong point was that they knew how to use a friendly conversation to get information, and I think this is all lost today, that today -- the problem really is that people today are telling me, the reason why this won't work, this is not a war like we had as World War II; these are terrorists. And I am convinced that it doesn't make any difference whether you're a terrorist or a World War II prisoner, you're still a human being, and the same method would get you -- you know, honey will get you more than vinegar. But, you know, it's [12:00] really amazing. The people that did interrogating, I don't think, went to a training school to become interrogators. I think that a guy like Mandel [12:14] or the other one you mentioned spoke German. They were taken and said, "See what -- you become an interrogator. You are an interrogator."

BB: Do you think there was some sort of a screening? For example, why were you made a monitor and not an interrogator?

GW: No idea.

BB: That's one of the things that we're constantly trying to figure out.

GW: Yes. No idea.

BB: Why is it? Because of the folks that we've spoken to, probably around half, maybe

slightly less than half, were room monitors, whereas the other half were interrogators, and some did a little bit of both?

GW: Don't you think [13:00] it was a matter of filling the need? There is a need for a monitor, so you're going to be a monitor. The number of people available. I don't know.

BB: Do you have any sense or any opinion on which was more effective at gaining intelligence, room monitoring, or the actual interrogations themselves?

GW: I might have mentioned it to you, when I came out of the service and I said -- I spent 26 months, my U.S. Army service, and I said, "It was nothing, absolutely nothing." It wasn't until you called and said to me, "But you were part of Fort Hunt [13:51]," that I said, "Really?" I mean, to me, I did nothing. I still don't [14:00], you know. And yet from your viewpoint, looking at it as a team effort that took so many people to fill the team I was part of, and that certainly makes you feel good, that you were part of that team. And, quite frankly, that's why I am so determined that if I can do something for these other guys or, you know, for your people, hey, that's wonderful.

BB: That's great. Not to stray too much, but that's one of the things that Vince and myself and others feel so strongly about, is even if you don't remember that one conversation or that one interrogation as a whole, the level of intelligence -- I mean, you heard this from speakers at the symposium, like Colonel Kleinman and General Shafer. Not only did what happened [15:00] at Fort Hunt have a phenomenal impact on the military intelligence of World War II, but it has really set an example for future generations, and a lot of people feel that that is the model that we should go back towards in the current day.

GW: Well, that's what the pendulum means in his speech, and, you know, you can only pray that this is going to happen, because, quite frankly, you listen to an interview by President

[George W.] Bush [15:30] after this get-together between the Palestinian guy and this other guy, this guy is just off the wall, you know. I don't believe he has the intelligence to do what he is trying to do, and besides that, he's seven years too late. All this would have been [16:00] much more -- my idea was that when he became president, he would have taken Colin Powell, who was, in my estimation, the only good guy in the government; I mean brilliant -- would have said to him, "You go to the Mideast and stay there. Stay there, and use your know-how and your influence," because at that time America was strong and whatnot, "and don't leave until you get results." The world would have been a different place. He goofed. He missed the opportunity. So when you see today's -- when you hear what they have done, Guantanamo and all that, absolutely horrendous. And people don't realize that under our present system, you could get arrested today [17:00]. You could be put in Guantanamo with no legal representation, with nothing, and you'd be there for the rest of your life. And that's not America, but that's where we are.

BB: [affirmative] So I assume you're at least somewhat proud about what you all did there at 1142 [17:25].

GW: Oh, absolutely, and not only that, but certainly the record has proven that the methods that they used brought results. So if that has been proven, why deviate from it? Why do something else?

BB: Switching back a little bit more to the specifics about the room monitoring, were there any certain key subjects that you were told as a monitor, "Oh [18:00], listen in for this," or --

GW: No.

BB: -- "We're particularly interested in this."

GW: No. No. I think it was a matter merely of listening to the conversation, and you would, in your judgment, decide whether it was of interest, you know. If they're talking their family or about their lives or whatever, you just listened. But the time when you pushed a button to record would obviously be something -- when the subject became something that was military.

VS: And this is -- I guess it almost sounds like a silly question, but there were times where you pushed that button.

GW: Absolutely. Oh, yes.

BB: Any sense how often you would record a conversation?

GW: No.

BB: At least once a day? Multiple times a day? Or would you go for days at a time without recording anything?

GW: I would think that there were days at a [19:00] time without a recording.

BB: Where the prisoners were just talking about day to day.

GW: Right. Right. But I think what would really initiate pushing the button would be the after-interrogation conversation. That would trigger, I think, a more interesting subject than just the daily talking.

BB: So you feel that perhaps some of the more significant intelligence came from after the --

GW: I think so.

BB: -- listening in when the one prisoner told the other one --

GW: Exactly.

BB: -- "Oh, at least they didn't ask me about this," or something.

GW: Exactly. Yes.

VS: I guess what's a useful follow-up question is that, were you involved in monitoring the interrogation, and then immediately follow --

GW: Exactly.

VS: By knowing what was said during the interrogation, you can see [20:00] inconsistencies and maybe want to record that.

GW: Exactly. Exactly.

BB: So you would switch from listening to the conversation immediately to that person's cell.

GW: Yes. I would be told, "The prisoner is now being taken back to his cell."

BB: Okay. Did you get any sense of how long a certain prisoner might be there at 1142 [20:24]?

GW: No. No.

BB: So you were always just switching from prisoner to prisoner, so you wouldn't have seen -

GW: I'd get assignments in the beginning of the day. I might be getting the same cell that I had the day before, or I might be getting different cells.

BB: Any sense that, at any given time, how many Americans were there in the monitoring building, how many people were monitoring at any given time?

GW: Not at all. Not at all.

BB: Do you have a knowledge [21:00] or recollection of the intelligence-gathering practice that's referred to as using stoolpigeons [21:06]? Are you familiar with that term, stoolpigeon?

GW: Oh, yes, of course. Of course.

BB: And do you know if that was ever utilized at 1142 [21:15], where either an American of German descent or maybe a German prisoner who had been turned against the Germans was used and put into a cell?

GW: Not aware of it. No, but I know the method is used, yes.

BB: Sure.

GW: But the other thing that I heard, I think while I was still at Fort Hunt [21:46], is that prisoners were taken to Washington, and they got them women. Now, that is no different than what the Germans [22:00] did in Berlin with American POWs [22:04].

BB: So you don't have firsthand knowledge about that, but you just -- that was a rumor --

GW: Yes.

BB: -- that they would take them to Washington.

GW: Yes. And, you know, it would make sense, from a standpoint of you're trying to get information. I mean, you know, let's face it. Men are men. That would be one way to get to them, you know. "We'll satisfy that need." As I say, that was a rumor, but I believed definitely it could have happened, just like they would say, "Well, we took them for a cup of coffee," or this or that. The rest would be a natural thing to do.

BB: Any recollections or hear any rumors about using alcohol as well?

GW: No [23:00]. No.

BB: Do you know if the prisoners were given a great deal of freedom while they were on the post? You know, we mentioned about them going to Washington. If they had opportunities to either exercise or walk around or --

GW: No idea. As I say, when you're confined to this cubbyhole and you're sitting there for, what, eight hours or whatever it was, and then you just leave and go home and then come

back, there was no opportunity to find out about all this other stuff like what's going on at Fort Hunt [23:45], how many people are there, who is doing what. Nothing. Nothing. And certainly Captain Cory [23:52], the medical officer, he merely would see you if you don't feel good [24:00]. He was not involved in any of the aspect of prisoner-of-war [24:08] interrogations.

BB: But he was aware of what you were doing?

GW: I don't think so.

BB: Oh, really. Okay.

GW: I don't think so.

VS: Would he provide medical care for the prisoners, or did he ever talk about that?

GW: He didn't. I thought he was taking care of the Americans stationed at Fort Hunt [24:25]. That was my impression.

BB: So he was a medical officer, but did not really ask questions, or, you know, he just was doing his job at a military installation?

GW: He would talk about his experience in the Pacific, how he'd caught malaria and all that. Like I say, he truly was a gentleman.

VS: Now, presumably, there had to be instances where the prisoners needed medical care.

GW: Yes.

BB: Do you think that it might have been that he just [25:00] didn't talk to you about that? He felt that that was confidential information that he wasn't privileged to talk about?

GW: You know, it could be. It could well be that he did take care of it and did not talk about it, yes. Maybe his instructions were the same as mine. You don't discuss what you're doing. And, you know, quite frankly, what I would hear or do all day would be of no

interest to my wife. I mean, you'd come home from work and say, "You know, I just heard a" -- you know. We talked about -- first of all, we were just married, you know [laughs].

BB: Sure.

VS: Did you have a sense that the kinds of prisoners that were being held at 1142 [25:57] were different than other kinds of prisoners?

GW: Yes, I had the feeling [26:00] that they were high-ranking.

VS: Did you have any knowledge that there were others outside of military personnel that were coming there, like scientists?

GW: No. No.

VS: Didn't know about that?

GW: No.

VS: And did you know the name Operation Paperclip at the time?

GW: No, not at all.

BB: Operation Paperclip probably wouldn't have existed until after George was discharged from the military.

GW: Yeah. This is to get prisoners, scientists, away from the Russians.

BB: Yes. You got it. Exactly, and that's who many of the folks, like [H.] George Mandel [26:37] and Peter Weiss [26:39], they worked almost exclusively with Paperclip and other scientists in that program.

GW: Boy, those stories are absolutely amazing, you know, or [John Gunther] Dean's [26:49] story. I mean, you know, it was really funny that at one point in time, on the second day, where CNN is coming [27:00], "Would you be willing" -- I said, "Sure." So we all went

outside, and, of course, they got Dean [27:08], which was really great, you know, but I must say this, and I don't blame him. He's got a big ego, Dean. So he really hogged this thing, to where I was just sitting there listening, you know. [laughs] And I was happy. I mean, don't get me wrong. What the hell do I have to tell CNN, you know? But they said, "Do you want to?" I said, "Sure," you know. I volunteered, and when he got going, it was absolutely amazing, you know, once I got to know him. In fact, in the beginning when somebody said, "This is the ambassador," I said to Nina, "Yeah, sure," you know [laughs]. "What do you mean, ambassador?" you know. [laughs] And no different than this guy says, "What does George want?" you know [28:00], and then he looks at the DVD and says, "You know, this is" -- [laughs] Like I say, I have so much respect for these men, I can't tell you.

BB: And you're part of them.

GW: Well --

BB: Yes, as we've said, everybody --

GW: But like I say, surely if there would be a choice, I'd give up the microphone to Dean [28:30], you know, because he has the story, and I don't, see? Yes, it makes me obviously feel good to be part of this whole thing. What is very, very unnerving to me is that in Cleveland I found one guy that found this thing interesting, and he was the POW [28:53]. I mean, my grandson is interested in it, but these people [29:00] -- in many ways, though, it reflects American culture. I don't mind tell you that from where I come from, this country is so obsessed by sports, obsessed by movie stars, this adoration of whatever, and I don't understand why, if somebody makes a movie, why you have to have an Emmy [sic] Award. Why do we have awards for National Park rangers that did a

fantastic job? Do we have awards for purchasing agents that do an excellent job? And so some of this [30:00] thing is so overdone here that I find the lack of culture very disturbing to me. I have never asked -- nobody has ever asked me, the people I hang around with, "Let's go to the art museum."

VS: That's sad.

BB: Well, they could just come to your house. They wouldn't have to go to the art museum.

GW: No, but I mean, you mean all there is to talk about is sports, football players? He went to Notre Dame. Who cares where he went to school? I mean, but this is all part of the culture, you know. My grandson is totally involved in this thing, and I'm trying to give him some of the other. You know, "I don't want you to only do this [31:00]."

Appreciate art. Appreciate nice things in life. And so I can tell you this. I have friends in Vienna [31:16], and I have no friends here. You don't make friends here, and I've been questioning this for 20 years going there, and I'm told, "No, you don't. That's the way it is." That's sad. So if somebody says if you have two good friends in your lifetime, you're lucky. True. In the meantime, whatever you can use me for -- by the way, do you ever need engraved [32:00] nameplates in your offices or anything like that?
[laughter]

VS: We do.

GW: You do?

VS: Yes. The one thing that we don't want to forget about is you brought the paperwork up regarding your transfer orders to 1142 [32:13].

GW: Yes.

(End of Tape 2A)

(Beginning of Tape 2B)

GW: -- transfer from Camp Stewart [00:02], Georgia, and looking at the actual order, I certainly don't remember, but it does state clearly that once you get to Alexandria, Virginia, you call this phone number. I don't remember doing this, but that's what it says.

VS: Do you think we should call it now and see who answers?

GW: [laughs] That would be great.

[clock chimes]

BB: I'm just going to wait for the clock to stop chiming. And so, yes, as Vince brought up, there is the transfer order. And so that if we read that earlier. I guess it looked like it said it was transferring you to Fort Hunt [00:48], and then later on went on to even call it P.O. Box 1142.

GW: It says, "Any future communication is to be addressed to P.O. Box 1142 [00:58]." Right.

BB: 1142, Alexandria, Virginia [01:00]. And it simply said that when you arrived at Alexandria, you were to call this phone number for future instructions.

GW: Exactly. Yes.

BB: Do you have any specific memory of doing that?

GW: Not at all. Not at all. No.

VS: And so other veterans have talked about meeting at a corner, someone picking them up, and going to Fort Hunt [01:26] for the first time.

GW: Right. Right.

VS: And then we get their recollections of what their first impression was.

GW: I've heard them talk about that. Right.

VS: You don't recall that --

GW: Not at all.

BB: Or if you went by yourself or if you were with some other --

GW: I must have been alone. Definitely alone.

BB: And if you look on the roster, it looks like no one else came on the same date that you did.

GW: Right. Right.

VS: Is it worth just to mention that the patch -- since most people don't recall that. Maybe we can even hold it up to the camera.

BB: Sure. Sure.

VS: You had indicated that [02:00] this particular patch, you received when you --

GW: Exactly.

BB: -- were assigned to 1142 [02:06].

[inaudible commentary]

GW: Yes. Yes, coming into Fort Hunt [02:17], I was given this patch, which then replaced the AA, antiaircraft, patch which I had on my uniform.

BB: Got you. But while you were at -- you still wore a uniform while you were at Fort Hunt.

GW: Definitely. Definitely.

BB: You were not armed while you were there, were you?

GW: Not at all. No.

BB: And a few more follow-up questions with monitoring before we finish up with that. Your job at 1142 [03:00] as a monitor, was that pretty much a Monday-through-Friday sort of thing, or were you there --

GW: Absolutely. Oh, yes.

BB: So you still -- you had days off?

GW: Yes.

BB: You had at least a day or two over the weekend?

GW: Weekends. Sure.

BB: Do you know if there were other people who were doing the monitoring on weekends?

GW: Oh, there must have been. Definitely.

BB: You would almost assume they had to have been monitored.

GW: Sure. Sure.

BB: And likewise, what about evenings? You obviously went back to Alexandria.

GW: I had like an 8:00-to-5:00 job, and once I left the post, that was it. Went to our little room there. I remember we had a electric hotplate to eat ravioli out of the can. Yes.

BB: Were you assigned any other duties at Fort Hunt [04:00]?

GW: Not at all.

BB: Since you didn't live there, you weren't assigned KP duty or, you know, cleaning things or anything.

GW: No. No.

BB: Do you remember if you ever had to report --

GW: I thought, though, there were no duties. I thought possibly they were done by somebody. I guess there were enlisted men that were not part of the military intelligence --

BB: Sure. Well, people like Dominic Marletto [04:33].

GW: Yes.

BB: He was not in military intelligence --

GW: Right.

BB: -- but he was there more as part of that support staff.

GW: Yes.

BB: So that's where we just -- but we're constantly trying to, you know, see if that was the case or --

GW: The pictures that I received, cooks, truck drivers, yes, there was support people. So I think yes, we had [05:00], from that standpoint, a rather sophisticated assignment, you know. We didn't have to pull KP, although in Georgia that's all I was doing [laughs].

BB: Do you recall ever having to go to the parade ground for --

GW: Never. I was amazed when I saw these pictures of the parades and all that. I'm not sure whether that happened before or after. Could be. I have no idea what year.

BB: You don't remember, you know, the flagpole or anything like that.

GW: No.

BB: Do you remember any of the buildings there at all? You know, we talked a little bit about this last night, how you couldn't quite remember the building where you were monitoring. You really couldn't remember much.

GW: Not at all.

BB: Do you remember if it was above ground, or if it was a below-ground bunker or anything [06:00]?

GW: Not at all.

BB: Do you remember those concrete gun batteries that you saw while you were out there at Fort Hunt [06:08]?

GW: First time I saw it was when I went for the reunion, yes. Yes. It really is a shame, but I

don't know. Different people have -- their brain works different ways. It's like people that have -- what is it -- dementia versus Alzheimer's, you know. I visit a friend of mine. He got cancer some years ago. I see him almost every day, but he's got now Alzheimer's, and I walk in and I say, you know, "Did you have breakfast?" And he doesn't know. But he can tell me stories 50 years ago of what happened. It's amazing [07:00].

BB: One thing we had just mentioned a little bit at the end of the last tape that I wanted to make sure that we had recorded, you mentioned you remembered there being a sign saying "Private Drive."

GW: Right.

BB: Is your recollection that you would be presumably on the George Washington Memorial Parkway and then there would just be this sign that said "Private Drive" off to the side?

GW: Exactly. Exactly. But today the Memorial Parkway seems so much wider, so much larger than what I remembered. Driving to Mount Vernon was just a two-way highway --

BB: Really.

GW: -- in my recollection, and like I said, distinctly see the sign that says "Private Drive."

BB: Well, the Parkway hasn't gotten any bigger. The Parkway is the same number of lanes as it has always been, unless you were perhaps on, say, Route 1, which is on the other [08:00] side, which runs right north-south and goes somewhat close to Mount Vernon.

But it wouldn't have made that much sense; the Parkway would have been a straight shot, straight down from Alexandria right --

GW: I'm sure he drove me up the Parkway.

BB: Yes. Yes, that would have made sense. I'm trying to think if there's any other questions

specifically to monitoring. I don't know, Vince, if you have anything, or if, George, you think we've left anything out.

VS: I was surprised that you said you didn't write anything down when you were monitoring. Again, they must have had a lot of faith in your judgment if they didn't give you instructions to say "if you hear anything about weapons or names of officers or" --

GW: Yes, but I think the instructions pretty much are like, "If something comes up, you push the button [09:00]," rather than writing.

VS: Right.

GW: I think that's what it was, so I think if there were interesting conversations, you would immediately record, you know.

VS: The question is, and I haven't thought about this enough, you didn't go to Camp Ritchie [09:26], and you asked the question, what determined whether you were an interrogator versus a monitor. If we looked at the folks that were monitors and asked the question, "Did you go to Ritchie or not?"

BB: That's a good point.

VS: Maybe that might be part of that discussion. But you had the good language skills to be able to understand, but you weren't trained in military intelligence to do interrogation, that maybe they put you in and utilized those language skills as a monitor.

GW: Were people trained at Camp Ritchie [09:59] as interrogators [10:00]?

BB: Yes, we believe so.

GW: They were.

BB: They received a well-rounded intelligence background, and one of the courses that they took was strictly in interrogation.

GW: Oh, really. So they were trained interrogators.

BB: They even had mock interrogations there.

GW: Really.

BB: Many of the people at Ritchie, most of the people at Camp Ritchie [10:24], did not go to Fort Hunt [10:25], 1142. Most of them went overseas.

GW: Oh, they did go -- I see.

BB: The vast majority went from Ritchie to the European Theater, where they conducted field interrogations. Some of them were assigned all the way down to individual regiments. Some were at, you know, Army Headquarters.

GW: So there was like a trained interrogator who was in the Intelligence Service, assigned to a unit. So he was like the only intelligence officer; in most cases they were officers.

BB: In most [11:00] cases. Not all, but in most cases the folks at Ritchie [11:06] who went overseas were commissioned. There are some people from 1142 [11:12] who went -- in your case, maybe first went from basic training or someplace to 1142; worked as a room monitor; then were transferred from 1142 to Camp Ritchie [11:28]; received additional training in interrogation, were commissioned, and then went overseas. So not all of them; some of them were not commissioned. Wilbur Wrights [spelled phonetically] was not commissioned.

GW: I tried to get to Nuremberg [11:40], and I couldn't. That's where I wanted to go. But, of course, this Fred Schnabel [11:50] that my parents knew, the one who was in Dachau, that was a heck of a job he did [12:00].

BB: Yes, at least one of the veterans went from 1142 [12:05] to Nuremberg [12:06], Rudy Pins[12:07].

GW: Yes.

BB: He went to Nuremberg.

GW: I think somewhere -- oh, I know where it is. That's him.

BB: Oh, the friend of yours.

GW: The friend of my parents, yes.

BB: The friend of your parents, Schnabel [12:33], okay. And you said he's still living.

GW: Yes.

VS: And you say he was the chief interrogator --

GW: At Nuremberg [12:42].

VS: -- representing the --

GW: The Americans.

VS: The Americans.

GW: Oh, yes, he was in this country and was in the Army.

VS: But he wound up going to Dachau.

GW: Yes, and survived [13:00].

VS: Well, that's interesting, because -- was Rudy Pins [13:05] at Dachau?

BB: No, Rudy was not. Rudy was not in any camps. Norman Graber [13:12] was at Dachau and Buchenwald. Again, I know we've probably already asked this before, anything that you can remember about the types of prisoners you were listening in. Obviously, you remembered in some cases they were high-ranking field marshals or generals, maybe with an orderly.

GW: Right. My impression was that all prisoners at Fort Hunt [13:46] would have been high-ranking.

BB: High-ranking, okay.

GW: That is my impression.

BB: So your impression is that they were there more for their intelligence, their field intelligence, their war planning intelligence [14:00], as opposed to technological information.

GW: Yes. I really was not aware of what I know now, that you were after technical information that America didn't have, for instance.

BB: Right.

GW: That's amazing.

BB: Because we know a lot of what they did early on at Fort Hunt [14:22] dealt with the U-boat war and trying to figure out how the German U-boats worked, how deep they could go, how many torpedoes they carried, that sort of information. So you don't remember recording anything technical about weaponry or anything.

GW: None. No. No.

VS: It's surprising to us that there didn't seem to be this collective, strategic discussions as a group to say, "Okay, here's our prisoner. Here's what we're looking for. Here's what we know about them." Were you provided with some [15:00] sort of background information on the prisoner that you were monitoring? Did you know their name, their rank?

GW: No. No.

VS: I mean, it seems like having that information might be helpful to you.

GW: Yes, now that you mention it, definitely, and I don't recall any time where such information was given to me. To me it was just walking in the room, turning on the

thing, listening. But I don't recall, "You're going to be listening to Field Marshal so-and-so, and pay attention to this or that," any -- no. No such thing. I think they strictly relied heavily on the interrogation, the skill of the interrogator, and I [16:00] think the monitor was kind of used to, let's say, record this interrogation; replay it, listening to it; learn from it. The interrogator probably said, "What could I have done better? What could I have asked him, or how could I have asked him to" -- you know. So it's kind of a support function.

VS: Yet clearly, having a command of the German language was necessary for that position --

GW: Absolutely.

VS: -- so that you knew when to push that button.

GW: Exactly, yes. And like I said, the different dialects, I'm sure, made it very difficult.

BB: Did you have a background in any other languages besides German? French or anything like that?

GW: No. Well, like I said, we had it in school, but --

BB: In school, but not enough.

GW: You know, I was a very poor student [17:00]. I think, looking back, one of the reasons was that I didn't have parents that really paid much attention to what I or my brother were doing. That was left to the cook, and what the heck, she was a peasant woman that cared a lot for us, you know, I mean, a very good person, but -- so my schooling was a disaster to start with. See, when you go to this technical high school, it's like any other school. The first year really sets the groundwork to -- they never taught me how to read. They never taught me how to absorb, to, you know, comprehend what I'm reading. So my skills are [18:00] totally not in schooling, which made it tough in many, many ways.

There was a program, and I think Peter Weiss [18:19] has mentioned some woman that he is in touch with, that is working on this, being compensated for the cut-off education from the --

BB: Oh, really.

GW: Yes.

BB: Really.

GW: Of course, they're also talking about the Austrian government bringing us to Austria for a week at their expense and all that, you know, which is great, but when they asked me, "Have you returned?" I say, "I've been there 15 times." So fat chance I have [19:00].
[laughter]

BB: Do you have any sense of the size of 1142 [19:10] in terms of numbers, any idea at all, at any given time, how many German prisoners might have been there?

GW: No. No, or the size of the installation --

BB: Or the American --

GW: No, until now when I look at these things. There were, what, like 400?

BB: We don't know.

GW: Do you think? Is that a good number?

BB: In terms of prisoners or Americans?

GW: No, Americans.

BB: You know, it might be close. It might be a little bit high, but that's something that we're always trying to figure out, is exactly at a given time --

GW: Have you taken a look at the map that shows the number of barracks?

BB: Yes, we know how many barracks were there.

GW: And you know how many [20:00] beds are in a barrack? Would that give you a clue as to the number?

BB: Well, it would, except people like you wouldn't be counted.

GW: I know, but how many were there? There were only --

BB: We've actually interviewed a number of veterans who at one point or another lived off-post.

GW: Really?

BB: Yes, and also some of them have recalled that many of the officers lived off-post. For example, we know that there was U.S. Navy involvement early on at Fort Hunt [20:38], particularly when they were trying to find out about the submarines. But we know that the U.S. -- no one from the U.S. Navy lived on the post. They all came in every day. We know everything from interrogators down to other room monitors who also lived in Alexandria.

GW: Well, based on that, on this much traffic [21:00], it is quite obvious. There was a place when you drove in there, somebody stopped you. It's obvious [laughs].

BB: Sure. You couldn't have just walked in and out like that.

GW: I mean, can you imagine a secret post like that with people driving all over?

BB: Right. Right. No.

GW: Yes, it's really interesting. But what a shame to destroy so much of that --

BB: Of the buildings and whatnot?

GW: Yes, the contents. Who would give that order, "Destroy all that?" The War Department?

BB: I think the military is concerned about secrets, and also, in terms of the buildings, the National Park Service wanted their park back, and so they actually put in -- because,

again, this was a national park that was -- there was a special-use permit [22:00] that was written allowing the War Department to use Fort Hunt [22:04] again, and in that it said, "One year from the end of hostilities, it should be turned back to the National Park Service, and all of the military buildings removed."

GW: I see.

BB: So we actually have ourselves to thank for the fact that the buildings were removed. Now, whether -- for the documents, it's difficult to tell how many might still survive and where they could be, but certainly a lot of them were destroyed.

GW: Burned?

BB: We know for some of the programs that were there, and that's one thing -- a long shot -- we'll ask. You may have heard of it, you know, through Vince's talk or some of the other talks and discussions, about this MIS-X [Military Intelligence Service-X] program, that Escape and Evasion Program.

GW: Yes. Yes, yes.

BB: Do you remember ever hearing about that while you were there [23:00]?

GW: Never. Never. No, I was strictly interrogation, yes. Was that program very successful?

BB: It was extremely successful.

GW: Was it?

BB: Yes, at least that's our understanding, is that was so successful that a lot of the current programs to -- you know, if an American is to go missing in action or potentially be held as a prisoner, a lot of what was developed is still potentially --

GW: Really.

BB: Or forms of that are still being utilized today, to the point that the military as recently as

10 or 15 years ago, was very concerned that so much was being shared out to the public about this program, because it was so secretive.

GW: You know, the disturbing thing about this Guantanamo and the interrogation that's being used today [24:00], what bothers me is, suppose an American would get captured, and suppose they would say, "Hey, what do you mean, Geneva Convention? What the hell is that? You don't follow it, so, you know, why should we?" Are we not concerned?

VS: Amongst the list of killed and missing, I think there are -- amongst the killed and wounded, I think there is a dozen Americans that are missing in action in this current war, and so you can only wonder. Are you going to talk a little bit more about the Pentagon [24:45] relationship?

BB: Yes. That was the next phase I wanted to get into.

VS: Okay, and then just some quick background questions. Any presence of women on the base? Ever a reference to OSS or FBI [25:00] at the base?

GW: Never.

VS: Anything like that?

GW: Never.

BB: And so you don't remember there being any females or WAC officers --

GW: Never.

BB: -- or anyone stationed there?

VS: Don't remember any of the officers' names? Would Walker have been there during this time period?

BB: I believe so. Did the name Colonel Walker ring a bell?

GW: No.

BB: Okay. I believe he would have been the officer there. Another officer towards the end of the war was a gentleman named Zenas [R.] Bliss, but that may have been after you had left.

GW: [affirmative] No.

BB: Okay. Yes, the next phase I wanted to get into is to cover in a little bit more detail the courier. We've got about five -- we've got about five minutes or so of tape left.

GW: Okay.

BB: Maybe I'll actually go ahead and just hold off on that so that we don't get interrupted. I don't know [26:00], Vince, if you can think of anything else just to cover the next few minutes.

VS: USO or any kind of social activities while you were in the Washington area? Do you remember going into Washington, D.C., going to Mount Vernon?

GW: The only place that my wife and I went was Mount Vernon, the only one. And, of course, then she had to come to Walter Reed to visit me. Other than that, we didn't go anyplace in Washington. I remember summertime was extremely hot, humid.

VS: Since you were right along the Potomac River.

GW: Yes.

VS: There was a dock at Fort Hunt. Do you ever remember anything --

GW: I have a picture of it.

VS: Okay. Do you recall that dock during the time that you were stationed there?

GW: I thought that was part of Mount Vernon, not Fort Hunt.

BB: Well, there was [27:00] a dock at Mount Vernon, and I saw the photograph in your album here.

GW: Yes.

BB: But there was also a dock at Fort Hunt [27:07].

GW: There was?

BB: Yes. Yes.

GW: But isn't Fort Hunt high up from the Potomac?

BB: It's close, but you can actually get to the Potomac. The Potomac River is just on the other side of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, and there is a -- excuse me -- kind of a brick underpass underneath the Parkway that you could walk right under and go right on out onto the river.

GW: I see.

BB: So as the crow flies, Fort Hunt [27:38] is no more than a couple of hundred yards from the banks of the Potomac River.

GW: I see.

BB: It's actually fairly close. Do you remember when you were there -- I know you've had difficulty remembering the physical buildings or anything, but do you remember, was the area wooded? Was it secluded, or was it wide-open [28:00] fields?

GW: It wasn't. The only thing I remember, my impression is as you turn right from the highway, and that was wooded. But I can't visualize driving in and seeing what it looked like, no.

BB: Do you remember it from inside the fort? Could you look out and see other houses or the neighborhood around it or anything?

GW: No.

VS: Any presence of any British military?

GW: Never heard of them. No. I wish I could recollect a heck of a lot more than I do, but --

BB: That's okay, and just because you say no, we don't want you to feel bad for that. We're just -- we've got lots of questions to ask, and [29:00] you remember some details that other people don't. You actually remember a good bit about the process of how the monitoring process went, more so than other people we've spoken with.

VS: Our understanding of Fort Hunt [29:15] is based on 20-some interviews, and if we only understood it based on one interview, we would have a very biased understanding.

GW: Yes. You have to combine it and --

BB: Exactly. Collective understanding.

GW: Sieve and [inaudible] through it.

BB: Every single interview that we've done, we've walked away with

GW: With something

BB: With at least one, two, three new tidbits of information. Sometimes they're bombshells, information you just couldn't even fathom. And other times they're smaller, but they're still important pieces of the puzzle, and we're trying to find all those pieces, and what we don't know is just how many pieces there are to the puzzle.

GW: Sure. Sure.

BB: So that's why we're asking so many questions.

GW: Well, hopefully, for instance [30:00], when you get to the West Coast, they might surprise you, and they've got all kinds of photographs or documents or whatever, you know. You never know.

VS: This has been very helpful so far, as Brandon said --

BB: Absolutely.

VS: -- and we're excited about what we've learned about monitoring, and we're also excited to talk to you about that link to the Pentagon [30:18], which we haven't really received from anybody else.

BB: Correct.

VS: Arno Mayer a little bit -- or Arnold Kohn [30:25], Arnold Kohn actually was Paperclip officer stationed at the Pentagon, and so he provided a little bit of insight, but I think yours is a new perspective for us.

GW: So there must have been information that was gathered at Fort Hunt [30:46] that I carried into the Pentagon [30:49]. Otherwise why would I carry a top-secret bag?

BB: Right, and that's where, I think, we'll pick up. We're down to just less than a [31:00] minute on the tape, so I think we'll go ahead and call it quits for now, take another break, and then we'll pick up with picking your brain a little bit about the Pentagon [31:10] trip.

GW: When do you think you want to start the newsletter, the monthly newsletter? Will you have a chance to get started with it?

BB: We'd love to do something as soon as possible, if even just to send out -- I think the first step is going to be for us to get you the contact information for the veterans that you don't have already.

GW: Yes, that is important, because I'd like to follow up on that.

[talking simultaneously]

(End of Tape 2B)

(Beginning of Tape 3A)

BB: Okay, I'm going to continue here. This is the third in a series of interviews for the Fort Hunt Oral History Project with Mr. George Weidinger here at his home just outside of

Cleveland, Ohio. Today is November 29, 2007. This is National Park Service Historian Brandon Bies, as well as Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci. Again, this is the third tape in a series of tapes with Mr. Weidinger, and we'll go ahead and pick up -- I guess that we covered a lot in the last tape, asking you all sorts of questions about room monitoring and whatnot.

GW: Right.

BB: I guess I'd like to focus [01:00] a little bit more this time around -- you've already told us a little bit about what you remember of your trips to the Pentagon [01:07] as a courier, and just wanted to highlight that a little bit more and pick your brain a little bit more about what you might remember.

GW: Sure.

BB: So you had said before that that was a duty that you think was assigned to you basically as a break to get away --

GW: Correct.

BB: -- from either the monotony or the stress of the room monitoring.

GW: Right. Yes. The monitoring, sitting in a small, confined area for that many hours every day, I guess, deserved a break, and so the assignment given to me was that of carrying a sealed pouch of secret papers, handcuffed to my wrist, from Fort Hunt to the Pentagon. I believe I rode a [02:00] bus, which was an Army vehicle that took me from Fort Hunt [02:09] to the Pentagon [02:12].

BB: Do you know, was this a role that others had had before and after you?

GW: No idea, except there must have been somebody else before, because there must have been communication between Fort Hunt and the Pentagon. It certainly was not started

just when I got the job.

BB: So it appeared that you were following some sort of established protocol --

GW: Sure. Right.

BB: -- that this happened? And so you have every reason to believe that this continued even after you did this?

GW: Absolutely.

BB: When you were done with this job, you went back to room monitoring?

GW: Yes.

BB: Okay. So during this two-week period -- and while -- during this two-week period, you were not also monitoring.

GW: Not at all.

BB: You were just assigned [03:00] as a courier.

GW: I stayed at the Pentagon the whole day, and I'm positive that the bus took me back early enough for Captain Cory [03:13] to then drive me home to Alexandria.

BB: Okay. And you never had any knowledge of the contents --

GW: Never.

BB: -- of this briefcase?

GW: No, and I don't think anybody else did. You know, only the people that put the contents into the bag and the people at the Pentagon [03:37] that opened the bag.

BB: Do you have any recollection of who or what section, and what type of folks you got this bag from at Fort Hunt [03:49]?

GW: No. I don't know who handcuffed it to my wrist. I don't remember.

BB: Did you have a key?

GW: No, of course not.

BB: So [04:00] you depended on getting to the Pentagon to get this unlocked --

GW: Absolutely.

BB: -- from your own wrist.

GW: Absolutely.

BB: And so you would take -- but you wouldn't be in a private car. You would be taking public transportation?

GW: No, no, it was an Army bus.

BB: Oh, it was an Army bus.

GW: An Army vehicle.

BB: So an Army vehicle would come. Do you remember, were there others on that vehicle?

GW: Don't remember. There may have been. There may have been.

BB: Do you remember if it made other stops?

GW: None.

BB: So it was direct.

GW: Oh, yes.

BB: It only went from Fort Hunt to 1142 [04:39].

GW: For sure.

BB: Excuse me, to the Pentagon [04:42]. Okay. But you think there might have been other people --

GW: There could have been.

BB: -- from 1142 that were also going to the Pentagon --

GW: Could have been.

BB: -- on related business or something like that.

GW: Yes. They obviously had an Intelligence Section at the Pentagon [05:00].

BB: Do you remember anything about who you would give these contents to? I assume it was an officer.

GW: Whoever had the key and unlocked the handcuff, I would assume he was an officer.
Sure.

BB: But you don't recall if this person was a colonel or a general --

GW: No.

BB: -- or what their rank might have been?

GW: I don't. No.

BB: Okay. So then once you had delivered these, you never spoke or they never spoke to you about the contents whatsoever?

GW: Absolutely not.

BB: You were simply just a courier. Once you would then just wait at the Pentagon [05:40] for a few hours?

GW: Right. Yes.

BB: And eventually -- it would be towards the end of the day -- you would go and empty the wastebaskets?

GW: Right, and that's all the duty that I had.

BB: Okay.

VS: Did you ever transport anything back from the Pentagon to 1142 [05:56]?

GW: Not that I remember.

BB: So it was just one-way.

GW: Yes.

BB: From 1142 [06:00] to the Pentagon.

VS: Were you armed?

GW: No.

VS: Was there some sort of MP or security that was with you?

GW: Not that I remember. The only security I saw was at the Pentagon [06:13] at the time we emptied the wastebaskets.

BB: But you stated earlier, and I think you've shown it to us, that you had a pass that allowed you into the Pentagon.

GW: Right.

BB: And this got you through security or something at the Pentagon.

GW: Yes. In other words, whoever was at the entrance of the Pentagon was not able to touch the brown bag, because it had a special courier pass and the bag was marked Top Secret.

BB: I realize these are difficult questions to remember 60 years ago. Did you get the sense, was the briefcase heavy? Did it have -- do you think you were [07:00] carrying two or three sheets of paper or dozens of pieces of paper?

GW: I think that the bag itself was a very heavy leather bag, which I don't believe could tell you what's inside --

BB: Okay. So it would be difficult to tell.

GW: -- whether it's one sheet or 10 sheets. But the bag itself was substantial, yes. I think it was about this long, if I remember right.

BB: Really.

GW: Yes. It was not a briefcase. I know it was a bag.

BB: Do you feel fairly confident, though, that it was papers inside, as opposed to --

GW: Yes.

BB: -- say, audio recordings of prisoners or reels of --

GW: No, no, I would think definitely papers.

BB: Papers, okay.

GW: Or I assumed that's what it was.

VS: Or photographs or --

GW: Could be. Could be. You know, there again it's a matter of trying to figure out what would be generated at Fort [08:00] Hunt that would interest the intelligence establishment at the Pentagon [08:08]. What could that be? What would be sent there, and what would they do with it?

VS: Captured documents is an example.

GW: Yes. Yes, but there again, captured documents would be more usable at Fort Hunt [08:31] with the type of personnel you had there, rather than -- I'm not sure you had any German linguists at the Pentagon.

VS: Translated interrogations --

GW: That could be.

VS: -- with information about the order of battle or new technology?

BB: Or possibly -- I'm sorry, go ahead.

GW: Yes. Yes. I think that dissected information [09:00] that was looked at at Fort Hunt [09:04] was then sent to the Pentagon [09:07] after they got done analyzing it, but I don't think the Pentagon had the ability to do what Fort Hunt did.

BB: We believe -- there are some documents that give statements like there were X number of

interrogation reports that were produced at Fort Hunt. It's possible it could have been one of those, an interrogation report. We have not found too many of these at the National Archives, but, you know, just the basic information of the prisoner and then what tidbits of information, of relevant information.

GW: You had some Navy documents, though, that I found that were marked Secret that you can retrieve now that were interrogations.

BB: Yes, and some of the -- and they go through and they talk about -- some of them, they're not necessarily [10:00] transcripts of the interrogation, but they're actually summaries --

GW: Exactly.

BB: -- of the information. So perhaps -- we don't know this, but perhaps each day's interrogation reports, copies were -- you know, this was before [unintelligible] email.

GW: This could be.

BB: Maybe copies were being sent up to the Pentagon [10:19].

GW: This could be. Yes, an activity report of "what went on at Fort Hunt [10:28] today." Very possible.

VS: So you would go in the morning, come back in the afternoon?

GW: Right.

VS: You'd eat lunch there, presumably.

GW: I don't remember going into a cafeteria or anything. Who knows? It could be that [11:00] I came back early, earlier than I think. But by the same token, it couldn't be that early, or otherwise I wouldn't be emptying out wastebaskets at the Pentagon [11:12]. So it must have been at the end of their day at the Pentagon.

VS: Did you ever contemplate why they were having you empty the wastebaskets?

GW: No, not at all, because I realized that if you're working with secret documents, you certainly want to get rid of what's in the wastebasket so that the cleaning -- whoever cleans the office at night wouldn't be reading it. Oh, no, that was obvious you would do that. I didn't think I needed an armed guard, but, you know, that's the way it was done.

BB: Why couldn't the armed guard have just cleaned the wastebasket? Maybe you had a certain level of clearance that the guard didn't have [12:00].

GW: Very possible.

BB: But did you get the sense that the wastebaskets that you were cleaning had anything to do with the documents that you had transported?

GW: No. No. Just waste of whatever office work was done at the Pentagon [12:21].

BB: This may sound like a really silly question, but any sense of how many offices you were cleaning? I mean, you weren't, obviously, cleaning up the whole Pentagon, but, I mean, do you know --

GW: Very small area. Very small area. Maybe four or five wastebaskets.

BB: Okay, so this wasn't a huge -- so this didn't take you hours to do or anything.

GW: No, no. No, I think it probably was what is considered the Intelligence Section or a part of the Intelligence Section at the Pentagon [12:53]. Maybe there was a particular section that was connected with Fort Hunt [13:00].

VS: And once you had all of these discarded waste papers, where did you take them?

GW: To the incinerator.

VS: So you went right to the incinerator, and the guard was with you?

GW: Oh, yes.

BB: And the incinerator was right there at the Pentagon?

GW: Yes. You went there, opened the door, put the contents into the incinerator.

VS: And then you departed.

GW: Yes. Took the wastepaper back, and eventually got on the bus and came back.

BB: I can't really think of any other questions related to that. It's a very -- you're the only person we've spoken to who has ever had that experience.

GW: Really.

BB: We've spoken with others who had other experiences or other duties and whatnot.

GW: Of course, there again, if you consider the fact [14:00] that you are now -- you say you have a total of 50?

BB: Thirty-seven.

GW: Thirty-seven.

BB: And then another dozen children.

GW: Out of how many?

BB: Right. And that's what we're constantly trying to figure out. We have this list here of almost 600 names, but they were certainly not all there at the same time.

GW: Right. Right.

BB: Lots -- just to let you know, lots of people coming and going.

GW: Right.

VS: Did you have a sense or have any knowledge that the reason that you were doing this for two weeks, because somebody was on leave for two weeks, or was it --

GW: No, I think they took me out of the cubbyhole.

VS: To give you a break. Okay, as opposed to saying, "Hey, we rotate this to a new staff every two weeks, so that somebody doesn't know enough about this program to be able

to be a breach of security.”

GW: No, I think it was strictly to relieve the pressure.

VS: So you were feeling pressure.

GW: Oh, yes [15:00], definitely. I mean, first of all, I felt pressure being in the Army, obviously because I was married six months. That, you know, didn't help to say, “Oh, yeah, I'm happy to go.” But, you know -- yes, there was pressure.

BB: Questions that you sometimes ask is, did you feel -- knowing that you were listening to conversations, to German military Nazis, did you form any feelings about those people? Were they the bad guys? Were they the evil-doers?

GW: Not at all. No, because, fortunately for my family, we were not physically harmed getting out of Austria [15:52]. So, you know, I mean, people are asking me constantly, “How could you ever go back?” I hear that every day, and you say, I'm not [16:00] going to cut my nose just because -- I said, the people that I'm seeing there today weren't even born then, for instance, so, you know, this keeping blaming the Austrians forever is a stupid thing. And the other thing, you know, people here don't understand all this. I tell the story of my good Catholic friends in Austria [16:32]. Well, my godfather's father was married to a Jew. So when the Nazis came in, he lost his business, even though he was not Jewish. So his daughter is my good friend in Vienna [16:58] now, and people don't [17:00] understand here that well how can you go back to Austria after what they did to you. It's got nothing to do with today's world, you know. Then, of course, the old story that 99 percent of Austrians supported Hitler [17:20] when he took over. That's not true, not true at all. Yet there were many, and you have to again look at the background of what really happened. Austria-Hungary lost the war in the First World War [17:38].

Lost the war later again, you know, with Hitler. And Austria, after the first war, had so much unemployment, the economy in Austria [17:58] was terrible [18:00]. So many, many of the men went to Germany. When they went to Germany, they became the brown-shirts. And when Hitler [18:14] took over Austria, they came back, and Hitler gave them a free day in Austria. You know, I saw these brown-shirts with the women, screwing on the sidewalk.

BB: What do you mean by free day?

GW: A free day. They could do anything they wanted to. They want to go kill some Jews, that's okay too.

BB: So they had a get-out-of-jail-free card sort of thing?

GW: No, they came back with their uniform, swastika armband, and they roamed the streets.

VS: It was like a leave? It was like they [19:00] had a pass for leave?

GW: They were told anything goes, I guess. Yes, it was a terrible time, but, of course, many of the young girls wanted to get laid by the SS and all those Aryan -- you know, the blonde-haired super race. It was an honor to get pregnant by an SS. Yes, there was some, many of those, no question about it. But I would never accept the fact that somebody would say the majority of people welcomed -- now, there's a story of a -- my friend's in Vienna's [20:00] husband, who is now dead, owned a castle one-hour north of Vienna named Mistelbach [20:10], and Nina and I went there for a few years as guests. And the man that originally owned this castle was a World War I [20:26] army officer. When they lost the war, he lost his world. His world disintegrated. So when Hitler [20:40] came and promised to restore the old world, this guy, this officer, said, "Here is my hope," and so he joined the party. However, six months [21:00] later or whatever the

time was, when he found out what Hitler was doing, he got out, you know, he -- so you have to understand what made him join the party instead of just condemning him.

You've got to realize his world was gone. No, I have no particular feelings about anything one way or another. If I say if it wouldn't be for Hitler [21:39], I wouldn't be here, that sounds terrible, you know. But the fact is, that's why I'm here. My dad wouldn't have left Austria [21:48] or his making a living and getting uprooted the way he did, if it wouldn't have been the fact that [22:00] he could not get money to buy American paint. Hitler [22:07] wanted to spend that money on armament stuff, you know. So he was out of business.

BB: I guess wanting to, in the last 40 minutes or so that we have, and I guess to keep going chronologically, unless, Vince, you can think of any questions, I think we've covered the Pentagon courier duty and the monitoring. But again, those were the only two distinct tasks that you could remember having had at 1142 [22:42].

GW: Right. You're correct.

BB: Do you remember any other anecdotal incidents or anything, any funny stories or events or anything that took place while you were there?

GW: No, because I was not in touch with any of the people that were stationed there, none [23:00].

BB: Looking back on it, did you enjoy your time there, not enjoy your time there?

GW: It was -- you know, the Army was not an enjoyable time, but within the Army span, it was much better being there than being in the swamps in Georgia doing something that was idiotic. I mean, I didn't contribute anything. So from that standpoint, yes, it was much better.

BB: And so you were at 1142 [23:44] -- let's see. You arrived in November.

GW: November to August.

BB: And then August. So how did you come to leave 1142? I know you said that Captain Cory [23:55] --

GW: The day the papers were issued for me to be [24:00] transferred to a prisoner-of-war [24:03] camp in Arizona, Captain Cory put me into Walter Reed Hospital.

BB: And that was so that you would not have to go and be a guard?

GW: I was going to be an interpreter. Right.

BB: And you had no interest.

GW: No. For one thing, they were talking -- at that time already bringing Japanese in, and I said, "What am I going to do with Japanese?" And no. The other thing was this question of rank. You know, to be a PFC and do a captain's job or lieutenant's job is, you know -- didn't think much of it.

BB: And so he had you -- because in going through [25:00] the photo album, I saw some other ones. I think they were maybe the Fort Belvoir Hospital.

GW: Right.

BB: Were you there and then you also went to Walter Reed?

GW: Right. I was in and out of hospital many times, even in Camp Stewart [25:14]. Yes.

BB: And so he had you there, just knowing that you would -- just to hope that you would skip having to go to Arizona, or with the hopes that you would eventually get discharged from the military?

GW: No, he knew I was going to get discharged, a medical discharge. In fact, I got pension --

BB: Really.

GW: -- some money for a year, service-aggravated for whatever it was.

BB: When you were in the hospital, you were just -- you know, you obviously weren't doing anything having to do with 1142 at that point. You were just receiving treatment as a patient [26:00] in the hospital.

GW: Right. Exactly.

BB: So then you were mustered out once you were in the hospital?

GW: Yes.

BB: Or when you were released from the hospital?

GW: I got my discharge at Walter Reed, August 1st.

BB: Got you. And then moved. I guess Nina was still living in Alexandria at that time?

GW: Correct. Then we came home.

BB: Okay. Back to Cleveland?

GW: Yes, and I resumed where I left off, except, as I told you, instead of going back into the machine shop, I went into the engineering department.

BB: Let's see. You've already shared a little bit about -- last time you talked a lot about your varied careers after the war and working [27:00], it sounds like, a number of phenomenal jobs.

GW: Oh, yes. Very, very interesting jobs.

BB: Did you feel that your time at 1142 [27:10] in any way prepared you for any of that?

GW: Not at all. Not at all. No, as I said, my view of my whole Army career was very, very poor, you know, that I thought I really just served my time. But as far as getting anything accomplished, that was far from my mind.

VS: Do you know what prisoner-of-war [27:47] camp that you were assigned to? Do you

recall that?

GW: No, I don't. It was Arizona; that I know.

BB: There was a large one in Arizona known as Papago Park.

GW: Yes. I don't remember what the order said [28:00].

VS: Do you know what part of Arizona it was in, northern, southern?

GW: No, no idea. Yes, I don't know if those papers would be in the archives. I don't know.

You know, the --

VS: Have you ever applied for your military service records?

GW: No, I just have my discharge, that's all, discharge paper.

VS: Because that's something we can help you with if you're interested.

GW: Is there such a thing?

VS: If they haven't burned, which Brandon can tell you about, that there are some records that are in St. Louis.

BB: There was a large fire in the 1970s, and unfortunately, about three-quarters of U.S. Army personnel records from World War II burned. But there is about a one-in-four chance that your file, your records would still survive, and that would detail every transfer, every time you were in the hospital, every [29:00] commendation, anything like that, each time you were transferred from location to location.

GW: And how does one get that?

BB: We can show you on the computer.

GW: Great.

BB: Unfortunately, I don't have any with us, but we actually would have included -- well, you were in town for the reunion. We included in the packet a release form that would allow

you to sign and say that you were willing to have the National Park Service, on your behalf, request those records for you, and if we did get any records, we would make copies of them for you.

GW: We did sign a paper. I don't remember what we signed.

BB: You would have signed another paper for you to go -- Sam Swersky moderated that discussion, and he had a legal disclaimer in there, just to allow you. In fact, when we're all done here today, we have to get you to sign a quick little legal disclaimer saying you weren't forced to do this against your will [30:00].

VS: Did you -- we want to just ask any opinions he had regarding the reunion?

BB: Yes, I was just going to suggest that. A couple of things that Vince mentioned downstairs. You know, since this is probably one of the first interviews we've done with a veteran after the reunion, you know. We've heard a lot of what you've said already, but just any thoughts about what it was like to go back. Obviously, you didn't remember, you know, a lot of the folks who were there in talking with them.

GW: None.

BB: But if you would say for a couple of seconds, you know, what the reunion experience was like for you and your wife.

GW: I thought that it certainly changed my whole outlook on my Army career, where, as I said to you before, that instead of looking at 26 months of Army service, it made me realize that [31:00] I was part of a team that did some very important work, and as it was proven, I guess, either shortened the war, the length of time, and it also brought information that America needed. So looking at my service, it made it entirely different, and I think it was absolutely wonderful for the National Park Service to arrange for such a reunion. I hope

we can do it again. And many of the other veterans feel that it would be kind of nice to meet again, and have, rather than just a program, maybe have time to meet each other and, you know, just talk. Yes, it was a great two days.

BB: I guess that's the one thing, if we could have made it three days [32:00] and given people a chance just -- because that's the one thing that we've heard that from other people. There just wasn't enough time to really socialize.

GW: Well, we really weren't introduced to each other. You know, you met somebody and say, "I'm so-and-so," you know. Yes, it was quite interesting, and I'm totally impressed by the people that I met, including you people.

BB: Fantastic.

(End of Tape 3A)

(Beginning of Tape 3B)

BB: [unintelligible] item that Vince had mentioned downstairs, which, only if you'd be willing or interested, if you'd feel comfortable saying a few words in German about what your experience at 1142 [00:14] was like.

GW: If I were capable of doing that. You know, I don't think I know enough German words to really express what I would be saying, but --

BB: And if you don't feel comfortable, that's -- well, let's put it this way. Vince or I aren't going to know --

GW: [laughs] I know, but whoever is going to listen to it is going to know. Some of these men, like Peter Weiss [00:38], I mean, they speak fluent German today, and I was just amazed, you know. But maybe it is because in Cleveland I don't have the occasion to talk to anybody in German. There's nobody.

BB: Were some of the veterans speaking in German at the reunion?

GW: No, not [01:00] that I know. No. But certainly when Peter Weiss [01:05] sent me this article in the German paper and I read all that, I mean, some of the words are so strange to me, I don't even know, you know, what they are talking about.

[laughter]

BB: If you feel comfortable saying a few words, and if not, that's okay.

GW: [speaks German]

BB: That's great. That's great.

VS: So are you going to tell us what you said or keep us in suspense?

GW: We had a wonderful two days at the reunion and met some wonderful men.

BB: Great. Super [02:00]. Well, we're just trying to think if there's any other final follow-up questions or anything like that. You've gone over this roster of names before, and other than Erich Abels [02:15], you haven't recognized any of the names.

GW: The names of the five in my photographs.

BB: The photographs, right.

GW: And I can say that I remember them as people that I talked to. I just happened to have these photographs, and I thought I took these photographs, but I'm not so sure now. I think somebody may have given me the photographs. I don't know.

BB: The one thing we've often talked about is, it's surprising, initially, we hardly had any photographs of 1142 [02:53], and we just kind of assumed that because it was such a secret installation, that no cameras were permitted [03:00].

GW: Yes, I was told by some of the men it was verboten. You weren't allowed to take pictures.

BB: But obviously, people, from what you've seen, quite a few pictures were taken.

GW: Yes. I guarantee you there's more out there. It's just a matter of, you know -- I think some of the men are close to senile. Close, I mean, they are having a hard time. And so they don't know what they got in their shoeboxes. I think, you know, you got to keep on prying and see what comes. But hopefully there will be more photographs, and whatever there is, we want to add those and, you know, complete that thing. It would be great.

BB: The one thing that I can [04:00] -- and again, you know, just as a way to either refresh your memory or maybe bring something back, I think we handed some of these out at the reunion. Unfortunately, there are two pages, but it's the maps of the layout of Fort Hunt [04:15].

GW: Right. I don't recognize a thing.

BB: I have another one, actually, a larger one, out in the car.

GW: I mean, I look at buildings, and I don't know what I'm looking at.

BB: So, yes, these two pages kind of go together like so, you know. Here is the parade ground, which we -- you know, there's the flagpole right there, so you would have driven in here, and where we had the picnic pavilion, that was right in here, and then all the rest of the post. That's a prisoner compound, and that's a prisoner compound right there.

GW: This is where the prisoners actually were [05:00]?

BB: Yes, that one there, and this was the first one.

GW: And where was the monitoring?

BB: This building right here is listed as a monitoring building, and I believe one of these inside the other enclosure may have also been used for monitoring. But that's one of the things that we've been trying to figure out. So just take your time. Just, you know, take

another glance at that and see if it refreshes any memories of layouts or buildings or anything.

GW: Not at all.

BB: And I apologize the print is so small.

GW: I'd be lost, you know, looking at this.

BB: And then the Parkway would be over here.

GW: And you would be coming in here.

BB: Yes. The Potomac River is over here.

GW: Yes.

BB: Exactly. You'd come right on in here [06:00]. See, obviously, there was a fence around it. You can see the fence that's drawn on there.

GW: Not a thing.

BB: Nothing?

GW: No.

VS: Now, when the first veterans that we interviewed said that kind of thing, we always wondered, are they just not sharing their secrets that they know? But now we've seen it enough. I mean, the programs were so compartmentalized that one group of individuals were prohibited from communicating with other groups of individuals.

GW: Is that right?

VS: And they didn't want any individuals to know too much, you know, about the overall program unless you were --

GW: Up higher.

VS: -- an officer or military intelligence officer.

GW: That's probably a good idea. Interesting.

VS: So talking to as many [07:00] veterans as we can, we found, is extremely important, because part of what they tell us confirms, reaffirms what others have told us, and each veteran tells us some new insight that we never knew before, as you have.

GW: Well, like I say, maybe by the time you get to California and you talk to those guys, it may be a gold mine. Who knows.

BB: And, hopefully, if you can find Abels [07:27] -- he lives in Buena Vista, California --

GW: Now, he would have a lot to add. I'm sure he would.

BB: That would be outstanding.

VS: We hope you find him.

BB: Yes. Well, we're going to help you, just like you're helping us.

GW: Well, I'm going to write the letter today and get it in the mail. What did you say to put on the envelope, "Forward?"

VS: Oh, if you write "Forward to new address," the post office will see that. Sometimes someone will just put [08:00] it across and say "Wrong address," but if you put "Forward to new address," the post office, if they get it back, will make the effort to see if they have any sort of forwarding information instead of just taking it automatically and sending it back to the sender.

BB: Just thinking of a few last questions. When Captain Cory [08:28] would take you to and from Fort Hunt [08:31], that was in his own private vehicle?

GW: If I remember, it was.

BB: As opposed to, you know, a government, an Army car.

GW: No, I think it was his car.

BB: Okay.

VS: It's not relevant, really, to 1142. Do you recall learning about the attack on Pearl Harbor [08:54], and do you recall any recollections about the ending of the war and the announcement of the ending of the [09:00] war?

GW: Probably. Probably.

VS: Did you celebrate when you heard that the war in Europe was over?

GW: Not to the same extent as if I would have been in Europe coming home on a ship. To some extent, it was kind of a disappointment that I didn't get over there. I really wanted to go to Nuremberg [09:36], and that's why I say my outlook on my Army career was rather nothing at the time.

VS: Really.

BB: You mentioned early on that you had wanted to volunteer for the Marine Corps.

GW: Right.

BB: Any particular reason why you wanted to [10:00], or why the Marine Corps attracted you, or just any thoughts?

GW: I don't know why I choose the Marine Corps, but I think that one reason to join the services was probably to get away from my parents, might have been a reason. I don't know. Certainly getting married young, one of the incentives was to get on my own.

VS: You may have... oh go ahead.

GW: This competition with my brother probably was part of edging me on to, you know, get away.

VS: You may have mentioned this when you were going through the interview earlier, but did

you mention that you came into New York by boat or --

GW: Yes. Yes.

VS: Okay, did we talk about that? Do you recall that?

GW: We came to New York [11:00]. Of course, everybody on deck was looking for the Statue of Liberty. We did not go, get to Ellis Island. We bypassed that. Paperwork was done onboard ship, I think, so we did not go through that process. But...

VS: So your visa was valid. It was honored.

GW: Right.

VS: You gained access immediately to the United States.

GW: Right.

VS: What were your first impressions of the United States? Excitement or --

GW: Very much so. I unfortunately had an ingrown toenail on my big toe and it had to be operated on. Somebody had to cut it. Coming to Cleveland, I wore tennis shoes with the toe cut off, you know. But I think there was a doctor in New York, a friend of my mother's, that did that for me [12:00]. We got on the Greyhound bus to come to Cleveland, which came downtown Cleveland, and I remember, we had no place to live, per se, so we rented a room. I was separated from my mother and my brother in a separate room, and I remember going looking for a place to live, and I walked into a funeral home, not knowing what it was, looking for -- because it looked nice. It was a nice building. The other thing we did, the second day we were here, we went back downtown for breakfast [13:00]. [laughs] It was kind of strange.

BB: Did you keep up at all with any of your friends from Vienna [13:12]?

GW: I had no friends.

BB: You didn't have any friends, growing up in Vienna?

GW: No. No. None. There was a man, or a boy I grew up with in Vienna. His name was Peter Masters [13:31]. He lived downtown Vienna. His mother was one of my mother's best friends. He eventually went to England, became a British commander, was one of the first things to land in Normandy. He wrote a book and he [14:00] was on the speaking circuits all over. I mean, he was a real hero. I think the name of the book is "Striking Back." I have it downstairs someplace. He just recently died. But he was really the only one I knew from Vienna [14:23], and, in fact, I have a picture, going to his birthday party when I was this big and I was dressed in a costume. I have a picture of that. He lived in Washington.

BB: Oh, really.

GW: Yes. Peter Masters [14:40] was well known. He worked, I think, for the government, too, or something.

BB: Was he a Jewish refugee?

GW: Yes. Oh, yes.

VS: Citizenship. Did that come with your marriage or your enlistment?

GW: Citizenship came in Savannah [15:00], Georgia.

VS: At Camp Stewart [15:02], right?

GW: Out of Camp Stewart. From Camp Stewart I had to go to Savannah to get my citizenship, yes.

BB: That seems to be fairly common with the veterans we've spoken with who were not citizens. Of course, most of them weren't. Sometime during basic training, most of them were made citizens.

GW: Yes. As I mentioned, the basic rule was, you get shipped to the Induction Center, but not out of the Induction Center until you become a citizen. However, that didn't mean much, so I don't know how much later it was that I became a citizen, a few months after.

BB: It was at a -- do you remember that moment very well?

GW: No, not at all [16:00]. Obviously, it's a big, big, big thrill, you know, to do that. This Mexican granddaughter that came into us, she just became a citizen.

BB: Oh, really.

GW: Seven years. Legal immigration. She and I have many arguments about illegal immigration [laughs].

VS: She said she wins all the arguments, though. Quietly, she said she wins all those arguments.

GW: Me?

VS: She does.

GW: Oh, she does. All women do. Any disagreement just leads to the next argument. No, we don't have many arguments. We have discussion. But, no, what you learn as you get older is, what is an important issue and [17:00] what isn't, and you back off the unimportant ones. You let it go, and it doesn't make any difference who's right, who's wrong, and all that. But the important issues, I still think that I want to make that decision, you know, when it comes to major things. But you work it out.

BB: Switching back, I'm just thinking of last-minute questions. When you were a room monitor at 1142 [17:36] and you would press the button to record something, do you remember what it was recorded onto?

GW: A disk.

BB: Like a record or something?

GW: I think it was a plastic disk, thin plastic disk, I think, not like a vinyl 78 or 33, you know, that's thick. I think it was a thinner media [18:00].

BB: But it wasn't like a film, like a reel-to-reel --

GW: No, no, no, it was a disk.

BB: -- because they're circular, okay.

GW: Are any of these units still around?

BB: That's one of the many things on our to-do list, because we do have the names of what some of these -- you know, what they were.

GW: But you haven't seen a unit?

BB: No. No. Never seen one.

GW: Really?

BB: Though we have the photographs of them. We'd love, perhaps maybe for the new Visitor Center or something like that to be able to -- I think it would be great to recreate a listening station. Since we have the transcripts of many of the room conversations, we could even recreate a room conversation, and a visitor could come in and listen in on a room conversation, you know, from 60 years ago.

GW: Yeah. Somewheres in this country there must be one laying around [19:00].

BB: I'm sure there is. It's just a matter of finding one.

GW: Have you ever gone on eBay?

BB: Oh, yes, but not looking for -- both Vince and I are familiar with eBay, but I think that would be a fun to-do would be to try to track one of these down. Do you remember when you were monitoring, did you use headphones, earpieces --

GW: Yes, headphones.

BB: -- as opposed to, like, speakers?

GW: No, no, headphones.

BB: They were actually over your ears.

GW: Oh, yes. Yes.

VS: When you recorded, did you hold the button down or just push it once --

GW: No, you pushed the button.

VS: -- to start and then press it again to stop?

GW: Right. And there obviously is a tone arm, an arm that cuts the, you know --

BB: After a recording was made, would you listen to it?

GW: No.

BB: Oh, so you were just passing it on to somebody else.

GW: I would pass it on.

BB: And so it would be typed up and transcribed by somebody else [20:00]. You weren't doing any typing whatsoever.

GW: Not whatsoever, no. I think, as you said, the Evaluation Center [20:07], I think, listened to it.

VS: If you were monitoring three rooms back and forth, and you had multiple recordings to make, would they all be on the same disk, or were there separate disks?

GW: You wouldn't make multiple recordings. You would record one cell --

VS: On one disk.

GW: -- on one disk, and I think you would be listening while this is recording, and the other two cells either were dormant -- you know, I mean, there was nothing going on -- or you

weren't listening to them.

VS: But what if the situation was that you had a really important discussion you were recording in room one, and then that kind of died out, and then you were switching back and forth to see if anything was going on, and then you picked up a conversation --

GW: I'm sure you would change the disk.

VS: You would change the disk.

GW: I would think so, yes [21:00]. Yes, I don't think you would mix it.

BB: But you had said earlier that you don't think you made recordings super frequently.

GW: I don't think so.

BB: It wasn't happening multiple times a day or anything like that. Okay.

GW: Right. Yes, because don't forget, if you think of two people in a cell, they obviously are not talking super intelligent for all day long. They'd be snoozing. They'd be, I don't know, playing cards, I don't know. So the amount of time where you get something that is interesting is rare. Sure, over the amount of hours that you spend doing that, there should -- there has to be some [22:00], but I don't think it is continuous, you know, or anything.

VS: Once you got to 1142 [22:12], do you remember any sort of training that you went through --

GW: None.

VS: -- at any time?

GW: None.

VS: Never had to do rifle training or calisthenics --

GW: No, I did that in Georgia.

VS: -- calisthenics training or CPR?

GW: No. No.

VS: Nothing like that. No training relative to German language skills?

GW: Nothing [negative].

VS: Did they show any of the propaganda films --

GW: No.

VS: -- newsreels related to the war effort?

GW: No.

BB: How did you -- when you went from Camp Stewart [22:48] to Fort Hunt [22:49], you had this letter for Lieutenant Abels [22:51], trying to get you in there. Did they quiz you at any point? You mentioned once, I think, that a couple of officers [23:00] came down to Camp Stewart.

GW: Right.

BB: Did they interview you about your German skills?

GW: Right.

BB: So you had to have a conversation with them in German?

GW: I don't know. They established --

BB: That you could speak.

GW: -- that I spoke German.

BB: But you never had to take a written test?

GW: No. No, no. Well, obviously, in those days, my German was still --

BB: Sure.

GW: -- my mother language, and, you know, used every day.

BB: Sure. That's pretty much everything I can think of. Is there anything that you think we've left out?

GW: No.

BB: Or anything else that you'd like to say? Or..

GW: No. I appreciate you coming here, and I'm overwhelmed [24:00] by what this has really opened up for me, because I can foresee many wonderful projects that I can work on and -- to support this program.

BB: We appreciate you having us over. We appreciate your wife's fantastic cooking.

GW: Well, you're very welcome anytime.

BB: And we really look forward to continuing to work. I think the newsletter is going to be a great start to get started with, for sure.

GW: Yes. If you have any ideas what you would want to show, whether it's a picture or this, just let me know, and I'll be able to put that in.

BB: Absolutely.

GW: I certainly have the equipment to put out a good newsletter, you know.

VS: Great. Thank you very much.

BB: Fantastic. We'll go ahead and stop things, then.

[end of transcript]

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