

Fort Hunt Oral History
P.O. Box 1142
George Washington Memorial Parkway
Interview with Eric Kramer
by Brandon Bies
September 12, 2006

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Today is Tuesday, September 12th, 2006. This is Park Service historian Brandon Bies here in the home of Eric Kramer just outside New York City, and we're here to talk a little bit about his experiences at Fort Hunt [00:11]. So, if you want to start off again and just say a little bit about yourself, when and where you were born and a little bit about growing up.

ERIC KRAMER: I was born in Germany September 13th, 1920 and I came to the United States in October, 1937. I was 17 years old. And I lived with a sister of my grandmother's, who was really actually very poor. I was -- I don't know whether it's of interest or not, I moved in with them, and I could sleep on the couch in their living room. And my uncle, who had also come [01:00] to the United States in the late 1890s, was working the fur business. And as far as I was able to find out, the top salary he ever made was \$25 a week. When I came and I was able to get a job where I made \$8 a week, and I paid them \$5 for room and board, and I think I enhanced their standard of living to some extent because of that extra money.

INT: If you don't mind.

EK: No.

INT: I'm sorry to interrupt. If you don't mind, tell a little bit. We had chatted a little bit earlier about your family in Germany, how your father was a World War I [01:40] officer.

EK: Right. Oh, you're talking about--

INT: Sure, if you don't mind.

EK: No, not at all. No, I was born, I said, in 1920, a small town in the Bavarian Palatinate

where my father was a teacher. He had been discharged from the German Army in 1919 [02:00] and got married the same year. He had served for five years and had become a first lieutenant. I don't know too much about his actual Army experience. That's because he never -- he was always reluctant really, to talk about it. But, he was in this dual position of being Jewish and German, and as things developed later on in Germany, that became kind of important. Even though in the long run it made no difference whatsoever. He moved from this town or was born to the capitol of the Bavarian Palatinate, the town's name is Speyer, S-P-E-Y-E-R, where we lived from about 1921 to 1924, and at that time my father [03:00] got a position in the capitol of Bavarian Munich, and we moved there and lived there until 1937. I was able to go to high school, to go Gymnasium. I started in 1932 I think, after grade school. In 1937 I was told, as a Jew, I could no longer attend school. Even though for a while I was the only Jew in the class, and we had classes on Saturday, six days a week, Saturday morning. Because I was Jewish and relatively religious at the time, I did not write on Saturdays, but I had one of my Christian classmates take notes for me and give them to me. The relationship was perfectly normal [04:00]. And when I was no longer allowed to go to school -- I had a -- I wanted to complete my education, I -- the family, larger family had discovered that we had a brother of my grandfather's, on my father's side, who had come to the United States maybe 1895 or so. His name was originally Israel Kramer [04:28] and he changed it to Edward [04:33] when he came here. Family legend has it that he started working here by peddling merchandise on a push cart, and pushing it from street to street. Some of his customers -- he lived in New Jersey where people who worked at the plant that Thomas Edison got started in Menlo Park. From what we were told [05:00] that if one

day Edison came to him and said, "Kramer, you're too good for pushing this thing around. Why don't you do something similar, open a store?" And that's how they started Kramer's Department Store in Metuchen, New Jersey. These old stories that I heard afterwards, we weren't aware while they were happening because we had no contact. But when the problems under [Adolf] Hitler [05:24] started in Germany, the family discovered that we had this relative in this country, and in order to get here you needed what's called an affidavit. You couldn't just get on a boat and get here. You had to be sponsored by someone. This uncle sponsored 73 members of the extended family. Without any regard of the responsibility that was involved, that if any one of these 73 people couldn't make a living, that he was responsible to support them, because none of them [06:00] ever required that. He was sort of aloof. A cousin and I went to visit him once and we went there on a Sunday afternoon for tea or coffee, whatever, and met the family, and he had several children and grandchildren. The Kramer's Department Store was still going in full swing. To jump ahead, later on after I got married, our first child was a son, who we named Peter. And when we went on a trip to Florida once, a few years ago, we decided to drive back rather than fly back. We had rented a car. We came through a little town in Virginia outside Washington called Washington, Virginia. There was a very famous, very well-known restaurant there. We drove around there and we saw this sign on a door, and it said Peter Kramer [07:00], Cabinetmaker. It turns out that this Peter Kramer was the same name as our son's name, was the grandson of the man who had given all these affidavits. We started a relationship that didn't last, but because [unintelligible] back and forth for a while. Actually, he also -- it has nothing to do with the story -- had a branch of his furniture business on Cape Cod. That's actually how we

found out originally, and then visited him down in Washington, Virginia.

INT: And so, your family, when you came from Germany, how did you get here?

EK: I came alone.

INT: Okay.

EK: At age 17 I lived with an aunt and uncle, and the war started in September, 1939, and my parents were still in Munich, in Germany, and my father, being a good German, never thought anything would happen him, and didn't want to leave there because he was a civil servant [08:00], he had been teaching and was getting a salary, was still working, and would be entitled to a pension, and he didn't want to leave that behind. But finally, things got so bad that I bought tickets on an Italian steamship line for them, here, and made them leave and they came out, each carrying one suitcase, traveling from Germany through Austria, to Trieste in Italy, where they caught this Italian boat, and landed here in January, 1940.

INT: Wow.

EK: Nothing ever happened to them, it was miraculous, and they both lived to their 90s. I rented an apartment for them here -- and they -- my father got a job. He couldn't teach here, so he studied accounting and became an accountant with the hospital, and was able to make a living. Several of his siblings -- he was originally one of 12 [09:00]. Eight had survived, and several of them came to this country, so I had several first cousins here. We stay in touch. I then went to -- got this job in this drugstore as a delivery boy. They sponsored me to go to college. The pharmacist -- 19 -- started in '38 [unintelligible] in '42. Started working as a licensed pharmacist, and then in 1944, at my request, I no longer wanted a deferment as a civilian, and went into the Army.

INT: And again, you'd mentioned that you graduated and went to Columbia.

EK: I went to Columbia College [09:48] for pharmacy. I graduated in June of 1942.

INT: And then, for approximately two years, you were --.

EK: I worked as a pharmacist. Correct [10:00]. Right, right. And then I -- this is a job I actually went back to when I came out in 1946 when I left the Army.

INT: And so you then went ahead and volunteered in '44?

EK: [Unintelligible] I no longer requested the deferment which meant I was drafted in effect.

INT: Okay.

EK: That's how it worked. Being a pharmacist I was assigned to a medical training center in Camp Barkeley [10:34] in Abilene, Texas. I got basic training down there, jumping through the hoops and climbing over all kinds of obstacles, whatever. At the end of this training session, they find out that there were too many pharmacists around to be used in their profession, and they looked for secondary qualification, and found out that I was born in Germany [11:00] and spoke German. So they sent me to Military Intelligence training camp, in the Maryland camp, Camp Ritchie [11:11], where I took this seven- or eight-week course to become an interrogator of prisoners of war. Toward the end of the course it was discovered that the war was winding down, basically, so I was made an instructor, teaching two courses. One was German army organization and the other was German map reading. There were a lot of this camp, this kind of unique. They send us out in the middle of the night, and give us maps of the area of the American landscape. But they were German maps, so we'd get used to reading German enemy maps [12:00]. Everything was written in German, but we had to figure out from the location where we were what corresponded on the map, and find our way in the dark, with pre-assigned spot

where we would all meet just for an exercise. And then, as I said, I was teaching these two courses, so they can't close down. I taught it for maybe 3-4 months.

INT: Okay.

EK: And then I was sent to Fort Hunt [12:34], which we didn't know it was called Fort Hunt, Post Office Box 1142 [12:35], Alexandria, Virginia. I had basically the same experience as these other people you previously interviewed. There's really no point repeating that. My experience was [unintelligible] with everyone else's. When that wound down [13:00] they sent us as a group to a place in Boston Harbor called Long Island [13:03]. It was on an island and they sent the group of German scientists who developed the V-2 [13:18], V-1 [13:19] and V-2 rocket, Wernher von Braun [13:20] and his whole group. I think there was 73 people who came with the first group. There was a highly trained scientist, as well as carpenters and plumbers. People who would set up all the equipment and service the machinery and we only processed and they went down what was then called White Sands [13:43] in New Mexico. At this facility, I think it's still in existence and they helped us develop the start of our rocket science. So we probably started, too, but they were way, way ahead of [14:00] our research. I think most of these people stayed in this country and became American citizens.

INT: I want to go back a little bit later to -- to Fort Hunt [14:12], but we can -- we can keep going with chronologically. So you were at P.O. Box 2276 [14:21] until you mustered out.

EK: That's correct, yeah.

INT: And you mustered out about -- about when?

EK: 1946. I think it was June.

INT: Okay. Okay. And then, what did you do after you mustered out? Did you immediately -
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EK: I actually went back to the same place where I had worked previously. And a few years later we left and bought a pharmacy on Lexington Avenue, which the store is still in existence that we ran for 13 or 14 years and then sold to another entity, and it's still there.

INT: Okay [15:00]. To get back to Fort Hunt [15:05] a little bit, do you -- what do you remember about arriving at Fort Hunt? Did -- did they take you there in one big vehicle, in a truck?

EK: We thought it was time to go overseas because they packed us on a bus and didn't tell us where we were going. We were driving along the Potomac [unintelligible]. We finally got to this place and drove through a gate and he said, "This is it, guys. You're not going overseas, you're going to stay here." There were old barracks, and the place was absolutely amazing because [unintelligible] Civil War fort, and as you mentioned we have had a swimming pool -- actually a pretty nice facility [16:00] and it was small, intimate, and it was between Alexandria and Mount Vernon. And it was very close to the Potomac there was -- Potomac was across the main road, it was US-1 probably, I don't know what the road is.

INT: And is actually, it's called the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway [16:18], which became the George Washington Memorial Parkway [16:21].

EK: That's where we were. And we were able to get a -- we got off usually pretty early in the afternoon. We would take a bus to Washington, see some shows and go to the movies or whatever and was actually a pretty relaxed life considering that there was a war going on some place. Not where we were.

INT: Was it essentially a nine-to-five sort of?

EK: It was essentially, yes, it was -- it was business hours.

INT: Did you work on weekends?

EK: We, yeah, we had to cover, somebody had to cover. We didn't really work weekends, but someone had to be there [17:00], like, CQ or whatever it was called and we stayed there. But we were able, actually, from there, occasionally you'd take the train to New York to see our families.

INT: Okay.

EK: And that was possible on a long weekend.

INT: I think we mentioned this earlier. What was your rank while you were at Fort Hunt [17:20]?

EK: I started as a Private, but I don't know where I got a promotion, I was discharged as a Staff Sergeant. I don't know where that happened, in Alexandria or later on in Boston. I think most of the promotions happened later on.

INT: Okay. Okay. And you lived on post at 1142 [17:38]?

EK: Oh, yes. We lived in barracks.

INT: And do you remember anything about who was in the barracks with you? Was it mostly --

EK: I don't remember. It was the same -- other people who did the same job that we did. We basically had these two groups. The German-born American servicemen who were interrogators [18:00], and those who had studied German in high school or college were used to translate the reports from German to English.

INT: Okay.

EK: And we could help with that, too.

INT: Did you find yourself primarily doing most of the actual asking of questions?

EK: Yes, that's true -- yes we sort of had a, as I think, I don't -- not quite positive, had a list of questions that we had to ask and to find out what knowledge these people had. They had different backgrounds. Some of them were captured prisoners of war [18:31]. Others were some people were, I'm pretty sure, came on a voluntary basis to contribute to the American war effort. Some actually, were German civilians who had some motive in trying to be on our side rather on the German side [19:00].

INT: Do you remember -- ballpark -- how many people you spoke with while you were there?

EK: Not really. It may have been four or five a day, and I don't really know, there was 15 or 20 a week. It varied depending on who was available and what information they were looking for. One thing I remember having been told, if it's true or not, I can't vouch for that, because some of the conversations we had with these people, we were able to protect an American submarine that had been at danger to be sunk by a German U-boat [19:40], and whatever information we elicited was instrumental in preventing that from happening. It may or may not be true.

INT: During the interrogations, how did you dress? Were you in your army uniform [20:00]?

EK: We were in army uniform. We wore khaki, we wore khaki usually.

INT: And, could you describe again a little bit about where the actual interview took place?

EK: The place was set up. There were small interrogation rooms in barracks. It looked similar to the other barracks, and the -- there were hidden microphones under the light fixtures which -- no, actually those microphones were in the rooms where the detainees were housed. There usually were two together. And I remember one incident they were

allowed to smoke and one guy discovered that the cigarette smoke went straight up -- not to the light, but under the light. They ripped the light fixture out of the ceiling and discovered that there was a microphone.

INT: Really?

EK: In the ceiling that sort of [21:00] put a crimp into the scheme, but that's what happened.

INT: And so, were these inside the actual prisoner compound? Do you remember where, was this where --

EK: It didn't really look like a prisoner of war camp. These people had a certain amount of freedom. I recall that from -- to recall it correctly, some of these people were allowed to go to Washington to do some shopping for their personal needs. Clothing, underwear, whatever, and one of us had to go with them. We'd take -- probably a bus to Washington. There was a regular bus line on this highway to go into the city, and there were no perfectly normal people that didn't want to get away or jump bail or whatever. They did what they were told to do because a large number of them were here as volunteers [22:00]. So, it wasn't a question of having to keep them under lock and key, even though they couldn't go freely as they wanted. Also, they obviously had a language barrier because they -- anyone would find out that they were Germans.

INT: Sure. While you were escorting them here and there, were you armed in any way?

EK: No. No. Not at all.

INT: Was anyone armed at Fort Hunt [22:24]?

EK: I'm sure something must have been -- there must have been some MPs there, I'm not sure, but obviously there were some hierarchy who were above us who ran the camp itself, rather than just deal with the inmates as you might call them. And I'm sure there were

MPs that were armed. No question about it.

INT: Do you remember at any given time about how many prisoners, per se, would have been at Fort Hunt [22:51]?

EK: I don't know, I would guess -- that's a guess -- maybe 30-40. It was a small, small number [23:00]. I don't know what other people may have told you, but that seems to my right recollection.

INT: Did it seem to, did people seem to come and go a lot where people -- or was it kind of the same old characters that were there?

EK: Not likely. Not too much there were, there was some change. Some people were transferred to some scientific facilities. If we -- if it came out that they really had something to contribute to our war effort. To transfer some of their knowledge and there all of them were almost anxious to help us. For one thing, it's -- they knew Germany had lost the war anyhow, but they might as well be on the winning side, rather than being prisoners of war [23:40]. That's about all I recall about that.

INT: Do you recall about how long any of them stayed there for?

EK: I guess about maybe six months. We weren't there ourselves all that long [24:00] between our training and being there, and then going on to the next facility. It was probably a relatively short period of time. I mean, six months or less, probably.

INT: And you mentioned this a little bit earlier, did the prisoners have -- they had a certain degree of freedom? And did they have to be escorted everywhere or did they -- did they eat in a mess hall, or did they?

EK: They ate I think in their own mess hall, as I recall.

INT: Okay.

EK: But I don't think they were particularly monitored or watched, on a continuous basis.

INT: Let's see. Do any of the -- any prisoners in particular stand out in your memory? Did any particular interrogation or certain type of character or subject?

EK: I remember one -- one man who was a wind tunnel expert engineer, who then went to [25:00] an American wind tunnel place in Ohio. I forgot the name of the -- it was an Army base, too, I forget the name of the place, who helped with those -- with that research. That's about all I recall. I don't know what others -- there were some chemists I know. But I don't know specifically what the expertise was.

INT: And, do you know what happened to the information that you were able to get from them?

EK: All I know is that we had people who would translate these reports of the interrogations, sent them on to the Pentagon [25:36] and that was a big black hole as far as I'm concerned. I don't know what actually was done with that, if anything. Who knows?

INT: But you yourself -- did you --

EK: No, we had no -- no direct results about our work.

INT: Your role then was essentially to ask the questions -- let someone else --

EK: Handle the translation --

INT: Write it down.

EK: And the transmission. Correct.

INT: Okay [26:00]. And with the -- these translations and the folks that were doing the monitoring -- did you ever do that, or were you solely used to ask the questions?

EK: I was solely used as an interrogator.

INT: Okay. Okay.

EK: Occasionally I might help someone with some technical terms to translate them. As a

matter of fact, some of the scientists were versed well enough in their specialty that they would know the English terms that were required.

INT: Oh, really?

EK: They would help with the translation.

INT: Okay. Okay. And -- let's see here -- a couple minutes of tape left. Is there any other particular stories or humorous anecdotes or anything that you recall?

EK: Not really. Sixty years I haven't thought about it too much. Oh, some of the social aspects. What we did, I think I learned how to play bridge there [27:00], but there's nothing to do with the running of the place. Not really. It's sort of long, long time ago.

INT: Sure. This may seem like an odd question, but with your -- you would eat in the dining hall and I shouldn't say dining hall -- in the mess hall, and what did you think of the food? Do you know who was making the food?

EK: Food I recall, was pretty acceptable. As a matter of fact, in Camp Ritchie [27:31] where I was [unintelligible] the food was outstanding.

INT: Really.

EK: I remember getting Baked Alaska for dessert on Sundays. There were -- fed us royally there.

INT: Really.

EK: No, no the food was certainly more than acceptable. Yes.

INT: What do you remember at Fort Hunt [27:47] about the officers? What kind of relationship did you have with the officers? Did you salute every time you saw them, or what was the rule?

EK: No. I don't recall that that was necessary [28:00]. No, I don't remember too much about

it. We're so independent. Obviously we were supervised, and there was a chain of command, but I don't really remember anything about who our commanding officer was.

I just don't remember.

INT: But you would have been reporting to someone --

EK: Yes, no question about it. Sure. Sure.

INT: And, but you don't recall the names of any commanding officers of the Fort or what not?

EK: No.

INT: Okay. When you socialized with folks there at Fort Hunt [28:27], were you primarily socializing with your own -- with the interrogators?

EK: That's correct. Whether you follow the [unintelligible] people who were in our barracks, and we'd go to town together. We'd rarely ever go alone. A movie, or theater, or go out to dinner, or something like that. Of course the salaries that were made at the time weren't really large enough to splurge, but we managed.

INT: Did Fort Hunt [29:00], did it have a movie theater or anything like that, or was it small?

EK: I don't think we -- as far as I recall, I don't think we did have that. I don't think so.

INT: What about a PX?

EK: I think we had a small PX.

INT: Okay.

EK: Think so, but I'm --

INT: Did they allow alcohol on base? Do you remember anybody --

EK: I don't know. I never drank. I don't think so.

INT: Okay.

EK: I don't -- I don't recall.

INT: Okay.

EK: No. No.

INT: Okay.

EK: This group of people who were there were -- all the German refugees who were all very happy to be in this country, and anyone certainly would stick to the rules. I don't think there were any -- anybody who would break the rules or go AWOL or anything like that.

INT: With -- and I apologize for these questions -- we're jumping around.

EK: That's okay.

INT: Every morning would you have morning inspection or drill?

EK: No, we'd have -- yeah, we'd have revile or whatever [30:00], and after [unintelligible] they would raise the flag, and we'd have to stand and salute -- something like that.

INT: Would they have a bugler playing or anything?

EK: I'm pretty sure they did, yeah.

INT: Okay. Okay. And then presumably in the evenings and there was tattoo or whatever?

EK: Taps.

INT: Taps. Right. Okay. And so you were pretty much then free after five o'clock or so, or what not?

EK: Unless you had no CQ, you had to stay there.

INT: Right. Alright, well.

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

INT: Okay. Again, this is Brandon Bies with the National Park Service, speaking with Eric Kramer on September 12th, 2006. And, Eric, if you don't mind telling a little bit -- you

were just trying to tell a bit of, kind of a humorous story about P. O. Box 1142 [00:19].

EK: Well, I had been at Camp Ritchie [00:21] previously. My wife was able to join me there. She lived in -- she worked actually in Hagerstown, Maryland at some kind of a factory. And when I was transferred to P.O. Box 1142 [00:36], all I was able to tell her was the address, P. O. Box 1142 [00:44], Alexandria, Virginia. And she took a train down to Washington that went to Alexandria, and wanted to contact me and she went to the Post Office in Alexandria, Virginia, and said what is this 1142 [01:00]? And it was hush-hush secret. But in the long run we were able to get together by telephone, and establish communications. But living conditions down there were such that she decided to go back to New York, and she got a job there and worked. This was just an incident over the secrecy of the Army that even we who were there didn't know the name of the place, and honestly I did not know it was called Fort Hunt [01:33] till after I had left there.

INT: Really? Wow. And so, during the war, what did you tell your wife that you were doing? Nothing, whatsoever, or?

EK: No, you could just tell people that you worked with German prisoners. That, you could tell them.

INT: Okay.

EK: What you did and why, you weren't supposed to divulge.

INT: Did you -- once the war was over did you share with your family [02:00] what you'd been doing, or did you just kind of gradually --

EK: It wasn't a great big secret. Sure. Sure. Especially since all the people had been there had originally been at Camp Ritchie [02:08], and that was a better known facility and people knew, more or less, what was going on there. So, yes, we talked about it.

INT: Okay. Getting back to the -- some of the physical description of Fort Hunt [02:26].

From what you recall -- you'd mentioned you remember driving through a gate there.

Were there MPs or folks stationed there at the gate to kind of check the comings and goings of people?

EK: I don't really recall, but I'm sure there must have been. Any Army post I think had -- you couldn't just wander in -- in and out. I'm sure they were checking.

INT: Here's a question I never really thought of before. Do you remember if any of the guards or anyone there, did they have dogs? You know, sometimes you picture a typical POW [02:58] movie with dogs [03:00].

EK: I simply don't -- I don't recall.

INT: Okay.

EK: I don't. I doubt it, but I don't --

INT: Okay.

EK: I could naturally say no either.

INT: Okay. Do you remember the general size of the complex? Were there lots and lots of buildings, or was it -- was it fairly --

EK: It was pretty well contained. I know it had some underground structures -- dungeons that, from the Civil War time were apparently some Civil War prisoners had been kept, but that was more legend than fact, because we didn't really know all that much about it. But we did know that the place was certainly not a recent installation. It had been around for many, many years.

INT: Do you remember what those underground structures were being used for while you were there, or did you not ever go in--

EK: I don't think they were used for anything. I'm sure they didn't put the prisoners we had down there.

INT: Sure [04:00].

EK: Damp, dark, bald-like structures. They were just there.

INT: Do you remember any underground bunkers or anything ever being used for your project?

EK: Not as far as I recall.

INT: Hidden buildings, or anything like that?

EK: No.

INT: Were there any parts of the post that were off-limits?

EK: Not as far -- not as far as I recall. I don't think so.

INT: Okay.

EK: It wasn't such -- it wasn't such a big place, actually.

INT: Do you remember of any of the buildings had any nicknames or anything, or were they just building X, building Y?

EK: I don't recall. I just don't remember, no.

INT: Okay. And, getting back to the actual prisoners themselves, was there a pretty equal mix of folks that you were dealing with? I mean, I realize you can only speak from your own perspective. Was it an equal mix of soldiers versus scientists [05:00], or was it more scientists?

EK: I think I was more involved with scientists rather than military people.

INT: Of the handful of -- or the military folks that you did work with, do you remember if they were mostly officers, or enlisted?

EK: I think they're mostly officers.

INT: Okay.

EK: Mostly officers.

INT: Okay. And would you -- would they know what your rank was, you know? You being a -- being Staff Sergeant or whatever.

EK: No. A Private probably then. No, I don't think so.

INT: Okay. Okay. You don't recall what the highest ranking officer was that you ever spoke with?

EK: No, no, I don't remember.

INT: And were they from a range of military services? Navy, Army, Air Force?

EK: Yes, there were. There were some -- I think there were some Navy people there, and well, the majority probably were Army people. They were all brought there as far as I recall, for a specific reason, because we had lots of prisoner of war camps [06:00], both in Europe as well as in this country, where they had 2-3 thousand people just for keeping them there, and these people had been picked out for reasons of their background and knowledge, but the idea that they might be able to help us fight the war in some better manner.

INT: Were any of them extremely uncooperative, or were they mostly --

EK: No, they were all very cooperative. I think they may have been picked for that reason because they probably volunteered to give us the information.

INT: Okay. And you had said earlier of the more scientific minded folks, many of them were actually happy to be there?

EK: They wanted to be there, correct. I think a lot them were scared of the Russians and were very happy [07:00] to give themselves up to the American forces and a lot of them had

gone down to the -- the Bavarian [unintelligible] as it was called. Southern part of Bavaria. Where the American forces were, rather than staying up around the Berlin [07:17] area, which was occupied by the Russians.

INT: By the time you had gotten to 1142 [07:23], the war against Germany had ended, or was just ending. If you got there in the summer of '45, that would've -- that war would have ended around I think, April-May of 45, but the war in Japan [07:39] was still going on. How -- what do you recall just from your own personal perspective, hearing about the atomic bomb [07:46] being dropped? Did that come as a complete surprise to you, and what were your feelings?

EK: Yeah, it came as a complete surprise to us, definitely. I mean, like everyone else. And later on [08:00] then when we worked with German scientists who had done similar research, we got to know a little more about it. But at that time, it was a complete surprise.

INT: Do you remember, was there a victory party or anything like that there, or a celebration when the war ended. Did everybody take leave and go to Washington or anything like that?

EK: I don't recall. It's possible, but I don't recall, no.

INT: And again, a nit-picky question, but since a lot -- from your recollection, were the majority of the interrogators of Jewish decent?

EK: I think the vast majority -- I think probably all of them.

INT: Okay.

EK: Were German-Jewish refugees.

INT: Okay. Okay. Were there any -- was there a post chapel or were there anything that, you

know, were there Jewish services on post -- or if you --

EK: Not that I recall.

INT: Okay [09:00].

EK: It's possible, but I don't -- I don't remember.

INT: Okay.

EK: I think they were probably given a chance if there were Jewish holidays to go to service at somewhere outside, but not on the post, as far as I recall.

INT: Okay. Okay. And while you were there, we had asked -- I had spoken with you earlier today and asked if you remembered -- we were looking over that list of names, and there were some Asian-American names on there. You don't recall any of those folks being there, or what they might have been doing?

EK: No, I don't remember that at all.

INT: Okay.

EK: If there were any Japanese. I mean American soldiers of Japanese descent.

INT: Okay. What about -- do you remember if there were any African-Americans that served at Fort Hunt [09:46], either as cooks or anything like that?

EK: I don't recall. It's possible but I don't recall. No. No.

INT: Okay. What about women? Were there any women whatsoever in the post, or was it--

EK: No [10:00].

INT: No? Okay. Okay. Were the -- the prisoners -- were they all German, or do you recall any Russian or Italian or French or any other nationalities?

EK: I think the people we dealt with were either German or Austrian, probably, which is the same as German in effect, but I don't recall any -- any Russians being there.

INT: Okay. So, regarding Boston and P.O. Box 2276 [10:34] --

EK: 2276.

INT: Did a group of you all end up going?

EK: A group of us were sent up there and again, it was a Post Office box address. The Post Office box was in Boston itself, I don't remember which Post Office specifically, but we were stationed on a place called Long Island [10:54]. It's an island in Boston Harbor [11:00], which was divided into this old Army installation on one side, and a mental hospital -- a branch of a Boston City hospital -- on the other half. And we had to take a ferry back and forth to get there, and we were basically there to process the group of German scientists and workmen who came over from Peenemunde [11:23] in Northern Germany, where it worked on the American -- and then the German rocket project, the V-1 [11:32] and V-2 [11:33] rockets. And, ultimately, this resulted in the space program that there's one up in space right now, is a direct result of the scientific research that had gone on with a group that was headed by Wernher von Braun [11:52] and his brother Magnus von Braun [11:52], who were a bunch of East Prussian aristocrats [12:00]. But they were great scientists, and they came over with a whole bunch of people, and we basically had nothing to do with them on a scientific basis other than help with their transition from -- they got off the boat in New York. We picked them up there -- we processed them on this island and they were sent down to White Sands, [12:21] New Mexico to do their research.

INT: So, von Braun [12:27] and his group -- they weren't at Fort Strong [12:31] for a terribly long time?

EK: Not a terribly long time, just a transit point.

INT: Okay. Okay. And, was your role at Fort Strong [12:39] essentially the same as it was at Fort Hunt [12:41]?

EK: Yeah, exactly. It was more custodial in the sense that we didn't really interrogate these people, we didn't get information from them, because it was a given that they volunteered to come here to continue the work that had started [13:00]. So, we didn't have the scientific knowledge nor was this the time and place to do that. We just helped them and then they took -- I'm sure -- the time that they were taken down there by train. I don't think our aviation was that advanced to fly them down there.

INT: Okay. Okay. And, so you really weren't interrogating them?

EK: No, we weren't interrogating. What we did is we handled their mail to Germany as well as the correspondence that their families sent them from Germany. The families had all been herded together -- the wives and children in a place south of Munich, I forget the name of the town, and they all lived together, and I remember from the correspondence -- reading it, that the same rank and file situation from the top [14:00] banana was duplicated in Germany, that the wife of the top guy here, was the top lady over there. And they had all treated each other by rank and the -- the German titles -- Herr, professor, doctor and some other titles in advance of the name. And this was transferred to the [unintelligible] side of all those families. Just inside. And we didn't discover any great things. There wasn't much to censoring the mail. The war was essentially over, anyhow. These people would state they did a lot better. Frankly, I think in the long run that most of the people who were in our group [unintelligible] -- they all were able to transfer their families to this country and stay here. But that's -- that's it.

INT: Would you consider Fort Strong [15:00] to have been not how a prisoner camp, or was it

more a holding area? I mean, where'd that -- was there barbed wire keeping people there?

EK: No, there was not. It was not a prisoner camp. Not at all.

INT: It was just a place where they were housed.

EK: For the mere fact there was an island it made it difficult for them to go anyplace.

INT: They couldn't really go [unintelligible]. Right. Right. Okay.

EK: And they were there for a very short time.

INT: Okay. Okay. Do you remember about how big a group of folks you were working with?

Were they from Fort Hunt [15:28], or were there folks already there when you --

EK: I think the most of them were from Fort Hunt [15:31]. Maybe 15-20. I think it was a relatively small contingent.

INT: Okay. Okay. And then, anything else stick out in your mind about Fort Strong [15:42], or any incidents up there, or anything related to the story?

EK: Not really, except that as an Army life, it was a relatively easy way to do your Army duty [16:00] because we had very regular hours -- short hours, and certainly we weren't in any danger from the enemy as it was.

INT: Sure. Would you -- I presume you would have to take a boat to and from?

EK: I take it there were -- there was a Boston -- it's a ferry service that ran, I don't know what's left today, but I've been back in Boston a lot but only because my two kids went to school there but not to investigate that situation.

INT: But you lived in barracks there?

EK: Lived in barracks, right. It's an Army post.

INT: Okay. Okay.

[end of transcript]

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