Fort Hunt Oral History
P.O. Box 1142
George Washington Memorial Parkway
Interview of Arno Mayer
by Brandon Bies and Vincent Santucci
September 16, 2008

INTERVIEWER: What's that? Okay, today is September 16, 2008. This is an interview by the National Park Service as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. We are here interviewing Arno Mayer at his home in Princeton, New Jersey. This is National Park Service Historian Brandon Bies, as well as Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci, and with that, we'll go ahead and get started. First of all, thank you very much

INT: Can we move that microphone over?

INT: Oh, sure. Over to here. Are we getting movement on there?

INT: Not as high as I'd like to see.

INT: All right. With that, thank you for allowing us to come into your home and do this.

ARNO MAYER: Thank you.

INT: And what we want to start off with is, could you just tell us a little bit of your critical statistics, such as like when and where you were born?

AM: Well I was [01:00] born in 1926 in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, needless to say in the capital of the Grand Duchy, which at that time I suppose had a population of about 300 to 400,000 maximum, sandwiched between France, Belgium, and Germany, which is another way of saying it was one of the most -- how should I say -- dangerous spots in Europe. Given the history of warfare in the 19th, 20th century, certainly World War I [01:36] had left its mark on that corner of that corner of Europe. One of the recollections I have is that with the Boy Scouts they took us to visit the Verdun Battlefield [01:52], not only the battlefield but also the monument to the soldiers that were killed in that battle [02:00], which is one of the most gruesome monuments that you ever want to see in a

place of commemoration. The Germans after World War II [02:03] developed a word for that, a [speaks German], or that is to say a monument to warn you that it shouldn't happen again. That's why they took us, you see, as young boy scouts, 12 years or old something like that. We all know that the [speaks German] didn't do its work because then there was the Second World War [02:20]. So I was born in an area a stone's throw from some of the important battles, the bloodiest battle of World War I [02:30].

INT: Was your father in World War I [02:33]?

AM: No, because Luxembourg was a neutral country, and there was no military service there. So that no one of my family, I mean of my -- that is to say my father didn't do any military service. My grandfather on my mother's side who came to Luxembourg [03:00] from Czechoslovakia before World War I [03:03], he did some military service in his youth. But there was none of that. I mean I didn't know what a military was all about, because in Luxembourg, there was a small constabulary or something. It seems to me that I remember that the military band probably had -- the members of the military band probably exceeded those of the rest of the Army. So it wasn't really, shall we say, a serious military instrument.

[inaudible commentary]

INT: Can you talk a little bit about growing up in Luxembourg? You had some siblings as well?

AM: I had a sister who was 13 months older, Ruth, who's in New York; Ruth still lives in New York. And basically Luxembourg was close to 99 percent Catholic [04:00], which is another way of saying the Jews were a very small minority. But unlike in Eastern Europe or rather more like in central Europe, one couldn't really say that there was really any

ghettoization. Many of them were on the fast track to total assimilation in their acculturation into Luxembourg society, but there were the usual tensions between, shall we say, the native-born Jews and those who already had started on the track to assimilation and then some of the Jews who arrived from Eastern Europe. And that is something that I remember very clearly in large part because my father actually had a fit any time that a native born Jew or an assimilated Jew made a negative comment about [05:00] the Polish Jews who had recently arrived, or Lithuanian, or what have you. Still, it was a subculture, the Jewish subculture. There's absolutely no doubt about that. And one would have to say that in the city of Luxembourg there was a major synagogue and the cultural and social life did center around that, the synagogue. I myself was a very, very bad student. I didn't manage to graduate from primary school until high school, and I had to repeat my last year, and I also had to repeat my first year in high school. I was an extremely good soccer player, and I also was a pretty good cyclist. And that's where all my energy went, which is not a way of saying I owe a great deal [06:00] to Nazi [06:02] Germany in the sense that when the German armies moved into the low countries and France on May 10, 1940, we left Luxembourg at 1:00 in the morning because my father had connections with some members of the French Secret Service [06:21] who called and said, "Get the hell out of here." But it was that traumatic moment that all of the sudden brought to end, shall I say, my lack of seriousness about life. From me, until then, life had been a vacation. Vacation was over. It was absolutely traumatic because I had only one thing in my head and that is not to continue being a problem for my parents. I still remember when we were in the car leaving Luxembourg, we were barely over the border into France [07:00], when I confessed several of my sins to my parents, including

my going to the bakery and charging pastries on the bill of my parents, which they weren't aware of and I made a deal with the people in that bakery that they would put it down as bread. And all sorts of little things, you see, but it was just the beginning of my realizing that, here after, life was going to be serious, and that I understood that I was not going be a problem for my parents as we were going into the unknown. We became refugees on the roads of France that morning.

INT: So up until age 14, I guess --

AM Thirteen.

INT: Thirteen, up until then, was there any sense whatsoever in Luxembourg where you were living of any anti-Semitism [07:57] or any increase in that? In other words [08:00], up until 1940, how were you and your family personally affected or not affected by the rise of the Nazis [08:05]?

AM: Well my father had studied at the University of Heidelberg where he got his doctorate in political economy. And he had made some fast friends with a number of other young men his age, who by then had become left wing Zionists, humanist Zionists, and so on, which sensitized him rather more to the Jewish problem and the emergent anti-Semitism [08:45]. I make a distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. It was a lot of anti-Judaism in Luxembourg. You know they call you "God Damn Jew" and it didn't really mean all that much. I don't think that would have taken you to the gas chambers [09:00]. I remember a critical moment for me came in 1938 when some family members from Germany, we had helped them come to Luxembourg and then their sons went along to school with me. And I began to realize when we played soccer in the schoolyard that it became rather more pronounced and that if they'd hit somebody in the chin and they

would call you a "God Damn Jew," which hadn't been the case before. But that was anti-Judaism. That was not political anti-Semitism [09:34], let alone racist anti-Semitism. Now, my father helped a great many friends and family members from Central Europe, from Germany in particular, where we had relatives, to come to Luxembourg. But as so many others -- refugees who arrived from Central Europe, Luxembourg was a place of transit [10:00]. My father was able to get them temporary -- how should I say -- permissions to stay in Luxembourg until they would move on. And then many of them moved on. In fact, no one of the people that my father had helped to come there were still in Luxemburg in 1940. And we were extremely sensitive to the anti-Semitism [10:26] that was exploding in Germany and also the expansionism that was at the core of the Nationalist Socialist Project [10:35], to the extent that we left Luxembourg on false alerts between 1938 and 1940 five times, that we would go to Belgium, that we would go to France and so on to the point where, because my father was so highly wired on the issue, in 19 -- in February 1940 we actually moved to Brussels. We rented [11:00] an apartment in Brussels. We moved to Brussels, because my father said that we would have the additional protection of the Belgian army. In other words we would buy more time to get the hell out of there. But then we were back in Luxembourg on May 10th. Why were we back? We were back in Luxembourg because my sister and I had to sit for examinations in school. So we went back to Luxembourg for us to take these exams. That was the very time that the Germans moved in, and then we got out at 1:00 in the morning. So there was a high sensitivity, not only to the emergent and accentuated anti-Semitism [11:48] that was at work, you know, next door, but at the same time also to -- and this became more pronounced after the invasion of Poland obviously [12:00] -- to the

likelihood that the Germans would thrust westward and that there would be a military offensive, and needless to say, my father did everything he could to make sure we would not be caught there. So I was raised on that, and you see, even if I want to, in my bloodstream, I didn't quite understand what was going on, but now as a historian, I have reconstituted these different alerts, false alerts, of the Germans moving in, you see, and I'm reconstructing now as to what these moments were when we went either to Namur or to Brussels or to Thionville and so on, so forth.

INT: Do you recall, again, under the same time period an obvious increase in the number of Jewish families who were coming to Luxembourg, and to Brussels as well, to escape?

AM: Oh yes, absolutely. I mean there is just no doubt [13:00] that a good many of them, they were literally -- I have the figures. Something like, which for Luxembourg is a lot, something like 2,500. And I would say that all things being equal, the Luxembourg government was rather generous in terms of providing these temporary visas. That is to say for Jews, German Jews, to come to Luxembourg long enough to get -- to make arrangements to go to another place. That is to say, either to go to France, to England or whatever to go overseas or whatever. But what is striking about that, of course, is that so many of the Jews who did come to Luxembourg, who did come to France and so on [14:00], they really went there with the idea that the French Army would beat the hell out of the Germans. They'd stay nearby because it would be that much easier to go back. There was no idea that, you know, that you were going to have to get out, or that France would be defeated within six weeks or something like that. Nothing of that. And I distinctly remember that for example, in the morning when we left at 1:00 in the morning, before leaving my father still called a couple of families who were refugees

from Germany and told them "Get the hell out of here." Now they didn't have the visa for France, so it was a tricky thing and they weren't able to, really, that easily to get out, but they did manage to get out. So we were very much aware that there were many refugees that were in our home all the time. I hope your --

[audio break]

INT: I think you were [15:00] finishing up your thought about the -- I mean you mentioned they were able to get out.

AM: Yeah, they were. You see the thing is that when we left in the morning, at 1:00, my paternal grandfather came with us. My paternal grandmother had died of cancer in 1936. And he lived with us, and he came with us. We tried to get my mother's parents, my maternal grandparents, to come with us, and they refused. My grandmother, maternal grandmother, had also been born in Luxembourg, and she was a good nationalist and didn't want to leave and so on and so forth. Anyway, we then discovered because my grandfather, my father's father, who went with us, he still had a German passport. He had never bothered to get a Luxembourgian passport, though he'd been in Luxembourg for something [16:00] like 45 years or 50 years. He had a German passport, and in those days you had to renew it all the time, and there was a huge "J" on it; on the front, meaning Jew. And that caused us difficulties in the sense that, I don't want to tell you the story of the crossing of the border, which is in of itself an odyssey, because we got to the border at Rodange at about, say, 4:30 in the morning, and there was a French border police, and they thought that we were crazy because we were not the only car; other cars also had arrived. They didn't have a clue as to what was happening, the border police. They thought these Luxembourgians were going wacky. And so they wouldn't at first

[17:00] let us through, and in our case one of their reasons for not letting us through, my grandfather had a German passport. And he had no visa to get into France. So we stayed at that border post and about 6:30, 7:00 in the -- no, 6:30 someone who my father knew showed up in a car and was white as a bed sheet, and he said "Guess where I came from about three miles back? Some Germans had landed." In other words some parachuters and gliders. All that I tell you now is much clearer than it was to us at the time because I've been reading and working up the story. So my father said, "Okay" you know, to convince these guys, we're going to be the French Policeman and so on, the border police; we'd have to prove a little more and so on [18:00], anyways. So my father went back with the guy to the hill overlooking the place where they had landed and he confirmed it. The two of them went to the police and said, "Look, these are maneuvers and they made a mistake and they landed by error." By mistake you see.

INT: That's what the police said?

AM: Yeah, yeah. Then finally at 6:45 a small Fiat pulled up. The way I remember it, it was a red Fiat. And there were three people in it. The Grand Duchess of Luxembourg [18:36], her husband, Prince Felix [18:42], and then his aide-de-camp, who was doing the driving. And the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg [18:48] was not going to leave Luxembourg soil until she had definite proof that in fact Luxembourg's sovereignty had been violated, that this was not a mistake. They didn't land [19:00] by mistake. Anyway, to make a long story short, I don't want to take your time, finally she said, "Okay, we go." She had received a phone call to confirm that in fact the Grand Duchy had been invaded. And the barrier at the border, the border barrier, which you may remember from the invasion of Poland. They always show that picture, right. The barrier was opened and we went in.

Not long thereafter, again I'm not going to go into the details, we were stopped by French soldiers on the road, just beyond Verdun [19:43]. And they looked at our passports, and the German passport. And they said, "You have to go back to Verdun. You have to go back to military headquarters, because you are an enemy alien. You are an enemy of France [20:00]." We drove back. I still remember my father telling me, telling my mother that -- we, Ruth and I and my grandfather were sitting in the back, that we have to do something about this passport. Anyways so we went back to the headquarters. One of the headquarters was a French army there, and they were going to put us into a camp; they were going to -- because we weren't going to leave my grandfather behind. He said, "You can go, but not him." We said, no, that was impossible and so on. And then a guy came out; I think I know who it was but I don't want to say it because he's a very -- he became very important in French politics afterwards, but I don't have the definite evidence to say. He came out and he asked the captain, "Qu'est qui a?" What's the problem with this family? "C'est un ennemi de la France." An enemy of France. "Here's the passport; it's a German passport [21:00]." And he looked at the passport and he saw the "J" in it. And he said to the captain, "Mon Capitaine" Captain. "Do you know what that 'J' stands for?" and the captain says, "No, I don't." "Well I will tell you. The 'J' stands for Juif, the Jew. This probably means that this man has suffered enough. Give them the 'Laissez-Passer', give them the paper so that they can move on." We got that paper, we moved on, and I have a distinct recollection that after we got this Laissez-Passer in which there was my grandfather's name, date of birth, et cetera, all the essentials, my father asked me to tear up my grandfather's passport into little pieces and we spread it in this French countryside as we moved on, you see, to get rid of that. And

it's on the basis of that paper that we managed to get to the United States. But that's the story I'll tell you some other time.

INT: Wow [22:00]. So, one of the questions we want to ask is how did you end up getting to the United States, and I guess I'll step back a half step. What had your family's plan been? You mentioned that you had this plan as many people, but most people had planned to, let's just go to France. Was that the case for your family as well?

AM: Nope. My father had applied for a visa to the United States in 1936, no, in 19 -- no, sorry. My parents had originally -- no, we're not a religious family at all, but they, my parents, had spent their honeymoon in the early '20s in Mandatory Palestine. Because as I told you, he was touched by Zionism [23:00] when he was at the University of Heidelberg. He began to be active as a Zionist in Luxembourg. And then in the 1930s, in 1935 they went to Mandatory Palestine a second time with the idea of perhaps preparing our moving there. Then there were the first Palestinian uprisings in 1936, idea within a book that I just finished says the second Intifada. The grandparents, both grandparents, simply wouldn't allow my parents to take their children, that is to say my sister Ruth and myself, she -- you know, 11, I 10 or whatever -- taken to Mandatory Palestine which was going up in flames, or so it would seem from outside. So we stayed [24:00] then moved to Brussels as I had told you, always with the idea that, you know. And our trip was a very long one, because we left Luxembourg on May 10th; we got to the United States, my father and I, in January 1941. And my grandfather, my mother, and my sister followed in early February 1941. Now, what happened is, immediately my father wanted to get out of France. The only way to get out of France, the easiest way, was to go through Spain. So very early on, immediately after the armistice, June 18th,

1940, we headed to the Spanish border [25:00] with the idea of transiting through Spain to Portugal and taking a boat from Portugal to the United States. We couldn't get through Spain; not only because we didn't have the visa, which was not so much the problem. But my father was of military age. He was at that time I think 38 and a half, and there was an agreement between Germany, that is to say between the government of Nazi [25:25] Germany and the Franco government in Spain, that men of military age would not be allowed to transit because they might join the Allied forces, I mean the enemy forces. It wasn't clear it was the Allied. So we couldn't get through, and my grandfather, who at that time was 71 or 72, I don't exactly remember, but he was over 70, I can tell you that. The only way we could have gotten through Spain would be to walk over the Pyrenees, as a lot people did. I don't want to repeat the story of Walter [26:00] Benjamin but it was exactly the same spot where he eventually left his life walking over the Pyrenees to get out. So, we wouldn't do that because my grandfather was with us, and there was no way we could walk over the Pyrenees, which are not that formidable, but my father was not exactly a hiker and he always got -- he always had a marvelous formula. He said he got enormous pleasure out of going to the funerals of his very athletic friends. My father wasn't athletic at all, but we could've walked over the Pyrenees, but my grandfather could not have done it. So then the only way out -- the only other way out was through North Africa. And we headed for Marseille, and that's where we applied for a visa to the United States. In connection with that I'll have something to tell you in a while. And [27:00] we couldn't get the visa right away. We then went to Algeria, to Oran -- took the trans-Sahara from Oran to -- in the direction of Morocco. We were taken off the train at Oujda, which is the border town with Algeria,

because we didn't have a visa. Algeria was part of cosmopolitan France in constitutional terms, but Morocco was not, and we would need a visa, which we did not have, so they took us off train. After a few days we were sent on -- we were able to continue to Rabat, and to Casablanca. And it was in Casablanca that we finally got our visa for the United States. We then continued our trip; that is to say my father and I [28:00], from Morocco to Tangiers, through Spanish Morocco, to Tangiers. From Tangiers we took a hydroplane to Lisbon. And at Lisbon we got onto Serpa Pinto, that is to say the Portuguese ship that took us to New York. But that is more or less the odyssey, and that took us six months, that's about six months, you see. And that does shake you up, even if you'd been good for nothing, as I was, until age 13. The only other thing that I can tell you is that one reason why we got our American visa as rapidly as we did, all other things being equal, you see, we finally got it in Casablanca, is because my grandfather remembered that he had a cousin, whom he hadn't seen except once in his lifetime in Mobile, Alabama [29:00]. We got in touch with them, and they had a factory down there that made men's socks. I think it's still going today. Marrus, it was called, M-A-double R-U-S. Well, he understood our plight and began to intervene to have us get this America visa. Everything is politics, is it not? To make a long story short, we then got the visa. Once we arrived in New York, my grandfather, my mother, and my sister, also arrived, my father asked all of us to get into our Sunday best; we were going to go to Washington. Why were we going to Washington? Because this distant cousin of my [30:00] grandfather's had intervened with his local representative, that is to say the representative from Mobile, Alabama in the House of Representatives, a man by the name of Boykin, Frank Boykin [30:17], the III, I believe it was. And he apparently put in a good word,

which meant that we got visas, okay. I am on the Luxembourg quota, my visa is number 10, my mother is number 9, my father is number 8 -- no, my sister is number 10 and I'm number 11. So, Mr. Boykin [30:42] intervened for us. Okay fine, we went there. He couldn't have given less of a damn. We shook hands, let business go on, see if you know what these guys are doing here. Since I'm a historian, needless to say, since then I have checked out the career of Mr. Boykin. And Mr. Boykin [31:00] was a member of the Democratic Party, of course. He was -- served a jail sentence for corruption, one of the first sitting representatives to have paid that price for corruption. He was pardoned by L.B.J., by Lyndon Baines Johnson [31:22]. Anyway, this is the little history. You ask how we got to the United States. I might have to say thanks to Frank Boykin III [31:32].

(End of Tape 1A)

(Beginning of Tape 1B)

INT: No, this is fantastic.

AM: What I have told you now, I am not making up. I mean, this I have studied rather carefully in the last few months.

INT: I don't think we question that. I don't think we question that at all. And so, where did you end up getting at least temporarily or permanently planted once you got here to the United States?

AM: Well, we got to New York, New York City, and it was the usual refugee story. You see there, there was a certain point they're refugees; they're emigres; they're exiles. We were refugees. Very often people don't make that distinction because it's less noble to be a refugee than to be an exile, or to be an emigre. We were refugees, and refugees, when they moved they moved, when they arrive in a place usually they know someone [01:00].

They were family members that had settled in Washington Heights in New York City. Because in Washington Heights in the 1920s and '30s there was a huge construction program of apartment buildings, about six stories high, and so on. And then came the Depression, and they were empty. Couldn't rent them. And then the refugees arrived from Central Europe and so on and so on, and I can't -- I mean, it's ridiculous to say from Luxembourg, nobody knew about Luxembourg. So we became part of that, and a number of family members lived in upper Manhattan in Washington Heights where for a song you could get an apartment, because we had no money. So we got an apartment on Fort Washington Avenue and 270th Street, and this also meant that I was going to go to the schools in the neighborhood [02:00]. The first school that my sister went to immediately, because she was a good student, in addition to that when she arrived, she already knew English because she had a year's worth of English. I didn't know the difference between "yes" and "no" when I arrived.

INT: That was going to be my next question.

AM: Not a word. I mean, literally nothing.

INT: So you didn't speak a word of English?

AM: Not a word. And my parents, needless to say, through these relatives found out that there was a school in the Bronx that specialized in English for foreigners. So they sent me there. I went to that school, and within a week I came home and I said to my parents I was wasting my time. And they said oh my god, there he goes again. He doesn't want to work, he doesn't want to -- I said, "Look, I'm the only Caucasian. All the others happen to be Chinese and Japanese and so on and so forth. And it's much easier for me to cotton on to English than them [03:00]." So I've become the genius in the -- I mean it didn't

make any sense. Anyway to make a long story short, behind my parents back, I got a cousin of mine, who lived there, I should say the daughter of the cousin of my mother's, who said, "I'll take you to my school, to the school that Ruth was going to, your sister, to George Washington, and we'll see whether we can get you in." So they took me to George Washington High School, and something absolutely unbelievable happened to me then, in the sense that the woman who was in charge of the French department, Mrs. Orock [phonetic] [03:42], gave me a test in French, to see where she would place me in French. My French compared to Americans, oh well, I was a genius the first time in my life. Then I did the same thing in German. Oh my God, you know. I also had a little bit of Latin. Oh, I [04:00] flunked Latin, but still, I knew some Latin. And, they let me in, as, a first year of high school. I should add that Mrs. Orock [04:12] remained someone very close to me, and wrote letters to support my candidacy for OSS [04:21] when I was in the Army. I never made it to OSS [04:24]. I stayed in touch with her. Anyways, so this high school was absolutely crawling with the sons and daughters of refugees. It might amuse some people to know, and, of course, I was there but I didn't add up to a hill of beans. You may have heard of -- you ever heard of Henry Kissinger? Well, he was at George Washington High School, just a year older than I was. Have you ever heard of Alan Greenspan? Now Greenspan happened not to be [05:00] a refugee, but I could give you a lot of other names like that, you see. So it was a bizarre place, humming like crazy, and my parents had decided that maybe -- no, Mrs. Orock [05:14] had decided that maybe my name Arno was little on the difficult side. So she asked, "Do you have a middle name?" and I said, "yes, Joseph." "That's going to be your name." I came home and said this was going to be difficult; from now on I'll be Joseph, which was another

way of saying I'm going to be "Joe." And two days after I had changed my name, I was in the corridors in the morning and somebody yelled out, "Joe!" and some 15 guys turned around, because there were so many Joes walking around. And I went back home and said, "No, I'm taking my name Arno back." But that's the kind of place that it was. The teachers were incredibly supportive, incredibly [06:00] supportive. It was a very important formative experience, even though by the time I was 16, I began to work to help earn money for the family. I began to go to night school at City College; not the glorious City College, but the Baruch School of Business Administration, Lexington Avenue and 23rd Street, where eventually in 1948 I got my BBA, Bachelor's of Business Administration, because I was in business. Anyways that's another story. So you ask me where did we land: New York. Where in New York, in Washington Heights, which at that time became known as the Fourth Reich, because it was so many [07:00] refugees from that part of the world. As you know by now it has been completely Puerto Rican-ized. It is one of the sections of New York that changes with the different waves of immigrants that arrive.

INT: You mentioned at this time you were helping to work a little bit to support your family. What kind of work were you doing, and what sort of work was your father doing?

AM: My father had been a wholesale merchant in Luxembourg. When we arrived in New York he became sort of an associate of a refugee from Central Europe, from Germany, and they had a shirt business. Wholesale shirts, and then also began to manufacture some down somewhere in Pennsylvania. So that's the business that my father was in. I wound up working for a man whose business was dealing in ores, metals, and [08:00] minerals. Why did I wind up with him? Because my parents had become very friendly with him

because my father had helped him get to Luxembourg. And this guy was an extremely astute businessman, and I would dare say that by the time he died he probably had close to a billion. They had no children and I was to be the heir apparent. But I discovered that business, although I was pretty goddamn good at it, that it wasn't for me. I wound up in -- well, you may remember Kissinger was also the case; he worked in a brush factory. We did all sorts of things in those days, that you try out. The very fact though that it meant something; that it wasn't just a passing thing, is that I was not only in business and became one [09:00] of the great specialists in fluorspar, which probably no one has ever heard of. It was a mineral that was used as a catalyst in the production of steel. It wasn't only that I worked in that business, but at the same time I went to night school. What did I study, business administration. So I seemed to be oriented in that direction, but then came the Army.

INT: Moving into that, what were you doing when America entered World War II [09:34]? December 7th, where were you in the scheme of things at that point?

AM: Well, I mean your memories are always very, very tricky. But if there's one moment that I do remember, it's December 7th. Along the Hudson, up in Washington Heights, just [10:00] before you arrive -- that's one of America's cathedrals, that's to say the George Washington Bridge -- there are hard surface tennis courts. Because needless to say we weren't going to play tennis anywhere where you'd have to pay something, we had no money. But these were public courts, and on Sundays, a number of us refugees would go down there to these tennis courts with our rackets and one New York Times, which we shared. We were playing tennis when a guy came running and saying "Pearl Harbor [10:38] has just been bombed." We thought the guy was crazy. But our reaction was a

very bizarre one because we celebrated. Why did we celebrate? Because to us, that was the signal that the U.S. was going to get into the war. In other words, we were totally Euro-centric in the way in which we reacted to [11:00] that particular event, you see. So if you ask me where was I, and I continued to work until I was – I'm going to CCNY at night until I was drafted in 1944.

INT: At this time were considered an enemy alien?

AM: Was I --

INT: Were you considered an enemy alien? What was your status as a -- you were not a U.S. citizen at this point.

AM: No, indeed not. In other words we were waiting for the five years to be up to become an American citizen. I will tell you the story of how I became an American citizen because it's a hoot. It's a marvelous story. But anyway let me first go to Fort Dix [11:48].

INT: Real quick before you get there, you -- could you enlist, or no because you were not a citizen?

AM: No, I was [unintelligible]. I went at 18.

INT: You went at 18, and you were [12:00] -- so you were essentially drafted as soon as you turned 18?

AM: Absolutely. I still have the notification from the draft board.

INT: And you were more than happy?

AM: Oh yeah. I mean there was no question about that. None, whatever.

INT: Did you consider yourself an American? Do you still consider yourself an American today?

AM: That's a very, very difficult question. That's a very difficult question because one does

have to make the distinction between refugees, who have no place to go back to and those who do have a place. I could have gone back to Luxembourg in my full glory. But I didn't for any number of reasons and the experiences that I had. But I've always had difficulties, with the Pledge of Allegiance, with singing the Star Spangled Banner et cetera, et cetera, in a large part because [13:00] the Luxembourgians hadn't kicked me out; they hadn't been nasty to the Jews; they hadn't-- It was perhaps the greatest and the most peaceful country in the world as far as I was concerned. So it was difficult for me to change my allegiance. And it partly also explains as to why I have remained a critic in American society. So if you ask me the question, did you consider yourself an American, I'll tell you one little story that will give you a little indication. I mentioned the fact that so many of these children of refugees were at George Washington High School. Anybody who knows New York knows that City College had a huge -- in those days, by those days -- had a huge stadium. In that stadium [14:00], there were extremely cheap concerts, operas, recitals, and so on and so forth. One of the things that so many Europeans brought with them is this acculturation into the high culture of Europe. And so you can imagine we would go there in groves. It cost maybe 10 cents or something like that, Lewisohn Stadium is the name, the Lewisohn Stadium of City College. I distinctly remember, there was this one guy among many others, who never went. That was a certain Henry Kissinger -- Heinz Kissinger. He went to baseball games. We were very much aware of those who went to Lewisohn Stadium, and to Washington Square where Alexander [15:00], I forget his name now, did his chamber concert. I forget his name now. Anyway, those who went to that, and then those -- because if you go for baseball, and this will sound crazy to anybody, that's a very American thing. In Cuba,

right, they know what baseball is about. Maybe in Canada, but in Europe to this day baseball doesn't exist and they don't know what the hell these guys are standing on this first base and second base and all of that. It just doesn't make any sense. So I was alienated from that. I was a soccer man, god dammit! You couldn't get a soccer game anywhere. I just give you that as a small example. If you were going to really fit in you going to look the direct sort of line, the subway line that would take you to the baseball games [16:00], and not to the Lewisohn Stadium, and I'm over simplifying. But symbolically, if you would ask me was I American, there was a problem there.

INT: So to add to that, when you were drafted, is it safe to say that you were -- and I don't want to put words in your mouth -- but you were more excited at the prospect of getting back at the bastards, as opposed to defending America?

AM: Well, there was no way of defending America. The one thing that was absolutely clear there, there was this attack, and as time went on, and I've written about this so I'm repeating myself. Both World War I [16:40] and World War II [16:41], America was safe. There wasn't about to be an invasion. In addition to that, even though, we all, how should I say, remember and revere those who died [17:00] in the armed services during World War I [17:01] and World War II [17:02], compared to the losses suffered by the Europeans in those two world wars, let's leave the Japanese out, I mean, it's nothing. What was it, maybe 180,000 during World War II [17:23]? It's not very much Americans. It maybe be a little higher, whatever; I'd have to look it up somewhere. But it's not in the millions.

INT: It's not like the French in World War I [17:32].

AM: It is not in the millions, and there is Verdun [17:37]. It's -- and you know, there's no

sum; there's nothing of that nature, you see. In addition to that, even though a few American civilians were killed at Pearl Harbor [17:49], right, in World War II [17:52], more civilians than soldiers were killed, right.

INT: Well, look at Russia [18:00].

AM: Russia, Germany, whatever. Wherever you look. In the United States? And that's one reason why we have problems with draft and now the Reserves, and the volunteers, and it's all of that. We haven't had the experience. And we don't dare face up to what it really might need. That is one reason why in the case of Vietnam the issue came up. Anyway.

INT: So, Fort Knox [18:24].

AM: Well, so I arrived at Fort Knox [18:28], and while I'm -- I arrived at Fort Knox [18:32]. I had barely driven a car by then and they want to make a tank driver out of me. It's a little on the complicated side. At the time when I got there, which was in February, March -- no, I forget now when it was -- anyway, the idea was medium tanks, it wasn't the light tanks. They added that on at the [19:00] end of the training because light tanks would be used in island hopping in the Pacific. But anyway I arrived at Fort Knox [19:12], and two weeks after I got there, I wrote a letter. What I'm telling you now I can prove because I just found the letters that I wrote home to my parents from Fort Knox [19:21] and -- little, good boy, you know, I wanted to be a good boy to make up for my sins in my early youth; I wrote almost every day. About the second or the third week that I was in Fort Knox [19:35], I wrote a letter home to my parents to say that much to my surprise, a lot of our training centered less around rifles and tanks, and rather more around gas warfare. I didn't know what the hell I was saying. Now as I look back I realize that by

then it looked [20:00] as if the Allies were going to win the war and they were afraid that in the last desperate stand, the Germans and their Allies, as well as the Japanese, would have recourse to gas. Two days after that, I wrote another letter home, in which I said, "Today," and I'm not making this up. I can show you the letter. This one I haven't forgotten because I just found it. "Today I spent two hours in a gas chamber." With a gas mask, which, in the gas chamber, they had filtered mustard gas and one other gas into it. At that moment, the sentence, the word, the phrase, "gas chambers" had no meaning whatever. I wrote it in complete innocence. You ask me about Fort Knox [20:56]. That's the way it started. Not that I attached any importance to it. I didn't know what the [21:00] hell was going on. But then I became a tank driver, and I was as good as any, because I was as small as I was. The guys, most of them from the Bluegrass Country. I was one of the few from up north, and I think there were only two Jews in the outfit. They would use me to clean the tank, the motor, they would even hold me by my legs, lower me, and then I'd do the cleaning, and they'd pull me back up again and so on. Because they were tough guys and so on. I couldn't have reached that. It was a strange mixture, and sure I drove a tank, learned how to drive it and I got my certificate. I also got a certificate that I was a good sharp shooter. Any idiot can pull the trigger, and apparently I pulled it. In February [22:00] 1945, I was told that I was ready to receive my naturalization papers, because according to American law, unlike today, you could not be sent abroad to fight unless you were an American citizen. So they told me, citizen, I was overjoyed. I was summoned to the courthouse in Louisville, Kentucky, to be sworn in, and I got dressed for the occasion, I mean, certainly the best uniform I could find: the pleats ironed, et cetera, et cetera, thinking that this was going to be an important

occasion, and I would probably be facing somebody who would ask me to take this oath [23:00]. Now I wound up in a courtroom, in which there were another 250 guys that were in the same situation I was in. We were all there to be naturalized. Under the American law at that time, the judge, it was a presiding judge, in the courtroom -- I don't remember now what the district was in Louisville, Kentucky; it was the main courtroom in Louisville. I have the certificate if anyone doubts it. We were lined up alphabetically, and under the law the judge had to ask, "Have you any objection to becoming an American citizen?" Each solider, we were all privates as you could imagine, each soldier jumped up, "No your honor." "No your honor." You know, bop, bop, bop, bop, bop. And then it came to a guy who jumped up, "Yes, your honor [24:00], I want to remain a French citizen." He didn't want to become an American. In the atmosphere, the heated atmosphere of the war, everybody was convinced that this guy was trying to get out of military service abroad, and though he had said he wants to fight with the Free French, there was such hostility that the guys started attacking him in the courtroom and the MPs had to come and sort of get the guy out. So if you're asking do I remember being naturalized, [laughs] I sure as hell do. It was in February in that courthouse in Louisville, Kentucky. And then there was this very, very, for me, unsettling moment; namely, everybody was shipping out they say on the following Friday [25:00]. Everybody got his duffle bag fully packed, and our names were called, and everybody's name had been called in my unit. I'll show you the unit. You might be able to get it on your photograph. I have a photograph right here of it. Everybody's name was called except mine. I was totally frightened as hell. I didn't know why my name wasn't called. Nobody had told me anything. There were no orders for me to ship out. And after a few days, I think it

was a week, I was told that I would be going to Camp Ritchie [25:47]. Why, I didn't know what Camp Ritchie [25:49] was and so on and so forth. Anyway, I went from Fort Knox [25:55] to Camp Ritchie [26:00].

INT: A few questions, just to -- and again, I know you said earlier you still to this have no idea why that happened. In your time there at Fort Knox [26:15], did you ever have to take any sorts of tests about your English proficiency, your German proficiency, any language testing at all?

AM: No, number one, I suppose that my IQ may have been a little, quote, unquote, "high," in the particular outfit I was in. It may have been. I think it was something like 128 or something like that, I don't remember. I had it somewhere in my papers. Secondly, one of my commanding officers wanted me to apply for OSS -- no, for -- excuse me -- for Officer's School, Meadow.

INT: Yeah, Officer Candidate School? OCS [26:58].

AM: O-C, what? Officer Candidate School [27:00]. And I was interviewed, and there's no doubt that in preparation for that they looked at my background and they must've cottoned on to the fact that I know French and German. That may well be the key to my having been teased out of that group of I don't know how many to be sent to Camp Ritchie [27:30]. That would be my guess. I had an interview and I remember one thing, and that is that, in the interview there were four officers there. One of them asked me a question, "You come from Europe, and you're interested in what's happening in the European theater of war," and so on and so forth. "Do you really give a damn about [28:00] the Pacific and about the Japanese?" I mean that was one of the questions I was asked. I said, "That was for you to determine on the basis of the answers that I've given

on the questions you asked me thus far." Anyway, it was quite clear there was a certain suspicion that I didn't make it. There were good reasons for that. I would have made a very bad officer, I know that. They knew what they were doing. But it's through that moment you see, the fact that I applied for Officer's Training, that they may have gotten on to my dossier and to the fact that I know these languages.

INT: But no, nothing else, no tests, no instruction in military intelligence or anything when you were at --

AM: No. no. None. None whatever. Absolutely nothing. I mean it was really basically, tank driving [29:00].

INT: And you were the only one from your -- I mean obviously Fort Knox [29:05] is a big fort, but from your outfit that you're aware of, you're the only person?

AM: Yeah, absolutely.

INT: Did your commanding officer seem to have a clue what was going on?

AM: No. They had no clue. They were as puzzled as I was.

INT: Had you heard of Camp Ritchie [29:26]?

AM: Never. I hadn't heard anything.

INT: So did you find out you were being transferred to Camp Ritchie [29:29], or is that all you knew? Or did you know in that order, oh, that it was apparently military intelligence.

AM: I had no idea.

INT: You just showed up at Camp Ritchie [29:41], figuring out what was there …

AM: And found out -- we wound up in a Quonset hut. Is that what -- yeah, that's what it was called, a Quonset hut, in which people had accents speaking English that were even more bizarre then my accent. Because of these, [30:00] all these Europeans who showed up

there, European refugees. I had no idea.

INT: How are we on time?

INT: I would say this is a good breaking time if you're --

INT: Yeah. And listen, do you have any questions whatever leading up to Camp Ritchie?

AM: What time is it now?

INT: It's 11:00 -- 10 after 11:00.

(End of Tape 1B)

(Beginning of Tape 2A)

INT: Okay, today is September 16, 2008. This is the second in a series of recorded interviews for the Fort Hunt Oral History Project by the National Park Service. We are here interviewing P.O. Box 1142 veteran Arno Mayer at his home in Princeton, New Jersey. This is Brandon Bies, a historian with the National Park Service, as well as Vincent Santucci, Chief Ranger, and so with that, we were on a good point going into Camp Ritchie [00:34]. But if we could just real quick talk and maybe summarize a little bit what we were saying off camera just now about your English proficiency at the time.

AM: Well, I mean, I don't remember very clearly now. I had one advantage, for example, compared to my sister, because she had a year's worth of English in Europe in school. As I [01:00] said, I didn't know the difference between yes and no, which is another way of saying that I did not arrive here with an accented English. My sister had a much more difficult time getting rid of her accent. So I picked it up from going to movies and listening to FDR [01:22] on the radio and all that. It was more my ear than my brain that opened me up and connected me to the American English language. My English must've been reasonably, how should I say, understandable because in Fort Knox [01:47] the

officer of our unit asked that I read the daily news bulletin to the people in my barracks [02:00] when -- every afternoon when we returned from maneuvers. So they must've understood my reading of it apparently. It wasn't as if they weren't able to understand it. So my recollection is, that by virtue of the fact that I used the ear as much as the brain, that I got a pretty good mastery of English by -- I had a pretty good mastery of English by the time I arrived in Fort Knox [02:31]. That would be my guess, but I don't have a real clear recollection of that.

INT: So, Camp Ritchie [02:43]. You arrived there, you were in a Quonset hut, you mentioned, with lots of people with all sorts of accents.

AM: It was a bizarre place. I mean it goes straight from the Bluegrass Country where the members [03:00], the people in my barracks, had an incredible vocabulary of obscenities that I just simply couldn't understand. I mean, very other word was an obscenity when you had a conversation with them. I had never had that experience. And to go from Bluegrass Country, where most of them were southerners with southern drawl, et cetera, et cetera, to Camp Ritchie [03:42] and wind up in the Quonset hut where the other guys who arrived there just as innocently as I did, either were born in Brno or Vienna, or Berlin, or Trieste, or whatever, well, I couldn't quite believe it [04:00]. It seemed to me like something surrealistic, for God's sakes. You know the thing that struck me as this group began to take shape is that there was one American that wound up in our midst, and that was Leslie Willson [04:22]. I believe he was at Camp Ritchie [04:25]. He was from Amarillo, Texas. I can assure you that, number one, he stood out not only because he was taller than anyone else in the outfit; number two, because he spoke English the way no one else spoke it and did not have a southern drawl. Number three, the thing that

I remember about Leslie [04:54] all along, I could never forget his hands [05:00] because he was a champion typist. I think he may have been close to America's leading male typist. His hand to me was always the hand of the sculptures of Duhrer. But he stood out. He was America for me in that crazy Quonset hut, for God's sake. And everybody was reading newspapers there. Everybody was listening to the radio. And the other thing which I would have to say is that here I was in Camp Ritchie [05:39] in that Quonset hut, where they tried to teach us something about intelligence, interrogation, this, that, and the other thing, I think it was all ridiculous. But the one thing that I do remember is that, instead of only going out to Louisville [06:00], Kentucky -- I mean, to Baltimore, which is right near Camp Ritchie [06:05], or going to New York or weekends occasionally we would stay there. I know nobody will believe this, but I swear that this happened. We would sit down and would read books together. The most clearest recollection that I have is that one member of this crew, who probably you have interviewed by the name of Peter Weiss [06:30], he was going to St. John's College, under Great Books, and all I remember is one Saturday, instead of going for hot dates, we would sit there and discuss Machiavelli's prints. Now, where else in the U.S. Army would you do that, for God's sakes? That was my first contact with something classical in political [07:00] literature, you see. It goes back to that goddamn Quonset hut in Camp Ritchie [07:07]. That's what the atmosphere was like. The only other thing that I do remember, which was incredibly unsettling because I was in Camp Ritchie [07:16] when FDR [07:19] died, and I forget now the date; in April, wasn't it?

INT: Yes, it was April.

AM: There were other barracks. I don't know what was going on in the other barracks. But

there was a barrack in which there were woops of joy at the death of FDR [07:34] and FDR [07:36] for us coming from Europe, was a God. He presided over America getting into the war, this, that and the other thing. But except for that, it was these crazy Europeans. They teach us how to read a compass. I never learned how to read a compass. They'd drop me somewhere in the forest near there [08:00]. I didn't know how to read it. I found my way back -- they did it in the middle of the night -- but not in a legitimate way. I don't remember any instruction in interrogation and the whole thing was a hoot in my judgment. We learned nothing.

INT: So you don't feel like you learned a thing?

AM: Not a thing. Absolutely not a thing. It was good fun. It was good fun. I mean, I discovered Machiavelli, for God's sake.

INT: So you felt like you fit in there? Is that safe to say?

AM: Well it's safe to say they were the likes of Peter Weiss [08:34] and Henry Kolm [08:38] and so on and so forth. I mean what the hell.

INT: And you kept up with these folks, whereas I'm not sure you could name any of the folk that you were within the other camps.

AM: Well I have a few, because I have a few photographs. I have that unit, and so on, but I have not kept up with them and nobody's had kept up with me; it was perfectly normal. It's still pretty normal. I mean they considered me as being from outer space. There was no outer space then [09:00]. But it was not really belonging there. And there was also an incident at Fort Knox [09:08], an anti-Semitic [09:09] incident, which was very unpleasant.

INT: So you said you didn't learn a thing at Camp Ritchie [09:17]. But do you recall -- you

mentioned about being dumped off with a compass and going through; do you recall instances where they would dress up instructors in German uniforms?

AM: No. none. None whatsoever. I have no recollection. I'd have to make it up. I'd like to believe it happened.

INT: From what you recall, was it more field exercises or was it more classroom based? Or was it a mix?

AM: It was a mix. It was a mix and I don't even remember what happened in the classroom. The only thing I remember is these field exercises. We're supposed to find your way back with a compass and that kind of stuff, which was I thought was a hoot. They never [10:00] really explained what a compass was all about. I did never learn how to read it. I didn't take a compass seriously when they gave it to me in Boy Scouts in Luxemburg, and I saw no reason to take the compass seriously when I was at Camp Ritchie [10:11]. I mean, it just didn't make sense.

INT: Were you briefed when, either when you got there or while you were there as to why you were? What were you there to learn?

AM: No recollection.

INT: What was going to happen to you when you left?

AM: No recollection. Absolutely none. The only thing I remember is when finally we were shipped out to go to what eventually they told us was 1142 [10:39]. I have no recollection

INT: Do you recall about how long you were at Ritchie [10:44] for?

AM: Well, my guess would be something like two to three months. That'd be my guess. I don't know. I mean, the others probably have a clearer recollection of that.

INT: You'd mentioned you were in one Quonset hut with roughly 30 guys or so. Do you [11:00] remember, were there other similar groups, classes, all going through at the same time? For example, were there other groups of Americans there being trained?

AM: I really don't know. I don't remember. I just remember the unit. And I remember the whole thing being not particularly interesting. I didn't know what I was doing there. It was certainly a sea change from Fort Knox [11:28], Kentucky; it was a different kind of war. It was quite clear that they were after you not for your muscles, but apparently for something that your brain could do, that the others weren't equipped to do. The answer was, well the only reason they come after your brain is because you know another language or two. That's what it really came down to.

INT: Do you recall -- of your group of fellows in your hut, did they all have some [12:00] level of, quote, "higher education?" I mean you were taking night courses.

AM: Oh yea, they all had something.

INT: Everyone had either taken college courses -- so you're talking about more than just high school graduates.

AM: Absolutely. That would be my guess. Absolutely. And if they weren't more than that, it was certainly headed that way.

INT: Were they all young, or were there some that were --

AM: I think they were all young. All young.

INT: So mostly people that were in or straight out of college.

AM: That would be about before, while college, or shortly after. I would say up to 25 to 28. No more than that.

INT: But were you still fairly young in the -- were you --

AM: Oh yeah. I was not only young but I was small. Both. Small for -- Americans are much taller, and there were some fairly tall European people; Weiss [12:58] was fairly -- and Leslie [13:00], and so on and so forth. No, I was, I suppose one of the younger ones. I went in at 18, what the hell. And believe it -- I know you wouldn't believe it, but at the time I looked innocent, even if I wasn't, and I assure you I was not [laughs].

INT: Do you have any Camp Ritchie [13:23] questions?

INT: Did you have any thoughts or sense at that time that they might be preparing you to go over to Europe?

AM: We speculated about it. But I would say that there was no, how should I say -- there was no framed discussion of it. The officers -- I don't remember a single -- I remember some of the officers I had at Fort Knox [13:49]. I don't remember any of them from Camp Ritchie [13:53]. And I have only the recollection that we said to ourselves [14:00], they're going to be taking us overseas to Europe. Of course by then it was into '45, and it no longer looked as dangerous as it might have looked before. But I don't remember any real discussion of that.

INT: When they were dropping you off in these field exercises to navigate back, speculation as to why they were training you to do this?

AM: Well the only thing I speculated, that I remember, probably if they take you overseas they might parachute you behind enemy lines, and you might have a map because they taught us how to read maps. And with a compass you might be able to, in one way or another, number one to locate where you landed, and number two, what the nearest places that you should head for. That's the only speculation I remember making in my own little [15:00] head. But there was no official discussion of that.

INT: And you didn't recall that there were any other classes or groups that were training at Ritchie [15:11] at that time.

AM: I do not recall. I really do not recall.

INT: Because my question was, do you feel that they kept your group segregated?

AM: I thought so. But I don't know what the recollections of others are. Not that there was a systematic effort to segregate us, but it was a separate, a distinct operation.

INT: Are you aware of the production of a documentary called the "Ritchie Boys?"

AM: I have the, what do you call it, the film. But I haven't looked at it because I don't know how to use the DVD or whatever it's called. I have to wait until one of my sons gets here and puts it on for me.

INT: If we have chance before we leave we'll show you.

AM: Yeah, I haven't seen it.

INT: Okay. And just so you know there is a book that was written to a company that's just written in German [16:00]. There's no English version. So, frankly, we haven't read it. But there is a book with much more information.

AM: That'd be nice to if you'd give me the reference. You find that film interesting?

INT: Yes.

AM: Yeah.

INT: It focused more on the Ritchie [16:15] boys that went to the European theater. Of the folks --

AM: And of course most of them were very -- were of German background, I think. So I wouldn't have fit in.

INT: Of the veterans we've interviewed, a lot went through Camp Ritchie [16:38], probably

half, at least.

AM: Yeah, and what to do they say?

INT: From what I recall we've gotten mixed reactions. Some have said absolutely, that's perfect, and others have said, I don't remember it being predominately like that. So, I think it's a mixed bag, depending on your experience [17:00]. I think that what Vince said is very accurate. It focuses on the fellows who were there in '43, '44, who left Ritchie [17:09] and basically were sent over in time for D-Day. And these guys were dropped out of planes with the 101st Airborne to be used to interrogate captured German prisoners.

AM: But I'd have to make it up. If you asked me "you must say something," I couldn't. I could make it up.

INT: Do you recall if you learned German order of battle?

AM: Yeah, we learned some of that, but not very much. Not very much.

INT: Did you have the sense that they were going to -- did they have you training in regard to interrogation techniques?

AM: I didn't have any. I didn't have any.

INT: Okay.

INT: Geneva Convention, did they brief you on that sort of thing?

AM: Not a word. Not that I remember.

INT: The primary focus would be the European theater, as opposed to the Pacific theater.

AM: Right [18:00], right. Because, then I get back to what I said before. Mainly because the common thread in all this was mastery of a foreign language, in particular German. Also to some extent in my case I suppose it might have also helped that I knew some French

because in Luxembourg, you're bilingual. You see, you know both languages.

INT: And you said you had liberty to go out, take leave, to go to Baltimore.

AM: Oh, sure. Go to New York. Absolutely. There's no doubt about that. I just read about, in some of these letters that I wrote, of my day of arrival in Camp Ritchie [18:39], which was sort of a hoot because I got there to Baltimore and missed the bus. Somebody held us up by offering us a taxi. We went in a taxi, and then in the middle distance, halfway between Baltimore and Camp Ritchie [18:58], he stopped the car and said [19:00] that it would be so and so much; it was an astronomical sum, and I sort of remember trying to calm down the others who were in the car with me, because I would have killed this guy. I don't mean kill, but you know what I mean. It's that kind of stuff. But there was -- I don't think there was any big secret about that comparable to P.O. Box 1142 [19:21]. I think it was rather, they knew that some spooky stuff was being done there, but that's all that I remember.

INT: At the end of the war, they did hold some German prisoners at Ritchie [19:37].

AM: Oh I had no idea.

INT: Do you recall ever seeing German prisoners there?

AM: No. No absolutely not. Absolutely not. They did hold German prisoners there? I didn't know that.

INT: Late in the war.

INT: And especially after the war, they actually used some of the German prisoners to help look at captured German documents.

AM: Documents, I see. I had no clue on that.

INT: So, 1142 [20:00]. How do you find out that your days at Camp Ritchie [20:02] are done

and you're being -- did you all -- did you graduate, or was it just, okay, pack your bags?

AM: There was no graduation. Pack your bags, the way I remember it. They took us to the Pentagon [20:20]. The way I remember it, I don't know how other people remember it, I remember the steps of the Pentagon, what the Pentagon was then. An officer came out from the Pentagon [20:33] and told us that we were going to go to some installation not far from Washington, D.C.

INT: And you were all on a bus? You took a bus?

AM: They put us in a bus. And this is that famous bus that I'm sure you've heard about 100 times.

INT: Please tell us.

AM: In the sense that the only glass to look out of the bus in that bus was the windshield [21:00] because after all, the driver had to see where he was going, and I think it also -- the two windows on his right and on his left, but all the other windows in the bus were boarded up with plywood. Now, needless to say, I remember being a little puzzled by that. I'd never been in that kind of a bus, nor did I know where they were taking us. And they drove us to Fort Hunt [21:35], and checked us into the Quonset hut -- I mean, by then, I knew Quonset huts, you see. It was -- became a home away from home. They never really gave us, as far as I remember, any kind of a global perspective of what was happening at Post Office [22:00] Box 1142. And how the decision was made to make me the morale officer [22:04], which in and of itself is a ridiculous title to have, of some of these prisoners, I haven't got a clue. I haven't got a clue. It may well be that my German was not as good as that of the native German speakers. Perfectly possible. On the other hand, I may have had more conversations with my charges, that is to say with some of

these scientists and some of these officers and the others. But there is no doubt that when I speak, and at that time I spoke German fluently, I did have a touch of a Luxembourg accent. It was certainly not what one would call high German. "Hochdeutsch." I didn't speak Hochdeutsch. So how they decided to use me to do that, I have no clue. I have absolutely -- I never figured it out. Nor could I give you a clear [23:00] idea of what my responsibilities were. In other words, I do not remember how I spent the day. All I do remember is that there was a regular routine, that I brought them newspapers, magazines, some whiskey, et cetera, et cetera, that kind of stuff. But that couldn't have taken a whole day and I did nothing else. So, I had the impression that I wasn't really doing anything much, and indeed I wasn't. But somebody thought that it could serve a purpose to be nice to them and to engage them in conversation that was not [24:00] intended to extract information. I was not an interrogator. I mean that was clear. I was the morale officer [24:04]; I was not an interrogator. And as a result of that, I perhaps put them more at ease than some of the others did, because after a while, it became clear that I was just a delivery boy for all sorts of stuff, you see. That's the way I recollect what I did in all these months that I was in Post Office Box 1142 [24:28]. Others who were there did much more important work, I never had any doubt. And I felt that maybe I didn't measure up because the others were doing interrogations, and in addition to that, they were reading documents, et cetera, et cetera. I was doing none of that. Absolutely none of it. And yet, I formed very close relationships, not to say actual friendships. One doesn't have [25:00] very many friends in a lifetime. Maybe I had five or six. You have many acquaintances, colleagues. In America we use the word "friendship" and "friend" much too loosely. We even use the word to say Russia is a friend of ours at a certain --

that's bullshit. In international politics, there is no such thing as friends and friendship. Anyway, I formed very close relationships, friends, friendships with some of the people who were doing more interesting things than I was doing in P.O. Box 1142 [25:40]. And I should add here, that there was one friend of mine, whose photograph you gave to me recently when we met in Washington, Carlo Weiss [25:57]. I didn't know whether you interviewed him [26:00].

INT: We haven't found him. Do you know if he's still living?

AM: Yeah, I'll tell you after. And Carlo Weiss [26:07] was from Trieste. He was the only one from Trieste. I mean it was really a mini league of nations. From Trieste, from Vienna, Prague, Trieste. Even a guy from Trieste. And we became really rather -- we are friends, close friends. And Carlo [26:31], and I know you won't believe this, but anyway, I introduced him to the woman that became his wife. We were very close. He went to study political science at Yale University. I had never heard of Yale. I didn't know how to spell Yale, and I certainly had never heard of New Haven. But Carlo [26:51] said, "Why don't you come visit me?" And so I went up for a weekend to Yale. I took the train at 125th Street [27:00], and went to New Haven. He was writing his doctoral dissertation by then. I was still not sure what I was going to do. He said, "Why don't you apply for the program up here?" And I said, "Come on, you're crazy. It's not my stuff." I didn't know what Yale was and so on and so forth. He said, "Look you have nothing to lose." He made an appointment for me to see the chairman of the department. The chairman of the department at that time was also the director of graduate studies, the man by the name of Bernard Brody. Bernard Brody's claim to fame was that he wrote the first book on atomic diplomacy before Kissinger did. Highly respected guy. So, he

interviewed me. And he said "What are your grades?" Well, my grades weren't very good because I was working [28:00] in the daytime and going at night at City College. I told him it was a very mixed bag. But I was veteran, and I had the G.I. Bill. And he said, "I'll make a deal with you. You have another five courses to take to graduate from the Baruch School of Business Administration at City College. You get all As, I'll let you in." I got all A's. And in those days, things still happened that way. You didn't write an application, and I was admitted. And that was the beginning of my academic career. Crazy as it may sound. So it happened through a friendship that I had formed, at P.O. Box 1142 [28:48]. Or first at Ritchie [28:50] and then at P.O. Box 1142.

INT: So you remember Carlo Weiss [28:50] was in your group at Ritchie?

AM: I seem to remember so. But I [29:00] wouldn't swear to that one. I would swear to the fact that he was at P.O. Box 1142 [29:05].

INT: Okay. Well we'll have to chat at some point about the whereabouts of Carlo because we've been trying to track him down for a while. I didn't realize that you had the connection.

INT: You want to chat about that now? We only have a few minutes before we change.

AM: You want to shut it off? And I'll tell you how I might be able to help you to find him.

INT: Sure, but we can record it if you want.

AM: Oh okay. There's absolutely nothing secret about it. Carlo [29:34] up at this moment had a very unhappy life in the sense that, Ginny, his wife, died at 37, 38 of cancer. And I won't go into all the details. Anyway, he went back to Italy, and lived in Milano. We saw each other a few times. The last contact I had with him [30:00] -- and it was very indirect and it really didn't work -- is I was in London in connection with something with

my work, and I happened to have lunch with an architect, who knew Carlo's [30:17] daughter, who is an architect, and I called her in London. I can get that phone number for you and then you can get to him. I think that his health is very fragile.

INT: [unintelligible] he might be blind?

AM: And that he has lost most of his vision. But I think he may be -- I think he's still alive. Okay? And I will try to get in touch with his daughter and ask her how to get in touch with Carlo [30:46].

INT: Yeah, and if anything just let him know, I don't know if he knows about this project.

AM: Probably not.

INT: His is a name that, for whatever reason, a lot of people seem to remember Carlo Weiss [30:57]. I don't know if it's his personality or whatnot [31:00], but a number of veterans that we've interviewed, and not just veterans from your group at Ritchie [31:07] and then some went to Fort Strong, but folks that were at 1142 [31:13] before you were.

AM: Oh really?

INT: Very much. I don't know if you recall Rudy Pins [31:19]?

AM: Yeah sure.

INT: Rudy definitely remembered Carlo, very closely. Erwin Lachman [31:22]?

AM: No.

INT: Erwin Lachman [31:24] was a room monitor. His older brother, Alexis Lachman [31:26], was a lieutenant at 1142 [31:31]. He remembered Carlo [31:33] very well. In fact I think he was one of the ones that said he was in Milano. So, do you recall what Carlo [31:38] may have done at 1142 [31:39], what his job was?

AM: I know that he was doing stuff that I wasn't doing. And you see, because he came from

Trieste and his Italian was perfect, he was one of the few [32:00] who knew Italian. And I think that that may have become his wicket there, in the sense that whenever something came up related to Italy, whether military, political, diplomatic and so on and so forth, I think they fall back on him--

(End of Tape 2A)

(Beginning of Tape 2B)

INT: Before --

AM: No, I was going to say the only other thing that I remember about Carlo Weiss [00:06], because we were very close friends. His parents lived up in Riverdale, and I went up there any number of times, and met his parents and so on and so forth. What was left even more scratches on my mind was that in the house right next to the house of the Weiss' [00:28], that was the house of Toscanini and Horowitz. It was the first -- the only time in my life that I met them. And then Carlo's younger brother, Pietro, he became a pianist of sorts and I remember the only time that in New York City I distributed leaflets to get people to go to a concert, so that part of it [01:00], you see, because at the time Toscanini was the God in New York. You know the NBC Symphony Orchestra, and there was Toscanini.

INT: So, 1142 [01:14], you arrived, and I think you touched on this earlier. Were you ever sat down, welcomed to 1142 [01:22], here's what this place is, here's what you're going to do?

AM: Absolutely not. I have no recollection of that. I have none whatever. If others have told you, I'd be very -- I'll be very eager to hear what they tell you.

INT: And so you know, it depends, again, on when the folks arrived. Some of the folks -- and

again, what we've really come to realize, is the 1142 [01:47] when it opened in the summer of 1942, six months, seven months into the war, versus the 1142 [01:54] when you were there were very different focuses, a lot the same, but very different [02:00].

AM: Very different. Radically different. And also occasionally we had the sense that they were looking down on us because they had had more experience than we, and it was the real stuff; the war was coming to an end.

INT: The folks who had been there already?

AM: Right, right, right. You see, the one thing, and I think I said this to you once before, that I became absolutely convinced of early in the game, is that I was at 1142 [02:32] not really in any direct way to be connected with World War II [02:40]; I was basically into the business of cranking up the Cold War [02:48]. It wasn't called that at the time, but we were obsessed by then with getting these scientists so that they shouldn't go to the Soviets, obviously they didn't want to go [03:00] in the first place. Even to the extent that which there were some that were playing with that idea and wanted to use those that were already on our side, to help us get those that were still laboring as to whether they might go with the Soviets. The second thing, since I took care of some of these, was a morale officer [03:20]. And I took care of some of these generals who were brought here. All of the men had had experience on the Eastern Front, and the only thing that I was told at the time that really interested the interrogators is what is that Russian Army, the Red Army [03:38] all about. What is their order of battle, et cetera, et cetera? And do you know anyone in the hierarchy and so on and so forth. So those were the two things that made me say, "I'm preparing" -- I didn't --the word "Cold War" didn't exist, the phrase I used: "I'm preparing the next world war." And [04:00] I even said this to my

parents. I mean from the beginning I said this to my parents, I said "Look I'm preparing the next world war. I can't tell you what I'm doing, but that's what I'm doing." And then they obviously laughed at me and thought, once again he's gone -- our son is going off the rails. And with good reason.

INT: Do you recall ever dealing with folks, at 1142 [04:23], from the Vlasov Army [04:24]?

AM: No.

INT: So these were German generals. There were no -- you don't recall there actually being Russian -- were there ever Russian generals or officers there?

AM: No, no. I had no experience with that. But someone mentioned to me, I think it was you, it was somebody -- I did meet Alexander Dallin [04:43]. And we met a number of times afterwards. I don't remember now if Alex [04:48] got his Ph.D. at Yale, he may have. I'm not clear on that, but I don't remember. But anyway, in some ways, our interests began to overlap [05:00], because in my scholarly work began to be interested in certain aspects of Russian Soviet history and so on, which of course, has been his principal, his chief expertise and he was goddamn good at what he did, particularly in terms of the German invasion of Russia and so on and so forth. And I remember meeting him a number of times, at 1142 [05:26], but I would have to add he was not a friend. He was not for me a Carlo Weiss [05:33], a Henry Kolm [05:34], or a Peter Weiss [05:35], or a Leslie Willson [05:36], you get what I'm driving at. It was totally, in my judgment, a totally separate operation. I did learn, while I was there, not that I knew who he was. There was a very high animal there by the name of Hilger [05:52].

INT: Gustav Hilger [05:53].

AM: Gustav Hilger [05:53]. That I learned. I didn't know who he was. I mean, today I know.

But I didn't know then.

INT: So you had no [06:00] interaction with him?

AM: I had no clue. None whatever.

INT: Do you know if Dallin [06:04] and folks, were they working with Hilger [06:06]?

AM: That would be my guess. I have never asked him. I did not ask him while I knew him back them, nor have I ever thought of asking him afterwards.

INT: Yeah, and you were ever -- the other name that we've been given in terms of somebody who worked with the Russians was a gentlemen name Alexis -- another Alexis -- Alexis [Alex] Schidlovsky [06:27].

AM: No.

INT: No, okay. Unfortunately, both him and Dallin [06:36] have passed away, so we haven't been able to --

AM: Oh, I didn't know Alex [06:39] had passed away.

INT: Yeah, he passed away, I think, about seven or eight years ago, 2000, 2001. His wife is still alive, but he passed away.

AM: No, I did not know that. I can't say that I knew him very well. I mean, I did meet him, sure I must've met him what, eight, 10 times or something like that. I have [07:00] a vague recollection that we also met professionally when our fields of interest sort of intersected. But he wound up -- I think he was at Stanford.

INT: Maybe I'm incorrect, but I thought it was Berkeley, but it could be -- maybe it was Stanford.

AM: It was on the west coast. That's the only thing I can tell you. I really haven't much to say about 1142 [07:28].

[talking simultaneously]

INT: No, no, I didn't want to stop you, but we've got lots of questions to still get to. And this is interesting, what we're hearing from you about how you and your group, per se, when I say your group, I'll refer to your group of folks from Camp Ritchie [07:51], the Peter Weiss's [07:53], and --

AM: And the Henry Kolms [07:54]. Henry Kolm was in my house in New York with my parents all the time. You know my sister [08:00] asked me, well, because Henry [08:01] is a peculiar fellow. I mean he was sort of funny and not funny. It was a mixture of the two, and so my sister couldn't figure him out. Then we met the brother who was younger and so it was very close relationship. I never met his family except his brother. But he was a very close friend, yes indeed. He was.

INT: And, as a side note, we have Leslie Willson [08:27], well Leslie Willson kept diaries, every single day. And we have those.

AM: Are you going to share those?

INT: He writes a lot about -- particularly about you, Henry [08:41], and to an extent Peter Weiss [08:43].

AM: You're kidding.

INT: If there were the three -- and I haven't read through every page. We actually have some interns who are currently transcribing them for us and typing up all the diaries, but rather than talking --

AM: Can I get them or not?

INT: Oh yeah. No, I think so. I [09:00] want to clear it with his son.

AM: He has a son? I thought he only had a daughter.

INT: No, he has a son and two daughters. Brian I think is his son.

AM: Well I'll have to straighten out the question of the letter. Because that still remains a mystery.

INT: According to his son, he -- they have the letter. The original, the actual.

AM: Well if they have it, then we can determine whether or not it's addressed to Leslie [09:28] and Arno [09:30] -- I mean, to Leslie Willson and Arno Mayer -- or whether -- you may have heard that day that we had a meeting in -- at the fort, right. You remember that others claim that they were along on that one, Peter Weiss [09:48] among others.

INT: It's pretty clear from, because when I visited with Leslie [09:57], I asked him to tell the story.

AM: And how did he tell it [10:00]?

INT: He said it was the two of you. He didn't -- you know.

AM: I told you when we started.

INT: And the diary, he writes a diary entry about it.

AM: No.

INT: Yeah. It's recorded in the diary. And when the letter -- the actual ride is recorded, and what happened with the letter coming in to P.O. Box 1142 [10:23] is also recorded.

AM: You mean when we were summoned?

INT: Yes.

AM: You're not serious.

INT: No, it's in the diary.

AM: When the guy was trembling? Because it was the first time he had received a letter from the commander in chief.

INT: Yeah, we want you to tell us the whole story.

INT: Well, since we're talking about it, would you mind just telling the whole story?

INT: How much time we have? About 20 minutes.

AM: It's not going to take 20 minutes.

INT: So the whole story, from the ride as well as the letter.

AM: The whole story is very simple. I mean Leslie [10:53] and I, for reasons that are difficult to explain, we really hit it off. You know, a guy from Amarillo [11:00] and a guy from Luxembourg. And we had strict instructions not to do any hitch hiking on the Parkway that goes from Alexandria to Mt. Vernon because we would give away the location, et cetera, et cetera. And we had dates in New York for a particular weekend. Since it was New York obviously, it was my turf, and I -- through my sister, found friends, girlfriends and so on. Well anyway, we decided to hell, it's raining cats and dogs, the bus is late, and so on and so and we were going to go out there on Sunday, and who's going to pay any attention? We started thumbing [12:00]. I don't know how he writes up the story, but that's my recollection. Very, very elegant car came along and stopped, and there were three women in it; two in the front, and in those days you didn't have these bucket seats in the front, it was a bench. There were two women in the front and there was a woman in the back. They stopped, "Where are you going?" We said we were going to Union Station in Washington. They said "Well we're going to Washington but we won't be able to take you to Union Station, but we can get you pretty close to it, then you're on your own," and we said "We're infinitely grateful that you should take us." The woman in the back moved up front to make room for us, in large part because we were soaked. And they didn't want to get wet, a perfectly normal thing to do. And off we go [13:00].

So we started driving, and they were talking among themselves. At a certain point the woman who was driving asked me what I was doing in the Army, and I said, "Well, I, you know, don't feel comfortable talking about it; it's without any interest, and it's nothing very secret either," because this was after Hiroshima. "Even if I had a small atomic bomb in my bag here, I wouldn't tell you." There was a little sneering in the front, and they continued talking. Then the conversation was totally innocent. We talked about anything, general conversation in the car, and the women decided they were going to take us to Union Station instead of dropping us off because we had been very nice and civilized and so on [14:00]. They take us to the Union Station and drop us there; we profusely thanked them for this ride, because it made it possible for us to keep our date in New York. We got on the train, and about 10 minutes out [phone rings] --

[audio break]

INT: Let's back up to getting dropped off at Union Station.

AM: Yeah, so dropped off at Union Station, we got on the train and about 10 minutes outside of Union Station, Leslie [14:32] grabs my right arm, and he said to me, "They called her Mamie [14:40]." I said, "What does that mean?" "Well that could only be Mamie Eisenhower [14:52]." I said "What makes you think so?" "Well, it's clear from the way they talked she's, you know, [15:00] married to a military man or something." I said, "Come on, you're crazy." But by then we were nervous as hell, because we weren't supposed to hitch hike, and certainly I wasn't supposed to make a joke about secret work and an atomic bomb. We became rather glum. It wasn't funny any longer. And he had the swell idea that the way to try to get out of this box would be to write a letter to Mamie Eisenhower [15:42] and thank her and her friends for having picked us up. So he drafted

a letter to Mrs. Eisenhower [15:55], which he addressed, to the Pentagon [laughs]. I mean, the whole thing is crazy [16:00]. And he said, it was Mamie [16:04], and so on and that he recognized the name Mamie, which was not that usual, in large part because he was too from Amarillo. Mamie [16:13] was from Amarillo, and that we just wanted to express our gratitude. That was the letter. I don't have a copy of that letter. And I don't think he does, and if he does I'd like to see it. But that letter was written because otherwise there would have been no response. And I don't know, four, five days after that, the two of us are summoned to the commander of -- I don't know who it was at the time -- of Post Office 1142 [16:44], and I've never been in the presence of the commander, I mean he was a high animal. In addition to that, I'd never been in the headquarters, the central office of it. I mean, I was nervous [17:00], especially a little Jewish boy is always nervous because in German, there is a phrase [speaks German] or something like that. Anyway, the main point is that I didn't know why we were being summoned there. So we got there, and the guy was incredibly respectful of us, practically bowing from the waist and handed us this letter from General Eisenhower [17:31], which had been delivered by courier. That had impressed the commander, it certainly impressed us. It didn't impress us; it scared the shit out of us. Then we opened the letter. And the letter, what it says, "My wife," I think I'm quoting almost verbatim, "Mamie [17:53] has been -- yeah, has been ill" -- or "intermittently ill [18:00], and she has asked me to answer your very nice note. We invariably get enormous pleasure out of giving rides and meeting smart looking soldiers" et cetera, et cetera. Anyway, it was just the letter that made me say to Leslie [18:19], and I don't know whether he had this in his diary, but I said to Leslie, "This guy's going to run for president." Because, why should

he write a letter like that? It was completely ridiculous. That's the Eisenhower [18:34] story and the Mamie [18:36] story, you see. Now, I have the recollection that it was addressed to Leslie Willson [18:45] and Arno Mayer [18:46], I mean, by then Leslie was staff sergeant, and I think I was private. To Staff Sergeant Leslie Willson [18:55] and Private Arno Mayer, or something like that. But in the meantime, after that, shortly [19:00] after that, a lot of other people, because they heard the story, claimed that they were with us in the car, that the letter was addressed to them as well and so on and so forth. When in fact, the way I remember it, it was just the two of us. Not that I hold any particular grief for that, but I find it interesting that some others would want to cut in on this very funny story, which is without any significance, just a hoot.

INT: Were there any repercussions from that? I mean this commanding officer handing you this letter, did he seem mad? Had he read the letter?

AM: No, no, no, no, no. We opened it in front of him. It was sealed. No, no, no. I mean, come on, how ridiculous can you get. No, there were no repercussions at all.

INT: And in terms of the hitch hiking?

AM: No, no. Absolutely nothing.

INT: Was it Mamie [19:57] who moved from the back seat to the front seat [20:00]?

AM: That's the way I remember it. That's the way I remember it, but that I wouldn't swear. That Mamie [20:08] was there and that Leslie Willson [20:10] from Amarillo, Texas, that he immediately cottoned on to it, because he said to me "They called her Mamie," and I said, "What do you mean?" and then he told me; and I think Amarillo may have come up in the conversation between the women -- between and among the women, you see, as far as I know. But I -- again, I was totally innocent in that particular affair. I didn't cotton

on to Mamie [20:37], I didn't have the idea to write a letter, I wouldn't have known how to write a letter, et cetera, et cetera.

INT: The story as you tell it is almost identical to the way Leslie [20:50] told it to me in December. And, the only difference is he remembers that, how you mentioned having a package [21:00] with you -- he recalled, or that the package was apparently chocolates that you were taking to the dates and that you -- he remembered that you had told the women that you had an atomic bomb.

AM: He remembered that? Then I'm not making it up.

INT: No. He said that Arno [21:22], I mean he accuses you of everything, that Arno told them kind of like a smart aleck, "Well, I have the atomic bomb right here." In the package of chocolates.

AM: Yeah, I feel comforted to some extent that he should have recalled that. Because I don't have the evidence. The whole thing is crazy. I mean it's really insane.

INT: Almost to a T, including that he was the one who put it together about it being Mamie [21:51].

AM: Oh he did say that?

INT: Yeah. Literally, the stories were -- I'm picturing it right now wanting play the two stories right next to -- and we'll have to get you a transcript [22:00] of what he said, but it's exactly what you said.

INT: Did you make it to New York for your dates?

AM: Oh yeah.

INT: And did any of that lead to marriages?

AM: Well this gets complicated. Because any number of them found their wives through me.

I don't know why. Henry Kolm [22:25], I introduced Henry Kolm's wife to him. I introduced Carlo Weiss [22:36] to his wife, because she was a friend of a girlfriend of mine. Now, as far as Leslie [22:44] is concerned, I wouldn't be able to tell you.

INT: Just curious if Mamie [22:51] had an influence over the rest of your lives, based on getting you to the date on time.

AM: [laughs] This I just [23:00] don't remember now.

INT: Well, that's fantastic. What do we have, about 10 minutes?

INT: Yeah.

INT: Okay. So, in the last 10 minutes, we'll probably -- well, we'll ask you some more after lunch if you're so kind. But -- and I know you somewhat answered this before, could you describe what your role was at 1142 [23:27]? Would you classify it as just basically being the morale officer [23:27]? That was your assignment?

AM: Basically. The morale officer [23:31], and to engage them in informal conversation.

INT: And when you say "them," you're speaking of German generals?

AM: I'm speaking of both German scientists and of German generals. When I say German generals, I only remember those two very clearly, and it could be [Heinrich] Aschenbrenner [23:58]. I forget the other guy's name [24:00]. And you've seen in the interview I gave to Studs Terkel, that scene when they were debating as to who should sit in that fragile chair, that armchair. So those two I remember, and I remember some of these scientists, wasn't only Wernher von Braun [24:25], there were four others. I have now recovered the names, as I went through my papers, you see. But I don't have it in my memory at the moment. But what I have said to you about Wernher von Braun [24:38], I really don't think I made that up. I really don't. As I keep saying to both

colleagues and to members of my family, I have the banality it takes to write books but I don't have any imagination. I couldn't think that my interaction with Wernher von Braun [24:58], I couldn't think it up. I couldn't imagine [25:00] it. I couldn't make it up. I mean, that particular incident when I took him shopping in Washington, I couldn't.

INT: And you're certain that happened in Washington. That was not at Fort Strong?

AM: I took him to Lansburgh Brothers. And there's no Lansburgh Brothers in Boston. And I've checked as to whether there was a Lansburgh Brothers at that time, in a department store in Washington, D.C., and yes, indeed there was. I have absolutely no doubt about that. Now what is mysterious to me, because I don't remember it -- not mysterious, but where I'm not clear, I don't remember when Wernher von Braun [25:40] arrived in Ritchie [25:41]. He wasn't there very long.

INT: At 1142 [25:40]?

AM: Yes, excuse me -- at 1142 [25:42]. I'm sorry; in 1142 [25:47], I don't remember that. I have a clearer recollection of then not long thereafter winding up at Fort Strong [25:56], and then having that large contingent [26:00] of German scientists; for whom I had to translate the Christmas sermons and so on and so forth, you see. And from whom I have that Christmas card that is signed by about 12 or 15 of them. But I don't remember when Wernher von Braun [26:15] arrived at 1142 [26:18]. You may have been able to piece that story together.

INT: Not exactly, because there's still, I don't want to say confusion. There are a number of veterans like yourself who have said absolutely, von Braun [26:32] was at 1142 [26:31]. There have been a couple who have said --

AM: I should add one thing though, okay, and that is Wernher von Braun [26:43], who I really

think was there -- but for God's sakes, I didn't really know what he added up to. I mean that -- anybody who tells you who was at 1142 [26:54] and met Wernher von Braun [26:55] and had a conversation with him or whatever, et cetera, et cetera, [27:00] and if they tell you he knew what Wernher von Braun [26:59] was all about, I'll call him a liar unless he was from the inside group that in so many different ways arranged for his being brought to the United States, and those guys knew what they were doing: the [Operation] Paperclip [27:19] people. But the likes of us, the Leslie Willsons [27:26], we didn't have a clue who he was. So I don't want to pump myself up. It's only retrospectively that the name has a resonance.

INT: It stuck with you, it was just like if Aschenbrenner [27:40] had gone off after the war, and you, and that would've stuck with you.

AM: And it registered for another reason, because, if you want to see the stereotype that we have of the Prussian, tall, blond hair, blue eyes, Goddammit it was Wernher von Braun [27:56]. And that also stayed with me. Anyways [28:00], sorry. I shouldn't have gotten into it.

INT: Do you recall, Henry Kolm [28:06] recalled that not only was von Braun [28:04] was there, but his brother Magnus von Braun [28:12] was there as well.

AM: Okay now, there are photographs. And certainly his brother Magnus [28:22] was at Fort Strong [28:24]. That I have absolutely no doubt because there are photographs of Wernher von Braun [28:29] going to meet his brother on his arrival shipside. In those days, one didn't fly that much. Sorry we were raised on the idea that you go across the Atlantic, you take an airplane. A lot of people came by boat. My recollection is that he came by boat, and that by then, I think he was up in Fort Strong [28:55], but I may be

wrong.

INT: I misspoke. Henry Kolm [29:00] -- Henry Kolm remembered von Braun and -- excuse me, Wernher [29:04] and Magnus von Braun [29:05] both being at Fort Strong [29:06].

AM: Yes.

INT: And he remembered that Magnus von Braun [29:06] had apparently gotten quite seasick. For whatever reason, that was stuck into his [unintelligible].

AM: Well that would confirm that he came by boat, that there was a boat-side incident. And that photograph I see of his going to the boat; because at that time Wernher von Braun [29:23], I think, had his arm in a sling. And I think he picked up his brother.

INT: So you remember that von Braun came to -- Wernher von Braun [29:33] came to 1142 [29:31], and then later went up to Fort Strong [29:34] and met up with is brother and then from there --

AM: There is one other possibility, and that is that they dropped him off for a few weeks or months in Fort Strong [29:52], between two other locations. It may have been another location in addition to Fort Strong [29:55], but I don't know [30:00]. That he was there, I have no doubt. But who knows? I may be fabulating.

INT: We've had numerous other veterans, particularly the ones in your group per se, who have verified that he was at 1142 [30:16]. One of the reason we are asking the question is, believe it or not, I was at the National Archives a year or so ago, and I overheard the person in front of me asking some questions of the archivist "Oh I'm trying to pull this record, relating to Wernher von Braun's [30:37] and V1, V2 rockets," and I being nosy, butted in. I said "I'm sorry I couldn't help but overhearing you're looking up von Braun. What are you working on?" And he turned out to be his biographer. Von Braun [30:50]

just had -- this gentlemen just published the biography on Wernher von Braun that just came out last year.

AM: I have the reviews. Yes, I haven't read the book yet.

INT: I mentioned [31:00] about what we were doing with 1142 [31:03], and I said about how Wernher von Braun [31:01] had been at 1142 [31:03]. He said "I didn't put it in the book," because he said, "short of the" -- he mentioned, "Short of the Arno Mayer [31:15] " quotes "in Studs Terkel, that's the only reference, and he said, "and I don't really believe it." And I said, "Well what if I told you that we've interviewed eight or nine veterans who all say he was there?" He said, "Well I haven't found any records of it, so I didn't put it in the book." So there's still some question, but we had eight or nine veterans -- I don't think -- and again you asked what comes of these interviews, when you get eight or nine people telling you the same story --

INT: Independently.

INT: -- then you have support for that.

INT: I think we have -- we're going to lose the tape here.

INT: Okay.

AM: You ready for some lunch?

INT: Absolutely. Fantastic.

AM: Shut it off.

(End of Tape 2B)

(Beginning of Tape 3A)

INT: Okay, today is September 16, 2008. We're here conducting the third in a series of interviews for the Fort Hunt Oral History Project with the National Park Service. We are

here at the home of Arno Mayer at his home in Princeton, New Jersey. This is Brandon Bies and Vincent Santucci, of the George Washington Memorial Parkway and with that, we'll go ahead and get started, and Vince has a question.

INT: This is mostly for Brandon's sake. During lunch we had a chance to talk about several things. We talked about Google, and we talked about googling 1142 [00:38], and Princess Matilda [00:40], and I just wanted you to restate your reaction to that whole discussion.

AM: You know, how can I be so stupid not have thought of googling this? I mean, good God, where have I been? It's just about the only thing I can do on a computer. I can do nothing else. And then in addition to that [01:00] it had never, absolutely never, occurred to me to ask, what to me seems like one of the most obvious questions to ask, and where did the number 1142 [01:13] come from? I mean, here I lived in that post office box I don't know for how many months, and it never occurred to me how that address came to be. So, I'm absolutely now fascinated by the question how did they think up this 1142 [01:31], how did it come to be? And I'm sure there are many crazy, how should I say, different stories about it, as to the venue of it, where it came from and so on and so forth. And I think it's rather just the wild speculations that would turn me on rather than the definite truth of it, if there was any.

INT: Okay. I guess to get back into the swing of things from before lunch [02:00], we had a lot of conversations during lunch and a little bit this morning about Wernher von Braun [02:06] and some of them are recounted in the Studs Terkel book, but could you again, just for us right now, go ahead and talk about your interactions with von Braun [02:18], what you were assigned to do, what interactions you had, and if you wouldn't mind

mentioning some of the stories that you mentioned in the interview with Studs Terkel.

AM: Well, I mean, I had no idea who Wernher von Braun [02:33] was, I think, at the time. I had absolutely no idea. All I knew was that he was a highly at once respected and competent scientist. It was quite clear that, as a morale officer [02:51], I was to treat him with kid gloves, not that in any of my other activities [03:00] I ever took off kid gloves, because my assignment was to be a kid glove. Though I would immediately have to admit that I do not have any clear recollection of who gave me the instructions and what I was told to do. So when I saw Wernher von Braun [03:21] and one or two scientists who shared his little hut, or these high officers from the German Army -- one of them from the SS [03:33], probably by the name of Aschenbrenner [03:35], the other one, tall and the very, how should I say -- the very idea of what we have of what a Prussian officer of old lineage would look like: tall with blond hair and blue eyes and so on and extremely well behaved, the other one much cooler. But I was nice to all of them. What did I do [04:00]? I brought them newspapers. I was chastised once because I brought them some left wing newspapers. I remember bringing them PM at one moment, which some people objected to and I don't even know how those who then chastised me found out that I had done that, but in fact, Life magazine, and then as I indicated also some occasionally, a bottle of whiskey and so on and so forth. I was to engage them in innocent conversation. I was not to come on as an interrogator, and I was not an interrogator, and as I think I indicated -- I don't have any recollection of having been trained as an interrogator at Camp Ritchie [04:44]. But then again some of the others who were dealing with these people hadn't been trained either. And they became interrogators. Any conversations were, as you can imagine, were very loose. At the same time, I was 19 years old [05:00].

Sure I was in American uniform, but was a little tense, because I'd have to admit, of course, I hated just any German. In particular, when they tried to make nice to the United States and so on, because I knew they had their agenda to in one way or another either clean their skirts and make themselves useful. In the case of von Braun [05:29] I learned fairly rapidly -- now I don't know if I learned this at 1142 [05:37] or Fort Strong [05:37], but my recollection is that I learned it at 1142 [05:41], that they would over -- they were brought over here, they were promised per diem, they were also promised a fairly rapid naturalization, and also they were promised that number one [06:00] -- not number one, but they were promised that their families could follow them. This is the recollection that I have. Now, I may be making this up on the basis of what I have learned afterwards and read afterwards, but I don't really think so. The only time, and I think I may have this in the Studs Terkel, I don't remember that, where I really exploded at Wernher von Braun [06:21], he was with one of his fellow scientists, whose name I do not remember now is when he, in a conversation that we had, which was a very informal conversation, he said to me that the only mistake that [Adolf] Hitler [06:39] had made was to go after the Jews, to kill the Jews. At which point I exploded, and sort of said to be sure that Germans had killed many Jews, we really didn't know anything as yet about -- the word "Holocaust" didn't [07:00] exist. We didn't know anything of the nature of the phrase "Final Solution." Absolutely not. One knew that the Jews had been one of the prime victims of the war that had made millions of victims. When he said that to me, I lost it. And I said that I found this statement altogether inadmissible because many other people died in that war, and the implication was obviously for political reason, that he von Braun [07:42], wanted the Americans to know that he fully approved of the way in which we were now

going to face up to the Soviets in Europe. This was to be my first run in with this business [08:00]. I also remember saying to him, "I wonder what you would be saying to the Soviets had you gone over to the Soviet side. I'm sure that you would've probably reversed the formula; you might have said the only mistake that Hitler [08:18] made is he came after the Soviets. It's all right to go after the Jews," or something like that. Anyway, I was chastised, because all the conversations that we had in that small piece at Fort Hunt, at 1142 [08:37], that small area where they lived was totally wired. In other words, they not only listened to the conversations that they had among themselves, for example if three or four scientists that shared a small bunker, whatever it was, or these generals, you see, but also the area outside, when they sat outside [09:00] on the lawn. There was this little table with these two chairs, and that area also was wired. I was called in afterwards, and told that I had no business exploding on him. I was to just listen and make them feel comfortable. Anyway, then the second major event that I remember is when they came to me in the month of, I think it was October, and they said that the situation was very serious in Germany. That is to say there were enormous food shortages and so on, and that they would like to send some packages, Christmas packages, to their families, their wives and so on. I thought it was totally insane [10:00], and I went to the commander to whoever was in charge of me -- I don't remember who the officer was, and I said, "Look, they want to go shopping for Christmas and send packages." My superior told me, "Well, we are to keep them happy. If that's what they want to do, we take them shopping." Well, anyways, so he arranged for a car to be ready a few days later, and I gave Wernher von Braun [10:34] and three other scientists, whose names I don't now recollect, gave them sort of an appointment, what do I know, let's say

9:00 in the morning. They showed up at the appointed place, two of them -- I don't know whether it was Wernher von Braun [10:53], but I think so, were wearing, as so many Germans did, who arrived from Europe at the time [11:00], they were wearing these long leather coats that practically went down to their ankles. One or two of them wore hats with Tyrolese feathers in them. I said look, it was pouring rain, and we had no other coats, we had no other hats, and by then I was beginning to amuse myself. I said, "Well, if they don't have other coats that's fine." It was amusing me even more to take these characters into Washington to a Jewish department shore, Lansburgh Brothers, and shop for Christmas for their wives. So, okay fine, the driver takes us into Washington, going to Lansburgh Brothers. We start first buying food, the way I remember it. What I do remember is that we bought cocoa, coffee, sugar, some essentials [12:00] that they considered essential, I'll summarize and deposited that somewhere. And then I said, "What next?" They said to me that they would want to buy some underwear for their wives and their family. I was all of 19; I had never bought either panties or brassieres or anything close to that. And it was a day when these things were not in open bins, but you had to go to a counter at Lansburgh Brothers, and somebody would serve -- a woman would serve on you. So here I was in a neutral uniform, I didn't even have any braiding on my cap, and I had four guys with me, two of them with leather coats, and one or two [13:00] with Tyrolese hats, and it was an unreal scene. In addition to that, we were speaking German. So we asked for panties, ünterhosen, and she asked -- the woman behind the counter asked for the size, and they took out their -- what do you call these little --

INT: Slide rules.

AM: Their slide rules, took out their slide rules and they translated centimeters into inches. It was the moment when nylon was coming along, and when they came out, held up panties, they were very delicate panties. One of them said, I don't know whether it was Wernher von Braun [13:54], said really I can't forget it, he said, "[14:00] [speaks German]." "But no, panties with long legs, and made of wool, because the winter is going to be hard." Well, the lady shrugged, because she didn't exactly have what they wanted, and I asked what next. We then went for brassieres. The same thing, the size -- I mean you can't just order brassieres, for God's sake. She asked the size, and once again the slide rules came out and so on. There was a lot of gesticulating. Just as the woman came out with the brassiere, the Military Police arrived and arrested the whole bunch of us because somebody had said something. It was bizarre; here are these -- speaking German [15:00], buying underwear, the guy with them from the U.S. Army without any insignia and so on. Anyway they took us in. Obviously, after a half hour we were out because I had a phone number and I knew whom to call at 1142 [15:17] and I don't now remember whom I called, because you had a number. That was very fine. I was given a bunch of cash, I don't remember, something like $500 or whatever, which was a lot of money at that time, to pay for this stuff. There were no credit cards, for God's sake. They certainly wouldn't give me any credit, they didn't know where the fuck I came from. Anyways, that's the cherry story. Maybe I have invented it all, but I doubt it very, very much, because as I keep saying to both friends and family, I have the banality that it takes to write books, but I don't have any imagination. That's my Wernher von Braun [16:00], but I would have to add one thing. That is the time when he said to me, the way I remember it, that the only mistake that Hitler [16:10] made did get me started on the

train of thought that later on emerged in one of my books, mainly when I wrote this book on the Final Solution, the title of the book is "Why Did the Heavens not Darken?" Then subtitled, "The Final Solution, a History" where I do try to see what the -- connect, what the mix is in the Nazi [16:40] ideology between anti-Bolshevism and anti-Semitism [16:46]. In other words, I do think that throughout the '30s and into the early '40s, the emphasis was by far more on anti-Bolshevism than on anti-Semitism [17:00]. It was too long to go into that story now, but it did leave a scratch on my mind. That scratch was recently reconfirmed, in my own head, in another -- coming from an entirely other source, I found the text of the sermon that the rabbi of Luxembourg gave in the synagogue of Luxemburg in 1937, on Yom Kippur, in which his theme was anti-Bolshevism and anti-Judaism, and anti-Semitism [17:43]. Unfortunately, I did not have that document when I worked on that book I just mentioned. But, the conversation with Wernher von Braun [17:57], and his saying "the only mistake [18:00] that Hitler made," did leave a permanent scratch on my brain.

INT: You'd mentioned about von Braun [18:08] and that everyone at 1142 [18:13] was being monitored. The whole place was wired, you said. You knew this going in to -- I mean, from the beginning you knew it was wired.

AM: Yes.

INT: Okay. So that wasn't a secret to you?

AM: To me, no.

INT: Do you think the prisoners, per se, knew?

AM: I don't know. It really was a puzzle to me all along because they couldn't be that dumb. Why would you put them together and at the same time into fairly comfortable quarters

and so on and so forth? Though I know that it's very fashionable today to say look, we had other ways of dealing with prisoners from the way in which we deal with them now, at Abu Ghraib, and all that? I think it's a wrong analogy [19:00], totally wrong. I would assume that they must've been -- if they were not, they were I think politically more innocent than I am prepared to admit that they were. So I don't know; I don't know, for example, whether these recordings, whether they are in any archive. If all that stuff was recorded. You know in those days you had -- you didn't have tapes. I don't know where they would be deposited, you see, whether they would have kept them. I have no idea. I have absolutely no idea.

INT: Did you ever go into the monitoring building or whatever, where all this was being recorded?

AM: I think I was in there once. I was in there once and I saw them sitting there. And I thought it was -- this was before my incident with von Braun [19:57] -- and the only thing that I remember, my reaction [20:00] was I was jealous, because they were certainly having a more interesting time than I was having, by listening to these characters.

INT: Do you remember if any of your group of folks from Camp Ritchie [20:12] was involved in monitoring, or if that was a separate group?

AM: I really don't remember. My recollection is that it was separate. For example, Henry Kolm [20:22] didn't do any monitoring. Leslie [20:23] didn't do any monitoring. Peter Weiss [20:25] didn't do any monitoring. Carlo Weiss [20:26] didn't do any … [George] Mandel [20:28] didn't do any monitoring as far as --

INT: I don't think he did.

AM: So I would be inclined to think that that was a separate operation and that probably --

these were highly skilled guys who knew what they were doing.

INT: You'd mentioned that von Braun [20:46] and company were kept in these huts, or these other areas. Can you describe them at all? Do you recall? Were they, were they separate from everything else -- from the rest of the camp? Were they secluded or were they right there [21:00] in the middle of everything?

AM: I really can't remember. This is why I told you when I was down in Fort [unintelligible] that I didn't recognize anything down there. My recollection is that they were not Quonset huts, in large part because they were in smaller places, I would say something like three or four rooms that they would share, but maybe that's also a figment of my imagination. That's the way I remember it. There certainly was not a Quonset hut, and they certainly did not have 20 or 30 guys together in one location and so on. That's not the way I remember it. I remember that it was smaller places with three or four rooms, because I was in them occasionally when it was raining and so on and so forth. That it was systematic separation in the work that I was doing, morale officering [21:54], and I told you I don't know what the hell I was doing [22:00]. The one thing I do remember is that the military people were separate from the scientists. They were not put in the same, whatever you want to call it, house, bunk, whatever you want to call it.

INT: You dealt with -- you mentioned the examples of von Braun [22:20] and his group; how many other scientific folks did you deal with? I mean, you didn't just deal with -- your experiences weren't just --

AM: My guess would be at that time there were about eight of them. If you ask me, I have the names; I have the names because I have some photographs somewhere. But I don't have them here in Princeton. And I also have that Christmas card that they all signed for me

up at Fort Strong [22:53], but some of these guys had been in 1142 [22:56] before, and I recognized names. Some of them were incredibly well [23:00] known. I remember one of them was the hot shot when it came to infrared light. I didn't know what the hell infrared light was, but the likes of Henry Kolm [23:13] or [George] Mandel [23:14] or whatever would be able to clue me in on that one. So I have a vague idea now of why that was a -- now, there was another one who was a hot shot in wind tunnels. I didn't know what a wind tunnel was, nor did I know what the hell it served. Even after it was it explained to me I couldn't make sense of it. But apparently it was very important. It was that kind of stuff, you see. So there weren't all into the Peenemünde [23:39] stuff. I don't mean -- I mean into the rocket science, you see. The ones I remember, infrared, wind tunnel; there's one other one I forget now.

INT: One of the Paperclip [24:00] scientists who we know did a lot with infrared was a gentleman named Heinz Schlicke [24:05]. Does that ring a bell?

AM: I think he signed the Christmas card for me. I promise that I will send you the card.

INT: That would be just outstanding.

AM: I couldn't believe it when I found it, you see, in my papers.

INT: One of the ones we also know is there was a gentleman name Helmut Hertz [24:26], as in megahertz. His father developed the Hertzian wave. He was there as well, during, again, more radio technology and whatnot.

AM: So you yourself from your interviews --

INT: We have gathered some names.

AM: But it was varied crew. It wasn't just the rocket people.

INT: Correct. Certain people for example, George Mandel [24:51], he worked very much with

rockets, rocket engines, and for whatever reason they chose that to be his specialty, so he did that. Whereas other veterans [25:00] we've interviewed have nothing to do with rocketry. Nothing whatsoever.

INT: We came upon a list of 1,600 German officers and scientists that were brought to this country as part of Paperclip [25:14].

AM: 1,600? Austrian or German?

INT: Mostly German. There were a few Austrians. And all sorts of specialties.

AM: That many?

INT: And to clarify, that was a list of 1,600 that the U.S. were seeking. I don't believe all 1,600 ended up coming to the United States.

AM: Well, which is another way of saying that they knew whom they were looking for. So they must have had some information. Somebody must've given the information.

INT: Apparently, and I could be remembering this incorrectly, but apparently the Germans during the war made this list, saying here is our top six -- here is our list of our top 1,600 scientists. A copy of this list fell into the hands of the British intelligence.

AM: Oh, I see [26:00].

INT: So that gave us a lift at the end of the world -- end of the war to say, this is who we want to get before the Russians get them. So yeah.

AM: Is there a book on Operation Paperclip [26:14]? Because I haven't started my reading on this as yet.

INT: There are a couple, which we can give you the recommendations for. We have them in our offices. One of them, you have to take with a grain of salt because it was written by a journalist, who was doing a kind of investigation, took kind of an investigative reporting

approach. The focus of her book was not on, look at these phenomenal scientists. It was look at these war criminals.

AM: Look at these?

INT: War criminals. It was very much an antagonistic view that she took of the U.S., saying look how the U.S. went in; apparently the way the [27:00] -- and you probably know more about this than I do -- I guess folks were assigned a number scale from a one to five as to what level of a war criminal they were. With, let's say, level one being virtually nothing, maybe they were party members and that was about it, Nazis [27:16], and a five being somebody that was going to Nuremburg [27:22] and being tried. The U.S. had a policy that for Operation Paperclip [27:27] we would accept 1s, 2s, and 3s, but not 4s and 5s. And apparently there are some cases where some 4s had something crossed out and became 2s or something like that. So some of these Operation Paperclip [27:41] scientists, not necessarily the ones you were specifically dealing with, but some of these Paperclip scientists, had done some -- some of them were some of the folks who had done medical experiments in the camps and whatnot, that were brought over. And so her approach in this particular book is very [28:00] much on that focus.

AM: One of the things von Braun [28:06] has been criticized for, or should I say taken to task for, is that he knew about the conditions of some of the workers in the underground, how should I say, factories that they had set up to produce these rockets. That it was, in quotes, "slave labor" basically. He could not not have known. Now I don't know where this debate is at. I once read something about this, and I'm about to get into all this stuff, but I could imagine that if it, after a while, served American purposes to sort of change the classification [29:00] of a guy from a four to a two, or from a five to a three, I

wouldn't find that -- it wouldn't surprise me. Wouldn't surprise me at all. The logic of the situation was such at the that of course you would do that, then at the same time I'm sure that the Soviets would be doing the same thing at the same time. I mean, neither side was angelic in what I call the dawn of the second Cold War [29:27]. The first Cold War [29:28] was after World War I [29:30], and between the wars, but I'm not going to go into that now. But at the dawn at the second Cold War [29:36] there's just no doubt that both sides were cutting corners, obviously, as they prepared for what came to be known as the Cold War [29:44].

INT: Earlier in the interview, you made the reference to the Paperclip [29:56] people. Did you know that name Paperclip during the time you were at [30:00] 1142?

AM: I did not. Definitely not. It was afterwards that I found out about it. That's my recollection. I don't know what the others remember.

INT: Did you realize that you were in a program where we were trying to extract information from German scientists to support our efforts?

AM: Well, yes. I mean, just as I was absolutely convinced that the reason why we had these high German officers from the Waffen-SS [30:30] and also from the regular army, one of the reasons we brought them to the United Sates was not to punish them, or to do anything of that nature. It was to get information for them, and the information that we wanted, since by then the war was over, the information that we wanted -- and the thing I knew about specifically -- was the order of battle for example of the Red Army [31:00], the chain of command, et cetera, et cetera, and also more details on where they had fought, et cetera, et cetera. These were officers the way I remembered it who had served on the Eastern front, but they were captured, they were in the United States; obviously

they were captured somewhere else. In other words, very often you'd be, how should I say, reassigned from the Eastern front to the Western and the other way around. But I'm sure, even though there could have been mistakes, there's no doubt about that, but it would seem to me that any high officer, German officer, who we would take the trouble after he was captured to bring to the United States would in one way or another be able to tell us something that would be of use. As, what I at the time said, prepared the third world war, and that was eventually called the Cold War [32:00]. I can't really imagine that they would bring people to the United States, officers, high officers, or other high animals, political animals to sort of try and get more information to see if whether or not you're going to try them for war crimes. That you would do over there. And I may be wrong on that. I haven't studied that, so I don't really know. But the use function of these people would be fairly important, yes --

(End of Tape 3A)

(Beginning of Tape 3B)

INT: The folks you were dealing with were just, quote, "scientists." You did not have any dealings with any military personnel?

AM: Well just these two Germans that I remember very clearly, these high officers. And there were a number of others, but these stand out in my mind because of a particular incident, you see. Also, somehow, given my background, it was not easy to be in the presence of a German officer. Quite frankly, it was unpleasant, to put it mildly. I mean, I would almost feel like vomiting for the very simple reason that I had to be nice to these guys. The only question that I asked myself is what did they do there during the war [01:00], and to what extent were they complicit, even if they were not fully on board. Either was

the domestic policies of the Nazi [01:09] regime, or if not that, the foreign and military policy, you see. So, I felt uncomfortable, and that may be one reason why I'm blanking them out. I see these two characters, Aschenbrenner [01:21] and the other guy and I somehow in my mind but -- and they were very civil. They weren't Untermenschen in any way. My interaction with them was very civilized, for God's sake. From my point of view there's a reason why it shouldn't be, because I was to be the nice guy. The others were the bad cops. I was the good cop. In the sense I was the cop who arrived with goodies. The others were doing other things, so I was above suspicion but they couldn't have been that [02:00] stupid because they certainly knew that I was in contact with the others, so they would ask me what is his agenda, so it's only normal.

INT: Were the folks that you dealt with, I'm just curious, were they in -- they weren't in prisoner fatigues, were they? They were just in civilian clothing?

AM: No, not at all. No, they were in civilian clothing and stuff that I suppose either with which they arrived or that they -- had been given to them once they got here.

INT: Even the two German generals?

AM: The two German generals I think they were in civilian clothing. I do think so. I do think so.

INT: Okay. You would be dressed in a uniform, but would you have rank on that uniform?

AM: Not the way I remember it. While on service, for example my recollection was that when I took them into Washington I had a neutral uniform on and there was no rank. But when I went on the weekend pass [03:00], I wore the regular uniform with the braidings. I mean, the highest rank I achieved was sergeant or corporal, sergeant I think. I don't remember that. I don't think many of the others went very higher than that. There were

very few officers running around. I don't think Henry Kolm [03:24] was an officer. None of them, none of us were. No matter how many college degrees we may have had, or how many languages we may have been speaking and so, all of us were glorious private to staff sergeant. Leslie Willson [03:39] was staff sergeant.

INT: And so how did you feel about that? Here you are, you guys had varied degrees of college educations, you knew the language, you were dealing directly with these prisoners. How did you feel with the fact that, did you think that you should have been officers?

AM: Not at all. It never even crossed my mind. Never even crossed my mind. Not at all [04:00]. Not at all. Absolutely not.

INT: Because we've interviewed some folks who are -- I don't know if it's the right word to use -- but are almost a little bitter at times that -- they weren't made -- they weren't of higher rank or officers. And even the typical -- what you might call the typical grumblings of Army enlisted men, you think that they're doing more work than their officers.

AM: Well, all I can say is that the officers that were there were absolutely marvelous. They knew, most of them, that we knew something they didn't know, that they needed us more than we needed them, and I got very, very friendly with some of them. And we had an extremely good relationship. I'm not sucking up to them in any way, but I found it totally, how should I say, normal that these officers who quite obviously [05:00] were American born and bred, should be officers and that I, a refugee that just arrived there, who in addition to that was on my knees with gratitude to the United States for entering the war, et cetera, et cetera. It was only normal that I should not be an officer. And I

would say that the one thing I didn't understand was why they should've made me sergeant. I mean, all things considered, I would've preferred to remain a private. So I'm amazed to hear that, you see. Unless, you had a very specific job for which you were trained and highly skilled, then I could perhaps understand.

INT: Did your officers, did any of them understand German?

AM: Very few. Very few. Given my recollection. The one thing that I do remember is that they had among them [06:00] a German who was brought here, a man by the name of [Rolf] Arndt [06:07].

INT: We'll continue and we'll tell you, but please continue. I'm sorry for that reaction.

AM: A man by the name of Arndt [06:19]. To this day, I wonder who this character was. He was with the officers all the time. He seemed to be the translator and mediator. They seemed to rely on him a great deal. But I didn't know who he was. I didn't find him particularly interesting, so I made no effort to get to know him and so on. I seem to remember that I'm in a photograph [07:00] in which he appears.

INT: We happen to have that with us.

AM: And, Leslie [07:08] is on it as well and so on. Well, anyways, it's not important. If you know anything about that, I would be --

INT: Well we're going to ask you a few more questions, but, yeah.

AM: Yeah, yeah. You know which one is Arndt [07:23]? Yeah. That's right.

INT: Do you want to start by identifying any faces that you know in that?

INT: Yeah, would you mind, and I can just direct you toward this?

AM: Well, this is George Mandel [07:38]. This is Peter Weiss [07:40], this is, I forget his name.

INT: Erich Kramer [07:43]?

AM: Erich Kramer [07:44]. This is Leslie [07:46].

INT: You skipped the rest of the folks in the top row

AM: Oh, and this one I don't know who it is. I can't make him out. I don't remember.

INT: Well, and that's you.

AM: That's me, yeah.

INT: But you're not sure who's next to you.

[talking simultaneously]

AM: -- [08:00] this goddamn, you know.

INT: You're not sure who's next to you?

AM: No. The name would come to me after a while. This is one of us.

INT: Alfred Bomberg [08:12].

AM: Yes, the lieutenant.

INT: We've interviewed him. He's living out in California.

AM: This -- he was one of us but I don't remember. The older one. This is Leslie [08:24] and this is another one of our officers whose name I don't remember. But there is no doubt, this here, this guy right there, if you look closely, there no insignia, right, except for one thing. He has an epaulettes which we don't have. Do you follow?

INT: So he's dressed as an officer.

AM: He's dressed as an officer. I don't know anything about the guy, except I know he was German.

INT: He was German born.

AM: German born, and I think he was brought over here from Germany [09:00]. That's my

guess, but why he was brought over from Germany and why he was hanging out with us, I don't have a clue. Maybe you have one.

INT: We do, but I want to -- no, we are going to tell you, but I want ask a few more teasing questions first. Did -- he spoke English as well?

AM: Yes, he spoke English, with a very heavy accent, which was no exception in the environment I was in. We all had accents. But this was a Viennese accent or a Brno accent, or Trieste accent, everybody had an accent. And from that point of view he fit in just swell.

INT: He wasn't with you at Ritchie [09:40], was he?

AM: Not that I remember. I think I remember him at 1142 [09:47].

INT: Do you know if he actually held American -- do you know if he was considered an American soldier? Was he considered to be an American or if he just wore a uniform?

AM: I have no idea. He remained a mystery. I don't even know why I mentioned the name [10:00] now.

INT: I'm thrilled that you did.

AM: Because I don't have the vaguest idea. He remained a mystery man to me. I would have to admit I didn't particularly like him. I didn't feel comfortable in his presence.

INT: Do you think he stood out in your mind right now because of the fact that you remembered him as kind of a mystery man?

AM: You would ask me the question as to the relations between officers and those of us who never became officers and so on and so forth. And then I talked about the one guy who had these epaulettes. Why should I remember that, you see? He had a status unlike any other in the outfit. And how he got there, I don't know. What his mission was, I don't

know. I know nothing.

INT: And you don't know what sort of work he was working on? If he was -- did you get the impression he was working with prisoners who were there?

AM: I have no idea.

INT: Do you recall if he was [11:00] -- came up to Boston with you?

AM: I think so. But yeah, I think so. Yeah.

INT: What we've learned about Arndt [11:14], and well the other question I want to ask you is, does the name Carlson [11:20], ring a bell, Herb Carlson [11:23]?

AM: No, no.

INT: Okay. What we've learned, and we've learned this from you, Henry Kolm [11:32], Alfred Bomberg [11:35] the officer, and I believe Leslie Willson [11:38] mentioned it to me when I interviewed him. About five or so folks, and I feel like somebody else mentioned it later. Did -- Bill Hess, Bill Hess [11:49] did as well, have -- the first person who mentioned this was Henry Kolm [11:56]. He mentioned -- his description of Arndt [12:00] is that he was essential a double agent.

AM: That was our suspicion, but I wouldn't say that publicly because I have absolutely no evidence. Go on.

INT: That was his suspicion, his thought, was that he was a double agent. From what we've gleaned from -- what you told us it is very much in line with what everybody else has. But the -- what we gleaned is that he was German born. We believe -- we are not certain -- but we believe he was in the German military, was captured by us. In fact, someone by his name shows up in the prisoner records for 1142 [12:37] earlier in the war, '43, '44, as being captured. And then, later on, as the -- the longer -- this prisoner is held at 1142

[12:48] for a good while. And then he begins to -- we start seeing his name on documents with letters "SP" next to his name, which stands for stoolpigeon [13:00]. You're familiar with the term stoolpigeon [13:04]? I don't know if you've had any experiences with stoolpigeons [13:07] being used at 1142 [13:10]. But we know that they used them, sometimes to a great extent they used stoolpigeons [13:16], where they would plant German soldiers, sometimes Americans pretending to be German soldiers, but usually sympathetic Germans who in return would get better treatment and whatnot, and they would go in and basically rat out folks and go in and try to get them to talk about -- he was clearly used as a stoolpigeon [13:35] for a while. Then, we start to see his name listed on documents as an interrogator, actually going in and conducting interrogations. That's about it. There's been some thought that it was never really clear which side he was working on [14:00]. Somebody -- it might have been Henry [14:02], somebody said that they believe, again, he was in the German military, that his family, his wife and children were killed by the Germans during the war. Because of that, he got this hatred and decided to come and work for us.

AM: I have no idea. You must excuse me for a second.

INT: Absolutely.

[audio break]

INT: You might need to -- you might have to blow them up. The top one is a similar group shot from this one here; in fact, I think again it's very similar. You just see some of the folks who are a little bit more --

AM: He's standing. He was sitting before. The guy who was standing next to me is now sitting here and so on.

INT: Now, you are not in that photo, correct, but Henry Kolm [14:55] is.

AM: Yeah.

INT: I'm wondering if you took this photo [15:00]?

AM: I might've taken this photo.

INT: And Henry took the other photo? But that's Arndt [15:05] again right there.

AM: Oh yeah. And this is him again. You can see how prominent he was. You see, I'm not making it up. Now who's this? Is this Henry [15:15]? And yours truly? Oh, that's perfectly ridiculous. Oh, he was the only one who had a camera.

INT: That's what he recalls.

AM: Willson [15:29] with two "L"s or one?

INT: Two.

AM: Oh I didn't know that.

INT: And that is apparently Rolf Arndt [15:36] at his desk.

AM: This is Peter?

INT: That is Peter Weiss [15:42].

AM: Well that one I know. And that is who? Jesus, a tennis racket. You see, that fits with what I told you I was doing on December 7th, Pearl Harbor [15:55]. What the hell is this [16:00]?

INT: He said that's you studying.

AM: Good god. Henry Kolm [16:07], squatting?

INT: Now that's the picture I wish we had a larger one. According to Henry, that is a group of German scientists.

AM: Wait a minute. I'm going to get a magnifying glass. Yeah, those are German scientists.

I can't remember their names. And they were dressed much less formally than the military [17:00]. If I had that Christmas card I would be able to identify them. Did Henry [17:12] give these to you?

INT: Yes, these are all from him.

AM: Will I have to ask for copies of all these?

INT: No, we, the National Park Service, now -- he gave us copies and now we can give them out. I don't think he's going to -- he would mind whatsoever.

AM: I'm sure he wouldn't. The only thing --

INT: Who am I kidding? These are for you to keep.

AM: The only thing I'm --

INT: We can just maybe try to send you bigger --

AM: Okay, the only thing that I would be grateful for is if I could -- and you'll have to find that out, if I could see Leslie's [17:45] diary.

INT: Absolutely, you were mentioned a great deal.

AM: Because that would give me a certain legitimacy, because everything I told you about Leslie [17:52], right, you remember, in Washington; I said you must talk to him. And I didn't give you a bum steer. Because you have the diary [18:00], which I think is fairly valuable to you, I would imagine.

INT: No, no it's extraordinary. And just while we're on it, here's --

AM: And his wife's name is Jean.

INT: You're absolutely right. And that's the pictures taken during the interview with him.

AM: This is Leslie [18:23]? He was loyal to Yale. He got his degree there.

INT: No, he wanted to wear that shirt during the interview. He actually intentionally put that

on and wore it for both days. You can keep those if you'd like. They're all for you.

AM: They are?

INT: Absolutely.

AM: I can almost break down in tears when I see this. You see, because I still called him the year before when he was already in a pretty bad way [19:00], and I said look Leslie [19:01], if you don't go I don't go; this was to the meeting in Washington. And I meant that, even though I hadn't seen him for decades, you see. There was something between us and I don't know what the hell it was. I really don't. My family were incredibly fond of him, my father and mother because he stayed at the apartment all the time when Mamie [19:27] took us to Union Station for us to go to New York, you see. [laughs] If I could see that diary, I'd really be in your debt.

INT: Absolutely.

INT: He had wonderful handwriting.

INT: Beautiful handwriting. You had mentioned his typing skills, his handwriting was --

AM: Yeah and I mentioned his hand -- extraordinary --

INT: His handwriting, right, and you mentioned that and when I interviewed him, I looked and his hands were huge. I mean, slender but --

AM: They're slender, right. Slender [20:00].

INT: No, it was very -- it meant a lot to the family, and it meant a lot to him, but to the family that we went down and interviewed him.

AM: I can imagine.

INT: It meant a great deal.

AM: And Jean, she's alive right?

INT: No, she passed away a year or two earlier.

AM: Oh I see. Yeah, that's what he told me.

INT: Yeah. She had passed away, and then I think he started to decline a great deal after she passed away.

AM: And they have the children. Well I think, if someday you have a moment you could send me that phone number.

INT: I have their email addresses.

[talking simultaneously]

INT: It's very easy for us to correspond with them.

AM: And if you want to mail it to me by email, I can get it. In other words, you send me an email and I have somebody read it for me. And then I can take it from there, but put phone numbers on. I'd be very grateful.

INT: No, absolutely [21:00]. He speaks, again, a great deal of you, Henry [21:05], and to an extent, Peter [21:06]. But primarily you and Henry.

AM: Well the three of us, for a while, we were inseparable. I don't know how that came to be, because here's this guy from Amarillo and Henry's from Vienna, or from Brno. I think it was Brno, and I was from -- I mean it was crazy. Come on, it made no sense. Excuse me, no, no, no, I would never --

INT: What we were amazed about is that of your group of 27 from Camp Ritchie [21:37] that we've identified and interviewed, I think 10 -- at least 10 of that group, was sort of like a band of brothers. And that, Peter Weiss [21:48] and Arno Mayer [21:50] and George Mandel [21:52], and Henry Kolm [21:54], and Leslie Willson [21:56] are all part of that group. And what's interesting about it [22:00] is not only do you each tell different

stories, but you recall things about each other. And it just makes it more powerful.

INT: It really is very powerful. That's the one of the more enjoyable parts. And you can argue question for histories per se tell me how this is important; it's really neat for us to hear the personal stories and the interactions of people who were brought from around the world to this place called 1142 [22:25] to come work together.

AM: It is completely nuts. I mean, Leslie [22:29], interested in German, typing this that and the other thing. Kolm [22:34], a physicist. Mandel [22:37], at that time chemist. I, nothing. I hadn't started my university studies. I mean I had gone to night school to do some for bachelor in business administration, but I didn't fit in. And then Peter Weiss [22:52], he --

INT: Well you took Wernher von Braun [22:55] underwear shopping, and you elicited a letter from the Commander in Chief of the United States [23:00] Army.

AM: [laughs] You must admit that's also very funny.

INT: Oh, it's ridiculously funny.

AM: I have three -- by now I have four grandchildren, and that story, I certainly am going to tell them. It is funny. And I didn't know what I was doing. I mean I had no clue when I said write him a letter, and it was Leslie's [23:23] idea, it wasn't mine. So, I have absolutely -- with George [23:29] it was more that I -- chemistry for me was as much of a mystery as physics. Basically. So when he started talking about some of the more scientific aspects of what he was doing and so on, I just was completely out of the loop. I didn't know what the hell -- I hadn't mastered that vocabulary. That's was what endeared him to me. I thought he had mastered some mysterious craft that I [24:00] didn't, but maybe I should master. And it was a crazy crew. It was completely crazy. So

are we all done?

INT: Oh, no, we have more questions. We just --

AM: Oh, oh, fine.

[talking simultaneously]

INT: Could we just talk a little bit more about your role as a morale officer [24:24]? First of all, did you have the exact same role at [Fort] Strong [24:31]?

AM: Exactly the same thing. Exactly the same thing. That's why I mentioned to you that only the morale officer [24:35] would translate sermons at Christmas, at the Catholic service and the Protestant service. I can assure you that as a refugee, Jewish refugee from Europe, with the war barely over, that's just about as bizarre [25:00] --that's why I remember it -- of an assignment as you could get. When I was asked to do that, which obviously some superior must've asked me to do, I think I said, "You must be kidding." [laughs] I mean, what the hell? There I was, that was my Christmas day. I mean to begin with, Christmas for a Jew didn't add up to a bag of beans. Then to top it all, to go to these two services which were set up for them, and an Army chapmen and so on showed up, and you have to be a translator. I mean, it's a bizarre assignment. You couldn't forget it, and you couldn't make it up.

INT: Were you the only morale officer [25:50], or were there other morale officers [25:52]?

AM: No, even -- I think I was the only one. I don't even know whether [26:00] they gave me that title, or how I came to have that title. All I can say is even my job wasn't a full time job. So if they'd had one, two more than one, that would really have been even more ridiculous than having just one. And as I keep saying, what did I do? Distribute newspapers, and drinks, and so on. And came awfully close at a certain point, I hesitate

to say this, and probably this you will cut out I hope; I think it came awfully close to my providing them with women. There was talk of it. There was talk of it. I didn't. I wasn't asked to do it, but there was talk of it.

INT: Were there requests from the prisoners or the scientists for specific items?

AM: Somebody above me had heard about that and brought it up, as to whether one ought to do that or not, but I don't remember the details. Even, again, I was 19 years old [27:00], and what the hell? It seemed bizarre to me. It was sort of interesting, I didn't think I'd be fighting the Germans, whom I hated with every gut that I had, right? That I would wind up fighting the war that way. I mean it was crazy. It was crazy.

INT: But what about other items? You mentioned for example that you brought them whiskey or something on a regular basis. Was that something, an item, that they would request? Were they requesting these items? Or --

AM: No, this was our being nice to them, making them feel at ease, feeling comfortable and so on and so forth. And obviously, if we gave them newspapers, and if we gave them Life Magazine, and the likes, obviously it was also because these were highly literate people. To have them tuned into the way in which political -- the way in which the press [28:00] dealt with the war, the post war, this, that, and the other thing, you see. So, it was part of our reeducation program. I would assume, but -- so it would seem to me; I don't know for example whether they had radio. I seem to remember they didn't have radio, so that their only contact, so to speak, with the real American world was through these newspapers, through these magazines. Yeah. More than that, I don't remember.

INT: Would they specifically -- once you started giving them things, did they ask for things? Cigarettes, gum --

AM: Yes, yes. And occasionally -- not gum, because that ain't a European thing, but cigarettes and chocolate and so on and then I would bring this stuff without asking, whether they wanted it or not and so on. There was a very informal [29:00] relationship that developed as a result of it, as you can imagine, you see. And all of that P.O. Box 1142 [29:08] paid for. I mean, I certainly didn't pay for these newspapers and magazines or this whiskey or this chocolate.

INT: Since you were dealing with their morale, I imagine the worries about their family at home --

AM: Those were very, very real. I mean that they talked about all the time.

INT: They talked to you about that?

AM: Yes.

INT: Did they ask you to try and correspond with their families?

AM: They were doing that anyway. I think that was set up through the military hierarchy and so on. But I wasn't involved in that. But they talked about it, the hard times that they were having over there. You know, how long it would be before they could join us, and so on and so forth. Now of course, Wernher von Braun [29:50] at the time was not married as yet. When he came to the U.S., I don't think he was married, or maybe he got married just before he came over here [30:00]. I don't remember that. That story is told in a couple of books that just came out recently, I think. The way I remember it. I think it was somebody his parents wanted him to marry, not that it was an arranged marriage. But I do remember that at the time -- and I may be wrong on this but I don't really think so -- I don't think he was married and I would be very, very surprised if he had any children. I don't think he had any at that time. Whether he had any later, I don't know.

Others did have family that would go beyond the wife. I mean he did speak about other relatives and so on. They all did, you see, as to where they were and obviously making a huge difference after the war was over between the western zones and the eastern zone of Germany, you see, where their relatives were. But I just don't remember the details of that. I mean, I'd really have to [31:00] invent things, and I don't particularly like to do that.

INT: Do you know if their mail home was being censored?

AM: I don't know but I'd be very surprised. I'd be very surprised if it was, but it's perfectly possible. But I'd be very surprised.

INT: Your interactions and communication when you were delivering things, were those deliveries outside or were they inside any building?

AM: No, they were both. In other words, when the weather was -- well you know enough about Virginia. If the weather was nice, we were often outside, and I would be sitting with them outside. Or else, if the weather was bad, I'd be inside. And, it was very informal. Very, very informal.

INT: Inside their rooms where they stayed?

AM: Yeah, they had a, I use the word "a common room." In other words there were so many bedrooms, three or four, and then there was a common [32:00] room, living room, whatever you want to call it. I don't remember now where they took their meals. This I don't remember because I am certain -- I am very doubtful that they did their own cooking.

INT: Do you want to show him the air photo and see if he can pinpoint what buildings he may have gone into?

INT: Sure, we're going to have time.

INT: Probably less than a minute.

INT: Okay. Maybe we'll start of the next one with that.

(End of Tape 3B)

(Beginning of Tape 4A)

AM: Listen, if we don't finish, what we will do is I'll take that call at 3:00 and you relax for a few minutes, and I'll go in the other room and talk and then come back out to you.

INT: That's fine. And that'll even maybe give us a chance to go ahead and call for a cab to come at a certain time or something like that.

AM: Do you have a number for a cab?

INT: We can dig one out, and if not, we'll take your suggestion.

AM: Yeah.

INT: If you already have --

AM: No, I have one guy, but I don't know -- he may be charging more than he should. That bothers me a bit because he once took me to Trenton and he charged me $40, which I thought was too much. So I'd rather take a regular guy. I'll give you the phone numbers.

INT: Okay, sure.

AM: That'll be more reasonable.

INT: Sure.

AM: I have never used him again. I mean, this was two years ago, and I had felt, since I had been using him for years, that he had taken -- anyway, I'm not [01:00] a cheapskate, but that was a little bit too much, I thought.

INT: All right. I'm going to give my introduction here, and then we'll get going with this tape,

and then whenever you need to take a phone call, by all means, that's fine. Today is September 16th, 2008. This is an oral history interview for the Fort Hunt Oral History Project by the National Park Service. This is the fourth in a series of interviews with Arno Mayer at his home in Princeton, New Jersey. This is Brandon Bies of the National Park Service, as well as Vincent Santucci. With that, we'll get back to what we were talking about, do want to show you some more photos, and maps, and whatnot. Before that, a couple more questions. When you were interacting with the scientists and folks, did they know your name?

AM: Yes.

INT: Did you use your name, Mayer [02:00], or, you didn't have a pseudonym or anything?

AM: No I had no pseudonym.

INT: Because we know some of the folks at 1142 [02:06] used pseudonyms.

AM: No, I did not use a pseudonym. I used my name. As I said, they knew I was Jewish. And behind my back, they occasionally spoke about that. But, I used my name.

INT: Again, we mentioned about rank. You would not wear anything showing rank. Were there other -- do know if while you were there -- again, you were dealing with a certain group of folks -- were there other lower ranking German soldiers there, you know, folks --

AM: Not to my knowledge.

INT: Okay. Did you ever go to or see -- there was a main prisoner compound there, that sounds like it's not where von Braun [02:56] and company were kept. It was a larger [03:00] compound with, built, with individual rooms, and they were all bugged with microphones and whatnot. Did you ever have any dealings with that?

AM: No, absolutely not.

INT: Okay. Do you remember anything about the physical description of the camp? Was it large, was it small?

AM: No, I mean I knew our small enclave, and have again in my mind again a picture of the Quonset huts, which were on little elevated space where they were doing the Alexander Dallin [03:41] stuff. You point with fingers. That's where they deal with Soviet issues and so on and so forth, but I had no dealings with them at all. And as I think I may have indicated to you, it's something that one didn't [04:00] speak about. It was generally assumed what was going on there was highly secret, and the less said the better.

INT: And so, it was just understood you wouldn't --

AM: It was understood. I was never inside that, quote, unquote "compound," or that sector of the camp and so on, not at all.

INT: We might just go ahead now and show you a couple of these, and these are -- I'm going to flip the light on behind you here as well. This is a series of aerial photographs taken in 1942, in the very, very beginning. So certainly, much more would have been added, but there's the Potomac River --

AM: There's the highway.

[talking simultaneously]

AM: Parkway going to Mount Vernon

INT: Mount Vernon, Washington --

AM: Yeah, and Washington over there, sure.

INT: Hey, Brandon, can you point from the other side [05:00]?

INT: Sure. And so –

INT: I'm sorry from his opposite side.

INT: Come over here. Got you. And you know, here is the parade ground, right, and the baseball field. You can't see it, but the flagpole --

AM: Flagpole right there, yeah.

INT: Our understanding is this area here was a long -- you see the long, barrack-type buildings, would've been where a lot of the enlisted men like yourself may have lived, but that may not be the case while you were there. This is that larger compound with barbed wire all the way around it.

AM: I never set foot on that. I never did whatever. This here strikes me like a lot of -- a lot of space with a few people I knew, but of course, maybe we just had one -- are these Quonset huts, do you know?

INT: I wouldn't quite call it a Quonset huts; they're more long, linear, wooden-frame barracks.

AM: Wooden frame barracks, yeah.

INT: Again, this photograph was taken four -- three years before you were there [06:00].

AM: And where is the entrance to the camp?

INT: The entrance, there's a couple of them, yeah. Right in here, you see the road come out of the parkway there would be an entrance there; there was another entrance that came in this way, but we think this was --

AM: Well, this is the one that we took in.

INT: The one off of the Parkway?

AM: And then I just wonder what is here on the left.

INT: Here on the left were a number of smaller building, headquarters buildings, all the offices --

AM: And where's the command? The command, was it, post?

INT: The command post was in this vicinity.

AM: That's what I thought, because when you arrived there, I remember that being on the right when we got off the bus or something.

INT: And so the parade ground would have been more to the left and the command center would have been more to the right?

AM: That's right, yeah. But I have no recollection of where we lived. I mean, I'm not good at reading these. I mean, these photographs, as I told you also, as when they tried to teach me how to use a compass, or how to read a map at Camp Ritchie [06:49], I flunked. So I wouldn't be able to be of any help for you on that.

INT: Okay, and these are various similar -- these are just four -- from the four different cardinal directions.

AM: Right [07:00].

INT: There's the Parkway; here's that same area we were talking about; here's the parade ground.

AM: I have no recollection.

INT: Do you recall if you came through a gate? Were there MPs or guards at the gate? Was there a fence?

AM: Yes, yes I remember that. To get onto the grounds, I don't remember, but I remember that -- especially in off hours. I think in the daytime, from 8:00 to whatever, there was barely anyone there. But I think off hours there was a permanent MP or something like that. But again, I couldn't describe to you what the gate looked like. I can't do anything like that.

INT: Okay. While we're showing you photos, one more to show you, and you may need your hand lens for this [08:00]. This is a photo that --

AM: Oh my God.

INT: -- we believe was taken of the intelligence staff at 1142 [08:11], in -- around the winter of 1945. We don't think that you or your group of characters is in this, because it would have been while you were in Boston. We think it might have been around Christmas 1945. But we're very curious if there is anyone in this photo that you do recognize.

AM: Well many of these are, well, lots of staff sergeants here.

INT: You know the name Colonel Bliss [08:44]?

AM: Yes.

INT: Zenas Bliss, we believe that is Zenas Bliss right there.

AM: Was he the top honcho?

INT: Yes, at that time, he --

AM: At that time, sure. But he was there when I was there [09:00]. I mean I was there when he was there.

INT: Right, but he did not go to Boston.

AM: No, no, no, no, no.

INT: So while you were in Boston, he stayed. Again, this is just us surmising that this may have been taken when your group was off in Boston, and these were the folks -- because obviously 1142 [09:18] kept operating when you all went to Boston.

AM: But I don't recognize anyone on here.

INT: You don't remember Marvin Levinthal [09:24]?

AM: No, who he?

INT: He was actually -- there was another camp called Camp Tracy [9:32], out in California that was primarily for Japanese prisoners. But it ended up having Germans there as well. That camp was closed, and they were all brought into 1142 [09:45] at the end of the war, and he was part of that group. Rudy Pins [09:49] is in this photograph.

AM: I don't remember now where I met Rudy Pins [09:52]. I can't locate it. I mean, I met him there, I know, but I don't remember where he came [10:00] from. I think he was in Washington for the meeting, wasn't he?

INT: Yes. He came, yeah.

AM: Now which one is Bliss [10:09] on here? This man here, isn't it?

INT: Yes, to the right of my finger.

AM: Yeah. I'm just wondering whether the reason why, when you asked me does the name Bliss [10:24] mean anything to you, whether he may not have been the guy who gave me that letter, from Eisenhower [10:30].

INT: Oh, okay. Could've been, certainly. He would have been the head honcho of the intelligence program.

AM: That's what I mean. It's perfectly possible. I don't recognize anyone.

INT: Well, again, that's for you to keep if, you should peruse it.

AM: You sure you don't need it?

INT: We have many -- we can print out -- that's a scan on a computer. We can print out 100 copies of that. I don't want to diminish that it's for you, but it's no problem [11:00] for us.

AM: Well I'll accept all that on condition that you check with Leslie [11:07], whether I could look at that diary.

INT: Absolutely. And to let you know, they hadn't even seen -- they didn't know that he kept these diaries. He gave these --

AM: But how did you come to them? He gave those?

INT: When we were at -- when I went to visit him last year, he actually said that he thought he had -- he thought he knew where the Eisenhower [11:28] letter was, and directed me to a file. He wasn't well enough to go to it himself, so he directed me to look through it. And I didn't find it; his son has since found it. But I did see right above it: "Diary 1942, '43, '44, '45, '46, '47," so I asked him about it and he said "Oh sure, you can just go ahead and take them, and just return them when you're done." So we've copied them and are in the process of transcribing them. His children didn't even know, so my point is that his children haven't even read them yet.

AM: But I must say it's a mystery [12:00] to me how a guy I was so close to [phone rings] -- [audio break]

INT: That's a map of 1142 [12:13]. Ignore the circles; they're just labels. This should be similar to the aerial photograph, where again the entrance would be over here and you would come in; the parade ground's here. This is that area we were pointing at before with all the long buildings, and this seems to show some of these huts that were off more in the distance, including some of these out here as well.

AM: Those would be the huts. You see, I said to you they were in small huts, and that would be them, but I don't have the -- how should I -- typography and geography to -- of the camp sufficiently in mind to be able to say it's there rather than here, but these were the small huts. That's where they were, and [13:00] in other words, certainly my -- all my dealings with the German officers, were in huts, these small huts, and the same was true

with the scientists. In other words there were none that were in these large things. That's my recollection. I said that to you from the start, so I'm not contradicting myself.

INT: No, absolutely, absolutely. Where do you believe you lived? You lived, you thought in more of Quonset hut sort of structure with a group of --

AM: Yes, that's my recollection, but I may be wrong on that. I really have no clear recollection. I remember there was a Quonset hut, where all of us were at Camp Ritchie [13:37], but the living arrangements in Post Office Box 1142 [13:43] somehow I don't remember. And maybe the reason why I don't remember is by then we knew each other so well we didn't give a damn where we were. In other words, a real bonding had taken place between the months, of people working [14:00] in the program, was when I got to Camp Ritchie [14:06] I came from the Bluegrass Country at Fort Knox [14:10], and I didn't know anybody. What you were impressed with first was what will be the sleeping arrangement, this, that. The other place I have no recollection. What have the others said? Do they remember?

INT: The others remembered staying in the long, wooden barrack, mostly living in this area.

AM: Yeah, that's what I -- now can you hold this for a second? I want to ask you a question. Could this be where that other program was, Dallin [14:34]?

INT: It could be. That's the main prisoner compound, with monitoring buildings built in and everything, a double set of barbed wire fences --

AM: What would this be?

INT: That again we thought was more barracks, where you, and the Americans --

AM: My recollection is that this would be on a slight elevation, and I knew what was going on there a little bit, but didn't dare ask any questions [15:00]. Nobody did. Nobody talked

about what was going on there.

INT: Okay. The only other thing we haven't covered that much is specific to Fort Strong [15:15]. Is there anything that you think we should know about Fort Strong that we haven't already talked about?

AM: The only thing I remember from Fort Strong [15:25] is it -- in terms of the larger project that the American authorities had at the time, and that is to process them, the scientists, the German scientists, as carefully and as rapidly as possible so as to send them on to either -- what are these different bases that they went to?

INT: Huntsville [16:00]. To White Sands [16:01].

AM: To White Sands and to Huntsville.

INT: Wright Patterson Field [16:05]?

AM: Yeah. Oh Patterson [16:06] I didn't know, but I knew it was connected, and this is why I spoke for example of the infrared and the wind tunnel and so on and so forth, and that I remember. And they wanted to get these people out as fast as possible. I don't know what criteria they used to decide this guy has been processed sufficiently to be sent on because there was some ambiguity as to whether all of them would stay or whether some would be sent back to Germany. So I think it was -- this was my impression at the time -- so that -- it's not that they were interrogations, but they were long conversations with them to figure out both what their past was, but above all what their specialties were, and then to -- again, in my judgment -- have them [17:00] talk about each other in terms of what they could bring to whatever the project may have been, and I know nothing about the projects. Strictly nothing, and I was just you know, the fifth training wheel on a tricycle or something like that, and continued plying them with the usual stuff, you see.

More, I don't remember.

INT: Henry Kolm [17:25] talked of bringing them in secretively, because they didn't want anyone to know, maybe not even the State Department, to know that they were bringing in these enemy aliens into this country, without citizenship, without immigration papers.

AM: Well, I would say that, and I totally share Henry's recollection in the sense that 1142 [17:50], and certainly Fort Strong [17:51] -- what was the Post Office Box again?

INT: 2276 [17:52]. Does that ring a bell with you?

AM: Yeah, I have it in my paper --2276 [17:57]. It was all [18:00] hyper secret. I mean there was absolutely no doubt in the mind of any one of us that the government didn't want this to be known. All things being equal at that time, a Nazi [18:10] was a Nazi. A German was a Nazi [18:12], et cetera, et cetera, and to bring them here, I mean, good God. When you come right down to it, it's sort of extraordinary that you should, after you've captured some German officers, bring them to the United States. I mean, what's going on here?

INT: So with that, it seems odd that they would allow you to go into downtown Washington with Wernher von Braun [18:39], who may be more recognizable.

AM: He wasn't recognizable at the time. Absolutely not. I mean, nobody knew who he was. None of us. None of us had any idea. And then there are those who of course who will maintain that some of his colleagues were every bit as known or would be [19:00] every bit as well-known as he was for the scientific work that they had done. I mean he had more visibility than the others, and I think one has tended to make a hero out of him, a superhero, et cetera, et cetera, which suited him very well, but also suited the Americans very well when they want to run with that ball. But there were some others in there that,

needless to say, never hesitated to say yes, we were a team and Wernher von Braun [19:29] was the head of the team and so on and so forth. But I think it was all undercover. Not undercover, I mean, I don't want to say it's spooky; it wasn't that. But to the extent to which you can keep this out of the press and it was kept out of press, as far as I know. Certainly as long as I was wearing the American uniform and was doing stuff with these people, I don't remember having read anything about them in any newspaper, in any magazine [20:00], or heard anything about it on the radio. I mean, nobody knew what was going on, and then in addition to that, we never talked about it. When Henry [20:10] said -- made that statement to you, it's totally credible, totally credible. And, there may even be -- have been some among us who said this is really going a little bit too far, to bring these guys here. [laughs] I was being a little bit too nice to them, especially those who didn't have the suspicious mind that I had, that they knew and those who brought them over here knew that we're going to use them for whatever we're going to use them for, you see. That certainly the thing that was most secret, as to what they were being used for, you see. So it was just the question did people know as to whether they were here, but it was also a question if they did -- should they find out, what would one say about why they were here.

INT: When you and your [21:00] group left 1142 [21:01] to go to Strong [21:03], did you go as a group, did you go by train, by vehicle?

AM: I have absolutely no recollection. No recollection of that, whatever. I might even have gone through New York and changed what I had in my duffle bag at home and then take the train up. But I really have no recollection of it, whether we went all together. I really don't know. I mean, I don't remember.

INT: Was the operation at Fort Strong [21:33] smaller or larger than what was going on at 1142 [21:36]? Just, I mean, physical size-wise in terms of personnel.

AM: I think it was, to me, at any rate, somewhat larger because there were more German scientists there. As a result of that, there was also more people dealing with them, you see. It was at a more advanced stage [22:00]. But I may be wrong on that. I may be wrong on that. Just as I said, they had people up there who knew what they were doing as they processed these guys. I'm using an incredibly vague word when I said process them, meaning just what their specialties were, how highly regarded they were -- also how they would have to team them up because Huntsville and -- which was the other place -- White Sands, you see, that go down there as individuals. I don't know much about the scientific enterprise, but the way I read the situation at the time is obviously they wanted some certain bunch of specialists together on one job, rather than on another. That's why I mentioned the wind tunnel, that's why I mentioned infrared, and that's why I mentioned the rocketry, right. Those are three areas [23:00] I happen to hear about. Don't ask me what it's all about. It would seem to be logical that they would want to have a team of scientists that would be able to work on a wind tunnel. Apparently they had a considerable advance on America on wind tunnels. Apparently, also, they were the ones who came up with infrared light, but I'm not sure, of the Germans. But that's what I was given to understand at the time, and then again I would suppose the specialists working on infrared stuff, I don't know what kind of scientists it would take, may take chemists, physicists, what do I know, but it would take a team. My hunch was that's what they were doing up at Fort Strong [23:48]. Do you understand? To tease out what were the right kinds of teams to be sent to different places because it was quite clear they

were not going to stay in Fort Strong. Just as it was also [24:00] clear that they wouldn't stay down at P.O. Box 1142 [24:03].

INT: Where did you go after Fort Strong [24:09]? Did you go back to 1142 [24:08]? Do you remember chronologically how things were?

AM: I think that way my final station.

INT: Do you remember where you were mustered out, or discharged, I should say?

AM: My own hunch is that I went back to ground zero, Fort Dix [24:26]. Is that possible?

INT: Fort Knox [24:28]?

AM: No, Dix [24:26] because that's where I went first. That's where, when I was induced --

INT: Oh, so you were inducted --

AM: -- inducted at Fort Dix [24:37], and I was there for two weeks and then I was sent away, but that was where I had my fist run-in with KP and this, that, and the other thing, and then they sent me down to Fort Knox [24:46]. But I think I went back for a few days to Fort Dix [24:52], but I am not sure. Would that make sense?

INT: Yeah, sure. To go back to whatever was nearest to your home, and Fort Dix [24:55] was.

AM: That's what I [25:00] vaguely remember. But I certainly didn't go to Fort Knox [25:01], and certainly didn't go to Camp Ritchie [25:12]. I will be able to check whether I went back to -- and I'll let you know when I went back to 1142 [25:23] because as I told you I found the letters that I wrote to my parents. There may be a letter in there that may be P.O. Box 1142 [25:32] and the date.

INT: The other giveaway is -- are Leslie Willson's [25:41] diaries. When we get you copies of those, because he keeps track of when he arrived and left certain places, and I think, according to his diaries, you guys were at 1142 [25:48] for a chunk, then at Boston, and

then back to 1142 [25:56] for a short while, for a month or so.

AM: Yeah, that's perfectly possible [26:00]. That's perfectly possible. It's possible. I mean certainly, if he has a diary, I mean you couldn't do any better than that because Leslie [26:10] was -- is a very meticulous -- was a very meticulous guy. In addition to that, he wouldn't invent anything, so it is possible that we would've gone back to 1142 [26:25]. But God knows what we did there. I don't think we would've done very much. We probably would've twiddled our thumbs.

INT: Do you remember when you left Fort Strong [26:34], had that operation shut down?

AM: No, but it was being, I thought, phased out. It was a whole question because we didn't -- I mean someone like myself didn't know who was being sent where, right. I knew that the program was moving in a direction of sending them to places where they would be able to do their work. The only two places I heard about were Huntsville and White Sands. I heard of nothing else [27:00]. I mean you mentioned another place, but those were the only two that I had ever known anything about, not that I knew what was going on there. I didn't have a clue. Didn't have a clue.

INT: Right. Okay. Do you have anything?

INT: I think that's it.

INT: Do you have anything else, that you think -- that we left out?

AM: No, the only thing that I --

INT: One final question is that you commented before, how do you think your experiences at 1142 [27:33] have affected you after the war, in any way? Did they inspire a publication?

AM: Well the only thing that it did with me is that when my parents asked me what are you

doing and I couldn't tell them what I was doing, the phrase that I kept using over and over and over again, also with friends and family and so on and so forth, was always, "I'm preparing World War III." I was singularly struck by the fact [28:00] that all that we had on our brain, that the American authorities had on their brain, was the Soviet Union. I don't like to engage in cheap psychology. It's not exactly my cup of tea. But it would seem to me very, very -- how should I say -- very bizarre that I should've studied and written some of the books that I've written, without having had that earlier awareness of the dawn of what I came to call -- and I think that may be my own formulation [29:00] actually -- the dawn of what I call the Second Cold War [29:02]. My first two books were on the problem of the western realm relationship with Soviet Russia, 1917 to 1920, do you follow? And I called what happened afterwards, namely the quarantine that we established around the Soviet Union, between the wars and so on and so I called that the First Cold War [29:25], you see. Then I, you know, went on from there to deal with the second Cold War [29:30], but I didn't use in those first books, and certainly I didn't know back then when I was in the Army, I didn't use the words, the phrase "cold war." That's why I say to you, I kept speaking about preparing the third world war. I knew it wasn't for very peaceful purposes that they got a hold of these guys. That's the thing that left a scratch on my mind [30:00]. It's silly to say that, but I just think it registered that way with me.

INT: Using your own phrase or term, do you think the dawn of the Second Cold War [30:11] rose a little earlier at 1142 [30:18] than it did elsewhere?

AM: Absolutely. Absolutely. In other words, I would say to you that -- and this is more complicated stuff but it takes two to tango. I'm sure that the Soviets were not innocent,

and they were thinking "how we going to defend ourselves from a new invasion?" They were obsessed after European Russia had been practically destroyed by the Germans and deadly afraid that there would be a resurgence, a revival of Germany and this would happen again. And we know the old saw that [31:00] generals always prepare the last war, not the future one. They thought -- and it was perfectly normal that they should be worried about it, and would set up the Warsaw Pact [31:15], as we set up NATO [31:17] for God's sake, and it took two to tango, and we have it today in Georgia. What the hell? We're not innocent in the affair. Certainly the Soviets -- the Russians, not the Soviets -- are not innocent. Georgia is to Russia what Cuba is to America. I mean, it's the second time in Cuba, basically. To read in the paper now, I can only laugh that there are two Russian airplanes that have just landed in Venezuela and that there's a Russia frigate which is in the Caribbean right near there; it just makes me laugh. Here we're starting up again. And this is why I never accepted the purely ideological interpretation [32:00] of the Cold War [32:00]. There were real conflicts of interest, conflicts of power, et cetera, et cetera, and that's what I sensed at the time. I've been severely criticized for that, and probably with good reason. But, I do say it was the dawn of the Cold War [32:17] and that I was in on it.

(End of Tape 4A)

(Beginning of Tape 4B)

AM: Never had something to that I was always, perhaps -- I came from a more left liberal background than most of the others did, than all the others did, and that certainly affected the way I viewed the world at the time. There's no doubt about that. Get lost [laughs].

INT: Well, thank you very much.

AM: Take it easy. No, no, I don't want to throw you out.

INT: No, that's fine, but we've got to pack up. We've got to call a taxi.

AM: No, I'll give you a list for a taxi.

INT: And we've got to get you to sign this piece of paper, which we'll make you a copy of.

[end of transcript]

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