

Fort Hunt Oral History  
P.O. Box 1142  
Interview with George Frenkel  
by Brandon Bies, Sam Swersky and Doug Heimlich  
December 5, 2006 & January 18, 2007

BRANDON BIES: Today is December 5, 2006. This is National Park Service historian Brandon Bies, as well as Fort Hunt Oral History Project team members Sam Swersky and Doug Heimlich. We are here in the home of George Frenkel in Kensington, Maryland, and we're here to record a little bit about his experiences relating to Post Office Box 1142 [00:29] and his own personal history. With that, George, if we want to get started, again, if you could just start by telling us a little bit about when and where you were born, about your family, and your early life in Germany.

GEORGE FRENKEL: Okay. I was born in Berlin on the 13th of February 1919 at the very end of [01:00] World War I. When I was about six weeks old, my family traveled to Switzerland, specifically Zurich, where my father took a very enticing job as the deputy of the chief executive [unintelligible] of a department store trust. My early childhood in Switzerland I remember very little of; just some visual images. However, I stayed there until I was about 5 years old, and my family decided [02:00] to go back to Germany because they found Germany, at that time the Weimar Republic, more enticing to live there than Zurich, although Zurich was certainly a very pretty town. My father hungered for the more sophisticated life in a country, which, at that time, was blossoming culturally and, unfortunately, before too long, faced different times because, in the wake of the inflation, which for all practical purposes, destroyed the German middle class and drove them into the arms of Hitler [02:56], that [03:00], for all practical purposes, ushered in difficult times for us. Fortunately, thanks to a connection that my grandmother had with Carl Laemmle [03:20], who was a school pal of hers in the province of Gutendugbot, now Guttendugbotten [spelled phonetically]. We saw quite a bit of Carl Laemmle, who

later on became the founder of Universal Pictures Corporation. He was a frequent guest in our house. Whenever he came to Europe, he would stop by [04:00]. My father, who saw the handwriting on the wall, decided to ask Carl Laemmle [04:11] whether he would give me an affidavit so that I could immigrate to the United States. Carl Laemmle [04:21] told him that he would make a major effort to get me an affidavit, but since he had already given so many affidavits, he felt that the American Immigration and Naturalization Service would not be too kindly disposed to still another person being sponsored by Carl Laemmle [04:53]. He talked to members of my American [05:00] family, the scions of my grandmother's brother, who immigrated to the United States quite early in the game and established a very lucrative commercial enterprise, a silk wholesale house. He finally persuaded the owner of that business and his brother, who lived off his inheritance, to give me the affidavit. They did it reluctantly because they were worried that I would be a financial burden to them and that [06:00] they would have to support me. Well, initially, one brother, the older brother, the owner of this wholesale house, employed me in his business until I found greener pastures, meaning a little more money because my weekly salary at that time was \$11.50, which even in those times was not exactly a munificent income. This was my fault. He had asked me how much I thought I needed, and I wanted to be modest, but I was unfamiliar with American commercial ventures, and I had no [07:00] idea how much it took to sustain oneself in the United States.

BB: Real quickly, going back, this time when you were coming to America in 1937 is when you came here, did you actually come here after Kristallnacht [07:22]? Did that take place while you were in Germany still?

GF: Yes, it took -- no, I am sorry. I had already left.

BB: But your family was still --

GF: And I was trembling thinking that my family was facing destruction. But whereas members of my family went to concentration camp and were pretty brutally treated, with one exception, my uncle who had been an officer, a German officer in World War I [08:00], they managed to be dismissed from the concentration camp. At that time, that still existed. Later on, people who went to a concentration camp were brutally killed, as you probably know. But for me that was, and for my father, specifically, that was the handwriting on the wall.

BB: Could you relate a little bit, you had mentioned earlier, your father sought refuge with a cousin of his, was it?

GF: Yes, a nephew.

BB: A nephew.

SAM SWERSKY: Could you describe what Kristallnacht [08:46] was and what happened after?

GF: Sure. When Hitler [08:58] was already in power [09:00], a Polish student, whose name I don't recall, but he is certainly recorded in the history book, killed a German diplomat. That gave the Nazis [09:21] the excuse to exact retaliation on the German Jews. They were rounded up, put into concentration camps, with few exceptions, I'm sure, and their businesses and other Jewish-controlled establishments, synagogues, and so on were ransacked or destroyed. Because kristall [10:00] splinters, and these businesses were destroyed or at least ransacked, it was called the Kristallnacht. After the Kristallnacht [10:21] was over, the Jews were given a temporary reprieve, but my father, who was a

very sagacious man, very widely traveled, had no illusions about what might happen. There were many Jews, who, to their detriment, thought that this would blow over, especially if they proved their continuing loyalty [11:00] to Germany, but the Nazis [11:06] didn't want any Jewish loyalty; they wanted to get rid of the Jews as soon as they could. I think you know the history of the Holocaust [11:17], so that I don't have to elaborate on that. Well, as far as I'm concerned, I worked in a good many low-level jobs. I was initially a delivery boy in Sellcutta [spelled phonetically]. I then proceeded to another job to become a stock and order clerk.

BB: And when you were here, you first lived at the Young Men's Hebrew Academy?

GF: Association. Yes, I shared a room [12:00] with another German-Jewish refugee. I remember that we paid \$3.50 each to live at the Y[MHA]. That left me roughly \$1 for food and 20 cents for entertainment, going to an occasional movie. I certainly couldn't buy any clothing, but fortunately, one of my sponsors was generous, and he took me and he bought me quite a few clothes. He was appalled that I didn't own an umbrella or goulashes and that my ties were German rather than [13:00] American. So I was clothed in the American image, in his image. I then, as I mentioned, got another job, and while I was in that job, World War II broke out. The Germans marched into Poland. You know the rest of the story.

BB: When you came here, you did speak a bit of English?

GF: I spoke very good English because I was in a school, enrolled in a school, from which I graduated and got my certificate [14:00] of maturity, which is called abitur [spelled phonetically], in German. I spent about nine years studying English, and after two years of residence in the United States, I spoke English, for all practical purposes, the way I do

today. Later on, when I went to night school, to Engrid [spelled phonetically] University, did all of my graduate and postgraduate work as a night student; I first acquired a degree in English literature and modern foreign languages, and then later on, a degree in Germanic languages and literature and a master's degree [15:00] after my departure from the Army, after my retirement.

DOUG HEIMLICH: George, one last thing I wanted to ask you on the Holocaust [15:14] when you came over. You said that most of your immediate family had escaped the Holocaust, but that you did have an aunt that was being shipped to a camp, and on the way, she did perish.

GF: Theresienstadt [15:28] in [unintelligible] Czech Republic.

DH: Do you know what year that was when that happened?

GF: I am not sure. It was after I had left for the United States. She was protected by her Aryan sister-in-law, who was a wonderful human being [16:00], the widow of my -- the widow of my uncle -- one of my uncles on my father's side, and she made life bearable for my aunt as long as she could. My uncle died quite early, and he never experienced any of these persecutions. In a sense, he was fortunate, but obviously, an early death is not a very fortunate event.

BB: Before we get off of the Holocaust [16:49] and move on to your World War II service, real quick if you want to mention, you said that you had a younger brother, but since he was born in Switzerland, it may have been a little easier for him to get an affidavit [17:00]?

GF: Yes, because he emigrated under the Swiss quota, since he was born in Switzerland. American immigration laws prescribed that people who were born in a specific country,

regardless of their citizenship, were allowed to emigrate under the quota extended to that country. And so since he was born in Zurich, he was permitted to come to the United States much faster. As a matter of fact, the immigration story of my family is quite interesting. My [18:00] father, my mother, and my grand -- no, correction -- my father and my mother were able to emigrate in 1939, if I remember correctly, and they even managed to bring out their household goods and a certain amount of money, not much. But fortunately, my father had stashed away some money in England during the time that he was working for the Economist. What you see in this room is part of my family heirloom.

BB: Really?

GF: This is a picture by the [19:00] Dutch painter Kalbogon [spelled phonetically]. He was a Dutch Impressionist.

BB: Does that say 1903 on it? I'm trying to see the date. Or 1913?

GF: Could be. I've not looked at it.

BB: Sure. So your family was able to actually bring that over in the frame and everything? Or they just roll up --

GF: Yes.

BB: That's fascinating.

GF: This picture here is --

DH: Looks like a Rembrandt.

GF: You are very perceptive.

DH: I've been to Holland and I've seen lots of the paintings there of Rembrandt.

GF: I've been to Holland too. I'm pretty widely traveled, thanks in part to my European

military [20:00] service. Point being, the painter of this picture was a Frenchman who painted in the style of Rembrandt, but he is not known in this country. And I think the frame is more valuable than the picture.

[laughter]

DH: I also wonder, you always, you say that you are fortunate. You've been saying that several times during our sitting. To me, not only did your family get out, they got out with some money; they got out with some of their heirlooms. I guess with other families during that time who were Jewish, they just weren't that fortunate in terms of the Holocaust [20:46], and how many can say they got all of their family out.

GF: A great many Jews were convinced that this would blow over [21:00]. This was a grievous mistake. And when they realized they would be deported to Eastern Europe, it was too late. They were rounded up, sent in cattle cars to various concentration camps, some of them also who lived in Germany. I've known people who have been to concentration camps and survived them. They were just either tremendously plucky or fortunate, probably a combination of both. But I have a great deal of admiration for the Jews who managed to stay alive [22:00] and managed to survive all of this, and some of them even still live in Germany to this day. I don't think -- I have -- I hold no brief against the current generation of Germans. They are not, obviously not responsible. There were a great many others who refused to buckle under the Nazis [22:38]. My parents-in-law -- my wife was born a Lutheran, is not Jewish -- my parents-in-law absolutely refused to join the Nazi Party and suffered considerable hardship. My [23:00] father-in-law, who was a banker, lost his job. He finally found employment, but certainly not at the same level of income. And my mother-in-law, a genteel German woman, who

lived very well -- they had money and an active social life -- and to go from door to door and sell foundations in order to keep the family financially afloat. You might ask me, and I will perhaps anticipate that and tell you that, whereas I hated the Nazis [23:58], I [24:00] didn't indict in my own mind the entire German people. And when I became, in the course of my military service, an interrogation officer, I abided strictly by the dictates of the Geneva Convention. I never mistreated a prisoner of war. I interrogated him. It was -- became a battle of wits. And late in the war, they knew that the war was lost anyway, and they didn't resist interrogation, at least most of them. But to me, the idea of mistreating another human being is absolutely [25:00] out of the question. I would never have done it, and if I had another opportunity, I still wouldn't. I was born -- I was raised in the humanitarian spirit, and I had a very strong regard and admiration for the German poets, who are still revered. It would have been impossible for me to kill anyone gratuitously. When I finally arrived in my native city and joined the [26:00] so-called Berlin District Interrogation Center [26:04], at that time the exodus of Germans from the occupied countries took place, and I watched how German residents of the German part of Czechoslovakia came through Berlin, mostly women because the men were still at the front. They had some horse carts or some other carts in which they carried shabby belongings, and [27:00] many of the women were barefoot in pitiful condition. I simply couldn't get these people, these miserable people who suffered a miserable thing, I couldn't do anything to them. They were human beings.

DH: I think that's what Brandon would probably like to pick up, is with the start of World War II.

BB: Yes, if that's okay, unless either of you have any thoughts, have anything else you'd like



to cover on Holocaust [27:36] or Mr. Frenkel's life in Germany.

DH: I would say that I can hear the emotion in your voice as you talk about the war, and, well, I'll let that be that.

GF: You want to hear something about my military service?

BB: Absolutely, but did you have something that you were going to say?

SS: Maybe just one last question [28:00], wrapping up the family. Was your family fairly well assimilated to German culture? Was your Jewishness, Jewish heritage obvious?

GF: Yes, it was. On my mother's side, the family had lived in Germany for centuries. I don't know how far back that went. I traced it up to a certain point, and then I just didn't have any -- I couldn't collect any more background. But they were exceedingly well assimilated, so much so that one of my forbearers on my mother's side was made a juror [29:00]. That was in those days a high honor for Jews. So that just shows you the degree of assimilation. My father's family came originally from Poznan, Poland, which at one time was part of Germany. You probably recall the various partitions of Poland, where one part went to Germany, one part to Austria Hungary, and one part to Russia, I think, yeah. They came to Berlin, my father's family, by way of Silesia [spelled phonetically] [30:00], and some of them stayed in the Silesian area, and others went to Berlin. They were about as assimilated as Jews in Germany could be. I have to say that the very fact that so many German Jews were assimilated, well assimilated, and had high-ranking jobs in the German government during the days of the Weimar Republic, it seemed inconceivable to them that what happened to them did happen. They were simply not prepared for it [31:00].

SS: In growing up either in Zurich or in Germany, did you face any discrimination based on

your religion, do you recall?

GF: I personally, no. If there was some discrimination, I wouldn't have sensed it as a young kid. Later on, when I went to high school, to the gymnasium, I experienced some anti-Semitism, but for the most part, my classmates were very kind, didn't ostracize me, treated me as one of their membership. I recall [32:00] only one instance where a fellow student, who became a member of the Hitler [32:11] Youth, had it out with one of my classmates, and that classmate's --

(End of Tape 1A)

(Beginning of Tape 1B)

GF: -- anti-Semitism there, but it didn't affect me personally; if so, to a very minor extent.

BB: All right, well, with that, why don't we move on to a little bit about your military service? We started to get to it earlier. I guess you worked a number of jobs when you came here to the United States. What was your job again when you were drafted in 1941? What were you working as?

GF: At that time, I worked for a commercial enterprise that engaged in embroidered goods. It was a well-established firm, and I was a stock and order clerk. So I picked stock in order to fill orders. It wasn't a very exciting job [01:00], but I made more money than I did before. I started out, as I told you, at \$11.50 per week, and I worked my way up to \$17 a week. But it still wasn't very much.

BB: And so at this point, had all of your education been in Germany? You hadn't attended any schools here in the United States?

GF: I don't recall when I started to go to school in the United States as a night student. It must have been somewhere during the time that I was employed in either one of these

establishments.

BB: Okay.

GF: But I can't tell you the beginning or the end. Needless to say, once I entered the military [02:00], it stopped, but only temporarily. Later on when I was an officer, stationed in Fort Riley, Kansas [02:09], I and a fellow officer would go to Manhattan, Kansas, where Kansas State University, then Kansas State College, was well established. The name of this school is also associated with [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. He, if I remember correctly, was a native son of Kansas. But there was a long hiatus.

BB: Sure.

GF: When I was stationed in Berlin, I decided that would be very interesting and very helpful [03:00] for me to speak Russian. I met a Russian officer. That's a long story, which I'll be happy to tell you some other time.

BB: Sure.

GF: That's when I was almost killed by a Soviet deserter. I made a compact that we would exchange lessons; I would teach him English, and he would teach me Russian. But I did find a German who spoke fluent Russian, and he gave me some lessons. But that was the extent of it. Later on, long after the end of World War II, I had a great many academic experiences in and out of the Army [03:51], and at any time that you so desire, I would be very happy to tell you what I studied.

BB: Great [04:00]. You were drafted then in 1941. Do you recall the exact date or the month that you were drafted?

GF: Let me see whether--

BB: It's probably on some of --

GF: If you could hold some of the --

[talking simultaneously]

BB: The paperwork. And if you'd like to consult with this while we're --

GF: Yeah.

BB: -- while we're talking, that's --

GF: It was -- it must have been in May 1941.

BB: Okay.

GF: And that period of May to October '41 covered my induction and my basic training.

BB: And could you relate -- you had mentioned earlier the incident that happened in your first official day in the Army [04:53]. Could you relate again where you went for your initial training and what happened that first day?

GF: Okay. Well [05:00], I was taken to the station hospital, and I was there for a month recuperating.

BB: And could you relate to how that happened, where you were at?

GF: I was at Camp Upton -- I was at Camp Upton [05:20] -- excuse me [laughs] -- in upstate New York. This was a huge induction and training center. I don't recall getting any training there. I may have gotten some very basic training, but I don't think so. But when I was released and considered ready for service, a levee [spelled phonetically] came in for [06:00] people, for soldiers, were to join, were to experience horsemanship training, and then later transferred to one of the two still existing divisions that were still on horseback. And there were two. One of them was an all-black outfit. At that time, that was before integration which would be occurring when President [Harry S.] Truman [06:44] decreed it, and it turned out to be quite a success. The other one was a cavalry

division. I think it was the 1st cavalry [07:00] division, 12th regiment, but I'm not sure. As a matter of fact, cavalry had a slightly different nomenclature. A company was a troop, and so on. So I was sent to Fort Riley [07:33], and which at that time was a cavalry replacement training center. I was interviewed by an interviewer, and he asked, "Can you ride?" I misunderstood him and I thought he had said, "Can you write?" [laughter]

[08:00] Since I have always been a fairly talented writer, as a matter of fact earned my living mostly as a writer and researcher -- he said, "No. Ride. Not write." And I said, "No." So I was given horsemanship training. That was a somewhat painful experience because I didn't know how to post. Do you know what to post is? You adjust your movements to those of the horse, and once you move in unison, then, you know how to ride a horse. Well [09:00], I was -- initially my training included learning how to post, and, of course, I did it all wrong, and the horse went up; I went down, and we collided in midair. It was very painful until I learned how to post properly. I also had all sorts of other training; shooting, obviously, to fire a pistol from a horse, all of which was not very useful to me at this time of transition. Eventually the cavalry division, which I joined at El Paso, Fort Bliss [10:00], was deprived of its horses and became mechanized and eventually landed in the Pacific and invaded the Admiralty Islands, but by that time, I had left the division, and I must say, I wasn't terribly sorry because this was a bloody war, and I could have well been killed there. But now comes the part of my story where I gradually eased my way into intelligence and related activities.

DH: George, this one story that we really laughed at, as well as when you were very hungry at one point and were heading towards the mess hall [11:00], was that at the horse camp, or

was this a different --

GF: No, that was at Camp Upton [11:05].

DH: Camp Upton, when they called for the dinnertime.

GF: Right. That was my first day of service.

DH: And what happened that day?

GF: I heard the chow call, you know, and I was hungry, a hungry young man. I ran toward -- I wanted to run to the mess hall, and I missed a step in the barracks and fell down the rest of the steps and turned my ankle, and that gave me a month [laughs] of residence in the hospital.

BB: So you then were at Fort Riley [11:53] for cavalry training, and was it when you were at Riley that you found that you were going to be -- you [12:00] started to make this transition into intelligence, or did you go somewhere else after Riley [12:05]?

GF: No, no. I went to El Paso to this cavalry division. But again, I was very lucky. A great many of the regular Army [12:19] soldiers -- and I was drafted very early because in Queens in New York, a great many young men were married, and married men were initially exempted from induction. So I was inducted at a very early stage and sent to Upton [12:50]. After I had been sent to [13:00] Fort Riley and from there sent to Fort Bliss [13:06] in El Paso, Texas

BB: Okay.

GF: That's when my regular military duties began. But at that time, the regular Army [13:21] was still dominant; there weren't all that many draftees. They were -- for a good part of them anyway, they were refugees from the Dust Bowls of Oklahoma and Texas and so on. I would say that a good many of them were functionally illiterate. I remember how

painful it was when the corporal wanted to write a pass that would allow me [14:00] to ride a horse recreationally; it took him forever. But I had a terrific sergeant who was my superior and who found out that I was functionally literate, and so I first became a supply clerk, and then later on I was made a personnel clerk. I didn't have to ride a horse; I rode a truck, which that was not the ultimate in comfort either. But you have to remember that being a cavalry man, a horse cavalry man is a very taxing affair. When you finally call it quits, as far as training is concerned, well, you first groom your horse [15:00]. That's step number one. You know, you use your curry comb and this hook with which to clean the hoofs and brush him down, and -- I'm sorry to be indelicate -- you lifted his tail and polished his rear end [laughs]. And when there were still -- yes, then you cleaned your saddle equipment and then you cleaned your weapon. And when you were done with all of these activities, you could take care of yourself.

SS: At this point were you an American citizen at this point?

GF: I'm glad you asked that question, because that relates [16:00] to a later event. I was not initially allowed to take interrogation of prisoner of war training because I was not a citizen. I had put in for my first papers, which allowed me to be drafted. I mean, if I hadn't allowed myself to be drafted, I probably would have been expelled from the United States. But, in any event, this was not relevant because I was grateful to have been allowed to immigrate to the United States, and I would have never turned down military service, even though I was not exactly enthusiastic about fighting.

DH: If I could interject just one point now, you're doing this training, though, before America has entered the war, is that right?

GF: Yes. As a matter of fact, I can -- I remember the day, although not the date, when I was

in El Paso [17:00]. I think it was El Paso. I think I had already gone from Fort Riley [17:09] to El Paso. And I was walking down the company street, troop street, I think to go to take a shower, and at that point somebody came out of a tent or wherever else and said, "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor [17:31]." And then it was only a question until we entered the war.

BB: Did you know where Pearl Harbor [17:38] was?

GF: Yes.

BB: Okay.

GF: I was quite well educated, and that included geography.

DH: I am curious what your mind was thinking when you heard that that day. Did you think action was going to be what you were going to see in the future for yourself [18:00]?

GF: I really didn't form any clear opinion as to what would happen next. I figured that it was a pretty grave situation, but it sank in slowly. Well, then, of course, I continued in my job, and until there was a call for linguists, primarily German linguists. And I thought that I was a natural for that, and so I applied but was told that I couldn't take this training because I was not a citizen. As a matter of fact, my first papers followed me from post -- pillar to post, and it was only in 1943 [19:00] that I became a citizen, in Alexandria, I think it was. I think by that time I was already at 1142 [19:13]. But the second time around when they had a need for linguists, they decided they needed them badly enough, so I received permission to enter a training program. That training program was offered at Camp Bullis [19:41], which was a desolate area above San Antonio. San Antonio, as you undoubtedly know, is a very pretty city, and whenever we had needs to go to San Antonio, we took advantage of it [20:00]. Well, the IPW, interrogation of prisoner of



war, training was conducted under the supervision of one of the finest men that I have ever met in the military. He was Viennese-born. He was -- I think at that time he was still a major, but later on he became a colonel, a man by the name of Warndof [20:37], W-A-R-N-D-O-F. He was an engineer by profession and, I would think, a longtime resident of the United States, and he came from Texas. And Colonel Warndof [20:53] was a winner; he seemed pretty [21:00] grouchy, but actually he was a gentle and utterly decent man. I still think of him gratefully from time to time, because at various points he took me under his wing and I profited from that. Well, I took the course. It was on various aspects of intelligence extracted from prisoners of war. I did exceedingly well. I may have been the top student in my class.

BB: Do you know about how many people were in the class?

GF: It wasn't all that big, but I can't give you a number. I have a [22:00] very vague recollection. What I remember are the various types of training: organization, documents, insignia.

BB: By organization, was that order of battle, military organization?

GF: Yes. Right. The structure of the German Army.

BB: If you recall, can you take us through a typical day of this training? Was it mostly in classrooms? Was it field training? Were you practicing with interrogations?

GF: It was mostly in the classrooms. I'm sure, or pretty sure, that there were [23:00] interrogation exercises, but the ones, the ones that I remember were the ones at the Camp Ritchie [23:10].

BB: Ritchie, okay. I want to talk about that, but we'll wait till we get there chronologically.

GF: We'll get there pretty fast.

BB: And so finally at Camp Bullis [23:23], were most of your classmates enlisted men or were there some officers there as well?

GF: As I recall it, they were mostly enlisted men. And Colonel Warndof [23:35] was assisted by a man who was not my cup of tea, and I will tell you why. His name was Colonel—his name was Sergeant [Paul] Kubala [23:56]. He was a non-Jewish German [24:00], a native of Berlin, and he was a very bright guy because he was a master sergeant, if I remember correctly. He was also involved in this training. Of course, he spoke fluent German and good but accented English. He had his eye on a more lucrative job, and that job which he eyed was at 1142 [24:45]. Well, I did exceedingly well. Later on when I studied my records at the Pentagon, Colonel Warndof [25:00] expressed himself in very flattering terms about my performance. After the training was over and we got our graduation certificates, I went back to, to El Paso. And I could go on and on and on to tell you about personal experiences that I had. I have to tell you very honestly that I remember some of my dates better than I remember some of my military experiences. In any event, some other time when we meet in private.

[laughter]

SS: We'll [26:00] remember that.

DH: Was there anything else about this assistant that really, just anything that -- I was waiting for something in terms of a character flaw or a -- not a character flaw, but maybe the way he treated you or the way he treated any of the other men there.

GF: Well, I can tell you some of that. He was responsible for my eventually -- I'm sure he was -- winding up at 1142 [26:39] because he respected my performance, I guess, and he made it possible for me to -- I'm sure I'm right at that, he made it possible for me to

come to 1142 [27:00].

BB: And is this Warndof or Kubala [27:02]?

GF: Kubala. Warndof [27:04] went to Camp Ritchie [27:08] and became the head of the German faculty. I will tell you about my reunion with him because that led to a rather ludicrous situation that I should tell you about. But at that time, the Louisiana maneuvers came about, and my division went to Louisiana, to the northern part of Louisiana, the area of Mansfield. That was pretty miserable [28:00], although I must say I was lucky that I was riding on a truck and didn't have to deal with all of these ministrations that I told you about. So we went to Louisiana, and that was very interesting for me personally. I had never had any contact with blacks to speak of. The only black person whom I met socially was a highly regarded gentleman from a very distinguished black family; I have forgotten his name. I met with him and other people, mostly white, personally in New York before [29:00] I ever got to the Army [29:03]. But this was an area heavily populated by blacks, and I got a very healthy perspective on what these people were all about and how they were economically deprived. I must say I was very favorably impressed. They were hardworking, gentle people, and we made it a point to go to their dwellings and talk to them. I found that very worthwhile for my education. They helped us, in turn, by washing our dirty laundry. That was a [30:00] nice additional income, because these were poor people. Their dwellings were spotlessly clean but very poorly furnished, but they were not subservient or anything of that sort. They demanded respect by their actions. And again, it was an education for me.

BB: I think right now we'll -- we have to quick change tapes because we're all out.

(End of Tape 1B)

(Beginning of Tape 2A)

BB: This is the second in a series of tapes of interviews with Mr. George Frenkel, a veteran of P.O. Box 1142 [00:10]. This is National Park Service historian Brandon Bies, as well as Fort Hunt Oral History Project team members Sam Swersky and Doug Heimlich. Today is December 5, 2006, and again, we're at the home of George Frenkel. We'll just pick right back up where we left off. If I could, real quick before we speak anymore about the maneuvers in Louisiana, just a couple of last questions about your activities at Bullis [00:39]. Do you recall about how long you were there at Camp Bullis [00:45], how long that training lasted for, before you went back to El Paso?

GF: Maybe that will jog my memory [01:00]. It must have been in March '43 that I went back to

BB: To El Paso.

GF: El Paso. And, no, I'm sorry. I was there from May to July '42, and then I was at 1142 [02:00] from August '42 until March '43.

BB: Okay, you had mentioned that at Bullis [02:09] you had taken a number of classes in organization of order of battle, documents, insignia. Do you remember any of the other courses that were taught there?

GF: I think they covered pretty much the same ground that they covered subsequently at Fort Ritchie [02:31] -- Camp Ritchie at that time. The training at Camp Ritchie [02:38] was much longer and simply covered more ground.

BB: Okay, okay.

GF: And I will tell you later on about one situation that [03:00] occurred at Ritchie [03:04], which was almost laughable.

BB: How about -- when we get to Ritchie in a little bit here, I may have you compare a little bit. When we learn a little bit more about your experiences at Ritchie [03:16], it might be interesting to look back at how they compared to what you were trained at Bullis [03:21].

GF: I really have a very, very feeble memory of Bullis [03:27] except for my presence there. I remember that they essentially offered the same kind of subjects, but not that much depth. Essentially, Ritchie [03:44] was an expansion of what I was taught at Bullis [03:51]. But because I remember so much better what happened at Ritchie, I must [04:00] say my memory fails me a little bit as far as Bullis [04:04] is concerned.

BB: Okay.

GF: But it really paved my way to the military intelligence.

BB: And so, then, going to back to Louisiana, you just finished speaking a little bit. Did you have any more to say? You mentioned you had a lot of interaction with African Americans there and interacted with them a lot. Any other -- anything else you wanted to relate to that, or shall we move on to the actual maneuvers themselves?

GF: The only other thing that I can tell you about the Louisiana maneuvers was that they were quite taxing. The sanitary facilities left much to be desired. I managed to take a bath in a helmet to the extent [05:00] that I stripped naked in the dark, then poured the water down my body, and managed to keep clean. But--

BB: Was this hot water or --

GF: Cold water. It came from a tank truck. Close living together was not particularly enticing. I remember one of my fellow soldiers who was a very nice person, but not given much to physical hygiene, and he smelled horrendously. Being in this proximity and doing my work as a personnel clerk was not particularly enjoyable.

DH: Had you ever been exposed to such a sultry, warm [06:00] environment?

GF: Well, New York can be pretty hot during the summer, but there was some air conditioning.

DH: Thankfully.

GF: The beginnings of air conditioning. I don't recall any other instance because our travels, in my younger days, took us mostly to Central and Western European countries. So, where were we?

BB: We were speaking about Louisiana maneuvers. So, if there's anything else about those or where you want to take us next from there.

GF: I have pretty much forgotten [07:00] that at that time Sergeant Kubala [07:06] had talked to me about the possibility of taking me to another place, but I was totally absorbed in dealing with the "rigors" -- in quotation marks -- of Louisiana. It was a very unpleasant - - insects which attacked you at night, found you waking up with red welts and that sort of thing. It was not a garden state. But I'm glad, in retrospect, that I endured it because it was part of my education. Well, one bright day, I was performing my [08:00] usual duties. I was told that I was being transferred to a place in Virginia. I think it was identified as Alexandria, Virginia. Frankly, even though I didn't know what was expected of me, I was delighted to get out of this maneuver situation. I arrived at Fort Hunt [08:36], and I have a very nebulous recollection of how I arrived and what happened next. Well, I was apprised of my duties and what Fort Hunt was all about [09:00]. Sergeant Kubala, now First Lieutenant Kubala [09:07], was there. I was placed in charge of the M section, which I had no memory of until I read it in my notes here, although I was, to the best of my recollection, still a lowly private. There were others

whom I don't really recall, with the exception of [Sterling G.] Callahan [09:47]. I do recall the officers. At that time, Fort Hunt [09:57] was strictly an interrogation center [10:00] for captured submarines, German submarines. I saw very little of Fort Hunt [10:15], except the areas, the pastures, the greenery, which was accessible. Getting in and out of Fort Hunt was a pretty cumbersome experience. I never saw any prisoner facility. The prisoners were sort of disembodied voices. The officers who performed the [11:00] interrogation were, other than Lieutenant Kubala [11:06], a captain who had received a direct commission because he was of German parentage and spoke acceptable German, but to the best of my recollection, he did not have any military background. He just received a commission for reasons that have something to do with his language proficiency. There was a college professor who also spoke pretty fluent German, and then there was Kubala [11:50], and those were the only three that I recall performing interrogations [12:00] which were recorded and were later you know what happened at Fort Ritchie [12:12] -- at 1142 [12:15]. I don't know to what extent it is still classified. I don't think it is.

BB: To our understanding -- and forgive me; I should have brought this with me. Everything has been declassified related to the interrogations there. We actually have documentation from the National Archives stating that everything that they have has been released and declassified. In fact, I even brought -- and I'll show you a little bit later if you'd like -- the actual prisoner interrogation records. You can go to the National Archives today, look up a prisoner's name, and actually pull their room monitoring conversations and look and read word for word the conversations [13:00], look at the drawings or the notes that the prisoner might have made during an interrogation. All of those records have

been declassified.

GF: That's very interesting. I think I'll take advantage of that during the spring or the summer.

BB: I would love nothing more than to go with you to the Archives, and we could show you where they're at and look at them if you remember. One thing that might be fantastic would be to actually find your name in some of the interrogation documents because we've been successful for a good number. Perhaps even the majority of veterans we've interviewed, we have actually found actual document that they created while they were there. We can make photocopies of them and everything. While we're on the -- I have a number of questions to ask you, but since we're on the subject, I'll just open that up and show you. We quite literally [14:00] even have the mug shots and everything of -- this is a German general who passed through. That's Ulrich Kessler [14:13], who was the Luftwaffe officer in charge of all of the antiaircraft defenses for all of Germany.

GF: That's very interesting. My God.

SS: Was it in '45?

BB: Yes. He was interrogated at the end of the war in '45, which was after your time there, but they have records from '42 and '43 there. So, by all means, we could attempt to try to pull some of those.

GF: That would be very interesting. So--

BB: And we have more. I can show you now or show you later, but we have full transcriptions in English and in German of the actual -- I mean, here I'll just hand to you. This is part of his file [15:00], the actual interrogation, see the report of interrogation of Kessler [15:05]. It gives the names of the interrogators, the transcribers, the date, the



time. In fact, that's in German, so I'm sure you can read that. So You can read it better than any of us.

[laughter]

GF: I'm completely bilingual. Although, I must say that, over time, English has become my primary language. My wife and I converse in English, despite the fact that we could just as easily converse in German. My wife was a German radio speaker and radio actress [16:00], and she made one fatal mistake. Instead of pursuing a distinguished career in the German media, she married me.

[laughter]

And next year, we will have been married for 60 years.

BB: That's outstanding.

GF: But [German, unintelligible] they were cast these -- some of the people in Dachau [16:42] were cast together with criminals, terrible criminals. I didn't know that.

DH: All [unintelligible] all together[17:00]

SS: And I think on all of these sheets you should see a declassified mark from the National Archives. It should be on the bottom, I think, of the sheets.

BB: So I, unfortunately, this is the only copy. I didn't have a chance to make a copy, but we're more than happy to make a copy of this or any of the other records we have. But, like I said, it would be our honor to go to the National Archives with you and sit down with you and pore -- they literally have records on 4,300 prisoners.

GF: My God.

BB: All of whom, they're arranged alphabetically, and anyone can come in, register as a researcher, and pull the entire interrogation report. So that's the long answer to, yes,

everything has been declassified, and so I want to assure you that [18:00] it is permissible to speak about these things since, you know, we can walk right in and pull all these records ourselves. But I don't want you to think -- your side of the story -- these records can't talk. We can't ask these pieces of paper questions. You, we can ask questions. And that's why this is so important.

SS: In fact, the---

BB: So since the article came out in the Washington Post, we were contacted by the DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency [18:31]. At first I was little bit concerned; why on earth is the DIA calling me about this, but it turns out they, simultaneous to our project, have begun a project called the Lessons Learned Project, and they are looking at the history of interrogation, how interrogation has been conducted over the ages, because obviously there's been a lot in the news lately about interrogation tactics and whatnot in Iraq, at Guantanamo Bay [18:59], and [19:00] they're really seeking to change that, and find out how clearly it worked in World War II, how did they get it to work then, and during other wars as well. But they found out about our project, and they're extremely interested in speaking with veterans or getting the information from our interviews so that they can learn what did work, what didn't work, what were the some of the tactics, so that they can actively apply it to today and use it for their operations.

GF: I think this is absolutely necessary.

BB: Would -- go ahead.

GF: We've much to learn. As a matter of fact, I was lucky enough when I finally went to Europe to be trained by the, received further training by the British Intelligence Service [19:58]. These [20:00] British interrogators were so much more sophisticated and better

than our people. We were just -- we were trained, but the training didn't measure up to the standards that should have been achieved.

BB: Would you be interested, at a later date, perhaps after the holidays when things settle down, in speaking to folks from the DIA with us? And we can certainly be present. They're very interested in either getting the information from our interviews or from coming in and actually speaking with veterans themselves, and they've expressed that they would be honored to speak with anyone who would be interested in speaking with them, so that they can apply this to today.

GF: I would be happy, assuming [21:00] that I would be physically still okay.

BB: Fantastic.

GF: I happen to be in reasonably good shape. I have some infirmities, but I'm still able to do certain things. So if I'm in a position to help a current intelligence agency, I would be happy to do that, simply because I would consider it my patriotic duty.

BB: That's outstanding. And they've been very cooperative with us and very interested in what we're doing, and are willing to either host us at their headquarters or one of their offices in Clarendon, or to come to the actual interviews. They met us a week or so ago at the National Archives to go through some of these records. So [22:00] we can work out the details later, but they would be honored to speak with you. These individuals are actual modern-day interrogators. Some of them, quite literally, have just returned from deployments overseas conducting interrogations and would very much like to learn from your experiences.

GF: Well, the most important thing that they could learn from my generation is how to outwit their opponent. They should have a certain training in psychology or something like that.

I read, of course, a good many of these interrogations conducted by these three officers, and [23:00] I recall one instance, and I want you to treat that with a dash of caution because all of this happened a long time ago and -- but I feel pretty certain that this happened. There was a man -- at that time a major, I think later on promoted -- who was an exceedingly nice person. I actually answered to him as head of the M section, and I think his name was Van Cleve [23:58] or something like that, but I really [24:00] don't remember.

BB: That does ring a bell, a name we've run into before.

SS: Yes.

GF: Well, he, in my opinion, was one of the good guys. But if I remember correctly, he only had organizational control over us. I don't think he was concerned with intelligence matters, but that may be a misapprehension on my part because I did not have any overall understanding of how things worked. I was only concerned with the translation -- I shouldn't say translation. I was only concerned [25:00] with the production of these interrogations in terms of their being taken down by whatever instruments were used. As I recall, they were records. I think they were recorded even on records, old-fashioned records, and it was our job to transcribe them, and that we did. So we had a very limited distance. I had no idea where these prisoners were, where they were interrogated. I just got [26:00] the end result of the interrogation and that was it, and that's why 1142 [26:13] was not a major experience for me. Later on when I became a prisoner-of-war interrogator, interrogated them on the spot overseas that was a different story. And I also have to say I experienced certain things overseas that made me a better interrogator. For instance, I conducted -- we conducted a study of the effects of trench foot, as far as

German prisoners were concerned, and how that [27:00] impaired their military proficiency. I went to a makeshift military hospital where these prisoners were kept and looked at their blackened feet. Not a very appetizing experience, but at least it made me understand how trench foot can affect military capabilities. And I conducted another story -- another interrogation about the effect that our bombing had on lines of communication. Again, I prepared myself properly so that I could conduct this interrogation [28:00] intelligently. I should mention also that I had plenty military duties. I was -- when we went overseas, I was in charge of our enlisted contentions, did things like censored their letters, that sort of thing. So it wasn't all strictly intelligence.

BB: There's a number of questions to follow up on I'd like to ask. You had started to mention about Major Van Cleve [28:37], and I don't know if there was a story there that you wanted to relate or not.

GF: No.

BB: Just that he was who you reported to?

GF: He was my superior. He was very nice to me. I have absolutely no complaints about him. And I don't think that he was instrumental in [29:00] getting me transferred to Ritchie [29:03].

BB: You don't think that?

GF: I surmise that some of the others were instrumental, but I can't say. I really can't accuse anyone. Let me just say, one bright day I was transferred to Camp Ritchie [29:23], and that was a major event as far as my military career was concerned.

BB: I definitely would like us to cover that. I have some follow-up questions on Fort Hunt [29:36] for a little while before we move on to Ritchie [29:38]. First of all, how did you

get to 1142 [29:44] from Louisiana? Did you take a train to get to Alexandria?

GF: I have absolutely no recollection. As a matter of fact, I don't have any visual image of where I stayed [30:00]. This is in Fort Hunt [30:03]. You know, all I remember are these small -- relatively small facilities where we did our work. But I felt totally detached from the actual intelligence effort because ours was a -- just our exploitation of our German proficiency was all that mattered. And I have one recollection, and I would like to caution you that I think it happened the way I'm telling you, but I can't be sure because, here and there, my memory falters a little bit, which is not surprising.

(End of Tape 2A)

(Beginning of Tape 2B)

BB: Go right ahead. I'm sorry about that.

GF: What I remember is that one bright day, I think it was Callahan [00:09], came to me and showed me a recording and, I think, a transcription. One or the other or both, I'm not sure. And said to me, "George, is that what the prisoner said?" And I listened to the tape, and one or the other passage had been "sanitized," in quotation marks, by one of the interrogators or maybe several interrogators; I don't remember which. But it seemed to me [01:00] that the record had been slightly sanitized to make the interrogator look good, and that, of course, was a no-no as far as I was concerned. And it is entirely possible that this was discussed perhaps between Van Cleve [01:34] and the interrogators, but I don't know, and that somebody said, "Let's get rid of this wise-guy," and perhaps that's how it happened. What -- how it happened and to what extent, I can't tell you. I want to be very cautious because [02:00] I don't want to indict a fellow soldier when he didn't deserve this indictment.

DH: So when you said, "Let's get rid of this guy," you were talking about the interrogator was saying that about the prisoner?

SS: No, no, having him [Frenkel] transferred.

DH: Oh, oh. Gotcha.

BB: And so then you -- were you transferred shortly thereafter?

GF: Yes.

SS: Okay, okay. Interesting.

GF: Yes, that happened. If that transfer was intended to shanghai me, it failed miserably. I had a -- I can only say that I had a fabulous experience at Ritchie [02:54].

BB: Going back, some more questions about Fort Hunt [03:00]. You had mentioned that you were in charge of the M Section. What did M stand for?

GF: I have no recollection.

BB: Okay.

GF: I just don't remember.

BB: Okay. Do you remember anybody else who was in that section? Callahan [03:14] you believe was?

GF: Yes. There were others, and for some strange reason I have no recollection of them either. I only remember Callahan [03:25] because he was some, he was a person out of the ordinary because he was a Mormon, and I don't know how deep his military knowledge was. He was a very nice person; that's all I can say. He came to me simply because he probably thought that there was something rotten in the state of Denmark, and it might have been.

BB: So one note before we leave today I'll [04:00] pass on to you, we have a full roster of the

Army [04:03] personnel that were at 1142 [04:05] with your name on it, with Callahan's [04:07] name on it and there's about 600 other names on it with the dates at which they were there. So we'll leave that with you. If you'd like to look at it and see if any other names on there ring any bells or if you remember anything about them. So--

GF: I probably wouldn't, but I'll be glad to scan that.

BB: But certainly -- absolutely. And finally -- I shouldn't say finally, but you mentioned that you recalled three officers who were doing the actual interrogations. Kubala [04:37] was one of them, and then you said there was a captain?

GF: There were two captains. One, I think, was engaged in something commercial. I don't remember what he did. But I can't even tell you why he was commissioned and how he was commissioned. I seem to [05:00] recall that he received a direct commission. I don't see anything out of the ordinary in that except that people who received a direct commission didn't have enough military training in order to be an effective interrogator. I mean, for instance, to make an Army [05:28] officer interrogate a submariner when an Army [05:33] officer doesn't really have much knowledge of submarines impresses me as unwise. But to the best of my recollection, all the prisoners that were interrogated at that time were naval people and not Army [05:53] people, and that impressed me as being strange. But again, there may have been [06:00] reasons, maybe even cogent reasons that I wasn't aware of.

BB: And you mentioned there was the other officer, presumably a captain, he was the one who was the college professor?

GF: Yes.

BB: Okay. And you don't recall either of their names, though?



GF: I don't. Maybe if I were to look at that list, I might.

BB: Sure. Great. We'll definitely do that.

GF: I just don't recall their names.

BB: On the subject, you brought up the submariners and how that was -- and as far as you're concerned, the only focus at 1142 [06:38] was on these German submariners; do you recall there being any United States naval interrogators who were also there at Fort Hunt [06:48]?

GF: No, I don't. And there may have well been, and I just wasn't aware of it. But I don't recall any.

BB: So to your knowledge, it was primarily or [07:00] exclusively Army [07:01] officers who were doing the interrogations?

GF: Specifically those three because I do not recall reviewing the products of others.

BB: And so your role, again, was primarily as a monitor with, you know, listening in. Was this listening in to interrogations or also just the day-to-day room conversations, where a prisoner might be in his room?

GF: Interrogations.

BB: Just interrogations. So that would primarily --

GF: That sort of thing I did extensively in Europe when I was a member of a mobile, field interrogation unit.

BB: But at Fort Hunt [07:54] it was exclusively listening in on interrogations.

GF: Yes.

BB: So for the interrogations -- and, again [08:00], you didn't see them, correct? You were just listening in to the voices.

- GF: I didn't see any prisoner. I didn't even know where they were. I didn't see any interrogation rooms. I just was in my small bailiwick, and that was it.
- BB: Do you recall what the building was like that you were in where you were doing this? Were there other people monitoring at the same time?
- GF: No. If I remember correctly, and my memory may betray me too, there were just these small rooms where everybody did the monitoring. I don't even have a visual image of those rooms anymore. I'm just wondering why my memory of those happenings at Fort Hunt [09:00] was not as clear as my memory of many subsequent happenings.
- DH: George, you mentioned that -- you talked about the outsmarting the prisoner, and you talked about the way that they were very successful at doing that with your ears and listening to these interrogations. Did you learn at Fort Hunt [09:28] even though you weren't part of the actual interrogation, just listening in to what questions were asked and taking down these notes, were you learning about the same time? You just really were just writing down and just not really picking up tactics?
- GF: We were just doing this very limited -- performing this very limited function. Why we were disqualified from interrogation when some of us, including yours truly, were [10:00] reasonably well equipped to do that eludes me to this day.
- BB: Any other questions specific to -- I'd like to get into a little bit about Camp Ritchie [10:13]. We've got about 15 or 20 minutes left.
- SS: Lots of questions. One, were you were transcribing word for word, the interrogation, or were you making a summary of what was being said one to the other?
- GF: To the best of my recollection, we just took down every word and summarized.
- SS: Now, as you're doing this, did you find it difficult to do that, to transcribe word for word

was being said on these recordings?

GF: No, not that I recall.

SS: Sometimes people would speak too fast and you have to go [11:00] back again to hear.

GF: It's entirely possible that that happened, but I have no specific recollection.

SS: As you're transcribing it, are you aware of what's being said? In other words, are you aware of what they're talking about?

GF: Yes. Except that when they were naval personnel and they discussed something specifically Navy-related, of which I had no knowledge, but that, obviously, I missed something. But, again, I have no specific recollection.

SS: Do you remember anything about the subjects? These were U-boat crews and commanders?

GF: It was clear to me that they were naval personnel. Beyond that I didn't know anything, what rank they had [12:00], what specific function on the U-boats; all of that was Greek to me.

SS: Do you remember the types of questions that were posed in terms of what sorts of material they were trying to get from these prisoners?

GF: I had some inkling, but, again, I'm sorry, but I --

SS: No, that's fine.

BB: It's quite all right.

GF: -- cannot be more specific.

SS: We hadn't asked, so I'm just asking.

GF: One thing I'm very scrupulous about, I want to tell you specifically what I know, and not

make anything up.

SS: That's very admirable. I just have to ask.

DH: My last question would be, in terms of the prisoners, did you find them to be cooperative in their answers?

GF: They, they seemed to be, but this was [13:00] still at a time when the German military didn't stand on its last leg.

DH: Right.

GF: So I would have expected them to evade questions, but whether they did -- you get a totally different perception when you're facing a prisoner, and I've faced many of them, including the 14-year-old boy of Gauleiter Sauckel [13:40], who was part of the Volkssturm [13:43], and I think you probably know what that is, that was the German manpower that was mustered after the Germans had suffered [14:00] tremendous losses. But I must tell you, this activity at 1142 [14:12] was a almost disconnected experience. I wish that I had been present, physically present, at one of these interrogations, and I would have a much better memory. But we people of the M Section had an almost isolated life, very detached. I think it was a mistake.

SS: In a similar vein, did you [15:00] either speak with the officers who were doing the interrogation either before or after, and did you have a general feeling -- and it's okay not to remember, of course, but do you have a feeling for how well prepared they were when going into the interrogations, or what went into preparing for an interrogation at 1142 [15:22]?

GF: I really don't remember any specifics. I don't remember even whether I discussed these interrogations with them or whether I just brought them to the attention of Major Van

Cleve [15:41], and he discussed it with his officers.

BB: So when you were done typing up a transcription or a conversation, do you know what happened to these documents? Did you hand them to Major Van Cleve [15:57], or was there another section or something that you recorded them to [16:00]?

GF: No. I think they were just handed to Major Van Cleve [16:05].

BB: Okay.

GF: The other officers had no jurisdiction over me, except that they were much higher ranking. But I think I had the distinct impression that they knew that, in military terms, they were my superiors, but I don't remember any specific instances.

DH: No follow-up questions in terms of a certain part of an interrogation that they needed to talk to you more about, how you took it down?

GF: It might have happened, but [17:00] I just don't recall.

BB: Do you recall when you were at 1142 [17:07], and realizing that you weren't there for more than what, six, eight months or so, any other secret programs that were going on there? Do you remember other personnel that were there that were engaged in other work, or did you talk to anybody else about anything that was going on?

GF: I didn't. I really had no insight into the activities at 1142. I felt very isolated there.

BB: Do you remember if it was -- would you characterize it, if you recall, as formal or informal? Was there inspection? I mean, compared to your days of boot camp and the maneuvers and whatnot, was there inspection? Did you have to go to the parade ground every day?

GF: It was strictly an [18:00] office-type sort of existence. There were no military activities that I attended.

BB: But did you still -- you know, was there a mess hall that, from that sense, it was still like Army [18:18] life?

GF: There must have been, and strangely enough, I don't remember that mess hall. Obviously, this being a military installation. I can't tell you why I remember so few things. For instance, I searched my brain. I was awake during the night for a little while, and I said to myself, "These gentlemen are coming. You must muster as much knowledge as you are duty-bound to do," and [19:00] I cannot remember a mess hall. I cannot remember the room in which I slept. I obviously stayed on the reservation.

BB: Do you remember if it was a private room or a barracks shared with other people?

GF: It must have been. I was only a private, and I'm sure I didn't have any palatial quarters.

SS: So the guy next to you was less smelly than the guy was in Louisiana.

BB: But you did live on post? You didn't live off post?

GF: Yes. I must have because I remember that it took some doing to get off post and go on a date with a nice girl from -- at that time, Washington was overpopulated with young women. The men were [20:00] mostly at the front. So we men were favored by the situation.

BB: So do you recall going on dates in Alexandria or in Washington?

GF: I'll tell you about one date that I had and which was sort of amusing. I knew this girl in New York, if I remember correctly, and she worked as a secretary, I guess, somewhere in Washington. She was a very nice young woman, very pleasant, and I took her on a date to the National Theatre, and I don't remember what we saw. This was pretty much at the beginning before I could shed my [21:00] trooper's uniform. I still had all the accoutrements of a cavalry man. And so I picked her up, resplendent in my uniform,

campaign hat, horse insignia --

DH: Oh wow [laughs].

GF: -- high-laced boots, and I looked like a fugitive from a western.

[laughter]

And when I entered the National Theatre, people stared at me as if I had just landed from Mars. They had never apparently seen a horse trooper before, and [22:00] later on, I got a conventional uniform. They took this uniform and supplied me with a conventional one. My friend was so embarrassed that I looked to people like an apparition from Mars that she said to me, "If you don't get another uniform, don't bother to take me out again."

[laughter]

BB: And so did you take her out again?

[laughter]

GF: Yes, because I got another uniform.

DH: I'll bet you got that quick [laughs].

GF: But Washington at that time was a heaven for bachelors, and I was a bachelor.

BB: Do you recall if you went out with other [23:00] folks from 1142 [23:01] or just group dates, per se?

GF: No group dates, all individual dates. Yes, I went out with others, and I, but in some instances, I don't remember whether they were during my Ritchie [23:20] time or during my 1142 [23:22] time. I took out some very nice girls, and certainly no sluts. But we were all willing to date because their social life was pretty drab because of the heavy preponderance of males -- of women over men.

BB: How did you meet women that you were going out with? Did you go to the USO or were

these people that you just met on the -- I don't want to [24:00] say on the streets, but do you remember how you met them or were they --

GF: Well, Selma, the one I just described to you, I knew in New York, if I remember correctly. The others I really don't recall. I can tell you while I was in El Paso, we met girls at USO dances, and I had a steady date during my time in El Paso when I was with the cavalry division. She was a Mexican American. I even remember her name. Her name was Lucille, and her family, Mexican Americans [25:00] lived in a rather sequestered area. She came from a very nice family. I met her mother, and I think I met her father too. The mother couldn't speak one word of English, although she had lived in El Paso for the longest time. But we went -- she had a car. She was apparently a pretty high-powered secretary or something like that, and she had a very nice family, and I felt very comfortable. The Mexicans as a cultural group were strangers to me. I spoke a few words of Spanish, mostly because I studied so many romance languages. I had studied Latin for six years in high [26:00] school. I had several years of French. So I was quite comfortable listening to Spanish, but speaking was another matter. Lucille spoke accented English, but perfect English, and so I had no linguistic problems there. But I remember being very uncomfortable in the presence of her mother because I didn't know what to talk to her about. And one bright day, I wanted to point out to her -- when she asked me how I was, I said -- I wanted to say I was tired because I'd had a tough day at training. And I said, "Ya casado," and I should have said [27:00] "cansado" because "cansado" means tired and "casado" means married.

[laughter]

And fortunately, Lucille, who had been primping upstairs, came down and straightened



things out. Otherwise, the mother probably would have thrown me out of the house.

DH: George, how was it in your uniform, when you got out of that horse uniform and into the regular uniform in Washington? Did the people just sort of recognize you and acknowledge your presence in the uniform like that or was it just another --

GF: Well, military people were a common sight then in Washington. It was -- to the people who attended that performance, I looked like a fugitive from a [28:00] wild western.

DH: So you really didn't have to worry about -- not too many people asking you what you were doing?

GF: Nobody asked.

DH: Okay.

GF: I mean, I was just another soldier on temporary leave. It was pretty difficult to get off post and on post because I seem to recall that I had to take public transportation.

BB: While -- I'm sorry. Go right ahead. I'm sorry.

GF: I think, if I recall correctly, I got on a bus, and I told the driver to let me get off at a certain point, and I walked the rest of the way, which was very -- just a few short steps. I walked on post [29:00].

BB: And this would have been on, do you recall, the George Washington Memorial Parkway [29:05]? Is this the bus, is that the route that you were on? Do you recall any of the roads?

GF: Yes. I'm pretty sure I was on the Parkway [29:14].

BB: So you would take a bus to and from the post?

GF: I may have taken a taxi here and there, but I don't have to tell you that the soldiers of those days were not particularly well paid, and so I'm sure I took public transportation

wherever I could.

SS: Did you also get a chance to get back home to New York?

GF: Pardon me?

BB: Did you also have a chance to visit -- go back home to New York?

GF: I probably did, although I have a clearer memory of going home from Ritchie [29:52]. I can tell you some amusing stories about that, but it's strange that the [30:00] 1142 episode didn't resonate as much with me as it should have.

BB: In our final minutes, we've literally got about a minute or two left of tape. Doug had started to touch on this, in terms of the level of secrecy, do you recall when you were at 1142 [30:19] ever being briefed, "You are to not discuss this with anyone?" Was that just understood or were you --

GF: I was instructed, I'm pretty sure, and I was very security-conscious. After all, this was a wartime situation, and this was not a laughing matter. And I took it very seriously, and I just didn't talk about it, certainly not to my family. This stayed within myself.

BB: And even after the war ended, did you still keep that inside? You didn't share that, the story of 1142 [31:00] and with your other military career, did you, you know --

GF: If it was still classified, as it was for me after the war, I did not spill any beans.

BB: So even when you married your wife shortly after the war --

GF: I did not talk classified matters with her. I did not discuss it, and she didn't press me either. She was much too smart to know that this was something that I had to keep within myself.

BB: Outstanding. Well, that is -- we have about thirty seconds of tape left, so we'll just go ahead and call it quits for right now.

(End of Tape 2B)

(Beginning of Tape 3A)

BB: -- on multiple-page documents, but great. All right. Well, I think we'll go ahead and get started again, if you're all set. So, again, today is Thursday, January 18, 2007. This is Park Service historian Brandon Bies, along with Fort Hunt Oral History Project team members Sam Johnson and Sam Swersky. We're here with Mr. George Frenkel in his home in Kensington, Maryland. This is the second of a series of interviews on his experiences at 1142 [00:37] as well as at Camp Ritchie [00:39] and other places. I think we'll go ahead and get started. I'd like to just start, I guess, by recapping a little bit of our conversations of a month ago. We spoke a good bit about Fort Hunt [00:51] and what you recalled. And if you could just for us, to get us back on track, if you could just summarize again briefly what exactly your role was [01:00] at 1142.

GF: As best I recall, I was in charge of a group of enlisted men, who assisted, in a sense, the interrogators, and my connection was strictly with the interrogators. The only ones that I met were all officers. We were just a group of enlisted men who transcribed the interrogations. What happened to these interrogations later on, I don't know. They were passed on probably to some [02:00] intelligence unit that exploited them for intelligence purposes. I never met any of those. We were pretty isolated. We functioned in doing this work for the interrogators, and we were supervised by a very fine gentleman. I think he was a major, Van Cleve [02:39], who was really an administrative supervisor, but to the best of my recollection, didn't have any intelligence functions. But I may be wrong there because, as I said [03:00], we were quite isolated. That's about all I can say about our functions. I think I pointed out the last time that the German prisoners of war who

were interrogated were all naval personnel, submarine personnel, who had been captured, I guess, on the high seas and were taken to Fort Hunt [03:37] for interrogation purposes. And I would assume, because that's what we did during, during our operations in Europe, that once we had interrogated them, they were sent to some prisoner-of-war camp and, unless they were war criminals [04:00], they were released and had a post-war existence in their native countries.

BB: You've mentioned that you supervised some other enlisted men. Do you have any recollection about how many there were that were working in this monitoring program?

GF: I really can't tell you. I would think no more than 10. And except for Callahan [04:32], whom I've mentioned to you before, I really don't have much of a recollection of my fellow soldiers.

BB: Do you recall, and you may not, but do you recall if many of them were German-born, immigrants to this country, or native to this country, or a mix?

GF: I would assume, from the basis of my [05:00] experience in Camp Ritchie [05:02], that some of them were German-born, probably the majority, but I can't give you any specific figures.

BB: Okay. You may have addressed this the last time, and I think you hinted upon it right now, but did you ever in your time there actually see any of the prisoners who were there?

GF: I never saw a single prisoner. I don't even know where they were kept. We were strictly insulated, so I can't be helpful in that regard.

BB: Of the conversations, now, again, were you monitoring and listening in the room conversations, or were you transcribing the recorded conversations, or were you doing

both [06:00] functions?

GF: Again, my memory fails me. As best I recall, I was -- I listened in the [unintelligible] there, but the others did the actual transcribing. I was -- despite my junior rank, I guess I was -- I supervised what they did, and if there was any question, resolving something that the prisoners had said or had only alluded to, I got involved there. I also had some administrative, if I recall correctly, some administrative [07:00] supervision over these other enlisted men, again, if my memory serves me correctly. I hate to make all these qualifying remarks. I was only a PFC and certainly not a person of great import.

BB: You mentioned that all the interrogation that you recall at that point were with German navy personnel.

GF: To the best of my knowledge.

BB: Do you recall anything about those interviews, those interrogations, or conversations, what subjects were addressed? Certainly you probably don't remember any specific questions, but do you remember anything about general subject matter? Was it [08:00] repeated through each interview? Did they ask the same questions, or did it seem to be tailored towards each specific prisoner?

GF: I really don't know what the records these officers received. I find it strange, in retrospect, that I and my fellow soldiers were only concerned with the technical aspect of monitoring and transcribing. We -- I should say, I had been through a previous course of prisoner-of-war interrogation, and I'm pretty sure that I was selected [09:00] to come to POB 1142 [09:06], Fort Hunt, because of my performance at this previous course held at Camp Bullis [09:16] in San Antonio. The head of that course seemed to be very impressed with my performance, and when I met him again at Ritchie [09:34], he made

me a rather surprising offer, to which I responded. I might as well mention it now.

When I -- he asked me whether I would like to teach or whether I would like to go through the course [10:00], and as it turned out later, I had to do both, a ridiculous sort of thing because I was, I'm sure, the standout among the students by virtue of the fact that I was thoroughly familiar with the material. The only course in which I didn't get the highest marks was German military documents because I had been the assistant to the officer in charge of the German military documents course and I had written the school [11:00] solution. Unfortunately, the person who took over for me while I was sitting in class did another approved solution, which I didn't know, and this was the one that carried greater weight, and I don't think I maxed this course. Whereas the others -- I think in the others I did very well, for obvious reasons. I take no particular pride in that. [laughter]

BB: So to try to wrap up with the aspect of monitoring at 1142 [11:54], so you don't really remember any specifics from the actual interrogation [12:00], any of the subjects that were covered?

GF: No, except for this one where I thought the interrogator had sanitized his interrogation, but I can't be absolutely sure. I couldn't tell you about any subject matter. I would assume it had something to do with German submarine operations, but that's a guess.

SS: At the time that they were interviewing the U-boat crews, was it a big problem for the Allies, the German submarine warfare [13:00]? Were you aware of the problem that the U-boats were causing to shipping for the Allied forces?

GF: I really never thought about that. Of course, everything seemed to be so mechanical. I'm sure they were debriefed on submarine operations, the successes that they scored, if any.

You have to understand that I was so completely detached from anything that was of military interest. I was simply a technician, I and my cohorts, a technician who took down the -- [14:00] whatever the prisoners of war said. But, you know, it was so depersonalized because I never met any of these. I can remember some of the people whom I interrogated in Europe, once the mobile field interrogation unit to which I belonged, had been activated and I became a member.

SS: Just before we leave Fort Hunt [14:46], I mean, Fort Hunt was the first -- you had just finished a class at Bullis [14:50].

GF: Yes, and there was an intervening period where I participated in maneuvers in Louisiana, because I returned to my unit [15:00].

SJ: But Fort Hunt [15:02] sort of stands between your initial experience with interrogation and intelligence, it's the first, and the work you did teaching it and participating in it Europe, this was sort of your first taste in the real thing?

GF: Yes.

SS: So did it strike you, you know, were you sort of looking around and saying, "Well, this is what I've been learning about all this time?" Or I mean, I realize it sounds like it was a very -- sounds like you did not have a lot of fun at Fort Hunt [15:34], that you didn't find it a very rewarding experience. But this was also your first look

GF: Yes

SS: At sort of the realities.

GF: But I never really, to the best of my knowledge, to my recollection, it really didn't make any great impression upon me. Since I pride myself [16:00] in being a pretty good teacher, although you have to remember that that was my hope while I still lived in Nazi

[16:12] Germany, that eventually I could become a professor of literature. Obviously, Jews were not used for that purpose anymore; they were phased out and eventually maltreated or else they emigrated or whatever. So the historical role that the events at POB 1142 [16:49] played, I don't think I spent any thoughts on that [17:00]. I was essentially a human machine. When I came to Ritchie [17:14] and started teaching, my role obviously became much more important, and I devoted time to thinking about what the future might hold, and once I was in the theater of war, things fell into place. I was, for instance, able to assess what some of the activities that I engaged in were of importance. Let me give you an example. I engaged [18:00], together with others, if I recall correctly, in a collection of intelligence on the effects of trench foot, and I and several cohorts went around doing this field hospital that had been established to house and treat these prisoners of war, and there, for the first time, I realized how something that I had never even thought about had played a major role in the events at the front. And so I did something which was not particularly enjoyable. I went from bed to bed and looked at the [19:00] feet of these prisoners. Some of them were black, a very unappetizing sight, but I realized that that was important. Or that when I interrogated the prisoners of war about damage done to the lines of communications by our bombers that meant something to me. Some prisoners stood out. Among them was the son -- he was probably in his mid-teens -- who had been called up in the desperate attempt [20:00] on the part of the Germans to rally Germany against the, by at that time, overwhelmingly successful Allied operations. This kid was -- I mean, he was just cannon-fodder. What made him interesting to me and others, I'm sure, was that he was the son of so-called Gauleiter [20:33], the man in charge of a political entity, a political province or whatever



you want to call it, and this man was one of the accused at the Nuremberg trials [20:53] and was executed. We had a [21:00] funny word for him, because it was already known to me and my colleagues that he was the scion of a very important German Nazi [21:22] personality. We called him Die Kleine Sauckel. Gauleiter [Ernst Friedrich Christoph] Sauckel [21:31] was spelled S-A-U, I think, C-K-E-L, and "Sauckel" means -- "sau" is the same as the English, "sow," and "ckel" is "chap," so he was the "swine chap" or something. It's little things like that that I recall much more [22:00] than some of the subject matters that were dealt with.

SS: Without getting into your Camp Ritchie history, you were a teacher there.

GF: Yes.

SS: And part of the staff at Ritchie [22:21].

GF: Yes.

SS: And a number of your students went over to Fort Hunt [22:26].

GF: No.

SS: No?

GF: Not as far as I recall. Some of the personnel at Fort Hunt [22:35] went to Ritchie [22:36], such as yours truly, but I don't recall that we did any training with the avowed purpose of using them at Fort Hunt [22:45]. When I left Fort Hunt, I was sort of severed from whatever happened at Fort Hunt. I never even thought about Fort Hunt, because [23:00] what I experienced at Ritchie [23:02] was so consuming and so rewarding. I felt that here was at least a phase where I contributed to the American, the Allied war effort.

SS: So even though Camp Ritchie [23:26] was the military intelligence training center, you, as the staff, didn't have any particular oversight or evaluation or communication with

1142 [23:42]; is that correct?

GF: None, 1142 just disappeared in the distance.

BB: Was there anybody at Ritchie [23:54] while you were there either as your professor or as a student [24:00] that had been at 1142 [24:03], other than yourself?

GF: It's possible, but I haven't any particular recollection.

BB: To try to finish off with 1142 [24:17], because I would like to move on to Ritchie [24:19] shortly, are there any specific events of your time at 1142 [24:27] that stand out in your mind, any specific incidents or events or anything like that?

GF: No, except for our questioning the veracity of some of the interrogators. Again, I don't really know or recall whether they were justified. I still think that they were. But other than that [25:00], I really have to reiterate that once I left Fort Hunt [25:10], it became a relatively unimportant part of my military career, but that may be true only because I wasn't able to properly evaluate the importance of the role which we played. We were just technicians. Our proficiency in German was what was important, and there were these technical means to make them contribute to military intelligence [26:00], but I really have no recollection of the importance, if it was important, that I played there. I was just a tool.

SAM JOHNSON: In your opinion, would you say that that isolation that you felt, being cut off was a conscious decision made by the people higher up, the officers, to isolate you guys, to not let you know about the confidential, secret stuff that was going on, or not clue you into the importance of it, maybe?

GF: I think that was consciously done [27:00]. As I recall, we were not even briefed to any extent on the role which we played and how we fitted into the larger military intelligence

effort. I think that was deplorable, but once I came to Ritchie [27:27], the exercises that we did and the role-playing that we did at Ritchie, that brought us closer, at least me closer, to the eventual role that I was to play. There was a progression of involvement [28:00] on my part that made me realize what was to come, [unintelligible]. The ball is rolling, and all of a sudden, it picks up all sorts of debris and becomes a bigger ball. I became a more important person. I felt that I was doing something worthwhile. As I said before, at POB 1142 [28:44], I felt like a tool. Obviously, my proficiencies were used, and the fact that I had attended a good course at [29:00] Fort Bullis -- Camp Bullis with the teaching staff, faculty, supervised by the same supervisor, who later on became my supervisor at Fort Ritchie [29:21], at Camp Ritchie at that time, that was just about the only thing. I realized that probably Fort Bullis [29:37] had played a major role in my getting into intelligence and that Fort Hunt [29:48] was just an interlude.

BB: The last thing that I'd like to ask about 1142 [29:56], and right before we started recording, we were talking about that list [30:00] of names that we shared with you last time, and you said there were a couple of other names on that list that you've since remembered and that stood out. Do you want to talk about any of those a little bit, any other personnel from 1142 [30:13] you might recall?

GF: The trouble is that there's some confusion in my mind as to whether I met some of these people at Ritchie [30:28] and at subsequent locations in the theater of war. But strangely enough, with the exception of this one incident where Callahan [30:48] would have been involved, I remember some of the names at POB 1142 [31:00]. Van Cleve [31:03], also because he was an utterly decent man and a very likable supervisor. I remember, of course, Kubala [31:16], who became, I guess, sort of a *bête noir*. You speak French?

Okay, you do. Bête noir means “black beast.” I remember a Captain Kretzmera or [Edwin M.J.] Kretzmann [31:48], I’m not sure [inaudible], who was one of the interrogators. He was a professor [32:00] at some, I think, New England college, and I would assume that he taught German or else he wouldn’t have been recruited. He conducted some of.

(End of Tape 3A)

(Beginning of Tape 3B)

GF: Of course, did I mention Van Cleve [00:10] yet?

BB: Yes.

GF: Then there was a captain whom I remember very well, but I don’t remember his name, and I’m not sure whether he’s on the list.

BB: Okay. He was involved in some commercial enterprise. I don’t know what it was all about. He had received a direct commission. His German was derivative, I guess. He’d grown up in a German-speaking family or something like that. He may have been a first-generation American [01:00]. He was sort of a jovial guy, but to the best of my recollection, he was not particularly conversant with the military subject matters that were of interest, and I’m sure that both Captain Kretzmann [01:29] and this gentleman had received direct commissions. When we discuss Ritchie [01:41], we can talk some more about the direct commissions, some of which were so outrageous that I cannot imagine that the intelligence apparatus as part of the U.S. Army [01:59] could [02:00] have committed such a stupidity. I will elaborate on that later.

BB: Briefly to clarify, when you refer to a direct commission, you’re referring to someone who, immediately upon entering the service, that was their initial rank?

GF: Yes. And I am pretty convinced, as is true -- oh, as was true, in my opinion, of this gentlemen, that they had no military background to speak of, so they were recruited just because of their, I guess, general attractiveness and language proficiency.

BB: Do either of you have any other specific questions on 1142 [02:53]? Do you have anything that you think we may not have covered on 1142 at this point [03:00]?

GF: No. And I'm afraid that I'm not very useful as a source in connection with POB 1142 [03:14], but you have to remember that my role was very limited, and it is not one of my fondest memories, although, in retrospect, it was okay. It was certainly very attractive. If I hold it against the background of my initial service in the U.S. Army [03:45], you have to remember I was pulled out of a very unappetizing maneuver in the red clay county -- red clay area [04:00] of Louisiana, and it was a worthwhile experience simply because it really made me realize even the make-believe war could add to one's experience. But was I ever glad to be pulled out and sent to a civilized area and a civilized institution!

BB: Okay. So, concluding 1142 [04:42], how did you find out that you were being transferred, that your time was over there? About when was that? How long were you at 1142 [04:51]? And about, do you remember, what month? This was in 1943, correct?

GF: That must have been in 1943 [05:00]. I do have a civil service form.

BB: I should apologize. You lent us a copy of that to make a copy of, and on my way here realized I had left it in my office. So we do still have a copy of that, and we'll get that back to you.

GF: Okay. No problem as far as I'm concerned.

BB: Great.

GF: I'm here to help you as best I can about my activities in World War II, and I have very

vivid recollections about some and very little of a recollection about others.

BB: So we'll say it was sometime in '43, and I believe we can double-check that later. In fact, it's probably listed on the roster that we have, that has [06:00] your name on it. Do you recall how you found out that you were being transferred?

GF: I really have no specific recollection, but I -- but somebody simply told me, "You have been transferred. Get ready." No, no explanation was given as to why that transfer occurred.

BB: Was this effective immediately, going the next day?

GF: No, I was given the appropriate time in order to get ready.

BB: Did you go direct from 1142 [06:57] to Ritchie or were you given a brief period of leave in [07:00] between?

GF: I don't think so. I think I went directly from 1142 to Fort Ritchie -- Camp Ritchie [07:10].

BB: Do you recall how you got to Ritchie? Did you take a bus or a train?

GF: Probably a train, but there again, I have to be imprecise.

BB: Sure.

GF: For the simple reason that I took a few train rides during that time. One allowed me to come to my parental home in suburban New York, in order to attend -- I'm not sure it was attending to, but it was in connection with the death of my grandmother. I seem to recall that I was told that [08:00] this was an exception because compassionate leave was only extended to people who lost their parents or a closer relative than a grandparent. That much I remember.

BB: Had you heard of Ritchie [08:21] prior to being told you were being ordered there? Did

you know anything about Ritchie [08:26] before you got there?

GF: I really can't answer that. I just don't remember.

BB: How about when you did arrive, were you briefed? Were you told what this facility was and what its purpose was?

GF: Well, I found out soon enough, but how that was communicated to me, I don't recall. I did what happened to be one of the most important decisions of my military life [09:00]. I -- Colonel Warndof [09:03], W-A-R-N-D-O-F, had been in charge of the course of instruction at Camp Bullis [09:15], and he was apparently very happy to see me again. I was very happy to see him again because I had a tremendous amount of respect for this gentleman. He was an Austrian. He was, if I recall correctly, an engineer by profession, who I'm sure could relate to certain military things [10:00]. He was very, very intelligent. He belonged to a supervisory role. He was rather taciturn. He spoke English with quite an accent, and, but apparently the U.S. Army [10:36] had done one masterful thing and selected this man to be in charge of an intelligence operation when our intelligence effort, in my opinion, was very inadequate. I don't blame [11:00] anybody for it. We, as a nation occupying half a continent, were pretty isolated from Europe, and many people in the United States probably had never given a thought to getting involved with Europe. So except for people who were commercially involved, if your people were closer to the future theaters of war, like Germany or Japan, many of them probably had never given a thought to -- maybe these few people on the East and West Coast [12:00], who were closer to the scene of future action. This is an American characteristic, which I, as an ex-European, even though that part of my life is very much in the past, couldn't readily understand. Americans are kind, and they're guileless people, but I don't think

that military intelligence, unless they were thoroughly indoctrinated, was something that was of great interest to them. I guess they found out later on how important it could be.

But when I was subsequently trained by the British, I found how much the British [13:00] were ahead of us when it came to being knowledgeable in that field.

BB: You started talking about Warndof [13:11]. Do you recall what his specific role was at Ritchie [13:15]?

GF: Yes. He was the head of section five, which was the teaching section, and it was use of the German language in various types of military activities. I will tell you about some of the subjects that were taught.

BB: Sure. If you'd like to do that now, sure.

GF: Yeah. Okay. German documents, of which I was a participant. That was my role [14:00] as a member of the faculty, and my superior was a man that I'll tell you about just a little further on. German identification, that is, the identification of uniforms; German organization. I think there may have been something about tactics, but I'm not too sure. In other words, all the things you had to know about the German military to make you a capable interrogator. The British added to that, because they had been in the game a lot longer than we had [15:00], and the personnel that I met among the British were much better prepared for their roles than we were.

BB: Were there British there at Camp Ritchie [15:23], or are you referring to Brits that you met when you were overseas?

GF: That was later, once I traveled to the European theater.

BB: Okay.

GF: So this teaching section did some other things. We had mock interrogation. They



sometimes were very funny. May I digress?

BB: Absolutely.

GF: For instance [16:00], we had a special section that was subordinate to us but organizationally was in some other unit, but we had make-believe prisoners who were fluent in German and who were to try the patience of the interrogator. Some of these interrogations were an absolute howl. For instance, I remember one of these make-believe prisoners who had a great sense of humor [17:00] and who saw it as his task to make the interrogators as uncomfortable as he could, so I think they played their roles rather well. This one, for instance, was faced -- I will never forget that -- by an officer who apparently came from another branch, a great many of them did, who was Jewish and who spoke German with a Yiddish accent. Do you know what Yiddish is and how it came about to become the language of communication among [18:00] Polish and Russian Jews?

BB: I can't say I'm terribly familiar with that.

GF: Well, let me just tell you. During the Middle Ages, a great many Jews were confined to ghettos, had only one recourse to making money, and that was to become money lenders because the medieval guilds and other professional organizations wouldn't allow Jews. Now, the -- during the Middle Ages, the black plague erupted [19:00] and killed thousands of people, and the Jews, because of their sanitary dictum, were religiously prescribed ritual washings and all that sort of thing, escaped pretty much unscathed. It was therefore assumed by the non-Jewish populace, the majority, that the Jews had poisoned the wells, and they were cruelly persecuted, but fortunately for them, a monarch who was more kindly disposed, King Casimir of [20:00] Poland, welcomed the Jews who

were evicted, driven out of Germany. They took their medieval German language with them, and through the addition of some Polish and some Hebrew, it became the language in its own right, but it was still predominantly German. So people who spoke Yiddish were able to understand a lot of German because their own language was eminently German language [21:00]. So some of the military personnel, Jewish military personnel, that were part of the U.S. Army [21:14] were able to speak Yiddish. It sounded rather ungrammatical for a German language purist, and this specific officer, who had probably earned his commission the hard way, was recruited because he spoke German, but it was German tinged with Yiddish. So this officer [22:00] wanted to know about German artillery as part of this game-playing. In German, a cannon or a gun is a “kanone,” but they also have a funny word for a field kitchen, and that was “Goulash kanone,” “Goulash cannon,” of the field kitchen which were in operation. So they were discussing a fictitious military operation [23:00], and the make-believe prisoner managed to get this interrogator into the business of cannons, but he first already antagonized his interrogator by refusing to give him his name, serial number -- name, birth, and serial number, I guess it was. And so finally the interrogator [24:00], for obvious reasons, got very mad at this make-believe prisoner and said, in half-German and half-Jewish, Yiddish, “[speaks German/Yiddish].” “I don’t want to know what your name is.” So a certain hostile atmosphere had already been established. Then the prisoner, assumed to talk about military hardware, actually talked about these Goulash kanones, which were of no military interest at all. So then he depicted a very fancy scene where the artillery pieces were standing on top of a [25:00] hill, and the Goulash was flowing down the hill and all that sort of thing, just baloney. And the interrogation ended very badly because this

officer was fuming, and rightfully so, because the make-believe prisoner had made a fool of him. The make-believe interrogators were instructed not to fall for all this stuff, but to get to the heart of the matter. Well, so we had some very funny situations like that. You really had to be not only knowledgeable as far as military things were concerned and have the requisite [26:00] language proficiency, but you also were instructed not to get rattled. The task of these make-believe prisoners was to rattle the interrogators, so that -- and of course, those of us who witnessed these make-believe interrogations -- and we instructors were among those who were appointed to this subsidiary role. If they got rattled or if they lost their thread or whatever, that was recognized as being a deficiency.

BB: So were you -- were you an instructor in that particular area [27:00], in that particular course?

GF: No, that was an additional duty. Of course, we graded them. But my duty specifically was to teach German military documents, such as the [speaks German] or tables that every German had to carry on himself, a German military man, which was also a source of intelligence information. But I also taught military documents. I taught practically every subject that was taught by [28:00] section five. I taught German organization, German rank insignia and military implements. That was about the size of it.

BB: We just have a minute or two left of tape and then we'll have to switch tapes, but just to clarify before we finish up for right now, so when you arrived at Ritchie [28:34], your first role was as an instructor, not as a class member.

GF: Yes.

BB: And was that decision made by someone like Warndof [28:43]?

GF: It was made by Warndof.

BB: It was made by Warndof.

GF: Because he specifically gave me the choice based on his observation of me at Camp Bullis [28:55]. I think I was the honor student there; I'm not sure [29:00].

BB: Was that intimidating for you at all, to be immediately made an instructor, or did you feel fairly confident, since you had gone through a similar course at Bullis [29:14]?

GF: I was confident that I could handle it. Maybe I was crazy [laughs], but...

BB: And finally, what was your rank? Had you been promoted at this point or were you still a PFC?

GF: I arrived as a PFC, I think. Then I successively was made a corporal, a sergeant, and eventually a staff sergeant. And at that time, for reasons while I'll relate as soon as I can, I [30:00] I received a direct commission too, eventually. But I felt very comfortable in that role.

BB: All right. We'll go ahead and stop taping right now and take a little break.

(End of Tape 3B)

(Beginning of Tape 4A)

BB: All right. This is the second tape made in the second series of interviews here at the home of Mr. George Frenkel. This is Park Service historian Brandon Bies, as well as Fort Hunt Oral History Project team members Sam Swersky and Sam Johnson. It is January 18, 2007, and we'll go ahead and pick right back up where we left off with the last tape. And that was -- we were talking about your experiences at Ritchie [00:37] as an instructor and how you were initially made an instructor pretty much as soon as you got there. About how long did you serve in that capacity while you were at Ritchie?

GF: With the exception of the course of instruction which I was compelled to take when they

discovered that I hadn't been through the school [laughs] [01:00], which was ridiculous, because I was tested, instructed and tested in all the subjects that I taught, and there was only one course where I didn't do as well as the others, and that was German documents because I had written an approved solution and my successor, as an instructor, changed the approved solution. But I think you will be impressed with the ridiculous aspect of making a member of the faculty go through a course in which he had actively participated.

BB: At what point did [02:00] you have to take this course? At the conclusion of your time at Ritchie [02:06] or this was in the middle of when you were there?

GF: In the middle [laughs]. That made it even more ridiculous. Colonel Warndof [02:17], I suppose, was instructed to send me to the school, and so I took all these classes. I'm sure I maxed every subject with the exception of documents. Then I went right back on the faculty.

BB: While you were faculty, were you taking any of the other courses there, or were you just faculty?

GF: No, I didn't take any courses. There were so many courses. First of all, German was not the only [03:00] language course. There were other languages taught. There were other functions. For instance, a relative by marriage of mine spent the entire time at Ritchie [03:29] as a -- running a photo lab, so he never saw a shot fired in anger. There were people that took courses that I wasn't even aware of. This was a pretty large, sprawling installation, and there was a lot of activities [04:00] going on. You have to remember that people had to be interviewed as to their proficiency in German. Then there were -- I can't even begin to recall what else, but it was a motley crew. We were a motley crew.

Dr. [Henry] Kissinger [04:38] was there too, as a member of the garrison.

BB: You didn't know him while he was there, did you?

GF: No, never met him, and I haven't met him since. I [05:00] hate to admit it to you, but he's not one of my favorites, but certainly a brilliant man.

BB: I didn't realize he'd been at Ritchie [05:10]. I knew he was in German military intelligence in World War II, but I didn't realize. Makes sense that he would be.

GF: Oh, yes. He was a Harvard graduate, I think; he was a brilliant man. It's just amazing that an immigrant from another country would rise to the heights of being a secretary of state. That's something very special and has to evoke admiration, also on the part [06:00] of the American government, whatever it is at the time. The success attained by immigrants, with the affirmation, it seems to me, of the public at large really does us honor. I find it just incredible, but this is a nation of immigrants, and it has perpetuated that role. I, for one, of course, am among the many who is deeply grateful for the opportunities I've received here and for the fact that I was able to escape and not go up in smoke in a concentration camp. So I am not [07:00] a show-off patriot, but I'm deeply patriotic for that reason. I will never forget that the American people gave me the opportunity to live a rich and long life. Ritchie [07:26]. Aside from the fact that it was a great post, I also profited from some of the knowledge that I gained there, and I feel that I was reasonably well equipped to go to the European theater of operations and do what I had to do [08:00]. Some incredible happenings I must tell you about. Obviously, even though we had been involved in World War I and other intervening unpleasantness, we had to take our role seriously. There was plenty of opportunity for entertainment. There was a lake in the middle. During lunchtime or whenever we were not teaching, we could

go to the lake and swim Sunday. We [09:00] had a social life. I, for one, dated a very lovely young lady who was a WAC and was part of the clerical staff of section five. So you couldn't be in a better place from the standpoint of entertainment and divergence than Fort Ritchie [09:34]. The location was spectacular. It's very close to Camp David [09:42], where the presidents go to in order to relax. But I think of Camp Ritchie [09:56] often and with pleasure [10:00]. You can hardly blame me for that. Well, two things happened I still remember. I was still -- remember, I was still a staff sergeant. One bright day there was apparently a desperate need for additional intelligence-trained personnel in Europe, and in order to remedy that, they created the so-called cattle alert, where they just grabbed every person who had been through the course, regardless of rank, regardless of other considerations, and sent them over. They sent people over with very [11:00] meritorious background, who had done well in the military, and other people who were relative novices. They were all grabbed and shipped overseas.

BB: If I can interrupt, why was that? Was that because of the invasion had started?

GF: No. Well, maybe so. I never thought about it. Because there was desperate need. I would assume that it was after the invasion had started. You're right. That [unintelligible] reason didn't occur to me till just now. The second time around, they took everybody who was around and spoke German [12:00], whether he cleaned toilets, waiting for assignments, or was on the faculty, such as yours truly. We were all sent over, and we were all given commissions. I mean, I would suggest that I was perhaps as entitled as most everybody else because I'd certainly received a lot of instruction, and I was a successful member of the faculty. But there were others who were privates and had experienced very little, if anything, and they were given direct commissions. So you

had the incredible situation where, say, a master sergeant or a staff [13:00] sergeant, who certainly had done his or her share in furthering our military effort, being superseded by a young innocent who had just been drafted. I still can't believe that that was done, but it was.

BB: So when someone was to go to the European theater of operations to do actual interrogations, were they always given a commission?

GF: No, nothing of the sort. The members of the cattle alert went over in the capacity which they had arrived at Ritchie [13:53].

BB: So in the ETO, there were enlisted men acting as interrogators.

GF: Yes, and later on when [14:00] these mobile field interrogation units and these frontline interrogation teams were formed, it could very well happen that the head of that team was one of these young -- I was young, too, at the time -- one of the young people who had received a direct commission and had been elevated from private to second lieutenant in one fell swoop commanded a frontline unit, a tactical interrogation team, or any other kind of an interrogation effort, the mobile field interrogation units, of which I eventually became a part of one of them, operated at the Army [14:59] group level [15:00], so from company or regiment to Army [15:06] group level, that's quite a few transitions. I must tell you about one of the few men who really was entitled to his position. He also didn't have much of a background, military background. I'm pretty sure he had also received a direct commission, but I really don't recall. There were a good many people who were already officers and who deserved to be an officer as part of the intelligence effort of the U.S. Army [16:00], but he was a professor, too. He was the translator of -- I mentioned that before -- translator of a significant German literary work, the poet was Heimlich



Heigler [spelled phonetically]. He was Jewish, later on converted to Christianity, and it was a purely opportunistic move, which was understandable, of course, because anti-Semitism in Germany was still very much in evidence [17:00]. But he translated at least one more work of Heimlich Heigler, which became part of our literature. He really made Heimlich accessible to American poetry, and he was a very erudite man, a very fun-loving person. He, incidentally, also converted to Christianity. I think he became an Episcopalian because his wife was Christian. That also was not a big [18:00] issue in my family. My family intermarried, including this one, my wife was a German war bride. But I'm happy to say she came from an anti-Nazi [18:19] family, who suffered as a result of Hitler's [18:23] accession to power. Well, so I worked hard at Ritchie [18:39], but I had a good time. That's about all I can -- a few other things that I can talk about. There was a bit of corruption going on. For instance, it was said -- and so I'm conveying [19:00] hearsay. There was a sergeant who spoke with a heavy accent -- I don't know what his native country was -- who was employed in some logistical capacity, and he ran a taxi service. Of course, gas was rationed during the war. He was reputed to have milked some of the military vehicles, and that allowed him to run people to and from various destinations and make a lot of money. We had one free day [20:00] every eight days, and that allowed us to, as in my case, I would grab this illicit taxi service and get as far as Baltimore or Washington, mostly Baltimore, and then from Baltimore I took a train, and that enabled me to visit my folks, my parents, and made the same way back. It was pretty taxing because we had to sleep on the train if we wanted to catch any sleep, because in the morning I had to teach again. My brother, incidentally, also went through Ritchie [21:00], but he went, I guess, as a private, and eventually, made it to master

sergeant, but he was with the tactical outfit, so he did frontline duty. Thank God he escaped. There were some other people on the faculty with whom I continued to socialize and met one or the other again. That's about all I can tell you about Ritchie [21:48], come to think of it. If anything occurs to me that is worth mentioning, I will be happy -- I may interrupt the [22:00] flow of this interrogation, but if it's important, I will divest myself of it.

BB: Don't call this an interrogation. We're not -- it's just an interview.

GF: Okay.

BB: I don't want you to think of this as --

[laughter]

GF: I'm now in the --

SS: Nazi [22:18].

GF: I've talked so much about interrogation. I didn't think that you had any hostile intent.

SS: When you said "motley crew," could you describe the average soldier that went through Camp Ritchie [22:34]? Did you say they needed to know German before they were allowed in camp?

GF: Oh, yes, they had -- for instance, the man with whom I was briefly in business with after World War II, after -- yeah, after the war [23:00], he was a teacher; and I don't remember at what grade level. He spoke very good German, but with an accent, and those of us who were not natives, spoke German fluently, but English with an accent. As a matter of fact, I remember one instance, and that was already after we had arrived at our final destination; we had an elderly German Jewish refugee, a very nice man who spoke German -- who spoke English with a heavy accent, and during the [Field Marshal Gerd

von] Rundstedt [23:54]counteroffensive -- you know what that is [24:00], the final major offensive launched by the Germans in order to ward off the ultimate disaster -- the German troops, German soldiers who were in the vanguard of this effort -- grabbed him. I'm sorry. I screwed things up just now. It was the Americans who -- he was in an American uniform, obviously, and you may recall that the vanguard of the German troops, some of them wore [25:00] American uniforms in order to do some intelligence collecting. So we were all cautioned that that possibility existed. So he was grabbed by American troops because he spoke with this heavy accent. He was assumed to have been a German in the vanguard in order to mislead our troops, and he was held prisoner, as it were, at least briefly. And it took, at the station by [26:00] our superiors and God knows who else, to document that he was indeed an American. So, things like that happened too. What else can I tell you about Ritchie [26:22]? Well, I have to tell you that the collection of German speakers, in which we also had a role; we had to interview people that we thought might be useful, could be developed into effective interrogators, but I remember that as if it had happened yesterday. I interviewed [27:00] a lumberjack. I guess he came from the West Coast, who spoke German all right, because -- I don't remember exactly how it went, but he was -- either he grew up in a German-speaking household or else he was himself an immigrant, and he was at that juncture a civilian. We looked at him and talked to him and so on, and we realized that he was just not material. He was a blue-collar boy who was not very well educated, and he [28:00] spoke German all right, but he was not literate in German. So to separate the chaff from the gold, or whatever the proverb is, we had to do that, too, to pick people who were educationally qualified to be involved in intelligence. In section five, I had a fellow

instructor who was a Harvard graduate, I believe, and was very brainy. There was another one who also was a German Jewish refugee [29:00]. Mind you, we were not all German Jewish; a good many of us were non-Jewish. The idea was to get people who had a good education and were proficient in German; those were the overall qualifications.

BB: So if I can interrupt, this case of the lumberjack, did that interview actually take place at Ritchie [29:26]?

GF: Yes.

BB: So he was brought to Ritchie and then essentially denied and then sent back to wherever he came from.

GF: Exactly. You put it very elegantly.

SS: Was the American government looking for civilians who spoke German as well as, or were they receiving expressions of interest from the public to -- "I'd like to help," or --

GF: I really can't answer that question. I'm sure that there were some volunteers [30:00]. There were some people who were drafted, and it was found out in the course of their becoming soldiers that they should opt for intelligence because it sounded glamorous. Unfortunately, I never ran into a Mata Hari. Have you ever heard of Mata Hari? Okay. They just seemed on the surface qualified. How they were acquired, I can't tell you. A good many of them, such as myself, were draftees. Others volunteered, I would think [31:00]. So I really don't know whether there was any organized effort to round up German speakers.

SS: So one commonality was that you spoke German. Were there many different cultures? You were talking about some who were Jewish people. Some were Mormons. Were

there a variety of different cultures at Camp Ritchie [31:28] that sort of congregated there?

GF: Yes. We got along exceedingly well. I mean, we were all soldiers, and we had a job to do, and if they called upon us to serve as intelligence personnel, we did it. I was amazed, just generally speaking. This is -- I'm digressing [32:00]. But I ran, during my military time, I think right at the beginning, into a Issei [32:13]. You know what a Issei [32:14] is?

BB: Yes.

GF: Okay. In uniform. Very pleasant. We got into a --

(End of Tape 4A)

(Beginning of Tape 4B)

GF: -- because they were afraid that he had been an infiltrator. And you know the terrible injustice that was done to Americans who were of Japanese or other hostile -- I shouldn't say "hostile" -- Japanese extraction or recent -- who had on the Japanese side, the counterpart of someone like myself, and I guess he wound up in this famous combat team that fought and died in Italy, and who were just about the most loyal Americans that you could think of.

BB: The most decorated unit in American history.

GF: It was a fantastic effort on their part [01:00]. They ought to be held in high esteem, having been vilified and yet drafted into the U.S. Army [01:17]. Their kin were put into camps to await the outcome of the war. So

SS: Could you talk a bit about the -- I'm sorry, did I interrupt you?

GF: No, you didn't.

- SS: Could you talk about the numbers of people who went through Camp Ritchie [01:41]? Was it seen as an important effort in the war? In the conduct of the war, you needed to get numbers through. Were the classes large? Could you talk a little bit about how many people went through Camp Ritchie [01:57] and how the classes were run [02:00]?
- GF: Yes. The classes were run in a very professional way, and the students behaved in a very professional way. We were all aware as to what needed to be done. And I remember several students who were outstanding, including one person who became a very good friend, and who I met again in the military, stayed in the military. The classes were full of students who had a genuine interest in being taught and participating. I can say nothing detrimental about any of the people that I had in my classes. The classes were [03:00] sometimes, there were 20 or 30 students. I can't talk intelligently about numbers they varied so much. They came into these classes either as competent soldiers, including some professional soldiers, not just draftees, and I think, on the whole, they performed quite well; at least I had that impression. We did what we had to do as a faculty. We ran exercises; we had classroom sessions [04:00]; we did some unorthodox things. It wasn't just a dull classroom routine. We did other things like these exercises I described. The composition, yes, there were German Jews, Americans who had acquired a good knowledge of German like academic personnel. There were Mormons, who were a class act; I can't describe it any other way. They [05:00] did exceedingly well, who had been sent out to Europe, to Germany, among other countries, to do some proselytizing, and who acquired a good knowledge of German. Whether they were equipped because of the nature of their religion, I cannot be a judge of that. Every Mormon that I came across -- and I came across quite a few because a lot of proselytizing was going on --

were all exemplary people, very nice people, well behaved, good [06:00] fellow soldiers. I can't say any unkind word about them. There were others who didn't fit any of these categories. But we were all trying to do our jobs and do them well because there was none of this atmosphere which exists today. I don't know, 60 percent or 70 percent of the American population is against the war in Iraq. But I feel that there was a certain feeling of patriotism that we had to do a job in order to save Western civilization [07:00]. At least I had that impression. So we did the best we could. That some of us turned out to be bad apples, and there were a good many once we arrived at our destination is another story. And there were some. One leader of the field interrogation unit was court-martialed. I have that on hearsay. But he was the man who initially involved me, a man by the name of Kubala [07:41] who was a professional soldier, came from the Berlin area. He was already, I think, a master sergeant or at least a high-ranking non-commissioned officer. He was bright [08:00], and so that was one who turned out to be a bad apple. There was an officer in my unit, a captain, who got involved in black-market activities and committed suicide when he realized that he was facing a court-martial. Our unit commander of our field interrogation unit to which I belonged who was my direct superior did something which was really despicable. And this is just, you know, to give you an idea as to [09:00] what kind of people we had in the unit. He and an enlisted man in his unit competed for the affections of a very beautiful, blonde French girl, and when he realized that this competition was there, he accused this enlisted man under his command of some kind of infraction and confined him to the post. And in the meantime, he took over. We had people like that too. We had wonderful people [10:00] who remained true to their spouses, although the temptations were plenty, and came back,

having been loyal to their marital commitment. I must say, with all the temptations floating around, that took some doing. I remember an enlisted man, with whose kin I'm still in touch, who later on was a civilian -- not later on -- who was a civilian employee with a high GS rank at Oberammergau [spelled phonetically], where I was stationed for a while, and [11:00] he wrote the most beautiful love letters to his wife. We were -- I wasn't -- in addition to my other intelligence capacity, I was also the commander of the unit. In other words, I had disciplinary powers over the enlisted men, and I had no trouble whatsoever. They were all, for the most part, fine. But we were required to censor their letters so that they couldn't possibly divulge any military secrets, innocently, I would think. And I was just touched by the way he [12:00] comported himself. I had a fellow officer; I think he came from somewhere in the Midwest, who was senior to me in rank, didn't fool around at all, just a fine person. So we had good apples and bad apples.

BB: So for Ritchie [12:37], before we move on too much to the ETO, which I do want to touch upon before I finish up, when you were there at Ritchie [12:46], were you essentially under the understanding that Ritchie [12:51] was for the training and preparation for becoming interrogators in the European theater of operations?

GF: Yes. I am not [13:00] sure that there were other language-related people. It's possible that there were, for instance, some document specialists who did not interrogate, but performed other intelligence functions in the European theater of war.

BB: But once you were at Ritchie [13:26], did you ever again hear -- I may have touched on this earlier -- of people at Ritchie that were going to 1142 [13:34] or to other installations around the United States for the interrogation of prisoners, or was your understanding that when people left Ritchie [13:42], they were going overseas?



GF: Well, some people were retained for specialized functions that they performed, like this guy who ran the photo lab. I [14:00] know of no instance, but then I didn't really evince any interest in who went to P.O. Box 1142 [14:12]. It's entirely possible. I simply just don't know. There were -- the vast majority, I'm sure, went over to the European theater of war, and there were stages which they went through. Let me give you my function or my eventual function. I started out -- I went over on a ship which was part of a convoy, which was handled by a Scottish crew [15:00], and their English was somewhat different from ours. There was a very nice guy who was sort of a -- performed service functions, you know, God knows what, serving breakfast or whatever. I couldn't understand him to save my life. But we got along. He was such a nice man. He was an ally. I thought no more about that language problem. So I arrived in [16:00] England on this boat. We didn't have any hostile encounters. Obviously, the German submarines were keeping us under observation, but we had a destroyer escort, that sort of thing. We arrived in Scotland, were loaded on a train. I would have loved to stay a little bit in Scotland. Loaded on a train and arrived in Birmingham [16:34]. It's in the Midlands, and it's an industrial town. And at Birmingham [16:44], we lounged around in requisition quarters and didn't do a thing. We just waited for the evening to arrive so that we could go [17:00] to the nearest pub or chase skirts, have a date, God knows what. I remember some of that very well. I, for instance, partook of some of the cultural offerings. I don't want to depict myself as an innocent who didn't do some of the other things, but I took my date to a Shakespeare performance. I even remember the play; it was "A Winter's Tale." That was very profitable for my purposes, because later I became an English major [18:00], and I had no trouble remembering some of the works that I had seen. So

in Birmingham [18:15], we did nothing except to enjoy the scenery, a horrible waste of time, and eventually some levies were made. People were assigned to various places. I went -- I was destined for strategic interrogation, again, I would hope on the basis of my potential. I went [19:00] to Beaconsfield [19:07]. You remember Beaconsfield, the name? Beaconsfield was the surname of Disraeli, one of the great British prime ministers, who was, incidentally, Jewish and was knighted. There was a secret, I guess, British compound, which in some ways reminds me of POB 1142 [19:50], and there, we were trained by British officers in one of the aspects of interrogation [20:00] and other intelligence-related activities that we should have known about. We -- in particular, I and some of my fellow officers -- were instructed by a British officer who spoke perfect, unaccented German, and I never found out as to whether he was my kind, you know a refugee, or whether he was a native-born Englishman, because his English was not accented, who had become a member of the British Army [21:00]. Others had -- they were really the cream of the crop in some ways. I remember another man who was, I guess, a captain or something like that, who had a cultural background, I don't know, it could have been anything that involved requiring a language proficiency, and he was part of this British contingency. So we were trained, and I have quite a few recollections about that part. It was very useful because the British, unlike our fellow Americans, were [22:00] either professionals or somehow had a much better intelligence background. So this was very useful. We also got a day or two off, so we took the next train to London. I had friends in London, including one of my dearest friends, who was in a German gymnasium with me, gymnasium high school, plus a few years of college. So [23:00] whenever I came to London, I associated with him and his family. He died a couple of

years ago. He became a lifelong friend, and I'm still in touch with his widow. I met my first real girlfriend there, who by that time had become a British nurse. So this was all very pleasant. Then eventually we were sent to the mainland of France.

SS: Good place to stop.

BB: Okay [24:00].

(End of Tape 4B)

(Beginning of Tape 5A)

BB: All right. This is the third in a series of tapes today of the second series of interviews with Mr. George Frenkel, a veteran of P.O. Box 1142. It is Thursday, January 18, 2007. This is Park Service historian Brandon Bies, as well as project team members Sam Swersky and Sam Johnson. And we'll go ahead and carry on with what we were just talking about. Before you get too much further into your role when you were in the ETO, if we could just touch a little bit more upon your time in England. It sounds like you were there for some time.

GF: Yes, I arrived in the fall and I guess during the winter. I stayed there for a relatively short time because [01:00] once my superiors felt that the training by the British was fine, but then I should really get involved in a more active role.

BB: With this training with the British, were they training you specifically in interrogation?

GF: Yes.

BB: And how were the tactics, if you recall, that they taught you different than those that you had learned at Ritchie [01:35] and Bullis [01:36] and other places?

GF: I really can't answer that because I remember what I did in Ritchie, and I suppose that the stay in Britain was a logical sequel, but [02:00] I don't remember anything about that

part. I just remember that my instructors were good; that the material which I absorbed was profitable. For some strange reason, I remember the military aspect of my stay in England. I don't remember that at all, or hardly. I just -- I certainly don't remember any details about the curriculum. I could only assume that it was a logical sequel to the training that I received stateside.

BB: While you were there, you were with other interrogators who had come with you from Ritchie [02:55]?

GF: Yes, probably so, but then again [03:00], I really don't have any recollection of a specific person. Strangely enough, I have a very vivid recollection of some happenings and a very poor recollection of others. I guess that's a function of age.

BB: So you then -- sometime in the winter, presumably this is the winter of '44, '45, you were sent over to France?

GF: It was in the winter of, yes it was '44, '45, I was sent to France. Strangely enough, I still remember the flight [04:00].

BB: So you flew.

GF: Yes, we flew. We eventually landed in a place called Le Vesinet, V-E-S-I-N-E-T [04:16], I think, which was on the rail line between Paris [04:29] and Versailles, if I remember that correctly, because I've been to Paris [04:38] on more than one occasion. Some of these things are just no longer part of my memory. But we were sent to Le Vesinet [04:51] and then again a short period of inactivity set in [05:00], and we took liberal advantage of it. But I mean, we also did sensible things. We had access to the French Officers' Club and could use all its facilities. So we spent our days in Paris [05:39], at least a good many days, and did not do just skirt-chasing; we also engaged in

some activities that were profitable. I mean Paris [05:58] is, for my money [06:00], the greatest town that I've ever met -- ever encountered. I was just thrilled to be in Paris [06:09]. I have to say it's somehow attributable to the fact that I am a Francophile. My parents both spoke French. We had social relations with some French-speaking people, so I may have been prejudiced in favor of the French, but whatever the reason, to me, being in Paris [06:50] was a revelation. Again, we socialized a great deal [07:00], but we always had to go back to Le Vesinet [07:05], which was our headquarters, so to speak. I still remember the name of the hotel, L'Ibis, L-apostrophe-I-B-I-S, which is a bird in France and everywhere else. In Egypt, where it was, I guess, a sacred bird. So after a stay in France -- not in France, but in a nearby Paris [07:58], we were [08:00] assigned to our final destination, which was a relatively small town in the northern part of France close to the Belgian border, and there we were assigned to our unit, which was a mobile field interrogation unit and interrogator of prisoners of war about matters of a strategic nature I've already mentioned, one [unintelligible] study the lines of communications, studies of various other matters that would be of interest [09:00] to people that functioned at the [09:04] Army group level. There, I became very much involved in interrogation and, secondly, in activities of a nature that was reminiscent of 1142 [09:30]. We had a different setup. We used some German and Austrian prisoners of war who had made up their minds that they were going to defect to the U.S. Army [09:49] because they were anti-Nazis [09:51], and they were very helpful [10:00]. But interrogation was still my major occupation.

BB: When you say that there were some prisoners who had defected, per se, what were they engaged in? Were they assisting you with interrogation or acting as stoolpigeons [10:21],

or you mean they were just openly giving information?

GF: I think they acted, in a manner of speaking, as stoolpigeons [10:29]. We put them into a German uniform and assigned them to various huts where prisoners were kept, wooden huts, and there they just mingled with them and tried to extract information. That was also recorded. This operation [11:00] was reminiscent of what we did at POB 1142 [11:05]. Eventually, our unit was moved in the direction of Berlin. All of a sudden, we walked into an end [spelled phonetically]. I remember that day very definitely, and I, we crossed the border into Germany when the Armistice was declared [12:00]. We moved into a new location after several stops at various towns along the way. There was this one major industrial town; it was Halle, H-A-L-L-E, in the Prussian part of Saxony. Before that, we again went to a place where we lounged around and did nothing. We called that staging.

[laughter]

This place was Bad Lippspringe, which was a resort town which prided itself on its curative waters and [13:00] thermal baths. I lounged around in those and sunned myself on the deck and did nothing. But we were destined to eventually move to Berlin and assume a different function. The function was the transition from a prisoner-of-war interrogation activity to an activity where we did not interrogate prisoners anymore but German people of note [14:00], including, for instance, a famous professor -- I think his name was [unintelligible] -- in order to debrief them about different subjects that would be useful to the occupation. At least I felt that that was our mission. So we eventually came to Berlin and set up the Berlin District Interrogation Center [14:37]. So now we were involved with civilians, not necessarily all civilians, some German generals, one or

two, but generally prominent German citizens who had some information to dispense. So [15:00] that took me to Berlin. And in Berlin, we were assigned to a very fancy residence, and that's where we met our Russian allies, by one of whom I was almost killed. Fortunately, I'm not six feet underground, but very much alive and here.

BB: Would you like to relate that story?

GF: Sure. Well, our initial encounter with the Russians, whose abode we were to occupy [16:00], they had to be somewhere else because Berlin was subdivided into four zones of occupation. We moved into the American zone, obviously. The Russians had left an incredible mess. There were a good many people, many soldiers who were from Siberia and other inhospitable places, and some of the things that one does in a relatively cultured Western environment were unnoted. When we [17:00] opened some of the drawers, we found that the Russians had defecated into them. Some Russians left very reluctantly, but managed to move a piano. I guess it was booty which they felt entitled to, and we didn't interfere with them. They relieved themselves into the bidet because they had no idea what a bidet was. So it was sort of messy.

[laughter]

We organized German residents; we just co-opted them [18:00] and made them clean up all this mess. Then, of course, we lived rather well. Again, for the time being, we had very little to do until the Berlin District Interrogation Center [18:26] was organized and then we interviewed, for the most part, people of distinction, people who could be of interest in our occupation, so the role changed.

BB: You had said that one of the Russians almost killed you.

GF: Well, one Russian [19:00]. I dated a very impressive lady. Yes, I do not plead innocent.

Fraternization was prohibited, but nobody gave a damn. I guess sex is more powerful than certain prohibitions. Well, that started already as soon as we entered England. In England, of course, nothing was prohibited because they were our allies. The same held true for France. But when we came to Germany, non-fraternization [20:00] was the rule, but we didn't abide by the rules. Nobody did. Well, except those honorable people who were married. I wasn't married, so I make no pretense that I was a nice little boy. But it was also very useful to us personally. For instance, this lady who was really a very cultured lady, classy, befriended the famous German movie actor, Heinz Rühmann [20:53], and one bright day she invited [21:00] me, together with Heinz Rühmann and his wife, a gorgeous German actress -- he was considerably older than she was -- who, when the Russians took over -- and this is a real horror story -- was raped by Russians 17 times in a row. But somehow she had the fortitude, the intestinal fortitude and spunk to get over this horrible experience. She was very gracious during this period of social intercourse. We had a very interesting meeting later on, much later, when I was [22:00] much older, when I already was a civilian. I saw Rühmann [22:14] on stage. It was a delightful cultural experience. So I bade her goodbye and went to my quarters in this requisitioned mansion, and we heard a commotion. I think it was the people of one house along the way that had been invaded by Russian defectors and [23:00] were shouting for help. And my girlfriend said, "You are an American. You mean something to people. You've got to go and help them." Whereas I was not very anxious to do that, because I thought that this was a dangerous situation; I couldn't possibly say no. What made me particularly uncomfortable was that I was unarmed. So I grabbed two GIs who were armed with rifles and commanded them to come with me, and they left big point guards



[24:00] at a boathouse and were to guard the equipment. So I grabbed them, and we proceeded jointly to the house where the cries for help came from. We ran to this house along the moonlit garden path, and had there been any people who wanted to kill us, we were sitting ducks running along this garden path. Well, we entered the house where the cries for help came from; all of -- and the GIs knocked at the door [25:00] and the windows with their rifles, and all of a sudden the door opened, and a lady ushered us in. As I found out later, she was the wife of one of the men who had been murdered in that house. There, a perfectly horrible scene came to view. I reconnoitered the lower part of the house, and the GIs went upstairs, which was my good fortune. First of all, I saw ladies' drawers, underwear on the floor. That made me realize that something very unsavory had gone on. So I entered a bedroom [26:00], and there were two men, both murdered. One of them was lying in the bed with a red mark, [speaks German], which indicated that something had been done to them, you understand? Next to him on the floor lay a man who later on we found out was the husband of the lady who had opened up the door, and her husband lay on the floor in a big puddle of blood, and I realized that he also was dead. So I realized there was nothing that I could do in order to help these men. And so [27:00] I went upstairs. There was a staircase. There I found my trusty two GIs had cornered a Russian sergeant who was armed with a pistol, and as I appeared at the top of the stairs, he trained his pistol on me, and if my two GIs, to whom I will be forever grateful -- but the two GIs poked him in the ribs with their blunt rifles, and he decided not to shoot me, and the GIs disarmed him, and [28:00] for the time being, he was under arrest. Later on we turned him over to the Russian Army. That's another story. Some of the things that I've experienced, in retrospect, it seems like sometimes a

good dream or sometimes a bad dream. But when you're involved in a war like this, some things seem really unreal. So --

BB: Do you know if he was ever punished or hung or anything like that?

GF: I would assume, but I'll tell you how we delivered him to the Russian authorities. Then we searched the grounds [29:00] and found a man in civilian clothes. He also was a soldier who had helped himself to some civilian clothes. Dead drunk, lying on the ground. So we arrested him too. Then we contacted the Russian authorities in a different part of Berlin, the Russian part of Berlin, and before long, a contingent, a very small one, of Russians, led by an officer, a lieutenant, came and grabbed these two men and [30:00] delivered them to whoever had jurisdiction over them. And I am convinced, although I don't know, that they were probably shot. Russians were not reluctant to do things like that, which in our case, would have required, I would think, a court-martial. But I don't know what happened because that's the end of the story, pretty much. The officer, the Russian officer, was a Jew from Moscow who was, I think he was a tailor in civilian life. He spoke Yiddish, so I was able to talk to him because Yiddish is close enough to German that communication [31:00] could ensue. We became best buddies. After all, we were allies, and the Cold War was still quite a ways away. So we chatted, and we decided that we would get together again. He would teach me Russian, something which I accomplished much later at the Army [31:39] Language School in Monterey [California], and I would teach him English. Well, we parted the best of friends. He went back to his place where he was accommodated, and I went [32:00] to the central part of Berlin, the Russian zone, and I had taken some of my --

(End of Tape 5A)

(Beginning of Tape 5B)

GF: -- and since I couldn't speak Russian and they couldn't speak German, a friendly sentry that I encountered, who was guarding the Russian headquarters, whatever its level was, and I said, in English or German, "Is Lieutenant so-and-so here?" He was a very friendly guy, and he pointed to the building and said, "[speaks German]," which means "Headquarters," [speaks Russian?]. And I climbed up a few stairs and knocked on the door, and [01:00] out came a very dapper Russian major. I said, "Is Lieutenant so-and-so here?" And he said, "Krank" which means, "Sick." Well, I was sure that he had a political sickness, and I tried again to get together with him, and he said repeatedly, "Krank." That was the end of the interview, and I left without having met my newly gained one friend, and I am personally sure that he was transferred to another place where he couldn't fraternize with Americans. So in some ways [02:00], the Cold War -- there was already an unofficial cold war which preceded the actual Cold War. So that was my experience during the early part of my stay in Berlin.

SS: Do you want to ask a little bit about the Berlin Interrogation Center [02:28], and what George's role was in that?

BB: Yes. We've got about 25 minutes left of tape or so. It's my own fault. I only brought three hours of tape.

SS: I actually have another tape.

BB: But while we start to wrap things up, do you want to talk a little bit more about your role at that Berlin Interrogation Center [02:51]? You said you were mostly working with heads of the government or folks involved with the politics in that area?

GF: Yes [03:00]. We were -- our job was to interrogate prominent German civilians and

some high-ranking military people in order to extract information that could be useful to the occupation because by then the war, of course, had ended, or at least we were in armistice mode. So this was a totally new role for us, and [04:00] people were brought in who could give us some information on topics that were broached to us. I wasn't involved in the selection of the topics so I can't tell.

BB: Were they mostly helpful and willing to assist?

GF: I would hope so, but I really don't recall much about the activity, the interrogation activity. But I can tell you about one person who was a woman who happened to be the lover [05:00] of a very interesting German. He was an anti-Nazi [05:04], and he was the son of an eminent German scientist by the name of Professor Hausholder [spelled phonetically], and the son -- Hausholder -- arrived at an accommodation with the Nazis [05:28], I think. That's my guess. The son was an anti-Nazi [05:44], who after the S.S. assassination attempt against Hitler [05:52], he and other anti-Nazis, suspected anti-Nazis [06:00], were arrested. And Hausholder, Jr., was marched to a German civilian prison, quite well known, and there he was shot. But his fiancée, who was a very nice person, was able to salvage a book of poems -- a booklet of poems. I still have it here as part of my library, and I will be happy to show it to you [07:00]. I'm in the process of reorganizing my study and my library, and I'm not sure that I could find it right now, but if you're interested, I'd be happy to have you here again and show you some of my mementos. I'll also show you some examples of my activities as a DA civilian, because I -- after my inactivation as a military man, I opted to stay on in a civilian capacity and became a publications control officer for the military government. It would take too long to tell you about all of that, but that was a very interesting sequel [08:00]. So you're

invited after, come back and -- dealt with some necessary things on an informal basis, if you want; I'd be happy to tell you about them too. I don't think we have the time for them now. So stay in touch, and I'll be very happy to divest myself of whatever other information might be available. So, where were we? Yeah, so these people -- this woman was in sad shape. She, she must have walked a great deal because her shoes were unusable [09:00]. Before long, she threw them away and walked barefoot. We had a WAC on our staff, again a very nice person, who managed to get her a pair of military shoes for females, for a WAC, and she used those and was divinely happy. I managed to -- I was then working in a civilian capacity. I was no longer interested in being in the military subjects; I was interested in the revival of the media, specifically literature. I have a small library [10:00] downstairs in my basement of some of the literature, which I sanctioned and which was published by a German publisher. I'd be happy to let you look at it. I've come to the point where I think I'd be better off if I were to give them to an American university, maybe my alma mater, George Washington [University], or maybe even the Library of Congress. I've kept it all these years, and they're disintegrating, and I think I'd better give them away, or if somebody's interested to buy them, I'd sell them. But I think it would be [11:00] better for the sake of the interested public to give them to the university. I'm thinking of the two that I attended: George Washington [unintelligible] and one was Kansas State University, which I attended evening sessions while I was still in the military, and with an unorthodox outfit which you wouldn't believe.

SS: George, getting back to -- sorry for the interruption. The Berlin Interrogation Center [11:52], were you involved in setting that up or was that --?

- GF: Indirectly. I wasn't involved in the [12:00] logistical organization, but I was involved in the preparation for extracting the activities that we were to undertake.
- SS: Where did the information go that you accumulated there?
- GF: Frankly, I don't know, but I would assume to some military government entity at a higher level than Berlin District Interrogation Center [12:44].
- SS: People were brought to you, basically brought to you and questions --
- GF: People were brought to me and my cohorts who had information of interest [13:00], cultural figures, technical experts, you name it. There was no specific request, as far as I know, for specific people, but people who had something to offer.
- SS: Eventually, after the war, a number of scientists make their way to America eventually, maybe in Fort Hunt [13:29]. Would they have come to you?
- GF: It's entirely possible that we selected some people that later on went -- came to the United States, but I have no specific knowledge.
- SS: Was there a feeling there, after the war, of approaching Cold War [14:00] and it was important to get figures either away from the Russians?
- GF: I don't know because these things were transacted at a higher level. I was not a high-level person. I was just an American intelligence officer who was charged with interrogation of certain topics. But this was beyond the military arena, and I really don't know what directives we received with regard to returning certain people. I'm sure they came from a higher military government.
- SS: Were you involved in, sort of interrogating people to find their Nazi backgrounds [15:00] or try to find people who may have been worthy of further prosecution? Was that part of it?

GF: It's entirely possible, but I did not become involved. I think it has something to do in part that I had logistical duties in addition to interrogation, and we used the same methodology, technical methods, that we used in 1142 [15:35] and other places. So later on, when I became a civilian and functioned in a totally different capacity [16:00], things may have transpired of which I had no knowledge because I was shipped out. I was transferred from this interrogation center to another military activity, also intelligence, in West Germany, and I transitioned directly from a person who was functioning in a military capacity to a totally different capacity, cultural rehabilitation capacity. Why I was transferred [17:00] from Berlin to [European Command Intelligence Center] Oberusel [17:03], which was an intelligence facility, I really don't know, but there I had a totally different function. This is another long story. I was already then in a military capacity which took me from the end of the war to my retirement. I retired from the military, after 20 years of service, in 1964.

BB: The majority of which was as a civilian employee of the military [18:00]?

GF: Let me think. No, some of it was purely military. For instance, I collected -- I was an intelligence analyst with the military government with the Army [18:24] of occupation in Germany.

BB: So you still held military rank at that point?

GF: Yes.

BB: What was the highest rank that you --

GF: I was a major. You can look at the -- at my collection of honors, which are collected there in my study.

BB: Quite a rise from a private in Texas in the cavalry to a major in intelligence.

GF: Yes, I think it's somewhat unique [19:00]. I made a very important decision, which I can't regret, although I never foresaw it. When my contract as a DA civilian expired in 1947, I had a choice to make. Should I stay somewhere else in a non-military capacity or should I go back to New York, rejoin my family, and most importantly, probably the most important decision I've ever made, and I brought [20:00] my German fiancée as a war bride to the United States, married her, and this year in July, we will have been married 60 years. People don't get -- stay married 60 years very often. But fortunately, we're in tolerable health. My wife is in very good health except for a hearing problem that I share up to a point. So I decided, purely on material grounds, to reenter the civil service [21:00], and my first year as a civilian, after I returned home, was a disaster, so I decided to reenter the civil service, and I went to Washington job hunting and was interviewed by a colonel, a lovely man who was in charge of the Office of the Chief of Military History, and there I functioned as a military historian. Well, it was a specialized activity. It would take too long to [22:00] tell you all about that, although I'd be happy to do it some other time. I could either try what I would have loved to do, which is to go back to school, which I did later on anyway, and become a professor, and I could save my family from starving and accept an offer to switch from civilian status to military status and rejoin the military. This is an exaggeration, but it was a matter of making \$40 more per month, military pay, and recouping my military [23:00] status than to work as a research analyst and find it somewhat more difficult to make a living. I did that. I opted for continuing military career. I had any number of assignments, which I'd be happy to tell you about, too. I finally retired. I retired from the military after 20 years of service in 1964. I had any number of civilian jobs, and eventually, I wound up as a scenario writer



for the Voice of America in the European Division. That was my final job. I was 67 [24:00] years old then, and I decided I would have to retire at some time. This was an opportune moment to do so. End of the story of my various activities. But as I said before, you were prepared for a two-session deal. If you want to go more about what I did, even if it isn't relevant to your objective, I'll be happy to tell you more. But it's been an interesting life.

SS: Did you go back to the neighborhood you grew up in [25:00] in Berlin after the war?

GF: Yes, I went back.

SS: What did you find?

GF: I found that Berlin was pretty badly destroyed, but not the neighborhood in which I grew up. That was a good suburban neighborhood. Our house was still standing. Later, when I went on my final visit to Berlin, I found that the house had been divided up into apartments and commercial entities, but before -- was it before or after? I had sent my daughter and her husband, who also retraced [26:00] their father's mother-in-law's background; they went there and were brazen enough to knock on the door, and a very nice lady came out and took them inside and allowed them -- in the meantime, the house had been converted again -- and allowed them to inspect the inside of the house and -- which was very touching -- gave them a book about Grunewald, which is the area where I lived, and I still have that book, and I will always treasure it because it's part of my past.

SS: When you were stationed there, did you [27:00] look up any people that you had known?

GF: When I was stationed, yes. I looked up a former schoolmate who was half-starved by his family. He had married a lovely young woman who more or less upheld -- she was really the one that persuaded him to just pull himself together and hope for better times. He

was not a Nazi [27:47]. His father was a Nazi of sorts, I guess. He just decided to play ball with the Nazis [27:58]; that was my assumption [28:00]. Well, I did the best I could in order to keep him alive. I gave him food. He, without my help, later on managed to get to the United States, divorced his wife who had been so good to him, married another woman, who was also of German Jewish extraction. He was Jewish, obviously. He managed to stay out of the Army [28:43] during the war. How he managed to do that -- I think he had flat feet. How he was -- managed to do that, I can't tell you. Well, in any event, I tried my best to keep him alive, and when he came [29:00] to the United States long after I had returned, he looked me up. I invited him a few times, and we drifted apart, and I never saw him again. I don't know whether he's still alive. He was something of a scoundrel, and I wasn't interested in retaining the connection. And he was, yes, and, of course, I had, still, family. My family intermarried, including, as I told you, myself. All these marriages turned out to be happy marriages. The non-Jewish wives followed their husbands into exile, and some of them lived a miserable life [30:00] in exile. Those who went to Chile and the Canary Islands didn't have much trouble. I meant to tell you something specific. Yes. I said I had family. I had a cousin who was half-Jewish. My uncle died before the Nazis [30:38] came to power. I think he had prostate problems or something like that. And I remember his death. I was a kid then. He married just a lovely non-Jewish, [31:00] German woman. I adored her. She was such a good woman, and she harbored and helped the only Nazi [31:16] victim in my family. She was an old aunt. She continued living in Berlin. My non-Jewish wife, aunt did everything that she could to keep her going, but eventually the Nazis [31:39] grabbed her and sent her to Theresienstadt [31:43] which was one of the better concentration

camps, and she died. She was already in her 80s, and she died en route to the concentration camp [32:00].

BB: And our tape has run out.

[end of transcript]

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