

Fort Hunt Oral History
P.O. Box 1142
Interview with Ralph Patton
by Brandon Bies, Vincent Santucci and David Lassman
February 10, 2009

BRANDON BIES: Okay. Today is February 10, 2009. This is an oral history interview for the Fort Hunt Oral History Project by the National Park Service. We are here interviewing Mr. Ralph Patton at his home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is Brandon Bies, joined by Vincent Santucci and David Lassman. So with that, Mr. Patton, if you wouldn't mind giving us your very most important biographical information, such as where and when you were born.

RALPH PATTON: I go back a long way, but I was born on August 16, 1920 in Pittsburgh, PA. I lived in Pittsburgh most of my young years. It was certainly nothing exciting about my life except that I spent a lot of time in the gym and I probably got my high school letter in gymnastics. I didn't have any [01:00] delusions of grandeur because I wasn't that good, but it kept me busy and it kept me out of trouble, for one thing. I went to work after high school, in 1938. I went to work for Gimbel Brothers in Pittsburgh. And they do -- I worked in the warehouse, and the warehouse manager wanted to make me an assistant to the manager, not an assistant manager, but an assistant to. New York controlled all the comings and goings of Gimbel Brothers, decided I didn't have a college degree, and they turned me down. I think that was probably one of the bitter happenstances of my young [02:00] life. In any event, in 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor [02:09], I knew that I was a perfect draft bait, and I didn't feel too good about being in the infantry, so I decided I'd rather fly. I had never been off the ground, but I joined the U.S. Army Air Corps [02:34]. I was called to active duty in August of 1942, and then was sent to Nashville, Tennessee for classification. We went

through all kind of psychological, psycho motor tests, you name it, and finally on the day that the decisions [03:00] were posted, I found my name on the list of those for pilot training, and I thought that was a pretty good idea. So I was sent to Sikeston, Missouri [03:13] for primary flight school, and the first time I'd ever been off the ground more than 10 feet, they put in a PT-19A with an instructor, and I thought surely he would wash me out. They called it the Messerschmitt Maytag. A civilian pilot would teach you to fly and an Army pilot would pass on whether you were Army quality or whether you would be washed out [04:00]. But I was able to pass all the check rides and was sent to Coffeyville, Kansas [04:12], for basic training. There we flew what we considered, or kiddingly called, the Vultee Vibrator, because it shook, rattled, and rolled, and you were never sure that it would stay together until you got it back on the ground. I graduated from that and went on to advanced flying school, which was twin engine; we called it the Flying Boxcar. I graduated in May of '43, and was sent to Pyote, Texas [04:54], for B-17 training. I was the co-pilot on [05:00] a crew that was sent overseas in October of 1943. I flew my first combat mission the day before Christmas 1943. We were bombing an oil factory on the outskirts of Paris, and for some reason I was told that you put your parachute under the seat, and when you got over the target, you would hook your parachute onto the harness that you always wore. When I got the parachute out from under my seat and tried to hook it on the harness, the rings on the harness didn't match with the rings on the parachute. So I had no parachute [06:00] that was usable, and I flew from Paris back to the base knowing full well if I had to bail out, there was no chance. Nevertheless, I flew seven additional missions. On the ninth mission we were shot down over the Brittany Peninsula [06:27], and we lived with the French Underground [06:30]

for 62 days, and with the help of British Intelligence Service, MI9, and the British Royal Navy, the 15th Motor Gunboat Flotilla, a PT-type boat came into the shore on the northern coast of France, and took 25 of us back to jolly old England [07:00]. From then on, I stayed in the Air Force [07:06], I went to instructor school, I learned to be an instructor of new pilots, and when the war ended, I got out as soon as I could. I did not want to stay in the service. So I went back to the old job that I had and lived a very fruitful life, married my high school sweetheart, had two -- [laughs] three good kids, and now we've reached the tender age of 88, and we're trying to record the past without worrying too much about the future.

BB: Outstanding.

RP: I wish I could be more [08:00] -- able to enunciate a little more clearly, but that's me.

BB: That's okay. We're getting this just fantastic. It's coming through great. If you don't mind if we back up a little bit and try to eke out maybe a little bit more detail from you. We talked a little bit about this over lunch today, but obviously we didn't have the tape recorders going, so we might ask you to repeat a few things that we've already talked about, if that's okay.

RP: Fine.

BB: The first question is, did you receive any briefings or trainings prior to going into combat about what to do if you were shot down?

RP: We received some verbal instruction on how to use a parachute [09:00], how to control it, how to control the gyrations, and how to land so that you didn't break a leg. I assume that it was adequate. As I came down in a parachute, I was swinging back and forth and I remembered the instructor's admonition, if you're swinging, pull on the cords, the

shrouds. I pulled down on the shroud and I watched that nylon umbrella start to collapse. It scared the daylights out of me, and I let her swing, and I landed pretty well, as they had instructed. I'm not sure that the intelligence briefing on how to evade capture [10:00] was of much value because 90 percent of it was luck. You had to be where the Germans weren't. We were very fortunate; the Germans were around the coastal areas of Brittany [10:23] and we landed right in the middle. So they couldn't get there in less than an hour, and we had an hour to get away from the scene, which we utilized pretty well. We did a lot of things wrong, but luck carried us through and we got back to England in 62 days.

BB: So again, getting back to [11:00] prior to the mission, you'd been briefed on how to use a parachute. Can you talk at all about if you had an escape kit and what was inside that kit?

RP: We had escape kits. We did use the halazone tablets, which was for purifying water. We did use the concentrated tablets. It was a type of candy, I think. We did use that, but the escape map was just practically useless because it covered too broad an area. You couldn't pinpoint on that silk map where you were [12:00], because that silk map, about two and a half feet square, covered all of France. So I don't think it was of much value. The French people that couldn't get you in contact with an Underground [12:20] would give you a map or would tell you in what direction to go. They were most cooperative, even though they couldn't be very specific. The first night we had a hot bowl of some kind of coffee, slept on a featherbed. Boy, we thought we had it made. Well, the next morning he made us a breakfast and shoed us off. He didn't know what to do with us, three big [13:00] American boys. He just wanted to help but could not. They get you in touch with intelligence before the Underground [13:14]. That's a generic term, "underground." Means everybody that was working against the Germans.

BB: Another quick question about prior to you being shot down. While you were flying your various missions, were all of your missions to fly against German targets or were they all French targets, or did the targets vary?

RP: The targets varied. However, if the first or primary target was socked in with clouds, we were under instructions never to bomb in France [14:00]. Our first mission was to Paris. We had cloud cover, about eight-tenths. We could not drop on the target, so we dropped our bombs in the English Channel on the way home. But we were permitted to drop bombs on any positively identified German town. Unfortunately, Swiss towns got bombed a couple of times, which should not have happened but did.

BB: Let me ask you this. So it sounds like some of your missions covered flights over Germany, though, as opposed to French targets. Were you given a [15:00] different escape map depending on the target? You mentioned earlier you had an escape map that covered France. Did it also cover Germany or did you have a separate map or did that depend?

RP: We would have had a separate map maybe for Belgium, if you were going to fly over Belgium, or some parts of Germany. But I really don't recall specifically how they did that. Did they insert a separate map in those escape kits? If they did, intelligence had a pretty big job before every mission, because we didn't know where we were going until briefing and they pulled the curtain over the big wall map [16:00]. Then we knew. But I think the maps were just too large a scale to be of any value.

BB: Okay. Did you have -- your escape kits, were they with you all the time or were you issued an escape kit prior to every individual mission, and did you have to turn it back in after the mission?

RP: As I recall, that was the case. We were given an escape kit and we had to check it back in when we got back on the ground. There was, I think, the equivalent of \$200 in each escape kit, so we did have some money, and therefore I think a lot of the escape kits were broken into from time to time.

BB: Prior to your fateful mission [17:00], did you ever meet anyone who had successfully evaded, ever escaped?

RP: No, I never had the pleasure of talking with any U.S. airman, at least, who had had the good fortune to escape. Prior to that time, in 1943 and '4, prior to that time there were not a great number of Americans who had escaped. Most of the people went out over the Pyrenees Mountains, some into Andorra; some went into Switzerland. But the Swiss -- those that went into Switzerland ran into a [18:00] complicated political situation. The guys that went over the Pyrenees into Spain got arrested, but the American consul or the British consul in Bilbao would bail them out. Somehow they were able to get loose. But the Spanish on the surface had to try to maintain a loyalty to the Germans, and as such, they made life uncomfortable for some of our boys that climbed over the mountains and froze their feet and so forth. They had to spend a few nights in jail. But the British had an agent by the name of Donald Darling [spelled phonetically] [18:58], who was in Gibraltar [19:00], and he arranged all those passages from Spain into Gibraltar, and from Gibraltar, they would fly them back to England. So they had to take a great circle route to get home, where we went right across the water. Took us, I think, about four hours, and it was not quite a pleasure cruise, but it was better than crossing the mountains.

[inaudible commentary]

BB: If we could then talk maybe a little bit about your specific incident where you were shot

down, and then detail what happened next. We can pause it if you want to, while you [20:00] answer the phone.

[audio break]

BB: So, a couple quick questions. For your mission, the base you flew out of in England, what base did you fly out of in England?

RP: I was with the 94th Bomb Group [20:18] that flew out of Bury St. Edmunds, which was in East Anglia, not too far out of Cambridge.

BB: Okay. How long were you at that base? Were you there for a few months prior to flying the mission?

RP: We went into that base on October 15, 1943, and we were shot down on January 5, 1944. So we were there roughly three months.

BB: You mentioned earlier that your first mission, was that on Christmas Eve, the day before Christmas?

RP: Thanksgiving [21:00].

BB: Thanksgiving, okay. So over the course of about a month and a half, not quite a month and a half, you flew nine missions, from Thanksgiving until early January?

RP: I guess that's right, yes. The practice missions were -- we did a lot of practicing and formation flying, trying to make a tight formation, and this was a critical part of the 8th Air Force's [21:36] mission. If they could fly a tight formation, they could bring to bear on any fighter aircraft. Well, each B17 had 13 machine guns, 13 .50-caliber machine guns, and they couldn't all be brought [22:00] to bear on an incoming fighter, but if you had six ship elements, 21 ship formation, you could put a lot of firepower out there. The German fighters were something else. They'd come right through that fire and split us

out, and [unintelligible]. We had been hit by flak over the target, which was an airfield around Bordeaux, and flak went through our right horizontal stabilizer, and it set up a vibration so that we couldn't keep up air speed with the formation. They were coming down, descending -- we could fly at 150 mile an hour pretty well, but they wanted to go 170 [23:00]. If we went 170, we were pretty sure that we'd shake off the tail. We got up over the Brest Peninsula [23:11], we dodged the antiaircraft fire from Lorient, and fighters, FW-190s came up from Lorient, and we could not dodge them. As we evaded the antiaircraft, we kept turning ever so slowly, and we found ourselves headed back into France. It didn't seem like a very good idea at the time. So we made a pretty radical turn to get back on course. Now, at that time, the fighter got our range and cornered us with 13 about .30-caliber machine guns [24:00], and as we twisted around, the entire tail assembly broke off. So the plane went straight up in the air, it stalled out, and went into a flat spin. So that those of us that were alive had no great difficulty getting out of the aircraft, but three of our crew didn't make it, and based on the experience that I had, I assume they were killed in the last fighter attack.

BB: At this time was your aircraft completely by itself? The formation had long since --

RP: They were two, three miles in front of us, maybe more than that. We [25:00] lagged behind over the Bay of Biscay, which is -- there's Bordeaux, and you go off to the peninsula in Lorient the submarine pens around Lorient and Brest [25:19] and St-Nazaire. There's a heck of a book out about the German submarines stationed in Brest [25:30], by a British author -- or a French author. Has nothing to do with what we're talking about. But I -- having been in Brest in the Brittany Peninsula [25:45], I'm a little more interested in those things than a lot of people would be. We have been back to France, I would

suggest, at least four times [26:00], maybe five, and always very well received. We have had several of them over here. I think to sum it all up, the slogan of our organization is we will never forget, and then implied, we will not forget that these people put their life on the line in order to help a bunch of young, adventuresome Americans who got into trouble. We've tried to make it known to them, but they won't accept it. They say, "No. We will never forget what you did." So it's become [27:00] a national -- an international admiration society. So there.

BB: Just a few more questions. When you were shot down, you mentioned that you were two or three miles away from the formation. Were they close enough that they could see that your aircraft had been shot down? Were they able to report you and count how many chutes had come out of your plane? Do you have any idea?

RP: I think it was reported that they saw parachutes. I don't think anybody said how many, but I do believe that the report back to base was parachutes -- a couple of the guys -- I don't [28:00] really -- he said that a fighter shot at him, but I don't think that happened.

BB: Did fighters circle you in your parachutes?

RP: Yes. A fighter.

BB: Oh, a single fighter?

RP: I don't know how many. The crew maintains that they shot down several German fighters. I have no evidence of that, and I was unable to find the German pilot that shot us down, because, you know, most of the German pilots didn't survive the war. But it's possible the guys in the tail crew might have [29:00] shot him down. I have no way of knowing. I did inquire from a pretty good German source, but he was unable to point to anything.

BB: To shift gears then a little bit to your actual time in France, you landed, you parachuted to the ground. Was your crew relatively close together, the seven of you who did make it, or were you spread out over a few miles?

RP: We were pretty well spread out. The first pilot and I and the bombardier were together within five minutes, and we tried to talk to French people in the farmyard where we landed, but, of course, we didn't know a word of French [30:00], and I'm not sure that those people knew much French either. We were in an area of Brittany [30:07] where they speak a tongue called Breton, and the young people learn French, but the old people, some of them never learn French, so the kids had to learn Breton to communicate with their parents and grandparents. So when we couldn't talk to them, we decided the smartest move we could make would be get out of there, so we hid and we ran for a while, hid in the bushes, took off our Mae Wests and our [unintelligible] and any of the gear that was disposable, and we buried it as best we could, and then we headed east. We knew we were in that Brest Peninsula [31:00], and we also knew we had to get out of it to get home. We couldn't just go north, so we headed due east, then figured we'd turn south and go down to the Pyrenees Mountains. But one thing led to another and somebody was looking out for us. We had various experiences. We stayed five weeks in a schoolhouse, two weeks in a bistro, two weeks in a hotel, four nights in a very rural farmhouse.

BB: If we could pause real quick, we're going to just flip [32:00] this tape.

(End of Tape 1A)

(Beginning of Tape 1B)

BB: Could you repeat again, was that the order that you stayed in? You mentioned you were four or five weeks. Was that the order that you stayed in these?

RP: [affirmative]

BB: So again, starting off, did you feel like this plan of, "Okay, we need to head -- so we need to head east and then south"? Did you formulate that, literally, immediately upon landing on the ground or was this a plan that happened within days of you landing?

RP: It was the thing to do. There was no discussion.

BB: You just understood.

RP: Oh, yes.

BB: So did you need to use your escape maps or did you already know from your navigator exactly where you were?

RP: Well, we knew exactly where we were. Whether the navigator knew or not, I can't argue, but we knew, and we knew we had to get out of that peninsula [01:00], although I didn't realize it was 100 miles from north and south, but we -- somebody had given us a map the first or second day of the local area.

BB: A French person gave you a map?

RP: Yes, a French woman or man; I don't remember. We asked a lot of questions, "Where are we?" And we could see the maps of Brittany [01:36]. We weren't going to swim back to England, we were pretty sure of that. So it was quite obvious that we had to go east and somehow get down to the Pyrenees Mountains, about the only way we knew [02:00] that people got back home. Nobody ever heard -- well, you know, they used to talk about, "Well, we'll send an airplane in and get you." Like hell they will. They would send an aircraft in to get a fighter ace, a guy who [unintelligible]. They couldn't get the average American [spelled phonetically] out. But those fighter people sometimes could -- or somebody that was lucky to fall into the hands of an underground organization

that was receiving an air drop or a carpetbagger mission, you'd have to be very, very lucky, and a few guys were [03:00]. But most of us had to sweat it out, and I do mean it became a drag. We had -- I lived with a guy for four or five weeks, and he would ask our host every day, "What are you doing to get us out of here?" He was really antsy, and I don't know that he wanted to get back and kill some Germans or fight the war, but he didn't want to be cooped up with nothing to do for days on end. I was just fairly content to be safe. As Winston Churchill said, "There's no greater thrill in life than to be shot and [04:00] missed." Well, I had been shot at and missed, and I didn't think I wanted to do that anymore.

BB: Now, after you landed, you were in a group of three. Did you soon group up with the remainder of the surviving flight members, the other four?

RP: No. We met up with a waist gunner on the third morning. He had been helped by a Frenchman and he had picked up the navigator from another airplane that was shot down over the Brest Peninsula [04:45] the same day.

[audio break]

BB: So you were saying that you met up with one of your waist gunners and a navigator from another flight.

RP: Right, another crew. They had bailed out [05:00] almost in the same area. They were more scattered around than we were. Norman King [05:08] was the navigator from a crew on the 410th Squadron of the 94th Bomb Group [05:17]. We were in the 331st Squadron of the 94th. Our navigator and he had nothing in common. The navigator and our radio operator stayed with a certain group of French people, and the bombardier and I and the pilot were with another group. Then we got together somehow and all five of us

stayed in the schoolhouse, four of our crew and [06:00] the navigator, Norman King [06:05]. What a chore that was to take care or feed five healthy young men. I don't know how the French did it. But I estimated that over 100 people were aware that we were in town. Between that and then traveling up to the coast to have the boats come and get us, well, all told, I think I figured that it was about 100. That's a lot of people to have their lives risked [07:00], and it's all a mutual risk. Everybody is at risk. But that's why we try to say we will never forget.

BB: Did you ever suspect at any time or were you ever concerned that some of these might be Vichy French or French who were working for the Germans who might betray you? Or is that just a risk you had to take?

RP: The word was collaborator and every time you'd pass a house you felt uncomfortable, whether they were a collaborator, and the people had them pretty well spotted and they stayed away from them. I don't know who was a collaborator and who wasn't. We had to trust the French [08:00]. But they had them pretty well marked. And, of course, after the surrender of the Germans, they took a vengeance on some of them too.

BB: In speaking of the Germans, especially in the first few days, did you get the sense that there were German patrols sent out to look for you and your crew?

RP: Never thought much about it, but I later have read many reports. And, of course, the Comet line [08:38] was infiltrated at least three times, and what the German agents would do is take an American or British airman from Brussels, say, down to the Spanish border. Then they'd come back and arrest everybody [09:00]. So they did that on a couple of occasions. After the war, they brought up the one agent and his dying conclusion was, "I bet on the wrong force." Well, he sure did. But we don't know how many of these

Germans infiltrated the line and how many of the Allies and the underground executed either. We don't have any clue on that. They just disappeared. So it was dirty business. I can't remember the alias, Jacques de Service [spelled phonetically] [10:00]. Jacques was a -- I think he had a habit of betting on the wrong horse. They did have some. I think the Shelburne [10:20] line never had a problem. A few people may have disappeared, but the Comet line [10:31], I think they lost two members of the Resistance for every flyer they got out. It was pretty bad news. And the Dutch, we have had tremendous relations with the Dutch [11:00] and the Belgians and the French.

BB: So these various lines, are these certain escape routes that you're referring to? Like the one that you were part of, was that just for, say, the Brest Peninsula [11:27], for that vicinity?

RP: No. They had agents in Paris. The Burgundy line was one under British intelligence. George Bruceens [spelled phonetically] was a writer, a newspaper type, and he apparently had some connection with the British by radio. He had a woman working with him, an American movie star by the name of Drue Tartiere [12:00], and he sent people out from Paris to -- well, partway to Brest, not quite to Brest [12:13]. These names, a lot of them were given after the war, but some of them were named by MI9. I'm not sure which ones were, but Airey Neave [12:33] became Margaret Thatcher's shadow spokesman for Northern Ireland, and he was a victim of the IRA and they planted a bomb in his car in the House of Parliament garage. But he was pretty important to the Shelburne [12:57] operations, for example [13:00].

BB: So, your -- again, to get back to your specific escape story, your group originally wanted to head south and then head east, but did you end up essentially staying in the same spot,

the same village for weeks or months at a time?

RP: We were in a schoolhouse in the town of Plouha for five weeks. We were in a bistro about two, three miles from there, and a hotel all in a three-mile radius, anyhow. Then we took the train from the town of Lorient in the center of Brittany [13:55] up to the north coast. We went from Lorient to Guingamp [14:00], and we went to Plouha by truck. Some came from Paris and they came by B train to Saint-Brieuc, and they had a little narrow-gauge railway from Saint-BrieucS to Plouha and they rode that little rascal. So they had various means of getting us there.

BB: And there was the port, the place where you were going to meet the boat?

RP: Yes, Plouha.

BB: And did you -- at what point did you know that this was going to be the plan? Did they tell you right off the bat that, "We're going to put you on a boat and it's just going to take time to get there," or were you in the dark until the very end?

RP: I think that we were in the dark [15:00] until we -- at the time we were staying with a gendarme and his wife, and a few minutes before 6:00, two men pulled up in front of the house in a little pickup truck, and they came into the house and they turned on the radio and they listened very carefully. They'd say, "Allonzee." "We go, go, go, go." They had heard the BBC broadcasting these coded messages, and they would say dumb things, apparently meaningless things. But the secret code for our mission was, "Bonjour à tout le monde [16:00] à maison d'Alfonse." "Good evening to everyone at the house of Alfonse." Now, this was dreamed up by the people in London, Harry Needen [spelled phonetically] and Brigadier Crockett [16:18] and his gang, and that meant that the MGB 503 of the 15th Motor Gunboat Flotilla of British Royal Navy had left the Port of

Dartmouth in Southern England and was headed across the Channel. If all went well, they would pick you up in a few hours. If things went right, a guy would be standing in the middle [17:00] of the cliff with a blue searchlight flashing the letter B. If things went wrong, he would put a red hood on his flashlight and signal -- I forgot what the letter was, but there was a signal that would tell the boat don't come in. But they never had to do that. They flashed the letter B in blue, and we went down the cliff in the rowboats and the MGB anchored offshore about a mile and a half or so, [unintelligible], and we climbed onboard and went home [18:00].

BB: Were you with all Americans or were there any British flyers who were also being taken out?

RP: I don't know on that particular mission, but there were British and Canadian that came out that way. But mostly it was an American evacuation mission. When they took off, those engines set up a tremendous roar, and, my God, that's all she wrote. As we sat on the beach waiting for the boats to come in, a German [unintelligible] battery way up on the cliff opened fire, and it was like daylight, just big time. I don't know actually how many shots were fired [19:00], two or three, and we figured that they knew something was going on out there and they were firing away at our boat. Well, it was just a happenstance, just a coincidence, according to the British Navy. They said, "No, they didn't even come close." But after we'd been under way about an hour, we were below deck, most all the Americans, and a British sailor came down and he said, "We just got word that there are six German E-boats between us and England." And, "Oh, boy, here we go again." Somebody asked, "Well, can we outrun them?" "No." "Can we outshoot them?" "No." "Well [20:00], where can we hide?" Well, I guess one of the

[unintelligible], they can see the searchlights from the German boats, and they'd just steer clear of them. So we get back to England at dawn, and got a beautiful hot shower and clean underwear, and they put us in British battle dress. We put a gold bar on. We were locked up for three days and interrogated by everybody imaginable. When we did get to go out, we put a gold bar on GI clothes, and a brigadier stopped us; "Soldier, you're out of uniform." "Yes, sir." But we had [21:00] a piece of paper that I still have, and it says "confidential," and it identifies us as just having returned from enemy territory, something to that effect. About an hour later, two MPs trot over, and one says, "We're going to arrest you for being out of uniform." I said, "Hey, read this." He says, "We're still going to take you in." I said, "You better read that very carefully." His buddy looked at it, "Oh, no. I wouldn't touch that with a 10-foot" -- and so he turned us loose. But what had happened is that the paper said, "I, Sergeant So-and-so, identify Lieutenant [22:00] Patton as having been a former member of the 94th Bomber Group [22:06]." And it started out "I, Sergeant," and that's all they read. They didn't read, "I identify Lieutenant Patton." It's funny, the general took one step back, "Welcome home." So that was a pretty good experience when you look like you're about to be arrested and even a one-star salutes you.

BB: That's a great story. Very meaningful and powerful.

RP: Well [23:00], you know, it is a pretty common story. People say [unintelligible]. There are hundreds of stories like that, but to the people that haven't been exposed to them, it's a little different. A lot of guys had a heck of a lot tougher war than I did, but I do want it to be recorded for the kids, the grandchildren. We've got four. Our granddaughter just celebrated her 21st birthday last Thursday. She called me up and, "Oh, Grandpa, we had

a great time. We bought a bottle of wine.” Well, that’s the first legal wine [24:00] I guess that she’d been able to buy. But that’s a picture of the beach. [unintelligible] People always bringing something to the Americans when they come, and since I’m the leader of the band, I get most of these things. But a lot of them are down in a museum in Savannah. The Air Force Museum in Dayton several years ago talked me out of my original ID, false identity card, so they have [25:00] them. They made good copies for me, but they also have the original badge, which is unique. It’s a gold and silver embroidered boot, and it was non-authorized. You weren’t allowed to wear it on the uniform, but you wore it under your lapel. The guy at the museum talked me out of that one, and he said he’s never really ever seen another one. So people guard them pretty well, I guess.

BB: Quick question on uniforms. When you were in France, it was 63 days? Is that how long you were there?

RP: [affirmative]

BB: At what point did you get rid of your [26:00] flying outfit? Presumably, they gave you civilian clothing at some point so you would blend in?

RP: I’m not sure, but it was -- clothing was an elective gathering, whatever. The British Army had retreated and left thousands of GI khaki-colored things. The French Army had dissolved. So dress was not quite as critical as we had imagined it would be. You just didn’t want to wear a uniform that said USA on it. But I had GI shoes. I was so lucky. Our waist gunner had blisters on his feet the second day; he just didn’t have shoes [27:00]. But I had GI shoes. I got a blue shirt from somebody, which I had brought home. I don’t know what happened to it. I had like a light jacket. This was in January.

It was fairly cold.

BB: So it doesn't sound like it really mattered when you were in hiding what clothing you wore, if it was military or civilian.

RP: I didn't have a feeling it was a great concern. However, our first pilot was six-four, and the French had a terrible time finding any clothes for him. The schoolteacher's husband [28:00] was a POW in Germany, and he gave me his topcoat. I had a warm topcoat. So there was a lot of clothing around if you ran into the right person, because the men were all shipped off to Germany. I forgot what they called it now, but it was forced labor, and any man between the age of 18 or 19 and 25 was conscripted for working in a farm or a factory in Germany. There weren't too many men around. Toni [spelled phonetically] [28:54], who was the schoolteacher in this town, lived in the [29:00] house or apartment between two classrooms, and her brother was in hiding there because he was eligible to be sent to Germany.

BB: Did you use any of the money in your escape kit at all?

RP: I gave somebody some money. I should have given them all of the money, but I didn't. I didn't feel that money was the issue. The French were not doing it for money, and [unintelligible]. However, they could have used anything we gave them. Two-buck train tickets, for example. We rode the train [30:00] for about 50 miles. It took us about eight hours, I think, the Germans in the front two coaches and city folks going to the country to buy food in the last one. We were in the last coach, pretending to be asleep for six hours or something. I don't remember. The worst part of it was there were women with shopping bags loaded with bread and food and stuff that had to stand. We could not get up and give them our seats. So American gentlemen were not gentlemen and could not

be.

BB: Okay. Did you have to show papers to a German [31:00] guard to get on the train?

RP: No. We were very lucky. We were picked up at a farmhouse and were taken to a town of [unintelligible]. The guy driving the truck couldn't find four of us. He found the bombardier, but he couldn't find four of us. So we missed the train. So they put us up in their house. He happened to have been a barber, so we all got a haircut. The next day we got on the train. Well, the train was so loaded because of the weekend with people that were trying to buy food in the country, and they stopped at every chicken coop, and the train was an hour late getting into town to the north. Well, the German guards [32:00] went home on time, and we arrived after they had left. So we just walked out of the station and followed a Frenchman.

(End of Tape 1B)

(Beginning of Tape 2A)

BB: This is an oral history interview as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. We are here today. Today's February -- excuse me, March 19, 2009. We are members of the National Park Service interviewing Mr. Ralph Patton about his experiences during World War II as a successful escaper and evader from enemy territory, and we're going to learn about AFEES [Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society] [00:28] today and the history behind that organization. This is Brandon Bies with the National Park Service, also joined by David Lassman, Brian Mast, and Ed Yuen. With that, we'll go ahead and get started. Mr. Patton, again, if you want to take us right on into the presentation, we can get going.

RP: Well, I think that we'd like to start at the beginning. The first slide [01:00] shows the

logo of AFEES [01:04]. The logo is a little complicated. It was designed by a committee and it looks like it, but the AFEES stands for the Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society, and the pro libertate ambulavimus, a Latin teacher in Pittsburgh said that means “we walk for liberty.” The winged boot implies that we flew one way and walked the other way. The little seashells on the side indicate those who came back to home base by boat or by some other means than walking [02:00]. This all started on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor [02:16]. Next slide, please. I was sitting up in bed with papers all around, preparing for an accounting exam on Monday, and as soon as I heard about this, I knew there was probably very little schooling going to take place from that time forward. I folded up my papers and I tried on Monday night to pass an accounting exam [03:00]. I’m not sure how it worked out. In any event, I joined up as a -- next slide -- as a cadet, I had never been more than 10 feet off the ground, and yet I decided flying was a lot better than marching with a 50-pound pack and a 15-pound rifle. Next. My first day of training was in a Fairchild PT-19A, 175-horsepower with an in-line engine. We had fun. By sheer luck, I passed the check rides, and after 60 hours [04:00] I was graduated from primary flight school at Sikeston, Missouri [04:06], and sent to basic flying school at Coffeyville, Kansas [04:14]. Next. There we were assigned a Vultee Vibrator. This was a 400-horsepower engine designed to do acrobatics or aerobatics, and we did formation flying, cross country, navigational skills. I got this fellow to spin one time, and on two tries I couldn’t get it out. Well, my instructor took over [05:00] and I could hear him yelling, “Rudder, one, two, stick!” which was the assigned procedure for recovering from a spin. The airplane wiggled and jiggled and finally slowly came out of the spin. My instructor said, “If there’s anything wrong with this airplane, we should

know it. So let's go back up and do it again." Well, we went back up and did it again, and I yelled at the top of my voice, "Rudder, one, two, stick!" and I popped the stick to the firewall and this airplane shuddered and wiggled and came out of the spin. I went back, landed the thing [06:00], and felt pretty sure that I was going to become a pilot in the United States Air Corps [06:12]. Next slide. So we went on to double-engine, one-pilot school. Bamboo Bomber was an AT-17. From then on in my flying career, I never flew solo again, much to my later regret. At the time -- at the time I thought maybe I might become an airline pilot, but I had no engine experience that it would be in my favor. After graduation from [07:00] -- I became a brand-new, shiny second lieutenant and rated pilot in the Air Force [07:17], and given 21 days leave and ordered to report to Pyote, Texas [07:27], in June of 1943. Next slide. Well, we had some time in the hottest ship on the base, an AT-9, an all-metal, twin-engine job, but from there, our orders said we would go to Pyote, Texas -- next slide -- for B-26 training. We got to Pyote, Texas [08:00], and they had never seen a B-26. Neither did we. I was assigned as a co-pilot on a B-17 and we got a partial crew in Pyote, Texas, and headed to Dyersburg, Tennessee, for operational training. Next slide. We got overseas on a 10-man crew in October of 1943. I was front row, four officers on a B-17, and a radio operator. Six enlisted men, a radio operator [09:00], ball turret gunner, tail gunner, and this was the Glen Johnson [09:07] crew that in October 1943 was assigned to the 331st Squadron of the 94th Bomb Group [09:18]. We flew the first mission. We went to Paris, and we could not see the target because of about seven-tenth cloud cover, so we dropped our bombs in the English Channel. What a waste. I went to -- according to the old timers, you put your parachute under the seat. When you get near the target, you clamp the parachute [10:00] onto the

harness that you were wearing. Well, I thought that was a great idea. So I reached under the seat, pulled out my chute pack and went to clip it on my harness, and I found that I had a harness with rings on it. The unfortunate part of it was I also had a chute pack with rings on. So I'm flying with an impossible parachute situation, and on any one of my flights -- an engine B-17 behind us and I'm scared to death. But we dropped our bombs in the English Channel and went back home. For the second mission -- and this is late November 1943 -- we went into deep Germany, and they had [11:00] assigned me to the left side of the airplane, which was the pilot's seat, and he was in my seat. The reason for that is, looking into the sun, it was better the co-pilot should look into the sun than the pilot. We got to the target, and the bombardier called, said, "The bombs won't release. Salvo the bombs!" The pilot has the control for salvoing the bombs, and that's me on this given day. So I reached down [unintelligible] there's a red ball alongside of the seat that I pulled, and nothing happened, and I pulled and nothing happened. Now, mind you [12:00], I had taken the parachute pack out from under the seat, clamped it on the rings, and had a big chest pack. I had to reach over with both hands to salvo the bombs. I yanked, and the cable release came, but so did my parachute. I had silk all over the cockpit, like an octopus trying to get the silk back -- it was actually nylon -- and still help fly the aircraft in the formation. Well, obviously, we made it back, and I did [13:00] not have to experiment with throwing parachute nylon out into the air. We got home safely and we did drop our bombs on the target. Number two mission, three, four, five, six, seven were relatively routine. Number eight was routine. Number nine, we got up before dawn, formed a 21-ship formation into wings, and the group into air divisions. We had -- I believe there were four or 500 aircraft that were assigned to bomb [14:00] a German air

field near Bordeaux. Flying down was uneventful. We dropped our bombs on the target. I don't know what damage we did. We may have put a few holes in a runway. While over the target, anti-aircraft put a burst through our right horizontal stabilizer. And in the meantime, we lost a target and an ME-109 swarmed through the formation, putting further holes in the vertical and horizontal -- well, in the tail section of the aircraft. Now, as we came off the target [15:00], we had been flying as deputy lead, which sits on the right hand of the leader, and we were deputy squadron leads. But with the holes in the stabilizer, it set up a vibration that gave us great concern. We headed north over the Bay of Biscay, and we lagged about two or three miles behind the formation. This is the strike photo of our bombs hitting the perimeter of the air field. But as we go across the water and [16:00] come inland to the Brest Peninsula [16:05], we are about two miles behind, clear blue sky and German anti-aircraft [unintelligible] open fire. Now, we're in the middle of the Brest Peninsula [16:28]. We start easing away, very slowly turning to the right. Well, after a while, the anti-aircraft bursts about 200 yards off our left port wing, and he was tracking beautifully. But we were avoiding him by a very simple right turn into France [17:00]. But that didn't seem like too good an idea either, because you're going to end up in Grenada, where there's more anti-aircraft. So we gave it a sharp right turn to get back on course, and at that point in time a German fighter FW-190 attacked, and .30-caliber or 15-millimeter guns from the FW-190 [unintelligible] that went through the cockpit. As we made a violent turn [18:00], the entire tail assembly of the B-17 broke off at the tail. Well, it was quite obvious from the cockpit point of view the control pedestal was like a wet noodle, and I could tell immediately that the best move was to get the hell out of there. I put my chute on. I was very fortunate we had

four good engines, so when the tail broke off, the plane nosed up and went into a stall, and when she stalled out, you had freedom of movement. So I think everybody that was alive had a chance [19:00] to get out. I got my chute on, I jumped down, or crawled down between the pilot's seat, and there was an escape hatch below the control area. The navigator and bombardier had, by then, opened the escape hatch, and I got down there and immediately bailed out head first into the calm, quiet air. As I fell, I had been instructed to withhold opening your chute until you could see the ground. Well, I was spinning so heavy, I couldn't even find the ground [20:00]. So I decided the prudent move was to pull that D-ring now. My chute opened beautifully, and I drifted to the French countryside, and I landed right at the foot of a hedgerow. Hedgerow were to become famous after the invasion in Normandy. It gave the infantry [unintelligible]. But I landed with a thud, unhooked my parachute harness, and started across the field to a house where people were standing and watching the show. We went up -- oh, I turned around to my first pilot. Glen Johnson [20:57] is coming across the field, so [21:00] the two of us tried to talk to the French farmer. They didn't speak any English and we did not speak a word of French. So we took off to the woods and picked up our bombardier, and now three of us end up, three days later, trying to circle the town of Plouay, and this is the schoolhouse in Plouay. A young man -- oh, that's the other slide. How'd we do that? Well, we were trying to -- go back [22:00]. We were trying to come around the town from the north, so we get on this road heading for a monastery that we knew was there, and eventually turn thinking we could get to Spain. About here a little boy by the name of Lucien Dumais [22:29] spotted us, and he would not move. He stood right there in the middle of the road. Well, we knew he had seen us. So we just, "Well, that's the

way it is,” and we took off slowly marching down the road. Lucien [22:59] was late for school [23:00]. He didn’t get back from lunch in time, and when the teacher asked him, “What’s this being late business?” he said, “Teacher, I have seen five Americans in the road.” She didn’t believe him. “Where?” So he tried to direct -- tell her where we were. Well, schoolteacher is Toni Pillbinger [spelled phonetically] [23:43]. Toni turned her class over to the teacher in the other classroom, and she come looking for us. Well, in the meantime, we [24:00] were found by another -- or by a Frenchman who thought we were nuts to be five. We had picked up two more. We picked up our waist gunner and the navigator from another ship on the second morning, and none of us had the smarts or the strength to say, “You guys get on your own. I’m going to do this alone.” So we all five stayed together, and this French carpenter indicated [25:00] he thought we were crazy, but we ought to follow him anyhow. So we followed him. This is Toni [25:12]. Now, Toni, a year earlier, had an American airman by the name of Frank Green [spelled phonetically], and the first thing she said to us when she found us sort of hiding in the tall weeds in the middle of the field, Toni said, “You know Frank Green?” Our bombardier says, “Yeah, I knew Frank.” She said, “Well, he -- we had him and I got him back to England a year ago.” Well, you can imagine what that did to our [26:00] spirits. But we stayed in the schoolhouse, five of us, for five weeks. In the meantime, my mother received the routine telegram. She received this. We were shot down on January 5th and I think she received this on January 18th. My wife -- we were not married at the time -- had joined the Navy, and so she didn’t learn about it until my father called her [27:00] on March the 18th. This is the people of the village of Plouay. This is Josephine Mellick [spelled phonetically] and her mother and father. She, while working with Toni [27:25],

found food for five hungry young men. She was a gutsy little gal. Towards the end of the war, her husband was in prison, and some German officer, in effect, surrounded, and she, with a pistol to his head, marched him to the next village to get her husband free. She also had [28:00] a few chickens. The Germans would come around trying to get food, trying to get the eggs, and she said, "I don't have any eggs." Just then the rooster starts making a noise. "If you've got a rooster, you have a hen." So she went up to where the chickens were and she put, I think, half a dozen in her apron. In that part of France they wore wooden shoes, and she got within about 10 feet of the German officer, she tripped, and the eggs went kaplooeey. That's the kind of courage that these people had in defying [29:00] the Germans and in helping Americans.

VINCENT SANTUCCI: We've got about two more minutes before it ends, two or three.

BB: Again, Mr. Patton, this is going very well, but again, we just want to make sure we have time at the end to spend a good bit of time about AFEES [29:27] and the Society.

RP: I'm getting carried away.

BB: Trust me, I think we're all extremely interested in this.

RP: I'm trying to get [unintelligible] the scenery as to when the --

BB: Okay, yes. [unintelligible]

RP: If I go like that --

BB: Okay [laughs]. Sounds good.

RP: I can cut the dialogue. Do you want to go on from here?

BB: Sure. Yeah, we can move on [30:00].

RP: All right, I'll finish. The story is about to finish anyhow. These are the warnings that were posted in every building in town. "Warning: Any man caught helping aviators will

be shot in the field. The women who are caught aiding in any respect will be sent to concentration camps.” I was not aware that “concentration camp” was a word that the Germans used. We had to have a false ID card. So this was a picture beneath -- we put a sheet over the schoolhouse door [31:00] and took a picture. The picture was used for my false ID. But during the period when we were holed up, being bored to tears, the American Air Force [31:23] was dropping leaflets all over town, trying to tell the real story of the condition of the war. This was one that was dropped on January 11th, I think. This was my false ID card. You can see the picture. The Underground [31:58] would [32:00] find a way to steal the [unintelligible] stamps.

(End of Tape 2A)

(Beginning of Tape 2B)

BB: You said that you found a way to steal these.

RP: They would be able to say that I was from the city that was bombed out, that the records were gone. In addition to the -- oh, by the way, I was a mute traveling salesman. Now, that's a little incongruous, but that's what they said I was. I was a [speaks French]. After the schoolhouse, we were moved. After five weeks or so, we were moved to this little bistro about three miles down the road, and this is the [01:00] father of three girls. I hope we have a picture of them. This is Jean Virro [spelled phonetically], Francine Virro, who was the daughter of that man previously, and Yvonne and their sister Marie. Jean was a prime mover in keeping us there for two weeks, then we were moved again to -- go on -- to the Hôtel Tullevey [spelled phonetically], and this was run by Alyse and Josef Guliea [spelled phonetically]. We stayed on the third floor for two weeks with her aunt and uncle [02:00], who we had bombed out in Lorient, and now staying at the Hôtel Tullevey

right in the middle of Brittany [02:13]. We were there two weeks. After two weeks, in the middle of the night, Monsieur Germaine [spelled phonetically], we met him in the middle of the road, and he took us to the next town. All he knew in English were cuss words, and even that sounded good. He had been in New York for a while, and all he learned to do was swear. He took us [03:00] into the country to the home of the Lenoirs' [spelled phonetically]. This 94-year-old lady fed us a couple meals. We slept up in the attic, and on the fourth day -- well, this is an example of passive resistance. They would take this 20-franc note and cut a postage stamp and circulate it. I don't think I've ever seen another one [04:00]. Okay. On the fourth day, Monsieur Crème [spelled phonetically], the barber, came looking for us. He drove us to the town of [unintelligible] and we were late. We missed the train because they didn't know where we were. So now we've got five guys. He gave us all a haircut. The next day we caught the train from Lorient, which is in the middle of Brittany [04:38], up to Guingamp. This is François Carabraun [spelled phonetically]. François had the biggest truck in Brittany. He did much work for the Germans during the day, but he [05:00] -- this [unintelligible] hauled us from the town of Guingamp to 20 kilometers to the coast, the town of Plouha. Go to the next one. This is the home of a policeman, gendarme, at Guingamp. He'd sit at a window and watch the troops, the German troops, march up and down the street. Their headquarters was up at the break in the wall. When we worried about it a little bit, the wife said, "There's nothing written across your forehead that says [06:00] you're American." So then on the second night, François came in his pickup truck, and took us to the town of Plouha. François LeCarnick [spelled phonetically] was the chief Resistance man in the town of Plouha. He was part of Reseaux Shelburne [06:34]. This

is Joe Binge [spelled phonetically]. Joe was a merchant marine captain and he was responsible for picking the spot for the British Navy to come in, and he's the one that signaled the ship that it was safe to come in [07:00]. Let's go to the next one. George Ortiz [spelled phonetically]. I like that picture. I don't know what he did, but he sure looks like a spy or a secret agent. He was part of the network in Plouha. This is Maria Teresa Le Talvere [spelled phonetically]. She was part of the team. She and her mother sheltered or put up, in effect, we transients. People would come from Paris to Plouha by train. They would stay at her house with her mother until the time the British Navy could take over. This is Jean Jequat [spelled phonetically]. Jean and Mamie, his wife [08:00], owned a farm about a kilometer from the beach, and this was the last meeting. Quite ironic. The night I came out, there were 25 airman and one British -- or one French colonel, and they met at their house. The Germans suspected some activity. When we came, the British -- the [unintelligible] and the French took to the field, and nobody got hurt. But the Germans came back and burned [09:00] the house down. Now, this became known as the la maison d'Alphonse. The reason it became named that way, the British Broadcasting Corporation would broadcast many messages every evening. So the British and the French would listen at 6:00, and if they heard, "Bonjour, tout le monde à la maison d'Alphonse," the French knew the British gunboat had departed from Dartmouth and was heading for the Brittany [09:50] coast. So, therefore, the house just took on the name of la maison d'Alphonse [10:00]. Now, this is the path out of the house of Alphonse to the beach, which the Germans mined. Now, the story goes -- and I can't vouch for the truth of it -- that every night there was a mission. Pierre Hewett [spelled phonetically] and Joe Nadeen [spelled phonetically] from Plouha would go out with a

mine detector and put white handkerchiefs on the mines. Well, after the war, or after the surrender, German POWs were put in to work to dig up the mines. Well, the French knew there were 19 mines, so they put 19 handkerchiefs [11:00], and they made sure they collected them on the way back. Well, it seems that the story goes that the German POWs dug up 20, which makes a good story, true or not. We went out to the coast and we didn't realize what a beautiful city we were going into on that day. We were told that we'd better be careful going down the cliff, and we came from in from over, then came down, and it was pretty steep. I didn't worry about getting down, but I thought there's no way I could get back up. But anyhow, we sat there for [12:00] -- on the rocks over here, 26 of us plus the French, and we waited. Two hours later, a German big coastal defense gun opened fire. Everything lit up like daylight, and we could just visualize our boat either being sunk, or turning tail, and heading for England. But the Germans, it just seemed, had a night practice mission, and after two salvos there was no more firing. We sat there another hour and pretty soon we saw plywood rowboats spreading [13:00], coming in on the swell. Five of us got in each boat, and the British sailor rowed offshore to the 503 boat of the 15th Gunboat Flotilla of the British Royal Navy, and what a beautiful sight she was. We climbed on board, and they started those big diesel engines. She had three big engines -- go ahead -- and she took off with a mighty roar. After about an hour at sea, one of the sailors came down and he said, "You want to see a nice show [14:00]? We got three German E-boats between us and the English coast." I said, "Well, can you outrun them?" "No." "Can you outshoot them?" "No." "What are you going to do?" "We're going to hide." They stayed out of range of the searchlight, and about daylight in the morning, we pulled into the port of Dartmouth. We had promised the

French that we would send them a picture of us in uniform, so this is the five that got together to have a picture taken [15:00]. We also raised with the French an argument about their language. One egg is “un oeuf,” and two eggs is “des oeufs.” We said, “No, it’s des oeufs.” So we had the BBC broadcast “Les oeufs sont bien arrivés.” So that’s how we communicated to them that we had returned safely. End of the story. Too long? That is Lucien Dumais [15:47], the leader of Reseaux Shelburne [15:50]. He was captured at Dunkirk in the disaster [unintelligible]. He escaped from the [16:00] POW train and got out of France by way of the Pat O’Leary [16:08] line, and they asked him if he would go back in as head of a mission. He said, “No, I don’t need that.” But then he went back to his unit, and after a couple months, he decided maybe he’d be better off, so he went in MI9 and accepted the offer. He with his radio operator, Ramon ReBosse [spelled phonetically] -- Ramon had been in as a radio operator on Oaktree mission, which was compromised, and he [17:00] escaped over the Pyrenees into Spain. He volunteered to go back as radio operator of Shelburne [17:15]. The Comet line [17:20] is the most famous -- I guess “famous” is the word -- that they lost the most Resistance people. They say for every airman that they got out, they lost a member of the Comet line. D.D. Dejong [spelled phonetically], who headed many, many operations, just died last year [18:00]. We had been in touch with her and the members of the Comet line [18:06] many times. That was D.D. Dejong. Her father started the line and then he was compromised and executed by the Germans, and she took over and operated the line. She was a nurse, and I think after the war she served in a leper colony in Africa. This is Baron Jean-François Nothomb [spelled phonetically]. Franco was down in Toulouse as part of the Comet line [19:00]. Franco lived in London, Ontario, for a couple of years,

and when we lived in Detroit, we were able to get together with him on several occasions. This is Florentino Gillshe [spelled phonetically]. Florentino was a Basque guy who would lead the groups over the Pyrenees Mountains. The Comet line [19:39] would feed them down to border towns; Florentino would take them inside of Spain and turn them loose. This was more of the Comet line. Val Williams was a very interesting [20:00] study. He was American. He was quite a basketball player and he was a matter of interest in the [unintelligible] party. He broke an ankle escaping from prison, [unintelligible], got to the Brittany [20:28] coast and was evacuated by ReBosse, who had been Val Williams' radio operator. That was a short-lived line that didn't accomplish much. Val was the Russian -- the mad Russian [21:00]. Pat O'Leary [21:03]. He is -- among the English, he is probably the most respected of the MI9 operatives. He operated out of Marseilles. He was arrested and they tortured him, but he did survive the war. He was a major general of the Belgian Medical Corps. He was in charge of the Belgian Army medical facility after the war. He went as Pat O'Leary [22:00], and his name was Albert Giresse [spelled phonetically], but I guess the British accepted that name. Okay. Dutch Pearl [spelled phonetically]. This is a chap by the name of John Henry Wagner, and he was a member of the World Council of Churches. Dr. Visterhoff [spelled phonetically] in Geneva and John Wagner had a good relationship, and Visterhoff was a big help to John Wagner. Let's have the next slide. This is Dr. Visterhoff. And, of course at that time, Alan Dulles was in [23:00] Switzerland. But this man worked very well with the Dutch-Paris network. He took some people into Switzerland and he took some people into Spain. That's John going into Switzerland. This is Dr. Gabriel Nammus [spelled phonetically]. He lived in Toulouse. He was a young medical student

when he got tied up with Wagner. Dr. Gabriel Nammus became an anesthesiologist professor at Columbia University in New York [24:00]. He was on our panel in Louisville, Kentucky, and we had a group of airmen and a group of Resistance people. Oh, I didn't realize I had them all -- Burgundy, a Burgundy line operator out of Paris and sent a lot of airman to Brittany [24:32] for pick up by the Shelburne line [24:37]. But Burgundy was operated by George Grocee [spelled phonetically], and he was helped by an American movie star by the name of Drue Tartiere [24:57]. [unintelligible] [25:00] Imagine being shot down and then ending up with her as your primary interrogator. I don't know whether it would give you confidence or -- but anyhow, let's go to the next one. That's George Grocee. There was another big American that helped the Shelburne [25:35] network, and she just died recently. The chateaus throughout Brittany [25:51] were suspect [26:00]. Some people, some airman, went over the Pyrenees into Andorra, but there was no big network there feeding airman into Andorra. Now, that's a good shot of Pat O'Leary [26:27], but that was long after the war. That's a lot of fruit salad for one officer. They operated a ship from Gibraltar to the southern coast of France near Marseilles. This was a German officer base in the Pyrenees Mountains that the Pyrenees people had to [27:00] avoid and get around. Oh, boy. This is 1974, when we dedicated a tunnel or opened a tunnel into the beach so that the people didn't have to slide down the cliff, and I guess that's me making a speech. But the French Army [unintelligible] the Americans sent a squad of Marines, in one of the many activities that AFEES [27:49] has engaged in. That's Donald Darling [27:56]. Donald was a British agent [28:00], MI9, in Gibraltar, and when people got to Gibraltar or got to Spain, he arranged to bail them out of jail -- because they usually put in jail -- and fly them back [unintelligible]. He wrote

the book "Sunday at MI9." Airey Neave [28:29] wrote the book "Saturday at MI9." That's their nom de guerre. That's Brigadier Crockett [28:43], who was head of MI9 at the time. This is Airey Neave [28:54], who was a member of Parliament and was shadow spokesman [29:00] for Margaret Thatcher over Ireland. He got blown up in the garage at the Parliament. That's Jimmy Lima [spelled phonetically]. He lost an arm at Dunkirk, and he wanted to continue to serve. So he was second in command of MI9. This is our meeting, the first meeting of Shelburne [29:50] men. Had no thought of being an organization or no thought of AFEES [30:00]. This man on the right in 1961 gave me a list of 94 American airman that had been evacuated by Reseaux Shelburne [30:12]. I then got in touch with Lucien Dumais [30:21], the little, small boy, and he gave me the name of his radio operator, Ramon ReBosse, and they somehow came out of it with Anita LeMogne [spelled phonetically], who lived in New York had been an interrogator in Paris. I thought -- with that list of 94, I found one from Niagara Falls. I was living in Buffalo [31:00]. So I went over to Niagara Falls one day on business, and I stopped in to see this man, John Amer [spelled phonetically]. John says, "Why don't we get a reunion?" Well, that seemed like a pretty good idea. He showed up at one, but I never heard another thing from him. So I had the ball, and when I carried it to this meeting and I got all these Resistance group and I got 35 American airman and more with their families.

BB: Can we actually pause right here? Because we're about 30 seconds away from running out of tape.

RP: How about that? I just over talk. But that's the [32:00] -- that's the beginning of AFEES [32:03], and those people decided we should have an organization.

(End of Tape 2B)

(Beginning of Tape 3A)

BB: Okay. Today is March 19, 2009. This is an oral history interview by the National Park Service as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. We are here interviewing Mr. Ralph Patton at his home, and this is the third in a series of recorded interviews with Mr. Patton. This is Brandon Bies of the National Park Service, also joined by David Lassman, Brian Mast, and Ed Yuen. With that, Mr. Patton, if you want to pick up the last of the slideshow here talking a little bit more about the various AFEES reunions.

RP: After this very successful meeting in Buffalo, this photo was taken at the Niagara Falls Air Force Base at that time. Three or four of them decided they'd like to continue [01:00] as an organization. So Harry Meyer [spelled phonetically] [01:05] and Bill Spritting [spelled phonetically] [01:07] and I got our heads together and we, for lack of a better name, called it the Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society [01:23]. About the same time, I had seen an ad in an Air Force [01:33] magazine that a man in Paris who was trying to organize an escape -- helper-escape organization, and so we sort of got our heads together, and, for lack of an acronym, we came up with AFEES [02:00]. Bill Spritting [02:06] published a booklet based on our meeting in Buffalo. It gave us credibility. We were a legitimate organization because we had a book. I think the next trip after the Buffalo meeting was back to Brittany [02:42], and this is the American group at a big stone monument overlooking the beach that we all got out of France [03:00] via. In 1969, jointly with the Canadian Royal Air Forces Escapee Society [03:19], Canadian branch, we organized Project 69, and we stopped in Holland and we came to Belgium and we were invited to the palace. This is King Baudouin, the tall man

in the middle, and D.D. Dejong in white, Queen Fabiola, and Ralph Patton [03:50] hiding behind D.D. Dejong. This was a wonderful trip [04:00]. That's the queen and her military aides, Jean Businger [spelled phonetically]. Prior to that, well, we went on to France and to what became known as Plage Bonaparte [04:32]. Bonaparte Beach in the [speaks French] in northern Brittany [4:40], and we designed this plaque which says, "We, the 94 American aviators who embarked for England from this beach in the dark nights [05:00] of 1944, say to our Briton friends of Reseaux Shelburne [05:08], we will never forget." Thus was born the slogan for AFEES [05:16]. [unintelligible] and in the bottom is a quote from Eisenhower [05:25]. He's saying thanks. This was our first trip overseas, and we were so well received, we said, "We have to reciprocate." Well, 1967, the Canadians had invited 10 helpers [06:00] to Toronto, and we invited them into the United States and we had a dinner at the Niagara Falls Air Force Base in 1967. This [unintelligible], the Ramon ReBosse, and we had 10 very prominent helpers.

[audio break]

-- sixty -- this is part of the '69 trip. We were received at the Paris Hôtel de Ville, City Hall, and the deputy mayor had a cocktail reception for the whole group. Some of these slides are out of order [07:00]. Prior to that, we had been to the Royal Palace at -- I think it's pronounced Sunjek [spelled phonetically], outside of Amsterdam, and this is Prince Bernhard. Prince Bernhard had been a pilot in the RAF, so he was very empathetic, and he had a stag cocktail party for us. When his aide came and said, "It's time for you to go," in effect, chased these guys out, he said, "Where the hell you going?" So we had a great rapport with Prince Bernhard. In 1974 we had invited [08:00] members of the Comet line [08:03] to come to the U.S. This, Michou, Herman, then Gillou [spelled

phonetically] were received by Mayor Abraham Beame on the steps of City Hall, New York, and presented the key to the city. This was a beautiful affair. In 1976 we invited Shelburne [08:40], and we had 50-some members of Reseaux Shelburne [08:46] at the White House, no less. We saw President [Gerald R.] Ford [08:56] from a distance. Then [09:00] in -- oh, I'm mixed up. This is the Royal Palace. We saw her Majesty Queen Elizabeth [09:11] in 1969 on a special invitation to the Palace. I can't explain to you the feeling when you get into a taxi and you say, "Buckingham Palace." When he pulls up to the gate to drop you off, you're able to say, "No, right on through." We went into the Palace and it was very much pomp and pageantry. She was a lovely lady, easy to converse with. The leader of the Canadian group and I had a private audience [10:00] with her, and she kidded about our youth at the time. She was the same age. Let's go on. We're back [unintelligible]. Ford Motor Company [10:30] received us, and then [unintelligible], and that's why the picture was taken in front of the Ford Building. In 1978 we had the Dutch. We had 40-some Dutch. We laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown [11:00], as it was called then, and we had a chap -- oh, this is 1967, here [unintelligible] and I am presenting her with a souvenir of her visit to the U.S. This is probably our first Christmas card [11:28]. It was mailed to about 600 helpers. Many books have been written. This is -- I think, it's Jack Gilfrey's [spelled phonetically] book. He's going to be part of the new exhibit. This was just a series of books that have [12:00] been written on escape and evasion. Harry was our newsletter editor for a long time. That's a very good story. This is our membership chair, past president, an all-around great guy. He went the entire route to northern [unintelligible] to Spain. This is another book by a woman who was a courier for the Resistance network. This is Jack

Gilfrey. Jack's story is going to be at the museum in Dayton. Go ahead. Now, this is a great book by Pat O'Leary [13:00]. Oh, this is John Henry Wyman's [spelled phonetically] book on the Dutch-Paris network. I had a book I -- Oh, yes, this is the front page of our newsletter. When the war ended, she had about 100 airman that she marched down to the American headquarters. This is a book that we helped on. She was a professor at Eastern Michigan University, and I put her in contact with some of the women, and she acknowledges us very, very well [14:00]. All of these books are part of a collection at the Air Force Academy Library, as part of my -- the collection's under my name on escape and evasion, many of them in French. That's the daughter of the lady that I was presenting, and she is our reunion chairman and she had done a fantastic job. She was 14 when her mother was bringing all these uncles from Paris, and she said her contribution was she gave up her bed to all these strange uncles [15:00]. This is a unique story. This is Charles Vandersloot [spelled phonetically] on the right, and Charles' father had had his picture taken with President Hoover. Charles insisted he was going to have his picture taken with Jimmy Carter. Well, Howard Cannon, Senator Cannon, arranged for the meeting with Jimmy Carter, and Charles Vandersloot had his picture. This is 1978. Now, this is a pin that we had originally designed as a helper pin. Well, it didn't -- the concept of it has changed, and it's just [16:00] -- lately we had an enlargement of it made and we're putting it on this souvenir book for our helpers. That should -- I think that's about it.

BB: Okay.

RP: Are there any more?

BB: No.

RP: Oh, okay. Well, 1,000 pictures later.

BB: Well, we can certainly keep on chatting for a little bit, if you feel up for it, if you're not too tired. I'm sure we could probably come up with a few questions and pick your brain a little bit before. But, by all means, if you want to take a break, that's just fine.

RP: Go right ahead.

BB: All right. Well, I think at this point we've gotten, between our last meeting and this one, a good understanding of your own personal [17:00] experience, and just now a little bit of the history of AFEES [17:05]. I want to ask a few questions as it relates to our project on Fort Hunt and the MIS-X program. Are you familiar with the term MIS-X? Had you heard of that before us?

RP: MIS-X [17:24]?

BB: Yes. MIS-X, M-I-S, dash, X.

RP: Yes, I heard -- I knew -- and I felt that when we were at Brook Street, that that was part of MIS-X.

BB: Okay. So you were aware of MIS-X? During the war you heard of it, of MIS-X?

RP: But that's all.

BB: There were no names or people that you could associate with that organization?

RP: The people at Brook Street, Captain [18:00] White, Captain Smith [18:07], Lieutenant Edwards [18:08], the known names that I figured were closely affiliated with MI9, and then when MIS-X [18:21] -- I don't know. It became a name -- it became a something. I'd heard of it and I just assumed it was MI9's counterpart.

BB: That's what MIS-X was, essentially, the American counterpart of MI9. It was based on that. In fact, the book that you showed, called "MI9" by M.R.D. Foot [18:48], goes into

some detail of the MIS-X program. They were very similar. MI9 took the lead simply because they were around much longer [19:00], but eventually MIS-X branched off and was its own stable organization and worked very closely with the British. But that's where our interest comes in, because the National Park Service site that we manage was essentially the American stateside headquarters for the MIS-X [19:20] program.

RP: When did they set up Brook Street, '42?

BB: I do not know specifically when they did.

RP: That was an interrogation -- they locked us up, they brought in the interrogating agents and I assume it was all under the control of an organization similar to MI9. I didn't know anything. But they had the naval intelligence [20:00], Army intelligence, British Navy intelligence, and they all come in and had a shot at us. But, you know, what did we know? We were just young kids.

BB: During these interviews, were you asked not to talk about your experiences?

RP: I'm sorry. I didn't --

BB: During your interviews at Brook Street, were you asked, when you left the interviews, not to talk about them?

RP: Oh, absolutely. We were forbidden. I had a paper that was confidential, that if anybody stopped us for anything, this was [21:00] like an open sesame. We had a one-star stop us one night in Paris; another guy and I were just walking down the street, and I showed him this paper, which I still have, and he took one step back, "Welcome home, boys." Then I had two MPs stop, and they were going to take us into jail because I had a GI uniform with gold bars on the hat and shoulders. He read this confidential paper which, in effect, says, "I identify Ralph Patton [21:55] as Lieutenant Patton," and it was signed by a

sergeant. Well, all he saw was the [22:00] sergeant's name, and he was going to arrest me. Fortunately, his buddy said, "Hey, I think we'd better let these guys alone."

[unintelligible] but we were not allowed to tell. I was sent on a lecture tour and I was allowed to tell what happened the first four or five days, and then I had to say, "From then on, our journey was arranged." There was no talking about anything except that we were dumb enough to walk down the road, five Americans in uniform. We were allowed to talk about that [23:00].

BB: I'm going to pause this real quick.

[audio break]

BB: Okay. So, Mr. Patton, you had just started -- you had mentioned about you went on a lecture tour. Was this to Army Air Corps bases? This was during the war?

RP: I was sent to the fighter bases in England, and I don't know how many I went to, but I was a TUI for a month, I think. I was well received by the fighter guys. One guy wanted to check me out in the P-47. Well, you know, I don't think I need that. It might have been a thrill, but I turned him down. But we were free, and I think it was sort of "throw a dog a bone [24:00]." You know, give the guys a vacation on the company.

BB: Do you know, what was the point of this? Was it just a vacation for yourself, or were you giving escape and evasion information to other Air Corps flyers, to give them instructions or anything like that?

RP: I think it was to boost the morale of the fighter jockeys and to let it be known that the average guy, if gets shot down, had a pretty good chance of getting out. It's like one of our guys say on the DVD today, he says, "We knew we were going to get shot down. We just didn't know -- we just hoped [25:00] we didn't get killed." I think that's pretty much

the story. You had a 4 percent loss rate. You had to fly 25 missions. I don't know, Einstein could figure that one out. Your odds were not very good.

VS: When you did this training, were you given a preset criteria you were supposed to discuss with the airmen, or was it just more speaking from your personal experiences?

RP: Sorry, Mr. --

VS: Were you speaking -- when you spoke to the airmen, were you speaking from a preset lecture or --

RP: No, just off the cuff.

VS: Okay.

BB: And you did this for about a month?

RP: Yes.

BB: What happened after that? You were not permitted to fly again in combat, correct, in case you were shot down a second time [26:00]?

RP: I was sent home. We got married, and I was sent to Hobbs, New Mexico, to go through some kind of school, instructor school, I guess. I don't know. Then I got caught in a windstorm, and the wind blew the barracks door shut sooner than I expected and I broke my finger. Well, I was grounded, and they -- "Well, we don't know what to do with you." So they gave me 21 days' leave. On the 21st day, I had an attack of appendicitis [27:00] in Memphis, where she was stationed. I went to Kennedy [unintelligible] Hospital and the doctor said, "Well, in your business, you shouldn't mess around with an infected appendix." He said, "Take it out." I said, "Okay. Take it out." Well, that was two weeks in the hospital for an appendectomy, and somehow my records got messed up and I was AWOL at Nashville. By the time I got back there, they had me grounded and

all. I [28:00] -- then it happened, Betty got out of the Navy, and I put in request to be transferred from the Southeast Training Command to another training command, and the guy said, "That's impossible." I said, "Let's try." So the sergeant -- the master sergeant of the squadron put through a request for transfer, and by Jobe, it was granted, and I was sent to Columbus, Ohio. Betty was in Pittsburgh with our son, and I found a house in Columbus, and I was instructor at Columbus, Ohio when the war ended. So [29:00] I think when I came back in April of '44, from then until discharge, I had at least 42 days' leave, 21 sick leave. I didn't accomplish much, and I'm sorry that's on tape.

[laughter]

BB: That's all right. We won't judge you for it.

RP: It was 50 years ago. They probably won't break me, bust me down to I don't know what.

BB: So if we could -- to change the subject a little bit and get back to the escape and evasion, in your experience over the last several decades with AFEES [29:53], have you heard stories of escapers, who [30:00] received maybe -- let me start over again. Are there members of AFEES who were actually shot down and held in German prison camps?

RP: I know of one airman who escaped from the POW camp and got back to England before D-Day. After D-day, you know, all bets are off after that, because that was a can of worms. They were marching them by the thousands, and if a guy just laid on the side of the road and let them go by, he's considered an escaper. But this guy, on the third try he got in the hands of Shelburne [30:55] and he came back to England by motor gunboat [31:00]. Shorty Gordon [31:02] is the only guy, and he is legendary. He just died.

BB: He just passed away last year, I think.

RP: He died last year. He was -- we visited him in Australia, and he was still a character. He

was on our panel. So I considered Shorty [31:28] an outstanding human being. He was so obsessed of getting out. He's the only one I know. There may be more. I think if we were able to read all two thousand of these reports they were getting, you might find more [32:00].

BB: I'm just going to pause.

(End of Tape 3A)

(Beginning of Tape 3B)

BB: Shorty Gordon [00:01] is the only member of your society that you're aware of who escaped from a camp pre D-Day?

RP: Before D-Day.

BB: Right. Because, again, I guess you could say, much of the focus of the operations that we're familiar with here in the United States were focused, not on -- not as much on individuals like yourself as they were people -- Americans who had already fallen into German hands, and trying to assist them with escaping from prison camps by sending them escape devices in the guise of care packages, sending them escape maps, radios that were hidden inside packages that they could listen to the BBC, very similar to the sorts of operations you've talked about, except listening to the BBC for coded commands from inside a prison camp [01:00]. That's more of what was being -- that and the coded messages. There was a whole series of coded letters that were being sent back and forth between American prisoners and American soldiers at Fort Hunt [01:15]. That's more what we're familiar with. We're less familiar with your sort of experience with the evader.

RP: We wouldn't have any occasion to get sidetracked, but we do have some members that

evaded capture for more than 30 days, and then were picked up just before they crossed the Pyrenees. So we have some people who can -- unfortunately, the primary one has died, but he was, I think, seven [02:00] or eleven months with the Underground [02:04]. They got him down to the border and pulled him off a train. So there are those people that you might have helped in a POW camp, but you couldn't do much for us because the underground was taking care. I think the most important thing they did was get message back to England that we were okay or that we were who we said we were. Yvonne's mother is the one that interrogated all the guys. She would verify their story and she'd ask them questions that you weren't [03:00] supposed to have to answer. I had an experience the night we were in the maison d'Alfonse with interrogator Lucien Dumais [03:10], [unintelligible] in intelligence said, "Now you're about to face the most dangerous part of your mission." He came to me, he said, "Where do you wear your epaulets? Do you wear epaulets?" He asked somebody else, some guy in the back. We were pretty well crowded in. "You don't have to answer that. You're an officer in the United States Air Corps [03:40], and all you have to do is answer name, rank, and serial number." Dumais [03:40] says, "You shut up. This guy will get back to England. He may have a hole in his belly, but he'll get back." Well, I -- [04:00] I'd been in an organization for 62 days. When a guy asked me a question that's a little out of the name, rank, and serial number business, then what do you think I'm going to do? I'm not going to say, "I can't answer that question." The guy, he's got a boat coming and he tells me whether I can get on it or not. I don't know anything anyhow; that's the first thing. I think the emphasis on POWs now, if you don't know anything, how can -- I think it's a more relaxed story [05:00], what I hear, but I haven't gone through the school.

VS: Mr. Patton, one thing that was part of Fort Hunt [05:16] was actually the escape and evasion kits. So if you were an Air Force officer you probably were given an evasion kit before you went on the mission, with some supplies and some money. Do you have any experience with those?

RP: We used the halogen. Halogen, that sounds like a light.

VS: Yes.

RP: There was a water purification tablet and we used that, and we ate the chocolate bar. But the map was almost [06:00] useless. It gave you -- I guess it gave you a clue. I'm not sure where my map is, but it's an interesting story. I gave it to a French woman who had brought food to us, and I gave her my silk map. Fifty years later, she came out of the audience crying and gave me back my silk map. She said she had saved it all these years and she wanted me to have it again, which I thought was pretty -- but anyhow, they're readily available anywhere, but they were not of great value [07:00].

BB: Do you recall if your escape kit had anything else in it, like wire cutters or, you know, a saw or anything?

RP: Three or four compasses. We had a super energy bar. I've used a compass. We had a plastic collapsible bottle to put water in. I think the museum had several escape kits broken out.

BB: Were you familiar during the war with the compasses that were hidden inside buttons?

RP: [affirmative]

BB: Did you have one of those?

RP: Yes, we did. That was a pretty good gadget. Yes [08:00], yeah, we had some bigger compasses, too. We had about three compasses, I think, in that kit. One of the important

things -- well, the Germans were about a half an hour away from our landing site, which gave us a head start, and we headed west, which is not logical in Brittany [08:40]. You would think you'd want to get out of there. But then we fooled around and finally did head east to get out of the peninsula, then, so we could go south. But we [09:00] sort of had a plan. It may seem vague now, but we figured the odds were pretty good that we were going to get picked up. But we did not travel on the roads, and at night, we get to see the headlights, and in the daytime, you could hear a car. We'd just glide over the hedgerow. Always, when you heard somebody coming, you'd hide, but somebody coming was a rare occurrence in that period of time [10:00]. In the first place, nobody had a car. The second place, nobody had petrol or gasoline. If we were traveling, we were suspect, so there was very little traffic on the road, and you could hear it coming a mile away.

VS: Mr. Patton, some of the interviews that were done when evaders got back to American and British lines, they kept track of the names and locations of helpers. Now, are you familiar with, after the war is over, with helpers getting rewards or getting recognition [11:00]?

RP: Yes. The MIS-X [11:05] office in Paris spent a year or two seeking out people mentioned in our daily reports, and awarding medals. The Freedom Medal was granted to a lot of helpers, and I don't know that there's a file in the National Archives or not on who was granted the Medal of Freedom, but there might be. But I was able to find my helpers' report. I didn't truly look for the others because there was too many of them. I don't know how I could -- I couldn't -- but I don't know that any of them got the [12:00] Medal of Freedom. Toni [12:03] did, and her citation is -- I have a copy of.

BB: One of the veterans who we've interviewed already, who was stationed at Fort Hunt [12:22] as part of the MIS-X [12:23] program here in the United States, he was later reassigned to Europe to go through France. He spoke French, and he was used to interview French who had assisted Americans and make sure that they received recognition, sometimes made sure that they had money to send their children to school, those sorts of rewards. But he was assigned from Fort Hunt [12:52], our park, to do exactly the sort of thing that you were just talking about.

RP: Well, Dorothy Split [spelled phonetically] [13:00] did it for a year or two. I don't know whether John White [13:06] did any of that or not, but he probably head of mission or whatever you call it, chief or head honcho, but I think he's the guy that salvaged all the E&E reports, Captain John White [13:31]. I never met him. At least I don't recall.

BB: Any other questions? I've asked most of the questions that I have.
[talking simultaneously]

DAVID LASSMAN: Do you remember what questions were asked to you, sir, during your debriefing after you got back from the [14:00] --

RP: Interrogation generally involved around the physical. What was this room like, or you went from here to here; what was the road like? Were there British here? Would this hold a big sort of tank? How would I know? But those were the kind of interests. The British Navy wanted to know if we could hear the engines from the 503 boat anchored offshore. No, we couldn't hear the engines. You know, it's amazing the swells from the tide coming and going [15:00], and they create such a buffer of noise. I can't imagine that that diesel engine could kick off with the roar that it did. I later thought about it and I was convinced there was no way anybody on shore could have heard that because of the

lapping of the water. These big Rolls-Royce engines [makes car noise]. But they could move [unintelligible]. In March of '44 [16:00] I think they made five missions, but they did other things, too. They went up to Sweden and brought ball bearings back. And I'm surprised. I wish -- well, I have several books written by the navigating officer, David Birken [spelled phonetically], who had the 16-millimeter tape that he gave me. It's in the academy. Lloyd Bott [spelled phonetically], an Australian, wrote a book on the little [17:00] navy, and I had the pleasure of meeting both David and Lloyd Bott, and we had Billy Williams and Norman Heinz [spelled phonetically] at our meeting in Denver. I have a video on that. They're explaining the 16-millimeter tape and naming all the names. Historically, it's probably a pretty valuable little thing, a research tool.

Fortunately, I have an inventory of everything I've sent to the academy, and I'm going to send a lot more. They will have the most complete file on E&E [18:00] in the world, probably. I mean diverse. The National Archives has all the E&E reports, but it doesn't have all the books that have been written. The historians, Roger Hagan [spelled phonetically], has written the story of Shelburne [18:27]. There's a three-volume book on the Comet line [18:35] in French, and there's a book called Plage Bonaparte [18:44], and that little Marie [unintelligible], they wrote a book about her. She became mentally ill [19:00] and expired about five years ago, I guess. But that's -- it's pretty well documented.

BB: Any other questions or anything? Mr. Patton, anything you think we've left out? Any important question we haven't asked, or have we been pretty good interrogators?

RP: I think you've done pretty well. I think I've talked more than I should or more than I would normally do, but --

BB: Well, we certainly appreciate it.

RP: I get excited, and I start talking. I don't talk too well anymore [20:00]. I am scared to death about this meeting in Denver -- in Dayton. I'm going to try to go, and since this is our last hurrah, I probably -- I don't know. Well --

BB: We certainly hope you can make it for sure, after all that you've done over the last however many decades.

RP: It's been a career-hobby. I think that it started because I had the list in Buffalo, but more importantly, I had a one-man office with a secretary who was not [21:00] kept busy. So I could dictate letters, and no bosses were there to tell me I shouldn't do that. I was in no way neglecting business, and they kept promoting me. So I guess I didn't screw up too badly. But then, when I went to Rochester, I had the same situation: a secretary who did not have enough to keep her busy. Then let's see. Five years in Buffalo, five years in Rochester, five years in Detroit, then I came back to Pittsburgh in 1976. My secretary was sitting outside the door in a room, and there's no way that I could have AFEES [21:56] stationery in her typewriter [22:00], so I was inhibited quite a bit from '76 on. Then the computers started coming. I retired in '82. There's been a heck of a lot of letters written and a lot of stories told.

BB: This has been fantastic. Thank you very much for spending both the last occasion and this occasion with us. We're going to do our best to get you copies of this interview.

RP: That would be nice.

BB: So you can have it for your records and for your family. You know how to get in touch with us and you know how -- we know how [23:00] to get in touch with you if you think of anything else.

RP: Well, Dave and I talked a little bit about these pictures that I'd like you to take and see what you can do with, and if you can give me one, I can keep the copies.

BB: Sure.

RP: But I need to get the photograph cropped and enlarged to fit this little book.

BB: Sure.

RP: Having copies made from -- you know, the expenses in getting somebody to do special work. I took a negative to Ritz. It took five weeks to get the print, and then they charged me [24:00] -- I forgot what it was -- four or \$5 for five prints, something like that. So if you can get me a three-by-five of these things and make 20 of these, and it would be 10 to 15 cents apiece.

BB: Sure.

[end of transcript]

Index

- 8th Air Force, [Tape 1A] 21:36
94th Bomb Group, [Tape 1A] 20:18
 [Tape 1B] 05:17, 22:06
 [Tape 2A] 09:18
- Air Corps, [Tape 1A] 02:34
 [Tape 2A] 06:12
- Air Force, [Tape 1A] 07:06
 [Tape 2A] 07:17, 31:23
 [Tape 3A] 01:33
- Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society (AFEES), [Tape 2A] 00:28, 01:04, 29:27
 [Tape 2B] 27:49, 30:00, 32:03
 [Tape 3A] 01:23, 02:00, 05:16, 17:05, 29:53
 [Tape 3B] 21:56
- Bonaparte, Plage [Tape 3A] 04:32
 [Tape 3B] 18:44
- Brest Peninsula, [Tape 1A] 23:11, 25:19, 25:30, 31:00
 [Tape 1B] 04:45, 11:27, 12:13
 [Tape 2A] 16:05, 16:28
- Brittany Peninsula, [Tape 1A] 06:27, 10:23, 25:45, 30:07
 [Tape 1B] 01:36, 13:55
 [Tape 2B] 02:13, 04:38, 09:50, 20:28, 24:32, 25:51
 [Tape 3A] 02:42, 4:40
 [Tape 3B] 08:40
- Canadian Royal Air Forces Escapee Society, [Tape 3A] 03:19
- Christmas card, [Tape 3A] 11:28
- Coffeyville, Kansas, [Tape 1A] 04:12
 [Tape 2A] 04:14
- Comet line, [Tape 1B] 08:38, 10:31
 [Tape 2B] 17:20, 18:06, 19:00, 19:39
 [Tape 3A] 08:03
 [Tape 3B] 18:35
- Crockett, [Tape 1B] 16:18
 [Tape 2B] 28:43
- Darling, Donald [Tape 1A] 18:58
 [Tape 2B] 27:56
- de Service, Jacques, [Tape 1B] 10:00
- Dumais, Lucien [Tape 2A] 22:29, 22:59
 [Tape 2B] 15:47, 30:21
 [Tape 3B] 03:10

Edwards (Lieutenant), [Tape 3A] 18:08
Eisenhower, Dwight [Tape 3A] 05:25
Escape and Evasion, [Tape 3B] 18:00

Ford, Gerald (President) [Tape 3A] 08:56
Ford Motor Company, [Tape 3A] 10:30
Fort Hunt, [Tape 3B] 01:15, 05:16, 12:22, 12:52
French Underground, [Tape 1A] 06:30, 12:20, 13:14
 [Tape 2A] 31:58
 [Tape 3B] 02:04

Gordon, Shorty [Tape 3A] 31:02, 31:28
 [Tape 3B] 00:01

Johnson, Glen [Tape 2A] 09:07, 20:57

King, Norman [Tape 1B] 05:08, 06:05

Meyer, Harry [Tape 3A] 01:05
MIS-X, [Tape 3A] 17:24, 18:21, 19:20
 [Tape 3B] 11:05, 12:23
M.R.D. Foot, [Tape 3A] 18:48

Neave, Airey [Tape 1B] 12:33
 [Tape 2B] 28:29, 28:54

O'Leary, Pat [Tape 2B] 16:08, 21:03, 22:00, 26:27
 [Tape 3A] 13:00

Patton, Ralph [Tape 3A] 03:50, 21:55
Pearl Harbor, [Tape 1A] 02:09
 [Tape 2A] 02:16

Pillbinger, Toni [Tape 1B] 28:54
 [Tape 2A] 23:43, 25:12, 27:25
 [Tape 3B] 12:03

Pyote, Texas, [Tape 1A] 04:54
 [Tape 2A] 07:27, 08:00

Queen Elizabeth, [Tape 3A] 09:11

Reseaux Shelburne, [Tape 1B] 10:20, 12:57
 [Tape 2B] 06:34, 15:50, 17:15, 24:37, 25:35, 29:50, 30:12
 [Tape 3A] 05:08, 08:40, 08:46, 30:55
 [Tape 3B] 18:27

Sikeston, Missouri, [Tape 1A] 03:13
[Tape 2A] 04:06

Smith (Captain), [Tape 3A] 18:07

Spritting, Bill [Tape 3A] 01:07, 02:06

Tartiere, Drue [Tape 1B] 12:00

[Tape 2B] 24:57

U.S. Army Air Corps, [Tape 1A] 02:34

[Tape 2A] 06:12

[Tape 3B] 03:40

White, John [Tape 3B] 13:06, 13:31

White (Captain) [Tape 3A] 18:00