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AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM L. PROUT

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK

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TRANSCRIPT BY

KEVIN J. KILPATRICK

Sandra Holyoak: This begins an interview with Colonel William Prout on March 10, 1996, in Tucson, Arizona, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Mr. Prout, thank you for participating in the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II program. I would like to begin the interview by asking you about your parents and your childhood.

William Prout: My father was John Layton Prout, ... a World War I veteran. My mother's maiden name was Olive Mildred Boudreau, a good French ancestry. They were married in 1919 and I came along in 1920. I am the first of three boys and ... the earliest part of my childhood, I can ... only remember little pieces of. My family moved west to Montana, and, for about three years, my father wild-catted for oil in the oil fields north of Shelby, Montana, came back to New Jersey in 1925, when I was five years old. Back in those days, the technology was such that he'd never drilled quite deep enough. So, I am not the son of a millionaire, but, the son of a very fine poor man. [laughter]

SSH: Can you tell me a little bit about your father's military career?

WP: ... He went into World War I at the age of, I think, eighteen or nineteen and never had to go to Europe. So, he spent his time in the US and, naturally, survived.

SSH: Which unit did he serve with?

WP: I don't remember. [laughter]

SSH: Were your parents married before he went off to World War I?

WP: No, no, after the war.

SSH: Can you tell me a little bit about the other members of your family who served in the military?

WP: My two brothers are both former Air Force officers, World War II. One was a navigator on a B-17, one was a navigator on a B-24, heavy bombers. Both were shot down over Germany. My middle brother, Gordon, spent sixteen months in *Stalag Luft 1*, a German prison camp. My youngest brother, Harold, went down twice, first time, over the North Sea, in February of '45, and life expectancy in the water, at that time, was fifteen minutes, and, when the British mine sweeper fished him out of the water, he was unconscious, didn't even know that he was still living. [He was] one of only four of the crew [that] survived. Six perished on that mission. A short time later, he was flying with a new crew and went down a second time, almost [in] the same place, but, the wind was in the opposite direction. ... He landed in a canal on the coast of Holland, and was taken prisoner by the Germans, and spent the last month of the war in Dutch wooden shoes, walking across Germany, Holland and Germany, until he was finally freed by the Russians.

SSH: Were your brothers stationed in England?

WP: Yes.

SSH: The Prout family is well-represented in the military.

WP: My son, also, was a former Army officer, a former Green Beret, saw a lot of action in Vietnam. He commanded four companies of *montagnards*, tribesmen, up in the Central Highlands for a year, and then, he volunteered for a six months extension, if he could command a US rifle company. ... They gave him one with the 173th Airborne Brigade. After that, he volunteered another six months, if he could go back with the Special Forces, and he trained Laotians, Thais, Cambodians, and Vietnamese in long range reconnaissance techniques, and, finally, came home after this with ... two Purple Hearts and four Bronze Star medals, and said, "The Army has taught me a tremendous amount, but, I owe them nothing and we part friends." [laughter]

SSH: You grew up in Long Branch.

WP: Yes.

SSH: Did you go through grammar and high school in Long Branch?

WP: [Yes].

SSH: How did Rutgers figure into your life?

WP: Well, my uncles were all Princeton graduates, as are most of my cousins. They wanted me to go to Princeton, but, my dad couldn't afford to send me to Princeton. ... I did get a state scholarship to Rutgers and that prompted me to go on with my education, so, I took electrical engineering. My two younger brothers followed me, after the war. My middle brother is a civil engineer. My youngest brother is a mechanical engineer. So, we are well-acquainted with the Engineering School at Rutgers.

SSH: In high school, were you involved in athletics?

WP: No. I never got over 125-pounds in high school. So, I played all kinds of sand lot ball. I'm a skater, I'm a skier, and I can do most anything, but, I was never big enough to be a varsity player. I tried, one year, to play JV football and it was so punishing at my weight that I quit. [laughter]

SSH: Did you have other interests or extracurricular activities during high school?

WP: ... Growing up on salt water, I was an avid boater. I spent half my time in a canoe, weather permitting, sailing. ... Every summer vacation in college, I was a lifeguard. My last year of lifeguarding, before I went into the active service, I was the highest paid lifeguard on the Jersey Shore, Long Branch area, at \$27.50 a week. [laughter]

SSH: The Jersey Shore was quite different in those days.

WP: Back in those days, Long Branch was one of the country's foremost seashore resorts. I better not say anymore. [laughter]

SSH: Maybe I should ask why? [laughter] Was your family ever involved in local politics in Long Branch?

WP: No. ... My grandfather had been. My grandfather was a lawyer and a judge, and was an avid friend of presidents back in those days, McKinley, for one, and I think, at one time, he did run for either the State Senate or the Senate from New Jersey, but, did not make it. ... From that point of view, there was that kind of political activity in the family. My grandfather was a Democrat and my father, and me, and my son are all Republicans, [laughter] but, that's about it. My dad was active in town. He worked for the State Highway Department, and was the chief title examiner for the State of New Jersey for, oh, heavens, thirty some years, I guess, and active ... around Long Branch, but, not politically speaking.

SSH: Was he able to do this job in Long Branch?

WP: Oh, yes.

SSH: That is interesting. When did you enter Rutgers?

WP: '39.

SSH: Had you already decided to study engineering at that point?

WP: Yes.

SSH: Why were you attracted to engineering? Did your father's wild-cattin' experiences influence your decision?

WP: No, I don't believe so. I think that ... having good grades in physics, chemistry, and math in high school probably dictated going on in this vein at the university level.

SSH: What was Rutgers like in your day, between 1939 and 1943? What kind of impression did Rutgers leave on you?

WP: It was a private college back in those days, and not very big at that, ... but, a good school. I have no regrets about going there. ... On the contrary, I am very happy that I did and, if I had to do it again, I would probably go to the same school

SSH: As a Rutgers student in 1939, how aware were you of the war in Europe?

WP: No. ... In '39, the Germans really hadn't started to move, yet, and so, '39 and '40 were, you know, basically peaceful years, a lot of homework. ... Rooming with a pre-med student, we never got to bed much before two o'clock in the morning, because, by the time he got done with football practice, or whatever practice, [the] fraternity came in, and, by the time we would get to the desk for homework, it would be nine, nine-thirty, ten o'clock at night, and the next day was coming, so, we had to ... work and worry about it. ... I don't think we have too many students today who work that hard anymore.

SSH: Were you involved with the ROTC for all four years?

WP: Four years, two years basic, and then, two years advanced ROTC. I had to skip summer camp, the summer of '42, because of the war effort, and, being an engineering student, they wanted us to go ... to school our junior summer, so [that] we could be graduated early and get into uniform early, which I did. Actually, I missed my own graduation. I think graduation was sometime [in] the latter part of January ... of '43, and, when it came time to say, "When do you want to be called up for active duty?" I looked at my calendar. The last day of school was, I think, the tenth or twelfth, and I said, "Twelfth," and that was one week before graduation, so, I never made my graduation.

SSH: Were you a fraternity man?

WP: I was a Beta, Beta Theta Phi.

SSH: Were you involved with any other clubs or activities on campus?

WP: Scabbard and Blade, AIEE, and the Hilt Club, which I don't think is an official organization, but, it's a drinking club. [laughter]

SSH: Where was this drinking club headquartered?

WP: It might have been the Beta house. [laughter] I'm not sure.

SSH: Were you ever involved in campus politics?

WP: Negative.

SSH: You chose to leave school early, in January of 1943. Where did you go next?

WP: Since I had missed summer camp, I had to take Officers' Candidate School, OCS, in lieu there of. My four years of ROTC were infantry, but, because I was an electrical engineering graduate, the Army opted to commission me Signal Corps, and so, I went directly to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and did my OCS there. Finishing OCS, putting on my gold bars, I figured, "Well, I'm going to leave New Jersey, finally." All of a sudden, I went back to school at Fort Monmouth and they trained me in heavy switchboard equipment, installation, maintenance, and, I guess, operation, also. ... When I finally finished that school, I figured, "Well, now, I'll

leave New Jersey,” and then, they decided to assign me to the Air Force, and I went from Fort Monmouth to Allenhurst, New Jersey, five miles away, and, for the next, I think, ninety days, I was again trained in the latest ... in sophisticated radio equipment that the Air Force was using and direction finding equipment. ... After, as I say, I think ninety days of that, I finally left New Jersey, heading for Robins Field, Georgia, now called Robins Air Force Base, Warner-Robins Air Force Base. There I figured I’d be for a short time and be heading overseas. Well, a year-and-a-half later, I was still at Warner-Robins. Being one of the few officers who had military training, almost all of our officers in this particular organization were direct commissioned engineering students trained in England in radar, this country, all kinds of, at that time, sophisticated electronics, and so, I had the opportunity, and the orders, [laughter] ... to give basic combat training to about 150 to 250 officers. So, we had to build our own obstacle courses, rifle ranges, etc., etc., etc. So, this was my job ... for the first year-and-a-half, really, of active duty. I had to take a break, one time, and go up to Dayton, Ohio, for another month’s schooling where I was taught installation, maintenance, and operation of the ... Air Corps’ instrument landing systems, which was state of the art at that time. I make the assumption that some of that equipment has not been greatly improved on today and is still being used by commercial fields throughout the world. ... Then, when I finally did leave the US, I went to China, and ... my mission there was to install instrument landing systems, and I put the first one in [at] Kunming Field (Air Force Base) in Kunming, in South-Central China, and then, as the war was drawing to a close, I had to take another one down to Shanghai, and I put ... another system in the air base in Shanghai, China.

SSH: What was life on these bases like? What kind of interaction did you have with the other units stationed on these bases and the natives living around the bases?

WP: [Are you] talking about [the] US or China?

SSH: Both.

WP: Both. Well, it’s a hard question to answer. Anybody in uniform on a base in the US was a friend of every other body in uniform. ... Yes, you worked hard during the day, but, you had ... enough free time to do some play. ... I think I can say the same thing for the jobs I had in China. My BOQ room was just about a hundred yards from General Chennault’s house at Kunming. ... You know, most of the Air Corps were flying airplanes, but, some of us had to ... do the work which kept them in the air, for example, putting in the instrument landing system, but, everybody got along, doing a job. ...

SSH: Did you interact with General Chennault at all?

WP: Chennault, oh, not really. A lieutenant and a general don’t have much in common, you know. [laughter]

SSH: Did you get to go off base in China?

WP: Oh, yes, yes. Kunming was a very nice town back in those days, got some good Chinese food, and it was interesting, always, to watch the way the Chinese families outside of the town lived. It's still a source of amazement to me, back in those days, with 400 million Chinese, how they could sustain themselves as a nation, feed themselves, etc., and I'd like to go back, because, today, there is, I think, 1.2 or 1.3 billion Chinese, and I'm sure, in many cases, not doing anything different than they did back in those days, when it comes to genuine, hard work, raising what you have to raise in order to get enough to eat. Much of this, I'm sure, is still in being and I would like to go back some day and take another look.

SSH: When you traveled off base, were you able to communicate with the Chinese?

WP: In English, not in Chinese, [laughter] not in that short period of time. Later on, when I was serving, many years later, in Sweden, I had to learn the Swedish language, which I can still negotiate in, but, I didn't have to do that in Chinese.

SSH: Where did you go from China?

WP: From China. Well, one little aside, I had the opportunity, when I was in China, to drive the Burma Road, which was built by US Army engineers, ... with hundreds of thousands of Chinese coolie laborers helping, through ... the mountains, through the Mekong Gorge and Salween Gorge, perhaps the most fantastic road, at that time, in the world. ... I had the opportunity to drive it from Kunming into Burma, pick up a piece of equipment, and then, come back up the road to Kunming, and, when you're talking about engineering feats done in a relative short period of time, I don't think the Burma Road can be surpassed, and that's civil engineers, for the most part.

SSH: There is no bias there on your part.

WP: Not at all. [laughter] Coming home from China, it would have been, let's see, January of '46, and a month or two later, I terminated my active duty and became a civilian again. I stayed active in the Reserves and, in ... [mid]-1949, I was recalled to active duty, with the Korean War imminent. So, I came back on duty, and instead of going back as a Reserve officer, which I did, I requested a regular Army commission, and I became a regular Army lieutenant, and, from that point on, I put in another thirty years in uniform.

SSH: There was about a four year gap between when you returned from China and when you went back in for Korea.

WP: About a three year gap.

SSH: What did you do during that time?

WP: ... I worked. Well, I looked for jobs in the electrical engineering area with Western Electric, Bell Tele[phone], and some of the other companies in the New Jersey area, and, yes, I could have gone to work for about fifty dollars a week. ... By that time, I had one youngster and

one on the way and, I figured, that was not enough. So, I decided to do something else, and I went to work for a heating and air conditioning company in Orange, New Jersey, and I was with them for, oh, over a year, and [that is] a different type of engineering. Back in those days, air conditioning was in its infancy and ... wasn't greatly required in New Jersey, as far as home comfort, but, there were companies, like coffee grinding operations, where the air conditioning system ... became essential. So, we were doing a different type of engineering from what I'd learned in school, but, it was interesting, and then, I branched out and opened up my own office in Long Branch, and ... I was there doing that kind of work until I got recalled for Korea. [laughter]

SSH: Did you get married after you returned from China?

WP: No. ... I mentioned I was at Werner Robins Air Force Base, and, while I was there, I got word that my middle brother, Gordon, had been shot down, and I, quick, grabbed a five day emergency leave, hopped in my car, and headed for home, nine hundred and some miles, to comfort my parents. ... On the way home, on the car radio, I got word that the Germans had broadcast, in the evening, a prisoner of war [roster] and ... he was among those named. So, by the time I got home, ... I drove twenty-four hours straight, I realized that ... he was living, and, on the way home, my girlfriend of seven years was a nursing student at the Margaret Hague School in Jersey City, I called her from Trenton. I said, "I'm on my way in. What time do you get off duty?" "Seven o'clock." "I'll be there. I'll pick you up," which I did, and, on the way from Jersey City to Long Branch, I said, "Maybe it would be a good time to get married." Utter silence for about an hour, then, she finally said, "Okay." [laughter]

SSH: You got married then.

WP: We got married. There's a waiting time in New Jersey of three days. I didn't have three days, so, we had to talk to the officials, cut it to two, and, after driving for twenty-four hours, plus, going to New York the following day to buy wedding rings, by the time my wedding took place, I had gone four days, perhaps, with four or five hours of sleep. So, after the wedding, my wife and I drove to New York, champagne already on ice, waiting for us, to the Hotel Pennsylvania, got to my hotel room, and, guess what, I fell asleep. [laughter]

SSH: It must have been worth it.

WP: [laughter] The wedding? The wedding was a good one and our marriage has lasted for fifty-two plus years. Before I left for China, my son had been born. I was home for the birth, Cesarean section, and I had to go back to Robins Field, and, about three weeks later, I had my orders for China. I was going to leave out of Greensboro, North Carolina, and I called my wife, and my son, at this time, was six weeks old. I had only seen him for the first week. I said, "Can your parents take care of him? Come on down." ... So, I didn't see him again until ... he was a year old.

SSH: Your young family stayed in Long Branch while you were overseas.

WP: Yes.

SSH: Did they live in military housing?

WP: No. We bought ... our first house. No, actually, not that time. ... My wife and my son stayed with her parents while I was in China. When I went to Korea, then, we bought our first house, just a few blocks away.

SSH: When you began your regular Army career, did your family live on base or off base?

WP: Both. We have done both. When I went to Korea, we bought our first house, in Deal, New Jersey, which is just south of Long Branch, a couple of miles, and my wife stayed there with the two kids, and, when I came home, my orders from Korea were to Washington, DC. So, we had to sell the house in Deal, and we moved to Washington, and we lived there in a duplex, ... not too far from where I worked. ... I worked, at that time, for three years almost, at the White House. Back in those days, the Army provided all secure presidential communications in the White House and all presidential communications whenever the President was traveling. ... At that time, we lived off base. From there, we went to ... Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and, at Fort Bragg, we lived on base. Actually, the first six months, we lived off base, we lived in Fayetteville, but, then, we moved on base and lived there for a year-and-a-half. ... The other time we've lived on base was when I moved a battalion to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and that was later on. We lived on base at Fort Huachuca and, when I went to Vietnam, my wife stayed on base, while I was in Vietnam. All the other times, we have lived off base, sometimes in rental housing, but, most of the time, in houses that we bought.

SSH: Did you use the GI Bill to buy your home?

WP: Yes, two or three times. [laughter]

SSH: Great. When you were living in Deal, you ran for public office. Please, tell me about that.

WP: Oh, I did that one time in Long Branch, New Jersey. My dad and some of his friends insisted that I run for the city commission, so, I did, but, I would have to say that it was hardly a sincere effort, but, ... I did get seven hundred and some votes. [laughter]

SSH: When you returned from World War II, did you find that there was an effort made to welcome you back?

WP: ... Yes, I suppose you could say that. Of course, there were a lot of people coming back and I would have to say that everybody was happy to see everybody coming home. There is an exception to that. When I was home, occasionally, we would be requested to put our uniforms on and stand honor guard ... [for] those coming home in caskets, and, once in a while, they would request that we visit some of the schools and do a talk, again, in uniform. So, I guess you could say that people were happy to see us home ... and trying to take advantage, perhaps, of our experience. ...

SSH: Why did you stay in the Reserves?

WP: With four years of ROTC, I had no option. [laughter] I was always proud of my uniform, still am.

SSH: I was just wondering if it was for financial reasons as well.

WP: No, no. I never got anything in the Reserves, except for when I was on active duty, ... in the way of pay.

SSH: Where did you report to when you were called up for Korea?

WP: Initially, I reported, first off, to Governor's Island, New York, which was First Army headquarters, and I was there for several months, and then, from there, I went to Fort Monmouth. Again, since I had never taken the signal officers' basic course, they felt that it was about time I did. So, what I had to do when I took my regular Army commission, I was commissioned a first lieutenant and I had to resign my captaincy, because my captaincy was a Reserve rank. [laughter] So, I started over again as a first lieutenant, and then, ... from six months of school at Fort Monmouth, where did I go? Oh, we're talking about going back in for Korea.

SSH: Yes.

WP: No. I'm getting ahead of myself. Yes, then, ... I went directly from there to Korea and I joined the Seventh Division. The Seventh Division ... had been heavily drained ... of some of its personnel and equipment to put the first couple of divisions into Korea when the North Koreans came across the 38th, but, when I joined the Seventh, it was in August of '50. We were staging at Mt. Fuji, Camp Fuji, on Mt. Fujiyama, not too far north of Tokyo, and then, we loaded aboard ship, and the Seventh US Infantry Division and the First Marine Division made the Inchon landing on 15 September, 1950. So, I was early into Korea and Korea was the one war that I was with the infantry. I commanded the Seventh Division Signal Company, a company of about 380 men, eighty-five vehicles. We were scattered everywhere, from, sometimes, forward outposts to regiment [or] division [headquarters]. ... After the Inchon landing, we cleaned up around Inchon and Seoul, moved over land to Pusan, where we then made ... another landing, north, ... near Wonson Beach, and then, from there to the Yalu River, and, in November of '50, we were already getting thirty degrees below zero. We weren't equipped for the heavy weather, the cold weather, fully. So, it was an interesting time, and the Chinese came in, we had to pull back off the Yalu, drop back to the Hamhung-Hungnam perimeter, and, finally, we were evacuated from there. I was one of the last off the beach, the 24th of December, and I landed, again, at Pusan, got a jeep, and moved back up land to join my unit. ... It was Christmas Eve, and I went down and got a whole bundle of mail, and one of the packages was from my father-in-law, a little, metal cake tin with a plywood top taped to it, packed with cotton and a bottle of bourbon. So, I celebrated Christmas Eve, 1950, having survived a very interesting and difficult time in North Korea. We stayed there, and rolled with the punches, and chased the Chinese back up after a

long period of time, and I finally came home in the Summer of '51. By this time, I was a captain again. (Battlefield promotion.)

SSH: During World War II, you were in China and the Chinese were our allies. Now, you were in Korea and the Koreans were the enemy.

WP: South Koreans were the allies, but, the North Koreans were the enemy, that's true, and the Chinese were our enemy.

SSH: Did you find that twist of fate to be ironic?

WP: I was so busy, I didn't give it any thought. [laughter]

SSH: You said that your unit was ill-prepared for the weather.

WP: Well, we didn't have winter lubricants for our vehicles, and so, I had to keep, at all times, about ten percent of our vehicles running all night, so that we could tow the rest of them in the morning to get them started, because, at thirty below zero, with normal batteries and normal lubrications, a truck won't turn over, or a jeep. So, we also didn't have everything we should have had for all of the troops, for example, Arctic mittens. We didn't have enough for everybody, and, yes, we had Arctic sleeping bags, but, ... we didn't have proper fuel ... for our tent stoves. So, we were burning gasoline in our tent stoves and one of my biggest jobs as a unit commander was to make sure my troops weren't blowing themselves up because of the cold. I would go into some tents and the tents, though, would be red hot. ... Outside of worrying about getting shot, that was my biggest worry, keeping my troops from burning themselves to death. [laughter]

SSH: In terms of your communications equipment, how well supplied were you and what was the quality of your equipment?

WP: ... You know, I talked "state of the art," [I meant] state of the art depending upon what period of time you're talking about. ... Yes, we had good equipment. ... It had limitations. When you ... spread a division over a depth of a hundred miles, your normal telephone communications almost cease to exist. You can't lay wire that long and expect it to talk, so, ... you have to revert to radio, and, when you're talking about the normal radios we were using for this type of communications, it's basically line of sight. ... Once you get beyond twenty-five miles, you might as well hang it up, but, by studying the terrain and having a team or two that didn't worry about not being able to defend themselves with no one else around, we picked sites on the highest points in the mountains we could find and we were able to relay, using line of sight equipment, for over a hundred miles. So, we could maintain contact between division headquarters, somewhere down around the beach in Wonson, with two of our regiments up on the Yalu River, a hundred and some miles north. So, being able to do this ... got me my first medal. [laughter] ... When I came home from Korea, I spent the next two years at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, testing new equipment of this type for the Army, a research and development

type operation, and I forget the company, Motorola, one of them, was trying to redo the same equipment that we were using in Korea, with improved characteristics.

SSH: What kind of interaction did you have with the Korean civilian population?

WP: Well, most of the Koreans I saw were ... Korean civilians being evacuated from the combat area, whole families and whole small villages being moved out of the way, so that they didn't get blown away by artillery fire, etc. ... In one full year in Korea, I never had a Korean meal, because I never got ... into a town.

SSH: Comparing your World War II experience with your Korean War experience, what were your living conditions like?

WP: Well, ... when you're living on an air base, well, you have pretty good facilities. When you're with an infantry division in a combat zone, the best thing you can hope for is a pup tent, or a two man tent, and that's all I ever had. [laughter]

SSH: What about rations?

WP: Well, ... if you get too far from the company area, yes, you have to go on a field ration, K ration or C ration, but, as long as you're within distance of company, either company base or company advance, we could split our kitchen, oh, sometimes two or three times and ... always be able to provide, you know, most of our troops with hot food, but, ... as I said, the guys up on the mountain, at the relay site, they were cooking their own C rations, and, you know, a five or six man team spent a lot of time in a K ration box.

SSH: Do you have any stories about these incidences that particularly stick out in your mind?

WP: Well, I have one ... that I have told many people. My mess steward, Sergeant Hayes, he was a sergeant, first class, and Sergeant Hayes and his kitchen crew did such a fabulous job that, the month or so before I was due to come home, I called my personnel officer and I said, "I want Sergeant Hayes made master sergeant." He says, "Mess stewards aren't authorized to be master sergeants." ... [I said], "I don't care what they're authorized, I want him made master sergeant." So, we pulled enough strings at division [that] we had Sergeant Hayes promoted to ... master sergeant, E-7, and, going back one little time before this, I mentioned I had a 380 man company. ... President Truman, at that time, integrated the Army. I had 380 white soldiers, and I got my first black soldier, a genuine, nice, little guy, reported in for duty, and the first night, going through the chow line, he looked around, and, in a voice that could be heard by most everybody, he said, "I'm gonna starve to death in this outfit." [He] said, "I come through this line one time and everybody knows it." ... He was trained ... as a radio-relay technician. After he had been in the company a few weeks, he came in and he asked to see the company commander. He came into the office. I said, "What's the trouble?" He said, "Captain, ... I went to school as a radio-relay type, but, I really don't understand it. Maybe you could give me a job that I could do better," and I said, "What would you like to do?" He said, "Well, maybe I could work in the kitchen." I called in Sergeant Hayes. I said, "Sergeant Hayes, you got a new man," and Sergeant

Hayes, from the deep South, looked at me, the company commander, and he said, "Captain, I'll take him, and I'll work him, but, he is not going to sleep with my cooks." I said, "Sergeant Hayes, that's your problem. He's your man." That evening, I went to see what Sergeant Hayes had done with this little, black soldier and where do you suppose I found him? sound asleep, sleeping right next to all the other cooks and cook's helpers. [That is] a story I've told many times, to not only my white friends, but, to most of my black friends, and it's a true story.

SSH: In general, how did the integration process proceed?

WP: When I took command of the battalion, an 850 man battalion, in Fort Smith, Arkansas, I had a percentage of black soldiers and black NCOs, my operations officer, a black captain, and, by and large, every bit as good a soldier as any other color.

SSH: Were there any other problems?

WP: I had problems only one time. I had heard of three or four young privates, or PFCs, from the Chicago area, and this was at Fort Huachuca, sometime later, and I came in one night, and they were playing cards on the floor, but, they were drinking, and it's forbidden to have alcohol in the barracks on an Army base, and one of my sergeants came in, a black sergeant, and started to tell them to clean up, and one of these young blacks from Chicago got on his feet, picked up a bottle, and was about to use it, and the sergeant decked him. So, the next morning, I had a court martial case, [laughter] which turned out well. ... [The] sergeant was acquitted and two blacks were transferred off post.

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE-----

SSH: What was your reaction to the news that the atomic bomb had been dropped? Where were you when you heard the news?

WP: ... I mentioned I had driven the Burma Road and I was somewhere not too far back into China from Burma. We'd been weathered in with three or four days of extremely heavy rain, and so, we were basically stalled for several days, and that's where I was when I got the word, ... by radio, that we had dropped some fantastic weapon on Japan. ... By the time I got back to Kunming, we had dropped the second one on Nagasaki, and, basically, the war had ended. This was, I suppose, just as much news to people in uniform around the world as it was to civilians. The Manhattan Project had been kept under wraps very well and it went off very well.

SSH: Did you support the use of atomic weapons?

WP: Absolutely. We are not the only nation that has atomic weapons and we are not the only nation that would have used atomic weapons. We spent the next thirty years building all kinds of sophisticated nuclear devices, as did the Soviet Union, aimed at each other, capable of blowing ourselves off the face of the Earth. So, [due to] the fact that ... we had good engineering back in those days, if we hadn't, there would have been a lot more dead bodies throughout the Pacific

and to have had to make landings on the Japanese [home] islands would have been extremely costly in human life.

SSH: Did you ever feel that we should have used nuclear weapons in either Korea or Vietnam?

WP: Well, we really didn't have any occasion to have to use another one, as long as the Soviets didn't. ... The world is lucky that this never happened.

SSH: Nuclear proliferation and testing are still big problems.

WP: The French are still testing and Lord knows who else has them. China, I'm sure, has them. [Saddam] Hussein is trying. ... He may also have one, and so, yes, we have ... cut back dramatically, but, I hope that we have not reduced our arsenal to zero, because, at some point in time, one never knows. I might also say, when I was getting ready to go to Sweden, I spent a day aboard a nuclear submarine, went down, and they're still in being.

SSH: Do you remember which boat you were on?

WP: ... Was it the *Nautilus*?

SSH: Could have been.

WP: Could have been.

SSH: Was it the one that went under the polar ice cap?

WP: Yeah. ... It was, at that time, stationed in Norfolk, Virginia. ... Those of us who were getting ready to go on attaché duty were trying to be trained in everything that, ... not only the Army, but, the Armed Forces had, and so, I spent a day aboard an aircraft carrier, watched them launch all their birds and bring them back, spent a day aboard a nuclear submarine. We had to submerge and they told us all about what we were doing, and how, and why. So, yes, we still have them. [laughter]

SSH: Before we continue with the rest of your military career, do you have any other stories about Korea?

WP: No. Most people, I think, have forgotten about the Inchon landing. ... The North Koreans had come in and pushed the South Koreans and [the] small handful of American troops that we could muster, both from in-country and from Japan, in a hurry to a perimeter around Pusan and General MacArthur decided to use what troops we had left, one Marine division and, basically, two regiments of one infantry division. The Seventh only had two regiments left, the one had been decimated of personnel to fill the others, and the Inchon landing was made in Inchon Harbor, that had thirty-five foot tides. So, we came into the narrows, through the island chain, and it had to be at flood tide to get the landing craft to the ... beaches, and as soon as the tide went out, there wasn't gonna be another flood tide for perhaps another thirty days. So, it had to

be done in one fell swoop and every LST and landing craft that they could muster in the Orient made the landing with as many of the two divisions as they could put ashore. ... The next morning, I looked, and some of the landing craft that had disgorged and put people and equipment ashore couldn't get back off in time, and there they sat, thirty-five feet out of the water, sitting ... across docks, and on rock piles, and whatever. So, it was quite an interesting operation.

SSH: There must have been a lot of inter-service cooperation for a landing of that magnitude.

WP: Oh, absolutely. Most people don't also realize that, yes, we have a Marine Corps that goes ashore, yes, we have an Air Force that goes ashore, but, they can't sustain long term operations without the Army, because the Army is equipped with all of the heavy stuff for long term operations, the Engineer Corps for building roads or doing whatever has to be done, damming rivers etc., etc., etc., and all the other services are basically quick reaction, but, light duty, so to speak. Yes, we all get along fine.

SSH: I was wondering if there were any complications in terms of the military hierarchy.

WP: No, no. The Joint Chiefs of Staff is comprised of all services. ...

SSH: You get along.

WP: We get along.

SSH: You were part of one of the first units at Inchon. Do you have any other stories about the Inchon landing?

WP: No. We weren't there very long. We made the landing and we didn't get our vehicles ashore until sometime later. ... Most of us were on foot for the first twenty-four hours and that's the first time since I was in training that I had to carry a pack and move over land on foot. I remember that from Inchon. [laughter]

SSH: Where did your career take you after Korea?

WP: I went from there to Fort Bragg. I was at Fort Bragg for two years, testing new equipment.

SSH: How many medals had you earned by this point in your career?

WP: No, no, no, no. If you're being shot at as an infantryman, you deserve your medals. When you're doing communications and support work, you don't deserve them. You don't get that many. ... No regrets. I have my share from later on. ...

SSH: Where did you go after Fort Bragg?

WP: From Fort Bragg, I went ... to the White House. Back in those days, [as] I mentioned before, the Army provided the communications for the President, and, today, it's a purple suit outfit. [The] Army, Navy, and Air Force are all integrated into that unit, but, back in those days, it was all Army and it was interesting, [for] almost three years. ... President Eisenhower was in office and I provided the communications for the first Big Four conference in Geneva. I provided the communications for a twenty-one nation conference in Panama City. That time, I had to take a brand-new switchboard down from the US to Panama to install in the embassy, because the embassy switchboard was antiquated and couldn't handle it. ... I made a Canadian-Mexican-US conference in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, (Greenbrier?) Hotel, a fabulous place. Anybody listening to this, if you ever have a chance to go to the (Greenbrier?), go, if you can afford it. [laughter] ... I made all kinds of other trips. Every time the President goes to give a commencement address at a university, or political speeches, or whatever, the Secret Service and the communicators go in advance, usually a week to ten days, provide everything that's going to be needed, secure the equipment, secure security communications, direct links to the White House, so that the President can be advised, momentarily, continuously. So, this ... was a very, very interesting job, perhaps the most fascinating job that I had, and most people don't realize that the Armed Forces do a lot of things.

SSH: Did the Army interact with the FBI in trying to provide adequate security for the White House?

WP: Secret Service. [The] Secret Service provides the security for the President, both in house and on the road. ... I think they [also] have some military armed guards at the White House. They didn't have them when I was there, but, they're basically for looks and not really for security. Secret Service provides the security. ... They're part of the Treasury Department, which is right next door to the White House.

SSH: Did you interact with the Secret Service?

WP: Oh, yeah. Every trip I'd go on, there would be two or three of them with me, or I was with them, [laughter] and, yeah, they are a great bunch, too.

SSH: Did you have any contact with President Eisenhower?

WP: Oh, yeah. When he had his heart attack, in Denver, he had been out on a fishing trip and it was a Sunday afternoon. ... I had a radio in my car on the White House net. I had a hot line telephone next to my bed to the White House switchboard and it was a Sunday afternoon. I got the word, "Bill," it was the President's military aide, "President Eisenhower just had a heart attack. Get on a plane. Get out there," and [he was at] Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver, an Army hospital, and so, I got there within a matter of hours later. ... Colonel (Schultz?), Bob (Schultz?), was the military aide. So, he and I shared the office next to President Eisenhower's bedroom for the next thirty days, and so, I got to know the President quite well, take him, ... sometimes, an afternoon movie, maybe some music to listen to, he and Mrs. Eisenhower. I can give you a little aside. Mrs. Eisenhower's mother, Mrs. Dowd, lived in Denver and I got a call one afternoon. The television set had gone off, could I come out and take a look? So, I took one

of my sergeants, and I went out, [and we] took a look at the set. Back in those days, they were vacuum tube sets. We checked it out and there was one tube that had to be replaced, went downtown, picked it up for about \$1.75, if I recall, came back, put it in, said, "Mrs. Eisenhower, it's back on the air." She says, "Oh, what did you have to do?" I said, "Just put a new tube in." "What did it cost?" She said, "What did it cost?" I said, "Oh, nothing. Don't [worry]." "Captain, what did it cost?" I said, "\$1.75, ma'am." She went upstairs, and, you know, between she and her mother, they had to scrape the penny bank in order to come up with \$1.75, but, she wouldn't let me leave until she paid me for that tube.

SSH: What did you think of the President's family?

WP: Oh, it's a great family. I have many souvenirs from my White House days. One is right there, a picture of Ike.

[Tape Paused]

"William L. Prout, with lasting appreciation. Splendid service on the White House staff," and, "With best wishes, Dwight Eisenhower," and I have lots more. I have Christmas presents from every Christmas I was there.

SSH: There is also a lot of great looking communications equipment in front of the President. [laughter] President Eisenhower and his family treated you very kindly.

WP: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SSH: Where did you go next?

WP: Then, I went as ... one of our assistant Army attachés to Sweden. That was from 1957 to 1960.

SSH: This was at the height of the Cold War

WP: Yes.

SSH: How did that situation affect your assignment?

WP: Well, at that time, ... we were not permitted to talk to our Russian counterparts in Sweden. We knew them and they knew us, but, we couldn't socialize. We socialized, but, not with each other. ... I mean, we would all be invited, let's say, to a Swedish function, but, we used to try to keep our distance and our cool. ... It was an interesting three years. I traveled all over Sweden, from the southern tip to the northern tip. I had a chance to travel in much of Norway. My wife is Norwegian born, by the way. She came to this country when she was seven years old, but, she is a blue-blood Norwegian. She won't let you forget it. ... It was an interesting three years, the first time I'd been inside of an embassy. Traveling on a diplomatic passport is always nice. You can do things you can't do otherwise. ...

SSH: Can you give me an example?

WP: Oh, for example, going down to Germany, and then, coming back with [turkeys]. Back in those days, the turkeys in Sweden, ... when they were raising turkeys, they'd feed them fish heads and such, and the turkeys would have a distinctive fishy flavor. So, whenever we could, we'd always make sure to manage a trip down to Germany, by car, before Thanksgiving, and again before Christmas, and we'd pick up fresh turkeys in the commissary, frozen, buy dry ice, pack them in dry ice, put them in a car top carrier, and then, come back into Sweden. That was illegal, but, traveling on a diplomatic passport, ... you're outside of the law, so, they couldn't search your car. ...

SSH: What a covert operation. [laughter]

WP: But, that's about the only thing I ever did in contravention of Swedish law.

SSH: The Swedes were neutral.

WP: The Swedes were neutral in two world wars.

SSH: Did you find that they were neutral in favor of some party?

WP: ... The first foreign language taught in Swedish schools until World War II was German. There was a close affiliation between Sweden and Germany. A million troops transited Swedish soil to go into Norway and Finland. Yes, the Swedish were neutral, but, that means they didn't shoot us or ... trade shots with us, but, by the time World War II had ended, or before it had ended, Sweden had seen the hand writing on the wall. ... By the time World War II ended, the first ... foreign language being taught in the Swedish schools was English, and German was the second, and French was the third. So, my two children, at that time, both went to Swedish schools for three years. ... My daughter was ten and she could have stayed in the Swedish schools for three years, but, my son, ... let me get this straight. She was going to go to Swedish schools. My son, ... if we had put him in the English speaking school, English-American school, in Stockholm, it only went to the eighth grade and we would have had to send him to Germany for his third year. So, we decided to put him in Swedish schools, also. So, they went, for three years, ... to Swedish grade school and my son actually went, say, to junior high. By the time we came home, he was through the ninth grade and went into high school in the States. They both became quite fluent. Actually, my daughter became so fluent in Swedish that, by her third year, she was standing in the hall, talking to her brother in English, and one of her teachers walked by and heard her speaking English, and she said, "Randi, I thought you were Swedish." Her Swedish was that good. [laughter]

SSH: What were your duties as attaché, officially and unofficially?

WP: Well, the military attachés, ... we have each service in most countries. We had the Naval attaché, Army attaché, and Air [Force] attaché, and, at that time, each had two assistant attachés.

I was a captain, the other assistant was a major. By the time I came home, I was also a major. ... Our job is to learn as much as possible about the host country's armed forces, or armed force, and the supporting industry, [such as] Bofors, one of the world's finer armament manufactures. Bofors has the finest hotel in the world. I've been there many, many times, and [the Swedes had] Saab, Volvo, Skaniavalsis making vehicles, heavy vehicles, L. M. Erikson Electronics. ... We traveled all over. We'd get invited, ... request to be invited, to the various military units, hobnob with ... our Swedish counterparts, get to know the Swedish defense people in Stockholm, and get to know all the people who do the manufacturing for them. So, it's an interesting job and I would have to say, basically, overt. There may be a little bit of covert, come now and then, but, you have to be careful.

SSH: Were the Russians doing the same thing?

WP: Yes, Russians, and most of the European countries have embassies in each other's countries, and they all have military attachés there. We got to be friends with the Swiss, the Norwegians, the Finns, Germans, French, Italians.

SSH: You had a very mixed social scene.

WP: Oh, yes, yeah, very much so.

SSH: Did you find that the Swedes were friendly to Americans?

WP: ... The Swedes are very, very fine people. They enjoy entertaining and they enjoy being entertained. They like good food. They like outdoor sports. Coming from New Jersey, I never saw a pair of skies up close until I got to Sweden and, by that time, I was thirty-seven years old. ... One of the first things we did, before Fall started, we got there in July, [was to] go down and buy complete ski outfits, skis, boots, etc., for my wife, myself, and my two children, and then, every chance we would get, we would ski. By the time we came home, my two kids were basically expert and I wasn't far behind. [laughter] Back in those days, there was no such thing as quick release bindings. [laughter]

SSH: Where did you go after Sweden?

WP: From Sweden, then, I went to Northeastern University and I taught in the ROTC program. I was an associate professor for three years and, while I was there, I also did my graduate work and got my Masters degree, evenings, part-time. [laughter] It took me three years, but, at that time, Northeastern had the largest ROTC cadet corps in the country, with 2700 cadets. That was just prior to Vietnam, from '60 to '63. In '63, while I was there, ... I slipped out for six months and I went to the Command General Staff College, and then, when I finished at Northeastern, I went another six months to the Armed Forces Staff College, and then, from there, I went to Fort Smith, Arkansas, and took command of a battalion, a signal battalion, with three different type companies, strategic type communications equipment for the most part.

SSH: You were trained as a soldier during World War II. How would you compare your preparation to the training given to the soldiers of the Korean and Vietnam War eras?

WP: I would have to say that the Armed Forces do a fantastically good job. We got caught short to a degree by World War II, Pearl Harbor, and having to declare war ... [while] being far less than at full strength, and the same thing happened in Korea. We had basically disbanded our armed forces, almost to a ridiculously low level, when the North Koreans came across, and, yes, we had troops in Germany, ... and, yes, we did have some troops in Japan, but, ... they were not at full strength. So, again, we had to, in a hurry, you know, put together armed forces again and we've been lucky. I don't think, if it happens another time, with the sophistication of ... some of the stuff we're using today, that industry can gear up fast enough to provide lots of it, if we need lots of it, but, getting back to the training of individuals, I am a firm believer in disciplined young people. When I look at the various rates in the evening paper, we have become the murder capital of the world, and etc., etc., etc., and I think [that] ... since we don't have family, a good influence, to a great degree anymore, maybe we ought to take a lesson from what the Armed Forces do, and draft every seventeen-year-old into uniform, and teach him how to behave. I know we can't do that. ... [laughter]

SSH: After your stint with the ROTC at Northwestern, you were sent to Arkansas.

WP: ... I took command of a battalion (850 men) which was way under strength. Actually, it had been ... fairly recently reactivated and ... I was there for about six months with it. ... We fleshed out, personnel wise and equipment wise, and then, we went on a 100,000 man maneuver out in western Arizona, out along the Colorado River area, in the Parker Needles area, and, by that time, we were in pretty good shape, and, by the time we came back to base at Fort Chaffee from the maneuver, we were on orders to move to Arizona. They were going to, basically, close out Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, which is just outside of Fort Smith, and turn her over to the Reserves, and we were going to a full fledged Army base. So, we got another lesson in how to load trucks, and vehicles, and equipment, on to rail cars and how to lash down, and block, and etc. So, we moved the whole battalion out to Fort Huachuca, including my daughter's horse. That came behind the car in a trailer. [laughter] The reason ... I mention that, when I left Northeastern, my son had played three years of varsity football at Framingham High School. [He] was a good football player. My daughter was a varsity cheerleader and, when I got my orders to move, she was half way through her junior year at Framingham High. She's a very pretty girl, and ... the whole class loved her, and, when she had to move, "Awww." So, I said, "Okay, when we get out West, I'll get you a horse," trying to soothe some of the anguish. We hadn't been in Fort Smith more than a week and she said, "Okay, Daddy, you said you'd get me a horse. Where is it?" So, we went shopping and we got a nice horse, [laughter] the only privately owned horse on Fort Chaffee. [laughter]

SSH: Were there any other horses at Fort Chaffee?

WP: Part of Fort Chaffee was leased out to ... a rancher, and they were running maybe 500 to a thousand head of cattle, and every Wednesday, on my PT afternoon, I would mount up my daughter's horse, and I'd ride out with the ranch foreman, and we'd cut a few head here and

there. ... My troops all called me the “Cowboy Colonel,” and so, when we moved to Fort Huachuca, one horse wasn’t enough. We wound up with four horses. ... I was president of the Riding Club on base at Fort Huachuca and we could mount fifty some riders. ... For the parade in Tombstone, the annual parade, ... we would leave the base on horseback, thirty miles overland from Huachuca to Tombstone, camp out for the night, dress up, and parade the next day, play around in the town for a while, camp out again that night, and then, ride back the third day, thirty miles to base, and one year, I conned out of the officers’ club the fifty state flags, and we mounted fifty riders, each carrying the state flags, the US flag out front, and a club banner between, and me in front of all that, and that’s quite a spectacular sight. You don’t see that very often.

SSH: Especially now.

WP: Not even out West. [laughter]

SSH: Do you still ride?

WP: I have now a bone disorder which they medically call Paget Disease, which is gradual deterioration of the skeleton, calcium being deposited from this part to that part, where it is not needed, etc., and it’s been moving extremely slowly, but, about five years ago, my doctor suggested that I give up high country riding. I have been active since I retired and I’m a life member of the Pima County Sheriff’s Posse, twice captain. I’m one of the original founders of the Mounted Assistance Unit at Saguaro National Park. I’m still active there, but, I don’t ride there anymore. So, I gave up high country riding about five years ago, and then, about two years ago, I finally decided that since my hip and pelvic area were no longer capable of staying comfortable in the saddle, I gave it up [entirely]. I had a wonderful horse, a Morgan. The Morgan horse, of course, was the official horse of the US Cavalry, many years ago, good looking head, good brain, sure footed, and he and I have been all over these mountains.

SSH: I assume that he is still with us.

WP: No. He was twenty-five when I finally stopped riding him and I decided that I wouldn’t give him to anybody else.

SSH: I understand. Where did you go from Fort Huachuca?

WP: [From] Fort Huachuca, I went to Vietnam. My wife stayed on base while I was there and, by this time, my son was a junior at the University of Arizona, had transferred out from Rutgers at the end of his freshman year. ... My son couldn’t see him[self] staying in school and his father going to Vietnam, so, he and I left Tucson on the same airplane, he getting off in California to be sworn in at Fort Ord. ... My daughter was, at that time, I guess in her last year in high school at Buena, a high school in Sierra Vista, ... a town outside the base at Fort Huachuca, and so, my son went to infantry basic, infantry advanced, applied and was accepted immediately for OCS. By the end of his first year, he was a second lieutenant in infantry and spent his first year in Korea, up on the DMZ, in command of a quick reaction force right near Freedom Bridge, and the week

that the *Pueblo* was taken by the North Koreans, there was a rash of border incidents along the DMZ. The big one was in his sector and that's when he got his first Purple Heart. They had the major skirmish in his sector and they had to knock off a couple of North Koreans. When he came home from Korea, he said, "Well, Vietnam is my generation's war and I haven't been there." So, he volunteered for Special Forces training, airborne training, and Vietnam. The infantry brass said, "Yes, yes," and so, some months later, he was a Green Beret and heading for Vietnam. In his first year there, he [was] put up on the Central Highlands with four companies of *montagnards*, saw a lot of action. Did I mention this before? and then, went to a US rifle company as the company commander, and then, home. ...

SSH: Where were you at this time?

WP: ... When he was going to school, I was on General Westmoreland's staff, and I will have to say, that [was] the first and only war that I fought in where I had an air-conditioned office, but, I was in the communications section of General Westmoreland's staff, the J-6. ... My desk took care of all of the operational strategic communications in theater. I had to come up with the priority system for who got what circuits when, and how often we needed to expand our tropospheric scatter systems, etc., etc., etc. ... So, it was an interesting job for a year. ... If we had been given, at that time, what we needed to win the war by LBJ and McNamara, it would have been over, but, [when] the history is finally written, Johnson and McNamara's graduated response philosophy, they'll go down in history as two of the worst. [Vietnam] cost a lot of time, lives, and a lot of effort and we're still paying the price.

SSH: What was it like to serve under General Westmoreland?

WP: Very fine man, Eagle Scout. [laughter]

SSH: Were you ever able to connect with your son in Vietnam?

WP: No. ... I was coming home about the time he was going, and then, I was in the Pentagon, and I was on the Army Staff, ... deputy chief of staff for operations, and I used to go down to the war room every morning and keep a check on what was going on and how he was doing. ...

SSH: As a parent, did knowing what was happening to your son help you or would you have rather remained ignorant?

WP: Well, that's a hard question. I've only been [on] the one side. I would have to say it was probably easier for me than his mother. It was probably easier. Maybe [it was] no less easy for my wife, his mother, than it was for my mother.

SSH: What were your duties at the Pentagon?

WP: I put the first almost a year-and-a-half as deputy chief of staff for operations, in psychological operations and covert operations, this type ... of overall management, supervision, and then, I switched over. When I made full colonel, I switched back over to the

communications part and ... was in charge of basic, I guess you might say, strategic operations, strategic communications, world wide, for another year-and-a-half, and then, I opted to go back to Sweden, and then, my career branch got mad at me. [laughter] They wanted me to command a signal group, and, when I turned that down and said, "No, I'm going to go to Sweden," then, they said, "Well, we'd like to send you to the NATO Defense College." I said, "Where's that?" "In Rome." "Oh, how long?" "Six months." I said, "Oh, I can finish that and still get to Sweden." They said, "Oh, no, then, we want you to become Fifth Army signal officer in Germany." I said, "Oh." The decision now was, "Do I terminate my career as a full colonel or do I go ahead and try for the star?" and I decided [that] I would probably enjoy life a lot more [by] taking my wife back to Scandinavia. So, I did and I have no regrets.

SSH: What were the differences between your first tour and your second tour in Sweden?

WP: Well, the difference this time, now, I'm a full colonel. ... I'm my own boss, so to speak, and the first ambassador that I worked for was Brud Holland, All-American football [player], Cornell, and a wonderful guy, and his wife was also a doll. The first Christmas, I was going to come home. We were chatting. ... When I went over, I bought, before I left, ... I have every dress uniform that the Army ... can wear, white mess, blue mess, dress blues, Morey Luxembourg tailor-made service uniforms, you know, etc., and a tuxedo, and I had three or four, at that time, [of] the ruffled shirts. ... After the first couple of parties, Mrs. Holland said, "I tried to get one of those for the Ambassador, but, they don't make his size." I said, "What size?" "Eighteen-and-a-half neck." I said, "Oh." [laughter] So, I said, "We're going home for Christmas. I'll see what I can do in the Washington area." In order to get an eighteen-and-a-half neck, you have to have it tailor-made. [laughter] ... Back in those days, that'd become an expensive shirt. ...

SSH: Did you have the shirt made?

WP: No. Then, my next ambassador was Ambassador Strauss-Hupe, who was a college professor and a college president, I forget the school, down in the South. ... What had happened to Ambassador Holland, the Swedes were so anti-US involvement in Vietnam that when he went home for a leave, the Secretary of State didn't let him come back. So, the deputy chief of mission took over in his absence and, when he went home a month later for Christmas, they wouldn't let him come back, either. They were teaching the Swedes a lesson. So, all of a sudden, the third man in the embassy is now the acting ambassador, and, at that time, the Air Force attaché, Colonel Bob (Burman?), was the deputy, because he was the second ranking man in the embassy. I was third. [laughter] So, rather than send Ambassador Holland back, they finally replaced him with the professor, Ambassador Strauss-Hupe, also a wonderful guy. His wife [was] also a wonderful person, but, she smoked too much, and she was downed with emphysema, and my wife and the CIA chief's wife, both nurses, used to spend many, many days with her, keeping her happy. ...

SSH: This was before we knew what smoking could do.

WP: Yes, but, this time, I got to know my Russian counterparts. When I was there, Sergi Evdokimov was the assistant Russian Army attaché, a graded captain. I was the assistant Army

attaché, US. When I got back to Sweden, Colonel Evdokimov was the Russian Army attaché. I think the Swedes must have figured, "How come we get both of these guys back at the same time?" and, for the first six months I was in Sweden, every time I would go on a trip, I saw police cars parked along my route. They were keeping a close eye on every move I made and I'm sure they were doing the same with him. ... For the first year or two I was there, we still had fairly cool relations ... with the Soviets, but, then, as time wore on and the US started to relax its position, as did the Soviets, we got to be pretty good friends.

SSH: Did you ever feel the presence of the Swedish secret police?

WP: (Sepal?). Well, they're not [too bad]. A good friend of mine, also in Sweden twice with me, was ... a CIA type, Paul Garbler, now lives here in Tucson. He was the assistant chief of station when I was there. He is also a former Naval officer and Naval aviator. ... Actually, he was assistant Naval attaché in Seoul, Korea, when the North Koreans came across the border in 1950. ... His wife is a former Army nurse, World War II type, and they got out, but, lost everything they had, but, they got out, and so, Paul ... was CIA, and I got to know them back in 1957, in that time frame. When I went back to Sweden, in 1971 and '72, Paul came back. So, I am the only Army attaché to serve twice in Sweden and he is the only CIA officer to serve twice in Sweden. We both did it at the same time, just like my Russian counterpart. [laughter]

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

SSH: This continues an interview with Colonel William Prout on March 10, 1996, in Tucson, Arizona, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

[Tape Paused]

WP: I thoroughly enjoyed my tour in Sweden. Normally, when you go on a job like that, it's for three years, and, when I had two-and-a-half under my belt, I decided I'd ask the Pentagon to let me extend for another year-and-a-half, which they did, and then, towards that end, I said, "You might as well let me stay one more year-and-a-half." So, I parlayed that into a double tour, a six year tour, working for three different ambassadors. By the time I finished, I was the senior colonel on base. So, not only was I the Army attaché, I was also the defense attaché, and there's basically a good group of people that worked in the US embassies around the world, quality people, whether you're talking about the Department of State, Department of Commerce, whatever, and ... the visitors we get, I hosted the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs one trip to Sweden, the Secretary of the Army.

SSH: Do you remember their names?

WP: Oh, I'd have to dig out my wife's guest books, look up some of the names. When you get to be my age, pushing seventy-six, your memory starts to fail, especially on names, but, I have them all recorded someplace. ... So, over a period of time, actually, I went through five different ambassadors and all were, you know, first class Americans. ... I've worked with a lot of Swedes. Admiral Arvas was the top ranking Swedish officer in charge of the Swedish government's

operational and military attachés of all countries and Dag Arvas and I got to be real good friends. ... He was from northern Sweden. Actually, he came from a little town up in Lapland, I think which is called Arvas. He is of partial Finnish ancestry, and so, I think his parents gave him that name because of the town that he was born in, but, anyway, he was a rear admiral, a wonderful guy, and, by the time I had been there a couple of years, back on skies, with all new equipment, I was an adequate skier. ... Every winter, he would take all of the foreign attachés on a three or four day trek through the northern Swedish mountains. So, what he would do is say, "Okay, Bill, come on with us. We're going to go up and we'll do the trail that we're gonna take the attachés on." So, we pack [supplies] on my back. ... Dag, usually a Lieutenant Colonel Anders Westerland, Swedish Air Force, and me, we would do the hike over the Swedish mountains, a three or four day trek, and then, at the end, all the foreign attachés are now arriving, and we'd take them back over the trail that, now, we knew, we'd laid out. So, I got to be that good and that good a friend of the Admiral. [laughter] ... We also had our own boat in Sweden for four or five years, a twenty-five foot cabin cruiser, and not only have I seen all of Sweden on land, I have seen almost all of Sweden by water, the east side, where the Swedish Archipelago is, and we have boated all the way through the Archipelago, from Sweden into Finland. We had good Swedish friends who we used to boat with all the time and I have some fabulous pictures of [my grandson]. ... My daughter, and her kids, and her husband were stationed in Turkey, and they put him on the airplane and sent him up, so [that] he could spend part of the summer with us up in Sweden, and, at four years of age, he was skippering my boat. ... The only thing about Sweden that I never really cared for was swimming in the Baltic, because the water never really gets that warm. [laughter] Seventy degrees is about top [temperature], but, the fishing is good, the boating is good. I think they estimate that there are 20,000 islands in the Stockholm Archipelago. Some are very small, some are good sized and partially inhabited, but, there are fantastic places to moor and to enjoy

SSH: Maybe you should have joined the Navy. [laughter]

WP: That thought crossed my mind. [laughter]

SSH: Did you live in the American Embassy compound?

WP: No, no, no, no, neither time. We rented a house, our first tour, in a suburb called Danderyd, and we were there for a year, but, it was right near one of the main, busy roads, and so, we moved, the second or third year, into another, nicer house, actually closer to where the kids were going to school, in a suburb called Danderyd, which is quite a fashionable suburb of Stockholm. ... When I went back in '71, the attaché ahead of me had managed to rent a beautiful house in another suburb called Vasby Park. ... My wife, being an expert seamstress as well as a fantastically fine hostess, decided to take a part of the house which was basically a walk through from the living-dining area to the bedroom area and make it into the dining room. So, we went shopping and bought I forget how many square yards of material. She made drapes for all the windows, and we designed that into a dining room that could seat forty-eight people, and there were many parties we gave where we sat forty-eight people, never at one table. My wife is a firm believer in sociability, and, even here, our only tables are round, but, by proper spacing. Tables, the bane of my existence. [laughter]

SSH: Were you involved in negotiating any of the treaties?

WP: No, not really, no.

SSH: Is there anything else you would like to say about Sweden before we continue?

WP: ... Going to Sweden the first time, we went by ship. We went over on the Swedish ship *Gripsholm* and we came back, three years later, on the ship *Kangsholm*, wonderful vessels, no longer in service, but, they were wonderful vessels at that time. ... When we got off the ship in Gothenburg, Sweden, back in those days I was smoking, and we got off, walked down the street in Gothenburg the first evening, and I got ready to put out a cigarette, and I looked, and there wasn't even a speck of dust on the sidewalk, let alone trash. So, I reached down, I stepped on the end of my cigarette, put it out, and then, I carried it for Lord knows how many blocks now, until I finally came to a refuse can, where I disposed of it. The Swedes, not only were they totally clean in this respect, but, also, totally honest. I could have left a suitcase or pocketbook in the middle of the sidewalk, and come back the next day, and it would still be there, waiting for me. ... Oh, back also at that time, the population of Sweden was about ninety-eight percent Swedish and the other two percent were, basically, Norwegians and Finns, almost, let's say, ninety-nine percent Scandinavian population in Sweden. Then, like many other countries, especially under the Socialist system, Swedish kids no longer want to work and do the menial tasks, so, the Swedes start to permit emigration from southern Europe, and, by the time I left, in '77, ten to twelve percent of Sweden were no longer Scandinavians. Also, the streets aren't clean. Also, you locked your doors at night. So, things change in other parts of the world, just like they change in the US of A. You may want to edit that. [laughter] I didn't name any countries.

SSH: What happened when you returned to the United States?

WP: ... When I came back from Sweden, I only had two years to do before I was going to have to retire, and, when you're a regular Army officer, at thirty years, with a regular commission, you're basically forced to retire. So, I knew I was going to retire within two years after I came home. So, I asked if I could put my last tour in at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, because, back when I was here the first time, with the battalion, my wife and I decided that we were going to come back and settle in out here in the West. So, the Pentagon was nice enough to me that they said, "Okay," and I came back. We had bought the house in '75. We didn't come home and move into it until '77, and it's seventy miles from the house to Fort Huachuca, so, for almost two years, I commuted. First, I went down, bought myself a little Honda Civic, and I drove myself back and forth to work, and ... I also had an apartment on base that I could use, if I wanted to. I rarely used it, but, I used to come home almost every night. Then, I got into a car pool and there was bus service. So, I finally hung it up.

SSH: Did you have all of these lovely bedrooms back then?

WP: Oh, we did that when we first moved in. We added bedrooms, a new carport, a new bathroom, all kinds of shake shingle roofing around, an Arizona room, etc., swimming pool, stone walls, brick walls. [laughter]

SSH: What are your interests now that you have retired?

WP: Well, when I retired, with an engineering degree, and with the experience I've had, and a graduate degree, I probably could have gone to work. I have no doubts about that, but, I felt that the taxpayer takes half decent care of retired military types like me, and, if I go ahead and take a job, it's probably a job that somebody else needs. So, I decided to volunteer my time. So, I joined the Sheriff's Posse and the Sheriff's Posse became active in search and rescue. We do a lot of search and rescue out here, [people] getting lost in the mountains all the time. ... I activated the Mounted Assistance Unit in Saguaro National Park with, at first, eight people. We're now [up to] twenty or thirty. ... Even in a national park like Saguaro, there is [only] one, maybe sometimes two, back country rangers. You're talking 70,000 acres, mountains, etc., and by adding ten, or fifteen, or twenty uniformed personnel as eyes and ears, it's a tremendous assist. So, I basically volunteered my time.

SSH: Do you have any other comments before we conclude?

WP: I would like to just say, to start with, that almost everyone in uniform that I have been privileged to work with, or to know, I have had great admiration for. The military is sort of a breed apart from most people. As an Army officer, my word was my bond. I got off the ship, coming back from China, [after] World War II, I had three dollars in my pocket, and I had a two, or three, or four day train ride from Washington State to New Jersey, where I was going to be discharged. I got off the ship, I walked down to the first bank I'd come to, I walked in, and I said, "Could you cash me a small check?" "Yes, sir, Lieutenant. How much?" I said, "Well, fifty dollars will be more than enough." "Fine." I said, "I have one problem. I don't have a check." "Oh, what's the name of the bank?" "Long Branch Trust Company, Long Branch, New Jersey." He opened a book. "Yes, sir," handed me a blank check. I wrote, "Long Branch Trust Company, Fifty Dollars," signed my name, and ... [he] handed me the cash, and that won't happen to anybody again, today, but, it left a ... warm spot in my heart, not only for Seattle, but, for the fact that, if I hadn't been in uniform, I probably couldn't have done it. If I had my life to live over again, I'd probably do it the same way. [After] three wars, I can't hear very good anymore, but, I still play tennis three times a week and most anything I can do in the upright position, I can still do as good as most. There are lots of little incidents that go along the way. Most people, most Americans, and I think around the world [that] most people don't realize that an armed force is more than a bunch of dough boys carrying a rifle and learning how to shoot somebody. An armed force, when you're talking World War II days, you were talking about a ten million man force, scattered all around the globe. Even today, the Armed Forces of the United States are all around the globe. We have 100,000 troops still in Germany. We got a handful, maybe less than a division, now, still in Japan and Okinawa. You've got them on some of the Pacific islands. You have attachés in almost every country in the world. You've got air bases other places that you've never heard of, and this all has to be designed, redesigned, staffed, re-staffed, supplied, re-supplied, moved, and most people don't realize that everything that is

done in civilian society, basically, is done, and, sometimes, to a better degree, in the military. You go ashore, you take your own police force, you take your own fire department, you take your own medical system, you take your own supply system. It has to be sustained by aircraft, or by ships, or whatever, and most people don't stop to think about it from this point of view. So, I just hope our current president doesn't decimate us to the point where we can't do the next job coming up and there may be one coming up.

SSH: How has this recent wave of downsizing affected the Army?

WP: Well, I've been retired now for nineteen years, so, I am not what you'd call in real close touch with what's going on, but, ... the other day, I think it was our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General, and his name is a tough one, [laughter] said that, "The Armed Forces, yes, they have been downsized, but, quality wise and equipment wise, they are probably better than ever." I hope that's right.

SSH: When you were serving at the Pentagon, who was the Joint Chief of Staff?

WP: We had a couple. General Westmoreland was for a while, ... and then, who followed him? [General Creighton Abrams] Again, memory. [laughter]

SSH: Thank you again for your time. This concludes an interview with Colonel William Prout.

[Tape Paused]

This is an addendum to an interview with Colonel William Prout.

WP: Going back to Sweden and the fact that, not only was Sweden opposed to our role in Vietnam, some of our American troops were, also, and we had a number of American soldiers, sailors, and airmen desert and come to Sweden. When President Ford proclaimed his amnesty program, me, the Army officer, basically got the job that the US consul previously had. Any American in country, up until that time, ... we couldn't touch. The American consul had had the authority. Once President Ford declared his amnesty program, proclaimed it, then, I became the point of contact for all military deserters in Sweden, and I had the "dubious pleasure," and I put that in quotes, but, at least the occasion, to interview, and, eventually, send home maybe 200 to 250 young Americans who had, for whatever their own personal reasons, ... gone awry. ... This was, again, an interesting facet. ... It's one thing to have somebody you know get killed in combat. It's something else to have him, basically, quote-unquote, "shoot himself" by deserting the armed forces and trying to seek asylum someplace else. I hope that those that I sent home have managed to succeed in the later parts of their lives.

SSH: This concludes an interview with Colonel William L. Prout on March 10, 1996, in Tucson, Arizona, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/12/00
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 6/14/00