



Mr. Carlton Onderdonk -- 3/16/2007

By Tina Mathews, CRRL Intern, editor

Interviewed by Tom Lyons

Today is the 21st of October 2003. My name is Tom Lyons, and I'm talking with Carlton Onderdonk who was a former Scoutmaster in the Fredericksburg area. Mr. Onderdonk was born June 6, 1930, is married to the former Shirley Hedrick and they have three children: Susan Elisabeth Onderdonk, Kathryn Onderdonk Perlewitz, and David Carlton Onderdonk. The National Boy Scout Jamboree has been held at Camp A. P. Hill in Caroline County since 1981, and at times has attracted better than a quarter of a million people. The interview begins with a discussion of the jamboree and of some of the Eagle Scouts of the Fredericksburg area.

Mr. Onderdonk: Well, for the young ones the Jamboree is infectious because they experience it and want to look four years hence.

Interviewer: I heard that the first three Eagles in Fredericksburg were Cornwell, Elwood Garrett, and Waldo Beck. I'm afraid that I do not remember Mr. Cornwell's first name.

Mr. Onderdonk: Isn't that something? Is that right?

Interviewer: But the funny thing I thought was Mr. Beck was talking about how Eagle Courts were conducted at the Mary Washington amphitheater.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, yes. That's true. I never saw one there, but I heard about it.

Interviewer: Isn't that a great idea?

Mr. Onderdonk: It suits the atmosphere, being outside.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's out there; it's part of the community.

Mr. Onderdonk: And in nature, too.

Interviewer: The other thing is about the 12 mile First Class hike.

Mr. Onderdonk: My oldest grandson, Stephen Kerr, is 12. He turned 12 in June, and he calls me every time he goes up for Court of Honor. He called me about a month ago to tell me he'd be getting his First Class, and he said he got several merit badges. I said, "Well, how many Stephen?" "Well," he said, "Five or six, and you know." But he and I talk a lot about scouting obviously, and his dad, John Kerr, is an Assistant Scoutmaster, so I think he's getting the understanding as to what it's all about. Not just getting merit badges.

Interviewer: It used to be badge accumulation. It used to be older guys, when they were trying to turn Eagle, they'd go to summer camp and get maybe four or five at a time, and that would do it. The current Mattaponi district is Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County, King George County and Caroline County, and they get together for their district dinner. Do you recall where they used to have district dinners around here?

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh yes, in a lot of different places. Most of them were around in different churches because they had the facilities and schools. Of course my beginning in Scouting was when the Rappahannock district encompassed Stafford County and part of Prince William County. Of course, Prince William County has its own district now because the two Quantico troops -- one on Quantico Marine Corps Base and one part of the Quantico town community -- were a part of the Rappahannock district..

Interviewer: I think those folks now are part of the Aquia district.

Mr. Onderdonk: Quantico is part of Aquia?

Interviewer: Right, they're no longer part of our district, and probably you do lose a little bit of vitality without young people coming in.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, I guess. Did you become involved in Scouting as an adult or as a youth?

Mr. Onderdonk: I was involved with Scouting as a youth. I was in Troop 171. And then, later on I transferred to Troop 179, which is at Fairview Baptist Church and was Senior Patrol Leader there for a year-and-a-half. Then I got active in sports and school, and Scouting kind of took a back seat at the time. But, one thing I notice here was that the

troops were primarily supported by the churches. Currently there's not one at the Fredericksburg Baptist Church..

Interviewer: These are the ones that are currently in Fredericksburg. [referring to the list at bottom of article]

Mr. Onderdonk: Now, Dr. Bob Caverley was the pastor, and he walked up to me and asked me to be Scoutmaster.

Interviewer: In Troop 171 ?

Mr.Onderdonk: In Troop 171, and he said,"The troop is inactive,and I want you to take over as the Scoutmaster.' I said, ` Dr. Caverley, I don't think I can do that. I'm not 21 years of age.'[aside he said:"Oh I'll take care of that"]. I have, somewhere in my belongings, a registration card that says I was s Scoutmaster, and I was 20 years old. And that began my tenure in Scouting as an adult.

Interviewer: Do you remember the year that that was?

Mr.Onderdonk: 1950.

Interviewer: 1950, okay. And Dickie Graves. December 19. 1957 where were the sponsored Cub Packs?

Mr. Onderdonk: At the Fredericksburg Baptist Church, we had a troop, which got reactivated, and it began to grow. We had a Cub Pack there, and Barbara Geslock , who recently passed away, was instrumental in that one from the word go. Later on Bobby Jones organized the Explorer Post in the Fredericksburg Baptist Church and served with me for some years as Assistant Scoutmaster. But the church up here on the corner, the Lutheran Church, had probably the very best Cub Pack in the district. It was probably because the pastor there was a cub master and hard charging. It was loaded with kids, very active, and he was a hard charging cub master, and it showed.

Interviewer: What was the size of the Cub Packs?

Mr. Onderdonk: That pack probably had close to 70, 80 kids in it. And a good number of adults obviously. Den Chiefs and Assistant Den Chiefs and Den Mothers, and most of the Cub Packs as I remember then were around 30 to 40 population-wise.

Interviewer: Basically in churches?

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh yes.

Interviewer: See, I don't understand why that's changed. It's all chartered to schools now. There's one still in the city here that is chartered to a church.

Mr. Onderdonk: Is that right?

Interviewer: Yeah, just one.

Mr. Onderdonk: The downside, if there is a downside, of having an enormous unit size. is to get the boys the attention they need.. They probably need to be divided into two or three Cub Packs-- that group for instance. But, if you've got a strong leader, they can only be in one place at one time.

Interviewer: What rank did you end up as a Scout?

Mr. Onderdonk: I got First Class, then. Then later on when I went to Troop 179, I finished up, and I got my Eagle. And, I cherished it greatly.

Interviewer: I mean, that was the same way I was. After you got to high school there were other things to do, and mostly on weekends if you were on any sports team, it was much more attractive going someplace with the sports team than it was with the Scouts.

Mr. Onderdonk: I might disagree just a bit.

Interviewer: Sure.

Mr. Onderdonk: I will tell you two quick stories. One was a lad, who's a grown man now, [John Jefferson] that got Eagle during my tenure as a Scoutmaster. I feel very fortunate that I had as many scouts, because I was a benefactor of those lads making Eagle. He said to me. that when he applied at Virginia Tech to go to college. there was a question on there: 'Were you an Eagle Scout?' Now I don't know whether that's on that form today or not. but somebody saw the wisdom and the value in that determination. To them that said. "You've got leadership potential." And the other thing was. I was going to digress a bit, and that is that when I said I was a benefactor. During those 25 years. I had the good fortune of having 33 boys to make Eagle Scout. And recently, I got a phone call from the chairman of Troop 171 asking if I would come talk to the boys and the parents after a Court of Honor

was concluded. I did that, and he wanted me to give him a list of names and phone numbers of those who live locally. I said, 'You realize its been 53 years since I've started? For me to go back and recapture names and phone numbers would be hard.' 'Well, do the best you can.' I came up with ten that live locally. The other 23 live away from here. Now, out of the total of 33, I can recall 30 out of 33 that made Eagle. I have a hard time, and it bothers me. I can't think of the other 3. [Mr. Onderdonk provided the list at the end of this interview.]

Interviewer: You know, you're happy for each one of them.

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh, yes.



Staff photo by Barry Fitzgerald

Carlton Onderdonk with 18 of the 33 Boy Scouts which have attained Eagle rank under him.

Carlton Onderdonk with 18 of the 33 Boy Scouts which have attained Eagle rank under him.

Interviewer: And what happens is. you've ,Tot the programs, and certainly have all the files and stuff.

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh yeah, that"s old stuff there.

Interviewer: Old memories there.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah, sure it is.

Interviewer: Do you recall who were the significant individuals in Scouting in Fredericksburg? You know, who started it down here; were there any people with the banks that sort of got it going? Any community leaders?

Mr. Onderdonk: I'm not sure I'm in a position to answer that, because Scouting was ongoing when I became a Scoutmaster. Now, some significant people, you mentioned, Waldo Beck was one. Another one that just passed away last week, George Scotty Blaine. And Hank Steigleder down in Bowling Green, now don't ask me to spell his last name, it's worse than Onderdonk, and Jesse Russell was down there also.

Interviewer: Well, Jesse is still around.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, he is. Hank's still around, I don't know that he's doing anything in Scouting.

Interviewer: Yes he is; he shows up every year at the Order of the Arrow.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah he's been involved with that for a long time. And I had a couple good friends up in Culpeper, such as Charlie Robson, that were active and not just on the roles they did a super good job with the troop up there and were Al Grady's competitor when it came to camporees and competing and things like that. We had J. Edmund Smith who was an individual that worked with me for years as Assistant Scoutmaster. He also was one of the primary people here on the Fredericksburg Rescue Squad. So, consequently, every other year as part of our fall program or winter program we would take the basic Red Cross First Aid Course. And he taught it, so we had all kinds of guys that were certified, and that was one of our strong suits when we competed.

Interviewer: Well, he was a Red Cross Certifying instructor?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, oh yes.

Interviewer: He used to do it for the adults and boys?

Mr. Onderdonk: And boys, yes. What we did was we went to the Rescue Squad building and went upstairs where they have a room that is set up for training purposes. It had mannequins and the whole bit, and our guys really got a hands on experience, especially when he was there as a certified instructor, and they of course, knew him well because of his being Assistant Scoutmaster.

Interviewer: I know that's sort of the ideas that they're looking for and things like that, but do you recall where they used to have camporees and stuff?

Mr. Onderdonk: Well, they rotated those into the different geographical areas of the district, like Culpeper I just mentioned.

Interviewer: Did they stay in the district?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, and we had some in Caroline County, other than at AP Hill, and that became the permanent jamboree site.

Interviewer: They still use that.

Mr. Onderdonk: That's right.

Interviewer: And they like to use that so people won't say it's not being used.

Mr. Onderdonk: And we went, even when the Quantico troops were not actively involved, at that time, with us at that time in the Rappahannock district, we were able to use the grounds along the reservoir and all that up there, and it was some real fine camping. I have a patch, and to my knowledge, it's the only one that ever came off. There was a council Camporee, and it was at Soldier's and Sailor's Home in D.C., and I have a patch for that.

Interviewer: Never heard about that.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, it was only done one time, because the council got too big. Just like council dinners that were open, not the way it is now where you register, make a reservation, and you go and sit down, a few people. It was like they had it at the National Guard Armory in D.C. And they would have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people from all the districts. And that, too, had to be curtailed because of the growth of the council.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is difficult. I guess the dinners that they have, they still have the lodge dinner in December, and I think the only other council-wide affair they would have, would be sort of like the Silver Beaver award ceremony..

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: That's probably about it. I don't think they have anything else.

Mr. Onderdonk: I think that's in June, annually.

Interviewer: Did they ever do any Scout circuses or Scout shows down here in Fredericksburg?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah, they had those. Of course, also, it was a big display of Scouting. They used to have an organized George Washington birthday festival in February, on Washington's birthday, because of the significance of his growing up across the river, there was a lot going on then. Scout groups were encouraged to have displays down town.

Interviewer: Did they camp or was this just sort of a day affair?

Mr. Onderdonk: A day affair.

Interviewer: Did they put dioramas in stores and everything?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, yes. And they had a parade, and troops, as well as Cub Packs, were expected to sign up and participate.

Interviewer: Actually, I remember, they used to open up the grounds of Mount Vernon, and invite the Scouts up there. Since I've been down here, they've opened it up once, and they invited them to camp for, I forget what the reason was, but some of them did go up and camp there, and this was an annual thing in February? When did that stop, and why did that?

Mr. Onderdonk: I'm not sure when that stopped, Tom. It went on for several years. My wife laughs because when we were marching in the parade one particular year, I was insistent upon the guys in the troop wearing their uniforms. They had to wear warm clothing under that uniform, and it was bitter cold. She laughs now when she thinks about

it. She said I came down the street with the troop, and I looked like a frozen zombie. And I felt like it, too.

Interviewer: I believe there are still parades they go to, not in Mattaponai, but in Stafford County. Maybe it's Christmas or something like that, but I've never really seen any of that around here. What they have started for the first time this year is to do the Scout Show in Hurkamp Park and ask the troops to set up a rope bridge and whatever, that type of thing, and that's great.

Mr. Onderdonk: The more exposure you get out there before the public, the more young lads see it and want to be a part of it.

Interviewer: Down on the fairgrounds, did they ever do anything down at the fairgrounds?

Mr. Onderdonk: There have been a few things over the years over at the fairgrounds, but it has not been a continual thing.

Interviewer: They asked the Scouts to participate, asked them to set up a monkey bridge?

Mr. Onderdonk: Set up displays and monkey bridges, yeah. Dahlgren has had some mighty fine troops over the years, and a lot of those were run by military folks and other times by civilians. The Willet brothers were active down there in Scouting for a good number of years and had a real fine troop. The Methodist Church has had a troop for many years.

Interviewer: There are still lots of keen Scouters down in Dahlgren. You mentioned you're working. You're retired, I take it you've got a second job now?

Mr. Onderdonk: I do this very poorly, twiddling thumbs. So I have to have something to do. I retired in 1990, from the federal government, after 35 years. But, we were, my wife and 1, were one of 7 seed families to go out and begin what is now Chancellor Baptist Church. Well I ended up being the chairman of the construction committee, so I can tell you where every nut and bolt in that church is! When that was all finished, and we occupied the church, I was back to doing this. So I called a friend of mine, Julian berry, who has a woodworking shop out on Ely's Ford Road, [Wood Products by Berry] and I said, 'Do you need any help?' 'Yeah' I said, 'Well I'm looking for something to do.' He said, 'Come on out here.' So, it's been 12 years now. So I went out

there to this woodworking shop, I started out working at a radial saw eight hours a day, it started getting to my knees. I said I'm going to have to hang it up. 'Well, I tell you what,' he said, 'Why don't you and I trade places?' Now he owns the business, he doesn't have to, nor is he going to stand there eight hours a day. He was taking the truck, picking up lumber and taking it to the shop, and or taking stuff that was finished to the customers. He said, 'Why don't you and I trade places?'

Interviewer: A little variety.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah, and so I was doing that eight hours a day. And finally I got around and I said, 'Well you know, I don't need to work eight hours a day.' 'Well, you come in at 7:30, and if the truck's not loaded, load it, and make your deliveries, or pick up lumber, and you split at noon.' I said, 'Okay.' Well, right now, we're so far behind you wouldn't believe. I don't know why all of a sudden all these order kept coming, so I'd been extending my day up to 3:00, and that's why I postponed your visit until this time of day.

Interviewer. Well, that's fine with me, because well what happened, I had the same problems after I retired, I sort of sat around and then I was sleeping late in the morning. I said 'Hey, I've got to stop here and get some reason to get up.' So I go over to the Y, and I usually open up over there at seven, start two hours a day, and that's it, it's my reason to get up and get going now. Some of us just need a starter. Can't sit there.

Mr. Onderdonk: The first thing is, I didn't learn too well, I guess I'm a slow learner. When I went to work at Quantico, I was there ten years, then I went up to Ft. Belvoir for four, and then I went to Headquarters of Marine Corps for eighteen, and then I ended up in the last three with the Navy in Alexandria. But, I wouldn't change any of that. What I started saying, then it slipped my mind, was that all those years, and I still do it, seven days a week, I get up at 5:00. Habit.

Interviewer: You do need to keep in the little routine that is there. Was your troop involved in High Adventure trips? Did you do your yearly program?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, I was called back to active duty with a reserve unit. I got, I petitioned to get, they were supposed to get out the end of August, and I went wrote a letter, and they went all up the chain of command to the Secretary of the Army, asking if I could be relieved

early, because I had been selected as one of the leaders of Philmont Scout Ranch. And George Fry did let me out early, and so I took, I think it was 18 of the boys out of my troop, and another Assistant Scoutmaster went along. He took half, and I took half and went on a trail with them. The only financial support we got, as a troop, was that we talked the church into giving us \$450.00 a year. But it had strings attached. It could only be used for sending lads to the National Jamboree. We did that every year starting in 1953, right on up until, well I hung it up in 1975, but we had lads out of the troop down there in 1981 to AP Hill. The only Jamboree I missed, personally, between 1953 at Valley Forge, and my last one down here was '81 on the staff, was 1960 at Colorado Springs. I had to be on travel for the Marine Corps, and I couldn't get out of that.

Interviewer: What staff position were you on at the Jamboree?

Mr. Onderdonk: I have served as Camp Staff, with Camp Staff responsibilities. The last one down at '81, I was on the area show staff.

Interviewer: That's fun, that's fun. Food has improved, I think, each time; it seems like it gets better. As long as you don't move, because they have put a lot of effort into setting up a nice place down there. I am on the SCUBA staff.

Mr. Onderdonk: Are you?

Interviewer: So I enjoy that.

Mr. Onderdonk: So you work with Bob Talent?

Interviewer: Oh yeah, yeah, sure.

Mr. Onderdonk: Bob's good, he and his wife both are good friends of mine.

Interviewer: Yes, sure. They were in the district when I first arrived here.

Mr. Onderdonk: And he's been involved with that umpteen years.

Interviewer: Well, he comes from Key West. Just sort of fit right in on that sort of Jimmy Buffet type stuff. Summer camps, where did you go to summer camp?

Mr. Onderdonk: Well, occasionally we would go to this council camp or we went to Roosevelt, when that was over on Chesapeake Bay before they sold it. We went to several other council camps, but for the most part, because I had I was very fortunate, I had an active committee of ten, and I had anywhere from four to seven Assistant Scoutmasters. Most of the time, we ran our own summer camp, like Sherando Lake, up next to Waynesboro in the mountains. We used that for our summer camp for years. But periodically we would break the going there to give the boys the options to get to go somewhere else.

Interviewer: I guess personally I always liked to go to different ones and the kids wanted to go to different places.

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Some troops go to Goshen every year, and I guess some go to some place up in Maryland, too.

Mr. Onderdonk: And we went to a council camp up next to Johnstown, Pennsylvania. A former Assistant Scoutmaster to me became a camp ranger there, and so we went up there a couple different times over the years.

Interviewer. Well, I think the thing is, how far has the district gone south, is this about -

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah, Caroline County is about as far as it went. And north, as I said, we were into Prince William County before it became its own district.

Interviewer. Yeah, we're still moving along, here.

Mr. Onderdonk: And then of course, Rappahannock has now been divided into two districts.

Interviewer: One of the things downtown, there was a marker for a Scoutmaster, Russell Ferry, of Boy Scout Troop 849, 'A friend to old town Fredericksburg and many people who visit there.' Do you know anything about that?

Mr. Onderdonk: That doesn't ring a bell with me.

Interviewer: It's on Sophia and George Street. I don't know who troop 849 is, no one that I know around knows what it is, so I asked our

Exec. He must have done something, to have a good troop, to have a good plaque installed.

Mr. Onderdonk: Where is the plaque?

Interviewer: It's on Sophia and George Street, on the parking lot. There are crepe myrtles around it, about four crepe myrtles and a little brick -

Mr. Onderdonk: No date was put with it?

Interviewer: There was no date on the thing, no date.

Mr. Onderdonk: That's intriguing. Now the thing that I also mentioned to you on the phone when we talked was the picture that Burt Brooks has, and it's about 2 feet long and about 8 inches tall, and as I said it shows two troops, you might know the wind would be furling the flags, so you can't read the name or the number or anything, and the commanding general of Quantico at the time is sitting in a chair. I'm hoping that Burt's going to take it apart and look and see if there's anything on the back of it. Because the one thing it says is that Justice Smith did -- took the picture -- and it did say it was 1925.

Interviewer: I've got pictures of troops that were taken in the 1960s that were all in uniform sitting there nice. How large was your troop, anyways, just average?

Mr. Onderdonk: Mine?

Interviewer: Just average. Your troop.

Mr. Onderdonk: It averaged about 50. I retired as Scoutmaster in 1975, and in 1972 was the largest it ever got to, there were 85 boys in it. But, again, I had all kinds of help. I had seven Assistant Scoutmasters, and an active working committee of ten. When we went camping, the committee went camping, because they enjoyed it that much. And they were there to support.

Interviewer: What was the reason then it sort of petered out?

Mr. Onderdonk: Well.

Interviewer: The times?

Mr. Onderdonk: When I retired, one of my assistants took over as Scoutmaster, and he was there for three or four years, Bobby Lee. The Lee family there are five boys, I say boys, they're grown men now, and all five made Eagle Scout of the same family. And the dad, T. Eldred Lee, was District Chairman at one time. Bobby was there in that capacity for two or three years, and then he stepped aside, and another lad that made Eagle under me took over. I think he just lost the support he needed to make sure the troop kept going, and it became inactive. Well, when I heard about that, because at that time we were in Chancellor, I talked to the pastor at Fredericksburg Baptist Church and told him I wanted to see the troop get back active again, and they decided that they didn't want to sponsor it at that time. So I worked through the District Executive to get the troop transferred -- reactivated and transferred to Chancellor Baptist Church, and it was there for a good number of years. Now it is supported by the Spotsylvania Presbyterian Church. They're up and coming, they've got a troop of about 45 boys and adequate leadership. Good leadership.

Interviewer: Things do change, I guess, and when the Scoutmasters leave --

Mr. Onderdonk: -- a lot of times it makes a difference.

Interviewer. It does, unfortunately, impact the troop something severe like that. Let's see. Were there any hiking trails around in Fredericksburg?

Mr. Onderdonk: Not as such, not that Scouting developed. Some of the Recreational Departments, in the counties as well as the city, developed trails. Now, a lot of lads who were going for Eagle got involved in those by a portion of whatever they were doing, or whatever they wanted to cover, as their Eagle project that was approved, and they went ahead and did that, so it all fit in real well. But Scouting to my knowledge, did not take the lead in establishing the trails here.

Interviewer: There are a few trails that the council supports around in Washington.

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: But the Visitor's Center down there, if you stop in, they have two or three trails that were established by Scouts as projects,

and I've done those and those are sort of neat. It's a good background.

Mr. Onderdonk: And I like that program that the council has in tandem with the city, where the Scouts and leaders come in from other parts of the council and visit the various churches. They are oriented on the history of each church

Interviewer. Oh, you mean this one here [looking at folder].

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes.

Interviewer. That was Barry Jones's.

Mr. Onderdonk: He was the originator.

Interviewer. It appeared in Boys' Life, I think they did that in some other area. But I think he had the initiative of setting that up around here, and it's just perfect, too, because all the churches are within walking distance.

Mr. Onderdonk: It works out real well, and it's not uncommon to see leaders and boys hoof it as part of their trail.

Interviewer. My observation now is that the boys are younger and younger going on the trip.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah.

Interviewer Were there any other things around that they used to do, that were unique down here, outside of the George Washington Birthday Festival?

Mr. Onderdonk: Occasionally there would be an emphasis by various civic organizations for a promotion of a special event, and Scouting would be involved, invited to be involved with static displays and things like that. But none of them really, have been perpetuated over the years. The one for George Washington's birthday went for years, in February, so it was a big deal. In fact when my son was in Troop 171, during the Washington birthday celebration, they would issue them, as part of the festivities, a huge washer, which at that time was about the size of a silver dollar to try to throw across the river. He got it all the way across the river and got a \$25 savings bond for it.

Interviewer. Did the newspapers cover that type of thing?

Mr. Onderdonk: They did, they did a pretty good job of that, pictures and the stories and the whole bit.

Interviewer: That seems like something the kids would be for, things like that. Were there any District Execs. that stayed a long time in the area, or anything like that? My inclination is they just sort of stay for a year or two.

Mr. Onderdonk: Usually that's true, but we had one here for around five years, the name was Ed Fanning. And I guess he's retired from scouting now because eventually he went back to Ohio, in the professional ranks. We've had some here in Rappahannock that have stuck around for a longer tenure than what most of them do.



This photo dates back to the late 1950s, and includes at least one Eagle Scout, Gordon Raines. Others in the picture are Johnny Jefferson, H.B. Anderson, Phil Simpton and Bobby Smith.

1950s scouts Gordon Raines, Johnny Jefferson, H. B. Anderson, Phil Simpson, and Bobby Smith.

Interviewer: I think the thing is when they get here, they see this is a good area, and it's easy to get a job with more money.

Mr. Onderdonk: Scouting has to compete, and it's not always easy. The Round Tables were held at Fredericksburg United Methodist Church. They've been very good to Scouting for a good number of years. They offer the facilities for Round Tables, Cub Round Tables, Scout Round Tables, as well as training. A lot of training was going on

there. There have been other churches that have offered their facilities, like the Lutheran Church up here. There has been a lot of training held there over the years.

Interviewer. I think they are given now; Round Tables are down at the Liberty Bowling Lanes in Massaponnax

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh my.

Interviewer: Well, to get the facilities, you need a large space, and I guess that's where they move to now.

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh, it must be awfully hard to concentrate on what you're there for.

Interviewer: Though I do remember we had an Order of the Arrow banquet at this place, it was right next to a bowling alley, and they'd throw the ball down. You'd hear 'Boom, boom, boon-4' and there'd be laughs.

Mr. Onderdonk: I think that's counter-productive.

Interviewer. I used to love that sort of stuff. That's sort of the fun stuff there. But Troop 179, has been here 40 years, and they seem like they're the longest one. And then Troop 170 is 29 years, 30 years. So they're the two lengthy ones along with Troop 165, 12 years; and Troop 46, 15 years.

Mr. Onderdonk: Now, Troop 171 we reactivated it in 1950, and it stayed in Fredericksburg Baptist Church until 1992, and then it was inactive, and as I said we got it reactivated and transferred to Chancellor Baptist Church.

Interviewer: I know also we have commissioner meetings down at Shiloh Old Site Baptist Church, and they have a troop down there, for 15 years and going, so they're one of the longer running individuals down there. Thurman Brooks is the Scoutmaster down there, and he works at Dahlgren. Then Troop 72 in Hillcrest, that was what I was affiliated with up there, and that's just sort of going on ten years. The pastor is very supportive of Scouting.

Mr. Onderdonk: Well, we worked hard at trying to make sure that we had fun in every camping trip, and we camped 11 of the 12 months of the year. We preferably did not schedule camping trips in December,

we felt that was basically a church and family month and we ought not compete with that. So the other 11 months of the year we went camping, and we had a good time even when we got wet. I say that with some degree of amusement because a lot of the farmers around here that we know and knew then said, 'Well let us know when you guys are going camping because we'll know when it's going to rain.'

Interviewer: So camping was always on the agenda?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes, A yes. And we had a multitude of sites that we could choose from. We tried to vary that like we talked about, varying summer camp and things like that.

Jack Castle, who is now deceased, down at Santee, down at Caroline County, he was the Commanding General of Virginia, for the National Guard for years, and we had use of his farm. In March every year, we would have a camping trip that was geared to working the lads, we had 12 or 14 on the staff of older boys, and they would go down, and set out compass courses, and each patrol was given the compass readings to follow, to get to their destination for that particular -They'd leave Saturday morning, we'd move in of Friday night. We had central cooking then, and then Saturday morning after breakfast they'd get their compasses out and go their separate ways. We had two staff members to observe them -- from a distance, not there, let the patrol leader do his job -- and then we'd come back together Sunday afternoon, and critique as to how they did as a patrol. But it was a lot of fun, because these older Scouts felt that they had something to contribute because I never went down there, nor did any of my assistants. We would go down ahead of time, they would go down, and they would set out all the compass courses, and it was an enjoyable fun time.

Interviewer. Did you ever use that compass course up at Prince William Forest?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes. We took a troop home at a fun time, that took a weekend camping trip was only for fun. We took them up to Gettysburg a couple of times over the years not back to back years -- because that way we had new lads in the troop who hadn't experienced it before, and we didn't do a thing but have a good time. We came away with a greater appreciation of what took place at Gettysburg, as far as the war was concerned.

Interviewer. Yeah, actually I noticed some of the districts around here use that as a camporee, I think up there. I thought that was a neat idea. Our big trips around, we went up to West Point a couple of times, and we used to go with different troops. I took these guys up, and then we went to the Merchant Marine Academy, too. And the Naval Academy, so we went to the three of them. These guys had the opportunity there and they something out of each of them I think. So, hopefully we got a few sailors and soldiers out of the group. (laughs) But the Merchant Marine Academy is something different, they're sort of a lot more relaxed.

Mr. Onderdonk: Well, I can't believe they are as regimented as either of the other two.

Interviewer. But they sort of took us right in. We were in ready to cook and all, and the guy that was assigned to us, he says, 'Hey, just follow me. We're going to the mess hall.' So we went into the mess hall. Which was good, it was the only true -- the kids really enjoyed that too. Well, I think we touched on most of the points here. Was there anything I sort of missed as far as Scouting in Fredericksburg?

Mr. Onderdonk: No, I believe in the program, totally, obviously, because beside being a Scoutmaster for 25 years, I did continue working on the district level, for another 25. I'm not active now, but I feel that it's a program worthy of a young man to get involved with, and he can glean an awful lot that will go with him the rest of his life.

Interviewer: Do they keep you signed up?

Mr. Onderdonk: No, I'm not even a registered Scout.

Interviewer: Well, I'll tell you why, because I remember we were registering something, and someone came across, they said, 'We don't even know this individual; let's just not bother with him.' And well, that happened to be one of our big donors.

Mr. Onderdonk: That's not a good way to handle it, not at all.

Interviewer: Well, it's you sort of have a little respect for people that are down there, and ask them if they want to continue.

Mr. Onderdonk: Especially donors who say, 'Hey, I haven't got the time to take an active role in Scouting, but this is my way of being a

partner in the program. I can contribute.' And if we said, 'Well, I don't know him, so let's don't worry about it,' that's not too swift.

Interviewer: How about General Sniffin, is he involved with Scouts around here?

Mr. Onderdonk: Yes. Peter Sniffin has been involved in Scouting for a long time before he came to Fredericksburg. His two grandsons, I know one, the older one, had just gotten his Eagle, and the other one is about to get it. Because they were in Korea, he didn't see his older one get his, but the other one is back here, I think at West Point now, his dad is a colonel and on the staff up there, and I think when the younger grandson is about to get his, granddad and grandma are going to be there. Peter has been very active during my time as a District Chair, in not only recruiting people, but recruiting donors to meet the goal that was set by the council for this district. And he has this way about him to get things done. You can look at the way he does things and see him as a general in the Army.

Interviewer: If he knows that area and knows who to ask.

Mr. Onderdonk: Oh he does; he does.

Interviewer: I think that's one of the problems they have around here: who are the people in the community that are willing to do it? They have problems getting people to make those commitments at this time. Well, the people you get are people willing to become a leader, but they have no background to be the leader, and we've sort of encountered people like that??

Mr. Onderdonk: That is one of the fallacies, I say fallacy, it's a problem for the district - any district, but certainly our district here -- is when you have a turnover in professionals, all too often there is no continuity that ensures that new Scout leaders are required to get the training. You can't do the job without the training. Now the training committee is supposed to be on top of that, but I'm not sure that

Interviewer: I think we're looking for a new training chairman.

Mr. Onderdonk: Yeah, but an effective leader has got to have training or he's not going to be effective very long, if even at all.

Interviewer: Okay, well, I guess we were going to talk for about an hour or so, and it's about 5:00, so I am going to close off for now.

Thank you for your time and for sharing all of this wonderful information about Scouting in the Fredericksburg area.

Mr. Onderdonk: You are welcome.

The interview concludes with an informal discussion of local scouting and leadership efforts.

Troop 171 Eagle Scouts - Between 1950 and 1975

Paul Christie, Jack Ellis, Ronnie Ellis, Robert Ellis, Eddie Campbell, H. B. Anderson, Butch Fitzgerald, Val Folden, Phil Gallahan, Steve Gallahan, Buddy Gibson, Dickie Graves, Donnie Hicks, Greg Hollaman, John Jefferson, Ted Jenks, John Jones, Benny Lenox, Keith Littlefield, Butch Morris, Johnny Perry, Gordon Raines, Craig Schleigh, Lance Ward, Sam Saunders, Tom Shelton, Phil Simpson, Bobby Smith, Donnie Rawlings, John Ventura.