

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT J. GORMAN
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and
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TRANSCRIPT BY
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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Vincent J. Gorman on July 19, 1995 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and...

Rekha Gandhi: Rekha Gandhi

KP: I guess I'd like to begin, before we get to your wartime experiences, by asking you about your family. Both your mother and father were Newark natives?

Vincent Gorman: Yes.

KP: They had lived there all their lives?

VG: Yes.

KP: Your father was a chauffeur?

VG: Yes, truck driver ... chauffeur.

KP: How did he end up in the business, do you know?

VG: I have no idea. He didn't have that much education, like people then. My mother [was] the same way. And then, so, I guess, whatever job they got, they considered themselves lucky, because they worked for the city. You had good steady work.

KP: So, he worked for the city through the 1920s and 1930s?

VG: Yah, yes, yes. And through the Depression. I was telling Rekha ... during the Depression, he was paid in scrip. They didn't have any money. [The] city was broke and we didn't have any supermarkets. The A&P (...?) was just growing then, I guess. In, he was paid in scrip. We'd bring it down to the butcher's. My father would present it. Then, when he [the butcher] got paid, I guess, what they did with that, I don't know. They would present it to the city and hope they'd get paid, or, whatever. 'Cause, nobody had any money so ... but the kids didn't figure anything unusual, because nobody else had money.

KP: But, your father, and you, always considered yourselves lucky, growing up, because your father seemed to always have work?

VG: Oh yes, yes.

KP: Except for the scrip?

VG: Yes, yes, yup. We didn't have any money, but, I guess, we weren't unusual in that regard. So, we never thought about going anyplace. [laughter] Couldn't go anyplace.

KP: So, before the army, you really hadn't traveled outside of the New York-New Jersey area?

VG: No, no, no, no, no, no, Lord no. Well, I did, I am saying no. I remember, one time, we went down to [the] Keansburg Beach area. My father had a vacation, and so, we could afford to go there. It was practically nothing. So, we went there in the summertime, one time. But other than that, no, didn't go above the Penn Station. I lived in what was called Down Neck Newark. I don't know if you know of that area in the Ironbound section.

KP: Yeah, I know that area well.

VG: And, we'd never get past the Penn Station.

KP: So, you didn't go up to Branch Brook?

VG: Branch Brook Park?

KP: Yeah.

VG: Oh, I played baseball there. Walked up there

KP: Oh, okay. Your father, he didn't serve in World War I?

VG: No, no.

KP: Why?

VG: I don't know why. Maybe family, I don't know. His age might have been that (...?). I don't think, 'cause he was only forty-two when he died, so he could have been very young.

KP: Your father died while you were growing up. How did that affect the family?

VG: Yes, yes. Well I ... know it affected my mother, quite a bit. I was telling Rekha, [I'd buy], I don't know how they could exist. We had five children. How could she raise five children? And I can remember, people said, they suggested what they called "relief," then. There was no welfare, they called it relief. She wouldn't hear of that, she was stubborn Irish, (...?), no relief. That was beneath her. But, we had nothing, but that was beneath her. So, she used to work at night. She worked in the Prudential Building, I remember, cleaning woman and so forth. And that was it, that was about all we existed on. And then, my older brother and sister, they were past sixteen. So, they went to work, they worked in a Benjamin Moore Paint factory. And, between that [and my mother's job], that was the income. That's how we existed.

KP: When your mother worked at night, who stayed home? Did your older brothers watch you?

VG: Yeah, yeah. Well, they were ... yes.

KP: How long did your mother work? I mean, what hours did she keep?

VG: Gee, I don't know the specific hours. All I know is, it was at night, during the night sometime, and, when you are a kid, you don't think of those things.

KP: So your mother would cook you dinner, and then, go off to work.

VG: Yup, yup. And, I guess, how long do they work, cleaning offices, and toilets, and stuff like that? So, I don't know.

KP: Your father didn't get any sort of pension, or death benefit, from the city?

VG: No, no, nope. I don't think those things existed then, yet. Social Security and stuff like that, yet.

KP: It sounds like your mother and your father, before he died, were very active in the Church?

VG: Oh yes, yes. Saint James' Church, in Newark, oh yeah, it was a very active parish. And that part ... I feel very fortunate, the families, that was the community center. Then, we had four priests in the parish, and everybody did something. We were all involved, from the time you were in grammar school, a kid, till you grew up, you moved from one thing to another. The parish church was our center. So, that was good, kept us busy, kept us off the streets. Well, we played on the streets, too.

KP: You said you had a remarkable priest in your parish, who you mentioned before we started the interview, who would later serve on Guadalcanal. Was he there, when you were growing up?

VG: Yes, yes. Father (Reardon?). Yes, Father Reardon.

KP: Father Reardon was ...

VG: He just died, a few years ago, yeah. Yeah, he had (...?), he got malaria, very bad, over in, over in the islands. And, I tell you, it hit him every once in a while, and they'd have to cart him off to the hospital. He'd be yellow, and they'd feed him quinine, 'cause that's all they could do then, I guess. They had no other treatment. So, he was, he was a remarkable person; all priests are. He was a chaplain ... I guess they had to get permission, or something, from the bishop, to volunteer for service, which he did. And he wound up in the Navy, and that's how he wound up at Guadalcanal. I can understand a fellow like him, knowing him, in person, that he was where he should be. Guys appreciated chaplains.

KP: It sounds like they were putting themselves in harm's way.

VG: Yes, oh yes, they did, they did all the time. And, I met a couple good ones, over in Europe. And I met, I wouldn't go into details, one fellow, I didn't care for too much. ... But, we were in Hurtgen Forest [on the German-Belgian border] at the time, and, boy, it was, it was in November, I guess, or so, of '44, yeah, and, pouring like mad, Oh Lord! We just had these ponchos, and they said, anybody wants to go to Mass, you meet at a certain point, and then, you'd be transported someplace. They had a little weapons carrier, about four of us got on there, and we went to this clearing. And this chaplain-priest set up an altar, a [make-]shift altar. We were like drowned rats then, and we heard Mass. But, he wasn't too pleased about it. He wasn't too pleased about the turnout. I didn't know what he wanted us to do. [laughter] You can't call everybody off the line. So he said ... he thought he was wasting his time in the outfit. And, I don't even know his name, I couldn't remember his name now. He was from New York someplace.

KP: But it sounds like you had a really ...

VG: Didn't see him any longer. And yet, we ran into other, other chaplains, good chaplains. With the artillery, there was a Captain O'Neil, an Irishman from New York, and, a couple times at Mass, he was very inspirational. Very, very good, so I said, there's good and bad in everything.

KP: Your family, your father, and then your mother, were they active in any other organizations? Were they active in any Irish-American organizations?

VG: Not that I know of, not that I know of, no.

KP: Their lives really centered around the Church?

VG: Yes, yes, yes. My mother would be, she was part of the Rosary Society and my father would be [part of] the Holy Name [Society]. And, we used to have a big parade, Holy Name Parade, they called it, every year in Newark. All over, all the cities had it. And he had the job of getting enough fellows together to carry the banner. It was in a, in a device, a big heavy thing. And it'd be, it'd be windy, it was in March, not, not Saint Patrick's, although, [they] did the Saint Patrick's parade, too. And, it was a tough problem, holding down those flags and everything. So, he had that job of getting guys to do the job. Not everybody wanted to do that, but he would do it.

KP: You would parade in the Ironbound Section?

VG: No, down Broad Street.

KP: Down Broad Street?

VG: Yeah, yeah. Organizations came from all over. Parades were big things then. And then, when you had a parade, you had a big turnout, not only people marching, but people viewing it. And all the schools, school kids would go.

KP: It sounds like you have fond memories of the parades in Newark?

VG: Oh, yes, oh yes, oh yes, very, very much. Washington's birthday, Lincoln's birthday, which were held on Washington's birthday and Lincoln's birthday, not convenience dates. [laughter] Now, kids don't know what, you mention Mr. Washington's birthday, who's he? [laughter] Nobody cares when he was born, when he died, or anything like that. And it's all convenience.

KP: What about Armistice Day?

VG: Armistice Day? Do you mean...

KP: Or Veterans Day now.

VG: Oh, Veterans Day, now.

KP: But then, it was Armistice Day.

VG: Yeah, Armistice Day, yeah. Well, again, parades, same, same thing. Parades, we were familiar with, and everybody accepted them, and, I mean everybody, gee, and not just marching, but, but viewing. Thousands of people and everybody had a good time.

KP: You went to elementary school in the Ironbound, and then, you went to Eastside High School.

VG: Right.

KP: How good was your education, looking back on it?

VG: I thought it was very good. I think education, on the whole, was good then. And, I had gone to Seton Hall Prep, in South Orange, and couldn't afford to keep that up. And, how my mother got me in there, [I don't know?]. And, I played football, I was on the team, and, at that time, the colleges were big, the Catholic colleges were very big in recruiting guys. Fordham, and Georgetown, Villanova, and Boston College, and they would bring guys in from [all over]. We had a lot of players from Pennsylvania, big guys, who had gone through high school, but didn't take languages, or enough math, so they had to meet the college requirements. So, the college would pay the tuition ... there, at Seton Hall, and they would go there for a year and take geometry, or Spanish, or French, whatever, just to get the requirement. In the meantime, [they] played ball and they were good! Whew, they were big guys. And I was a kid, I weighed 147 pounds. I remembered, I was one of the walk-ons who made the squad. I played very little in the games, get

in the last minute, or something. So, we were sort of cannon fodder for these big hulks. And so, any rate, I wanted to play ball, you know ... I wasn't going to be able to play there much. So, I transferred down to Eastside and ... two years I played there.

KP: Which sport did you play, just football or others?

VG: Football, baseball. Track I didn't bother, [I] didn't have time for that. [laughter]

KP: When you were going to high school, in the 1930s and early 1940s, did you think you would go to college?

VG: The only hope would be a scholarship, but otherwise, no. I would like to go, and, I'll tell you the truth, the real attraction was playing football, or playing baseball, or whatever it might be. That was the big thing. Studies, they were secondary. You took them, you did all right, but that was secondary.

KP: You really envisioned playing football for a good school.

VG: Oh yes, oh yeah, I did. But, I did get quite a few scholarship offers. I went down to North Carolina University at the time, which was a big football school. They offered me the best they could, but, it still wasn't enough for me. My mother couldn't afford any extras, and there had to be extras. They couldn't, couldn't do any of that. So, [they?] said, well, if my situation changed within a year, or so, the offer is still open to come down, and they would, they would offer me the same thing. At that time, the big formation was "single wing." And, I played the single wing fullback in high school, and the single wing fullback handled the ball every play. He spun, he'd hand off, he threw, or he ran. And, they were a big ... single-wing school. So, I guess, that was, maybe, the interest in me. But, [to] make a long story short, I didn't go there. And then, the war came, I went to work. And, I was going to go in eventually, and I waited to be drafted, 'cause, again, [we] needed the income at home. I worked at night, from 12 o'clock to 8 o'clock in the morning, and I hated it. I worked for Celanese Corporation of America and I hated it, honestly.

KP: Which corporation was it?

VG: Celanese Corporation. It is now a different outfit.

RG: Its Hoechst-Celanese, isn't it?

VG: Its Hoechst, yeah, that's it.

KP: Was this in Newark?

VG: In Newark, yeah. I could walk to work. I was about ten blocks away from where I worked. And my brother worked there, my brother was a few years older than I, and he got me the job. He thought it was great. He had no concept. He thought it was great. I thought it was terrible.

KP: You had two brothers and a sister. None of them went to college?

VG: No, no.

KP: Was that by choice or simply because they couldn't afford college?

VG: I think it was, they couldn't afford it. They knew it was just plain impossible, so, they just dismissed that. My sister went to a two-year commercial high school, Catholic, Saint James' in Newark. That was it. She learned typing, and shorthand, and so forth. And then, my brother went to Eastside. He didn't graduate either. Because, again, they had to get out and work. They weren't any different than a lot of fellows.

KP: But one of your brothers was also in the military, your brother Frank?

VG: Yes, Frank.

KP: He didn't take advantage of the GI Bill?

VG: No, no.

KP: Because, he could have gone to college.

VG: Sure, sure. He could have. And, he talked about college, it was a lot of baloney. [laughter]

KP: So, in his case, he didn't want to go?

VG: No, I don't think he wanted to go. [laughter] He, he said differently, but, it was a lot of baloney. He could have gone. A lot of guys, fellows who had been in service, or relatives, they talked about [going to school]. A lot of guys griped about, in New Jersey, we never got a bonus. They owe us a bonus, and so forth. I thought, "Hey, I got a college education out of this. Got my Masters and everything." And I thought, it was the greatest thing that ever happened, but, they [said], "What about us guys?" I said, "You could have gone. It was your choice, you chose not to." But, again, a lot of fellows were making excuses, I think, for themselves, that they didn't go, should have gone, or, they really didn't want to go. But, they felt that the government owed them a lot, 'cause they gave us [GI Bill participants] something, but they didn't give them anything. They didn't take advantage of it. I think that the GI Bill was the greatest.

KP: Your mother, during World War II, did she change jobs, or did she just keep working?

VG: No, she worked.

KP: She just kept working for Prudential?

VG: Yes. She couldn't change much anything, 'cause she had no education, really. Again, she wasn't any different than most people, women, men. They couldn't move around too much, because they didn't have anything on paper.

KP: Growing up, did your family ever listen to Father Coughlin?

VG: Oh yes, oh yes. My mother swore by Father Coughlin. I don't think they thought too deeply about what he was saying. But, he was a good Catholic priest, and they, they didn't look at, really what he was saying, listen that deeply to what he was saying. But, you had to listen to Father Coughlin on Sunday, I think. He was on Sunday at four o'clock, or something, from Royal Oak, Michigan. And so, we listened to Father Coughlin.

KP: That's one of your memories, gathering around to listen to Father Coughlin?

VG: Oh yes, oh yes, on the radio. No television.

KP: What about Franklin Roosevelt? How did your family feel about him?

VG: Loved him, they loved him. I thought Roosevelt was good. He did a lot of things that had to be done. I think they were unconventional, unconstitutional, and everything else. But, he had the courage to do it, at the time, what had to be done. I don't know what else anybody could do ... Social Security, I think is, is the greatest thing he did, one of the greatest things. He was quite a personality. I can remember, when he was campaigning and there were thousands of people before the City Hall, in Newark. Everybody came, because he was the savior, and everybody wanted to crucify Hoover, and, but, in a working-class neighborhood. So, everybody showed up, and they had nine or ten big floodlights on, and so forth (...?). My brother lifted me up, he saw and he waved. [laughter] I thought that was the greatest thing I had seen, Franklin Roosevelt.

KP: You were very young at the time?

VG: Oh yes, oh yes. How old was I then?

KP: You must have been around ten years old?

VG: Ten years old ... '22, yeah, I was ten, nine maybe, when he was still campaigning. But, I thought Roosevelt was very good. Looking back at some of the things, like everybody else, maybe critical of this, that, and the other thing, like you can be of any president. But, I thought he was very good, did what had to be done.

KP: What about the Spanish Civil War? Did that issue ever come up at all, particularly in your parish? Did any of the priests ever express an opinion?

VG: Not really, no. Not that I know of. ... Not that I know ... I don't recall anything at all of them, saying anything.

KP: What about the war in Europe in the late '30s?

VG: I remember, our pastor, Father Tuohy, was ... I think if he could have shot Hitler, he would have shot him. [Hitler] was a very ungod-like person, and so forth.

KP: When was this?

VG: When he was...

KP: Coming to power in the '30s?

VG: Coming to power in the '30s, yes.

KP: Really, this priest was...

VG: Yes, oh yes, he was ... and he was very anti-Communist. He spoke about godless Communism, and so forth. And we didn't pay any attention. At that time, most people didn't, [to] the political things, and, for us, that was nothing. But, he would preach against communism and, as I look back at it, I think he was ahead of his time.

KP: So he was against Hitler and godless Communism. The two were linked in his mind?

VG: Oh yes, in his mind, there was no difference. And, of course, we didn't, 'cause we didn't delve on that, all we knew was, Jeez, there he goes again. [laughter] Didn't even know, we couldn't care less about Hitler, really.

KP: It sounds like what you really liked to follow was sports.

VG: Oh yeah, oh yes. That was the thing, that was the thing.

KP: Did you ever go see the Newark Bears play? I would imagine that would attract your interest.

VG: I lived, what, maybe two miles from the Bears Stadium. We were there all the time as kids. We used to go down at ... when they had practice, batting practice, in the morning. And they'd let us in, and we'd sit in the stands, and they'd rap one into the stands. We'd get the ball, they wanted the ball back. We can, 'cause they used, they didn't, [want to] throw a new ball every third pitch. And so, we would throw the balls back, and they'd give us tickets, tickets to the next ball game.

Sometimes, they'd hit one over the wall. Fellows would be standing outside the stadium, because, then, then you'd get that, that ball didn't go back. We'd see that ball, sometimes, on the field, guys, you play pickup games, sandlot games, and, and guys would say, "We got the Bears' ball. Let me see what kind of ball." Because, we had all taped-up balls, [that we] used. But, this other team had a Newark Bears ball, gonna hit that. [laughter] [The] Newark Bears were the greatest.

KP: What other sports events did you go to, any football, or basketball, in New York?

VG: No. No, it wasn't as big as it is today, anyway, pro ball. Baseball was the big thing. Even football was still in its infancy, coming into its own. I can remember the Newark Bears professional team, they played in, I think, it was called the American League. And they'd have playoffs. The Chicago Bears were the big team then. And, they'd have the playoffs, and the professional big leagues were finished, and they'd still be having the playoffs in the American. And, they played at Newark School Stadium, where we played our high school games, too, the city. And they would send down a player, or two. A lot of the other teams complained, because they would send ... I remember Sid (Luckman?) - Sid Luckman was great and I thought he was a great football player. But, he came down, and Johnny Long, several guys, McAfee brothers, or something, and, Newark Bears won the championship. But, basketball wasn't [very popular], I recall, and [I] didn't pay much attention to basketball pros.

KP: You graduated in 1941, in June of 1941.

VG: Right.

KP: And you had gotten this offer of an athletic scholarship that you simply couldn't afford to take?

VG: No, no, broke my heart, to tell you the truth.

KP: I would imagine.

VG: Oh, sure, sure. But, [if] you couldn't do it, you couldn't do it.

KP: So the first job you got was in the Celanese plant, which you were even more disappointed with.

VG: Yeah, yeah ... Oh Lord, honestly, I hated the job. I did all kinds of things.

KP: What did you do?

VG: I worked in a factory, whatever. You came in and you didn't know what you were going to do. You would work on one machine and be a helper. You'd be helping some fella. I helped my brother, my brother operated a machine. That was a higher-paying job. They got paid more. And, they had what they called the bonus system, or B Hours System, they were worth so many bonus

points. If you were assigned as a machine helper that night, well, you made more money. Otherwise, this is silly, [you were] a pad-brusher, they call it. A pad-brusher was a guy who took these big celluloid sheets from the sheeting machine. That was a noisy place too. Then, they put them in between these hot things. They were so hot, and they had to stay there for so many hours. They put them in big racks, and then, you had to take those things off. Then, they went into a cutting place, where they shaved them off even more and pressed them into different designs. So, that was my job, and, twelve to eight. I'd rather be someplace else. I used to go down to the beach, down to Long Branch, or someplace. Some guy had an old car, we'd pile in, and we'd go down and go swimming. And, go home about three o'clock, and you'd go to sleep and go to work again. There was a three-month stretch when [I] had no days off, worked seven nights.

KP: Seven nights a week, for three months?

VG: Yeah, oh yeah. The money was good. I gave the money to my mother.

KP: Then she gave you an allowance?

VG: Very little. Yes, two dollars a week. [laughter] Two bucks a week. And, but, you accepted it ... that was the thing. You knew you were doing what you should be doing. But, I hated the job. I quit there. I said to my brother, "I can't stand this any longer." He thought I was crazy. It was a good job. "No," I said, "This is terrible. I don't like the people I work with." Oh God! There were some really low-minded guys, so, I went to Western Electric, in Kearney. That I liked, because I worked with (a nice set of?) human beings.

KP: Really. What was the difference between the two plants that made such an impact on you?

VG: The surroundings were better, the people were better, generally on a higher plane. I don't know what you'd say would be a "higher plane". But, I always thought of, on a higher plane. The conversations were different.

KP: What would the conversations be like at Celanese?

VG: God ... Women, women, and drinking, and stuff like that.

KP: So, it would be cruder?

VG: Oh, very crude. The language was crude and everything. I mean, not that I considered myself a high-brow, but, I was thinking, "Boy, what a lousy place to be." I remember, this one fellow was on this, what they called, a planing machine. This thing, it took a big block of celluloid. They put it on the planer and they used micrometers, and so forth, to get a certain thickness that that sheet had to be, and they had this very sharp knife-like affair. And that thing went back and forth [makes slicing noises] all night long. And, it'd be maybe about ten machines in this whole place. And, I worked with this one fellow, he was an old pro-boxer from Jersey City, (Eddie Shredder?). And

Eddie's always chewing gum, or something. He had no teeth. [laughter] And, he had a nose over here, and cauliflower ears. Holy Christmas! I said, I said to him, in conversation, "Eddie," I said, "How long you worked here?" "Oh, I worked for thirty years." [laughter] Thirty years! He thought it was a great job. And, I said, "Boy, this place is terrible. How can you ever stay?" I said, "Do you always work at night?" He said, "Hey, if you work at night, you get a ten percent bonus," which you did. So, he thought that was the greatest, working at night, and he ... couldn't think of anything else, couldn't do anything else. [laughter]

KP: How long did your brother stay with the plant?

VG: [Until] he was, he was drafted. I don't know how long he worked there.

KP: He didn't go back?

VG: No, no. He went, he went to Benjamin Moore Paints. My sister worked there, and she got him a job there. He got out of Celanese, and he worked in the Benjamin Moore Paint place, which was a big place.

KP: Yeah, I hear it's still there.

VG: Yeah, along the Passaic River. I guess they are one of the outfits responsible for polluting that Passaic River, dumping all that stuff in it.

KP: Before I leave the Celanese plant, did you have a union at the Celanese plant?

VG: No, non-union.

KP: It was non-unionized?

VG: I don't know of any union.

KP: You went to Westinghouse...

VG: Yeah ... Western Electric ... yeah.

KP: ...You went to Western Electric, which sounds like a better place.

VG: It was in Kearny. I used to take a bus there. It was right next to the Kearny Shipyards, federal shipyards. They, they were going all the time, 24 hours a day. I think they used to build destroyers there. Thousands of people there, and, at Western Electric too. But, I did like the people I worked with at Western Electric. I used to work on ... a huge camera. It was, and I found out later, the engineers were working on a radar and...

KP: But you didn't know that at the time?

VG: Didn't know then, no. All I know is, they would send down blueprints, and they would set them up on this thing. There's a vacuum affair and the whole back of the camera was a dark room, where the things were developed. And, we'd set the thing up, and shoot these things, and then they'd go up to the engineers on the sixth floor, I think, I think they were. But, I found out later that they were working on radar. That was the largest camera in the East, incidentally, I found out later, too.

KP: When did you learn that it was the largest camera and about the radar?

VG: I don't know, to tell you the truth. I really don't know.

KP: Was it after the war that you learned this?

VG: Yes, yes, yes. And, on the camera, I worked as an assistant with this, this other fellow. He was from Jersey City, too. I can't think of his name, but, then, that's not important. But that, that was pleasant. I enjoyed that, and then, every week we'd be having a going-away party, sometimes two, because the young fellows were all going [in]to [the] service, either voluntarily, or they were being drafted. We had one party after another. That was great. [laughter]

KP: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

VG: Pearl Harbor, I can remember ... vaguely, (not?) very clearly. I had just come from Mass. I went to twelve o'clock Mass, at St. James', and came home. And, my mother was very excited that they had just heard on the radio that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Didn't impress me at all. I thought ... but...

KP: So, you didn't know what Pearl Harbor was?

VG: No, Pearl Harbor was ... Jeez. I can remember reading in the Newark Star Ledger, it wasn't called Newark Star Ledger then. I don't know what the heck it was called.

KP: Newark Ledger or The Evening News?

VG: Newark Ledger. The Evening News was a big paper, and ... but they had pictures of the scrap iron going to Japan. And, there were people complaining about it, as I recall. But, nobody thought too much of it, but, the people who were looking ahead were complaining that, we'd have trouble with the Japanese and we were sending them a lot of scrap iron, which they were. I could see barges being pulled up Passaic River, loaded with all kinds of iron, and so forth, and that was going down to Port Newark and being shipped to Japan. And, they used it later. [laughter]

KP: So, you had this initial reaction to Pearl Harbor, but when did you fully grasp how serious this was?

VG: Well, of course, then, things were getting more and more serious. And then, the draft, the guys, more and more guys [were] being drafted. What we can call the older guys, were being drafted. And then, reality started to set in that we'd probably be drafted, too. Well, I didn't see the need to volunteer, because, you're going to be drafted anyway.

KP: So, you didn't have this notion that you should volunteer?

VG: No, no, no. Some, some fellows did, but, again, economics was, was the important thing. You had a job. You couldn't, you weren't going to leave that job. You knew, you wanted to go, because everybody was going, and you wanted to go, and it was a chance to get away, and ... [to] places that you never dreamed that you'd see. But, I knew that would come in time. Not only me, but everybody felt the same way, and, sure, it did come. Gradually, the old crowd, one guy would go, then the other guy would go, and we wound up in different places. Of course, it's very glamorous ... getting a letter from one of your friends who was down in basic training in Texas, or in North Carolina, or something. Holy Jeez! So far away.

KP: So, for you, that was very far away.

VG: Oh yes, oh yes. That was, that was the thing, far away. When I was, when I was drafted in, that was 1943, February, and went down to Fort Dix, [there was] snow on the ground. We had these tents (we lived in brown, little tents?). That was a brand new thing. And then, you had to get used to being ordered around. That was, that was a completely different life. I didn't, the only thing I didn't like about it, I could ... You're young, you can tolerate anything ... [on the] physical end of it. But, [I didn't like] getting up so early in the morning, now, 4:30 in the morning, in the middle of the night. Why can't we sleep a little longer, or start a little later. [laughter] Couldn't understand why we had to be up so early. And, they'd have the first sergeant up there, you'd have to fall out. It was colder than the Dickens! And, he'd be up there on this platform, hundreds of guys standing around. And he's calling off a bunch of names, soldiers. They go here and they go there. I guess, they were just keeping people busy, really, till (a list come in that said?) where you were going to go. And, the old jokes about where they'd assign guys, "Can you do this?" And, they'd end up doing something different. [laughter] Sanitary engineers up front, guys who cleaned latrines, and they'd call them "sanitary engineers." And, I can remember, one time, "Can anybody here handle a typewriter?" you know. Oh my gosh! Get them over there, and assign them to a corporal, or something. And then, they'd march them off. They wound up cleaning someplace, the officers' club, or something. Nothing at all to do with typewriters. But, that was just to keep you busy, I think. [laughter]

KP: You were in Newark during the first real year of the war, in 1942.

VG: Yes.

KP: Were you ever an air raid warden?

VG: No, no. I remember air raid wardens, but no. And, the blackouts, pull your shades down. But, no, [I was] no air raid warden.

KP: Were you the first in your family to go off?

VG: Yes. My brother, an elder brother, was 4F. He had bad feet, or something, bad arches. And, was being rejected, and was classified 4F. But, that didn't last long. He went in after I did, not too long after I did. And, I always remembered him complaining bitterly all the time. I'd get letters from him. And, he wound up in the, in the MPs, and he was out in California, riding trains, and so forth. The one time, they sent him with the K-9 Corps, with the dogs. He wasn't too happy with that. Because, everybody was gung-ho, we are going to go and fight.

KP: He wasn't happy that he was stuck in California?

VG: Oh yes. He was stuck in California, riding trains, and, down into Mexico, over the border into Mexico. And, and I was in various places, training, and so forth. He wanted to, wanted to get going. Well, I got, I got letters from him, when I was overseas. I always wrote back to him then that I knew what it was about. I said, "You're better off. You don't want to be here. Stay where you are." And, but, he wanted to go overseas, like everybody did. So, I got a letter from him one time. We got our mail very infrequently. You'd get a pile at a time. And, he had, he said he was going overseas. He was so happy he was going overseas. And, I got a letter from him, the next one was, whenever it arrived. He was overseas in Panama! [laughter] Holy! And, he was doing the same thing in Panama, Holy Jeez. The only thing he liked about it, he was a good bowler. And, he was on a bowling team down there. But, other than that, that was his overseas. He was bitter about that.

KP: So, your brother and yourself had very different wartime experiences, am I correct?

VG: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I, I, I would have traded with him, any minute. And, he would have traded, too.

KP: So, you both looked at each other's experiences, because, in some ways, it sounds like your brother was envious, at least on the surface?

VG: Yeah, yeah, right. He would be envious. All ... he wanted to go overseas like, like, I think, most fellows were. They, they wanted to get into combat, and end the war, and, not that they were looking to be a hero, or anything like that. But, that was the thing to do, that's what they were in for. They couldn't understand all this other nonsense. They need me here, they need me overseas. But ... and the feet, he had "flat feet", that was it, the term, I think, then. They were turning fellows

down for a lot of slight imperfections. But, they needed guys, and they were pulling them in. It didn't make any difference if you could breathe.

KP: I have interviewed a number of people who were rejected for such reasons from ROTC.

VG: I was in ROTC. Not ROTC, what do you call it?

KP: ASTP?

VG: ASTP.

KP: I will come to that, in fact, in a minute. I wanted to ask you...

VG: Yeah, yeah. But, no, no, like I said, ROTC. And, the fellows who were in college, of course, were, were exempted. And so ... and the fellows, one year in service, I think, there was some resentment of fellows who got their commissions in ROTC. They weren't real soldiers. They were, but, at first, you hear [rumors] from other guys. You realized [quickly] that was a lot of baloney. [laughter] They had every right, and they were good. They were good officers, and they were good soldiers. But, for some reason or another, maybe it was resentment at guys not going to college, or something, (that these are?) some college boys.

KP: Did you hear a lot of those types of remarks?

VG: Oh yes, oh yes. And, the "Ninety-Day Wonders," they care about. Guys would come in, and here, they were officers, giving you orders, and so forth. But, then, when you got to know them, and they were in your outfit, that all changed. But, they were good. They were just like everybody else. They weren't any different.

KP: Just going back to Newark, for another minute, what about rationing and the black market? Do you have any memories of these things?

VG: Oh yes. Now, rationing, I remember, when they had these stamps. And, you got so many, so much butter, so many points (or things?), for meat, you got so much weekly sugar, the same way, and all those things. And, all I know is, that you could only have so much of this and so much of that. My mother got the stuff. I had to go, I remember, to a place in Newark, the big office building, I forget what they called it (the rationing board). I should know, but I don't. And, you could pick up stamps there, or something, ration stamps, and use those. And, but ... it, it ... it wasn't bad, I don't think. That was the situation, and everything ... the best of everything was going to the boys overseas. That was the thing. Oh, okay, everybody accept[ed it] and that's fine.

KP: When you were one of the boys overseas, did you feel you were getting the best available food?

VG: I think, I think the food was good. Everybody liked to make jokes about it, and complained, and so forth. But, other than the K-Rations ... Oh God, Jeez!

KP: You had mentioned that in your survey, that was the worst.

VG: Oh Lord! World's worst! But, again, what else could they do. And, but, I think, basically, that the food was good. Food here in the States, I thought, was excellent. When you are in training, I think you got good food. They worked the heck out of you, and you could eat up a storm, because you are a young fellow, and so, you got plenty to eat. And, I thought it was good. Some things I didn't care for, but ... I like liver, and we got liver once a week, and guys used to hate that. Lot of people don't like it now. And so, you could eat liver 'til it came out of your ears, because nobody else wanted it. "Oh, liver again!". [laughter] I was living. Liver, and chocolate pudding, and butterscotch pudding. I loved those things.

KP: I am just going to flip the cassette.

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

KP: You mentioned that you initially reported to Fort Dix. You were sworn in at Newark?

VG: Yes, Newark, yeah. Newark Armory. And then, down to Fort Dix.

KP: Did you take the train down to Fort Dix?

VG: Yes, yes. And...

KP: Had you been a Boy Scout?

VG: No, I was, what we called, a Columbus Cadet, which is [the] equivalent of a Boy Scout. The Catholic Church had started it, or the Knights of Columbus, I guess.

KP: So, you had gone camping before.

VG: Yes, yes. But, outdoor life wasn't what I trained for. As I say, I didn't care for getting up so early. And, when you got the snow, and rain, and everything, Whew! That, that was the part I didn't care for, nobody cared for.

KP: Also, you reported at a very bleak time, in the middle of February, which, at Fort Dix, does sound very bleak.

VG: Yes, yes. I don't know how long I was at Dix. From there, we went to Fort Eustis, in Virginia.

KP: That's where you did your basic training?

VG: Yes, yes. That's still there. I went there one time. Now it's a transportation center, or something, railroads, and all that sort of thing. But, Fort Eustis, Fort Eustis was, got to be very hot and humid in the springtime. I was, I was only there for, I think, about nine weeks, and then, you took all sorts of test, and so forth, proficiency tests, and what-not. And, I, I took [the] OCS test, and was going to go into anti-aircraft, and where I was going to go, I don't know. But, I was selected, with a few other fellows, and we had to report before this board. It was four officers. I know one guy was a full colonel, a couple of majors, and they did a final interview. And, they wanted to ask us some questions, and so forth. And, they made it plain to us that, there wasn't any likelihood that you would say no, but, if you do wish to say [no], now's the time to say no, and not talk to other fellows. And, in the meantime, I was going to be transferred to radio school, in Athens, Georgia. And, that sounded pretty intriguing to me. Now the (...?), and a couple of guys I was with, they were going too. They were going to go to OCS. They convinced me.

KP: So, you very well could have gone to OCS?

VG: Yes, yes. And the, I remember this full colonel, he couldn't understand it. He said, "I don't understand this," is what he actually said. "Why, why would anybody want to say no?" And, well, "Why?" I said, "Well, to tell you the truth, radio school sounds a lot better to me. I have friends who are going, and I think that would be, that would be pretty interesting." So, I said no. Okay, next. [laughter]

KP: Just backing up, you had reported to Fort Dix and you were sent to basic training. Was your basic training in anti-aircraft?

VG: Yes, yes. Anti-aircraft infantry. Everybody received infantry training, but it was geared toward anti-aircraft. And the, all it amounted to, really, was introducing, it, [us] to the different types of equipment. They used forty millimeters, and the fifty caliber, and then, the big thing, they, these great big searchlights. And ... you worked on different things for a while.

KP: But, you also did the infantry marching, and weapons assembly, and so forth?

VG: Yes, oh yes, oh yes.

KP: And rifle range?

VG: Yup, yes. And, when, I say that was supposed to be thirteen weeks, but, I never did receive thirteen weeks.

KP: How many weeks did you do?

VG: About nine weeks I stayed, and then, I went to radio school. Radio school I liked.

RG: Was it just cut short, or was it because you went to radio school ?

VG: Well, I guess ... I guess, whatever their plans were, whatever they were coming up with, and whatever the needs were, and, you went there.

KP: You went to radio school for the Army, not for the Air Force, for the Army Air Corps?

VG: No, not ... [I would] be anti-aircraft, but for the Army.

KP: For the Army, yeah.

VG: Yes, yeah. But, radio school we went to, ... it was shift work. There were all kinds of fellows. There were fellows from the Signal Corps, from the infantry, from the Air Corps, all taking classes together. And, they ran three shifts around the clock. And there, again, I went to school from four o'clock till twelve o'clock, four o'clock in the afternoon till twelve. And we, that was a lot of fun to us, gung-ho bit. All the stuff was so new. And so, we would march here, and we would sing, and all those crazy marching songs. We went down to the University of Georgia and we had our, had our meals there. And, they had a pre-flight program, too, Naval pre-flight program. It was big at the, at the colleges, and one of the places was [the] University of Georgia. And they, on Saturday, Saturday we were free and they had the, the USO dances, and stuff like that. And they had one, all I remember is, the pre-flight cadets came out on Saturdays, after their review parades. And, they had these white uniforms and, oh, they're immaculate, and they looked good. And, they went to the dance, and dances ran from seven o'clock till eleven o'clock, I think it was. Well, I think they had to go at nine o'clock, or something like that. They'd announce, "All pre-flight cadets would please [leave]." [laughter] And, that was great. Then, they'd have girls there. They didn't particularly care for dancing with the pre-flight guys, because they knew they were going to go. The Army guys were still there. So, we thought that was great. We were special.

KP: It sounds like you had a good time in the Army, initially, except for the getting up so early in the morning.

VG: I did, actually. Yeah, that I didn't care for. And, there were times in Europe, of course, I didn't care for.

KP: But, in the States, it sounds like you were having a really good time.

VG: Oh yeah, yes, yes. I was ... Other than the getting up early in the morning. I couldn't understand that. From the time I left, I could never understand. They could do this stuff at [a]

different time, but that was all part of the discipline, I am sure. And, but, the States was, it was good.

KP: For someone who had not really traveled past Penn Station, New York, or the Jersey shore, you were seeing a good chunk of the country.

VG: Yes, yes. I never got west of the Mississippi. I got down South, down South, and up in New England. But...

KP: What did you think of the South? It was a lot different than the South is today.

VG: Yeah, yeah.

KP: Also, it was very different from the world you had grown up in.

VG: Oh yes, yes. And the, the accents, the different, and then, you heard all kinds of ... accents, from guys, from different parts of the country. And, but, Southern life was different to us. Well, a lot of things that we, we had been told, we believed, and we accepted, which really wasn't true.

KP: What had you been told?

VG: They were lazy. People were lazy, lethargic, and so forth. And, the pace of living was at a slower pace, and all of that stuff. But, they did everything that we did, alongside of us. And, but, I suppose, when you got a chance to get, get out to the countryside, you'd see a lot of poverty. Especially the blacks, and these little shanty-type things. The prejudice was, was very heavy then, and discrimination, and everything. But, again, this is the way it is. We didn't think of it. It didn't look so good, but, we didn't think too deeply about it. It was just terrible.

KP: You were shocked by the poverty?

VG: No, that's true. Yes, yes. That, we figured, everybody is poor, down South. They don't live in the best of housing. When we, when we went outside camp, like, we'd go on a fifteen-mile hike, or something. And, you marched along the roads, and the housing that we saw was not the best, to say the [least] ... even the white housing, not just the black. But, everybody just seemed to live in shanties. We didn't see much of the cities. Athens was, was different. Athens was very crowded, and, [when] we lived there, our quarters weren't the best. I lived in a, in a laundry, the back of the laundry, one time. It was about twenty of us, living in the laundry. And, the laundry was still in operation. And, boy, it was hot in there!

KP: Especially with the dryers on.

VG: Yeah. Oh God, that was a hot place. And then, we shifted, for some reason or another. Some of us were shifted to the top of a former department store, which they had taken over and used as

barracks. We lived in the top of there. It wasn't the best, but, it was better than that damn laundry. [laughter] One thing I can tell you too, about going to radio school there, having a good time. Bob Hope was big then. He had his radio broadcast. And so, he came. He was coming to the university to put on his radio program for the, for the cadets, pre-flight cadets. And we, we knew about it, and we were in school. And, a lot of people were saying, "Sure, he is going to do it for the, for the cadets, the high-brow guys, see. And, what about us men?" Well, they made an announcement, and, that we would be going, marching down to the University Theater, and Bob, we're going to see Bob Hope's radio show. And, it turned out that, the story was later, that he had put on his radio show for the cadets, regular, regular show. And then, he said, he found out about the other guys, and so, they said that Bob Hope insisted that he put on the same show for us. So that was impromptu.

KP: So, he did the show for you.

VG: So he did the show. That show ended after midnight. Jerry (Colon?) and he, they were clowning around, and they came out and did a lot of impromptu skits, because, they said, "Well that's the show." And they'd say, "Now wait a minute," really, and they'd get together and do something else. We thought it was great. But, I thought it was a very nice gesture. He didn't have to do it.

KP: So, you were at the show and...

VG: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

KP: Was that your most memorable USO show?

VG: Yeah, I think.

KP: Did you see any other USO shows?

VG: I ... not too many. I saw one, not ... yes, I remember a couple, but not...

KP: But not as memorable?

VG: Not a big star, like [Bob Hope]. After the war, I was in, I was playing ball in Kaiserslautern, Kaiserslautern in Germany. And they had a show there, one Sunday afternoon, and Freeman and Godsen, Amos and Andy, they were, they put on a show in an old theater, or something, down there. And, they had all kinds of people there. And, the thing that shocked, shocked me, of course, then there wasn't any, any flak about racism, or anything like that, and, on Amos and Andy. And, they did that skits, and then, they did some other skits which shocked me. [laughter] Today, it would be nothing, but, the language was terrible. They used that language, Holy Christmas! And we, guys would, guys, we thought this was awful, because there are nurses here, Red Cross women.

KP: They were using foul language?

VG: Foul language, yes. And, that shocked me. And, it shocked a lot of other guys, too. We kept looking at the nurses, to see what their reaction was, or, the Red Cross people. And that, that was (one show?). But, I remember, one time in Belgium, they were in and out. Everything was not announced, but they came around and said that there would be a show. Anybody available, they'd bring us back. And, we went into an old barn, and it was a comedian, a nightclub comedian from Chicago, and he had about three girls that did some dancing. And, we came, we loaded into a weapons carrier. It was about four of us. And, they took us down, and, of course, of course, the war was still going on. We would pull out. And so, we got there, and there were a couple of MPs outside, and they said no, its too late, they are filled up. Guys were sitting around and everything. There were no seats or anything. They had an impromptu stage, and so, this one fellow, he was standing, smoking a cigarette, and he was listening. And, he came over, and said to the MPs, "Where did these guys come [from]?" He told them, "Oh wait a minute." He says, "We can get them seats." He says, "Come on with me, fellahs." He took us into what was their dressing rooms, dressing area. And, we sat down on the stage, we sat down on the floor, we had to look up like this. That was a great show. Boy, he was a funny guy! And, I can't think of his name. I should remember his name. But, that was a show I enjoyed. Really good.

KP: You were in radio school, which you seem to have liked a lot.

VG: Yeah.

KP: I have one question on training. Was your basic sergeant, was he a regular Army man? Do you remember him?

VG: No, no. He was, he was drafted. Most of them [were drafted]. We had some, some regular Army men. In basic, we had regular army men, (an Academy?) one. One fellow was a barrack sergeant, Sergeant Wilson, and, another guy, from, from Pennsylvania, who we liked, a corporal, Delfino. I remember him. And they, they were in charge of us. But ... and one other guy, who was a sergeant, who was a ... he had arthritis, bad, and he used to shuffle along. We felt so sorry for the guy. Why don't they let him out. But, as far as I know, these fellows didn't do anything else. They stayed right there, and did, taught you marching, faces, and all that sort of stuff. But, but, most everybody was a draftee, or a volunteer, of some kind.

KP: You were in radio school for two months. Did you finish training before you were sent to ASTP?

VG: No, no, I didn't finish it. It seemed like everything I was [in] always [got] interrupted. But, no, I had just gotten T-5 stripes, T-5 corporal, that was it. You got, I was supposed to be a radio operator, so that I could take sixteen words a minute, that was low speed, then you got T-5, you see. I don't know what happened when you finished school, but, then the word came out that they were,

the army was starting to specialize training, ASTP, and it was voluntary. If you had any ratings, you had to give it up. If you were a sergeant, or whatever you had, everybody had to be a private, except the officers in charge. So, there were four categories. One was languages, you had to have two years of college, (that was out?), psychology, you had to have two years, premed, you had to have two years of that, and engineering. Engineering, all you had to have was a high school education. That was the only thing I was qualified for. And engineering was, math was not my large [strong?] suit. I said, "Oh, you'd never handle that," that's out. And I was doing fine at radio school. I'd just been, I was made a corporal, that's great. Hey, I'm moving up. So ... and, again, my buddies thought, "We'll talk him over." [laughter] They qualified, and you had to have an IQ, I think the IQ was 115 [or] 116, something like that, at least, and above. So, that was it, so you had to, had to report for this interview, and I reported downtown, they had a headquarters downtown. And, I said, there was a Captain Smith in charge. And I said, "Now, Captain," I said, "I couldn't handle that." I said, "That was all mathematics." I like the idea of going to college. Boy, that sounded great! But, I could never, I could never last. So, I had to decline, so ... I decline. It was a week, or two, not, not even two weeks later, we had a company bulletin board. And ... there was a bulletin board list of guys, report downtown, to headquarters, with your barracks bag. So we, we didn't volunteer, that's, that's... [laughter]

KP: You were drafted into ASTP?

VG: Yes, you were drafted into it, yes. There was the ... I guess, they had a quota, and they didn't probably didn't reach their quota, so, [they did the] and you, and you, bit. So, I says, what about this voluntary bit, and we were going to go. So, I said, "Jeez, I won't last in that damn thing, engineering and all math."

KP: Plus, you lost your corporal stripes.

VG: Yeah, and I lost that. That was a big thing, too. But, any rate, so, okay, so that's the Army way. [laughter] And, we went to...

KP: But, you were going to college now.

VG: Yeah, yeah, well that, see, that part intrigued me. But, I would never, the thought of going to engineering would frighten me. I said, "I can never last." In all honesty, I said, I, I wouldn't last in that. I wouldn't make it, so I didn't, I didn't want to go at any cost. So, but, we went. We went to...

KP: Providence College?

VG: The Citadel. No, I went to Citadel first, for again, go through the processes then. There, we were just hanging around, and then, they called us in formation in the morning, a list of names, and going here, there, and everything. And then, we got the word that we were going to Clemson College, in South Carolina. You went to Clemson, but, that was just another stop off point with more list[s] of names. Then, it was interesting to find guys going to different colleges. I wonder

where we were going, I wonder where we were going. So, then, I got on the list of guys going to Providence College, Rhode Island. Boy, that sounded good. That's, that's another part of the country, Rhode Island, New England. I was never in New England.

KP: Plus, it was a Catholic school.

VG: A Catholic school, too, yeah. And, and, that was run by the Dominicans. And, it was a good school, and that was fine. But, the, the stuff was being thrown at us sixteen miles an hour. Like the math part, too, especially. Had all kinds of math, and I didn't understand which end was up, to be honest with you. Everything else was okay. But, it was regular Army and we had, and they said, this was something new. We were going to be in the cadet program. We had two companies. We had two officers in charge, three officers. One was a major, and the other two guys were second "louies," and handled the different sections. And, we had retreat parades. We had Saturday morning, we had the parade, and, from then on, we were free till midnight, and so forth, and it was a ball. It was a lot of fun, it was good. And, like I say, everything else was, was easy, except the math. I didn't understand what the heck I was doing. I tell yahs that, imagine me in ... engineering [school], and this was engineering, imagine me as an engineer. I said, "Holy Jesus!" And so, that went on, it was, it was a good life. It was fine. Providence was a, was a sailor's town, not, not GI's. A lot of sailors down there. We were downtown, they sort of looked at us. What were we doing in their town? And they had, they had USO dances there on Saturday, for a few hours. And, it was, it was very pleasant, very nice. And, they had trolley cars there, and Saturday, after the parade was over, we'd be, you'd see everybody running to catch the trolley down, downtown. And then, a lot of guys went AWOL, down into, in New York. I did that a couple of times. Called up a brother-in-law and said, "I am down." Nobody checked. So, I went down. I guess, I think half the people in New York were all AWOL. [laughter] So, I went down and..

KP: It sounds like you had a good time.

VG: I had a good time.

KP: You really enjoyed Providence and Providence College.

VG: Oh yes. Yes, I did. Then, all of a sudden, it ended. Word came out that they were going to be scrapping that program, altogether, or cutting back on it, whatever. And, to be prepared, that was just the way it was put "to be prepared." For what? So, then, again, list came out, and some of us were being, being shipped out. And maybe, maybe, maybe, because I didn't, wasn't doing too well in math, I don't know, but, I was among the first group to go. [laughter]

KP: Was the whole ASTP program disbanded at that point?

VG: No. No, it went on. But, our understanding was, that it was going to be.

KP: A lot of people thought the whole ASTP, lock stock and barrel might be lost.

VG: Yes, yes. 'Cause, they still had it here. I remember, there was ASTP going on when I, when I started in '46. And, there was a unit. But, they didn't last too long. I think they disbanded that, but, the whole program wasn't thrown out at once, all over the country, but, it was pretty well ended. And, the reason for it, of course, we knew later then, we didn't know then, that there was this buildup, and you were needed in Europe, and they needed them in the Pacific, and so forth.

KP: Had you been doing okay in your grades?

VG: Oh yeah.

KP: So, you weren't failing out?

VG: No, oh no. No. No. No. They weren't kicking us out. And, like I, even though I didn't know what end was up in math, I was still okay. [laughter]

KP: You were still able to keep up your grades.

VG: Sure, sure.

KP: While you were in the military, you were essentially going to college, although in an accelerated program.

VG: Yeah, yeah.

KP: Did that make you more comfortable with the idea of college?

VG: Yes, oh yes. I wasn't afraid of college, handling it, like, I said, if it were my choice. And, of course, [if given the] choice, I would be, I'd be in Phys. Ed. I envisioned teaching, coaching.

KP: That's what you envisioned for yourself.

VG: Yeah, yeah. And, I had time to play ball up there. It was a pleasant life, in your leisure time. And, we had a big athletic program. And then, I won't go into that, but it was a lot of fun.

KP: You enjoyed the ASTP, the physical training part of it?

VG: Yes, yes, yep, I did. I enjoyed the classroom work and everything. And, it was a very civil life. Being in the military, but still, very civil. And, we'd get up at a reasonable hour, I forget what time it was, six o'clock, or something like that. [laughter]

KP: What do you think of the instruction you got from the teachers at Providence?

VG: I thought they were very good. Yes, very good. We had one, one priest. Father Duffy was, was a stickler. We had a religion class.

KP: As part of the curriculum?

VG: Yes, yes. I guess, maybe, it was part of the college's insistence, or something. But, we did have a religion class, and every, but, we didn't think deeply about it. So, we had a, but, he was a funny guy, pretty strict. He wasn't too happy about the program. He didn't like the idea of these guys being thrown in on him. We weren't college students, by choice. So, he was kind of looking down on us. And, he let us know about it. He called everybody "Mister", Mister Brown, Mister Gorman, Mister This, and Mister That. And, his attitude, and everything, was, was not too good. Everybody else was fine. And, there were good, good instructors, very good.

KP: Had you thought, after you got back, of going back to Providence College?

VG: No. When I came back, I went to high school, back to the old high school. There was an old football coach that I had a great deal of respect for. And he, we talked about going to college. And, I was very happy about the GI Bill, and he was very happy for me, and so forth, because he used to write letters for me, when I was in high school, about the different colleges. And he, he understood why that was impossible. But, he said, "Well ... do you have any preference?" He did mention Providence was a nice, nice school, and so forth. But, I said, it seems so far away now. [laughter] Then, it was this great, but now, it seems too far to travel. I want to stay close to home, and, like a lot of fellows. So, he said, "How about Rutgers?" Rutgers is a good school, and all of that sort of stuff. And, he said, "You don't have to go away from home." And, he said, "You can live there, or," he said, "You could commute." "You ought to play ball," he says, "You can still commute, too, and do that." But, he said, "There might be some scholarship aid available." So, [at] any rate, I, I chose Rutgers. I think a lot of guys, guys I met, same way, they had been here and there. We had been around the world, and different places, and now, so...

KP: And so, going to college didn't have quite the same excitement?

VG: No, no, no. And, the travel bit wasn't there. So, but college was, was good. That was fine. The opportunity that you figured was gone was now being offered again. So, I chose Rutgers and I, I was lucky then, too. I went out for spring football and, Harvey Harman was coach at the time, Art Matsu was backfield coach, Eddie Masavage, they were all good. And so, I took a room in Highland Park with another fellow, an Air Force guy, Harry (Fredell?), who's still a good friend of mine. And so, we got a, I think we paid five dollars a week. Nice room and really clean. Nice people. And, we could walk over the bridge, and we'd come to classes. But, then, I was, I was out. Harry was on the JV Basketball team, and so, I spoke to Coach Harmon after practice all the time. And, I told him, I said, "Look, [do] I have a chance for any scholarship aid, because, it is kind of tough living over here, around, (or what?)." So, he said, "Well," he said, "You seem like you'd be a pretty good fullback. Maybe we can do something for you." So he, he got me in touch with Johnny Kirkwood, who was head of the Scholarship Committee, and so forth. So, at any rate, to

make a long story short, I got ... a scholarship, a room and board scholarship, from the Newark Rutgers Alumni Club, for the four years. And so, and that was great.

KP: Because, that would supplement your GI Bill?

VG: Yes, oh yes, that was fine. They gave me [a] room here at Ford Hall. And then, I was over at one of the, one of the rooms in one of the Quads. They called it the Quad[s]. I can't think of the name of the one. ... Yeah, but, [at] any rate, there was, and then, there was in Ford Hall (at that time?). But, then, I got hurt, really, really, [hurt?] and, it didn't, it looked questionable for me. And I, then, the next year, so, they said, it would be limited playing time. And, I'd get into four games, little bit, and then, they put me on the B Squad the next year and, I forgot the key position's name at the time (Dr. Koppelman). He was, he was a, got to be pretty prominent in World War II, I would say. Now I forget his name, now, oh shoot! But, he advised me against continuing. He said, "How much do you want to do this." "Boy," I said, "Football is it," I said. He said, "Well," he said, "I think operations are out." He said, "You continue to play," he said, "You get somebody leans on you, that's going to be it for you. You'll be, you'll be really crippled." He says, "Why don't you give it up. How old are you, and so forth?" He now got me thinking about it. By that time, I could think rationally about it. Otherwise, he had asked me that at some other [time], (I'd tell him?) he's crazy, he's crazy. But, I did, I gave it up.

KP: It sounds like you didn't really want to.

VG: Oh, I didn't want to. I didn't want to at all. And, but, I couldn't operate the way I was, and they had the knee all bandaged up. And, I could run forward, but, I didn't have the mobility to [run] left or right. Otto Hill was, was coaching the JV team at the time. And, Otto got to be a great friend. But, the, I, I went to see Johnny Kirkwood. And, I told him, I said "Listen, Doctor said for me to give up." So, he said "What are you telling me this for? I said, "Well, how does that affect my scholarship?" He said, "Not at all." He said, "If you never do another thing, [except] go to class," he said, "That scholarship is good." He said, "We're not a football mill here." Because, I know other guys I met, who I had played against in Newark, and they went down South to the big schools, and got hurt, bad knees, shoulders, and that, that was the end of the scholarship. They were okay, as long as they could produce, but, if they couldn't that, that nullified their scholarship.

KP: So, you had the sense that Rutgers wasn't...

VG: Oh, Rutgers was good.

KP: So, you were very impressed, I think, by that, because you had this expectation that you were going to lose your scholarship?

VG: Oh, yeah. Oh yes, absolutely. And I, I still had the GI Bill. But, it would have been a lot tougher. So, then, I think, my last two years, I commuted. And, I would report down to Johnny

Kirkwood's office, and they'd issue me a check, and that was it. And so, I, I used that for commuting, and meals, and so forth. So that, that, that got me through fine.

KP: Well, I guess, going back to the war, I will ask you more about Rutgers after we get through the war...

VG: Yeah.

KP: But, it just seemed that you had such a great time at Providence.

VG: Oh yeah, pleasant memories.

KP: Did you date much when you were in the Army in the States?

VG: Yeah, yeah. I dated, but no one person. No, I dated and ... because, I couldn't see being serious. I was young, a young fellow then. And, I couldn't see being serious, too, and, under the circumstances. I was going, I said, "Jeez." Not being noble, but, it wouldn't be fair, if something happened to me. I always felt sorry for fellows who had family or girlfriends, [who] died in the service. Some fellows, who were what we considered the "old guys", maybe they're twenty-four, twenty-five years old, and they had maybe a couple of children. And, they had been drafted, right, and they were over there, and some guys did get, get wounded severely, or killed. What about their families? So, I was, I was glad, from that standpoint. I kept, I corresponded with girls here in the States, couple of friends, but, [I] let it be known that I wasn't serious.

KP: What about your wife? Did you correspond with her at all?

VG: Eh, no. No I knew her from when she was little. She came from a big family, very, very pretty girl. And, but, I always thought of her as being a kid. I couldn't date her seriously, because, one thing, I think, the war does to a lot of fellows, at times, is, it sort of aged you. Since ... and maybe [you] became more mature, which is true, and, you looked at things a little differently. And, I still remembered her as being the kid. But, I did, I did date her, right. There was something going on, some affair, [like a dance], and I needed a date. And, one fellow, who became my brother-in-law, was going with her little, older sister, and so, [he?] said, "How about Alice?" And I said, "Are you kidding! She's a kid." Oh Lord! Right, but, I was stuck, last minute. I had to ask. So, I asked her and she went. And then, one thing led to another, and I started to date her, and wound up marrying her. That's what I told her, "Jesus, I never thought I'd be marrying a kid." Kid! She was five years younger than I, which was a kid. But, that was my, my love life, as far as correspondence, in the war. I did date, like I said, when I went to Providence. A couple of times, the time I went AWOL, [my] brother-in-law said, "I'll get you a date," and he knew a girl. [He'd] call so-and-so for me, 'cause I couldn't call from there, long-distance. He'd arrange a date, and we'd meet at Grand Central station, and take the train down, and we'd go to the city. And, we went to the Hotel (Commodore?) in New York, big bands, and (Vaughn?) Monroe was playing there. We saw Vaughn Monroe, and another fellow, who was good friend of mine, was on furlough. And so, they got together, and we had, we had a good time.

KP: It sounds like you had, in strange way, more time now than when you were working before the war. And, also, you had more money.

VG: Oh yes. Yes, I did, yep. To me, that was big. The pay was good. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you really couldn't afford to do things like that before the war.

VG: No, no, no, that's true. It's true, I couldn't, so, I shied away from doing those things, because I knew I couldn't afford them. (I didn't have?) [the] money, so why think about it. I was happy, playing ball, and so forth. And, I did all of that. That occupied my time, and I wasn't disappointed.

KP: It sounds like you all of a sudden had a lot of money.

VG: Yes, it did. I think that was true of a lot of fellows. I think, we were all pretty much in the same category. They were in places that they never expected they would be. They were young enough to withstand the physical end of training, and so forth. And then, while the discipline, they didn't care for, it was a different, different life, but, the social end of it was open to them. And, the USO did a lot of that, too. It did a lot of good work there. So, that part was good. It was okay.

KP: Rekha...

VG: ...Question.

KP: Yeah, I just wanted to make sure that Rekha gets some questions in here. I can go back to your actions, what happens after ASTP.

RG: When you went to Providence College, you were not used to going to a Catholic school. Well, you went to Seton Hall Prep for a short period, but did the Catholic schools have a different environment, as far as teaching and priests were concerned? [Mr. Gorman replies affirmatively several times while Rekha states her question.]

VG: Yeah, yeah. I didn't think deeply about the religious part of it. That was just a part (of the education?), but, they were good schools, and that was what you thought of. I look back on it, now, highly unusual. Government program, and so forth, and a religious school, being able to teach religion. I look at it now and say, "Gee, how did they get around that." They'd never get around it today.

RG: The separation of church and state, I guess.

VG: Yeah, yeah. It wasn't as big a part then.

RG: So, when you were at Providence, there was a religion class?

VG: Yeah, yeah. Father Duffy.

RG: Did anybody complain, I mean, was everybody Catholic?

VG: No, no. You didn't think that way. Did anybody complain? No. I never heard anyone complain at all, and from any quarter, from the guys, I think. And, we had all sorts of guys. We had Jewish guys, we had Protestant guys, we had Catholic guys, all kinds. And nobody, we didn't discuss it. I didn't ask anybody what they think of now, what do you think? It was just a requirement, you took it, and okay. No, no thought. I was still a Catholic, and somebody else was still, still Jewish, somebody else was still Presbyterian, or whatever. They didn't try to change me. I didn't try to change them. Father Duffy, he still called us "Mister". [laughter]

KP: You were ripped out of what seemed to be a very wonderful life, even though you were a little concerned with engineering, and sent back where? Where did they send you after ASTP?

VG: Yes. I, well, everybody went different places. I wound up at Fort Bragg, in North Carolina, at a replacement depot at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. [laughter]

KP: So, you were back in the South?

VG: Yes, back in the South. And, which was a big base. At that time, you didn't know where you were going from there. You were just in the barracks, you were a replacement, and you were on your own. They never, never, we'd ... report for meals, we had to report for mission in the morning, and they would have names, and guys were being shipped here, there, and every place. I think I was there for about two weeks. And that was a big paratrooper training base and the airborne, 82nd Airborne. 101st, I think some of them were there, too. But, at that time, it was a new concept, gliders. Didn't like that at all. Used to see those things (at night?) and they'd have these C-47s, (right?), and we hiked down to Bishop Field, which was the, the airport. All I can remember, my impression there, was wheezing. These things, piled up all over the place, these gliders, all cracked up and everything. And ... Holy Jesus! And we'd see them, at night, they would, they would be practicing. They were going all the time. And, they'd have one C-47 towing, usually, about three gliders on these things. (...) They weren't up very high above the trees and it had the, these landing lights on the, on the wings. And, we'd see those and Holy! And they, we'd see the crash, and you'd hear about, they had accidents all the time. And, ... don't want any part of that.

KP: You knew how dangerous gliders were. They were later scrapped.

VG: Yeah, oh yes. That was a bad maneuver. But, I prayed that I wouldn't be, wouldn't be sent into that. I had a, had a friend of mine, who (I'll talk about later?). He was a pilot, I think, he was a sergeant, T-4, or something. And, he was a pilot in one of those things. He hated them. Nobody liked them. And, but, it was an experiment, and ... they had bad experiences with those, with those

things. Because, we ran into guys, the 82nd, overseas, and, talking to them, and their experiences were bad. So, at any rate, they didn't get into that. I was pulled out of there, and then, I went to Camp Davis, in North Carolina. And then, they were getting ready, we know now, they were getting ready for the buildup in England, getting ready for the invasion, really, which we didn't know at the time. And then, I went there, and I got into an outfit, 447th Automatic Weapons Battalion. I was assigned to them. They had just come off desert maneuvers and they had been in all sorts of maneuvers. A lot of them were from Texas, and Louisiana, and down South. And they, they hated that desert training out in California. They talked about that. They said that was bad, because, at that time, North Africa was the big thing, so ..

KP: They were anti-aircraft?

VG: Anti-aircraft, yes. From then on, I was all anti-aircraft.

KP: So, your original training had proved to be of some use.

VG: Yes, yes, yes. But, one thing about that. I, from, went down to Camp Davis. No, I didn't go to Camp Davis. I went to Fort (Fischer?), in North Carolina. Fort Fischer was, was nothing more than a little firing range, off the tip of North Carolina, below Wilmington. And so, they were sent down there to fire, to fire all kinds of weapons. And, I [ran?] into another fellow, Jack (Ferkie?). He was from Vermont, and, I forget, oh, he went to Saint Michael's in Vermont. He had gone to college before, he had college training before. But, he wound up in engineering, which he wasn't too thrilled with either. But, any rate, I forget where the heck he went. But, we crossed paths there, and he became a friend of mine. But, we were ordered to report to, to the headquarters, and we met, he was a captain at the time, Captain Resnick. Captain Resnick was a graduate of VMI, the military, West Point of the South, and he was real, a real Southerner, real prejudiced, and very, very military gung-ho. And, we were, to him, I think, crumbs. ASTP, which, I guess, he had no use for, and we had come from a northern (state). I am giving my opinion, but I think it was valid. He read the "Riot Act" to us. He (looked?) us up and down, and Ferkie and I stood there, and, he looked at me [and said] "Look at me! Stop looking at one another". You know, [we thought], "What the hell's going on here? What did we do wrong?" You'd think we'd just crucified somebody. And, as long as he was in it, we were crap, and we would always remain crap, and all that stuff. And, honestly, we didn't know what the heck. We didn't want to be there. [laughter] And so, that was our introduction into the 447th. And then, and then, the next thing he did do, he told, after we finished the interview, he sent us to the kitchen, immediately, and we went to the, to the kitchen. And we were on KP for about a week. And, to this day, I did nothing. But, that was his, his attitude, and when you talk about North and South, he had it to the Nth degree.

KP: He was still fighting the Civil War?

VG: He was still fighting the Civil War. Absolutely. That's, that's the worst, I think, though. I ran into some guys in the 447th who were, were, were more prejudiced than Northerners were

about Rebels. We didn't, we didn't think of Rebels, and stuff like that. But, they sort of looked at the Yanks, Yankees, oh, (eat them up bad?). And, we didn't think that way at all, honestly.

KP: You are not the first to say that because a lot of people said...

VG: Yes?

KP: I asked them, did you think much about the Civil War before going into the Army and they say no.

VG: No, nope, not at all. But, but, on the other, other foot...

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

KP: The tape needs to wind up.

VG: Yeah.

KP: I hate it. I wish there was some kind of continuous tape.

VG: That's something to think about. Something that would make it big, if you could do that.

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Vincent J. Gorman, on July 19, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and...

RG: Rekha Gandhi.

KP: You were saying, how long did this Captain...

VG: Captain Resnick.

KP: ...Resnick stay?

VG: He stayed with us, when we went off, went on the convoy overseas. And, we got to England, we had to build our own camps, start our own camp and ... outside of Helston, England. And, he stayed with us, and then, we knew that serious things were up. We were, we were given all sorts, a lot of, a lot of invasion training, landing, landings, and all that. And, he stayed with us. And, nobody liked him, honestly. He was, he was not well-liked by anybody.

KP: Even his fellow-officers?

VG: Yes. Fellow-officers didn't think much of him. They didn't openly come out and say [so], but they ... If there would just be a nod. [laughter] We had some, some nice guy[s], good officers. And, but, Captain Resnick, and he let on, he didn't care for anybody else either. He wasn't too

thrilled at being with the outfit that he was with. I don't know what he wanted, but he didn't like being where he was. And he, in England it seemed to rain all the time. Oh, it rained a lot. But, it was nice country, Cornwall County was very nice. And, we had lived in pyramid tents. We had to fall out early in the morning, which I didn't like, and, I can remember, guys would fall out, and they would be half-dressed. They'd wait and they would just throw on an overcoat, a raincoat, or something, and stand in formation. And then, back to the tents, which had a little stove, and get warm, before breakfast. And so, Resnick got word that this was happening. Oh! He couldn't stand that. He didn't say anything to anybody, he couldn't stand it. But, the word was out that the Captain wasn't too happy, and he had (one of these?) little crops, riding crops. And, I can remember this one night, boy! He was (in right close?), and you could hear a guy, you hear, "Whack". (You'd hear some guy?) "Oh you son of a...", (Oh, would be rising?) and he'd lift up the thing he's sitting on, some guy (...) like "Whamo!" He'd whack him, and ... with that riding crop, which really stung. And so, that wasn't ... and, boy, he'd get out there, and he, he let us have it. There'd be no more of that. Which, sort of, ended that, it was true. [laughter] You didn't want to get hit by that riding crop. And so, even though you were freezing cold, you got dressed. And he stayed with us, and then, before we went toward the staging area in Wales, Swansea in Wales. But, before we went to the, to the ships, to the real thing, he was transferred out. And everyone was happy about that, because, the old rule, the guys talk a lot in service. They said, "Boy, they can't wait to get that son of a B," ... and so forth, and, "He wasn't going to live long," and all that stuff. He would have, I am sure, because nobody was really murderers, but, the way they talk, they couldn't wait to get him over there. So, whether that's true or not...

KP: But he was transferred out?

VG: He was transferred out. Yes.

KP: You don't know where he went?

VG: I don't know where he went. But he, he let us know, if that happened, an officer went, there would be [a] farewell, nice words, and so forth. And he didn't, he didn't say much. And he stood up there, and he looked around, and he said ... well, he was being transferred. And, he was very happy about it. He didn't give a "G.D." about us, and so forth. And, well, words of that [nature]. He was very happy that he was getting out of this lousy outfit. And, he understood that the, the feeling was mutual. People were glad to see him go and everybody, if you seriously asked them, they'd all say "yes." But, any rate, he was gone. But, we had some good officers.

KP: You had mentioned Captain Robert William, his replacement?

VG: Not at that time. No, I forget who the replacement was then. But, he came later. He was, he was very good. He was excellent. He was, he was, I think, from Alabama, or someplace. He was a Southerner, but he, he didn't have the same attitude that Resnick had. He got wounded twice, the poor guy, but very good, very good. We had good officers.

KP: How much training did you do in the States with this unit you were joined with? They had done quite a bit before you joined them. How much training did you get with them in the States?

VG: Yes. Well, to tell you the truth, it was all, pretty much, familiarization for me, and firing, because they were doing a lot of firing, because, they were getting ready to, they were a "hot outfit" in other words. A "hot outfit" was one that's, was pretty proficient, and, they were, they were highly regarded, which they were. They were good at shooting down these, or shooting at, these target that they towed.

KP: So, in a sense, you were pleased at that, you were going into a good unit?

VG: Yeah. Yeah, good outfit, and, you knew that you were really, really slated to go overseas soon, which we did. And, you had to qualify, the Army, I forget what score you had to make with the, with the rifle, or something. The story was that you wouldn't go overseas unless you scored, what the thing was I don't know. So, you did a lot of firing, with the M-1, and some guys didn't, didn't qualify. Well, you'd say, well good, you didn't want to go overseas, you just didn't qualify. But, believe it or not, you wanted to qualify. You wanted to go. And, guys who didn't, I can remember, Christmas morning, they had special, it was cold, cold as the Dickens, and we were at Camp ... Camp Davis, and so, they were out on rifle range. And, they had bricks, hot bricks, they had to put their, the hand on. And, so they could fire, and, to qualify. They qualified. [laughter] But, and, from there, we went to Camp (Shanks?) in New York. I think that's, that's disbanded now.

KP: Yeah. Now there's a monument there.

VG: Yeah. Well, that's, that's where we went.

KP: That was your staging area?

VG: Yes, staging area.

KP: So, you didn't leave from Camp Kilmer?

VG: No, no.

KP: You left from Camp Shanks.

VG: From Camp Shanks. I can remember that we weren't there long. That was, that was ... funny things about that. This, you wouldn't go overseas, [unless], they gave you a strict physical. And, we had some guys who didn't want to go. (I remember?) I felt sorry for one guy. He was what we considered an "old" guy. He was probably in his young thirties. And, his name escapes me at the moment, but he was from California, and he was a chef, in hotels and that, and he was in the kitchen. He was, he was very good, good cook, but, he didn't want any part of going overseas. He was married, I think he had two children. So, we often wondered, what the heck was he doing

there. They said, "Well, they don't draft people because they are good cooks, do they?" because they had drafted him. But, at any rate, he was sure he, he didn't feel good. He wasn't too good physically, but he was sure that he'd never pass the physical. [laughter] That physical, you could put a dead body [on line] and they'd carry it through, you know! Honestly, and, but, the talk was about this strict physical, and the physical amounted ... we marched (...?) in outfits, all marching down to this big complex and, where you got this physical. And, one group would be marching in and another group would be marching out, always. But, you get down there, and you got, you went in, you took off your clothes, and then, you went before these different stations. And they examined and looked at you and [they said], "Next, next". And they had to do everything in a hurry. They couldn't spend much time, I imagine. And, I remember one person, I remember, it was the dental exam. The dentist, he had a tongue depressor, and he's talking to some fellow next to him. He couldn't care less. [laughter] You'd just step up, open your mouth, he'd put the tongue depressor in. He didn't even look in your mouth, he was talking to this fellow. [laughter] "Okay," you know, "Next, next." That was the strict physical. It all, it took all of two minutes, if that, and you were out, and you put on your clothes, and you're outside marching. And, another group's marching in and the other group's, you're marched out. That, that was the physical, the real strict physical!

KP: Which sounds like it left an impression because some guys really....

VG: Yeah. Yeah.

KP: Did any guys try to injure themselves, to avoid going overseas, or go AWOL, that you know of?

VG: I don't know of any. I don't know of any. I remember, one incident, now, now, when, when we were in England, and, as I say, we had all sorts of training there. We had, we had to go through quite a, quite an obstacle course, which was a lot of fun. But, it was a, a British paratrooper, a commando, too, and he was a big guy, and he'd double-timed us all over the place. And he ... let me see, why did I mention him now? Oh yeah. And part of the training, one day, was we, we reported to this place. We used to go, go on landing craft, go up this river, or whatever the heck it was, and we'd go down, about a mile or so, and run off. And then, back up again, run off. And so, then they showed us the guys from the First Division, who had been in, in the landings in, in North Africa. They were older soldiers, and so, we went to different places [for] demonstrations. They had to, they had fire-cracker mines dug in the sand, and you had to grope your way, crawl, and feel these things. And, you had to get your bayonet, and they taught you to dig around, to ... while you didn't deactivate the thing, you left that for the engineers, or someone, you had to mark that. It was a mine there. And then, so we did that. We went to another place. We were behind ropes, and [the] formation behind them was maybe six feet away, or so, [and there] was a guy demonstrating another type of thing. And this one fellow was demonstrating a, a pressure mine that had a, like, I don't know what the, the German equivalent would be, like a 30-caliber bullet on, like, a stick-like affair, with a charge underneath. And, it'd be in the sand, and if you stepped on it, and it would go through your foot, see. So, he was telling, telling us about this, and everybody's attentive, we're

watching. And, he kept describing it, and he had the thing in his hand, and he takes the thing, and he said, "Just your body pressure or something will release this thing." He takes the thing and pushes it in the sand and everybody is watching. You couldn't believe, well, what, this, it's not real! It was real! Phoom! It went through his hand, blew a couple of fingers off.

RG: Oh my God!

VG: So, they hollered for the medics (to come?), they're hollering for the medics to come, and this one lieutenant came in. Boy, he, he turned the air blue. When that guy, he had no sympathy for him, himself, 'cause, he was convinced that this guy did it purposely, because he didn't want to go in.

KP: This was a commando, a British commando?

VG: No, this was an American, ... I guess he was a corporal, or sergeant. I don't know which.

KP: And, you think he did it on purpose?

VG: Well, it seems obvious now. 'Cause, you couldn't believe it (You're?) watching while he was describing, what he was describing about this thing, that's what he was doing. He took it and he pushed it into the, into the sand.

KP: I have to say that someone at Rutgers, in the 1930s, launched a live mortar in the basement of the gym. He was demonstrating how to shoot a mortar.

VG: Yeah, Oh! [laughter]

KP: He armed a mortar and it ricocheted around the room.

VG: No kidding, oh boy! Yeah, it can happen.

KP: Yeah, but there was talk that this was more than simply an accident?

VG: Yes, yes because that used to happen. I, I've read about this, but that's the thing that I saw. Whether that was the purpose or not ... this lieutenant, he was convinced that it was. (Must have called?) him everything. [laughter] They'd load him into the ambulance while he's calling them. Well, he didn't think he was going to get away with this kind of nonsense.

KP: This guy getting injured because of the mine, was that your first contact with any kind of injury or casualties?

VG: Yes. Yes, absolutely.

KP: Did it make the men in your squad, or your company, a little queasy?

VG: Yes, yes. Everybody looked at one another and just, you thought a lot. It's, Holy! You see a guy get hurt, and, quite a bit of blood. It's the first time ... we had guys hurt, we had, I know, in that same training, with this same British commando. Part of the training was, oh, some of it was fun, going across a stream on ropes, and pulling it. If you fell off, you had to kick yourself up a certain way, and you made it across the other side. If you didn't, you fell in the stream of water, which wasn't very deep. But, it was a joke, everybody'd laugh. Guys couldn't make it, and they'd fall in, and they['d] get the "ha-ha." So, you didn't want to get that, so, you are determined, you're not going to fall in the water. That was fun. And then, another part of that, though, was, it was a high cliff-like affair, I don't know, maybe a hundred some-odd feet, seventy-five feet, and they had a rope tied, secured to a tree. And you,... backed over this cliff and you were rappelled down the side. It was okay, it was fun. You got started, but I am not too crazy about heights and a lot of guys, you know (are not either). And, this guy would, boy, he'd blame us, "Don't look down, don't look around." And you held on, you played out the rope, "Don't let go of that left hand." Well, we had two guys (hurt?), one guy, a sergeant got hurt and got killed. He panicked, or something, and let go, and down he went. I didn't see it, I didn't see it, I know it. And, but, that, that, in training ... but, he didn't do that on purpose. [laughter]

KP: When did you leave for England from Camp Shanks?

VG: Camp Shanks in, well, that was ... it was February of 1943, I think, it was ... 1944. Great, yes, because there was...

KP: How did you go over, what kind of ship?

VG: I went over on what ... they showed us a movie, was a supposedly luxury ship, in peacetime, "The Dominion Monarch." Nice looking ship, they had. There weren't Caribbean cruises back then, and not many luxury ships, so-called, and this thing didn't look like a luxury ship then, of course.

KP: They showed you a movie of the conditions?

VG: Yeah, they showed us a movie of it, and, but, oh, and it was a British ship, and we didn't think highly of the British, their sanitary things, and so forth, food and all.

KP: So, you had a British crew?

VG: British crew, it was British.

KP: What was wrong with the sanitation?

VG: Well, very bad, not very sanitary. [laughter] And, of course, a lot of guys were sick. Like you say, it was, we were on this huge convoy. When you got up on deck, you'd say, "Oh, there's ships all over." That way, they zigzagged, I understand. We were up the, the North Atlantic and there were a lot of military ships, destroyers, the Canadians had these little corvettes, and they would be in and out and they'd get up. And that's the first time I saw a liberty ship, you heard a lot about liberty ships, and some guys went over on that, and they'd talk about them. They, bang, banged on, the thing would go up and it'd slam down on the waves. And, at least our ship rocked a lot (and bounced?), but it didn't do that. But, every once in a while, I guess, some nuts and bolts would come loose on those things, and they'd have to drop back in the convoy, and, of course, there were subs in the area, evidently. So, then you'd see, when these corvettes, or something, they would gather around the thing like a mother hen, and then, 'cause they couldn't stop the convoy ... and so, we'd get going. One day, we saw, we were up on the deck, we saw the Queen Mary, was used as a, a troop ship, and it said that didn't, they didn't worry about the convoy. They were fast enough, they could go through the convoy. Now, I can always remember these guys pointing out, they said, "See that, off there." It was the Queen Mary coming. You could see, she was moving faster, and that went on its own. But, the stench was horrible, guys throwing up all over.

KP: Did you get sick at all? Seasick?

VG: I didn't. I got a little queasy one morning, first morning. But, didn't last any more than fifteen minutes, because I was afraid, Oh Jeez, here I am going to ... 'Cause some guys, some guys were sick from the time they get on that (doggone ship?). We get out of, out of the harbor to, when, and they, they weren't too happy. I think it took us thirteen days and they were sick all the time. They, they carried some of them off the ship. They were just dehydrated. And, I guess they got them to a hospital, or someplace, when we, when we got over there. But, we were down, maybe a couple of decks down, and we went up, I think, once a day. And, they would run upstairs, and we'd be up there for, I think, maybe, fifteen to twenty minutes. And then, we'd have to stand there, and then, they'd send us down. Well, I'll tell you, the fresh air felt good, and then, we went down to the stench of where we were. And we, we had a shower one day, (they sent you to the shower?). You got, I think, a minute in the shower, and it was salt water, and it's a kind of soap, was supposed to be, [would] lather with salt water. [laughter] There was no lather at all. But, I guess that was to hold down the stench a little bit, I don't know.

KP: What about the food? You mentioned the food was awful.

VG: Food, food, oh. First, I, I don't like seafood, and the British cooking, [tended] to have no seasoning. They didn't use any seasoning, and so, we had tables, maybe, seemed like only about that wide. [Gesture.] We had nine guys on this side and nine guys on that side, and the ceiling wasn't very high. I slept in a hammock. They said "Don't look at anything moving, because it'll make you sick." But, any rate, I slept in that thing, and I even had to take it down and roll it up. But, any rate, this first morning, they had some guys went down to pick up the food and bring it, and they had this great big pot of tea, put that down. And then, the guys came up with breakfast. It was, and some guys weren't feeling, and that time was the time when I was feeling a little queasy.

And, I was afraid, "Aw, Jeez, I don't want to get sick." And, they came, and they put this platter down, they had a big lid over it. And, they took the lid off, and there was this great big fish. Looked to me like it wasn't, wasn't dead yet, you know! [laughter] And broiled potatoes and ... Whew! I tell you, I wish I would have had a movie camera to see that. Lot of guys from that, immediately. [Makes vomiting sound] [laughter] And, they ran for the GI cans for breakfast. "Oh Jeez," I said, "This is what we are going to (eat)!" Well, I tell you, the food was bad all the way over. I think everybody, I know I did, existed on crackers, and chocolate. And you'd, you'd give money to, a couple of guys who were assigned. Different times during the day, they'd go to the, wherever they go, ship's store, or something, and they'd purchase the stuff, and bring it back. And, some guys were entrepreneurs, there's always some, some guys would sell you a bar of candy for a dollar, which was a lot of money then. Sell them for a dollar, they were making money. And, but, a lot of guys, I say myself included, was, were existing on that stuff going over, because you couldn't stand that food. Stinking fish all the way! [laughter] Which I couldn't stand anyway, it was ... So, I was glad to get, get out of there. Then, we got to England, we got into our first experience with dehydrated foods. At first, the cooks, and so forth, weren't familiar with proportions, I guess, and sometimes mashed potatoes looked like soup, 'till they got proportions, and they weren't bad. The first time, we had powdered eggs, and made a lot of jokes about them, but they weren't bad at all. But, that, the food on that ship was, was horrible.

KP: You mentioned going on deck a lot.

VG: Yes.

KP: It was entertainment. Was there any gambling?

VG: Lot of it, oh yeah, a lot of it. Yes, gambling all over the place. Big gambling. I, I was no gambler, I didn't take. But, we had, we had guys who were pretty sharp at it. I think the biggest gambling was, was coming home though. We (five?) we had, we had all type of guys, and we had, some of these guys from New York were pretty sharp guys. They were used to that and they, they ran the games. They didn't play. But, they ran the game and they took a cut out of every pot. [laughter] And, boy, they were, and the guys were dead serious. They'd shoot craps and (...?) and they would, some guy would be betting here, and there, and they'd cover the money real fast. Had to keep that game moving fast, because they all knew what they were doing. But, there were thousands of dollars they'd [make] on that. But I, I wasn't a part of that really. But, that was mainly coming, coming home. But, I'm sure there were games going over to England, too. I don't know, but I, 'cause you were limited. You were in one section of that ship, and you didn't, you didn't move out of there. The only time you moved out was when you trooped up to the top and got some fresh air.

KP: You didn't even go to the mess hall or galley?

VG: We ate there, where we slept. No. Not at all.

RG: What did you do? Did you read or something? What did everyone else do?

VG: Most of them just threw up! [laughter] But ... just talk. There may have been some card games, but not, not gambling card games, and conversation. But, not much of enter[tainment] ... you know. I'd say, we were brought to an open area one time to see this movie on The Dominion Monarch, that was a big part of the cruise, the cruise ship that we were on. [laughter] On one day, the funny thing was, they had, they had anti-aircraft guns on the ship. They had a couple of forty millimeters, and, I think, they were handled by Marines, part of the Navy Marines.

KP: Of the British Navy?

VG: No, yeah. Yes. And so, they, they said that, to be aware, don't be alarmed, but, they were going to practice, the guns were going to be fired. You heard the noise, you'd know what it was, because, we wouldn't, weren't familiar with that. And (one?) in the back, in the back end of the ship, they had one, had another one forward, someplace. And, they fired those things and there was an awful racket. [laughter] They blew some doors off, I think, they called them "hatches," or something, the concussion, or something, just blew the thing off. So, they didn't fire those guns anymore. That was a big joke. I said, "Boy we are in good shape, if we need those thing[s]. They can't fire them anymore." [laughter]

KP: Were any subs sighted during the convoy?

VG: No, not that I know of.

KP: So you had, in that sense, an uneventful trip?

VG: Yeah, that was ... it was uneventful. Cold, when you're up on the deck. And then, you were glad to get up on deck to get some fresh air, but, I say, one or two mornings, when it was really cold. They said we were really up north. There was ice and everything. And, boy, you're glad to get down below. You'd freeze to death up there. It wasn't a very comfortable cruise. [laughter]

KP: You went to England.

VG: Yes.

KP: And, you mentioned you set up camp. What were your impressions of England? This must have been a real change for someone who hadn't traveled much, and here you were, traveling to Europe?

VG: We were, I remember, we, we landed in Manchester, England. And, we got off the ship, I remember marching down these cobblestone streets, and there was old factory, but dirty, old, black buildings, and so forth. It wasn't very scenic. But, and there would be people just staring at, and ... but, we were marched down to a railroad station, right away. We were put on these little, little

trains, called Toonerville trolleys, the English train. And, we got on there, and I, I, it was a few hours, and then, we were down in southern England. But that, I didn't see much of England, as such, just the streets, and the factories, and then, onto the train, and then, down to camp outside (Helston?). There was nothing there, just fields, and we had to We slept on the ground, and then, we had to start next morning to build this camp. And they had platforms, and then, the tents, had to raise the tents. Got the camp built pretty quickly.

KP: You were in relatively primitive conditions, because a lot of soldiers in England had barracks.

VG: Yeah ... yeah, no, we didn't have any barracks, no. Like I say, it was, was just nothing, just fields.

KP: Were you near any towns?

VG: We were about five miles outside of Helston, England. Helston was just a little town, curved streets, very picturesque. And its claim to fame was, Bob Fitzsimmons, was a heavyweight world champ years [before], and in the 1800s, or so. And, he was born there. They had a little plaque on the side of one of the stone houses where Bob Fitzsimmons ... was born. I didn't know who Bob Fitzsimmons was, but found out later, he was a heavyweight champ. [laughter]

KP: Did you get into town at all? Did you go to the pub at all?

VG: They had pubs, yes. They had, (it was crowded?) and all they had was warm beer, you couldn't stand, and, the dark porter, they called it. And, you had to hold your nose to drink it. Some guys could drink it, but most of the guys [couldn't]. They thought we were strange, because we had everything refrigerated. They had everything warm. And, they had a Red Cross group there, a little, little canteen, and you could go there, and they'd have magazines, and books, and so forth, and donuts. They'd have donuts. And, people always complained about the Red Cross. And, they said, "Oh, they didn't give you anything." I guess it is all according to what you are looking for. I didn't have any complaints, from the few times that I ran into them. They were very nice and they said you had to pay for anything you got. Well, they had a little sign there, like a contribution for, for so many donuts, but nobody ever paid any attention, whether you paid or not. And, nobody paid, I know, for those donuts and coffee. [laughter] That so when I hear all these guys complaining about Red Cross and, they charged you for everything. It's a lot of baloney! [laughter] I thought ... in my experience.

KP: Well, it's interesting, because someone that Rekha has met, the last interview we had, he brought up the Red Cross issue, and he was really ... Apparently his unit was so mad at them...

RG: It really struck him as being, really unfair. Why should the soldiers be asked to pay for a donut?

KP: Exactly. He said that, when his unit got back, they were greeted by Red Cross volunteers and given donuts and coffee. And, they were throwing the donuts back at the volunteers.

VG: Oh, goodness. One thing I remember about, when, going back to coming out of Camp Shanks and loading onto the ship. Big secret move. We came down on a train, so we crossed whatever, I don't know what [it] was, the East River, or what, I guess. And, on the ferry, and we had been seeing all these films about "loose lips sink ships" and be quiet. So, I was being quiet. [laughter] You're afraid to tell the guy who is next to you, like he's going to be a spy, or something, you know what I mean. And so, we got across and we are in this long shed-like affair. And, we had winter overcoats on, [it was] cold, and there were the Red Cross ladies there. And they were up and down the lines and giving out a little cup of hot coffee, steaming hot coffee, and they'd give you a donut. See, that was the Red Cross. They didn't charge us. And, but, I remember, I was standing there. And then, time to go, and you'd have your, pick up two barracks bags at the, up this gang-plank, and onto the ship. You disappeared then, you didn't see anymore, into the hold, someplace. And, but, I can remember standing there. Boy, I was looking for that donut and hot coffee. This is about after midnight sometime. And you just, I had just gotten my coffee, I think, (and all of a sudden?) it was our turn to go. [laughter] I dumped the thing in the can, I said, "Holy Jesus!" But, [I'll tell you] the thing that impressed me about, that I thought was very funny about this very secret move. And, we were going up the gang-plank and there's a big platform with all kinds of shining lights on it. There's a band up there, playing loudly. You could hear them in Brooklyn. And, it's a secret! And, I can remember going up the plank, and the song they were playing, I will never forget to this day. I can hear them playing "The Jersey Bounce". In this big secret move. I said, "Jesus, any Germans around they'd knew what was going on."

KP: It sounds like you did a lot of training. You'd mentioned earlier, you had done a lot of training in England. Were you moving around a lot?

VG: Oh yeah. Always, we were always moving. Going, we had a lot of, of what they called "problems," little overnight problems. We'd go for two nights, the place was called "Goon Hilly Downs." It was, it was always windy there. Cornwall County is very, very pretty for England, the agricultural section. And, but, we'd go out there, and we'd go out in trucks. I don't know how many miles away it was. And, we'd just camp, play at fighting a war, which we knew nothing about. And then, officers would ride around and you had strict orders, wear your helmet liner,[they checked if] you didn't have a helmet or a helmet liner. And so, but, strict orders, you had to wear that, because you're preparing for combat now. They said, "You gotta get serious". So, we'd just sit around talking. Some guys had cards, playing cards, and, boss would come around, and, okay, look at everything, we're going to the next site. And, if you had a, didn't have a helmet liner on, you're dead. [laughter] Nothing ever happened, but you were dead. You were chastised for not wearing your helmet. "Don't you realize...," and so forth, and that was it. And then, we'd, either, at the end of the day, or the next day, pack up and [go] back to camp. But, but then, we did other training, too. That was just it.

KP: Did you have any idea of the mission you would later take part in on D-Day? Did you have any idea that you would be part of that initial assault, that first day?

VG: No, honestly, didn't know where I was going. We never heard of Normandy. Nobody ever knew of Normandy.

KP: So, you had no idea. You were given all this specialized training, but you didn't know where you would go?

VG: No, no idea.

KP: Looking at what happened, on the beach it's obvious why you got that training but...

VG: Yes, yes. I tell you, now, there are [was] all sorts of speculation. We went over on a merchant ship, run by American Merchant Marines. We loaded off from that onto a landing craft, but we were making guesses to where we were going. And, most everybody thought we were going to Italy. Never thought of France. Going to Italy, because, down to Anzio, they were having a hard time in Anzio, we understood. So, they couldn't break out of the beachhead, or something. And, the, the...

KP: The rumors...

VG: And the rumor was that, that was it, that was going to be the invasion there, and we were going to push out from Italy. And then, the night before, or so, we were gathered in groups and there was a chaplain that told us we were going to Normandy. "Anybody heard of Normandy?" he said. [laughter] No, so he gave us a little brief about Normandy. And then, we were given this little pamphlet, General Eisenhower's announcement about the, I forget the (thing?). I still have the thing today. Its about what [where] you are going, what you are going to do. And we were, I was in a group, we didn't have any guns with us. Like, we were in a group of, like, sixteen guys and we were going to have these positions. And then, the guns would be in, maybe, about a week later. So, and we had one lieutenant in charge of us, Lieutenant Fredericks. And that was it. We were going to get on the beach, and we had to go to just inland, not into the town, but outside of town of Vierville. And that was our mission. And, we were going to do whatever had to be done to hold that position there, and all we had was our rifles. And, 'cause we were infantrymen then.

KP: So, initially, you knew what about your assignment?

VG: Yes, yes, yes. Absolutely.

KP: So, a lot of your training was anti-aircraft, but also infantry? You were getting advanced infantry?

VG: Yes, yes, yes. The whole outfit, to tell you the truth, was used more as infantry, and anti-tank, and working at road-blocks, and so forth. We had fifty-caliber machine-guns, which weren't that mobile. But, we had half-tracks with four fifty-caliber machine-guns out, we had forty millimeters, lot of, lot of firepower. But, there weren't many German planes to shoot at. Did shoot at some. I don't know whether they hit them or not, tell you the truth. But, you didn't see much of them. I'll tell you something about that a little later ... about jet planes. But, we, we did land, we got off, off the ship, and food was good on there, on that. It was quiet a bit different from that British ship going overseas. [laughter] It was run by American Merchant Marines. We ate twice a day. We'd eat standing up on [a] little platform, little table. I can remember, the Channel was kind of rough. And that thing, (I couldn't?) put my tray down. [laughter] Stuff would wind up all over the floor. But, it was, it was funny. Nobody was worried about it, and the Merchant Marine guys were very courteous, we were (I said?) glad to see a ship run by the Americans, not those damn British.

KP: So, in a sense, you got the feeling that you were really guests on the ship?

VG: Yes, yes. Yup, and we had our choice in the morning of breakfast, which was unusual for us. You could have, [they'd ask], "What kind of eggs do you want?" We couldn't believe this, (on the other ship we?) just take it. Nobody ever asked you what you wanted. And we had, we could have whatever kind of eggs we wanted. They had bacon, I don't know if they had sausage, they had bacon, and good hot coffee. It was good breakfast. Boy, this is great. We still didn't know where we were going, but this was great. And then, we ate again at night. The food was, was very good.

KP: So, you were on the boat basically waiting to learn where you would go? It was only on boat that you finally learned your mission?

VG: Yes, that we were going to go to Normandy, yes. Now, to tell you the truth, that was the first time ... my experience that I thought, well, gee, it's time to worry. Jesus, this is for real. All that training, and so forth, was like a game, playing. And, I'll be damned...

KP: So, it was only on the boat, in the English Channel, that you realized the danger?

VG: Yes, yes. Yup, I say, I'll be damned, this is, this is for real. Somebody's going to be shooting at me. You are no more ... So ...

KP: Did you go to Mass on the ship? Was there Mass?

VG: We had a chaplain, yes. No Mass. No, no.

KP: No Mass. Did you go to Mass before? How regularly did you go to Mass?

VG: I went regularly. Not, not a great many guys did, but I went regular, any chance I could get, even, even over there, any time they, they asked. Very, very seldom, [did they hold] Mass, because there just wasn't the opportunity. But, when there was an opportunity, I went, and other guys went,

too. But, there weren't, guys weren't that religious. There were times when they got religious. They did a lot of praying. I did a lot of praying. Yeah, but not getting to formal Mass.

KP: You were given a stated mission when you were briefed?

VG: Yes, yes.

KP: What was it?

VG: Just do whatever you can. Hold, get the positions, and the guns would come in. And, we would, we would do whatever. We are going to shoot down planes, I guess. I don't know.

KP: But, it didn't go according to plan exactly?

VG: No, no. What a mess, what a mess, honestly. First, first of all, getting off the thing. We had done a lot of training, going down cargo nets, both here in the States and in England. Constantly getting that rifle tangled up in the cargo net, and, when the time came to get off the ship, we were called [by our] different units. And, we went down, like, down, maybe just one deck, and it was this little doorway, we called, they called it a hatch, I think. But there, that opened, you stepped up, it was this little plank, and then, the landing craft alongside, bouncing up and down. Boy, that really bounced. And, you had your pack on, and you had the life raft belt, and we were told about the CO2 cartridge. If need be, then you just press that and that would blow up. And so, then you jumped onto this thing.

KP: So, none of this net training was used?

VG: None of the net training for us. Just jump onto the deck, and those steel, those things are steel. Boy, I can remember, when I jumped, I caught that thing, when it was going down, I guess. I hit and, "Wow!" I felt like my teeth went through the top of my head. But, then "Whew!" get moving. And, we went down, about a half dozen of us. We had seasick pills, which you never used. But, down below [on] this thing, the diesel smell was terrible. I think that would make you sick. And, we were on that thing, they figured it would be about anywhere from half hour to an hour, we would be on, and then, you would be, you'd be in. And, we were on that thing for a long time. And, I said, to the one guy who was standing in this hatchway, we said, "Hey, sailor, how long is this going to be, before [we go in]?" He says, "First of all, don't call me sailor," he said, "I am not in the Navy," He says, "I am a Coast Guard." [laughter] I felt like saying, "Well, what the hell are you doing here?" You are supposed to be back guarding, no, I am kidding. The Coast Guard ran a lot of the landing craft. I understand Yogi Berra, I read later, Yogi Berra was in that [Coast Guard], not our ship, but in it. But, any rate, so, we ran on that thing, and it was couple of hours, or so. And so, we said to him, "When are we going?"

KP: You were in the midst of this large armada of ships.

VG: Yes, yes, the ships are all over. Well, we didn't see them, because I was down below, and when we got up, we saw them. But, he said that we couldn't get in to where we were supposed to get in. And then, he finally said, "Okay," and everybody up, and up, and we went up, and then, you saw all this carnage going on. Noise, and the smoke, we saw vehicles burning and everything. And, we landed around (Saint Laurent?), it is where the cemetery is today. All I remember, I saw a little sign. That's how I know it was Saint-Laurent. 'Cause nobody knew where they were. And, the eerie sight, the first thing that frightened me, was getting off and splashing the water. We were a little deep, and I can remember [there] being a small, corporal guy, from New Orleans, (Caruso?). And, Caruso was green, blue, purple, all kinds of colors, and he was almost chattering. I said, "What's the matter, Caruso?" He said, I said, "Don't worry, we're all scared." He said, "No," he says, he said, "I can't swim." [laughter] As far as, he couldn't swim the poor guy (we were all?) in deep water. So, I said, "Okay, don't worry." I says, "Stick with me, we'll be all right." And, we did, we just landed, just a couple of steps...

KP: So you were lucky you were...

VG: Yeah. And, I just held on to his collar and sorta pulled him in with me, till we hit the ground. I said, "All right Caruso, you're on your own." [laughter] And then, we, but, the frightening thing was, all the bodies, in the water, floating, and they were all grotesque. And they, I understand, what some of them did was press that cartridge, which had blown up and the thing turned them over. With the weight and everything, and, they just (drowned?) in it. Whether they could swim or not, didn't make any difference. They just plain drowned, and then, there were, there were craft being hit and everything. Some guys never had a chance. And, that was bad...

KP: You had mentioned, that since you had, in many ways, a pleasant Army experience, and then, you were only sort of worried in the ship...

VG: Yeah, yeah.

KP: And then, all of a sudden, you were among one of the worst battle-scenes.

VG: Yeah, all of a sudden. Yeah, it opens up to you. We went, all I can remember is, we, when we got there. There was all sorts of fire coming from the bluffs and the hills. They had that place zeroed in like mad. But, we ran, there was a bulldozer, was just abandoned, it was, sort of, like, on its side, and a lot of us ran and got behind that thing. We weren't going to move. And, there was this, this two-and-a-half ton truck, with its back blown off, sort of, and they had steel matting. And there was this guy, Engineers, they had [a] lot of special engineer brigades, they were on the, on the ship with us. They had an eagle-like thing on their helmets.

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

KP: This guy was throwing ...

VG: Was throwing this stuff for, I guess, like, vehicles coming in ... the sand.

KP: This engineer?

VG: Yeah. And so, we, we were behind this bulldozer, afraid to move, and Lieutenant Fredericks was with us. So, I looked around, he gets out his, this was about one o'clock in the afternoon, and, after a while, he gets out, gets out his map. And, he's looking at coordinates, and everything, and he said, "We belong way the hell down there." [laughter] We were not near Vierville, maybe a mile, mile and a half, two, I don't know, from Vierville. And so, he said, "Well, we've got to get down there." So, he gets up, and he says, "Okay, everybody up." He's going to start to call roll, you know! [laughter] It was what he was trained to do, I guess, to make sure that everybody's here. So, this, this guy from the engineers looked, and he said, "Lieutenant, are you out of your goddamned mind?" he said. [laughter] Do you want your guys to be here, with all those guys, because dead guys were out. He said, "Well, you'd better get them down." He says, "They're shooting at you up there, don't you understand?" And, I thought about that, and I said, "Well, they were shooting at him, too." He was just doing, well, he was doing his job. I guess that's what, what everybody thought of, you thought of (...?). You had a job to do, and you did your job. You were afraid, but you did it. So, we had to make our way down.

KP: So, he just started to make his way down?

VG: Yeah, I mean, yeah, oh yeah. We had to make our way down, 'cause we had to be ... We were, we were scheduled to be down there, and, in a little bit, that night. Well, we made our way down, all I remember, it was starting to get dark. I can remember, one time, dropping down beside a whole line of guys. (They?) dropped down beside them, and I look, they were all dead! [laughter] And, they're all ... And, they had been hit by machine-gun fire, or something, and they were all dead.

KP: As you were making your way down to your position, did anyone in your unit get wounded or killed?

VG: Not that I know of. Not in our small group, no. We had guys, the next day, and we had guys step on mines, and stuff like that. And, maybe, get in the way of some mortar fire, a couple of them got hurt. And, but, I know it was an awful mess. Guys, people all over the, all over that beach, not particularly from our outfit, (who had been?) who knows. And then, I, I could remember an eerie sight at night. There was graves registration, who were the people who were spreading white sheets now, over dead guys. And, they were starting, to take records, and take dog-tags, and all that. But, we got down toward Vierville, toward that end of the sea-wall. A lot of guys lying around there, too. And, there was a road that ran along, like, not on top of the wall, but it seemed like it was on top, and then, to the bluff, and then, they had barbed wire, and then, that was heavily mined. And, the engineers had white paths marked out, sort of, I guess, for the minefields. But, we, we got down, and I was, Ferkie was with me then, my friend that I told you about before, from, from New

England, and then, we were told to dig in. It wasn't hard, digging in, in the sand, but he and I dug together. And so, that was it for the night. So...

KP: Did you make any direct enemy contact?

VG: Not yet.

KP: You didn't do any shooting?

VG: No, nope. Not yet.

KP: Basically, you were keeping your head down?

VG: Keeping your head down, and getting to wherever you were supposed to go, and hope you got there. But, we, we dug in, I said, Ferkie dig in, and he stayed on that side, and I stayed out looking ahead. And, we were both quiet for a while. I know I was thinking a lot, I know he was thinking a lot. And I, I can remember saying, I said, "Ferk, did you ever think it would be like this?" He said, "No." [laughter] I said, "For Christ's sake, we aren't anyplace yet. The water is right there, we are here. We're supposed to be in there someplace." And we were no place, and then, I thought to myself, "Good God!" And then ... things quieted down at night. You could just, you could hear guys. Oh, I felt so sorry, I heard some guy crying for his mother. Eerie, very eerie, it got quiet. He was somewhere, hung up in the water, or something, someplace. And you, you couldn't do anything to help him. All you knew, (right?) was he was somewhere nearby, but you'd be afraid to stick your head up. Firing had quieted down by then, but, you were still afraid that you were going to stick your head up and somebody was going to put a bullet through you. So, we stayed, and so ... the next, next day, they sent word around that they're expecting [a] heavy, heavy counter-attack at dawn, the Germans were [going to attack]. Well, it turned out that the British were having a hard time up at Caen, and Caen would be up that way. And, they're having very heavy fighting up there, which ... I always said that, to me, that was one good thing that the British did. They held off that German armor, because, what Hitler was screaming about, they said, on the radio, that they were going to throw us back into the sea. They would have done it, because, if they got on that road, that network of roads just inland, not too far, they'd have run those tanks down there. And, we had no weapons and we had no real artillery. We had no artillery. We had tanks, all disabled, and they, they had ninety millimeter anti-aircraft guns they were using as artillery that they got in, and they were just set up on the sand, not in a regular way. And, they were frightening when they went off. I never heard one of those things fire. They were good guns. Whamo! [laughter] Jeez, everything was frightening. You got used to sounds after a while. You knew when something was going out, something's coming in, and...

KP: But the initial ...

VG: But, the initial thing, you didn't ... everything was frightening. Good God! You swore they were going, they were aiming at you. Everything was aimed at you. Jeez, but, we, they had no

counter-attack. And then, we stayed on, we made our way up this, they called (it draws?), the way back toward Vierville. And, up on the right-hand side, I remember, up on the top of the bluffs, there was a big blockhouse. And, they had a big gun in there, a seventy-five, or an eighty-eight, or whatever. But, infantry guys had neutralized that and they weren't firing anymore. They lost a lot of guys doing that, and, and then, on the left-hand side was a lot of barbed wire, and they had trenches, and, every so often, they'd have machine guns, and they'd have mortars. And, it was like going down into a mineshaft, and we did that. We stayed there, up alongside the hillside, we dug in, and things were fairly quiet for us. And, a lot of firing up ahead. The infantry was still having problems, and I can remember, one guy, young Mexican-American guy from our outfit, had to go to the bathroom. And, he went down, he went down into this, what we called, like, mine-shaft thing. You had (regular?) tunnels, and they were all connected, and he went there and left his rifle, with us. When he went down in there, he didn't think anything of Germans, or that, just had to go to the bathroom. And, he was too embarrassed to go up where anybody could see him, I guess. (So he went in?) and he came back in a couple of minutes, and he's shaking. He says, "There's a German guy down there." [whispering] [laughter] Most guys were like, "For Christ's sake, go get him, you don't need to tell us." And, he says, "I got my rifle here." So, he went back, and another guy went back with him. And, they come back with this young, he was Ukrainian, or Polish, or something. But, he wasn't German, and he was more frightened than they were. And he's, he's trying to say, "Comrade," and he couldn't quite say it. 'Cause, I guess, he was convinced they were going to kill him. But, they got him back, and said, "What do we do with him?" So, [they] turned him over to the MPs, got all the MPs on the beach, they took him someplace back on the beach. And, it was maybe a month later, or so, he got a big citation. This guy got the Silver Star, not just a Bronze Star. He got a Silver Star for that. I think that's the first medal in the outfit (at that point?).

KP: So, it was this guy who forgot his rifle.

VG: Honestly. [laughter] Forgot his rifle, and had to go to the bathroom, and was just as frightened as that young Polish guy, or Ukrainian, whatever he was, and he got a Silver Star.

RG: He got a Silver Star for turning in the enemy soldier.

VG: Yeah, for capturing this "German." [laughter] I am sure, I didn't see the citation, but that must have been something. They must have written that...

KP: Silver Stars became harder to get as the war went on.

VG: Yeah, yes, yes. That's quiet a decoration. It's, it's ... Bronze Stars were a dime a dozen. And, I understand that now, guys who were, had the Combat Infantry Badge, they were giving them all the Bronze Star. Recently, up till maybe a couple of years ago, they issued Bronze Stars for these fellahs. But, at, back then, nobody thought much of any, but, it was, it was a five, five extra points toward getting out.

KP: Yeah, it became a very important award.

VG: But, at the beginning, nobody thought anything of it, or nothing. But, if they knew, there'd been a lot of guys trying to do all sorts of things to get five more points. But, that, to me, was something. Silver Star that guy got. (Grahauva?) the guy's name was, Grahauva, but, at any rate. But, we got into, we got into Vierville the next day, and there was a road that ran alongside the hedges. We got in a little bit. And we held there. We didn't have to fight anybody off. The infantry was having a hard job and, but they were moving, moving in, down toward Isigny, and then, went inland along Aure River, toward Saint-Lo.

KP: So, how long did you stay at that site, at that position?

VG: At that particular position?

KP: Yeah.

VG: 'Bout, I'd say, that was the first night, we are on the beach. The second night, we were still not in toward Vierville. Maybe it was the third night, we were in toward Vierville, outside Vierville. Vierville had been cleared and, but, we had, we were in a dug-in, along a hedge row. The second night it was. No, it was the third night, we were in, in further. And, just around dusk, and again, you dug in alongside the hedgerow. And, it was just dark, and all of a sudden, all hell broke loose, all kinds of firing going on. Guys were diving for their holes. And, guys were firing up into the trees. They could swear they were, we're surrounded by Germans, and, oh boy, they're firing at everything. There was nothing there. What it was, the 2nd Division had come in, a couple of days later. I, 'cause, I remember, they were on, on the ship with us, too. They, they didn't come in with us. They had a big Indian Star on their shoulder patches. And, they were brand-new and (everybody?) liked them. Somebody heard some noise, from some place, I guess, and they saw us, and thought we were Germans. And, they started firing at us. Couldn't, didn't hit a thing, didn't hit anybody. [laughter]

KP: So, nobody got hurt?

VG: No, no one got hurt. No, I remember the officers hollering like mad, "Cease fire!" and, "Goddamn!" and all sorts of cursing going on. They finally got them [to] quiet down, because, they got together, their officers and they, they bellowed at each other. Who's wrong, who's right, [and] apologies, I guess. But, nothing happened, nobody got hurt. And then, we, we continued. And, I'd say, about a week later, our guns came in, and then, [we] got a little more organized. And then, we, we headed up toward Saint-Lo. I was with, we, we were attached to the 29th Infantry Division.

KP: When were you attached to the 29th? When you got to Normandy? Or, had you been attached earlier?

VG: No, we were, we had been attached earlier.

KP: So, you had been attached earlier.

VG: Yes, yes. And then, I didn't say when, it was in July, that the 28th Division came in. They came in under strength and, but, we were attached to them, and then, because St. Lo was a pretty hard place to get. The 29th Division had an awful time there, not only 29th, there were others. I know, when the 30th Division came in, too. I had a brother-in-law, we have talked about that since, he was with them, and they had, they had a hard time. But, they got, got St. Lo, eventually. We were attached to the 28th then. And then, there was this big breakout, and then, we got through there. Then, it was a race, more or less, and Germans suddenly got positions, and then, heading forward. And then ... we went through the rest of the war with the 28th.

KP: St. Lo has also been noted for the, partially successful, but also, tragic, use of air power to break out.

VG: Yes, yes.

KP: Where were you?

VG: There was a great big, it was a couple thousand airplanes enlisted. We saw that thing ... that was the raid where General McNair was killed. Had, they made a mistake on this road, they bombed too close to [it]. What division was it? 90th, or somebody. And all I can remember, it was a nice day and we were far from it, but, [we were] looking. And, we saw all these planes, all kinds of planes, 24s and 17s, and so forth, and fighter aircraft, and, boy, they were really bombing. And, and, this is a prelude to the breakout at St. Lo. And they, they were (systematically?) neutralizing everything, which they did a lot of, but, but they missed, they fell short. They got a lot of, a lot of Americans, I think, it was the 9th Division, [or] 90th? I am not sure. I forget, it doesn't make a difference.

KP: Yeah, yeah. I know that General McNair was killed there.

VG: He was, he was, he was a big ... he was a lieutenant general and, unfortunately, he was in the wrong [place]. He was in the right place, but, the planes were in the wrong place.

KP: But, you were far enough back?

VG: Oh yeah. We were far enough that we weren't in any danger.

KP: When did your unit first see hostile fire, actually have direct contact with the enemy?

VG: When we got through St. Lo, the Germans set up positions, and then, we were, we were put on road-block, one time, (that I can?) remember. And, they came through there ... and then, we had some fire, fire then. We lost, as I recall, that time, one half-track. And, the crew, a couple of the crew. And, but, that was the first, first ... direct hostile fire.

KP: Where you were firing back and forth?

VG: Yeah, right.

KP: Did you use the anti-aircraft guns at all?

VG: We used it one time ... and, the guys are saying, they were shooting at their own airplanes. They don't know, but, nobody hit anything. And, [we had] very few opportunities to fire at aircraft, very few. But, tanks, yes. They were, they were used as, what do they call it? Enfilading fire, just like the artillery used in an infantry attack. They used these, and then, they had their barrels of this. And, I can remember, I was going to say about the jet aircraft, first time I ever saw it. We were up around the, what's the name of that town? I'll think of it, but, any rate, and it was, the fields were frozen. As a matter of fact, we were in a field that was loaded with mines, but it was frozen ground. It was anti-tank mines, and you could walk over those things and not set them off. It took about two hundred pounds pressure, or so.

We found out about it and word got around, "Listen, we are stuck in a minefield, so could you pull off the road?" And, all kinds of outfits were moving, 'cause the Germans were really retreating. And they said, "Don't move the ... if you move, you have to move, don't move fast. But, stay where you are until we get further orders," because there were just anti-tank mines. And, anybody ran over them, "Boom!" They'd blow you from here to hell and back again. But, nothing did happen to us there. But, they had the town very heavily mined. And, they had to call up the engineers to clear the roads before we could move, because of the mines. As a matter of fact, we got ahead of the infantry, move[d] directly with the infantry there, because we were really up front, and the Germans were really retreating.

I can remember a, an artillery truck, artillery kitchen truck and, came along, and this infantry lieutenant was ordering everybody off the roads. And, this guy, the artillery cook, or something, (...you go up?) and it was a big barn-like structure. So, he wanted to get behind that, so he was waving his truck back into there. And, he hit a mine. Boy, he lost his head! I mean he lost his head. And, a lot of guys kept (...?), because that really blew. That blew that kitchen truck all to hell, and the guys on it. And, that's when the officers were really, really getting guys off the road, and really getting the engineers moving. Get them up there, get that thing cleared.

We had a, we had a half-track trapped there, got blown, too. And, we had a motor sergeant. I don't know what he was doing on the half-track. Maybe, they had been having trouble, or something. But, he's a big heavy guys with big blobs of fat. He was a roughneck, from Texas oil wells, funny guy. And so, he was on there. And they, they hit a mine, and it blew half of that track off. A lot of guys, including Bud (Lawrence?), his name was, and he got a lot of shrapnel in his back, embedded in his back. He was bleeding like a pig. And, the medics came, we're taking care of him. And, while they were taking care of him, one of the infantry medics and another couple infantrymen were hit, and he sat down beside this jeep, and he was working on them. Another truck hit something

and that poor guy got it. So, we were losing an awful lot of people all over in (Schleiden?), the name of that town was Schleiden. And so, that's, Germans just wanted to slow things up, and they, they really did, because nobody moved then. Meantime, there was a bridge we had to go across, this little bridge. And, all of a sudden, we heard all this stuff going on, like artillery. It was shells hitting, but you couldn't hear anything. And, what the heck was going on? So, everybody's diving, all over the place, and then, all of a sudden, we're looking, couldn't [see anything]. Somebody said it's an airplane, has to be, well look, couldn't see any airplanes. Now, this first time, we had (...?), you knew the Germans had used the jet. They were trying to hit that bridge, or the road, or whatever. Of course, they weren't even coming close to it. They were coming close to us, but not, not the bridge, and that was a jet aircraft. You heard the sound here, but the plane's way down there. [laughter] So, some guys (on the four wheeler?) hopped on, and the guys were going to try and shoot at the plane. They couldn't, couldn't even catch up with the damn thing. They were looking here, and it was way down there. They couldn't track it, couldn't track it...

KP: So, you knew how deadly the jet was?

VG: Oh yeah. Yeah. Good thing they didn't have fuel for those things, because, they had a lot of them, I understand. Like, the German Luftwaffe, as I understand, was, was really good. But, they couldn't get the planes in the air, for a number of reasons, for the fuel, and then, plus, our, our Air Force. They did a terrific job knocking those things out on the ground. If they could have got in the air ... because our Air Force was, was like shooting fish in a barrel. We had a lot of contact with the 9th Air Force, these P-47s. And, I know what happened, when the Germans were on the run. We'd come to a patch of woods, they'd retreat in there, and, at night. And then, when daylight came, they'd have to run and go. The [P-]47s came down, and they'd strafe those things. It was like shooting fish in a barrel. So, it was a game of chasing. Chase them out of the woods and let the 47s hit them. And they, they had mobile airports, like, I guess, you'd call them. They'd have a field, or something, they'd land in there, and go up, and take off. So, that was a rat race.

KP: Did you fight at all in the hedgerow country?

VG: Yeah, yeah. Infantry did, I should say, the infantry did a lot of fighting.

KP: Did you provide any support for the infantry there?

VG: Yeah. The only, the only thing, they'd call on us for a roadblock. They'd call our half-tracks.

KP: So, initially, you just did roadblocks?

VG: Yes, right. No, no actual, infantryman tactics, like. If we were called upon to do it, okay, but, at that time, no, no.

KP: During the big breakthrough, did you mainly just do roadblocks then?

VG: Yeah, and some, sometimes we were called upon, to, to join an infantry company, moving on foot. And that, that didn't happen that frequently.

KP: Did you have much contact with the enemy after the breakthrough, direct contact?

VG: Next contact, I would say, other than what I would, would think was really nothing, the, the greatest contact we came into was in this, quite a bit, the German breakthrough, which we called the Battle of the Bulge bit, and they ran right over us.

KP: Before going to the Battle of the Bulge, you were also in the...

VG: Hurtgen Forest.

KP: Hurtgen Forest, which was quite a fiasco.

VG: Hurtgen Forest was very bad. Oh yes, yes.

KP: For you and your division, but also, for other divisions.

VG: Yes. A lot of them.

KP: What do you remember about that particular campaign?

VG: Well, the main thing I, I remember about it, [there] was a lot of infantry replacements. And there, again, our forty millimeters did, did shoot at some German airplanes. And, I can remember, one day, a German plane came just above the treetops and he came roaring down this, sort of, valley, like, and he had a P-51 right on his tail, an American plane. And, you can hear him firing, and then, the next thing There was a big explosion, couple of miles away. He hit this German craft and, and he crashed. And our, our planes, our guns fired a few rounds, but they didn't hit anything. [laughter] And, again, it was a jet, I think. I think it was a jet. They were flying too fast for them. And, but, all I remember was, it was a very cold, wet, damp place, mud. And vehicles couldn't move, and they're bogged down in the mud. But, the German, not the Germans, the infantry was moving up replacements a lot. They, there were three towns they had to capture, Schmidt, Kommerscheit, and, I forget the other one (Vossenack). But, any rate, they'd get a town, and they'd get, maybe, two towns, and then, the Germans would chase them back out. And, they'd come back in again. They'd chase them back. And, all the while, they were, they were picking up casualties like mad. And then, these two-and-a-half ton trucks would come up, loaded with guys, and they'd let them off, and then, [you'd] see them marching off down the road. And they were going in, into the, the holes of the guys who had been hit already, and then, they'd get in. Some of them, I understand, weren't in there an hour or two and they were a casualty already. And they were loading him back out. So, that was, that was a real fiasco, and [we] lost an awful lot of guys. And we, I say, we didn't lose many, ourselves, our outfit.

KP: Because you were mainly doing anti-aircraft at that point.

VG: Yes, at that time, at that time. Right.

KP: So, you did not have a direct role in supporting the infantry, except for anti-aircraft?

VG: Yeah. No. No, and then, we were pulled out of, the division was pulled out of there.

KP: Before talking about the Battle of the Bulge, I interviewed someone who had been the order of battle specialist for the 28th. He had been with them for a while. He noted that there were some problems with some of the National Guard leadership. Do you have any recollections because you were attached to that division for a while?

KP: Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah. The only, the only thing I could say along those lines, that I, I don't know where the heck it was, whether it was in Belgium, or France, or wherever. That, in movement, the movement was so fast. The Germans were retreating, it was confusing. The, I think it was the 110th Artillery, got with the infantry, and before them. And they, they lost a lot of men, a lot of casualties, which they shouldn't have, and it was a colonel in charge, and he was reassigned because of that. He wasn't supposed to be there, and so forth. So, but, as far as the, the leadership, no, I thought they were pretty good. I know we had, we had General Cota, who was division commander. He had been the assistant division commander in D-Day, with the 29th. And then, before the breakout, when the 28th came in, he, he became the head of the [28th?]. He was, he was promoted to major general. And, he was pretty good, I thought. But, I don't know anything about the.

KP: It sounds like your battalion leadership was very good.

VG: Very good. Very good, once we got rid of Resnick, okay. [laughter]

KP: How many losses did you have in France and Germany, before the Bulge?

VG: I don't know the numbers, honestly.

KP: Did you lose any close friends in your particular unit?

VG: I lost one guy, I remember very well, Don Peters. And, Captain Williams, I remember, the wounded part, I told you, he was wounded twice. And, guys, no, no, no very close friend. No, I couldn't say.

KP: Your unit doesn't sound like it was devastated, like, say, the infantry.

VG: No, no, no. We were close to the infantry guys, as friends. But, we were far enough away from them that we didn't experience things that they did. Only by accident, we were called on, but, not as an everyday thing, no.

KP: When you were on the battlefield, because, like, the Bulge is a sort of a separate issue...

VG: Yeah, yeah, right.

KP: How good were your meals? How many hot meals would you get?

VG: Hot meals, they got to us occasionally, would amaze me. But, otherwise, you had K-rations. And, the next ration, which was better, which I, I liked, were the ten-and-one rations, they called. They were bigger, and you didn't have to move them. They knew that you were going to [eat them?]. They were nice. The breakfast was good. You got ... in cans, some kind of bacon, and powdered eggs, I think, and I forgot what else. But, that was good, that was good, where you could, you could heat them up. But, the K-rations were, "Phew!" especially the, the luncheon, beef, beef and porkloaf, I remember. It was like, if you've ever eaten Taylor ham, and somebody gave you a clump of it, like that, and salted the heck out of it, and gave it to you cold, and told you to eat it fast. Then, you'd be close to what the beef and porkloaf were, not beef and porkloaf, whatever the heck they called, not beef and porkloaf. That wasn't bad. I forget what they called it, but I used to take that can and wing it. Couldn't eat that stuff.

KP: How many hot showers did you get, after you went in on D-Day?

VG: Not many. [laughter] Didn't smell too good. Not many. No, we, we did get a shower. They'd have a shower unit pull up, a few miles back, and then, you were loaded on to a truck and brought back there, or something. They had like a wooden plank-like affair, and they'd have a tent-like affair, and you took your clothes off. They had guys that, then, took your clothes, and they'd look at what measurements, and so forth, and then, you went into this shower affair. And, they had portable showers. I think you were given like two minutes, or something like that, but enough time to soap up and shower off. And then, you got out, and guys were clean. And then, when you came out, you, they gave you towels, you dried off, and they gave you another [uniform].

KP: You got a clean uniform?

VG: Another clean uniform. It wasn't a new one, but it was clean. They were also, they were cleaning the uniforms there, laundering them down, complete laundry. Quite an operation, I'll tell you. And, you felt nice and fresh.

KP: You also took part in the liberation of Paris and you marched in the victory parade.

VG: We had nothing at all to do with the liberation of Paris, I gotta make that clear. But, we did march. We were on our way toward Rouen, and we got this order, not that I know, I know we did

get orders, to move. We were going someplace, and we're, everybody was loaded onto two-and-a-half ton trucks, and we, we rode, and we rode toward Paris. And then, we were let off in the Bois De Boulonge beautiful park, (in the stand?). You couldn't prove it by me. I never heard of the place there. But, we got off there, and it was, it was after midnight, sometime, and they said, "No digging in." You aren't allowed to do any digging at all. [laughter] I guess the French wouldn't like (us?) to destroy their park. So, and we had to find the, our equipment truck, which had our other, barracks bag, and you'd have a uniform in there. We had to put on an OD uniform, okay. We landed with OD uniforms. It was hot. And (...?) clothing on top of that, but, that's another story. And then, we had to shave, too. And, they took, we were given so much water in, in your steel helmet, and you poured it from the five gallon water can. And, you had to find yourself [a razor], and you had to shave, and, in the dark. [laughter] So, about two o'clock in the morning, you are trying to clean up as well as you could. And, during the night, I ... can remember, I got finished shaving and just got dressed into that OD uniform. It started to rain. And, it rained, I tell you, for a good half hour. Everybody started to get under trucks, and everything, to stay dry, which, which we did well enough. And, that's the first time we knew we were going through Paris.

KP: So, they wanted you to look nice? [laughter]

VG: Yes, they wanted us to dress for this. And then, then, everybody, that the guns were hooked up, and everything, infantry guys were in formation. And, we came out of that park, no training, we weren't trained for a thing like that. But, you'd swear, that thing was precision. Amazing. And, I can remember, I was on a, a weapons carrier, and we came out, we're in formation. There were about four across, and the guns were, I don't know how they were lined up. But, we came out, and we went in like a sort of semi-circle. The left was the, the Arc de Triumph, and there was this big platform. And, Cota was up there, and De Gaulle, and the other French [officers]. But, a lot of high officers. And then, we had to do an "eyes left," and we'd fold around that thing. Beautiful parade. Then, we went down to the Champs-Elysees.

KP: And, having grown up with parades, this was like being in the ultimate parade.

VG: Yeah. Oh, this is great. This is Paris. I'm in a parade. I couldn't believe this. Jesus! I have been to war one minute, and now, I am in a parade, for God's sake, in Paris,[which] I never saw before in my life. And, but, that parade got to be something. The French people were going wild. There were thousands on all side[s]. The parade would move and it would stop. It would move, like parades do, and stop. And, people were throwing apples, (one of the?) guys said, "I don't know whether they are throwing at us, or throwing to us." [laughter] At any rate, and they had, we'll call it champagne. It was cider, and all kinds of, all kinds of wine. And, guys were drinking, and women were hugging the guys, and then, you had to get back on your vehicle, and get going. And, some of the drivers were doing the same thing, and too much. Some of them got drunk. They couldn't even drive. They had to put another guy on the, on the truck and pull that guy off. [laughter] I understand, some guys went AWOL. I don't know this personally, but I heard they went AWOL there.

KP: They saw Paris and they took off.

VG: And, they saw Paris, and they didn't, they didn't catch up with their outfits 'til maybe a week, or so, later. But, nothing was done to them. And, that was a wild party, wild parade.

KP: So, you were just going to march through Paris and that was it?

VG: Yes siree, that was it. We had, matter of fact, I got a stamp of that parade through Paris. And that was our 110th Infantry Regiment, and they had, only had three guys marching, with the Arc de Triumph in the background, a nice stamp, official stamp. It's still in circulation, I guess, I don't know. But, we went through Paris, and then, on the outskirts of Paris, and then, we were moving in a different direction then. No more towards Rouen. And the, the same thing, the infantry would contact guys, and we would move along with them.

KP: The Bulge, probably, even more than Normandy, was a very distinct memory for you, because the Bulge, not that Normandy was a picnic, but the Bulge sounds much worse.

VG: Right, no, the Bulge, in particular, honestly.

KP: Because, it was supposed to be a quiet sector where you were.

VG: It was. I say, we had come down out of Hurtgen Forest. And, I could see that place to this day, clear. We were, there was this little river, Our River, O-U-R, and there was a little bridge, and a little town across, on that side of the river. Oured, I think it was, where we were, I think. And then, we were positioned on a little hill-like bluff, on the other, on this side of the river. Now, we could throw stones into the river, not literally. And then, and then, the woods were in front of us, on the rise. And, they had, they had a couple of blockhouses, the Germans had, which were abandoned. I guess they were part of the Siegfried Line. I would imagine, the outskirts of them, somehow, or other, because that was up the line even further. And then, you had new recruits in, replacements in the infantry. And, they were actually being trained. The artillery would fire, you know ... like an operation, but it wasn't. There was no enemy. And, they had to, they had to get that, neutralize that blockhouse, and they learned, combat training, right there. And then, they became new infantrymen. Then, they would move into their positions. And, it was quiet, I remember. I think it was about a day before, as a matter of fact. Any of us who wanted to, we, we dug into the hillside. (Incidentally,?) they used artillery shells, cases, and shored it up like, like a little cave-like. You could sleep in there. And, there was a concert, the 28th Infantry Division Band, which was a good band, really good, swing band. And, they came, and gave a concert, in, like, a church-yard, across the river. So, some of us, a lot of guys, I went over. I liked that. We marched over, and we had, you hear this concert. And then, we went, went back, I think it was, two days later. Incidentally, a lot of those guys lost their lives in, in, at Wiltz, Luxembourg, which was division headquarters. And, they were thrown in as infantrymen, to try to hold.

KP: Oh yeah.

VG: And then, they lost a lot of them. So, so, what, I didn't, any way, they say, they had a story in the Yank magazine that said, the leader was marching down the road with these guys, who had very little infantry training, just in basic. Never fired a weapon before, and here, they were going down to hold a position, to hold off the Germans. And, a lot of them never were seen, a lot of them were probably prisoners, or killed, or something. But, any way, they were good. And then, then, December 16th, I can remember, before, the infantry guys were coming back, we ... we came across, some of them. And, they said there was, Germans were getting all kinds of armor, tanks, and so forth, over this rise, and they couldn't understand. They were sending words back to headquarters. Nothing was being done. They couldn't understand it, because it looks like they're getting ready for an attack.

KP: So, in other words, you were talking to these guys at the concert? And they were saying something's up?

VG: Yes, yes, yes.

KP: And, apparently, this wasn't being filtered up the chain of command?

VG: Nothing. They said there was, they were sending back their reports, going back to their battalion headquarters, and, filtered back into Army headquarters, I guess. And, nothing was, was being done, being ignored. And, you couldn't, nobody can understand it. So, what are we going to do? Nothing. And so, then, then, the infantry was losing guys. There were, they were being guys out on outposts, they were being captured. Germans were sending over patrols, and so, everybody wondering, what's going on here? And then, we got orders to, this night before. We had guards posted, double the guards. The guys were like, "Jesus! Something's going to be happening here."

KP: So, it was only the night before that you started really to prepare?

VG: Night before, right, that something's going to be happening.

KP: At least, that the divisions were to recognize.

VG: Yeah, right, right. And, they didn't, they were just, apparently, ignoring it. And, everybody else knew about it, but, they didn't seem to know. So, any rate, that night, during that night, boy, all of a sudden, there was lights going. What they were doing, they rolled up the tanks, and they shone them on the clouds. And, all along, there was just, like, a very eerie sight, where blackouts didn't exist.

KP: Which is very unusual, because at night you were often trying to maintain a blackout?

VG: Yes, yes, you couldn't light a cigarette. Boy, there'd be all hell to pay, because you could see that, anything, for miles. And, no fires built, or anything like that. And then, all of a sudden, all

kinds of things started to come in. And, have you ever heard of them talk about "Screaming Mimi's"? They were, they were, I think the official word was Nebelwerfer, or something like that. But, they were a mortar (that was a head?) about how many orders of barrels. They would wind up, you'd hear "Roo, Roo!" That's why they gave them the nickname, "Screaming Mimi's." And, they would fire, they were a more terrifying weapon, I think, than anything else. They do damage, if you are around and you're hit, but weren't like other, other mortars that used. But, they fired those things, oh, it must have been going for an hour or two, more, and they were hitting this area next to us, the hill. They were firing into there, and they were beating the hell out of the ground. There was nobody there. But, if we were there, or they had switched their, their weapons, there would have been a lot of casualties. And so, we were ready then. I mean, there was positively all sorts of firing going on up the road, down a mile or two, and they were catching hell down there, really. And so, then morning came, daylight came, and, boy, we were, you could see up along this skylined road, (down there?), and you could see all sorts of German tanks, and weapon[s], vehicles, going down this way. And, where we were, right here, like Wiltz, was back, I don't know how many miles, ten, fifteen miles. And, and then, the, that's where our division headquarters was. So, we figured that's where they're going. But, then, there was another road that ran the other side of the river, and we figured, well, they're going to be coming down there. And, they got down, and there was just this little bridge that we had to get across. When they got that, they'd cut us off, and we'd be stuck. So we, we swore that's where they are coming. And, that's where we used our anti-aircraft guns, the forty millimeters. We are firing. They did get a couple of tanks, incidentally. But, they fired at those. So, what's coming across the ...

KP: That morning...?

VG: That morning. Yeah, in daylight. And, they were coming all that day, and then, we were, that's when Captain Williams, who had been hit the day before, I think, came back, and he came along. And, he was, he was a really good officer.

KP: Was he a regular or a draftee?

VG: No, he was a draftee, enlistee, yeah. And, but, a great guy, and really concerned about his men. He came around, wanted to know how everything was going, and to brief our sergeant in charge, let him know...

KP: So, even though he was wounded, and could have just gone home, he came back.

VG: Yes, he could, he could have been out of it. That's what, I know, I talked to him personally. I said, "Captain, what are you doing here for God's sake? You don't have to be here." He'd say, "I am here because I want to be here." Real good guy. And so, I, like I say, he briefed Sergeant Penham in charge of us, and what to do. And, keep firing, at the tanks, and we had to be aware that they could zero in on us, (find?) the coordinates, and, bink. And, nothing was happening in the woods in front of us, yet. I can remember that, the sergeant asked me, "Listen, did you ever fire a bazooka?" No. [laughter] Didn't ever fire a bazooka. And, another, another guy, a corporal

(Palmentier?) well, he said, "Would you, and Palmentier, take this thing down, get down a little bit there."

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Vincent J. Gorman, on July 19, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and...

RG: Rekha Gandhi.

KP: So...

VG: A very nice name. [laughter]

KP: You were sent on this mission to protect this road with a bazooka?

VG: Yeah, protect this road, in case they came. Right, which I had never fired before. You had a little rocket, and it had to be, you pulled on it, and it armed. You push down the thing, and you armed it. And then, there was, it was like a stovepipe, and you'd pull the trigger. So, listen, all right, it's over there, and we, we stayed there and waited. And, to tell you the truth, I said to him, I said, "We're crazy. [We're] not doing this." I said, "Christ, you never had to do this." I said, "I never fired this thing." And, I said, "We're facing these damn tanks." I said, "Well, what are they going to do to me?" We miss, they'll know where we are, and if we hit one, they still know where we are. [laughter] I said, "We're crazy." So, I said, "Well, maybe we won't have to do it." We were hoping, I was praying, that we wouldn't have to. But, in the meantime, the, the German (first attack?) had come through the woods. They were overrunning our infantry. Our guys were coming back. They had an outfit, I think it was the 106th Division, was off the road. And, they had been chased. A lot of them, I understand, a whole bunch of them, had surrendered. Back then, I didn't know, I know it since. But, they were going into, into water, it was cold. And, those guys were shivering, and they were shivering to death. And, they were frightened to death. They hadn't eaten, didn't have any weapons, didn't have any, everything. So, anyway, they were coming through the woods and the sergeant said, yelled to us, "Okay, let's go. We're going to get the hell out of here." And, it was getting near, near dusk, then, boy, I was glad to hear that. I said, "Thank God, we didn't have to do this."

KP: The decision to pull back, how much of it was the decision of your battalion or how much of it, do you think, was the decision of the division?

VG: I think it was from the division.

KP: It was division's orders to pull back?

VG: Yeah, yeah. And, of course, that filtered down to battalion, to get going, and, because we had to get across that bridge, too. The German artillery, now, they were firing, (text fire?), trying to get that bridge, too, to cut us off. And so, we got out of there, we got down (...?). They hitched up the gun, they brought it down the hillside. And, guys had fifty calibers set up. They put that on the truck and, by that time, you could see tracers coming at you. You could see them coming, you'd think that they were, flying right at you, but they were actually missing. They were going over your head. But, but, you knew they were, they were shooting at you. And so, we, we hopped on board a two-and-a-half-ton and, and we high-tailed it out of there. And, down the road, on the other side, maybe, a couple of miles, or so, we, we said [were told] to dig in, and so forth. And, from then on, the next weeks, it was just run. The artillery was sometimes, we, we'd back up into them, and they had their one-o-fives. They had them, the barrels pointing, some guns point this way, some of them point that way. Because, they almost had us surrounded. But, there was always a road out, that we could get out. And, we'd take that road and, and get out of there.

KP: So, you were on the run. How many times would you sit up and you were ...?

VG: For days, days. We were heading toward Saint-Vith. Our, our so-called rest area was Clervaux. That was a couple of miles back. And, I know, we, we could get time off to go there, when there was nothing doing, before the breakthrough. But, guys went back to there, they said, "There's nothing there." [laughter] Nothing there. I, I've been back since, myself, and there's a castle there, where they had a hell of, hell of a battle. They still have a, they have a U.S. tank there. They have a German eighty-eight there. That's a monument. And, the, the castle was, was really blown. It's, it's in ruins, but, they've kept it as a memorial. And, Clervaux was, was a ... roads coming down into it like that, (and hilly?) and, they had, they quite a battle there. But, we wound up outside St. Vith, I remember, whatever date it was. We went through there and, oh, God, vehicles coming from all different directions, and the MPs. It was, it was somewhere during the night, middle of the night, MPs had the flashlights, and they're cursing, waving everybody out of way, 'cause they're setting up a defense. And, some of, we were all split up, outfits were all split up, regiments were all split up. Our division was all, cut off [up]. And, they, some of them, were around Bastogne, and linked up with different outfits there (109th Regiment).

KP: Did you and your unit stay together during this retreat?

VG: Our unit did, yes. Yes, ours did, yeah.

KP: But, you knew that was, in some ways, exceptional, that you were retreating?

VG: Yes, yes, oh yes. Yes.

KP: Did you pick up any stragglers along the way, who joined your unit and hung on?

VG: Oh yes. Yes. I guess, we picked up guys, a lot of them, from the 106th Division.

KP: They joined your unit and were integrated.

VG: Yes, yes. They would go with anybody. And they'd try to get the guys warm and get them a weapon, because they'd thrown theirs away. And, they looked like they had icicles on them, (...) sometimes.

KP: When you finally stopped moving, where were you? Where did you finally get to?

VG: When we stopped moving, I couldn't tell you the name of the town. (Never knew it?)

KP: But, at some point you finally stopped.

VG: Yeah. And we, we were hooked up with the 82nd Airborne guys then, who were, who were being dropped in by parachute. They were infantrymen, too. They belonged to the 101st, but the 82nd, in particular. And, I can remember seeing them, unit, marching down the road, we were going this way and they were going that way, to hold off. And, just before Christmas, or whatever the time was, we, we had, ourselves, gotten into what looked like old railroad cars, with, with hay, and stuff, in them. That was to get in out of the weather. So, we bunked up in there. And then, the next thing We got word that, that we were going to get a hot meal. And, it was Christmas. And, amazing, like I said (before?), the American Army was amazing! And they, they brought up kitchen trucks, and so forth. And, they had a turkey dinner. We had a full turkey dinner! Out in the field.

KP: In the middle of the Battle of the Bulge?

VG: In the middle of the [battle], yup. And, you ate it out of, didn't make a difference where you ate. You had a tray, and you had turkey, and dressing, and sweet potatoes. That's (why?) I say this amazes me, how they do things. [laughter] These ... that made me feel better, good, good morale. Morale builder. And, but then, we were somewhere, be somewhere between, between Malmedy and, what the heck is that other big town? I was there, too, last year, at that anniversary. Must be getting Alzheimer's, or something. [laughter]

KP: You don't know when the retreating stopped?

VG: Yeah. Yes, oh yes.

KP: And then what happened?

VG: You just knew in your mind, [when] that stopped, that, that was going to be it. They couldn't have anything left, because they didn't have much before. They didn't have any gasoline, and stuff, like you heard. And, which, mustn't have anything now. And, that's about how it wound up.

KP: So, when you stopped retreating, your position wasn't assaulted?

VG: Yeah, no, no. We were just traveling along then, to tell you the truth, with the infantry. Infantry, the story was, they'd go until they made contact. And, sometimes, the contact, most of the time, was brief. And, the Germans would pull back, try to set up another position. And, that's when the 47s would come down and start. They, they couldn't stand still. We kept them on the run. And, for us, it was a truck ride. We had, I personally, had very little contact, our outfit, with no airplanes to shoot at. And, it was, since we were on the move, there was no roadblocking bit. [We] weren't called on to do that. So ..

KP: You battled more with the elements.

VG: Yes, yes. Always. But, we, we went across the Rhine, finally. We were held up a little bit there, because the engineers had to throw bridges across. We weren't in that Remagen ... we crossed on a Bailey bridge, pontoon bridge, around Bonn, and we went about, I'd say fifty miles, [on] the other side of the Rhine. ... And then, we were just pulled back, that's when we were pulled back, into the what the heck ... these "cigarette camps," they called them.

KP: "Lucky Strike"?

VG: Lucky Strike, that was the one. And then, we were on our way home.

KP: You did mention earlier, and this came later, after the Bulge, that you did get in a very costly enemy operation with mines. Your unit really did get a clobbering by the mines.

VG: That was around (Schleiden?).

KP: Yeah.

VG: Yes, quite a bit there.

KP: That sounds like one of your scariest moments with the unit?

VG: Yeah, yeah. As far as actual casualties, among guys, like...

KP: Really being hard hit.

VG: Yeah, yeah. And they, they had to put that whole town off limits. Military government people, I understand, came up, and, the infantry didn't, didn't have to do anything with the town. This was a sizable town, but you could bypass it. There wasn't any sense in going in there, because the first people in there, they were, they were suffering all kinds of casualties, because they had the place, everything mined. And, it served their purpose, it did hold things up for a while. Gave them, bought some time for them, I guess.

KP: During the Battle of the Bulge, itself, did you know about the Massacre at Malmedy at all?

VG: Knew of it, but...

KP: You knew what had happened?

VG: Heard, I heard stories, yes. But, didn't, didn't know. We weren't far from there. Wherever we were, I don't know. You don't, you don't know exactly where you are all the time. But, we weren't too far from there, but, and...

KP: So, you had heard that Germans had killed these American prisoners?

VG: Yes. I got back, last year, on the fiftieth anniversary of, of the Battle of Normandy, D-Day, and so forth, which was a very interesting thing, I'll tell you. But, and got to visit Malmedy, and the fields, and so forth. And ... it was an older Belgian, who's still living, he, who was there, and he, he told his story. And, and, but, that was, the type of thing that shouldn't happen. It happens, but it shouldn't. Part of wartime, I guess.

KP: When you were going through Germany, you had greater contact with Germans, in general.

VG: Yes.

KP: What did you think of the German as an enemy? He was the enemy, but did you have a lot of hostility?

VG: Yeah, yeah. First of all, your first reaction, you didn't trust anybody, because you felt, you did feel that everybody was your enemy. When, when we were pulled back from the (Rhine?), and the war was still going on, and we were in the Saar region. We pulled back to the Saar region, the Saar Valley. And, we had different outposts, guards (that we had to get checked?). Then, there was [a] no fraternization rule, which a lot of guys ignored. And, but then, the German people were friendly, some of them were. I remember the Burgermeister, Burgermeister of this one little town of (Fischbach?), it was called, and, right across the French border. And he, his granddaughter was living with him, and he said, her uncle, that's his brother, was a professor at Harvard. Well, I didn't know whether to believe him or not, because, that's one thing you said, you don't believe him, really. Be a little bit wary. But, they were very, very nice (for?) you, friendly. I didn't have that much contact, with only a couple of days there. But, but, for the most part, you're told, "Kill, or be killed," and all that stuff. And then, [you're told], "Hate the enemy," but, be honest with you, there wasn't that kind of hatred, permanent stuff (like?) now. To us, the war was over, forget it. It's still going on, [but] we know it's going to end very, very quickly. So, there was no hatred, really.

KP: Did your unit take part in, did you liberate any concentration camps or slave labor camps? You didn't see any?

VG: No, no, you didn't, we never got near them. No. I'd say we're out of the war long before then.

KP: Did you expect to have to go to Japan?

VG: Yes. Oh, yes, definitely, yes. When the, when the war ended, the high point men were, were pulled out. I think the high points were, like, 78, or something like that. Any guy who had 78, or beyond, was pulled out, was going to be discharged, sent home. I had 73 points, believe it or not. [laughter]

KP: So that's ...?

VG: That's why I was thinking about that Silver Star, and that Bronze Star. I'll be damned. Five more of those things, and I'd be out of here. But, and then, we were given a choice, our unit. Everybody in our unit was given the choice to go back, have infantry training, [which] I wanted no part of, or, you could go into the artillery. Now, our closest connection was [with] the 229th Field Artillery. Sure, [I] opted to do that. I would be a radio operator with them. I would be given training, not just I, everybody would be in different training, back in the States. And, we were going to begin, I think, they said, a couple of months of training, which may, or may not, be true. They might give you a week, but anyone, a couple of months, they said, and we were going to be trained in California. And then, we were going to go to the Pacific, which didn't make me happy at all. Because I, as I said, that Pacific (business?), to me, seemed, like, just bugland.

KP: Plus, you had seen enough of the war.

VG: Yeah. No, that was enough. I wanted out, period, like, but you couldn't, so that was the best second choice. And then, you're going to get back in the States for a while. Who knows, you might even get home. So, I was happy about that. And, the trip home from there, on the ship, was quite a bit different from going over; it was done on an American troop ship. And it was a pleasant trip, in July of 1945, beautiful sunshine. Oh, that was nice. But, any rate, we came into Boston Harbor, and we had the, the Governor of Pennsylvania to greet us. They had big banners and, and fireboats with the colored waters. (What a welcome home?)

KP: You really had the real hero's welcome.

VG: Yeah, oh Jeez, they really welcomed us. Couldn't believe this. Holy, look at this. We were allowed up on deck to watch this, and they were riding around with, with a bullhorn, saying all sorts of nice things. [laughter] And so, then, we got into the Boston Harbor, stayed at Camp Miles Standish, and we were on there for about two days, and I was shipped down to Fort Dix. At Fort Dix, I think, we got a thirty-day furlough, and then, then, this was all preliminary to going to California at the time. When I was home in August, that's when they dropped the A-bomb. I, I was at the Office of Price (Control?), for my stamps. And, I can remember getting my stamps, for my mother, who said, "Go get them." Okay, and I went into a bar across the street from this great big

office complex in Newark. It is still there, but it is not that. I don't know what the heck it is now. Went into this bar and met a guy from the 2nd Division. I knew he was 'cause I could see his patch. So we ... struck up an acquaintance and started talking and having a beer. And, I was conscious, halfway down the bar, there was some people, (they were?) in an animated conversation. They had a newspaper ... and so, they said, "Couple of GIs" they said, "What do you think about all this?" And, I, honest, we had no idea what they were talking about. And, what they were talking about was the headline, that they had dropped this atomic bomb. So, they said, "What do you think about this (thing they got?)." "What is it?" we said. So, they showed us. Holy Jeez! That whole, my eyes and his, Holy Christmas! And I said, "I wouldn't think anything of it." Because, I recall that, while we were in Europe, the story was that Hitler was always talking about his secret weapons. He was, he always had a secret weapon, which was going to annihilate us.

KP: And you had grown a little skeptical?

VG: Yeah, a little skeptical. So, that had to be a lot of baloney. And, it wound up that that was the truth. [laughter]

KP: So, you didn't realize it, like a lot of guys, that the war was over for you?

VG: No. Yeah.

KP: It took a while for that realization to sink in.

VG: That was it, that was it, period. We didn't have to worry about Japan. We were, we had, I went from there to, to Fort Dix, after my furlough was over. Camp Shelby, in Mississippi. Now that the war was over, we had nothing to do. They didn't know what to do with us. I got no artillery training at all. I wouldn't know how to fire a 105, at all. I knew nothing at all about their radio procedures, and, which I was going to be, have to be dealing with. And, on my discharge, I am discharged from the 229th Field Artillery Battalion. [laughter] And, I know nothing at all about it. That's the Army. And, but, we had seen, we did nothing at all ... but play ball, which I liked. It was pleasant, nice sunshine. We'd go out in the field, or something.

KP: You were actually there at a good time of the year.

VG: Oh yes. Another good time was ... Second Lieutenant Williams, I remember him, too, (Adam?) Williams. And, having a good time with the guys. So, they showed us plans, and training (division showed us well?), as long as the war [was over], no harm. They showed us plans for where we would be. We were gonna be on one of the islands there, preparing for another invasion, this big invasion of Japan. And, they told us, would be bigger than D-Day, but, I couldn't imagine that, but, this was going to be bigger than D-Day. So, they showed us this thing, and all the different outfits, and where they would be going into, into Japan itself, into the mainland. And, we were slated in there someplace, I know, our division, but, we were just one of many, many divisions. And, I guess, we weren't going to be in the first wave, or something, I don't know. But,

we were, and, looked at that and there were going to be so many casualties. It was obvious when you saw that thing. I said, "Thank God, we don't have to experience that."

KP: So, you had a good concept of what an invasion of Japan involved?

VG: Oh yes. Yes. And, there were a lot of guys that, that hadn't, that would have experienced that. I had a friend of mine, he was [one of?] my bosses, superintendent in schools, and he got [to] be a good friend of mine. And, he was a sergeant with, in the ... 98th Infantry Division, and a cousin of mine, too. And, they spent all their time, they had a good time, they said they were in Hawaii, but they were bored to death. They were training and training all the time. Like everybody else, they wanted to get into action. As long as they had the training for it, they might as well see it. But, they had no conception, and they were slated, they were, they were going to be in the first wave. I said to him, "Brother, you don't know how lucky you are!" That things turned out as they did. But, all in all, it was quite an experience. It sure did change my life, many ways.

KP: You had mentioned, on your survey form, that you had been to the fiftieth anniversary celebrations. Had that been your first time back?

VG: Yes, oh yes. No, I went back by myself, a few years before that. And, I made my own tour. I didn't have a car, and stuff like that. I used the Europass. And, I tried to get as close to where I thought I had been, and I went to Paris, and that was good. And, I did get to, I did get back to the beach. Somebody had told me, who had been there a year, or so, before, they said there's a bus that runs out to the beach. And, you get to, what the heck's name of that town? (Bayaux) The British had liberated, one of the first ... I say, I must be getting Alzheimer's, I tell you, now. [laughter] I keep forgetting. I should remember. But, (any rate?) if I think of it, and I am telling you something else, and I suddenly blurt out a name, you'll know I remember. (Bayaux)

KP: You also have a chance to correct your transcript, and add to it. [laughter]

VG: Okay. But, I got there and I had to take a special train out to, from, to Caen, from Paris. And then, went out to this town, which I can't remember the name of, and I got to the, to the information section, and I asked about the bus. She said they had, this was in September, of a few years [ago], she said the buses stopped running a week before. Holy Jesus! What do I do now? Said, "I gotta get to the beaches. That's what I came here for ... the bus." She said, "Well, just leave your name, address, and your hotel." She said, "What happens, there is some people come, and they see it. We put the name in and they'll contact you, and then, maybe, you can share the cost of a cab," which doesn't cost that much, maybe about forty dollars and something, or that, in American money. I thought, well, that's a good idea. But, I said, "Jesus," I said, "Is it too far to walk?" She's like, "I think you'd find, it was about, maybe, a twelve-mile walk," or something like that. I said, "Oh Holy Jesus!" So, I left my name, and there were other people in line behind me, and then, I walked out in the streets. And, I was walking down this street and a couple waved to me. I was (constant?), they were right behind me in line, and they waved to me, and came across the road. And they said they

had been in line, they heard what I had said. And they said they would love to see the beaches. They had just come back from Germany. They were on a tour themselves, and, but, any rate, so they said, "We have a car," and then, they would like to take me out there, if I would go with them. Brother, I said, "That's great." And, the guy wound up as a, he, he sold mobile homes out in Nebraska, or someplace. So, we made connections, and what hotel, they were just a couple of blocks away from me, that I would meet them next. Matter a fact, I said I'll meet [them] for dinner that night. Because they were so nice, I'd treat them to dinner. And, "No, no," they yelled, "I'll pay," no, okay. [laughter] So, any rate, we got [made plans]. Then, meantime, I was, I went out for dinner, came back, and there were a couple of young girls there. And, great, so they got my notice at the tourist, or what the hell (it was?), information bureau, and they wanted to hook up with a cab ride. I, I told them I had already made arrangements with these people, so that was out. So, I went to the beach with these people, and I took them. I was the tour director. And, boy, I was, I was really thrilled, because I did get down to Omaha, and I did get down to Vierville. And, and I got back to...

KP: And, were you surprised? Did you remember a lot?

VG: Oh yes. Yes. It was amazing to me, so much that was there that you could remember. Now, there were some monuments. Matter of fact, there's a big National Guard monument, right near Vierville, on the beach. And, there wasn't much. There was one of those ports there. There was just some of it remained, sticking above the sand, yet, but that's, that's long since gone. But, up in the British sector, a lot of it remained. The mulberry things, they called, those big concrete, they floated across. And there's a big museum up there, which is a, which is a great one. The British Museum was great. And, they depicted the preparations, and other things, and so on, and very dramatically. I was very impressed with that. And then, we could walk on the beach and walk up to that blockhouse, which was still there. But, some people had made a home out of it. But, it was, it was still there. They had, like, a concrete trench, and they, they used mortars there. They, I think they shot an eighty millimeter mortar, or something. They had, they didn't have to come up. They had shelves to put the mortars on, coordinates (up on the thing?), colored things with the, all they had to do was set that thing. They could hit that beach with mortars, which they were doing. And then, across, was the spot where I told how this guy earned the Silver Star on the first night. And, they had some of the barbed wire still there, rusted, but it's still there, and a lot of it. And then, some of the guns are still there, too, down further, down the beach. The road, a lot of things, you could really, vividly remember, the hedgerows. And so, it was nice of those people I tell you. They had to get going, they, they had all that day I spent with them. We got down to Pointe-du-Hoc, which, which you probably know of, and, along the beach (tours?), some little private museums that the Frenchmen had set up, where they, they had dug up stuff from it. And then, it was pretty good, some of them were pretty good.

KP: Had you been interested in going back and reliving history? When did you have that desire to reexamine what happened to you in World War II? What strikes me about GIs remembering the war is when I ask people, "Did you talk very much about the war when you came back to college?" most people say, "No, we hardly ever talked about the war."

VG: No. Not really. Not really, even though we (were with a lot of ex-GIs). It was who you were with, where were you, yeah, okay. But, everybody had stories to tell, I guess, but, you'd be embarrassed to sort of tell them, because it would sound like you were bragging about this, or bragging about that. And, but, and you figured, nobody would be listening to you, and nobody would understand, so you didn't, you didn't say much. Not constantly, you didn't think about it that much.

KP: Most people when I ask them this question, they almost think, "Well, of course, we are not going to talk very much about it."

VG: Sure. Sure. Talk more about it now. I know, like I said, this brother-in-law of mine, who was with the 35th Infantry Division, had seen quite a bit of action, quite a bit of action. He was a foot soldier, a real infantry man. What everybody's, if you've seen any combat, you're always proud. You want to be an infantryman. You don't want to be an infantryman, but you want to be connected with them, because you're proudest of them, I think, than any other units. And, I think they deserve all the credit in the world. And so, I talked to him, quite a bit. We get together and visit. My sister-in-law says, "You guys going to fight the war again?" [laughter] I said, "Well, nobody else wants to listen, so." (She says, "Is that so?") He shows me his book. I show him my book, and we talk. He was here, there, and many of the same places, so we have very much in common. And, that's the thing I find, well, you have so much in common, that you could talk. He listens to me, I listen to him, we understand. And, nobody else understands. So, we don't say anything and they wouldn't care anyway, so, you don't tell them.

KP: When did you join a veteran's organization? You are a member of both the VFW and the American Legion and Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge.

VG: Yes.

KP: Did you join those when you came home?

VG: No. No. I don't know when it was. American Legion, I didn't join 'til fairly recently, I would say, not more than a half dozen years ago. And, I was living in South Brunswick, in an apartment, at the time. And, the VFW, in downtown Highlands, I joined before then, maybe, maybe a few years before then. But, not right away.

KP: Was it the 1960s, or 1970s, or later?

VG: I'd say '60s, because I was teaching at Henry Hudson, yeah, yeah. I'll tell you the truth. I joined, I remember that I knew fellows in the VFW, and I was very impressed with them. The patriotic ceremonies they, they took part in, they organized at Veterans' Day, former Armistice Day, and they came to school. The kids weren't that much interested, by that time. But, I, I thought they did a good job, and I thought, well, I should join them. So, I joined, but I wasn't active.

KP: Yeah, that was really the reason you joined, it was not...

VG: Yes, really. Right, right. And not, not to take an active part, but to be a part of them anyway.

KP: You attended the ceremonies at the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, and you found them quite moving.

VG: Yes, yes. Very much, very, very much. I'll tell you a story about that. D-Day there, June 6th, it was just almost exactly a carbon copy of what it was fifty years ago. And, but, I joined this tour. As a matter of fact, I found it in, in, I think, a VFW magazine, or World War II magazine, which I get, and I joined that tour. It originated in Louisiana and I met the tour up in Kennedy Airport, went to England, and they retraced, traced a lot of steps. One of the things I remember was on June 6 it was, yeah, it was June 6th, at Utah Beach, 10:30 in the morning, they had ceremonies. We got, the day before, we were there to visit it, but then, the next day, we were there for the ceremonies. And, they had all sorts of stands set up. And, I was very impressed with the monument there, and everything, the set-up of it. And, they had TV towers, and the story, we were going to visit there, you're going to see the ceremonies. President Clinton was going to be a part of the ceremonies, President Mitterand of France, all sorts of dignitaries. And, but, the tour was going, also, we were going, weather was good, or not, we were going. And, buses, I was very impressed with how, how things were organized. And, the French were very strict. And, they wouldn't let you down roads, they had to have special things on banners. And, they were only allowed in that area, and some people were unhappy, because you'd want to go down this part of the beach, no, no. They, they wouldn't let you go, and people were griping about the French. They were right. They couldn't allow people to go wherever they wanted. There were so many thousands of people and buses. And, I was impressed with the French people, how, how nice they were, and congratulatory, and so forth. And, "Welcome Liberators," and all that stuff, every place you went, kids, they were dressed up, and, but, we got to Utah, and they had these ceremonies, and the bus got there. Oh God! There were so many buses. And so, they said we were only going to be able to stay there for part of the ceremonies. And, make sure everybody's back at the bus. We could only stay there about a half hour. So, okay, so we had to walk down, they had paths lined up and all these hundreds of people were walking toward the beach. And, we got down there, and so, we are walking along, the stands are all filled up. There was one, stands this way, and then, behind some big stands, and then, an open area platform type, and with the microphones, and before the monument, and then, they had little individual seats, couple of rows there, on that side and this side. And so, we said, "Well, looks like, [if] we look up there, we can get seats there." So, we're on our way there, meantime, this woman in a trenchcoat came and, and stopped us and said, said to me, I had this badge on. You have to have a badge if you had landed [on D-Day]. They had to get in touch with the French Government, if you landed on D-Day, if you were a veteran of that, American flag, and so forth. I should have brought it and showed it to you. Maybe you've seen it. But, at any rate, she saw that, she said, "Did you land on D-Day?" And, I said, "Yes, I did." The other fellows I was with, one fellow was from the 87th Division. He hadn't, he landed before the Battle of the Bulge bit, but, and,

another guy, but, I said, I said, "Yes, I did, but not here." I said, "I landed a couple of miles further down at Omaha Beach." And, she said, "Well, that's all right." She said the President's come, and he said that, she said that, she said, "We have an honored section for you, if you'd come up and sit there." "Listen, how long is this going to last?" She said, "Oh, maybe an hour." I said, "That's too long, because we have to be back, back at the bus." And, these other guys said, "Are you crazy? That bus is not going anywhere," which it was. You couldn't move, for God's sake. [laughter] So, I thought about that, I said, "Well, okay." But, I am thinking, meantime, what are we doing, if we miss that bus? So, okay, sat up there, and it was cold and I had on just a light jacket. And, I was freezing. I had to go to the bathroom. [laughter] Sat there all the while and I had another fellow there, from the 4th Division, who had landed there, at Utah. And, he was from Brooklyn. We struck up an acquaintance while we were waiting. Meantime, helicopters come in, and Mitterand came, and what's his name? Secretary of Defense, he was (William?) Perry, and a lot of people. And then, they had a, they started the ceremonies, they had a twenty-one gun salute. And, they had a unit from the French Army come in, and a unit of GIs. And, it, it was very nice. And so, then, last one to come was President Clinton. And, they landed the helicopter back at the main stands. And, he came. So, we sat there, and all the while, I was freezing to death and I had to go to the bathroom, bad. I said, "For God's sake," I said, I said, "This is terrible." I said, "What are we going to do now?" 'cause, we couldn't leave. They had Secret Service men around. They weren't going to let you move. They had these port-a-potties, back at the main stands, I understand, a whole bunch of them. I'd have given my right arm to get there. So, we sat through this, this whole thing, and, thank God, Clinton didn't speak long, nor did Mitterand. But, I think it was Perry, he spoke too long. And, not that it was long, but, for me, it was long, in my condition. And so, we got, we got through, got through the ceremonies. And so, then, this woman came back and she said, "If everybody would, if you would please remain in your seats for a little longer, 'cause the president would like to come and greet everybody." What were we going to do? We had to stay. Meantime, I want[ed] to say, "God's sake, I gotta go to the bathroom, lady." And so, then, he came and he came to every, every person, he shook hands, and he said "Thank you, and God bless you." I was impressed with his size. He must have had a bullet-proof vest, or something, on too. Because, I thought he's, he's larger than I thought he was. And, nice smile, and it was very nice. He had a good firm handshake. I was impressed with that, because I was never impressed with the guy too much, politically, to tell you the truth. Because of the Vietnam bit and, I guess, the publicity he got out of that. But, that doesn't bother me now. And so, I think, so then, we were liberated. And he went and I said, "Thank God, we're going to get out here." So, we made our way back, and we were going back toward the port-a-potties, and Senator Moynihan, from New York came up. But, I recognized him right away. And, he came up and he said a few words and, honestly I, I wanted to go to the bathroom so bad I was hardly listening to him. Shook hands with him, and, now, I just wanted to say, "Oh, for God's sake, let me go." I made it back to the port-a-potties all right. [laughter] But, the thing that bothered me about that business, now, it was on tape. And I, I saw, when I came back, I looked in the TV Guide, and it was, it had been broadcast. 'Cause people, when we were going around, French people saying, "Say, we saw you on TV." So, I said, "I know it is on there." So, I went to the library and I found, who do you write to? NBC, I wrote to them, told me, I'd like this tape. And, ... I'll pay for it, I am not looking for something free, I'll pay for it. And, I haven't heard a word to this day. I sent three letters. I wrote to the Asbury Park Press, The

Trouble Shooter, and enlisted their aid. They wrote back. They got no response. They wrote twice, got no response, or acknowledgment, that they got the thing at all, and it was on at four-thirty in the morning here. I know my children wouldn't see that. So ... it was ten-thirty over...

KP: Plus, they didn't know you were going to be on TV.

VG: Yeah, so, that was it. No tape, nothing.

KP: I was curious about your comments on Clinton. Clinton is sort of this poor transitional figure. He is the first president who didn't serve in World War II.

VG: Yes. Yes.

KP: Carter didn't serve, but, he was in the Navy, the Naval Academy, at the time. What do you think of that? He, in some ways does mark this important transition. What do you think of him? You may have thought other thoughts about him.

VG: Yeah, yeah. Right. Yeah. My thoughts changed. That doesn't bother me. I can understand his position on Vietnam. I think that was a bad, bad scene. And then, I could understand him, not wanting to go, but, I was disappointed that he went so far, as he did, in his criticism of the war, and so forth. Like everybody, my own son, protested that, in a way, and I got him to, finally, relent and serve, because I was very patriotic and (in the end?), you had to do your duty. Didn't make any difference, whether you agreed or not.

KP: And, your son didn't agree?

VG: Yeah. So, we got through that all right.

KP: So, that was your son who served in the Army Corps of Engineers?

VG: Yes, yes. And so, I can understand Clinton's position, but, I can understand. The Vietnam thing, I couldn't understand, and all that violent protesting, you know what I mean? I have misgivings about it now, that right, or wrong, it's just a shame that it [went to that point]. It was just a shame we were involved in the first place, but that's, that's my own personal opinion. But, Clinton was in a tough position.

KP: You seemed to be, at the ceremony, really impressed by him.

VG: Oh yes, it did. It did, personally. I guess, maybe, if we all met people personally, other than newspapers, or radio, or television, that we would think differently. That one-on-one, or something like that. And, you like to think of them in the right way, think that they're the kind of people that

you think they should be. And, maybe it is a bit of a disappointment, when you find out maybe they aren't.

KP: It seems like you had low expectations of Clinton and he managed to exceed them in person.

VG: Yes, yes. Yes, he did. And, I think there are a lot of things that, that are coming out now, as far as, that are in his favor, I think.

KP: It strikes me, you were a New Dealer, your family was pro-New Deal, and now you've sort of wandered away from the New Deal. Is that a fair characterization?

VG: Yes, oh yes. Yes.

KP: I am going to do two things. One, I have an important meeting, but, if you could.....

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

RG: Okay, so, we'll talk about Bill Clinton, how he has exceeded your expectations in some ways.

VG: Yeah. Yeah.

RG: Can we talk back about the war again?

VG: Yeah.

RG: And, now you said, when you came back, you didn't really talk to people about your experiences.

VG: No, naw.

RG: You came back to school, I mean, you decided to go back to school.

VG: Right, that was an experience that I (wanted?).

RG: How did you decide to come to Rutgers and study Physical Ed.? I mean, there must have been a decision made there.

VG: Well, Phys. Ed. was what I wanted to do all along, and teach. I envisioned myself as teaching kids, and stuff, which was, did happen. And, I said, my, my old coach in high school, football coach, took a great personal interest, and he suggested Rutgers. I told him, I didn't want to go away. I had been away enough, had seen a lot of things, and Rutgers sounded like a good deal. He

convinced me what a good school it was, and so forth. And, I agreed with him. And then, I came here.

RG: You used the GI Bill.

VG: And, the GI Bill, yes. I was so, so, I'm still grateful. I think that was a great thing.

RG: Okay, that's when you got your bachelor's degree. In '49, you graduated?

VG: Bachelor's and Master's. I got [a] Bachelor's in '49, and I went for my Master's at night, at Seton Hall. I got that in, in 1952.

RG: Did you start that right after you finished at Rutgers?

VG: Yes. After I finished Rutgers, I started up there.

RG: Were you only going part-time there or full-time?

VG: Well, I was going full, well, part-time, at night.

RG: Because you were already teaching.

VG: Yeah. I was teaching and going there at night, and Saturday mornings, and summer. And, I finished up in '52.

RG: Did you, when you were at Seton Hall, did you meet or see people from the war, like from your unit?

VG: Not from my unit, no.

RG: You didn't really stay in touch with them?

VG: I, I stayed in touch with some fellows. I [was] writing to [them], and then, it became a Christmas card deal, and that gradually faded away, except one fellow, my, my best friend, Bob (Graff?), who's [in] Indiana. I haven't seen him, to this day, but, we write once a year, at Christmas time, and he lets me know what he's doing, has done, and I do the same thing, and that's it. But, never, never met anybody.

RG: When did you get married? Did you get married a couple of years after graduation, or were you in school?

VG: I got married in, in '49.

RG: Okay, so the year you graduated.

VG: Oh '48, excuse me, '48. I, yes, I had my first child, my son, in '49. Matter of fact, I always kid him, I tell him he ruined what was called a, "Bachelor's Party," with all the Phys. Ed. Profs. George (Docket?), who's soccer coach, and a couple of other guys, and other guys, the guys [from the] football team and, had a party down in Princeton Inn, in Princeton. And, it was that night that my son decided to be born. It was a little premature, because we were expecting him in June, and I am not, July, I think it was, yeah. And, he was born [in] May, yeah, May of '49, that night. So, I missed that, "Bachelor Party." [laughter] But...

RG: What was it like being a married student at Rutgers? Was that different?

VG: I tell you, [there were] a lot of married students at the time, after the war. Guys who had gotten married and, I guess, with the GI Bill, they were able to afford college. Their wives, a lot of the wives did secretarial work, and so forth, for the different Profs., and the school set up a community on the other side of the river. There was nothing on the other side of the river but the football stadium, and practice fields, and so forth. Now, there's a lot over there. But then, they had these little, little units, I guess, which are still there, too. I don't know if they use them as classrooms now or not. But, that's where the married guys lived. And, it was very, very inexpensive living, I guess, for them and, some of them had children, and so forth. And so, I thought that was a pretty good deal for the guys.

RG: Now, did your wife work after you got married or did she stay at home?

VG: No, she didn't, she didn't work. She went to work for about fifteen years at Sears Roebuck in Middletown, because, then, my children were coming of college age, and [we had to deal with] the money problems, so she helped out there.

RG: But, when they were little, she was home?

VG: Yeah. Oh yeah. Yes. I did a lot of other things, different jobs, and that, supplement the income.

RG: Now, you were in Newark, for a while, after you finished school. And then, you had a change of careers, you were working for Prudential for a period of time.

VG: Yup. Yes. Five, five years, yes.

RG: You sold life insurance to people. Did you just call people, or, how did you do that?

VG: I'll tell you why I gave that up. I, I made more money than I made teaching school. But, I was going all the time, particularly at night. My children were growing up, and I got, I did well in the insurance business, and then, once in a while, the only time, I say, I really got to see my family, the

way I wanted to see them, would be on vacation time. Like, we'd have a sales convention in Florida. Well, the company provided the funds, enough funds, for the whole family, plus, and that was a good deal. And then, I'd go to Chicago, or something like that, but, I realized that I'd be leaving for work in the morning, before the kids went to school, and many times I had to call home, I got an appointment here, or there, and you had to see the people at night in their homes. And so, then, I'd come home, I'd have to call my wife, I won't be home for dinner. And, I'd get home, maybe about ten o'clock or so, by the time the kids were in bed. So, I got tired of that. And, I said, "I am going back to teaching school and we'll have to starve to death for a while."

RG: You went back to teaching history again, and that was in Red Bank.

VG: Right. Right. Red Bank Catholic High School.

RG: So, with the insurance job, you had moved out of Newark and you decided that it was time to get out of the city?

VG: Yes, yes. I moved out. Yeah, well, I had, when I started at Red Bank Catholic, I moved from Saint James High School, in Newark, and I did coaching there, and teaching. And, I did the same thing at Red Bank Catholic High School. Then, I went into the insurance, insurance business, and then, I went back to teaching school. I went to Highlands Grammar School, eighth grade, and then, I went to Henry Hudson Regional School, which was a brand new school just opening up in Highlands. I went seven to twelve and I finished up my career there.

RG: I noticed you were teaching history and you had minored in history in college. You must have had an interest in history all along.

VG: Yes. Oh yeah, oh yeah. Oh yeah, definitely, that was always [my interest]. The thing was, I wanted to coach, too, which I did. And, history seemed to be it. History was easier for me than anything else, I suppose. And, English, I had an interest in English. But, I just minored in history. I didn't want to go ... Some fellows, then, took two and three majors, but, I wasn't that ambitious.

RG: So, you were teaching, and then, you were assistant principal for about a period of four years, in late fifties and early sixties.

VG: I was at, that was at Highlands Grammar School, and then, at, when I went to Henry Hudson Regional School, (I don't know?) after how many years, I became Department Chairman Supervisor, and then, (I got made principal?) ... in history, yeah. And then, they gave me, also, the foreign language department, which I knew nothing at all about. But, I think it was an economic measure, too. Dropped some people from supervising, so they gave me that job.

RG: So, you were the head of two departments.

VG: Yeah, they, they gave it a name, I forget what they called it, but, it was history and foreign, foreign languages.

RG: Now, you got your Masters from Seton Hall, you said, and that was in what?

VG: Yeah. In Administration and Supervision. And, they got my Principal's Certificate out of that.

RG: And so, you were really involved with the schools, and teaching, and supervisor till '84. And then, you retired.

VG: Yeah. And then, I retired. Yes. My wife died in '82. And, I went on, but things didn't seem to have the same interest to me. And, I thought, well, these kids are probably getting tired of me, and so forth. So, I might just well retire.

RG: Did you start getting interested in any particular activities, or groups, or organizations after your retirement?

VG: Yes. Nothing, no, no, nope. I didn't, well, like I say, I, I joined the American Legion, but, I never got active in these organizations. Not very active. And so, that, [I] was just a dues paying member. And, visiting relatives and that sort of thing. And, I did get back to Europe, I said, that one time by myself. And then ..

RG: You returned last year.

VG: Yeah. Yes.

RG: Would you want to go back?

VG: Teach.

RG: Would you be interested in going back to Europe?

VG: Back to Europe, oh sure. Sure. I'd, I may do that, I don't know. I have a friend, I met, and I met another woman, not seriously, but, just friendly. She was a GI bride. Her husband was, was a GI, and he, he's since died. And, she had a friend over there, lady friend, known and been friends through the years. And, she comes here once a month, once a year, from Belgium, and the woman here goes over there, there for about a month, and they visit one another. And, last summer, the woman from Belgium came with her husband. Her husband came here, too. Very nice people, really nice. And, I took them around different places, and they, they were interested in and they were grateful. So, I have an open invitation to go back there, and visit them, and stay with them. And, the only thing I have to pay is my airfare. So, I am seriously considering that, going back there for a while and seeing them.

RG: Out of your children, only your son was in the Army Corps of Engineers. Nobody else was interested in the military, or ROTC, or anything?

VG: Yeah. No, no, no, no. (...?)

RG: Okay, you were saying that the war changed your life. How did it affect you? You said something about the war aging people.

VG: Yeah. Well, I think, when you, soon after, it did mature me, it was. It did age, you, in many ways, too, and mature. And, I think it made you a little more serious. I don't think it ruined you, in any way. But, it did make you grow up a lot more than you might have.

RG: Do you think it was a scary experience? Seeing people die, especially since you were landing on the beach, landing at Omaha, having never seen combat before?

VG: Sometimes. Yes, that, that was a frightening experience. I think everybody was frightened. Everybody was afraid, and confused, and it was all mixed up. It wasn't at all like you had figured it was going to be. You, you can imagine things, you say, you figure, well, you know how it's gonna be in training. But, you really don't until you experience it. I always say that anything, I think, nobody really understands something until they experience it, not just only wartime, anything. You say And people will be telling you (something?), yeah, I understand. You really don't. But, when you experience it, then you understand it. And so, it isn't too good. I don't want to, like I said, I'm not holding myself up as a hero, by any means, but I did a lot of praying.

RG: Do you think a lot of people turned to religion? Did they turn to the chaplains? Did they turn to spiritual means to learn to cope with the reality of the war?

VG: I think so. I think they do a tremendous job. Yes, yes, it's because, in the end, you have nothing else. You've got to hold onto something, and you do get more spiritual. I've seen a lot of fellows that had become more spiritual, and, like I say, like, I'll never forget that young fellow on the beach, wherever, he was, crying for his mother. It's just (you hear?) his wailing. And, when things quiet down, that time, because we were all frightened, and you figured you're not going to go much further than where you are, and all that sort of stuff. And, you almost wanted to curse at him, "I wish he'd shut up." And so, that you do, you do, whatever people want to call him, God, or a Superior Being, something. You want some help from someplace. And, that's where you, that's where you get it.

RG: So, praying was just something that really helped you to get through the ordeal?

VG: Oh yeah. Sure, sure. I think that as far as praying [or] religion, I prayed that I would be someplace else, or just get me through this part, you know what I mean. And, all right send me back someplace where I don't have to hear the noise, and then, and I'll be okay.

RG: But, do you think, you saw more casualties, as more time went by, you got a little hardened. You could take it in stride, almost.

VG: Yeah. Oh yeah. You could, yes. You don't become used to it, as people say, to that degree. But you, you've experienced things, are, you get more accustomed. For instance, I say, you can tell when shells are going that way and shells are coming this way. You can, you can tell the sounds of different weapons, and you can hear German, "burp guns", we called them, little machine guns. And, you didn't like that sound, because, when, [it means] they are close, they are firing on to you. You figured you are going to be next, you are going to be doing something.

RG: Do you think the officers, including General Cota, inspired the soldiers? Do you think they inspired by their example?

VG: Yes, yes. Yes, I think so. Yes, I definitely, definitely. I know General Cota was the Assistant Division Commander of the 29th Infantry Division, on the beach. There's been a lot written about him. And, I only saw the man briefly, two, two occasions, when I was with the 28th. And, I forget where we were going, someplace, a big operation, and he gathered regiments at a time and, like in the movie, what's the movie? Patton, with General Patton, where he, he speaks to these guys, I think, when they are going into the invasion, or going into Italy, or Sicily, something. The same, Cota did, sort of, the same thing. They had a microphone there and he talked, and I was very, very impressed with him, because what he was saying made sense to me and was truthful. And, he was a, he was a real man, a real, real leader. And, sometimes didn't have to be where he was, but he was there so (he was very brave?).

RG: When President Roosevelt died, and you got the news, you were still fighting. You were still in combat. How did you react? What was your first thought?

VG: Yeah, yeah. I felt bad, I felt bad, serious. And, one reason, because he was a real leader, too. Whether people agreed with him, or not, or what he did. I happen to agree with him. I think, I still agree with the things he did, he had to do. People may second-guess, people now, it's easy, hindsight's easy. But, losing a leader like that, you wonder, what direction are we going to go in now. And, Truman, I liked Truman. I thought, and, had I known then, I wouldn't have felt as bad, that, nothing to worry about. We got a good fellow there.

RG: Do you think, and this is all in retrospect, with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, was Truman's decision the right decision at the right time? There has been a lot of criticism of that decision and people have second-guessed him. What do you think about it?

VG: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I know. Sure. Yes, it was the right time, right decision. It's a shame it had to be made, but wartime is, something ... civilians get killed, people get killed, people who shouldn't get killed. But, that's, that's the sad part about war. A lot of people get hurt who shouldn't get hurt. But, it's going to be one way, or the other, and the way I look at that, and

knowing, knowing what the invasions are like, and what it was going to be like in Japan, which would be worse than here, I say "Holy Jesus!" It saved an awful lot [of lives], not just American lives, but the civilians that would be, would be killed would be terrible. And so, that, the number of people who sacrificed themselves, or were sacrificed, whatever way you want to put it, it is just too bad. But, it had to be done, really.

RG: So, you think that Truman was right?

VG: Yeah, I think he was right. Really, I wish I could say otherwise, but ... otherwise, there would be a lot longer fighting.

RG: The war would have been prolonged, and then, you might have been fighting into '46, possibly.

VG: Oh, it would have been prolonged. Right. And, oh sure. And the thing was, but, the, the Japanese peoples, they were never going to get it, and they're, I didn't experience the Japanese. But, from everything I have read, and, even some Marines who were there, I spoke to, they weren't going to give up.

RG: They would fight till the bitter end?

VG: They, they really were going [to fight]. Now, Hitler, who spoke to his people, and soldiers, and so forth, and fight till the last. But, they weren't going to listen to him as much as the Japanese would. Germans were good, good fighting people, well-trained, a good army, and so forth. But, they wouldn't hold out like the Japanese. It wasn't a religious thing with them, you know what I mean. So, they would have been terrible.

RG: What about Eisenhower? Did you ever get to see him?

VG: I saw Eisenhower before we went in on the landings, and we were in, just outside, I forgot the name of the town, but, in Wales (Wen Voe). We left from Wales, and so, he was coming around, I guess, I understand, [to] the different outfits, and we were sequestered then. We had, they had armed guards around the camp, barbed wire, and everything, but, nobody was moving. And, we had to stand, he came with a couple of assistants, it was pouring rain, wearing ponchos, and he was up on a platform and [with] a microphone. And he, he said, not that we were going to embark on a great crusade, he didn't say where we were going, but, all he knew was, we were going into combat. And, he wished us all luck, and so forth, and he knew we would do our job. And, I was very impressed. He was very military-like.

RG: Did he seem charismatic? Did he seem like a good leader?

VG: Yes, yes, yes. I think he was a good leader. Yes. Good leader. But, other than that, personally, I didn't know the man.

RG: After D-Day, and after the action in France and Germany, did you ever see Eisenhower again, during the course of the war or later?

VG: No. No, I never had. And, I was close to him, I know. Those things, you don't know. You don't know where you are half the time, really. Even officers don't know. The commissioned officers know ahead. Everybody has their little part to do in the theater, and where you are doesn't make any difference. You're going to go there anyway. You're going to leave, you hope. And so, you don't know about people.

RG: When you were training, preparing in England for the cross-Channel invasion, did you get to talk to any Canadians or to the British troops? Did you ever get a chance to interact with them?

VG: The only time, like I said, we were in training, that one period with the, it was a British commando, big guy. And, he's the guy that double-timed us all over the place and he impressed me, as being, and he had, had combat, which impressed us, you know what I mean. And, but, I thought a lot of him. The British, the average British soldier, they weren't too good, but, they were good, but, at first, I did not think so. And, I say, I think they did a great job at Caen, in holding back the Germans. I was, I'm still greatly impressed with that today, because I think things would have been a whole lot different. So, you've got to give them credit, a whole lot of credit, and they were no different than we were. I think that's the thing, that, really, when it comes down [to it]. No matter who they are, they were all pretty much the same.

RG: How about the Canadians, any contacts with them?

VG: Canadians, I, I had contact with Canadians. We had one guy who was a Canadian, who was with a different battalion, but in the same outfit, not a battalion, but company. I forget his name, but he was a very good-looking guy, Canadian, who had volunteered for the American Army. Accepted, and he was in the American Army. And, Canadians, in one, we were in England in this little town, outside this little town of Helston, and you would meet them in this canteen, which [was] run by the Red Cross. We were near an airfield, about ten miles away. Great big place where these British bombers would take off. And, like, some of those people would drift in, we met different people, Canadians, who incidentally, did not like the British. They, they didn't have a high regard for the British at all. But, we had guys who were in the British Air Force from Czechoslovakia, they had (guys?) from Poland, and, I forget where else they had. But, the Canadians I liked. They didn't like the British.

RG: I have been reading a little bit about D-Day, and, apparently, a lot of the defenders, when you landed at Normandy, were not necessarily ethnic Germans. They were from the Ost Battalions, the Ukrainians, and the Russians, and Poles, and so forth. Did you actually have any dealings or contact with them?

VG: Yeah, yeah. Right, right. Yeah. I didn't, no. I tell you that's... [the story about the Silver Star].

RG: Did you see any of the prisoners of war?

VG: Yes, yes. Oh yeah. There was, outfits taking, you'd see clusters of guys, sometimes a half dozen, sometimes as many as 20 or 30 of them. They gave up and they were just being marched back to the MPs, wherever they were. And then, they took them, I guess, they shipped, they probably shipped them back to England, or someplace. Matter of fact, I ran into, when I came back and came out of Camp Miles Standish, in Boston, down to Fort Dix, and then, I was given a furlough for thirty [days], the great big German guys from the, the Afrika Corps. Big, real big, husky blond guys, they were on the chow line. They were handing out the chow. We had to stand in line. And, the thing that impressed me, we get back, not only me, but the other guys [as well], you'd want some more, you'd say some more, "Nein, Nein," they told you to move. (...?) who are these guys, telling me no, you know what I mean. [laughter] (We just beat?) these guys, couldn't get over that, and, boy, they were, they were emphatic, "Nein," get moving. They probably liked that, too. And they, they were in good shape. They looked in good health. They, they did all right.

RG: After landing in Normandy, during the breakout, did your unit, or battalion, worry about being captured by the enemy? Was there ever that fear that you could become prisoners?

VG: Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. We had guys who were prisoners. We had one, Captain Lawrence, and about three other guys. This was either in Belgium, or Luxembourg, someplace. And, somehow or other, they got caught up by some Germans, or surrounded, in this woods, and one guy, one guy broke away, Staff Sergeant Anderson, and he got back to the outfit. And, he was telling us about it. And, they had, the Germans, ordered them to surrender, they knew they were in this clump of woods. And, they talked it over, what were they going to do? Well, Captain Lawrence was, was the highest ranking officer, so, he said "Guys, this is it, we [are] going," you know, "We're going to give up." So he said, "I am not going to walk out there," because, he said, they had a history of, sometimes, we heard of shooting guys [prisoners], surrendered, and they'd kill them instead. So, he was going to have no, no part of that. But, Lawrence's orders were, "Okay, listen. I am saying that we should give up. Do what you want. If you can make your way out of here and back up, okay." Anderson did that. He got out, but Lawrence surrendered, and two other guys were, and they became prisoners. But, you always figured, maybe, see, the worry was, were they going to take you prisoner or were they going to knock you off? And, that would be an awful way to go. You'd rather die fighting.

RG: So, you didn't dwell on it?

VG: No, no.

RG: It was something that might be in the back of your mind.

VG: Yes. Yes.

RG: One question about Rutgers. Do you attend the reunions of your class, the Class of 1949?

VG: Yes. Every five years, we have, the big reunion. And, I make, make it if I can. And I, I've made quite a few of them. But, it's good seeing a lot of the fellows again. And now, we are all, everybody's retired. [laughter] I don't know if anybody's still working anyplace, but, it's nice. I look forward to coming back all the time. It was a great place and I never regret coming here. I think if I had the choice, by all means, I'd choose this over any other university I might go [to].

RG: I think you mentioned Richard McCormick and Mr. Barnes, those were two of your favorite professors here. Did you like their style or did you like their classes?

VG: Yeah. (Two good Profs.?) I liked them personally. I liked them from every angle. They were very knowledgeable. They did an excellent job of teaching. McCormick is still here, now, I forget what his capacity is. But, I thought he was very, very good. We had, I took a New Jersey History course. And he, he had a project going, he was writing a book, I guess, on New Jersey. And he, he had all these different areas, and he said people knew very little about them. And so, he assigned, that was our term paper, to write on this person, or this area, and then, he would put it together. I had this, I forgot his name, governor, or something, one of the earlier governors. So, I had to find out anything I could find about him in the library and write it up. And, that was, that was interesting, and that was a lot of fun. His class was a lot of fun. He was very knowledgeable and, I guess, he had been an ex-GI, at the time, and very good. And, Barnes, too. Professor Barnes was very, very good, English. He taught English.

RG: Literature?

VG: Literature, yes. And, he was very good, very interesting. He liked plays. He always seemed to be hurrying off to go to a, to "go to town", he called it, to go to New York. And, but, a very nice person and really good, really impressive.

RG: So, you have fond memories of coming to Rutgers?

VG: Oh yes. Oh yes. Very much. Very much. It was a lot of fun. It was good people from every angle. We had, and some of the history Profs., Mark Heald ... was a Princeton man. He wound up at Rutgers, and he was very interesting, and he taught "Western Civilizations". And, he impressed me quite a bit. Professor Burns was another history Prof. who had written quite a few books and was quite an authority. Matter of fact, we were using his text, Edward McNall Burns, and he was a tough marker. Oh, he was a tough son-of-a-gun! When he took an exam, you would fill a blue book about the Industrial Revolution, or something. You'd write, write, and you'd think you couldn't possibly (write any more?), and that son-of-a-gun would have a red pencil ... question this, and question that. Son-of-a-gun. He was great!

RG: So, you must have done very well in your history classes, and overall in school.

VG: Oh yes. Oh yes. Oh yes. Yes.

RG: Okay, I think I am going to wrap things up, unless there is anything in particular that you want to say.

VG: No, I can't. We [could] go on and on, and you think about forty million things. I think I covered more than I thought I would, to tell you the truth.

RG: OK, great ... There's one more story you want to add.

VG: All right, but, at any rate, I, I thought of the same idea, the oral history. Well, why not talk to some of these fellows.

RG: You interviewed four or five GIs at Henry Hudson?

VG: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. They, they were on the faculty, good friends of mine. And so, I thought, well, I got a couple of tapes and I did what you do. I made up a series of questions. But, I did it differently. I thought, well, we got to have this thing running smoothly. [I] always remember Edward R. Murrow, was impressed with him and his interviewing. So, I thought, well, I'll get these questions, I'll give them to the guys. We are going to have this live interview, but this is what I am going to ask you. I didn't ask them their replies. But, this is what I am going to ask you, so be thinking about it. And, we did that. And, I introduced the thing and they told me their stories, and I put it on tape. I had, when I left school, when I retired, I left those tapes there. I have never traced them, whether they are still there, whether (they're part of the library?). What they did with them, I don't know. I did the same sort of idea, not as extensive as this, as this. And, not as long as this. And, but, I found it interesting. And, the kids did, too. I played [them] in class, to the kids, and I think the thing that they were impressed about, because not many people talked about it. I had the occasion, because I was teaching the subject, and, when we covered World War II. But, the other fellows didn't, the kids were impressed, because, they said "Gee, I didn't know Mr. (Liao?) was in the Army." "Yeah, he was in the war, yeah, he was in the war," bit you know. So, the kids talked about it. So, I found, that's why I found this very interesting. I said, "Gee, that's along the lines of what I had in mind," but not as extensive. So that's, that's what [I feel].

RG: Okay, I guess this is it.

VG: Yeah. Okay.

RG: For now.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

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