RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT KRAMER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Vincent Kramer, on February 21, 1995 with Kurt Piehler and ...

Maureen Prado: Maureen Prado

KP: At Rutgers University in New Brunswick. I guess I would like to ask a few questions about your parents. Both of your parents came from Holland.

Vincent Kramer: Yes.

KP: Do you know why they came to the United States?

VK: Yeah, they got fed up with Holland and decided to look for a better life.

KP: And how did they come to Paterson? Was it the silk industry?

VP: No. It was the fact that Holland at that time was, as far as I know, was exporting people, as well as cheese, and ... Paterson was one of the heavily Dutch neighborhoods at that time, and it still, to ... a degree, is. Actually, my mother came directly here. But my father was supposed to go to Canada, but when he got into Amsterdam they put him on a ship, and he ended up in Hoboken and none of them spoke English, but they put him off the boat, and ... fought their way on a train. They had no money, only their babushkas and their bundles. And they got their way to Paterson, and people picked them up and took care of them there.

KP: These are not family members?

VK: No.

KP: Community members ...

VK: Well, they might have. I don't think my father had any family members here. They ... knew Hollanders that came from the same area that might be in that area, and they found them, and they gradually got set up.

KP: Did you speak Dutch when you were growing up?

VK: Oh, yes. Yes.

KP: Do you still speak any?

VK: Yes, I can still barely get by. ... Yes, I ... can quite understand it, and I can still get past. I was in Holland recently and had no, although they all speak English there, but when I was with taxi drivers and like that, I could hold a regular conversation, just talk with them. But, ... I'm not

literate. I can't read or write.

KP: Your father went into business for himself. How did that come about, because he came with very little?

VK: Yeah. He was just an ambitious man. And since he was about sixteen when he arrived here, he had to go directly to work to help support the family because he was the oldest son. And he ... got this job and started working and then, I'd have to figure out the time ... 1913, he came. Fourteen years later he established his own contracting business. And it was very successful.

KP: And contracting, in terms of industrial construction, home construction?

VK: Mostly, in his time, it was mostly home, at that particular time, but he also had industrial, and then he ... eventually evolved into just paint contracting.

KP: And his business was centered in Paterson?

VK: Yes. It's one of the oldest businesses there. My brother's son still runs it.

KP: So it is still in existence?

VK: Yes.

KP: And your mother, she initially worked in the factories in Paterson?

VK: In the mills. Yeah. They had to, you know, to support the families, and it was a pretty tough life. They would leave home six-thirty in the morning, even bitter cold winter, and walk to work and then get home about six at night and half hour for lunch.

KP: You grew up initially in Paterson.

VK: Yes.

KP: And then your parents, it sounds like your father was doing better over the years.

VK: Yes, and then we moved to the East Side of Paterson, which Pop thought was ... bringing his family out into the country, which it was then. We had apple trees, ... but it's all big city slums now. And then after a few years there, he kept his business in Paterson, but he moved us up to Allendale where I went through the last years of grammar school and four years of high school.

KP: What are your earliest memories of Paterson, because you even lived in two different neighborhoods?

VK: Paterson was a ... city of immigrants. I ... know that in our neighborhood we had Italian, German, Dutch, and English. Each had our own ethnic background. There was no animosity whatsoever between the ... immigrants. No ... real feelings towards any of them that I ever saw. They all worked hard, they tended their own gardens to supplement their tables with food. Most of them were factory workers, some were shopkeepers. Tommy (Tinsely?) had a meat market. There were poultry markets in those days, which you may not be familiar, well yes, as a history, where you bought the chicken and they, you know, they took it. ... The most horrible smelling place in the world.

MP: There are still a couple of those in Union City.

VK: Yeah.

MP: Yeah.

VK: Don't they smell horrible?

MP: But good chicken.

VK: But good chicken. And ... each store, there were a lot of Dutch bakeries, and the doctor that delivered me was from England, Dr. Denton. And, ... we had a conglomeration, a mixture. ...

KP: So that's your earliest memories, of people from different backgrounds?

VP: Yes, never any difficulties, of great difficulties. ... We were poor, but we were happy. We didn't know any better. [laughter]

KP: How active were your parents in the church, in the Dutch Reformed Church?

VK: Well, ... not too active. ... My grandfather was, ... I believe, ordained as a preacher in the Dutch Reformed Church and, as a child, I went a few times.

KP: Sorry for that. [telephone interruption]

VK: Oh, that's all right. We had an interesting conversation. Didn't you think the book, <u>The Glory and the Dream</u>, was a great book?

KP: Yes.

VK: It's very accurate and it ... gives a fifteen-year period of history that's very good.

KP: Just going back to your grandparents.

VK: Oh, yes, my ... grandfather. And I'd ... go with my grandmother on my mother's side. My grandfather on my father's side was the man that was religious. And ... I remember ... from my youth at a very early age, you know, the difficulty I had sitting through church because it was all in Dutch and it was two hours and ... we sort of drifted away from the church. I think maybe that was one of the reasons they left Holland, too; I don't know. I'm not sure, that wasn't one of the reasons, but ... they never ... were very active in the church, no.

KP: Were they ever active in any fraternal societies, or Dutch civic associations?

VK: No. No. They broke away totally from the Dutch. As a matter-of-fact, in my home, we never spoke Dutch. I learned my Dutch from my grandmother. My mother and father would only use it of necessity, when they were dealing with ... their parents. But at home, no, it was never spoken. And the only reason I learned it was I would visit with my grandmother very frequently and she only spoke Dutch and so, of course, I ... learned it sitting, I had to learn it sitting with her as a child. And ... it didn't make any difference to me whether I said something in Dutch or in English. ...

MP: So did your grandmother come over with your mother?

VK: Yeah. Both of them, but my grandmother and grandfather came with my [mother] and my grandfather only came with my ... father.

KP: Your father in World War I, he did not serve? Was he drafted?

VK: No. No. He had two children and he ... was not drafted. There was no, none of them served in World War I. Not of the family.

KP: Did he ever talk about World War I? Or regret not serving?

VK: No. No. He never talked about it.

KP: How did the Great Depression effect your family?

VK: We weren't hurt too badly. Pop was always working and able to get business, and he could handle these crews very good and, which wasn't difficult in those days because people were clamoring for work. And ... I can honestly say that when I looked around me and saw what was going on, we didn't suffer.

KP: When you said your father had crews, how many people did your father employ?

VK: Oh, it ... varied, depending ... on the jobs. He ... might have, I suppose, I really don't know, but maybe up to, at the peak of things, thirty men.

KP: And at the low point he might just have ...

VK: Maybe four or five.

KP: The people that he hired, were they Dutch or were they other nationalities?

VK: Yes, when ... we were young and they were still coming into this country, yes, they were ... predominately Dutch.

KP: Your mother helped out in the business after ...

VK: He got started.

KP: After he got started. How long did she work in the business with him?

VK: About, I would say, till we moved to Allendale, just before we moved to Allendale, about five years. She ran the ... office. He had an office that he had built there, and my mother ran the office and did the bookkeeping, did all the typing, and things like that, things that she had picked up and learned herself.

KP: Which it sounds like she was a bright woman, because she only had a little bit of elementary school?

VK: Very little, yes. Yes, she was. She was a ... very capable and determined woman. She ... could type, take shorthand, she could, even when a friend was deaf, she learned ...

KP: Sign language.

VK: Sign language. Yes, she was ... a very capable woman.

KP: After mother stopped taking care of the office, did your father hire someone?

VK: Oh, yes.

KP: So it sounds like your parents were quite remarkable in that they fared well in the Great Depression, which was not an easy time for an independent contractor.

VK: Yes. ... Yes, he did.

KP: How important was education to your parents?

VK: I don't think it ... was very important because they got where they were without ... formal

education. And I sort of look back and think that's why I was never encouraged to go to college, for example, but rather to get to ... work and start ... earning a living.

MP: Did you work with your father in the contracting business when you were young?

VK: Well, ... I would as a kid, you know, help on the jobs, cleaning them up and like that. But no, I never was, ... what I would call a ... full-time employee.

MP: Right.

VK: Never. My brother did.

MP: Oh, yes.

KP: Because your brother did not go to college, your brother stopped at high school and went into the family business?

VK: Yeah.

KP: You saw three different types of schools, the Paterson schools, the Allendale elementary school and junior high and then the Ramsey High School. What were some of the differences growing up. Was Ramsey a better place to go to school than, say, Paterson?

VK: Yes. I think it was infinitely better. There was more interest in the students in Allendale. The ... type of education you received was infinitely better. And the Allendale educational system, I recall, when I went to Ramsey High School where they drew people, in those days, from Saddle River, from Waldrick, Franklin Lakes, Mahwah, Wyckoff, I mentioned. I remember one time one of the English teachers, ... Miss Miller, saying that the students from Allendale had the best grammatical, conjugation of verbs and so forth, background of any of the children, students, that came into Ramsey High School.

KP: When did you know you would likely go to college, or you wanted to go to college, since your parents, in a sense, would have rather see you go off and get a good job?

VK: Well, there's a man by the name of Les Wilding whom I still see, who was a teacher of mine in grammar school. He started teaching manual training when I was probably in the seventh, eighth grade, I've forgotten. I think the seventh. He's from Paterson, and he came up there to teach. Now, he was going to Rutgers at that time to get his teaching degree, but he was so good at manual training that ... he was hired as a teacher without a degree. But he, as I recall, he ultimately got it. Yes, he got his degree in 1935, so he didn't ... have his degree yet then. And he then was the manual training teacher in high school or what we called a shop teacher. He not only taught manual training, he taught metal work ... and all that, where you work with your hands, mechanical drawing. And he was an extremely active person with the students, and he

still is today. He just received the award for being the outstanding volunteer in Bergen County.

MP: Wow.

VK: And he's 85. So Les took those of us in the High Y, and I'm skipping right up to this, and asked us to come to Rutgers to a prep school weekend, those of us that had taken the classical course. In those days you were required, I think, eighteen Carnegie credits or something like that. I don't know what it was. And we had to take [a] transcript of what we had, and, ... fortunately, I had taken the classical course in ... high school. And so he brought us down here, Les did. And it was surprising. As I walked into that hall, the brand new gym, and I thought it was absolutely the most beautiful building I'd ever seen, what they call "the Barn" now or something like that. I couldn't get over how beautiful that entrance way, the foyer, was with the display cases and the beautiful swimming pool. They had that open for us. And this is exactly the way it happened. As I walked in with these others, someone took a hold of me and said, "We want to talk to you over here." I said, "Okay, I got nothing to do all day anyway." So I went in and it was the football coach, Wilder (Tasker?). And he said, "Could we see your transcript." And I said, "Yes," because I'd been playing football in high school and I was quite a big boy, a farm boy, and, well, from the farms. I wasn't a farm boy. And ... he took my transcript and he said, "Good." He said, ... "We'll see you a little later." And I said, "Fine." Well, he sent for me a little later and he said, "You're short a half a credit." That's how tough it was to get into college in those days. I had, I lacked one half a semester of Spanish. He says, "You know you can't be admitted?" I said, "Oh. Well, I really came down for the weekend." [laughter] He said, "Well, ... I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll send you to prep school. We have someone who'll pay for you to go to prep school. We'll send you to Bordentown," which was a prep school at that time. ... He said, "You can go home." I said, "I'm not sure." I said, "I may have to go to work." I said, "My family expects me to start being productive." And that's exactly what I told him.

So I went home and told my mother about it, and ... she said, "Well, you know it is bad times now for your Daddy," because she was running the business, although we never ... suffered, but, you know, to put up 400, 500, or 600, or 800 dollars was ... a little out ... of their reach at that particular point. But we never ... hurt. So I said to her, "Well." And she said, "You know you're going to have to start contributing to the family." And I said, "Well, they told me it wouldn't cost anything to go to prep school." The reason they were concerned, my brother had gone for four years to Blair Academy, which was very expensive, because they had the money and could send him. But now they, ... he's five years older than I am, so now we're into the Depression. He was there during the peak times, if you follow me. And so I said, "But, mother, they tell me it wouldn't cost anything." She said, "I'll talk to your daddy. You can go."

KP: So you ended up going to Bordentown for a year?

VK: To pick up the credit.

KP: So what was that experience like?

VK: ... That was a very fine experience. It was ... my first introduction ... to boys that had been sent there by Penn State, Cornell, Fordham, football players. And here I came in with all this, these men. Two of them later on made first string All-American. And the coach was a man by the name of Doug (Crick?), a remarkable leader. And I remember when he first sat us down, he said, "Well, we are gonna ... play this team, and they beat me last year, and they beat me badly." But in retrospect, he knew what he had. And he said, "I want you guys to do your best not to lose today." And we came in at half-time and the score was 33-0, in our favor. And he says, "All right, I'm not going to kid you anymore; you know what you've got. Move out and build up the scores on the rest of the year." And we did; we, I think, we played seven or eight games, we scored 218 points against seven or so. And everyone of us went away to ... to a college scholar, full scholarship.

KP: And what about the academic content?

VK: Bordentown was very tough. And, for the first time in my life, I stood in the honor roll there and, because you were forced as cadet, you had to go to your room at night, and you had to open the books and so [forth].

KP: And it was also, sort of, your first introduction to military training?

VK: No ... not really. ... I went to what they call CMTC, which I'm sure you don't know ... what that is. CMTC is Citizens Military Training Camps.

KP: So did you go to Plattsburg?

VK: No. No, I went to what was called Camp Dix at that time. And we went for four weeks, I think it was, and then the next summer I went to ... Fort Hancock Coast Artillery.

KP: And this was before you went to college?

VK: While I was in high school.

KP: High school.

VK: Yeah.

KP: And what did you think of those experiences, the CMTC? ...

VK: I ... enjoyed them because I had thought since there was difficulty in ... getting money to go to college, I had toyed with the idea, and I have even a letter at home yet, of enlisting into ... one of the armed forces, to be sent to the military prep school. Are you familiar with that? All the armed forces have military prep schools where you can enlist, and it was at Fort Totten in the

Army in those days, and you would ... it was down at Bainbridge, Maryland for the Naval Academy. And, if you enlisted, they would send you there to see if you could cut the muster. Otherwise, you'd go into the Army as an enlisted man, or the Navy. And so I tried to get into those, but at that point, in the Depression, they weren't even taking enlistments. And I went and took the test for West Point, and I remember, though I think, there were two vacancies, and I don't know how many people applied, but, you know, it was a huge hall full of people, ... and I'm sure there were some politics connected with it, too, I'm not certain.

KP: But you did try to get into West Point?

VK: Yes. ...

KP: So you had the idea of the military as a career fairly early?

VK: Yes, right. Yes, I did.

KP: It is not something that just came about because of the war?

VK: No.

KP: Some people had these, I would not say accidental careers because they chose it, but some people that I have interviewed ended up with a career because of the war.

VK: Yeah.

KP: You sort of found Rutgers, in a sense, if I could say, accidentally, from Les Wilding.

VK: ... Yes. ... Les Wilding.

KP: After your year at Bordentown, had you thought of going anywhere else besides Rutgers?

VK: Yes, but then I ... changed because I felt a loyalty. They had sent me here, because ... I was offered a scholarship to ... Penn State, and Penn State had a great football team. And they invited me out there. ... I went out there and one of the football players took me aside and he told me, he said, "Look it, ... if you are in good shape to come here, ... but if you get injured, ... [finger snap] you're are off your scholarship just like that." He said, "You better think about it before you come." I said, "I've thought about it already," [laughter] because I had an Upson Scholarship here, and Rutgers was not that way. Rutgers, once they took you in, they took care of you. It was not like I understand. Penn State might have been.

KP: So, both loyalty and the way the Upson Scholarship worked brought you to Rutgers, that you would keep your Upson Scholarship no matter what.

VK: As long as you maintained a certain minimal academic record, yeah.

KP: You came to Rutgers in 1937. What was the campus like?

VK: The campus was just like you see it now, College Avenue to the river. They were building the stadium on the other side, under the WPA. Douglass was on the other side of ... town, and the College of Agriculture, under the eminent Dean Lipmann ... was over there. We had a remarkable president at that time, and ... the new buildings on the campus. There aren't too many here, but the dormitories on the Banks of the canal are new. ... All of Kilmer is new, all of Livingston is new, and much of the College of Agriculture and ... Douglass is new, to me. But this campus hasn't changed a great deal. ... My fraternity was where Clothier Hall is now. So that was a fraternity at that time and then was a house behind us where I think the dispensary is. Those few changes have taken place on the campus. Our student center was a little old house on the corner over here, and there was a fraternity, which is the parking lot across the street, Kappa Sig, and ... other than that, there are not many changes. Oh, the parking deck is new, and that was a football field I first played on, Nielson Field.

KP: So your first experience with Rutgers was football practice.

VK: Yes.

KP: Ralph Schmidt sort of said that ...

VK: Yeah, I played with Ralph.

KP: He mentioned one of his first experiences was learning who got the Upson Scholarships and going out onto the field and finding out he is surrounded by a sea of Upson scholars. Was that a similar experience for you?

VK: Yes. ...

KP: One of the questions that I have is how did you select business administration and geology as majors? What led you to those two?

VK: I was advised that that would be a good course to take, so I took it because, as I understood it from that one, if I wanted to go into law, which I'd thought about, I could have done it ... with that background. Of course, if I wanted to change it, there would be time enough.

KP: You mentioned that Professor Johnson was one of your favorite professors?

VK: Helgi Johnson? Yeah.

KP: What do you remember about him?

VK: Oh, I remember him well. He was a Scandinavian. He [was] a very small man, but terribly physical. He'd climb mountains, do anything, very fair, very patient, to a degree. And he liked athletics. ... He was one of my favorite people. There was also an engineer, a redheaded, curly-haired, very tight curly-haired engineer. I wish I could remember his name. He was a remarkable professor, too. And Scotty Cameron, the librarian, had a lot of influence on me.

KP: So it seems like you got a lot out of Rutgers, both on the academic side and in terms of sports. You got a very well-rounded education.

VK: Yes. I'd say so. I wasn't a very good student, but I ... didn't hit the books either; I should have.

KP: When did you join your fraternity?

VK: ... Let me see, how'd that happen now? When I came here, ... for the prep school weekend, they put me into Phi Gam house ... for housing for the prep school weekend. Then ... the new coach, the coach that had recruited me, left, and Harvey Harmon came in. And Harvey Harmon was ... a Phi Gam, so ... he went to the house and made arrangements for me to get ... my room free there. And they were fine boys, and I enjoyed them, so I joined. I ... became a member of that. I actually, in retrospect, I pledged, you could pledge your fraternity before ... you entered school, before you matriculated. And, ... I think they pledged me the weekend I was here, anyway, but then Harvey being the ... coach helped me gain some help there. If I would ... work on tables and serve breakfast and things like and then ... I got some help there, so I didn't have, really, any expenses when I went, my first three or four years, three years.

KP: So you had both the scholarship and by working in the fraternity ...

VK: Yeah. The scholarship only covered the tuition and the fees.

KP: But working at the fraternity helped you meet the rest of the expenses?

VK: Yes. And I worked downtown at (Thouties?) Restaurant, which you probably don't [know]. That's all gone now. That was a Konditorei, that was a German ... restaurant with a soda fountain in front with a nice dining room in the back, and they made all of their own ice cream and everything. It was a remarkable place. And I worked there quite a bit.

KP: How many hours?

VK: ... After football season, I'd go there, to work there at nights.

KP: So it sounds like you were very busy during the school year?

VK: Well, I got no help from home and so, and I didn't want to ask for it. I could have gotten it, I think, but I ... was too proud and I was gonna do it all myself, so I did.

KP: Did your parents ever come to watch you play football?

VK: Oh, yes. My mother died, ... just after I graduated from high school, but my father came to all my games.

KP: Did he enjoy having his son go to college?

VK: I think so.

MP: Just following up on that, did a lot of the people that you grew up with in Ramsey, did any of those students go to college or did they mainly get jobs?

VK: Yes, they did. But very small percents compared to today. I would say out of the--and I've forgotten how many were in my high school class so I'll use percentages--I'd say before the war, some came on the GI Bill later, but before the war, I don't think ... many more than ten percent went to college. They went to St. Lawrence, one of them, up in New York State. And ... two came here with me, and there were, there were very few, there were relatively few.

MP: While you were here at Rutgers, what was the feeling toward the approach of war?

VK: It was building up.

MP: It was building up?

VK: Yes, no question, yes. Again, it distracted from your studies because you knew you had to go, and I would get home to the fraternity, and I always hit that eleven o'clock news on a little radio I had up in my room to see where the Russians were tonight, and they were sweeping all over the place as the Japanese, of course, were moving near Siberia, in Manchuria. ... But that's the only, that was not played up very much. That happened in '32, but the difficulty with Japan, began with the embargo on oil and steel, I think, going to Japan, you didn't have to be a Phi Beta Kappa to figure out what was going on there and the ... ability of the ... Germans to completely overrun France and England, English troops, and ... all of Europe. It became obvious that we would have to, have to do it. Go in there.

MP: Now ...

KP: I have interviewed a number of people from the Class of 1942 and a few from 1941, and a lot of them said that it was a very vague world out there, that at Rutgers, they were either too busy or did not have a lot of interest in world affairs.

VK: I'm sure that's true. I'm sure that's true, but I'm telling you just the way it was for me.

KP: You were following it fairly closely.

VK: I followed it extremely close.

MP: Well, you had all this background. You had been in these military camps during the summer, so you were interested in it.

VK: Yes.

MP: And this is what you sort of wanted to do. Did you have trouble relating with other people who were not so interested
in the war? Did you feel ...

VK: ... I had some ... difficulty with my classmates, but very few. There were about five, who were ... totally opposed to ... the United States entering into the war. And one of them, I saw a letter he wrote the other day where he regrets it today, that he didn't trust his government or his country. I have ... a copy of that letter, I have it at home. But these were the people, primarily, that we referred to, and they referred to themselves, even in the yearbook, as the Scarlet Barbarians. Now, the Scarlet Knights, you know, are the athletes. The Scarlet Barbarians were the anti-Greeks, so they called themselves the Barbarians as opposed to the Greeks. It was nothing derogatory. As a matter-of-fact, they were the brightest ones in the class. Howard Crosby, who was ... was he here when you were here?

KP: No.

VK: You have heard of him?

KP: No, I have not.

VK: Howard was a Scarlet Barbarian, others. And, I think, they were the few that would, although my memory is vague on this ... they were the ones that would maybe [be] the picketers today, you know, "Don't go to war, don't do this." They were the ones who spoke against it.

KP: There was a small chapter of Veterans of Future Wars on campus. Do you remember this group?

VK: No. No, I didn't know that one. I know that there were Marxists on the campus, too.

KP: A lot of people have said, and this was talking mainly to commuters, and many of them worked a lot, and many of them did not notice most students were not talking politics or involved at all, but you said there were some Marxists on campus.

VK: Yes.

KP: Were there any organizations?

VK: No, they stayed, they were very low key. I wouldn't divulge their names now, but I have discussed it with some of them later on after the war.

KP: What about American Firsters? How many American Firsters were on campus?

VK: I don't know. That part ... as I indicated, I like my parents, I never joined anything except Phi Gammma Delta and the Marine Corps. But the American Firsters, ... my greatest hero, up until that time, was Charles Lindbergh. And I thought he was one of the most remarkable men that this country has ever produced, and I still feel that way. And I felt, later on, ... it was justified, my feeling, ... when I was in the Pacific, and I had good friends who had go[ne] against a far superior Japanese aircraft with an inferior aircraft when Franklin D. Roosevelt had eight years of warning, beginning in '32 with the invasion of Manchuria. And they hadn't built us up and they allowed those brave men to be killed, even though they made a good record for themselves. And so, I guess I'm wandering here, but, therefore, I go back now to Lindbergh. Lindbergh came back and he said, "Hey, ... don't send your American people into ... this," because he saw what the Germans had, and he saw what the Japanese had, and he was the preeminent pilot of the day. The Germans even allowed him to fly some, I understand, and so I think he was, I sort of felt that he was trying to hustle this country to be prepared before you send men into be ... destroyed. At least give them a fair chance.

KP: You must remember Lindbergh's flight very well.

VK: Oh, yes. ... In 1927 we, as I said, we weren't affluent, but we were quite well off; we lived in Paterson. ... As I recall, ... in 1927, I was nine years old, the factory whistles began blowing ... you know Paterson's a factory town. And all the neighbors came over and asked my mother to turn the radio on and see what it was, and it was Lindbergh had landed in Paris.

KP: So your family was one of the few to own a radio on your block at that time?

VK: Yeah. They were ... the kind you had to move the aerials this way and that way ... and you got all kinds of static. Well, radios, I think, were brand new about that time. ...

KP: Yes. Radio was still new in this period.

VK: Yeah, I think so, yeah, because I remember we used to get K-DKA, Pittsburgh, PA. And Pop thought, "Gee, listen to that, we're getting it all the way from Pittsburgh." Of course, it was just sound waves. [laughter] ...

KP: Did you apply for advanced ROTC?

VK: No, I was gonna fly. So they started this CPTP program here, Civilian Pilot Training Program. So I felt that, as I recall, ... that was going to be my ... future; I was going to go into aviation, be a pilot. So I went through two years of that.

KP: You mentioned Lindbergh was your hero. Were you interested in aviation growing up?

VK: No.

KP: Not in that sense.

VK: ... It was too far away from me, you know. In those days you'd look up when you'd see a plane, but when they offered it to us, the ... Civilian Pilot Training Program here as courses at Rutgers, which was similar to what Hitler did, you know, with German youth with the gliders, Herb Newton and I and several of us began flying.

KP: When you joined the CPTP, did you think you would go into military aviation?

VK: Oh, yes. ... No question of it.

KP: You very much expected, before you graduated, that the United States would be at war and that you would have a military career?

VK: ... I would put it this way-that I didn't know whether I would be able to get a regular commission. They were very difficult to obtain because of the Depression years. Even then, this is on my mind, graduates at West Point, and I knew many, were placed in the reserves and not put on active duty. I don't know if you are aware of that or not. So the obtaining of a regular commission was ... rather tenuous ... and remote. So on the aviation end, I was ... going to use that to go into, at least, the military because I knew my life would be interrupted. It had to be at some point because of the war in Europe.

KP: What did your parents think of this all? They had left Europe?

VK: They never interfered with me. My mother, ... she died even before I went to college, but I remember ... she spoke of the "drums of the war;" she could see them in 1934-35. So this again, you know, I would listen to her and ... it made her quite sad that they were going back into another war, like World War I. But ... she predicted it, so I think that had an influence on me. My father, he could care less. [laughter]

MP: What did your father think of her talking about war?

VK: Oh, nothing. If mother wanted to talk about that, that was fine. ...

KP: When you graduated from Rutgers you enlisted right into the Marine Corps?

VK: Before I graduated. I went into take a flight physical because ... I was A-1, number one in the draft.

KP: This was the peacetime draft.

VK: Yeah. I had the lowest number. And I had a deferment to finish college. So I went up to 90 Church Street, you know, all dressed up, with my logbooks, and I had quite a few flight times, and I could do any acrobatic in the air because that was one of the things they taught us when we were flying the bi-planes. And I knew navigation somewhat and felt I'd go in and just, they'd take me, and it was the shock of my life that the guy says, "Well, we're not too interested in those, but we're going to teach you the way we want you to fly." I said, "Okay." So they gave me a physical, and I weighed 215 pounds, and in their narrow-mindedness of the military at that time, when you looked at the chart, I was six foot tall, you had to be 175.

MP: That's pretty thin.

VK: Yeah. Before the war; after the war, it changed. But at this time the war had not come yet. They still used the old charts, and I got down to skin and bones, 195, and I couldn't get any lower. So on May the 8th, Ellie Sutphin, a fellow that graduated in 1940, came, a 2nd lieutenant in the Marine Corps, showed up here, and he had placed notices around that he would be recruiting ... one officer candidate from Rutgers. So I signed up for that; I think eighteen of us signed up, but I'm not sure. And I was fortunate enough to be the one selected.

KP: So in many ways you came to the Marine Corps very deliberately. Had you thought of the other branches?

VK: No, ... I wouldn't have. Only aviation in the Army. I wouldn't have gone into the ground; Navy never really interested me. So the Marine Corps. As soon as I had the opportunity to get into it. ... You see, ... I didn't even know how to get into ... the Marine Corps. At 90 Church Street, I saw them there, and I asked them about it, and they only had the aviators there at that particular office I was in, because Marine flyers are naval aviators. And so ... when this officer candidate thing came around, I enlisted.

KP: I guess, before totally leaving Rutgers, is there anything else about Rutgers that you remember? How many people from your class enlisted before the war? Were there a number of them?

VK: I don't ... think any that enlisted before the war. The Class of '42 had, I had a lot of personal friends that ... enlisted and didn't graduate or else they gave them a degree if they stayed here until December. And one of them later became a prominent lawyer in New York and ... they had

the people that enlisted ... the few that did, not from my class because the war hadn't started.

KP: America was still at peace. So you, in fact, were one of the few to enlist before the war, because you enlisted in May 1941.

VK: Well, I guess ... if you don't count ROTC, yeah, I suppose so. I really don't know what affiliations some of the others had, maybe they were just waiting for their draft number, I don't know. There were a lot of them that had reserve commissions who didn't go to ROTC here. Herb Newton, for instance, got his at Bordentown, and I can't answer, I don't know much about that.

KP: It is one of my stock questions, but what did you think of Dean Metzger? Most people have had various thoughts on Dean Metzger.

VK: He was either loved ... or not thought too highly of. He was a deeply religious man, and he would go into, I've forgotten ... the details, but he would go into, almost morbid sometimes, it seemed to me. Has anyone else said that? Where he had tears. He was ... an unusual man, and he had the good of the students at heart, ... but he was ... I thought he was a bit emotional myself. I never had to confront him, so.

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KP: Another question I often ask is about chapel because for most people one of the things they remember most about their years at Rutgers is about going to chapel.

VK: Yeah, you had ... weekly chapel, yeah.

KP: What did you think of the weekly chapel?

VK: Well, I just thought it was something you had to do and so you went in, Dutch Reform.

KP: You must have been comfortable with the Dutch Reformed tradition?

VK: Yeah, ... it didn't overly bother me, but ... I went.

KP: I guess there were several prominent visitors to Rutgers, I noticed in the *Targum.* One was Wendell Wilkie in 1940. Do you remember his visit?

VK: Yes. Wendell Wilkie and his one world. And the one I remember the most, though, was Herbert Hoover, but yes, I remember Wilkie coming through.

KP: You said you remember best Herbert Hoover. What about that visit?

VK: Well, I wanted to see a former president, and I was impressed with him. And he spoke at a convocation, as I recall.

KP: Norman Thomas spoke quite a bit at chapel. In fact, he had sort of an annual talk. Do you remember any of his visits?

VK: No.

KP: What about Paul Robeson? He also would perform concerts.

VK: They weren't widely publicized when I was here. Paul was always welcome on the campus and ... greeted regally. Again, I worked here, you know, for awhile as alumni secretary, and Marcus (Canfield?), Class of '18, told me many stories about Paul Robeson. I had, I didn't like his politics, but I could understand them. So, ... I never did get to any of his concerts here. I was busy working, scrubbing dishes, and I ... the niceties of some of the things in college I didn't have time for. Paul Robeson was a great athlete. I think the greatest athlete we've ever produced and one of the greatest minds that Rutgers has ever produced.

KP: I guess another thing that some people have commented on was their fraternity initiation. Do you have any memories of it?

VK: Oh! ... They were brutal. They could be. There was a man, who later became a pediatrician, whose father was a chemistry professor here at Rutgers, who lived in Highland Park. And my one memory of that initiation was he took a paddle. and he swung that as hard as he could, and I was holding my ankles with my hands, and boy, I went klunk! And I mean that, oh! I thought I'd burst every blood vessel in my body. ... I was the only one [who] took it because I was the athlete in the house, and he came in, and he was going to pick out the biggest one. He picked me, and I did it. There were other things they made us do. For instance, they would serve us all the swill water and the slops and mop water, and we had to take mouthfuls and put out a fire in the fireplace until we got it out. [laughter] But, in those days, you just took it along; they had gone through it; you went through it too. You didn't bring a class action against anybody like they do now. [laughter] We didn't feel it was necessary.

KP: Most people in the Class of 1942 have a Vinny Utz story, do you remember any?

VK: Oh, Vinny played football with me. He [was] horribly wounded in the Battle of the Bulge. He lost his right arm, I think it was. ... He was a great football player. He went to Bordentown, too.

KP: So you knew him before ...

VK: No. No. We went one year there.

KP: Oh, so you missed...

VK: He was the year after me. ... Vinny was a heller. ... Vinny and I knew each other very well.

KP: We both would like to get some more of your thoughts about the famous 1938 game against Princeton and your memories of that.

VK: Yeah. Now, I had made first team in my sophomore year, and I played in the first game in the stadium, which was Hampton Sidney. And during practice, I beat a senior out for his position, Walt Bruyere. And Walt was shifted to the backfield. And during the next week's practice, a fellow by the name of Ken Omley tore the cartilage in my knee, and I was out for the rest of the season. Although Harvey kept me on the squad, I was able to eat at the football table and so forth, so I didn't play in that game, but I sat on the bench. And it was a thriller. And Moon Mullen and Art Gottlieb and ... this is something which ... both Harvey Harmon and I know, and maybe the manager of the football team would remember it. But Harvey was such a remarkable man to me that even though my leg was in a cast from here to here, and I had a football suit on, Harvey, I remember he said to the manager, he said, "There's forty-five seconds to go get Vince Kramer on that field." Which he wanted me on there to have played in that game. And by the time they got everything over, the whistle blew and the game was over, so I never got on the field. But I would have hobbled out there, see? But that's the way Harvey took care of his people. And you can't help but think highly of an individual man like that, ... when you know in your heart what he had tried to do for you.

KP: So he took care of his players.

VK: Absolutely.

KP: That was very nice for him to even think about making sure that you had gotten on the field and would get to say you had played in this famous game.

VK: But I got to play in the first game so ... I got a blanket the other day or something when they gave us; they had four of us on the field from the opening game, which was Hampton Sidney; Princeton was not the first game in the stadium.

KP: Though in most people's memories it is, so.

VK: It was the dedication theme.

KP: You had mentioned that you thought very highly of President Clothier. What were your experiences as a young undergraduate? You would later work in administration and get to know other presidents.

VK: Well, the thing about Clothier was that he didn't try to get down to his students level, yet he

didn't remain aloof. And he had a remarkable voice. That man was an orator from the word go. I don't know if others have told you that, but he had, if there's any tapes, he had a most remarkable voice. And, ... as I understand it, although I'm not certain of this, I don't think he had anything other than honorary degrees. I don't think he had advanced degrees. He had a bachelor's degree, I think, from Princeton, but just his appearance and his demeanor ... and not his aloofness, but his way of carrying himself on the campus. ... When he got up to speak, people just remained silent and listened to him. And we had an awe, I guess he awed us, which he ... was capable of doing. ... He didn't force it on us, but he was a remarkable man. The man that I remembered most in the administration that I thought the world of was Sam Silvers. And, ... I never even knew exactly what his job was, Silvers, but he was one of the top men because he lived in one of the houses on the campus. And he ... would show a tremendous interest in the students and help them.

KP: One of the things people comment on was how close, how small of a world it was, and that everyone knew each other. You saw the Rutgers where, increasingly, the people who were on the faculty and even the administration would not know each other.

VK: ... Yeah, ... it was a very small, close-knit group, and you know which professors' courses to take and which not. [laughter] And so, ... it was a wonderful school.

KP: One of the other things people comment on was there was a really big division between the fraternities and the "barbarians."

VK: Yeah, that's what I mentioned to you.

KP: Yes, although it sounds like you were very busy with your work and that you could not fully participate in all of fraternity life.

VK: No, ... I was off busy at other things, and ... it was a good home for me and the camaraderie I enjoyed.

MP: Did the fraternity members mind that you were not around a lot, or did not participate socially as much as they would have liked.

VK: No. No. ... They were all good friends of mine yet. I have lunch with them. Yeah. And then, the president of the foundation, they elected me that, where we have, we give about $6,000 in scholarships to Phi Gamm each year.

KP: Your wife, how did you meet your wife, because she went to Douglass?

VK: I met her at ... while we were here, one of the fellows introduced me to her. ... She was a bit young, but ... I think she graduated when she was nineteen from Douglass. ... But she was a straight-A student, which I was not. And we've had a very happy marriage, 53 years.

KP: When you were graduating in 1941, did you know you would be marrying your wife?

VK: Yeah. I sort of thought so, yeah.

KP: Had you given her your pin?

VK: Oh yes, yeah.

KP: You had left Rutgers for the Marine Corps. When did you actually go into active service?

VK: ... I enlisted May 8, 1941, and I went on active duty about the 10th of June I've forgotten what ... day we graduated; it was a week after I graduated.

KP: Where did you report?

VK: Quantico, Virginia.

KP: And you went through officer's training?

VK: Yes. I have my paper at home. I enlisted as a private, but as an officer candidate they promoted you to PFC, private first class, and I have that at home yet hanging on my wall, and then, ... you shipped off to Quantico.

KP: And how long were you at Quantico for?

VK: I was commissioned November 1st, so let's see, that would be let's say, June, July, August, September, October. So I was there five months in training. And then we were supposed to stay, I think, till June, but the war came, and we were ordered out to what they call a fleet Marine force, the fighting troops of the Marine Corps. And I think, ... we left school there around the first of February, or somewhere around that.

KP: You had been at ROTC at Rutgers, and you had been at Bordentown, and you had been in voluntary preparedness movement. How well did that prepare you for boot camp or officer candidate school?

VK: Well, the officer candidate in the Marine Corps ... didn't bother me, but it was an eye opener. ... They had, ... I've forgotten the number, let's say 350 in my class. They came from about 300 universities all over the United States, including Hawaii. The average school had one person, Columbia had three, Dartmouth had two, Pennsylvania had two, but for the most part they were one or two ... from ... these schools. ... When they got us there, ... they let us know that they were preparing us ... for a war. ... They had absolutely the finest officers and NCOs that the Marine Corps could possibly find there ... to take care of us. And, you know, it was a sudden

shock. You were up at, you had to have your bunk made, your shoes shined, and everything done by, I guess it was six-thirty, and then you went out to exercise. They would run you from here to hell and back and then you'd get back and then you'd take a quick shower, as I recall, and then boom down to a breakfast. Then you'd fall out again and in the class, and ... into studies and pounding, pounding, pounding, pounding. And when they marched you, those sergeants, ... it wasn't much different than that one they had, you know that one where they had that Marine recruit. I've forgotten his name, was, ... who was on a television show for a long time, where they'd go after you and they'd sound off. And even with all those exceptionally selected young men, not that I was exceptional, they'd busted over 100 of them out.

KP: You said they had the cream of the crop.

VK: ... Yeah, well, one fellow, whose name I will not mention, was a first string All-American and a good student from an Ivy League school. We were sitting on our bunks one morning just taking a quick test before we went out. The sergeants were there, and this fellow, you know, like a kid just out of college, he [said], "What the hell is this?" [whistling sound] That was at nine in the morning. They had discharged him, put him on a train, and sent him back to the place of enlistment and told him to ... report to his draft board, by noon. They trucked, ... no foolishness, none.

KP: What about your drill instructors? Do you have any memories of them?

VK: Oh, yes. They were good. ... They were only interested in making good officers of us, and that's all. They had no bitterness, no animosity, but they were going to be rough and tough, and make you understand to take an order before you could give one, and they did, and they were good.

KP: Did you have any memories of learning how to take an order or were you wise from the beginning?

VK: Well, ... I would never, I think I was wise from the beginning. I just learned to sit back and ... move ahead and do what you were told and do the best that you can.

KP: You were a football player so you were in good condition, but did the Marines make you in better shape?

VK: They sure did. I remember that I came back after I graduated from there and Harvey Harmon said, "I never got you in that good shape." ... I was down to 195 pounds and hard as nails. ... They had us all in perfect condition.

KP: You lost a 100 men. You mentioned one case.

VK: ... They'd broke out, yeah.

KP: Yes, and this particular case, the All-American, who was being foolish.

VK: The others, because they didn't cut the muster.

KP: Academically, athletically or both?

VK: No. Academically they were all right. It was, they couldn't take ... the constant drill, the drill, the drill, the drill, the pushing, pushing, pushing. They, I suppose, although I don't know, they would maybe show some resentment or something and ... that's what they were looking for, to weed you out, things like that. And some of them voluntarily left, they said, "Hey, I'm not going to do this." ... You could leave voluntarily. But all you had to do was then go immediately back and report to your draft board.

KP: Do you have any other memories of Quantico, your first induction into the Marines?

VK: Yes, I do. Again, these are minor things aren't they? The Marine Corps took such good care of us, that ... I was totally impressed. I'd been in the Army at CMTC and knew what fare we had there. But when I went into the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps went out of its way to take all of these young men and get a ration and a half for them. A ration for an enlisted man in those days was, I think, eighty cents a day. They fed you on eighty cents a day. They were given something like dollar and a quarter and dollar and a half for this, which meant, that they were trying to build us up; at the same time they were tearing us down. And the meals that we were served, ... I couldn't believe it, coming ... out of the end of the Depression. But, we had things like, every morning we'd have these frozen, thawed, frozen strawberries, and each man would have a pint of milk. And they would have, every morning, they'd have sausage, ham, and bacon, and as much as you wanted. Every meal you had two types of meats because they had extra rations. They took such good care of us, but they knew what they were doing to us. And they were burning up so many calories, ... more so than anyone else.

KP: So your initial experience with Marine Corps food was very positive.

VK: Oh, yes.

KP: What about the climate, in Virginia?

VK: It was hot. ... Again, that's another thing that took its toll. Some of these boys couldn't stand up in the heat, and they'd have to, you know. ... You had to keep going, you had to keep going, you'd be soaking wet with perspiration, ... and you were carrying full packs most of the time. I've forgotten how much they weighed, eighty pounds or something like that. I wasn't going to waiver. [laughter]

KP: They were also training you to be an officer. I guess one of the immediate questions would

be, both at the time, but, also, when you were looking back, how effective was that training in terms of making you an officer and a combat officer?

VK: I think it was unparalleled; it was the best.

KP: So when you did encounter hostile fire for the first time you, in a sense, were prepared?

VK: Yeah. The officers we had, too, ... were outstanding. ... They remained a bit aloof from us, but ... they were tremendous. They were all Southerners, everyone I had was [from] south of the Mason-Dixon line and east of the Mississippi. The Marine Corps was predominately Southerners, at that time.

KP: Even though there was a mobilization for the war, the Marine Corps was still a small branch.

VK: Oh, yes, very small.

KP: Did you think you would be making the Marine Corps a career at that point?

VK: I was hoping to, yes.

KP: Had you thought the nature of being such a small branch at this point would limit your promotions? Was there any thought of that?

VK: No. Never entered my mind.

KP: You were a Marine when the attack on Pearl Harbor took place. Where were you on December 7th?

VK: In Paterson; I was home visiting. My wife-to-be and I were over visiting with my father, and I'd just gone over to my brother's house when it came over the radio that Pearl Harbor had been hit and all, and the military were all ordered back, to report back to their bases. Boy, I remember it. ... It was something that I had sort of been expecting, not Pearl Harbor, but that we would be hit.

KP: So Pearl Harbor did not, in a sense, come as a great surprise?

VK: No, no, it didn't. I'll be honest with you, no, it didn't. I thought that we were, as a nation, antagonizing Japan to the limit ... in every way we could. ... I even analyzed that part, ... that they had no place to go, but come at us.

KP: Were you surprised that it was Pearl Harbor rather than the Philippines or Guam?

VK: Absolutely. Yes. Of course, ... I didn't know then what I know now, and at that point in my life I'd only been to Canada. I'd never been off the East Coast so I had no vision of the Pacific and its vastness. You don't have that until you actually cross that mother, that big one. And when you consider the remarkable way ... Yamamoto handled that, sending that task force the way he did, it's a true mark of genius on his part. Of course, we were unprepared, which is another story, which I will go into later, ... which irked us a little bit, that the we had all these years to prepare and hadn't, hadn't taken the steps that ... perhaps we should have.

MP: Was the attack on Pearl Harbor, while you were at home, you know, visiting your family, was that finally the thing that made them realize that this was something, that this was going to really take over their lives in terms of the war being felt more?

VK: You mean how the family felt?

MP: Yeah. You know, what was the reaction?

VK: Well, I was removed from them most of the time because I was at Quantico. On that day I could see some concern in my father's face, but he would never express it openly to me. ... I just said, "Well, I've got to ... get back to the base, but I'm gonna take my time," because I knew that we weren't gonna get hit, so I waited until the last train out of Newark and headed back.

KP: When you got back to your base, you were at this point in Quantico still?

VK: [Yes].

KP: Had you finished training yet?

VK: No, no. Then I went on until February. We were commissioned the first of November. This was a month later. Then they gave us only six or eight more weeks of training, and we had to get out because they were expanding so rapidly.

KP: When you got back to the base, what was the sense at the base, because you were actually in the military at the time, where a lot of people are trying to get in, at least, in the Class of 1942? What was the mood and the sense among the officers that were training you, but also among the newly-minted officers?

VK: I think that they were anxious to get under way, most of them.

KP: We would later learn that Japan would be a very formidable adversary, but what was the mood then in those first few days of war?

VK: Piece of cake. [laughter] They couldn't see and they were limited in vision and people. A lot of Marines had served in China and, therefore, had been in Shanghai where there was a big

Japanese force. ... They made mistakes; they misjudged them.

KP: At the time, many of your colleagues did not have a real sense of the task?

VK: No, because you still didn't have Corregidor, you hadn't lost Wake Island. The Battle of Midway had not taken place. But as those things developed, then we learned how tenacious ... and good they were.

KP: In terms of Wake Island for the Marines, that was their loss. What was the sense in December of 1941 as Wake Island fell? I have read there was a great deal of pride in the heroism of the defenders of Wake.

VK: Devereux. Devereux was the Colonel and I later on, several of them that were taken prisoners, I served with. ... They fought valiantly. They could've quit, but no, ... they sank a cruiser, they sank a destroyer, ... they fought until they were overrun. ... It held the Japanese up about a month, I think, I'm not sure, but I think it was, it was quite a while before they threw in the towel.

KP: Was there any change in the nature of the training before December and after December? You said that it conducted more rapidly.

VK: No, the only difference was now I went into officer's training, which was not the heavy physical beating, you know the discipline. It was more academic.

MP: Did they talk about the affairs that were going on, you know, like the attack? Did they bring those things up?

VK: ... They had a course to take and they ... stuck with it. ... The Marines knew they were going to fight, I think. Now, I'm going back now, expand on this. There was a Marine by the name of Ellis. Have you ever heard of him? A remarkable man. ... He could drink ... liquor like you wouldn't believe. You could bounce a bullet off his liver. You're too young to know what I mean. But, Ellis was a hero of World War I, and he was a good friend of Lejeune. This man was theoretically, but not actually, discharged from the Marine Corps to investigate all of these buildups ... in the Pacific. So beginning with a man like that, the Marine Corps was, in its own little way, that's a very small force. It was smaller, as I recall, than the New York police department. [They] had taken men like this and put them out there. He was killed by the Japanese. He went into, I guess, Saipan, Tinian, the Marshalls and Gilberts Islands. He would go out on any ship that was going near there, see, and then he'd feign wandering around. ... And ... he was a trained military man; he was noting the defenses they were building, ... not the fact that there was a pillbox here and a pillbox there, but ... that they were building them up for heavily defending. ... So, the Marines, I think, knew that they would be designated because of the amphibious nature of the war in the Pacific, to fight the Pacific. ... Therefore our training ... was already prearranged, I'm sure.

KP: So in your training you spent a good deal of time on amphibious warfare?

VK: Oh, yes. The vast majority of it, and establishing beachheads and then land tactics, you know, handling of a platoon, up to a company. We were taught up to a company, as second lieutenants. But ... you were taught the maneuver of the weapons at your disposal, how to employ the weapons and how to call for them, and what your mission was when you hit a beach and ... why you were given that mission. Just to give you an example, the Marines, the first thing they do is they move, they move as fast as they can, out of beach and take the high ground to deny observed fire on the beachhead. And ... that's the first step, that's the initial beachhead line.

KP: How much of what you learned in 1941, early 1942, worked the way it was conceived of by the planners, because the whole concept of amphibious landings and backloading was developed in the 1920s and 1930s?

VK: Yes.

KP: How much went according to the plan and training, and how did you see some of it get modified over the course of the war?

VK: Well, it was expanded upon; I don't think it was modified too much. You've got to realize that at the beginning of the war even though they had on the drawing boards, again this is, this still cuts me a little bit, they had amphibian tractors, ... they had boats with ramps, but we had none of those at the beginning of the war. They were on the drawing boards, and they knew it because the Navy and Marine Corps team had developed LSTs, LSIs, landing craft ramp, landing craft tank with the ramps. But when we went out there at the first campaign, we only had to jump over the side and most of the Higgins boats, although they had some to bring in the trucks, but later on, you had all ramps, and you didn't have to leap over the side of that damn thing and disappear into the water, you know, the way we did initially. So, ... I think the Marine Corps had done all of that planning, and, in that way, it was a modified way because then they began getting, ... after the later campaigns, they began getting ... the equipment that was designed for the amphibious operations which was denied us in the initial amphibious operation.

KP: The Marines is part of the Navy Department. You mentioned you had not had an interest in joining the Navy. What was your sense in training about the relationship between the Marines and the Navy? Did you get any sense of that?

VK: Yes, I always thought there was a very close, close relationship, extremely close. Occasionally, there would be differences, but even when the Navy was speaking for the Marines, ... they were very thoughtful and considerate of the Marines. May I give you an example?

KP: Oh, yes, please do.

VK: On the Battle of Peleliu on the Palau Islands, the fellow that recruited me was killed there, Ellie Sutphin. Now, that battle, ... the Marine Corps never run away ... from a fight, but, they felt, I've always thought, although I was never in on the planning, but everything that I've read that the Marine Corps, and particularly, the Navy, was opposed to that battle, that it was unnecessary. [They felt] that that piece of real estate could be isolated, and it would form no threat and the Japanese would ultimately starve to death. There would be no aircraft there, no ships. But General MacArthur demanded that piece of land be taken, and this is now to show the relationship with the Marines and the [Navy]. Admiral Nimitz argued, but he was in MacArthur's territory and ultimately had to accede to MacArthur's demands after arguing vainly that he believed not to take that. I don't know how many men we lost there, I guess, 2,000. A classmate of mine got a Medal of Honor there.

KP: A classmate at Rutgers?

VK: No. No, Marine Corps, Pope. He was also a Phi Beta Kappa. ... I remember, I talked to him about it and he said, "Well, we went in and took it." But it could've been later on strategy. It was learned that the Marine Corps and the Navy was right, that it wasn't necessary to take it. So the relationship, the only reason I tell you this [is] not to run MacArthur down. I don't want to do that. He was a remarkable leader, but it's to show you how the Navy and the Marines ... were a good team.

KP: What did you, at the time, think of MacArthur during the war, because the relationship between the Marines and the Navy and MacArthur was at times termed a rocky one during the war?

VK: ... As a youngster, you know, a relative youngster, when we were in the Solomons, we knew that MacArthur had left the Philippines.

KP: He was given the unfavorable epithet of "Dugout Doug."

VK: That's right. We had all kinds of songs about him. ... What, what was that book they call him the Caesar--the <u>American Caesar</u> actually, he was almost above the military, ... if you can visualize that. ... He got away with things that, only because of his greatness, ... which proved later that we needed the man. But when you consider that he never put those B-17s in the air that he had in the Philippines. Whether it's true or not, I've read and talked to people in my career in the military, and many have told me that he went into a seclusion and read the Bible, while the Japs ... were around. I don't know whether that is true or not, but ... I've heard that. ... You know, he should have been out there sending those B-17s up to Tinian, which is a city on Formosa or Taiwan as we call it now, because that's the place where the planes came from to bomb in Manila. And then when he left there, he did something a Marine would never do, but, again, he was above it. He took a nurse to take care of his baby and this and that, and this and that. And ... it was different than my training and that's why I think we refer to him as "Dugout Doug."

KP: I get the sense that the Marines could [be] very tough on your men, and you were trained to be tough, but there was a sense that a Marine officer does not leave his men unless he is literally being carried off the field because he's so wounded or ...

VK: That's correct. Well, he was ordered off, so I can understand that, but ... he could have taken [a] Navy nurse to carry that baby instead of a amah. Do you know what a amah is?

MP: Yes.

KP: In 1942, early 1942, you left Quantico; you had finished your training. Where were you sent initially?

VK: Well, ... there were people who were sent to supply, to this, to that, and the other thing. For some reason, about eight of us, they needed, I guess there were more than that, about ten of us, which I thought was a rather high per cent, were sent to a barrage balloon organization called ZMQ3. And that was at Parris Island, so I arrived there in February, not knowing what I was getting into. ... Then I learned that I had been assigned with six or eight or ten of my classmates to this. ... Many had gone to supply, some had gone to ... artillery and so forth, for further training. We arrived down there and we were in Parris Island, the boot camp, and we were put into this organization, and that's when I got ... my first troops. The commander was a man by the name of, I think he was a captain at the time, (McDermot?). Then above him was a red-headed fellah who later got a Medal of Honor, and gee, I thought never I'd forget, Dyess, (Acquilla?), that's why I couldn't remember his name, (Acquilla?) Dyess, a Georgian, whose hair was the same color as their clay. And he was a remarkable man, and he made us feel, even though most of us wanted to be in the infantry, we had infantry MOSs, welcomed us there. And we had the number three or four aviator was in command of it all. ... By that I mean, he was the third man commissioned a naval aviator. And so we began training ... on this stuff and ... these balloons, and we were ...

KP: What was the mission of this particular unit?

VK: Well, we weren't sure, but they were supposed to be flown at the advanced bases ... against the Japanese aircraft to deny them air space. They were never used, ... as far as I'm concerned, they were used in Samoa, but that was another outfit that had left ahead of us. So we were placed in the 5th Defense Battalion, I think it was, the 5th Defense Battalion, which was forming somewhere else, you know; you were all over the East Coast. And the Marine Corps was pulling everybody together they could because suddenly they were ordered to go into Guadalcanal. So the planning of all of this I'm not that familiar with. They took Marines from Iceland, who were up there defending Iceland, to form up. They were part of the 2nd Division, incidentally, to form up the 1st Division, because you were grabbing men from everywhere because we only had a few men, see. And on, sometime in early July, word came through that we would be moving out. And so now I'd only been out of college a year at that point, so we loaded all of our gear, and junk, and got on an old wooden freight train. I'll never forget it, I don't know where they

found these ... antiquities. The train that they used for troop trains was ... wooden cars, with wooden seats in them, and you had open windows, you know. They were from about 1920, I guess. And we went on them, and we weren't exactly sure where we were going. And we went overnight, and the next morning we were at Norfolk, Virginia and pulled right out on to the pier and the ships were there. The Navy was very efficient, and we went aboard a Dutch, a Dutch merchant Marine. It was an old ship that used to, it was from, the name of it was from the *Bloemfontein*, which as you know is a city in South Africa, ... but it had Javanese houseboys aboard it yet. See, they had commandeered all the ships in ports, and all ships that were out at sea when the war came against the United States. They pulled into American ports, docked ships and everything. So ... then we got aboard that and put our equipment on a Navy cargo ship, called an ... AKA, and we started out with three ships, I think, out of Norfolk, and had good escorts. They ... took care of us, ... because you had troops, ships were being sunk everywhere and ...

KP: And you faced significant U-boat threat in the Atlantic.

VK: Oh, yeah, yeah. We saw the smoke, never saw one hit, but I saw the ... smoke from the oilers and ...

KP: Was this the first time you had been at sea?

VK: Yeah. Yeah. So we went out. Then we had to divert the course because they spotted a subMarine. We also had aircraft flying ahead of us. And we went between Hispaniola and Cuba, I guess it was, and then into the Panama Canal and then, still not knowing where we're going. And then we went through the Panama Canal, and we were told we had to keep our mouths shut, about what outfit we're and anything. And, of course, you took a beating from the poor soldiers there, "Who are you?" And they were trying to be friendly and the Marines all kept their mouths shut. And, "Oh, you'd think there's a war [on.]" And they're hollering, you know, ... I mean camaraderie between us. And then we got into the Pacific. We only had one destroyer because there was no greater threat out there. And I remember seeing the ... Galapagos ... Islands, we went past them. And we were training our men and then we pulled into a place called Bora-Bora just to refuel, didn't get ashore. And then we were finally told we were heading to New Zealand to be put onto assault, transports [and] that the Marines had just landed, and that they had to get replacements in there very rapidly. So we went in, ... into Wellington, which is the southern part of the North Island, in the middle of winter. Oh, it was bitter cold. It wasn't bitter cold, but it was wet and windy and miserable. And we worked on the docks there and, finally, assault ships came in, and we moved all of our cargo onto them, packing it the way we'd been taught, you know, with the back loading, the food in the bottom and the ammunition in the top. [laughter] ... You needed ammunition more than they needed food. And it wasn't that bad though, we did all right. And then we shoved right off, and we went into Guadalcanal. ... We had to shift cargo, for some reason, at ... Noumea, New Caledonia, and then back out to sea. And we went into Guadalcanal the first week in September. And we were immediately assigned the defense of the harbor of Tulagi, which was the naval base of the Solomon Islands. Are you familiar with that at

all?

KP: Just the general details of the Guadalcanal campaign.

VK: There's a big island, Florida Island, and then you've got Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanabagu, and Malaita, and Guadalcanal.

KP: I guess, before going to your actual experiences at the Guadalcanal campaign, I just wanted to back up to your voyage and the unit that you would lead. How did you come together?

VK: We came together at Parris Island. The finest young men I've ever seen, before or since. Everyone of them volunteered on December 8th. And they were ready to go and they were tough and ...

KP: How many were they?

VK: Thirty-two of us.

KP: Thirty-two. And where did they come from?

VK: Everywhere. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Florida, Arkansas, Texas, everywhere.

KP: Did any of them have any college?

VK: One of them, yes. One of them was a lawyer.

KP: Your sergeant, what was your relationship with him?

VK: Very good. ... (MacMannes?), yeah, he and I had a good ... relationship. He was going to bring up ...

KP: For the first year, he probably knew more than you did. Is that a correct statement?

VK: I'd say the ... first three months. [laughter]

KP: He did more than ...

VK: Yeah, yeah.

KP: How quickly would he say to you "Sir, I recommend the following" or how would he make his advice known?

VK: No, he'd always ask me, ... what I'd say, and then, if he had, if it wasn't a direct, you know,

... if I was hesitant, then ... he'd come back and make, maybe a brief change, and then I'd say, "Okay, let's do that." There was never anything earthshaking. We were only thirty-two of us; it was simple decisions.

KP: On your voyage over did you get seasick at all?

VK: No. ... I don't think so because it was a pretty smooth ... voyage. Across the Pacific I don't remember seeing a ripple.

KP: What about the Atlantic?

VK: No, it was smooth. ...

KP: You had mentioned this was a Dutch freighter.

VK: Yeah, well, it was a passenger boat.

KP: Did it have any of the Dutch crew on?

VK: Oh, they were all on there, so I got along well, I ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Vincent Kramer on February 20, 1995 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

MP: Maureen Prado.

KP: And just to resume, we were talking about your first voyage as a Marine officer into the Pacific, and you were on a Dutch vessel, and you mentioned that there were certain advantages ...

VK: ... The Dutch, you know, always have Gineua, are you familiar with that, I don't know...

KP: No.

VK: Well, that's gin. And where the British have rum, although this was not a Navy ship, the Dutch always ... have spirits aboard. So ... after awhile, I got to know the erstastuman which is the first mate, and he was surprised that I could speak a little Dutch. And he invited me up to his cabin, and I was able occasionally, about once a week, I'd get a little bit of gin. [laughter]

KP: How much would you drink before you were on the vessel because the Marines are known, and you even mentioned, as a hard drinking lot.

VK: No. No.

KP: You never drank very much, but you did like that occasional drink on board.

VK: Well, I think it was more the temptation than anything else because, no, it didn't, I had no desire for, ... in the first place, in college, I never [had] enough money to buy any, and I ... just never would drink hard liquor. When I got into the Marine Corps, yeah, I occasionally, I drank bourbon and soda, Saturday nights when I'd go to the club.

KP: How comfortable or uncomfortable were your men aboard this vessel?

VK: They were very comfortable. ... It was a ... good space and ... they were quite comfortable.

KP: They were not crammed in like some troopships?

VK: No. No. ... Not only that, but they were able to use the deck space, the entire deck space, and you got out all day, stayed on topside.

KP: You mentioned that you did training aboard.

VK: Well, yes. You were constantly going over the weapons and map reading, ... and problems, hypothetical problems, with them. So the corporals and the NCOs would then go back and work with their men so they understood it. And we had the men so completely trained like with a BAR. We'd blindfold them, and they'd have to disassemble it and put it back together blindfolded, merely so they knew that every touch or in darkness that they could handle it. And machine guns the same way.

KP: How was the food for you and your men?

VK: Very good. At that time?

KP: Yes, at that particular time.

VK: Outstanding, they were still feeding us like passengers. [laughter]

KP: The reason that I ask is because many of the people...

VK: I know.

KP: ... It was one of their, especially for those that were privates, it was one of their least pleasant memories, was the food.

VK: No. I always went down there to make sure my boys got billet. ...

KP: And so you had three meals a day.

VK: Oh, yeah.

KP: Oh, wow.

VK: We were going to war in style.

KP: You mentioned that you went through the Canal Zone, did you get ashore.

VK: No.

KP: Straight through, and so you didn't really get off the vessel until you got to Wellington.

VK: That's right.

KP: And how long were you in Wellington, how many days?

VK: Well, my memory is vague on this, ten days. That's all we were there. We unloaded the Dutch ship, because that couldn't go into a combat zone. Got ... everything onto the docks and then we moved all the troops out to a place called (Piecockaricki?), which is a name given by the Maoris, and we went out there, too, and then, as soon as the ships came in, ... we got back on the train and back in and loaded the ships and out.

KP: This is sort of a simple question, but a time had elapsed since December 7th. Several months had passed and a lot had happened in the Pacific. What did you think of the enemy? And what kind of enemy you would face?

VK: Well, with the fall of Bataan and the fall of Singapore, ... I studied closely the movement down through Malaysia, the Malay Peninsula. I don't know whether they had started yet across into Burma; I'm not sure at that point. ... It looked like ... and they had bombed Darwin, and they had actually landed troops, I learned later, at Darwin. I don't know whether you knew that or not, they had landed scouting parties then brought them back out. So, it looked a bit grim. It didn't look good, and, when you looked at the map of Europe from the North Cape to the Bay of Biscayne, it all belonged to the Axis and a good part of North Africa. You had your work cut out for you.

MP: Was there a lot of propaganda against the enemy, against the Japanese, on the part of the military?

VK: No. Propaganda against the Japanese? No. No. We didn't need it.

MP: Right. Exactly.

VK: We didn't need it. It would have been wasted.

KP: You landed in the Solomon Islands, Tulagi, and you mentioned that you were not on the Higgins boats so you had to...

VK: Well, ... they brought us in; we had to jump over the side of them. But my introduction to war was that evening. We pulled into Tulagi harbor, which is a deep water harbor, and there were some other derelicts laying around there, other than that we were the only thing there. There were no ... Uncle Sam had lost everything. And ... I wanted to get off of that ship ... really. ... I thought, "I've had enough of this, ... I wanna get ashore." So I went up and saw my commanding officer and suggested that, that, perhaps, some liaison ought go into the beach to find out where we were going to put our stuff when we got going ashore. And he listened to it, and that's all; he listened to it. And ... about twenty minutes later, I'd no sooner gotten down below, and a Japanese seaplane, I learned later, I didn't know what it was, at dusk, came over. And it was the most fortunate thing of the whole war that ever happened to me. He let go two bombs, and one hit on one side of the ship and the other on the other. But, you know, it's like being inside a drum when those things go off. And then when those sailors open up with their deck guns, you figure, boy, I want to get out of here. So I managed to get the assignment to get ashore ... and then arrange things on the beach. But there was no more, nothing else came in that night, so the excitement was all over.

KP: So you led, you were not part of the initial wave, to take the beach. You were landing in a secure ...

VK: A secure area. As a matter-of-fact, there was no fighting on Guadalcanal on D-Day. Or D-plus-one. I don't know whether you knew that or not.

KP: No. In fact, the fighting came because the Japanese had not ...

VK: ... They had shoved off. The fighting came, the heavy fighting came a couple weeks later and then a couple months later.

KP: You initially landed, and you got your men deployed. When did you first see combat?

VK: Well, actually, in time of war ... you don't see a hell of a lot of combat. The combat that I saw, in this particular case, was when I was directed to make some liaison over to Guadalcanal and then join the friend of mine, Lefty Morris, who was in the 2nd Regiment, who had been on Tulagi with me earlier and stayed with him ... a couple of weeks. But on ... Tulagi ... the only combat we had was the heavy bombardment by naval vessels of the Japanese Imperial fleet, by their subMarines and their surface vessels, almost daily bombardment by their bombers and the constant patrolling, which Marine officers must always take out ... to search out [and] ... see if

any enemy were landing because we were under the orders that they would not be able to reinforce us or assist us in anyway and that they would be landing troops, which they did. They landed heavy troops, they landed about 20,000, I guess. And we were constantly ... patrolling to see ... if we could locate them. The fighting was held, in the hands of a, the Raiders on Bloody Ridge, the 2nd Regiment and the 6th Regiment, were the ones that ... took the brunt of the fighting. The rest of us ... it was primarily, for me, it was primarily beach defense, where we constantly were improving our beaches because we knew that they wanted, ... the first thing they wanted back was the big naval base. And we were constantly improving our defenses and then, when we had to, taking patrols out on the Florida and digging in further because of the heavy bombardments and raids.

KP: When you are being bombarded, there is not much you can do, in a sense.

VK: No. It's ... incessant, though, you know, it goes on, ... it doesn't bother you. I guess I wasn't bright enough to have it bother me too much. But I would always get down near the water where my guns were because the incoming would always be higher. See, naval gunfire can't eject, it's ... a relatively flat trajectory and it can't depress so, and they couldn't hit a water edge anyway, see, they are hitting into the hill behind you. So, that's the way they did it. I guess the most devastating thing that ... happened there one night, one of our, what they called yippy boats, a YP boat, a yard-patrol boat, was coming across at dusk and the Japanese fleet came down, what there was of it, and they took ... off after this yippy boat. And those poor devils, they put her full steam and they ran it right through our barbed wire and into the beach as far as they could get it. In the meantime, they were burning and on fire ... and the enemy was continuing to pummel them, to make sure that they had destroyed the ship, and then they started pounding all around it again. But that was the ...

KP: And you were on duty at the time.

VK: Well, yeah, ... it was just off my beach where that happened. ... I felt sorry for those guys. We went out through there, the barbed wire and everything, trying to get in as many as we could. ... We got as many as we could off ... the yippy boat.

KP: Was that your first time of seeing combat close at hand and casualties?

VK: Yes. ...

KP: You mentioned you saw the bulk of your fighting, though, on Guadalcanal when you were detached.

VK: When I went over there those few times, yes. But to say that you are constantly fighting ... in war is not true. ... It's ninety percent boredom and ten per cent combat. And the ... war at Guadalcanal, to me, their casualties there were not, in the Marine Corps, were not tremendous. I don't think we lost 1,000 men in the entire battle of Guadalcanal and Tulagi, Gavoto, and

Tambogo. The Navy took heavy casualties, very heavy. The Marine Corps' battle there was ... a dogged one, to hold ... that airfield at all costs. And the Japanese order was to take that airfield at all costs. These things I have learned, I knew vaguely then, but I know better now. Now, at the ... time the Navy pulled out, and we were the only ones to get in there for a long time; the rest of the time we were abandoned. There were 20,000 Americans abandoned there. ...

KP: Did you feel abandoned at the time? Were you pretty sure that they would come back sometime?

VK: Well, no. I knew we were abandoned, and I, frankly didn't know how ... the United States could. ... I didn't have a full feeling for the replacement value of the ... Navy. You see, we had lost almost all our cruisers and carriers and everything. We were there alone. And the Navy did tell, ... I guess, the War Department. I don't know who it was, did tell Vandegrift, he could come to terms with the enemy, I don't know whether you were aware of that. He was told he could surrender, but we knew he'd never surrender. But ... we had heard that rumor. And I finally, I searched over the years to find out where that message was, and it appears on this film which I got the other day, my wife got for me, of the sunken ships of Guadalcanal. Have you seen that? And in there, it shows the land war, it shows the sea war, and in there it states that the General was authorized to come to terms, if need be, with the enemy.

KP: At the time you felt abandoned. You had been deployed by the Navy.

VK: ... You were quite hungry. Some of the troops were down to one meal a day. ... Everybody had malaria.

KP: Did you?

VK: Oh, yes. You ran a fever of 106 degrees. And you still had to try to stay, and stay with your position. You had dengue fever, which is even worse than malaria. Men that were scratched with coral became infected with a rundown condition. It was a war of attrition, mostly, for the Marines, not for the Navy , but for the Marines.

KP: Your memories of Guadalcanal are very much of the food and the sickness.

VK: Privation, I guess you could call it. ... And the illness. And the ... Japanese were suffering the same.

KP: How many men did you lose at Guadalcanal from the enemy, but also from the deprivation?

VK: I didn't lose any to the enemy. I guess eighty-ninety percent of them had the malaria and so, but they had to stay; they couldn't be evacuated. We had no way to evacuate them.

KP: And the medical care that was there ... how much medical supplies did you have? Some

people did have to be in hospital sick bay, how many ...

VK: Yeah. Well, you had a tent [that] was a sick bay. I never would go on up there. I got there a couple of times. I knew the doctor real well. He's still a friend of mine. He was a young doctor, just out of medical school, and he had his little bag. And nothing, no, nothing like field hospitals or anything, at that point there. But, on Guadalcanal they did have one field hospital.

KP: You were at Guadalcanal on several occasions, and that is where you saw the actual bulk of your combat. What were your missions at Guadalcanal?

VK: ... When we came into Tulagi we brought these big ... canisters of helium. You know, they stand about that high. And they were popping all the time from the heat of the jungle. ... We knew we'd never use them, so it didn't matter. But then, suddenly, they determined that they would be of value to the airfield over there to put up the field lights. So occasionally, we'd be given a mission to carry them over and then turn them in. And then you, you wouldn't come back as fast as you could, and you'd stay over there with your buddies for awhile and come back later.

KP: You and your men would be deployed for ...

VK: No. ... Just me.

KP: Just you.

VK: ... The only other thing I did was, we went on the patrols, that's all.

KP: Did you ever encounter any of the enemy on your patrols?

VK: No. No excitement. ... Not in that area where we were.

KP: On Guadalcanal.

VK: On one of the raids, though, which was given to Pete Hahn, who had the next platoon to mine, was it Pete? I have forgotten who took it, one of them. And they had to take all the BAR men from us. And this ... will show you the way that natives worked with us, how ... closely they worked. On (Malaita?) we knew there was a Japanese outpost, which observed the aircraft taking off and landing and any ships [that] came in. You might call them Japanese coast watchers. And the natives apparently came back from (Malaita?) to Guadalcanal and reported them and then from Guadalcanal they were told that people in Tulagi would go over and destroy that post ... over there. And these natives ... were so good and so friendly towards Americans that they had cut trails right in, let's say ... that this is the island and that the outpost is here looking that way. They cut trails in from here and from here, right up to the edge of that camp, and, in the darkness of night, they led the Marines through. The Marines, my gunner was, my BAR man was there. He set up his BAR and his name was Ernie (Horsefall?). He's from New

Jersey. And he had just laid until the morning when the Japanese did exactly what the natives said they would do. They all went into this thatched hut to have breakfast. (Club?) and everybody, see. And they got rid of them, captured one. So that was the maximum extent of eyeball-to-eyeball in ... that campaign that ... we had, other than the patrolling, and the beach defense, and the shellings, and the bombings, and the occasional going over with, ... which I did, over to the Guadalcanal.

MP: You said that the natives had told you what they were going to do, that they were going to go to breakfast, so the natives were a source of information?

VK: Oh, yes. They were great. ... The Malanesians, they're beautiful people, not beautiful looking, but, you know, beautiful people. They don't look Polynesian at all. They're not, they're not Polynesian. I guess they're from New Guinea. I guess that's probably where they originated.

MP: Did they express a lot of sentiment about them being sort of in the middle of the war?

VK: No. They were very brave and stoic men. ... One of them just died recently, was captured by the Japanese, and he was bayoneted, repeatedly, after being tied to a tree. And they left him for dead, and he chewed through the ropes and crawled all the way back and ... he lived to be eighty.

KP: You were probably very glad when the Navy returned.

VK: Yeah. The Navy finally got back quite, quite late and ... then the Japanese began evacuating their troops because they knew they no longer could ... fight the war. They brought their best troops in there. But, they were very, very poor leaders. And the history books show you that the Battle of the Tenaru, which was the first big one, which I wasn't in, but ... they came in with these people that we ... our interpreters told us they must have been from Hokkaido. They were all quite big. And they were just wiped out to the man, and the commander committed hari kari. But he was trying to use, ... you see up until this time everybody had surrendered to them including the Philippines. Singapore. Singapore had something like three times the number of men that were attacking it. And they surrendered. But they couldn't get over this and then ... they realized they couldn't take it. They sent their best troops in because they ... were poorly led. They hit one place and they just got stymied and ... defeated.

KP: At the time, how much did you realize that the Japanese tide had finally been turned? What did you think were the causes of the Japanese defeat? How much did you attribute to bad leadership? What were the other factors?

VK: Well, I think most of us began realizing that ... their tactics, their kamikaze was ... ultimately going to be their downfall. We didn't realize it fully, but later on we realized it. But ...

KP: Their persistent desire to attack when ...

VK: Well, yeah. ... They didn't use their weapons well, and, you know, they had every advantage on Guadalcanal that ... we didn't.

KP: No. In fact in most assaults America's material and just everything was superior, whereas, Guadalcanal was more thrown together.

VK: Later in the war, I went over into China, which was quite different. I ... think it was in March. It was March or February, I don't know, when I took a jeep off a cliff, and I was rendered unconscious. But it was during a period when you couldn't, still couldn't be evacuated, so I've forgotten when it was, but there was no way of evacuating people out of there, casualties. But ... I had a basel fracture, skull, broken arm, broken jaw, everything. I was unconscious for, oh, I guess, two or three weeks. And they ... put me into the field hospital in Guadalcanal. But then, even though you are unconscious you know what's going on. You, I don't know, I guess you've never been unconscious. But ... you could hear the people, and you wish you could speak, you wish you could respond, but you're unable to.

KP: Is it almost like a dream?

VK: Yeah, you're drifting away, yeah. And I remember then, taking me and putting me into a, some sort of a shelter during the heavy air raids and then bringing me out. I remember, also, one time the doctor said, "Don't move him anymore, he can't be moved, just put a mattress over him." You know, in the ... tent, they put a mattress over you, just in case a big shrapnel came through there, and they'd take off and get into the dugouts, which they should do. And that's when a fellah I played football with was killed that night ...

KP: From the air raid?

VK: From Rutgers, yeah. He was, he was the end, he played end, on the second team I did. He was in the PT boats.

KP: Do you remember his name?

VK: He was captain. ... Yeah, I'll think of it in a minute. Shoot, I'll think of it. I'll probably have to call you because I never thought I'd forget his name. ... With me it's age. Parker Staples. Parker was killed, and I learned [it] from Silvers. When I was released from the hospital and came to visit ... Dean Silvers, he told me that [he was killed]. And ... when they told me the date, I knew that was ... that particular night.

KP: Your accident with the jeep, how did that happen? Was it at night? Was it a night patrol?

VK: No. No. ... I was told to get up to the command post, and they had a jeep there, and he told me to come up in that. He was quite a ways away from me, my commander. In order to get up

there, you had to go up a very narrow ridge, and I had the thing in ... four-wheel drive and was going up the ridge and ... we kicked a stone out from one side, and the whole thing went over and spun down the hill. And I stayed with it for three turns and then it just kept going, and I ... was out after that.

KP: After that you do not know what happened?

VK: They told me I got up, came up and found out how my men were and then I fell down and collapsed again. And that was it, yeah. The people were with me, I made sure they were all right.

KP: But you do not remember doing that?

VK: No.

KP: I have interviewed several Marine officers, and one of the things their impression was in training that they thought they were tough and that they were Marines and that they, I would not say indestructible, but that they were tougher than anyone out there. And then they experience battle and they realize someone was trying to kill them, and they better be careful. Did this jeep accident make you realize how mortal you were when it was all over?

VK: No, I never thought of it.

KP: Really? It didn't affect you at all? How about being under shelling for the first time?

VK: Never bothered me. I know that it bothered people. There was a classmate of mine, next to me, Sams, his name was, blew his cork. I went over to see him after that particular heavy bombardment with that ship, you know. And I could see he was gone. You know, I sat down and talked to him, to have a conversation with him, so I called the medics, and said, "Pick him up. Get him away from the troops." He was talking about landings that were going to take place. I suppose if you let it worry you, well, I was concerned, but I wasn't, I never ... felt that I would not ... win.

KP: Being laid up in the hospital, when did you regain consciousness? Was it on Guadalcanal that you regained consciousness?

VK: Yeah, when I was on Guadalcanal. I guess I was laying in there about three weeks; I really don't know. And they finally began bringing some airevac planes in, and I remember I was put aboard one of them, taken to New Caledonia, and then from there to Auckland and then I was tabbed, because I was not ambulatory. I was a stretcher case. I was tabbed to return to the U.S. and came into San Diego Naval Hospital.

KP: So was it still 1942 when you made it back to San Diego?

VK: No. '43.

KP: '43.

VK: It was, maybe June; I don't remember. I never kept a diary. I never kept records. ... Yeah, I guess by the time we went through all that, it was a slow process, you know, being evacuated, backwards, backwards, backwards. I'd say I got into, I guess, June.

KP: Just the whole flight.

VK: Well, I came on a ship. The only flight was, the only part of the flight was from Guadalcanal to ... New Caledonia.

KP: Then it was by ship.

VK: ... A hospital ship after that because I remember the nurses when I got into New Zealand. They had the nurses and the Navy hospital there. I was finally in the Navy hospital. I wanted to get out of Army hospitals. And the nurses couldn't believe that ... when you come down with these fevers, you ran a fever of up to 105, you know. And they'd put another thermometer in your mouth, and then another one, and I'd say, "No, it's 105." And, ... I guess, you know, in the United States they hadn't seen high fevers in young people, I suppose, that much. So they ... took good care of us, so, ... they kept replacing those thermometers, you know, ... want[ing] to be sure they're all right. And then the whites of my eyes were solid red, blood red, from the ... cranium, the injury. ... That attracted a lot of attention, too.

KP: You were pretty beaten up, I mean, at this point.

VK: Yeah.

KP: How was the medical care? You had seen a full range from the primitive to probably some of the sophisticated.

VK: Outstanding. The best.

MP: You said you had wanted to get out of that Army hospital.

VK: Yeah, I was in an Army hospital in New Caledonia, and I just could not stand [it]. ... I wanted to get away from there. ... There was a ship there that went down called, ... I think it was the *Lincoln* or something. I don't know, the one that hit a mine and sank, that presidential liner. And they had troops on that, and a lot of them ... were psycho. And I remember one of them was ... near me, and geez, I wanted to get away from him. And, you know, they almost had him in a cage, till they could get him out of there. ... He'd been there quite awhile, I guess, or maybe he cracked up later on, I don't know. But, in any event, he was one of the ones off that ship and

whether it took time for him to blow his stack or not, I don't know. But I didn't think they [had the capability of treating] .... him. ... Well, I'm prejudiced, that's the Navy, see? The Navy corpsman, believe me, is next to a doctor.

KP: You could tell the difference between care.

VK: Absolutely, yeah. And there seemed to be more, it, maybe it's, again it could be psychological, but it, there appeared to me in the Navy hospital to be more ... thought for the patient, and you're just not another number.

KP: Because you would see a lot of the hospital, Auckland and then on the hospital ship.

VK: Well, I was in the Navy hospital out on Auckland, so it was ...

KP: And then the long journey back.

VK: Yeah, I was bored out of ...

KP: Where were your injuries, your bones actually set and your injuries dealt with?

VK: Well, the ...

KP: You were on Guadalcanal.

VK: The jaw was broken, but it set before they knew it. The basal fracture of the skull, this side of my face was all crushed in, the bones in the cheek were broken, and this ... arm. But the arm healed itself. ...

KP: They did not even set the arm?

VK: They didn't know; they were too intent on just keeping me alive ... and then by the time it had healed fairly well. In other words, they didn't have to break it and do it over.

KP: Well, what about your face area?

VK: They didn't do anything. ... The doctors said, ... "It would be all right, it would knit all right."

KP: So in a sense your body healed itself?

VK: Yeah.

KP: To a large extent, with the right kind of care.

VK: The only thing is that most of us there came down with hepatitis, too. And while I was back in San Diego, all the way back there, and then, because we were in such horrible run-down condition, that ... I came down with hepatitis, too, and that kept me in that damn hospital a little bit longer, you know, because that's quite a debilitating disease. And you had malaria, dengue fever and hepatitis all at once, you know, these doctors were working on you and doing their very best to give you all sorts of vitamins and liver shots. I remember I hated them. And things like that to build up your [strength], what you had lost during that period.

KP: You were probably also very tired from being in the hospital so long and confined. At what point were you well enough, in a sense, to sort of want to get out of the hospital?

VK: Well, I wanted to get out immediately. And then I, finally, I asked if they couldn't move me to the East Coast, and they did, they moved me to St. Albans. But they felt I was ambulatory enough. ... I got to think how in the hell I got there. ... Yeah, ... I was ambulatory by now, but I had to turn into that hospital because they had to do some other work on me. I'd lost, knocked teeth out during that breaking my jaw, and so, they put me on the train and went across country to St. Albans, and ... then I was home again. And then I was there only a short while and ... I asked to be placed into a replacement battalion.

KP: So you wanted to get back?

VK: Yeah, yeah. I asked for that.

KP: Where did you meet up with a replacement battalion?

VK: I was ordered out of the hospital at St. Albans and where they placed us for further transfer, they put us in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, at the Marine barracks there, which was a bore, you know. You're just waiting for orders to come in; they got people they're shuffling all the time. And then after I was there about two weeks, which was right next to my home, of course, ... I guess it was in the fall of '43, I got orders to go to Camp Lejuene to a replacement battalion. So ... I went down there and ... got into the replacement battalion. and I was ordered to report to a company. And this is a funny thing, the captain, I was now a captain, the captain in the ... company had never been overseas. And he had a company, and he was so proud of that company, you see, that when I reported in, I was senior to him, and ... I remember saying to him, "Now, don't you worry about it. You take command and responsibility for this company and just leave me alone until we get overseas." [laughter] So ... I was ... I took an office in the back of the shed waiting till we, you know, routinely going overseas. And about that time, from Guadalcanal, one of the people running the show there, now, the Marine Corps keeps rotating people around, so everybody gets their fair share of combat. And ... the one was one that had been, that knew me ... when I visited over on Guadalcanal. And so he came through as an inspection one time and was looking for me. ... No, actually, what it was, he came in to inspect us, this company before it went overseas. And then he walked through the building, and he came

in the back and ... he saw my name, you know, you had to put your name up on, on the door. And he said, "Oh, I didn't know you were here." I said, "Yes, sir. I'm here." And I stood at attention; he was a Colonel. Bill McKelvy, Wild Bill McKelvy, and I said, "Yes, sir, ... Colonel." And he said, "What are you doing here ... in this replacement company? ... No more." I said, "Whatever you say." So ... he said, "We've only got people here that haven't even seen anything or patrolled into any area." And he said, ... "I'm going to put you in charge of the jungle warfare, the patrolling out ... in the woods here." I said, "I'd really like to go with the replacement battalion." And he said, "Well, we'll get you with one later." And so he ... held me there for awhile. And then, ... which I didn't know about, an order came in to his desk requesting, listen to this, "volunteers for hazardous duty." So I ... didn't know anything about it, and he called me in, and he said, "I just volunteered you for a good job." I said to him, "Good, what is it?" He said, "I don't know." [laughter] And he showed it to me, and he said, "All you got to do is report to the Navy Department in Washington." And I said, "Yes, sir, I'll go." So I went up there, and it was to go with, with ... irregular forces on the mainland of China against the Japanese.

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KP: Just before your regular assignment, what was it like to train people for combat having been to the war zone?

VK: Well, ... the main thing you wanted to teach them was ... to take immediate cover when ... fire opened up. And also that, if there were single ... people sniping away, ... that you didn't get hysterical, that you knew that one guy could take care of that other one guy, if there was one sniper up there and ... you worked on those theories. You worked on the element of surprise, which you wanted to ... instill into your people that ... they were never caught with the element of surprise. That the patrolling was proper with point support made by flank guards and so forth. And that it was essential that in patrolling, you patrolled where you were told, in other words, if you were told to go out two miles, you go out two miles. If you're familiar with the Battle of the Bulge, they didn't do that. And in the Marine Corps you do.

KP: So in many ways it sounds like your experiences at Guadalcanal merely sharpened and made you wiser in the things you had been taught?

VK: What I had been taught previously. ...

KP: You just realized the larger picture?

VK: Yeah, yeah. ...

KP: Significance. ... You were given orders to report to the Navy Department, but you didn't know until you got to the Navy Department. ...

VK: Where I was going, no.

KP: So you actually reported to the Navy Building in Washington?

VK: Yeah, one of those sheds. The old ... World War I buildings along the Mall, and I just went into there, and then they sent me over to the Pentagon, ...

KP: Which was brand new.

VK: Brand new in there. I think it was in there, yeah. And I remember, I did get squeamish because, when I was in the Navy Department, I was in this area where all these men with the subMarines and I thought, "Oh, what am I into?" Then when I got into this hall, ... they finally told us that we were all volunteers. There were, I think, four Marine officers that came from different places, all veterans of Guadalcanal and the Navy. ... A Navy doctor sat beside me, Walt Johnson. And they ... were very mysterious about it, but, suddenly, ... it was a big, huge auditorium. They opened up a map and there's a big map of China on the wall. Boom, boom, they pointed and then closed the map. Even if I had a photographic memory I couldn't have remembered it and then they brought in a Chinese naval, military attaché, who instructed us that we were strictly volunteers, and that we were going to China, and that we would be working ... against the Japanese in ... various areas of China with Chinese troops.

KP: You had been volunteered for this job, not knowing what it was. What did you think of getting the mission at that point?

VK: Didn't bother me. ... Anything to get back overseas, really. I'm not saying that in any other way, just ... I wanted to get back, yeah, get overseas. That's why I had volunteered for the replacement battalion, and I'd been denied that by being forced to stay in training a little longer.

KP: Did you get any further training before being sent to China?

VK: No.

KP: So after your briefing at the Pentagon, how quickly did things move?

VK: Very quickly and the doctor wasn't going to go because he had been on a ship that was sunk in the Pacific, and I said, "Maybe we can stick together and have a good time," because he and I had gotten to be pretty friendly. He said, "Nah, I think I'll go to Bethesda." He said, "I want to brush up on my medicine." I said, "Ah, give us a go." And he said, "All right, ... I'll go on one condition, that you and I stay together." And so we went back and saw them and they assured us that we would stay together. So we [went] over together and left together. I got out some maps and encyclopedias and read up on what I could of China, and I studied the war maps where the Japanese were. You know, they occupied all of the coastal area, and all of Manchuria, and they'd gone over to the Yellow River bend where it comes south out of (Shandong?) and ... by the time ... I got underway, I had a good feeling for where China was and what it was like. ... And I wasn't

sure how I was going to get in there, and then I learned that you came in ... over the mountains of South Asia, the Himalayas.

KP: So you in a sense had given yourself your own background briefing on China? They had given you very little at the Navy Department.

VK: No.

KP: You had read a lot, sort of, what we historians would call secondary sources on China?

VK: On what?

KP: Histories of China and so forth. How accurate was what you had read to reality when you got there?

VK: Well, you know, ... in those days, most of the history of China that we knew was, you were influenced by the writings of Time magazine ... and other periodicals that you had. We were also duped a great deal. ... I must say, I never was, about the ... Marxists. So ... when I got to China, I ... found that I was briefed completely by Admiral (Myles?), who was the commanding officer of the naval mission in China. So they ... brought us up, told us everything we had to know, and he spent a little more time with me than the others. He sent the others on their way, the other three Marine officers. And then he told me that he was sending me into the North, which was the corner where the ... Chinese communists and the Japanese had a warlord by the name of (Yeng Chi Sheng?), and Chiang Kai-shek's forces were all, more or less, working together or fighting each other, never with the Japanese, but the Chinese forces. And that I would have to be tactful and diplomatic in overlooking certain things that took place. ... In my days up there, that ... was not a clean cut war--that Chiang had his problems, and he had a warlord, and he's trying to cultivate them back. And China was coming through a chaotic period, and, of course, the United States was looking over Chiang's shoulders and not allowing him to move the way Mao could move and wipe out anybody that he wanted to. So ... I appreciated this, and then the Admiral explained to me why we were there. It was primarily not to fight their war, a war against the Japanese there, but it was to get weather [reports] out of China. And then he explained to me, which I had studied, the undulating history of China, the chaos and between (Tinasts?)

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

KP: You were saying that.

VK: That China had been brutalized by the West and, indeed, by the East, and the old man was very patient with me, and he said, "You know, ... you gotta realize that the Japanese have seized most of Manchuria, the Germans most of Shantung, Tsingtao and the Japanese, and the Americans and the French and the British made an international city out of Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macao, [which] were taken during this declining period when there was utter chaos under

the Manchus." And that was the Dowager Empress, if you recall, and he said that they have a suspicion of foreigners. And he says, "I have won their confidence." And he did, boy, the Chinese loved him. And he said, "I've gotten their permission now where I can send people in to get this weather, but in return, they have asked ... that I furnish them Marine officers who were back from the Pacific, who will help to lead their troops in, in various places in China, their irregular forces, not the regular Army." So he was having his trouble with General Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek was, and the only two people that got along with Chiang were Chennault and Admiral (Myles?). I thought Stilwell made an ass of himself over there. As a four-star general he should have showed some respect for the head-of-state, even if he didn't have it. And so he had ... he wanted Marines instead of Army.

KP: Did Admiral (Myles?) or Chiang Kai-shek want Marines?

VK: Chiang.

KP: Chiang. Before, sort of, going on with the mission, how did you get to China? You had mentioned you had had to get there.

VK: We left and, Walt and I left together. We went up first to Newfoundland, Argentia, and then the next place we landed was, I think, the Azores, but I'm not sure, and then we went into a place called Port (Liotee?).

KP: Boy, you really had a long journey.

VK: North Africa, and then we stopped at Tobruk, and [on and on] into Cairo, and ... then we went into Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan, India, and then over the hump, into China.

KP: You had mentioned before, I had asked you about before going to Guadalcanal, that you had only been to Canada, and you are almost taking an Indiana Jones trip around the world. What did you think at the time?

VK: Oh, it was great. I enjoyed every minute of it. Cairo was marvelous. I enjoyed when we first got there, seeing the German prisoners and the ... Italian prisoners were all handling your luggage in the ... terminal there, the military terminal. And they put us up in (Shephard's?) old hotel overnight. You may never have heard of that, but it was, ... the hotel of the empire. (Shephard's?) Hotel, it's burned down. The Egyptians when they got their independence burned it down, but it was an old, old, famous hotel there, and ... Walt and I, were put up in there. ...

KP: And you saw Iran?

VK: I didn't stay there. We just landed, and refueled, and took off.

KP: So it was only Cairo where you really spent a few days?

VK: Well, Port (Liotee?), Cairo, yeah. We had to wait in Port (Liotee?) for awhile. The other places just touched down and on our way.

KP: Were you flown directly into China?

VK: Yeah. You flew from Calcutta, over the lower end of the Himalayas. It's not ... the top of Mount Everest, you know. ... It sneaks away there like ... a dragon's tail, and ... I don't expect we went over 20,000 feet. But they are rugged mountains when you look down. I remember because I was in a cargo plane. We had to lay on top of the cargo, but we could still see out of the ports, and I remember looking down. And we had, then, they forgot to give us oxygen masks, and we had to get an oxygen mask handed to us. We beat on the door, and "Oh, yeah," and they handed us each an oxygen mask because I said to him, "Walt, I'm having trouble breathing." And he said, "Yeah, because we are too high; we'd better get some oxygen. Soon." They gave oxygen masks; they handed them back to us.

KP: You went over with a doctor. Did you stay together during your entire China tour?

VK: Yes.

KP: The Navy did keep its promise. After your briefing with Admiral (Myles?), where were you sent?

VK: I was sent up to the city of, my rear base would be in Chian, which is where the "Army of Clay Soldiers" is. You've heard of that, I'm sure. And that was nothing but a grave mound when I was there. And it was a walled city that stood alone. I don't know whether you know it or not, but it was the eastern terminus of the Silk Route, one-time capital of China. The wall, which surrounds the city, is twice as wide as the wall that surrounds ... north China, across north China. And that, I was thirty miles outside of that about, not in that city, where ... I had my camp to ... work in to the Japanese area.

KP: Your camp you reported to, with the doctor, you were the only two Americans then on this mission?

VK: I had to relieve a Marine major there; he was there ahead of me. And I had, in that base, a supply officer, Navy supply officer. Because of the amounts of supplies we were turning over, they had to keep ... records of them. This was a rear base. And I had a pharmacist's mate there and a couple of gunner's mates.

KP: It is a very small unit.

VK: Yeah, just handful. Maybe ten of us.

KP: The major you relieved, how long had he been there? What did he brief you on?

VK: Well, he ... briefed me on the fact that they had been forced out from their main base by the advance of the Japanese. They were unable to sustain them, and they had come back over the (Ching Ling?) Mountain Range and gotten out of there, and that ... they were now in this base camp, and that the enemy was in the Yellow River bend area. I knew where that was and ... so what, I just spent the day with him, and he went on his way.

KP: What were your responsibilities on a given day?

VK: Well, we were responsible here to, we had already started them, to train them and then go out to where they were fighting the enemy, in attempts ... to get further action against ... the enemy.

KP: So it sounds that it was in China that you saw quite of bit of combat?

VK: Yeah. Enough of it. Yeah.

KP: How much training did you do before you actually went out on missions with the Chinese troops?

VK: Well, we had Chinese troops, and these were replacements we were preparing essentially. So what I did, ... I went out to where the ... fighting was. And, usually, Walt would go with me, or he wanted to go along, and so we would then go up to these headquarters and ... encourage, you know, further against the enemy. But in a guerrilla warfare you must always have the distinct advantage before ... you take them on. ... You entice the enemy ... and hit them, and then, ... you withdraw, and it's that type of warfare. Yes, we ... did that. That was, I thought it was fairly successful, quite successful.

KP: How long were you in China in this particular mission?

VK: Nine months.

KP: So this was 1944?

VK: '44 and '45, yeah.

KP: Were you there on V-J Day?

VK: Yes, yes. ... When V-J Day came, I was up with the Chinese Army or ... guerrillas, and I was still able to communicate. A one time message came into me, was sent into me. I don't know if you are familiar them, but a one-time message is only two people can read it, the man that sent it and the man that receives it. And it's a coded book which you carry in your pocket

and there's groups of, I think it's five letters, or four or five letters, and then you write the message, and you combine the two, and then you put the encrypted message on the bottom, and then, when you decrypt it, you do the reverse process, and you get the message out. It's a ... nuisance, but, and it's time consuming, but, nobody else can read it. Even if the Japanese, no matter who intercepts it, they can't break down. In those days, you couldn't break down the possibilities that existed. So I was informed that--and I wish I'd kept this message--that the Japanese were about to surrender, felt that they were. I received it about the 10th of August. I guess the old man must have been informed, maybe, I don't know, about the atom bombs or maybe they'd already gone off, and I didn't know it. What was the date of the first here?

KP: It was in August, but I think it was just shortly before the tenth.

VK: Yeah. So I was ordered to abandon the troops, leave the troops, and proceed to Tsingtau in Shantung Peninsula, alone, unarmed. Now, I spoke pretty good Chinese by now, alone, and the old man knew that, alone and unarmed, and take over the Japanese naval base with its 20,000 men until the Navy came in from the Pacific Fleet. Now, I was ... 27; I'm in a Chinese uniform, with a Marine hat--I always wore that--you know that, ... and I looked at this message. I said to the Chinese general, I said, "You know, I ... know where ... Tsingtao is, but how in the hell am I going to get there?" I didn't even dare tell him I was going to go Tsingtao. I just told him, "How would you get to Tsingtao, from here?" "Urr." You always get that "Urr." ... Oh, it's so annoying. I said, "How many miles, maybe, or kilometers?" I think, he said, from where we were, 600. So I thought that's about 350-some miles. Wondering, how I'm going to get there, you know it's a long walk. And I had to go through communist territory. That was the thing that bothered me the most because we had had a couple of misunderstandings with the communists. ... And I sat there on that, and I talked to Walt about it, and I said, "Well, how do they expect?" ... Walt said, "You can figure out something." And I said, "... I'm not going to walk across that, that territory alone." I said, "It would take me a month." But I said, "There is an airfield there ... in the town of Xi'an," which is the capital of Shaanxi, and I said to Walt, "I think if I can get the boys, by the time I get back, and the war has ended, get the boys to drop me there, at that airfield, there's a train," ... we had been working on the train, blowing up the tracks. I said, "There's a train track open across there that goes to Tsingtao." So I said, "I'll try it." So I ... went back then to the city of Xi'an, which was easy for me to do because that was all through friendly territory, and I went to the airfield and the war had just ended. Well, they had said that. And I asked the Air Force there, they had a field, the Air Force had a field in ... Xi'an, if they would just put wheels down and drop me at that this Chinese airfield in Xi'an. And, you know, they were frivolous, too. They said, "All right." He said, "We will." He said, "We'll drop you there, ... but my men, ... my plane will go in wheels down, ... they'll swing around, and they will take right off, and you jump out of the airplane." I said, "Fair enough." So they dropped me on this Japanese airfield, and I was picked up by the Chinese immediately. By, you know, the Chinese saw the American emblem on it, and the peasants around there came over, and then I was chit-chatting and joking with them, and I was the first American they had seen there, so. There was a prison camp there, and I knew that, too. So I went into the prison camp, it was all civilians, mostly British, some, no. They were almost all British, some Americans, and determined that the B-29s

had started dropping supplies to them and that they were all well, and, under the circumstances, they were, had been well-cared for. And I asked them, before I left, if they were under, if their prison was under the command of where I was going, and they said, "Yes," and that they had treated them fairly well, under the circumstances. So then I went into the city of (Xinan?) and there was a Japanese lieutenant in the railroad station. And, by this time, I had 500,000 Chinese with me, see. They're cheering me on, and you've seen the pictures of those crowds how they followed you everywhere. And I asked ... the lieutenant if he would get a train for me to go to Tsingtao, and he feigned he didn't understand me. And I kind of figured he might understand some of it. And so I saw his sword there, and the sword had the Samurai, it had the Emperor's crest on it. ... What is it? The carnation, no.

KP: Chrysanthemum.

VK: Chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemum. I knew it wasn't a carnation. Chrysanthemum. So I pick that damn thing up, and indicate that I was going to break it, you know, and bend it, and just desecrate it. Then he said, "I speak a little English." I said, "Good." And then the Chinese came up, and he told me he spoke Chinese and Japanese, and he would relay anything I wanted this man to hear. So I told him all I wanted was a train, with one engine, one car, and I wanted him to inform the people between there and Tsingtao, as best they could, that they had to let this train go through and not to dick with it, that I was going to be on it, and I don't want to die now. So, by God, they got, they did, they got a train, and got on the train and I arrived in Tsingtao and after that it was a piece of cake.

KP: Were you in fact the only American there to take the surrender?

VK: The only one, the only one. And when I got off the train, the one ill-informed Japanese soldier had a bayonet on his rifle, and I told you I was ordered to go in unarmed. ...

KP: As a matter-of-fact you went in unarmed?

VK: Of course. What could I do with a .45? So you know there's 20,000 of them. So I watched him, and I slipped my mussette bag off. ... I had a mussette bag with some cameras in it, ... they had asked me to get some photos and stuff. And I watched him, and I came out of the station and, boy, when he saw the Marine, I guess he knew the emblem, I guess, because I had the Marine hat on, although Chinese uniform, he put his bayonet down, you know like that, and I thought, "Well, here it is!" Boy, I let that mussette bag slip down my shoulder, and I hit him on the side of the head with those cameras, and he went sprawling. And the Chinese were cheering, you know there's, wherever you go in China there's a million of them. So I took his rifle and removed the bolt, took his ammunition out, gave him his rifle back, shook my finger at him, and he had lost so much face he didn't know what to do. And so, then, a rickshaw took me, I told him that I wanted to go to the big hotel which I could see, the Edgewater hotel. He took me there and that was fully occupied by Japanese. So when I walked in there, they had a man who had been Consul in the United States, spoke fluent English, Japanese. I told him I was taking over the

hotel now, and that I wanted to see the Chief of Staff of the ... Japanese Navy immediately, and that he could go get him. And within five minutes the guy was there. And then everything went as smooth as silk after that.

KP: So you arranged for the surrender of this naval base. And as a 27-year-old. At this point, were you a captain or a major?

VK: I had just been promoted to major by now, yeah.

KP: And how long were you in charge?

VK: There?

KP: Yes.

VK: Ah, too long because, this is written in Admiral (Myles?) book, so it's not a sea story I'm telling you. I've told you I was a pilot so I, here I am fully in charge of all these Japs, you know, and I put them on alert that they had to keep the communists out of ... town. And my son, who is quite a historian, later on told me, he said, "Dad, you realize that when you were going in there, the Russians were going into Dairen and picking up the boy emperor," who was the head of Manchuria. Remember that? And he said, "Here you were the only American up there, and they're moving down, and that's why the old man wanted you there." So I had ordered these people on all roads to be blocked, coming into Tsingtao and beyond the airfield, too. So there was no problem there. ... We kept all hostile forces out, and the communists were trying to take it then, ... but they weren't prepared yet to quite ... move in. So I began taxiing one of their Betty's around. I had them, when ... it was overcast, because by now there were huge flights of naval aircraft flying over, making suppression flights to make damn sure ... no Japanese planes took off because once you got up, later on, when I got up into an airplane, I looked seaward, there must have been a 1,000 ships out there, ... outside of where Tientsin is. I never saw so many, as far as the eye could carry, but this was about four weeks later. So I began taxiing this thing around, and ... the Japanese admiral was getting more and more nervous because they had been forced to remove all compasses and radios from their aircraft on the terms of surrender. So I said, "Hell, it's no problem flying an airplane because you don't always need all that equipment as long as you know which way the wind is blowing you can head where you are going." And, ... he and I, he spoke fluent English, too; his name was (Okabi?). And so, finally, I told him that I would like to, on a bad day when it was overcast, take that airplane up and around, but I wanted a pilot with me. So we did, we flew it around a couple of times. The other American planes were above the overcast, and to make a long story short, I ... realized that I would have difficulty, not so much taking the aircraft off, but landing it, because, boy, it went down very, very abruptly. It was a Betty, a twin-engine bomber. So I told him that I wanted to go to Shanghai in it because, now, about three or four weeks had gone by, and the old man told me the Navy was going to come in immediately, and I knew he was going to move from Chunking to Shanghai, and the man that we were under the command of was, ... one of the most fearsome Chinese generals that ever lived,

Dai Li. ... And he was in complete commanded of everything, so I knew as soon as I got to Shanghai, all I would have to do was ask anyone where was Dai Li's headquarters, and they would get there, and then I would get to the Admiral.

... So we ... took off one morning under an overcast, and (Okabi?), the Chief of Staff, insisted on going with me. And we've got this Japanese pilot and I sat in the copilot's seat. And we took off without a compass or a radio and stayed on, pretty close to the water, and went into almost Nanking. And then turned to the east and took this Japanese Betty into the airfield, one of the airfields in ... Shanghai, which had already been taken over by the Air Force. And, oh, my God, the red lights began going on all over the place, you know, and they had ... no other communications with us, and I said, "Put her down the runway. What the hell, we've got to go in." So the Jap landed it, and I told him, "Pull off that runway and get behind the hanger over there." But by that time the MPs, the air police, grabbed me. I started out of the nose of the bomber and, boy, they grabbed my feet and pulled me down, and they were surprised to see an American. Where the hell did he come from? "Well," I said, "I had orders to get here." ... And, I said, "Don't bother my crew." And, "All right." So they took me back and got me all the way to Shanghai. I saw the old man. I thought he'd died laughing when I told him I landed a Japanese Betty there. And then, ... he said, "Well, you know, ... you're the only American up there, ... the Navy will come in eventually." But I said, "I had no way to communicate with you." He says, "I know it, I know it." He said, "... I need you back there, you've got to get back immediately." I said, "How?" He said, "You got here, you get back." I said, "All right," because he had no way of getting me there.

So ... we managed to refuel that Japanese plane and take off and go back and landed there, and then I waited there. And then, eventually, Tex (Settle?), who [was] the skipper of the lighter-than-air-dirigibles, was in command of this task force and ... he came in with his cruisers. And I remember then they didn't know for sure where I was on the beach and, finally, as soon the first one came in, I ... went out. And Bernie (Cost?), who was professor here, was on the ship. Did you ever hear of Bernie (Cost?)? He was over in microbiology. He's a retired professor. So ... Bernie was on that ship. And he almost died laughing because when I came here, he chided me. I'd forgotten him, and I was sitting at the Club having a drink one day, and ... Bernie (Cost?) came over and chided me about, about being there ahead of ... everybody. And so then, the Navy came in and they took over. And I ... had everything laid out for them; there would be no problems. I ... remember knowing that the kids in [the] Navy had suffered terribly in the war. I ... got them rifles and crated them up and threw them aboard ship so they could give them to the best gunners and this and that. Give souvenirs out to the kids. And brought out a bunch of junk like that and asked the Admiral first and made sure there was no ammunition with them, and so he could distribute amongst whomever he wished. And then I was ordered back to Shanghai, and the old man then sent a big sea plane. And now things are getting organized. It must have been about the 10th of September, the 15th of September, and the old man then sent a big PBM to pick me up, one of those big black cats, and it landed in the harbor and picked me up, and I bid farewell to Tsingtao and headed for Shanghai.

KP: As commander of a surrender base, what kind of orders did you give and what was your day-to-day routine?

VK: You must be very careful in a situation like I was in, where I was alone and couldn't get ...

KP: You do not even have an aide with you.

VK: So what you ... is I determined this ahead [of] time. I had to determine how I was going to do it. I got the Chief of Staff there, but before he came in I spoke to ... this consul who spoke fluent English. And I told them that I want him present at all times when I was dealing ... with the Navy, and that I wanted to see ... the Chief of Staff of the Navy. I didn't want the Admiral [to] lose too much face, the commander. So he said, "Well, you're lucky," he said, "(Okabi?), who was Chief of Staff has had ... several tours of duty in the United States, and he's very fluent in English. So when he came in, ... I knew that I would work all my orders through. You don't take command of foreign troops yourself; you tell him that he must see that, ... all the road blocks are put up and held in effect, and that to the man they hold them, and do not allow anyone through or out, and that all aircraft will be there. And then I said, "I want ... a chart of all the mines in the area, and I want a chart of the latest channels. I want them brought in to me." And when the Navy first came in, ... a destroyer came in, minesweepers, and they laid off shore, and I signaled to them as best as I could. And they sent a boat in. ... And I've forgotten even how I had [raised] the American flag up on top of the hotel, which I got from the Swiss Consul, in Tsingtao because they were handling our affairs, the Swiss. And so I went to the Swiss Consul, and I got the American flag. And then, they were hesitant to give it to me at first. I said, "Hey, come on." So I ran it up on the hotel on the flag pole, and then they sent from that. They didn't want to come in sweeping if they didn't have to, so they sent a boat in. And I went out with all the charts to this Navy captain and showed them to him, and then gave him all the information, and ... he, I guess he got on the radio and sent it to the cruisers, and then they came, within a day and pulled right into the harbor.

KP: You mentioned that you were very concerned that the commander did not loose face. Had you had any interaction with Japanese soldiers, officers, or Japanese, in general, before the war or during the war?

VK: Not ... live ones.

KP: No, exactly, because you had a fair amount of respect for the Japanese?

VK: Well, I did. I knew ... their authority rested totally with their officers and certainly, in any military organization, you must work through the chain. ... You issue the orders, but they execute them. You wouldn't try to tell them and lead their men because you couldn't do it. Now here's a man with a complete staff organization right there, and the Admiral wrote this up in his book, and he thought it was great ... that I gotten away with that.

KP: And your interaction with the Swiss Consul, had you had any other interaction with him?

VK: No, if he hadn't given it to me, I would have taken it. There was no question about that.

KP: Did you do anything to do help POWs?

VK: Yes, then there was ... an American type aircraft, silver transporter, twin engine, like a very small ... C-46, only this would only carry maybe ten passengers. And, ... while I was in Shanghai, the old man asked me what other aircraft they had up there, and he said, "Are there any other in the combat aircraft?" And I said, "Yes, sir, this one which I just described to you." He said, "Well, ... the Navy desperately needs ... pilots for TAKKUBAR and they're in prison, in Xi'an where you were." I said, "A lot of civilians there." ... He said "Well, I want you to get those pilots and get them to Tientsin." I said, "Admiral, the only way that I can do it is using that Japanese aircraft." He says, "That's all right. I'll inform the Navy that there will be one ... noncombatant aircraft going into Xi'an and over there in that area." So I flew up with that, but I didn't fly; I had the Japanese fly. And we picked up the pilots, and then we flew them to Tientsin in the Japanese airplane, which caused quite a commotion because by now there were Marine pilots in Tientsin. ... But they knew it was a friendly plane coming in, friendly cargo, and back to Tsingtao. I used that plane whenever I wanted to move around a little bit, not too much, though, because I was afraid some nervous guy. ... And one of the other things when I was coming in, I picked up a pilot that had been shot down--one of the Navy pilots--and while I was ... still in China, deep in China, and that was a funny thing. You know, my guerrillas brought him in to me, and they were all upset because he destroyed the aircraft, he bellied in ... and he couldn't understand who they were because ... he, of course, you know, he's a pilot coming off; he'd never seen them. ... He didn't know whether they were Japanese, Chinese or what they were. And he told me this later. He said, "I didn't know what the hell they were." And he said, "I wasn't going to give him my airplane." So he said, ... "I figured out some way to destroy the aircraft." And he said, ... "I put the top back," and ... "I destroyed the aircraft and came out of it, and the Chinese were all upset." I said, "The only reason they were upset [was that] they would have taken it apart, and carried it back here for you." [laughter] I said, "They don't believe in destroying anything." So he was with me for a while, but ... the humor of this was, we were sitting in this out-of-the- way Chinese place, you know, before I left to go to Tsingtao, I think it was, and he said, "Let's have a liberty," and he reach[ed] in his pants, unzipped one of his zippered bags, and he brought out a stack of money that thick. Chinese money, and, of course I'd been paying my troops in Chinese money, see, so I looked at it and said "Hey, this is great." He says, "It's all ours." And ... he said, "I was told to use it when I got on the ground." I said, "Great, it's worth about fifty cents." [laughter] He said, "Is that all?" I says, "Yeah, they got inflation here, like we're going to have back home." So that led to that. So I got him back aboard the carrier while we were ... moving around there. I got him back into the Navy's hands, and then they had to get him back. I didn't get him on the carrier, somebody else did. He was a happy-go-lucky guy. Those naval aviators were tough, ... not tough, they were good citizens.

KP: You are leading and training guerrilla units in China. How often would you go out in the

field and lead them or be part of a military action? What types of action did you participate in?

VK: ... It was irregular. I could go ... wherever I wished and when I didn't wish to. And I did it maybe one third of the time.

KP: What kind of missions would they perform?

VK: Well, most of them were delaying missions, to prevent, the Japanese were already beginning to pull back, so we didn't have too much trouble with them over there. But, ... we were to keep them out of certain areas and ... to try to find if we could, downed pilots. And that was towards the end there, towards August and July. Primarily, what we were doing, because we were also very concerned about the communists incursions because a line of demarcation had been established and the ... we made Chiang adhere to it vehemently. He had to adhere to it, but the communists were already patrolling well beyond it. And that's when John Birch was killed; he came out of the (Sieon?) area. And Birch spoke fluent Chinese. He was born and raised in China. I don't know if you know his background and he caught--whereas I was ordered to go in unarmed--after the war, he caught these Chinese communists in Nationalist territory, and when ... they ordered him to surrender, he refused, and they shot him, killed him. And he was the first casualty of the Cold War.

KP: You mentioned the line of demarcation. What was the relationship between the Nationalist Chinese and the communists guerrillas in your area?

VK: They ... were after each other, they ...

KP: How much of the combat would be directed against the Japanese?

VK: No. It was primarily against the Japanese. It was only if they incurred into your home territory that you would mix with them.

KP: So would you have skirmishes with them?

VK: Yes, yes. We had skirmishes. It was illegal, but we had them. That was one of the things that the Admiral talked to me about before he sent me up there. He said, "You realize that were not supposed to this, but." ...

KP: But it will happen.

VK: It'll happen. That's why he held me back and that's why he wrote in his book later on. He said he liked the cut of my jib or something, and he said he knew I would execute.

KP: It sounds like you had a great deal of authority, that you very rarely had to check with the admiral in terms of what was ...

VK: I saw him once.

KP: And how many messages would you send to him?

VK: I saw him once, then, in Shanghai, [when] I came back, I saw him again a lot of times because he wanted me to stay in Shanghai, ... but I told him I wanted to get home because, ... by that time, it was November.

KP: When you were in the field you would communicate with him by messages, but how often would you send him a message?

VK: Only when he would ask me a question.

KP: Really? So otherwise, you were ...

VK: I never. ... Like, he would send me a message.

KP: Yeah, that would be one of the few times you would communicate.

VK: The weather was sent entirely separate from me. That was sent everyday; that was not near me, but that was a communication with the Admiral. That was [what] he wanted, he wanted that weather. It would come from all over the interior of China, and they had schedules and they would shoot it in, as if they had some way of zipping it in. I don't know how that [worked]; I'm not a communicator. But they could type it out ahead of time and button the buzz and away it would go. And they did it in the clear because it was of no value to the enemy and ... within thirty minutes that weather was cleared all the way through to Pearl Harbor, where it was disseminated to the fleet within thirty minutes. So that's why we were primarily there and that's what the Admiral was ... primarily interested in.

KP: What did you think of the prowess of the Chinese troops that you assisted?

VK: I thought they were good.

KP: What about the supplies they had? How well equipped were they?

VK: Very poorly equipped.

KP: And how well fed were they?

VK: Very poorly fed. Nobody was well fed in China. The troops were poorly fed, everybody was. The entire population of China, ... much of it, had been forced into the interior. And the entire productive area was in the hands of the Japanese. ... There were no communications

between the North and South in China, no communications at all. The only railroad I know running was the (Ching-ling?) railroad, which went and terminated in (Bowgee?) from (Seon?); it was a 100 miles, maybe 50 miles. But the Japanese controlled all the network of communications. [They] were along the coast, and all the best agriculture was along the coast. And it was ... tough. They had the area of starvation in the month of March and April, February and March, I guess it was. And bitter cold in the North; it's bitter cold in north China.

KP: From what I have read, China was a tough assignment.

VK: It was a bitter cold, and the poor people, you couldn't help but have compassion for them. They tried so hard and ...

KP: Because it sounds like your soldiers fought very valiantly under very tough circumstances.

VK: They did, yes, they were good. I met some of them later in Korea. ... They were fighting, they were the ones that surrendered in Korea. They were forced into the communist Army.

KP: You also had some sense of the communist guerrillas there and the communist forces. What did you think of them as a potential adversary, because it seems like in 1944 and 1945 you thought they would be an adversary, and they already were your an adversary?

VK: We knew they were going to be adversaries. What did I think of them?

KP: Did you think that they would prevail, at the time? Or how tough did you think the going would be for the Nationalists?

VK: I didn't realize the inroads communism had made in this country. Harry Dexter White, are you familiar with him? Alger Hiss, whom people still defend, but is guilty as hell, these men denied all aid to China, Chiang. Then you had men like Theodore White, one of your emminent historians, and I challenge you to go back and read everything he wrote when he was over there. He was there at the same time I was, and there was nothing but praise for ... mean Mao. And he comes from a socialist family and it was nothing but criticism of Chiang. And that's where ... the bandit, this sort of thing, which permeated the American people. I know that ... Time Magazine wrote a story that China was trying to rid itself of the ghost of Mao Zedong. Do you recall that by any chance? They had a picture of Mao on the cover just after he died and all the evils which even Genovese has now recognized. ... Do you know who Genovese was?

MP: He was here at Rutgers.

VK: And he's a man, ... among those leftists. ... But, ... here you had these people saying, writing that China is trying now to rid itself of the ghost of Mao Zedong. And I wrote a letter to the editor, the only time in my life I ever wrote a letter, and I wrote it in plenty of time. It could have been published. And Theodore White was still living in Boston. And I said, "If China

doesn't know what to do with the ghost of Mao Zedong, they should send it to Boston, and let it haunt Theodore White, who put him in power." [laughter] And I got a letter back from the editor, even though he didn't publish my letter, he said it arrived too late, but he appreciated my sentiments.

KP: You sort of foresaw them as an enemy. What would you have done? At the time what did you think the U.S. should do in China, having been in the field?

VK: Yeah. Well, you know, it's a little bit, I suppose, like Patton, only I was no Patton. But his thoughts, you know he wanted to go ... on across, at least keep them out of Germany. ... And many of us felt that we should support ... Chiang here, but instead of that, ... he received very little, negligible support, and the Russians really poured the stuff into the North, which, you know, they brought a whole Army into Manchuria. Brother Roosevelt invited them in even though the Japs were defeated. And they moved that whole Army in, and I'm convinced, oh, I don't know this for a fact, that when that Army pulled out it was a front, as I recall. What the Russians called a front. When they pulled out they left most of that stuff there for ... Mao, because he ... had pretty good artillery and .... other material. And we wheeled out our men. Our war was over, and we didn't want to get involved in [it].

KP: You left China in November of 1945. Had you been tempted at all to stay?

VK: To stay in China?

KP: Yes.

VK: Well, I hadn't been home, and I was married. And I had been away for most of the four years of the war, you know, ... because ... you couldn't bring your families wherever you went. ... You mean to stay and work with the Chinese?

KP: Yes.

VK: ... That my government wouldn't allow. I was, ... we were ... breaking our ties with that, which we had to do and ... disbanding our organization. The Admiral wanted me to stay there to be the Provost Marshal of Shanghai, which I didn't want to be, that was ... a snake pit.

KP: I have read that Shanghai was a very wild city at that time.

VK: It was, unbelievable, and you know, to be the Provost Marshall, you would have the responsibility of all these sailors [who] get killed and find out why they were killed. And, it was too much for me. I wanted to get out of there.

KP: Well, in fact, you married your wife during the war. How did that come about?

VK: I got married just before I went overseas in 1942. June 16th. And I left a week or ten days later.

KP: Do you think the war hastened your marriage?

VK: No, no.

MP: Where did she stay while you were away?

VK: She graduated from Douglass and then she stayed at home with her family. ... She was editor of a publication for General Motors. She was a journalist at Douglass, at Rutgers. She took journalism at Rutgers; she went to Douglass, too.

KP: She was actually in one of the few coeducational programs, the journalism program?

VK: Yeah.

KP: When you came home in November, did you make the determination that you were going to make the Marines a career?

VK: Yes, yes.

KP: So you really, you remained a Marine all through ...

VK: Yeah.

KP: You also saw the Marines, in a sense downsizing after the war?

VK: Yes.

KP: What were your thoughts? Had you thought in '45, '46 that you should go out and make more money in private enterprise?

VK: Well, you could have, but I enjoyed the Marines corps ... the camaraderie, the fine, high-tide people you worked with; they were the highest type. And ... they were all dedicated to the defense of the country, totally, which I have seen lacking in some ... other areas. And ... we just stayed as ... what we called "a band of brothers," and ... I just stayed in the regulars. I didn't get demoted after the war. I stayed as a major. Half of my class, the lower half of my class, went back to captain and so ... I had the advantage there remaining as a field grade officer and ...

KP: Major is a high rank in the Marines.

VK: Yeah, that's very high.

KP: What were your inter-war assignments between 1945 and 1950?

VK: I taught school, ... for the most part. ... Between World War II and Korea, I taught the Marine Corps schools at Quantico. And then, ... because of my experience in China, ... the Marine Corps was called upon to furnish some people to this Central Intelligence Agency, not as a spy, but for unconventional warfare and ... I got a set of orders. We ... must, as a Marine officer ... serve with a civilian component of the government, whether it's the State Department as a naval attaché or something like that. ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Vincent Kramer on Feb. 20, 1995 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

MP: Maureen Prado.

KP: You had been detailed as a civilian to work with the newly formed CIA.

VK: Well, it was about three years old at that point. Not as a civilian.

KP: But as a Marine officer. It was a civilian agency.

VK: As a Marine officer. It was a civilian component of the U.S. Government. ...

KP: And what was that experience like?

VK: It was ... quite an experience. I had originally been assigned to them to work in the area of Taiwan, because of my ... linguistic background and my knowledge of the Chinese. But then the incursion from the North, ... [North] Koreans into South Korea came in ... and the agency, even though, ... I've forgotten where I was at the point, directed me, ... they took me away from the China desk. And this again is vaguely exact timing. I guess, maybe, they thought they needed me more up there than they did even before the incursion because then, I was sent over. ... I think I was in Japan when they broke through, and then I went into the Pusan Perimeter and worked with the agency.

KP: So you were deployed to Pusan. What was your first assignment?

VK: Well, my first assignment there, you know, that was [when] we were right in the corner there. We had to figure ways to disrupt the rail traffic on the East Coast of Korea. ... Initially, ... I was told to study that out. And then there were other missions that were assigned to me, ... that may or may not be still classified today in that particular time. But after we broke out of the perimeter and the landing at Inchon, ... this is were the genius of MacArthur comes to the

forefront. [We] then move[d] north. Then ... the agency, ... wanted to get people in there into the north, agents that might be able to inform us, and get radios established in there, that could help us ... should there be a reversal ... of the good fortune we were enjoying at the moment. So we worked on that up through North Korea. And, then, as you recall, the Chinese broke through, and the next thing you knew you're back in your own backyard again and, the stalemate came, generally, across the 38th Parallel. And then I was given the mission ... of keeping the rail line cut on the East Coast, north of (Onson City?) and south of Chongjin. That was an opening; it was purely a military structure I was going into now. ... And also exfiltrating agents ... who would be dropped in there and, then, to go in and pick them up on the coast and bring them out. ... That's what I did for a year ... two years.

KP: I have come across a *Washington Post* article, a few years ago ...

VK: Yes, that was about me. They spelled my name wrong.

KP: Yes, I noticed that.

VK: Where did you find that?

KP: The archives had it; they had clipped it out. It sounded like you were in the thick of things.

VK: ... It was exciting. The guy that wrote that article was a guy by the name of (Hans Toffti?). ... The one I always look to being my boss was a man that later became a four-star general, Richard Stillwell, who later commanded the United Nations forces in Korea. ... He would, like the Admiral, let me have my head, but gave me broad instructions. ... I merely executed; I managed to blow up one train up there, managed to destroy any number of bridges and culverts. It was difficult getting trains. Again, on this here, I can just cite. The other day a writer wrote to me, so this material has been released, and he's writing a book on this. His name is Dwyer. How he got my name, I don't know, unless ... he had that same damn article you did.

KP: Quite probably, because he did not talk to me.

VK: No, of course not, because he has been doing it with me for a year. ... But he had the same article you did and he wrote a story that was in Soldier of Fortune magazine, which was about part of my operations. He never knew me, but he got it from (Toffti?). So this fellow gave me ... the log, I have to think of my naval journals; I would have said diary, of one of the ADTs. Are you familiar with an ADT? An ADT is a assault destroyer transport. It's smaller than a destroyer, but they have put davits on them. Are you familiar with davits. That's where you lower boats. And they put these heavy davits up on them, so they go like this, and you can carry troops on them and do coastal raids. So that's what I operated off of, ADTs. He sent me the diary of one.

Now, would you want me to relate that, and that, in a nutshell, shows, because this has been

released. ... One night I was going in to exfiltrate a man about six, I don't know, I can't give you miles, [but] it was up near the city of Chongjin, which is on [the] Manchurian-Siberian border. And I was ordered to exfiltrate a man out of there which I knew, a man I knew. ... I had arranged ... exactly where I would pick him up because ... in the pitch black night, I knew I could find that place going into a strange area, you see. So we went in with a powerboat with underwater exhaust so they can't hear you, but your boat, your mother ship lays 7000 meters off shore, I don't know, where they won't get hurt. ... No artillery can pick them up, ... they don't want to make bubbles. So we go in to, I think, 2000 meters, 1000 meters of the beach, and an underwater exhaust, and then we'd get into rubber boats. Then you proceed with rubber boats very silently, but paddling, not with a motor. ... I was the commander, and I always picked a moonless night because I wanted to come home, too. So you get into the beach, and then the swimmers, UDT, under water demolition, they didn't think I could swim, they'd go in there with me. But their mission was to remain on the water's edge. They must not come out of the water; that's their orders. You've got to honor it.

So I went in, and then I proceeded inland at the exact spot where I was supposed to be. This is written up in the diary, the log. So I got in there ... and I removed my head mask from my ... exposure suit, and, of course, I had taken my fins off, and I had checked my weapon. I had a .38, and I had checked my stiletto, I carried a stiletto knife, on my leg. A commando, one of the British commandos gave it to me. So I had this stiletto, and ... then I had a couple of grenades. I always carried a couple of grenades with me just in case too many of them came. ... So I went inland and ... I was very quiet, very, extremely quiet and these people were, it seems to me, this is forty years ago, there was some noises in there ... that I didn't like. So I took my time, and there was a river beside me, and I went over and got onto [the] bank of the river because, if I got anybody in the water, I could handle him, I could drown him if I had to, but on land, if too many people get you, [you] can't make out too well. So, ... I'd lay around there ... looking for this fellow, and I wanted to get him because it was right on that river there where I was going to meet him. ... I began realizing that ... maybe there were ... too many people around. There was a road behind me, about were Easton Avenue is, and the truck traffic on the road was very heavy, and they even had their headlights on. And the city of Chongjin was all lit up, ... but the city of Chongjin was three miles away over a flat plain. So I had decided, well, if I go back, you don't trolly your trail unless you have to, you know. I looked at my watch and about forty-five minutes had gone by, and I knew the kids had left because they were only supposed to wait twenty minutes. So then, I cut across the river, and I thought, maybe, my man would be north, having run into the same problem I was running into. And I walked that beach for two miles, fog, fog coming in. [I] couldn't find him. But I knew now that the Navy was getting nervous because they wanted to get out of there before daylight, because within fifty miles of us were about 200 MIGS. So I went north, and I thought, "Well, I'll signal the boat to pick me up down there in the fog." And I'm sitting there and, "Oh, Jesus, what do I do now?" ... I took it, you know, I made hasty estimate of the situation I was [in]. I couldn't hide unless I came back where I came from because he might could go up into the hills. I could hide amongst the rocks until tomorrow night. On the other hand, I couldn't stay in this open area here, because I'd be spotted. ... Everywhere in Asia, people are everywhere. So finally I sat down for a minute and thought I'd work it over, and

I began signaling with my light and the fog lifted. And I began signaling some more, and the boys saw the light, but it was two miles from where it should be seen, and they had already left me at the other place because they said he didn't come out. So they thought, ... I guess, maybe, some way back in their mind, they thought I might have been captured; I don't know. But finally, one of the kids came in, to make a long story short, and he lit his light underwater; it was a pitch black night, as I said. And I wasn't sure whether it was ... phosphorous or a light, and then, suddenly, I saw it, and he stood up, but he was new to me, and he didn't know me that well either. I remember him backing away. He says, "If you're Colonel Kramer, ... just walk slowly toward me. I'm going to back away, but don't come near me." And I said, "Yes, all right, I'll be right with you. Just lead the way." We went out, got the boat and went back in. But, that's one night's work.

KP: The person you supposed to rendezvous with, what was his mission?

VK: ... These I was not privy to.

KP: You just may rendezvous with him, and you didn't know why? You would just bring them back then, but you didn't know what they had done?

VK: That's not my concern. That is compartmentalization, which they have completely, and it should be that way, and it is that way. I don't know what man; I knew the man.

KP: Yeah, but you did not know what he was doing?.

VK: ... My portion was in and out.

KP: So it sounds like you did quite a bit of raiding?

VK: Yes, yes. ... During that period of time, yes ... we did. ... I would occasionally take prisoners out. ... Just go in and disrupt ... areas, not villages, but areas. And the rail tracks, blow up culverts where it would be difficult for them to repair them and wait for trains. And, as I said, only once, ... did I land a train. One time two went past me, and I couldn't get one.

KP: You also got an Air Medal during the Korean war?

VK: Oh, I did ... a lot of overflights, looking at the beaches that I'm gonna land on. I want to find out for myself. I wanted to see how many aircraft were up there that they wouldn't allow us to hit because they were in Manchuria, and look at those fields full of those airplanes. ... Then sometimes I'd drop men in, I would be ordered to drop men in, and I wanted to make sure I knew where we were going before we dropped them.

KP: Were there any close calls? It sounds like the operation you just told me about was pretty hairy. Any close calls on any of your missions in Korea?

VK: I never felt I had close calls, no, because I tried to work things out in advance to every detail ... and it worked quite well. Most every time it worked precisely the way I wanted it to. For example, General Stilwell, later, General Stilwell realized that I had been under heavy pressure for a long time, and he said, "Vinnie, ... I want you to go back and brief," because I been out there ... two years. He said, "I want you to go back and brief Lighting Joe Collins," who was Chief of Staff of the Army on our operations here. And he said, "While you're home, go see your wife." So he wanted to give me a chance to go see my wife and kids. I had a daughter I hadn't seen yet. ... So he got me home and back out and took ... damn good care of me. During that period, one other guy went in on my [mission], instead of me, and got wiped out. I said wiped out; he said he lost, I think he told me, twenty men. The boats were all sunk, except for the one, and the one he got out on had fifteen holes in it.

KP: How many men did you lose on your missions, even when you are blowing up railroad tracks?

VK: Because I did all the swimming, you see, I would. ... You can train men ... to the 10th degree, but I still wanted to be the first one in there, and I would always be the first one in there just like I told you when I was with. ... I would invariably ... look the place over, I knew it well, ... even in pitch black night ... I had cat's eyes. I could see at night better than I could in the daytime. I have unusual vision. I would examine where I thought there might be guns. On occasions they would be there, and we would get rid [of] them and then proceed with our operation. But George, when he went in, got caught. ... No fault of his; it could have happened to me, [if] I had gotten the same one, I guess, but again you're extra careful.

KP: You mentioned you went back to the Pentagon to brief the Chief of Staff. You then came back to Korea?

VK: Oh, immediately. I was too excited not to go back out.

KP: So you served the duration in Korea during the Korean War?

VK: Yes. I think I'm one of the few that rates eight battle stars for Korea.

KP: Korea, even probably, more than Vietnam, is often considered the forgotten war.

VK: Yeah, that's true. There's a book written, <u>The Forgotten War</u>.

KP: Yes, and it's often referred to. We still haven't built a national Korean War Memorial in Washington. But it also was a very frustrating war, for Americans in general, but for even many who fought. What did you think of the war, the stalemate and what we should have done? Did you agree with MacArthur, that we should have expanded the war to China?

VK: No, I don't think we should have expanded to China, although at that moment there was an advantage to that ... because Mao Zedung had just taken command, and he was not dug in yet. If you had unleashed the forces of Chiang, from Taiwan ... you might had been able to do it, so there a comme ci, comme ca. I don't know which would have been successful, but you mustn't forget that ... he opposed the President. We were merely carrying out the Truman Doctrine, [which] was to stalemate the expansion of communism, which I believed in, even while we were in Vietnam. It was a good doctrine. It was the only way to stop those people.

KP: In terms of the relief of General MacArthur, at the time, how did you feel? Did you think MacArthur was right and shouldn't have been relieved?

VK: No, I thought he was wrong as a military man because he defied the Commander-in-Chief.

KP: Even though you were very sympathetic ...

VK: Even though I was sympathetic, you don't [do] that; you can't do that. I might not find it that difficult with the incumbent, but. [laughter].

KP: Were you frustrated we did not role back communism in North Korea?

VK: You know, I had [an] interesting experience if you want to hear about it. Dick Stillwell, when I finished my two years in Korea, he said, "Vinnie, I got a job that's got to be done. ... We want to find out what the French are doing in French Indo-China." This was in June, July, ... August of 1952. And I said, "Yeah." I was sitting with him, you know, he said, "I'd like you to go down there ... and because of your background with fighting with both Koreas," because they were all Koreans that I worked with when I was operating in North Korea, and China. He said, "I just want to see ... what you feel about how the French are doing?" I said, "Okay." I said, "How the hell do you get there?" "Oh," he said, "I've got that all laid out for you." He said, "You go down to Hong Kong and buy yourself a bunch of civilian clothes for the tropics and ... then you get on a plane and you go into Hanoi." He said, "I'll have people that will pick you up in Hanoi and they'll take you down to Saigon." I said, "Okay, that sounds good." So in 1952, I went into Hong Kong and bought some of these sharkskin suits for the tropics; you know, you can wash them. And I had to be outfitted and so I then went into Hanoi and was taken all through Hanoi by the French who picked me up there. I went up into the border of China, in a place called "Trois Rivieres," the three rivers, and back up into the Tonkin mountains and out onto the islands off the coast. I knew I was being given, ... you know, a show which wasn't true, because when they were taking me up into the other place, I could see the damage I had already done when I was with guerrillas. All the bridges were blown up, and everything else was blown up. You had to drive through the rivers around the bridges, you see what I mean? ... So it didn't take me long to see that they were losing up there. Then, I had to go down into Saigon and into Laos, and Cambodia, and the delta ...

KP: Mekong Delta.

VK: Mekong Delta, but there's another name, there's a human forest down there. ... I went off through there ... with the lead gentleman ... and stayed with them, I don't know, four months, three months, whatever it was. ... Then I was ordered to fly back to Paris where they, (Satitea?) I guess it was, debriefed me. ... And, of course, I knew how to handle them. Then, when I got to Washington, I told them, ... "they were going to lose. They were finished."

KP: Why were you so sure at the time?

VK: Number one, the people were hostile towards me. The native population was totally hostile towards me and the French. ... The way the French did it. ... One of the things that you did when you were with Chinese guerrillas was to show them the brutality of the Japanese, which was horrible in China. It's unbelievable what they did to the Chinese. You would let your people see that so they could fight harder and recruit better in those areas, against that vicious enemy. You've all read of the rape of Nanking, and it took place everywhere. There's a man who wrote a wonderful book on it, Judd, who later became a Congressman. And he was a missionary, a medical missionary over there. ... This is not too delicate, but ... when you went into Saigon, these people wanted to show me around, and they took me to a cage, and it was full of these Vietnamese women, you know. And they're screaming at you and hollering out [at] you. It was nothing but a big brothel, see, right in the middle of town, and the legionnaires are in there and everybody. If you want to alienate a population do something like that, see. ... You know, I couldn't tell them, "Hey, you shouldn't do this." But these things were all part of my little notes ... when I came home. Another thing was at Dien Bien Phu. This was before [the] fall of Dien Bien Phu. I had lunch with LeClare one day. He was the commanding general, and he told me about Dien Bien Phu. Well, I'd seen Dien Bien Phu and I said, "You know, it's kind of dangerous." "Well, we must be in that valley there to get the water." I said, "They're going to surround you with 105s and you'll wish the hell you weren't in the bottom." But I didn't say it that way. That's exactly what they did. ... You see, Americans begin to think too much like Americans. Guerrillas can take those 105s and with twenty men, they'll pull the barrel, they'll pull the case, they'll pull this, they'll pull the ammunition, and they'll move it where an American, if he doesn't have a jeep or a tractor or a trailer, he figures you can't do it, see. But ... with the native population you can. They take and put a band of powdered rice over their shoulders. That's a week, two weeks' rations. Just take a little of that rice, ... mix it with water, and eat it. ... and whatever else they can supplement it with ... a rat or a snake they might catch. ... It was difficult even when I talked with my own people because I had so much experience in this area, to say this is what happens, that we don't realize it.

KP: When you briefed Washington after observing the French, what was their reaction? Did they agree with you?

VK: They don't care, they just debrief you.

KP: So you didn't get any sense that they were skeptical?

VK: That's not my position. What did you see, and what did you hear, and I told them, and what's your opinion, and I told them.

KP: After your mission to Vietnam, where did you go to next stop?

VK: I was ordered back to the Marine Corps schools, teaching again. And I taught the philosophy of communism and irregular warfare, and things like that. Then I had a battalion command, command of a battalion. Then I was ordered to Taiwan to work with a Chinese Nationalist Marine Corps, and I worked with them old friends; we came back together.

KP: That must have been sort of a homecoming for you?

VK: It was, it was like a homecoming; it was a great time. ... And worked with them, and then, ... my last tour of duty was back in Vietnam.

KP: You had reported that the French effort was going to fail. What was it like to be back in Vietnam now that it was America's war?

VK: Well, it was one that I never should have gone back to because I believed ... in the British theory. Now, ... what you can't do with American service[men], I knew it wouldn't do much good. I did discuss it with General Stilwell, who was now a general. And he was in Vietnam, and ... he and I were together, and he spoke at my dinner when I retired from Rutgers. He came all the way up to do that. He just died a few years ago, ... and he was much younger ... than me. I mean, not much younger then me, not much older then me. He graduated from West Point in the Class of '38 when he was twenty and I graduated from Rutgers Class of '41 when I was twenty-three. So you see, there was only a few years difference, but this guy was a brilliant mind. He had ... [gone] to Brown one year because he was too young to get into West Point. So I sat with Dick, you know, and I said, ... "I see the same thing taking place here now, that took place under the French." I said, "They got all these blaring bars and night clubs. They don't have the cage, but they got these blaring night clubs. I'm not a moralist, but they got all these blaring night clubs." I said, "The average GI makes more money than a head of a family. He makes more money in a month than head of a family makes in a year. They flaunt this money," I said, "They bring stuff in, within two minutes it's on the black market. ... It shows, a certain amount of corruptness." "Well," he said, ... "What's your theory? What did the British do?" I said, "Well, from what I know about them, the British, when they sent troops into colonial areas, only paid them a small amount of money, and kept the money in escrow." I said, "In that way they didn't dominate the financial scene, and ... it made them appreciate more and learn more the cultures of the people and so forth." And so we went on from there, but he agreed there's no way you could take an American soldier over there and say, "Instead of giving you 100 bucks a month, we're going to give you ten, your ninety will be held back for you." ... So you can't do that in our type of market, but that's what I think would have prevented much of the problems we had over there.

KP: Your mission in Vietnam would be your last one in the military. Had you thought of staying on past your twenty years?

VK: No, twenty-three. No, I wanted to get out because, as you can see, I was away from home seven years out of twenty-three, more than that, I was away about nine. And my children needed a father at home and ... you know, I had to come home.

KP: It must have been hard on your family?

VK: Well, I have a very good wife, ... she took care of them. But, she let me know, she was starting to have ... little difficulties as the children were getting older, and it would be better if Daddy was a little closer.

KP: Any other thoughts on your experience in Vietnam?

VK: No, those were the principal ones there. We had one fellow from here, (Fittlebirdie?) I think his name is, who escaped over there. Have you ever heard of him? He's the man to talk about, but I don't even have the chance to talk to him. I would have told him it was futile because he was in Hanoi, and there's no place you can go. I know what he wanted to do. He wanted to go down and get into the river and get down to the shore and get in a boat and try to get out. You know, I've driven all those roads. I knew them, but there's people everywhere, you know. You can't hide, you can't do anything, and you stand out. It's not like in this country where they give succor ... to the enemy sometimes, which they have done in this country. But over there you wouldn't find it, because they'd get wiped out.

KP: You came back to Rutgers. Did you expect that when you decided to retire from the military?

VK: No, but Harvey Harmon, the football coach, I dropped in one day to see him, he said, "Hey, there's a good job over in alumni relations. ... It's a nice easy job. Why don't you put in for it?" So I put in for it, and they gave it to me.

KP: It sounds like you were a bit surprised that you ended up back at Rutgers. It was not part of any ...

VK: No, no, it wasn't in the books, no.

KP: You were in a sense, at the right place. If you hadn't talked to him you ...

VK: Yeah. I hadn't quite retired yet, but I was looking around, and he told me about it.

KP: You came to Rutgers at sort of a tumultuous time, in part, because of the Vietnam War and, directly, Eugene Genovese. You had started here in 1964 or 1965?

VK: '64.

KP: What are your recollections of the whole Eugene Genovese controversy as someone who had been ...

VK: Well, I told you that I had a great deal of regard for Genovese. But [for] the ones that were closet communists, I had none, and they were dominating the scene. For example, when they had the teach-in here, they tried to get ... someone moderate to present the case when a radical, which I would call the other side, presented theirs. And as soon as he went up to start to talk about the Truman Doctrine, this, that and the other thing, the microphone was wrenched from his mouth, and the people began, the audience began cheering and hooting. It was no different than my teaching the philosophy of communism to Marines. And, not to give a history, a lesson, but you will recall when Mr. Khrushchev came over, and he beat the [table], that's ... a communist type thing. Distract them from whatever, if it's getting away from you, distract them. Bang! So he took his shoe off. Do you remember that? Are you familiar with that?

MP: No.

VK: Well, Mr. Khrushchev came to the United Nations, and when the debate began going against the Soviet Union, he took off his shoe and began beating on the desk in there, in the United Nations. ... I had studied them because they were our enemy. I had studied their philosophies and modus operandi, and you can almost predict what they're going to do.

KP: You had mentioned that it was akin to teaching communism to Marines. What was that experience like?

VK: You know, ... I used to watch ... the glares in their eyes at me because they all knew me. But, at first I came up, and ... I compared it to the millennium. Are you familiar with the millennium? In the Bible?

KP: Yes.

VK: And actually, Marxism is the millennium; it's nothing more. It's a godless, stateless, classless, lawless society. You don't need anything because everyone has everything they need and everyone produces what they're capable of, so there's no qualms. ... This, you know, I would show how that was great, but ... then you would break it down. But I remember ... their eyes would be firing at me, you know, as if I were in favor of it. But ... then I would say, "Well, now during the next four hours ... we'll show how the cult of the individual steps forward." Then I'd use Stalin and Lenin and Mao Zedong. And it's irrefutable. Even Genovese says their excesses, were, I guess, ... beyond his imagination because he certainly didn't do anything to write them up when he was here.

KP: You were here as part of the Rutgers administration in a tough time for Rutgers. Eugene Genovese became quite an issue in the 1965 campaign. I actually had a student once do a paper on that, and there were quite a few angry alumni who wrote to the university saying, "What are you doing with this professor?" What are your recollections about this?

VK: They put out a paper on that which I'm sure you've seen, the University, the Genovese case. And academic freedom then came to the forefront. ... If it's balanced, I have no, I think academic freedom should be there. But, may I tell you something here? This should, you can keep on the record, I don't care. The cartoonist who does political cartoons for the *Newark Star-Ledger*, ... he and I were fairly close at that time. ... One day he said to me, "What the hell's going on down there?" I said, "Oh, they're just a bunch of communists using academic freedom as an umbrella to protect them while on the teachings they're doing." See, I don't know your political leanings, but I'm telling you what I did. So the next Sunday, and I've got the original at home, a big one, there was his cartoon showing a big umbrella with academic freedom written on it and two professors underneath it with tales of Marxism and this and that. And the quotation underneath was, "It's a handy little gadget, isn't it?" meaning the academic freedom. So I think it was abused.

KP: I talked to Bill Bauer during his interview, and he has also very succinct memory of the controversy surrounding ROTC and the effort to keep ROTC.

VK: They burned the building, you know.

KP: I'm aware of that. And there was a drive, although it was hard at Rutgers being a land grant university, but there was a drive to get rid of ROTC.

VK: Yeah, but again, this is done by a small, relatively small group, see. But again, look what's ruining the university today. A handful of them ... are in charge. They stopped a basketball game. I'm sorry.

KP: No, no, please continue.

VK: But Bill Bauer ... is a major general in the Air Force. He and I, we're on the same frequency on this.

KP: Do you feel that there were other memories of being in alumni relations. You were at the position for close to three decades.

VK: Twenty-three years.

KP: Twenty-three years. What changes did you see at Rutgers, especially when you compare it to the 1930s? But also the more recent proposed in the 1960s and 1970s?

VK: Well, ... it's a difference in students; I can show you this. In my day there were a handful, ... what we used to call the "picketers." ... I always felt they were centered around my classmate, Howard Crosby, and I could name a few others, but I won't bother. And they were the anti-warists in the '40s. We had a couple of them, but they were so few, as is evidenced by the number that left the Class of '42 and were given their degree in January so they could go into naval aviation and ... other places. So the spirit of patriotism was high even though we were coming out of a Depression without a welfare state, where you had to survive. It was survival of the fittest and you got nothing from the government. ... Yet, we had that strong patriotism which I had in those young, enlisted men that were with me. Now ... everything is given to them, where you don't have to work, and if anybody said to many students, "Do you work after [school], you know, to help you with?" "Oh no," you know, it's not ... done too much. So now that everything is given to us, I feel there is ... a weakness developing within the country where we demand everything be given to us. ... Therefore, ... we don't, won't go to war, let them come here. But it's unfortunate that they couldn't have seen what the Russians did in East Germany because I also had an assignment in Berlin which I didn't tell you about. I had to work with the Germans there and the barbaric. Do you know they sent the Mongols into Berlin? And ... they were the fiercest of their troops. They just wanted to emasculate that country, the enemy. And I had a friend by the name of Pat (Teale?), who was captured by the Germans, escaped from the Germans and went and joined the Russian Army before he was repatriated. ... "Jesus," he said, "It was unbelievable the way they would, ... the way they were, the Russians." ... You know, he was nothing but a fighter, being a Ranger, but he said, "Oh, even they went beyond him." They would just destroy, rape, pillage everything, kill everything. And, I don't know, that's today, ... you don't have the students, they haven't seen that, is what I'm telling you. ... I can just imagine from what I saw in China and what we know happened in the Philippines, and if you read any of the books, the one that ended up in Australia, A Town Called Alice. Did you ever read that? Well, you should. If you know what happened to those people, then you'd be willing to fight to keep them from your door.

KP: Does it surprise you that the Soviet Empire collapsed, but that the Chinese communist state still survives?

VK: No, because ... China is China, and Mao has been extremely careful to colonize his own country properly. They also are, I don't know the word, is it monolithic? ... There [are] only about forty million people who are not Chinese, minorities in China, and that I think is five percent. ... It's a little less than five percent. So they had ... no problem of minorities. They're primarily (Han?) ... Chinese. Now, ... I watched the development of Mao, which I had to do when I was in the military. When he took his soldiers out of Korea, they had a million mobilized up there, they didn't go home. They all went out ... into the (Tacomacan?). Are you familiar with the (Tocomacan?)?

KP: No.

VK: The (Tacomacan?) is the vast arid region of extreme western China that's next to (Kazak?),

and in extreme western China north and west of Tibet and north of Pakistan is the best way I can describe it to you. ... It's the most volatile climate in the world. ... It's dry, ... but you get the snow off the mountains. ... There's huge mountains there, too, the Tien Shan mountains there, range peaks 26,000 feet high. So he took his whole Army there and just moved them out there, and you'll settle this because they were Turks, who are Europeans essentially, and he wanted to get the Han Chinese ... to dominate ... all parts of his country. So he has done this, but he'll start losing his grip now, I think, with the liberalization and the opening of capitalism. I just went through China recently. ...

KP: So you have been back to China?

VK: Yes.

KP: What was that experience like?

VK: Oh, it was quite thrilling. It was what I expected. Now that they again, no matter whether it was he or Chiang, have control of all the means of communication and all the means of agriculture, they're able to distribute the food and get good crops out and feed the people. ... They're infinitely better off now, which it would been even better under Chiang, but they're infinitely better off now than when we were starving out there. So there's tremendous improvement, and reforestation has taken place and the expansion of the communication lines. They've cut tunnels through the Chin-Ling mountains ranges that I used to climb over. And now they just go through. They've put electric trains through there, where as most of their trains ... [were] steam, but to go through the tunnels, you have to have electric, so they've done that. ... They've shown a great deal of progress, and, again, I don't want to get into a debate ... of the bell curve, ... but I've always thought that [the] Chinese and Japanese ... had an extreme high level of intelligence. And that was apparent to me when I was working with Chinese soldiers, GIs. They could pick up things very quickly, and very fast, even though they were illiterate.

KP: We did not recognize communist China until really Richard Nixon's visit in 1972. What did you think of his visit?

VK: It was the same as with Roosevelt. He recognized after, let me see, it was fifteen years he recognized the Soviet Union, wasn't it?

KP: Yes, so you were not surprised by Richard Nixon's decision?

VK: No, to go over there? No, how can you leave two billion people being taken over, not taken over, but working with others, so you have to get in there.

KP: I guess ...

VK: You've got to be careful, though, because as it's showing on their violation of patent

infringements, ... they can be bandits when they want to be.

KP: I guess I have a two part question, on Vietnam. Are you surprised at all that the United States pulled out of Vietnam in 1973?

VK: I think ... they had no choice because of the leadership in this country ... of the professors at many of the universities. And I've read, I don't know if you ever read Mitchner's book on Kent State.

KP: No.

VK: I recommend it to you. He proves in there that it was outside elements that came onto the campuses, led the revolts, and then moved to the next campus. And it is only Mitchner ... with his staff research. I thought ... he wrote a pretty good book on that. So these things, I won't burden you with them, but I was aware of them, and again there it was.

KP: Although you do not have particular knowledge on Vietnam, but you have been in commando activity, what do you think of the whole notion that there are POWs still in Vietnam?

VK: I never thought that.

KP: You think that's just, in a sense, wishful thinking on the part of Americans that there are still POWs alive?

VK: Yeah, ... I don't see how they could have survived. No, I just don't.

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

VK: I'm taking up to much of your time here. ...

KP: Well, no, I'm almost done. But I don't want to keep you, more is better, but I know it's been a long interview.

VK: No, I don't mind at all, but I don't want to ...

KP: No, this is my purpose.

VK: Because, you've got so many more interesting people coming in.

KP: No, you are just about the most interesting we had. Very few people have been able to top your experiences.

MP: We were talking about the Vietnam POWs.

KP: I guess one question I sort of wanted to come back to is you mentioned about the brutality of the Japanese in China, and that's actually been quite a bit of controversy, in Japan not taking full responsibility.

VK: Oh, they've taken it. I think now they have.

KP: What kind of brutal practices did you see the results of?

VK: ... The tying up of human beings ... and using them for bayonet practice, that's one. The use of human beings for beast of burden, ... pulling carts. But on the other hand, ... in China, I've seen Chinese using huge stones to roll roads where they pulled it with manpower, but they didn't whip them and if, they died, leave them there and put somebody else in, and they were aliens instead of friendly. But ... the total story of the brutality in China has been recognized I think ... by most people. ... We, as a nation, I haven't seen that type of thing done by our men. I have seen them mutilate the bodies ... of dead enemy soldiers, but that's venting it. They didn't cut them up when they were alive or ... I never saw any Americans. We fed them and got them back as fast as we could, even when we got Japanese prisoners, which I took some in China. But, ... I think the ... [Japanese], what they did in Manila, what they did in Bataan, ... it's been pretty universal. And I know that on Guadalcanal we had a colonel by the name of (Goetche?). ... Before I got there, ... we were told the story. That's why we had no prisoners. ... They sent a man in to say that someone wanted to surrender and (Goetche?) went down, in a boat, to pick up the men. ... They came out in loincloths, with their hands up, but they had guns behind them. They killed all of the Marines except one, who got away and came back and told the story ... of the trap that they had laid. And so after that, I don't know of one ground Marine after the beginning of the battle of Guadalcanal was ever taken a prisoner. Aviators, yes. They were shot down, picked up ... by enemy submarines and they were fairly well treated while they were in the hands of the Navy. Most of them will tell you that. But on the ground, there was no, as far as I know, there was no Marine ground taken prisoner for the rest of the war. But we did take a lot of Japanese prisoners, quite a few, not many, not like they did in Europe where they'd come up by the thousands. But when everything was over and they were burnt and shell shocked, ... they'd come out. ... They were treated well, I thought. Of course, there's an occasional kid would get carried away, but not as an order like the Russians gave or the Japanese gave.

KP: You would spend most of your military career in the Pacific,
although you had this tour of duty in Berlin. Did you have any regrets, not even say, regrets, but the desire that you had had more European experience?

VK: No. No, ... I never regretted that. The Asia theater was new, it was fascinating and ... I found, I even was, you know found it exciting getting to new places and getting into new areas and seeing the people. They're wonderful people. Even the Japanese after the war. Like (Okabi?). (Okabi?), when I was leaving there, [was] the chief of staff of the base at Tsingtao. When I told him, "(Okabi?) I'm leaving now, and I'm turning you over to the Marines, they're

coming in off those ships, and I want to be out of here before they get here." That's exactly what I said to him and he laughed. And he brought his family samurai, and he said, "I want you take this with me." I said, "Well, I'm not taking anything else with me. All right, if you want me take it." So I took it and it was his whole family samurai. It was years and years old in a silk case, a beautiful thing. When I went to Korea, I brought it back to him, and gave it to him.

KP: He must have been quite moved by that.

VK: Oh, he was. He had to get that back, because that ... had been in his family since the days of the samurais. And he was absolutely delighted to get it back. I still had the silk case and everything on it and presented it to him. I think the sword would be worth about 10,000 dollars today. Not that I thought of the money; I wanted it back to his family.

KP: You had a very full military career, but did you have any regrets in not making general?

VK: No. No, no.

KP: You were happy being a colonel.

VK: No, I wasn't happy being one, but in the Marine Corps ... you've got to realize that, unlike the other branches of the service, we know where we're going to go. When I made colonel, all these men with all that background, all the combat experience, they had to flunk out, sixty percent. And when you go up to general, they flunk out ninety-three percent. Only seven percent make it. And the odds of making it ... were too great. I didn't want to fight it. On the other hand, if you don't make it, you could stay on active duty, but you'll never get a command again. You always get an administrative job. And I didn't want to gamble with it. And besides, I wanted to get home with my kids. ... My class didn't come up for general ... till, I think it was three or four years after I ... retired. They came up about in the twenty-sixty year, twenty-seventh year. And I had retired on my twenty-third year. So the fellah that was number one in my class came to me, and he was a colonel, and, you know, he just sat down with me. He was a very close friend of mine, Jim Love, and he said, "You know, Vinny, ... we gotta start thinking about our families now. We've given twenty-three years to the Marine Corps and had three good wars and ... here you gotta look at it. When we go up for general there's going to be ninety-three don't make it and only seven will. ... By that age, you're too old to get well-established into a civilian job. ... The retirement pay is not good enough to support you." ... So that, it figured in.

KP: And none of your children went into the military.

VK: No. ... They would have gone if they had been called, but no, they didn't.

KP: Do you have any regrets that no one followed your career?

VK: Yeah, I would have liked to see one of them. They're all bright children. One's a lawyer

today, the other's a chemical engineer, an MBA, the other's a CPA. The other one's got more damn degrees than the law allows. But, no, they never, ... I guess traveling around as much as they did, ... and they saw the fact that I was away so much. I think that might have had an impact on them.

MP: You said they traveled around. Where did they travel?

VK: They were in China with me, they were in Berlin. Camp Lejeune, like that. ... But, of course, when I was at war, then they had to stay home with mother.

KP: Have I forgotten to ask you anything?

VK: No, it's nothing that I just added. I gave a ... few things to you that may be of value. ... Again, I'm criticizing Westmoreland and the others for the way they, you know, what I would have done in Saigon, if I'd been God. I would have handled things, you know, before the surrender, before we got knocked off over there. I would have handled it a little bit differently. But I don't think you can. I don't think I would have ever had the power, even if I had four stars.

KP: But you think Westmoreland, there were mistakes he made that he could have corrected?

VK: Well, yes. I think there were some, but ... I don't know. I think the war wasn't lost because of him. The war was lost because of the effort on the part of people back here, the anti-war people.

KP: What about LBJ? What's your thoughts on him?

VK: Well, you know, I'm not that familiar with him, but I thought he pushed it a little too hard, I thought.

KP: Do you think he meddled in the military's end of it too much?

VK: The whole war was run out of Washington. ... The wars I fought in were run out of Washington.

KP: Korea and Vietnam.

VK: Which is bad because, if I could take one more minute, I'll give you some information here. This is based on my experience as a career military man, and it may give you some thought for the future, but I don't want you to feel that I'm blind or got myopic vision, that I only see the military. ... The first war I fought in, World War II was run ... strictly by the military. In Europe, there was some pressures ... from the civilian components on Eisenhower, who was, essentially, a political officer. But in the Pacific it was strictly the Navy, Army, and Marine Corps that ran the war. And then, when we went into the conflict of Vietnam and Korea, Korea and Vietnam, if

you will, ... the entire thing began being run ... out of Washington. ... We were told we couldn't take out the airfields. I thought surgical removal of those thousand MIGs, just across the river, wouldn't invite anymore effort on the part of China then they already had committed. So you would have destroyed their whole Air Force, but not to go into China. But, ... we were not permitted on those overflights that I got the Air Medal for. That used to just irk me to see ... those planes laying there. They were just thumbing their nose at us. But your instructions ... came out of Washington. ... These last two wars, it became overly clear to me, when I was J-2 for General Westmoreland and had to brief men like McNamara when they came over there and so forth, to hear them ask questions. ... Then you, they, well, if there's a church symbol on a building, you mustn't bomb it, even if they're full of ammunition, and that's an exaggeration, but you couldn't. They soon learned all they had to do was put up a church steeple or a red cross on a building and you weren't allowed ... to go near it. So ... you were held in abeyance, whereas in World War II, the military were given their freedom to win the war for the United States. And I think most people forget this, and this will be my closing bid. The Soviet Union lost seven million soldiers in World War II, and they fought only against the Germans. The Japanese lost between one and two million. The Germans, I don't know how many, about six, four million. The United States, under the great leadership we had at the time, I was a second lieutenant, but the leaders we had, Vandergrift, who would not surrender at Guadalcanal, and the others. We only, and you figure it's brutal, I know the civilians, but you figure your sense of victory by the casualties. And it's not a body count, but it's, you have to look when the battle's over. When you go into a battle, you figure you're going to mount three times as many men against an enemy dug in, and you're going to take twice the casualties he's going to because you got to go through him. And these are the factors that you consider. And you think them out, and you figure out [the] best way to do it, ... best way to preserve life. ... Our leaders, you know, MacArthur and, go on, name them, Vandergrift, and King, and (Hanthru?), those men during the peacetime years had been working and working and working with no support on how they were going to fight a global war. And when that whole war was over, ... we had to go in with inferior equipment, as I illustrated earlier in my talk, you know, the aircraft were inferior, our rifles were inferior to their rifles on Guadalcanal. We had the O-3 rifle on Guadalcanal. ... When that whole war was over, and we had knocked the Japanese out, and, with the Russians, had knocked out the [Germans], we only lost 450,000 men. ... You've got to give those top men a little credit, which they don't get, in that sense. Have you ever thought of that?

KP: No. I think that the preparedness movement in the '30s is given a lot of credit by historians.

VK: ... And the execution throughout the war. [And] the fact that you could come through those bloody battles in the Pacific against a tenacious enemy that would not quit. ... You had to go every inch of the way. It was a lot different than Europe and ... then only lose that many men. I think the worst part of our history, and then I'll close with this, were the early naval battles around Savo Island. They didn't know how to use radar because they had never had the time ... to have the modern stuff. As soon as they learned how to use it, ... Halsey and those guys moved right out with it. Yeah, that's all.

KP: Thank you very much.

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

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