RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM G. VAN ALLEN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Col. William G. Van Allen on May 10, 1996 at the Somerset Hilton in Somerset, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and...

Col. William G. Van Allen: Somerset Marriott

KP: And

KP: Sandra Stewart Holyoak, intern

KP: I guess I would like to begin by asking a little bit about growing up in the New Brunswick area. The area has changed a lot especially being on the tenth floor of the Marriott looking sort of at this area. How has the area changed the most coming back as a visitor?

VA: Well, the center city has certainly deteriorated greatly as the more affluent people have moved out into the suburbs of East Brunswick and South Brunswick and Somerset, so that's the most noticeable feature; the downtown had deteriorated badly back twenty years or so ago, but its' been restored to a great extent by the extensive expenditures by Johnson and Johnson to upgrade the central city, so it's coming back a little I think. It's very encouraging to me, to see the rejuvenated downtown.

KP: So you remember New Brunswick as very much a center for this area?

VA: Oh yes, it was. ... There wasn't much outside the city.

SH: Is your family here? I understand you worked for your uncle in a blacksmith shop?

VA: That's right.

SH: Can you tell us a little about that?

VA: Well, I used to work on every Saturday there. ... We weren't shoeing horses when I went to work with him, but it was sort of an interim period between the horse and the automobile in that we did a lot of work on wagons, we built new wagons for Milk Company and for others, and we also did work on repairing the wheels of wagons, put new tires on them. And, in addition, we did work on automobiles to replace broken springs which you never hear about anymore. [laughs] ... But it was quite a variation of duties. And most, my younger ... uncle he was the master blacksmith that operated at the forge and I helped him with a sledgehammer. [laughs] It was pretty tough work, but I enjoyed it.

SH: Now when you talk about a younger uncle, did you have quite an extended family here? Your whole family was from New Brunswick?

VA: Yes, let's see I had my Uncle Walt, my Uncle John, and my Uncle Charlie who was the master blacksmith and there was an Uncle William who predeceased my birth, but my Uncle John is still alive at 99.

SH: Well their last name would be?

VA: ... They were all Smiths and there were three daughters in the family: my mother Emma May Smith, and then my Aunt Caroline, and my Aunt Annete.

SH: You went to grade school and everything here in New Brunswick?

VA: Yes, I went to Washington School for the first five years and then we moved out into an area on the ... south side of town and I went to Livingston School in my sixth year, then to junior high school, and to senior high school in New Brunswick.

KP: Did your mother ever work outside of the household when you were growing up?

VA: Yes, she did. My father, I don't remember, because my mother divorced him before I became aware of what was happening and she remarried and my stepfather ... supported us for awhile, but then he left.

KP: So your mother had a hard road?

VA: Yes, she did.

SH: Did you have any other siblings?

VA: Yes, I have a half sister by my stepfather.

SH: Does she still live in New Brunswick area?

VA: No, she is in Poughkeepsie, and I plan to see her when we leave here.

SH: Fantastic. Did you always want to come to Rutgers?

VA: Well, I wanted to go to college, and this was the only one in town. [laughs] And we didn't have any money to support my going elsewhere.

SH: But I noticed, too, in your records that you were an Eagle Scout so you must have been quite busy working on weekends.

VA: Yes, I was quite active in the Boy Scouts ... and very dedicated to doing things. [In] fact, we used to raise the flag at Monument Square down by the YMCA every morning and every night we'd take it down, and I played the bugle, and we played the bugle. So it was quite an exciting ... thing for us. Every morning to get down there before school and after school to come down and take it down.

KP: And I imagine you marched with the Boy Scout troop in the Fourth of July parades.

VA: Oh yes.

KP: And Memorial Day?

VA: Yes.

SH: Were there other activities that you were interested in in high school, any sports?

VA: Well, I went to summer camp at northern New Jersey I guess in the later years in High School. And I was not interested in sports, particularly, in school.

KP: Growing up what did you want to become? You knew you wanted to go to college, but what career did you think you wanted?

VA: I always was interested in engineering, I guess, so when I registered I registered for engineering.

KP: What do you remember of Colonel Lindbergh's flight? Was that an important event growing up?

VA: Yes, I was thirteen years old, it was a very important event in history at that time.

SH: How much of the world news did New Brunswick get at that stage, before you went into Rutgers?

VA: I think they had a pretty good news. I used to read the Sunday paper and the other papers and ... we got, I think, a fair order of news, but I don't remember specifically now, ... looking back so long.

SH: Did you do any traveling when you were in high school, from your younger years, before you became this world traveler we know today?

VA: Well, my stepfather was from Buffalo so we made several trips up to Buffalo, in fact, we spent one winter in Buffalo before I was of school age, I guess. I remember that. And we used to go down to the shore with my Uncle, my Aunt's husband ... for ... short vacations.

SH: What did your mother do? You said she worked outside the home, do you remember what she did?

VA: Well she worked on various jobs, she worked for Squibb for a long time taking care of the animals in the laboratory.

KP: How hard was the Depression on your family?

VA: It was pretty hard. We lost our house. In fact, all of our family lost their houses.

KP: All the uncles, it was tough on all the uncles.

VA: Well it was tough on my Uncle Walter. He lost his house, eventually, although he hung on for quite awhile. And one of them was not married at the time, as I recall, he was living in Paterson and he had a job with, I believe it was, Curtis-Wright and he did not lose his home. In fact, I visited his son; he is the one that's still 99 years old. And I visited his son yesterday. And the other, my Aunt Caroline, she was married to a man that had a very good job with Curtis Airplane Engine and he had a good job all the way through. So she was very affluent and was somewhat helpful to the rest of the family who were somewhat destitute at times. [laughs]

KP: Your mother was a Methodist how active was she in the church?

VA: Not very.

SH: Are you both Methodists?

VA: No, I went through a non-denominational chapel regularly in New Brunswick, and they made me assistant treasurer. ... [laughs] And I used to help the treasurer count the money at the offering. And I enjoyed that association, they were all nice people.

SH: I am just curious it was on the chart for the interview, it said Methodist. We were curious about that.

KP: How well did the New Brunswick school system prepare you for Rutgers?

VA: I think very well, I graduated third, as I recall out of my class and I did well in Rutgers. I got to be Phi Beta Kappa in my junior year, and Tau Beta Pi, the honorary engineering society in my junior year too.

KP: And so it sounds like you had some good teachers to prepare you?

VA: Yes, I remember some very good ones.

KP: What do you remember about them in high school and elementary school? Do any of them stick out, even if you do not remember their names.

VA: Well I remember my Latin teacher in particular, he was Henry Miller, I think his name was, and he was a great old guy. [laughs] ... He had this dry sense of humor it was very interesting, and then I remember my science teacher ... from Junior High School. ... I forget what he taught now, but he was a man, there weren't too many men teachers then. He was a very admirable character.

KP: What about your Scoutmaster? Do you remember anything about him?

VA: Oh yeah, he was a kindly man in his 50's, Charles Zimmerman, and he was very gracious and understanding with the kids, would go on hikes or camping trips with us.

KP: In New Brunswick we have interviewed a number of people, who went to the New Brunswick school system. One of the things that struck me is how regional the school was in that you would have sort of farm boys come to school.

VA: Yes, it did serve a large outlying area, because none of the outlying areas had high schools. So there were, we got to know people from all of the outlying towns which now have their own high school.

KP: It struck me that rural New Brunswick was very rural even to the point of a lot of outhouses. Did you sense that at the time?

VA: Not in New Brunswick, in the city limits of New Brunswick I think all of the houses were sewered, but what it was like in places like Bell Mead, Middlebush I don't know, in the outlying areas they probably didn't have sewer plants then.

SH: You said that at Rutgers you were in the band, did you also play in grade school? Does bugle carry you through or did you play other instruments?

VA: I believe I played in the high school band too, I had a trumpet too, in addition, to the bugle. ... [I would play the bugle] for many ... [veteran's] funeral[s]. ... They call on me to be the bugler.

KP: So you are still a bugler?

VA: No, not [anymore.] [laughs]

SH: The trumpet is what you played in the school band?

VA: Yeah. ... Well I wasn't any great musician. [laughs] But I could really bugle, I was an outstanding bugler.

KP: It struck me that New Brunswick was a very diverse place; there was a large Hungarian community.

VA: The Hungarians made up a significant portion of the population. All of the area, I guess it's on the west side, is largely Hungarian. ... Like Perth Amboy was another major area of Hungarian. And they were very good citizens, hardworking, they were an asset to the community. In fact, one of my best friends is Hungarian and I'm going to see him tonight.

SH: That's great.

VA: He is one of my, my one surviving classmate, of my close classmates. Two of them have already gone on.

SH: I was going to say Van Allen, what is the ethnic background for Van Allen?

VA: Is Dutch going back to the 1600's. But I never really delved into it, although I understand there are quite a few of them scattered around the country. The story is that there were two brothers that came over, now they're supposed to be Admirals, but I doubt, they were probably sailors. [laughs]

KP: Growing up in the 1920s and early 1930s, what did you do for fun? You mentioned the Boy Scouts and playing the bugle and other things sound like fun, but does anything stick out like the movies or other activities?

VA: Yeah, the movies when I was a young kid was five cents, now it's a strain. [laughs] I went to the movies quite often, often by myself. And, then, we used to play games like ... nip. ... Have you ever heard of nip? You take a piece of broom and tape the ends and then you hit one end of it and then you hit it with the handle and see how far it goes. ... Then you put the stick down and somebody throws it back. It was a very rudimentary game, very simple equipment ... and you could play it in the street, because there wasn't much traffic then, and then I played a little touch football ... with the boys. I had a baseball, I was never a great athlete.

KP: Did you have any jobs, paid jobs in high school?

VA: Well, I worked for my uncle.

KP: The uncle, that was the only place you worked.

VA: Yes, whenever I had time, I would be working.

KP: No newspaper routes or anything?

VA: No.

SH: What do you remember most about Rutgers?

VA: I remember most of it. What do you mean by most?

SH: Okay, maybe your most favorite memory of Rutgers. I know you listed a favorite professor was Jerry Stodd.

KP: Slade.

VA: Slade.

SH: Oh, I'm sorry.

VA: Well, I remember other professors, too. It was a hard time because, I didn't have much money and I worked for, they had a student loan program where you got 25 cents an hour, and you worked for a professor, I worked for a head of the department, filing his papers. [laughs] But I enjoyed ... my studies very much ... There was a Professor Grant in math that I enjoyed very much, he was a good man and I guess he liked me too.

KP: A lot of people describe that college work was hard and they remember classmates that didn't make it, because they couldn't keep up with the work. Do you remember classmates who just couldn't make it or engineers who became business administration majors?

VA: Yeah, we had quite a drop out rate. We started out with 75 in my class of engineers and I think 37 made it to graduation.

KP: It was a tough time, I mean how many classmates, do you remember classmates who couldn't make it or really had a tough time?

VA: Yes ... one of my best friends who just died in February, we went through sixth grade all the way through high school together. And he entered college and his father was the president of the bank and he was rather affluent in the early years of the Depression. And then he lost his job at the bank, the bank folded and he was unable to continue. He had to go to work and I was able to struggle along with my uncle's assistance. So that was a very traumatic experience, but I still maintained contact with him.

KP: Your friend, did he ever get to go to college?

VA: No, he did not.

KP: What career path did he take?

VA: He went to work for Home Insurance Company and he was in their data processing area and I think he had a good job and they were very comfortably settled in the retirement community in South Jersey, near Toms River, so he had a successful career and they have two children, and two grandchildren and his wife is a very nice gal. We have spent the night with her Monday night. ... And she is concerned about her future, having recently been widowed, so we spent Tuesday morning going over with her her finances to help her to understand what things she has to do. So I think that's been very gratifying for us, to do that.

SH: That's very nice.

KP: Several things come up in the interviews one is the tremendous class competition that existed in the 1930s and 1940s. Do you remember any competition between sophomore and freshman classes, any rivalries?

VA: No, I think that preceded us. You mean the grease pole and all the rest of that stuff?

KP: You did not have that?

VA: I don't remember that, we had this little cap that we wore.

KP: The dinky, so you did wear your dinky.

VA: Yeah, but there wasn't any great amount of hazing.

SH: Did you have to wear the green tie?

VA: I don't remember having to wear the green tie, I remember the cap. [laughs]

KP: The caps are very memorable for those who had to wear them, apparently.

SH: Were your pants tucked in your white socks or did you carry a grocery bag?

VA: I don't remember that. I guess those disagreeable things you tend to forget.

SH: And memorize all the yells and songs.

VA: Oh yeah, we had to do that, that's normal for the course.

KP: A number of people remember that there was a real separation between those who were in fraternities and those who were not. Did you remember any of that?

VA: Yes, I think that existed, and I was asked to join Theta Chi, but I didn't have the money to join, regretfully.

KP: But you would have liked to have joined if you had the money?

VA: I would have liked to have probably, but we had our own fraternity in the engineering building of the engineers, the "Townies." And we would come down and we would study afternoons and evenings together, we spent a lot of time in the engineering building.

KP: So it sounds like a lot of the engineers were on state scholarships and they did not live in fraternities.

VA: Quite a few of them, ... that's right.

SH: Did any of them follow your path into the military? From Rutgers to engineering schools?

VA: John (Rosta?) did, ... but he didn't stay in the military, he and I were in ROTC together and went up to Plattsburg for summer training. And there was a John DeRosa who was, well he

wasn't in engineering though. But there were quite a few classmates in other schools who were in ROTC and there was a Bob Kriendler who ended up a Colonel, I think, in the Marine Corps. Have you heard about him?

KP: No.

VA: He was ... one of the class leaders really, his family ran the 21 Club in New York, so he was kind of an outstanding guy. He was successful in the war. And there were quite a few others in my class that were in the war.

KP: One of the things we noticed in the Targum; because Sandra and other students we have read all the Targums almost now from 1935 to 1950 and they have done reports based on the different semesters--is that there was, in the years 1934, 1935 and 1936 there was a very strong peace movement at Rutgers, and there were peace rallies and so forth. Do you remember any of those rallies and any of that sentiment?

VA: No, I never attended one.

SH: Were they as big as they appear to be in the Targum?

VA: I didn't hear about it, I didn't pay any attention, I guess.

KP: Why did you enlist for advanced ROTC?

VA: Well, I had always been interested in the military, even before I got out of high school, I signed up for CMTC, Citizen Military Training Camp, which involved going down to Camp Dix in between my junior and senior years, I guess it was, and they gave me military training there and then after my senior year I went to ... Fort Hancock at Sandy Hook where they had the coast artillery. And we fired the six inch rifles there, so I was always interested in the military and when I took my basic ROTC I was always looking forward to going on to advanced and I was in the band and they made me a sergeant in the band as a freshman and then they said, well if you were in the band, I couldn't go to advanced ROTC so I had to give up my sergeant's ...

KP: Sergeant's stripes.

VA: Sergeant's stripes to go to advanced ROTC.

KP: A number of people who were in ROTC in the 1930s did not get active duty commissions, they got commissions in the reserves. Were you hoping for a commission in the regulars?

VA: I do not remember actually doing that, but I did go on to apply for active duty when I graduated. And I was selected after I had already gotten a job in the civilian market and after working one week for Philco, the Army notified me that I had been selected for this one year of training in the Reserves. I was in the Infantry then. And so I quit Philco and went to Fort Wadsworth for military training and while I was there I took the exam, there was an exam

coming up for vacancies in the regular Army of the Corps of Engineers. There were eighteen vacancies nationwide, so I took that exam and I came out, I think number two of the eighteen.

SH: So you elected to go that way?

VA: Yes, so they notified me, I guess it was in September of '37 that I passed the exam, and they promptly gave me orders to go to Panama.

KP: We will get to Panama in a minute, but I wanted to just ask a few more Rutgers questions. Why does everyone seem to have a memory of Dean Metzger? Did you have any dealings with Dean Metzger or any memories of have of Dean Metzger?

VA: None, not personally, but he was a very pleasant guy and we all enjoyed his talks. He had a fine reputation.

KP: You mentioned you belonged to an interdenominational chapel, you must have enjoyed chapel at Rutgers.

VA: I didn't mind it, I enjoyed many of the speakers. They had some good speakers, Norman Thomas and many other outstanding speakers.

KP: Norman Thomas seems to have been a popular speaker even by people who did not agree with him.

VA: Yeah, because he wasn't too pink. [laughs]

SH: Were there as much grumbling as there appears in the Targum about the chapel because it was mandatory?

VA: Well, I guess some people didn't like to get up early in the morning or something. I guess some people didn't like it, but I didn't mind, we only had to go half the time as I recall.

SH: Did you participate in any of the services in any way?

VA: Lighting candles? [laughs] No, no I didn't sing in the choir.

KP: One of the things my students have done is they have examined a controversy that was brewing at Rutgers, the Bergel case. Do you remember anything of the Bergel case? Alan Silver, a Rutgers student, claimed that there was a German professor who was fired unfairly because he was an anti-Nazi. Do you remember anything of the Bergel case? I should say Bergel was an NJC professor.

VA: No, I don't remember that. Was it after ...

SH: It was in 1935. And he was a German professor at NJC, and he claimed that the man who was the department chair was a Nazi and fired him, or didn't re-hire him I should say.

VA: I don't recall anything about it.

SH: Okay.

KP: Anything about Rutgers that we didn't ask you about? You lived at home while you were at Rutgers?

VA: Yes.

KP: Did you ever regret not being able to live on campus, would you have liked to have lived on campus?

VA: Well, I used to walk to work most of the time which was about two miles, walked to the college a good deal of time so it probably was good for me to get that exercise.

KP: One of the memories of people, particularly townies is they used to go to Rutgers football games way before they were a Rutgers student. Did you go down to the old Neilson Field?

VA: No, I was satisfied with the high school game.

SH: Had any of your family gone to Rutgers before you?

VA: No, I had a cousin that went simultaneously with me. He was, his family was living in Clifton and he came to New Brunswick and started out at Rutgers.

SH: Did any of your other family serve in the military?

VA: I don't think so. There is a cousin Arthur who is much younger than I; he's about 65 he was in the Navy, but long after World War II.

SH: I thought maybe some of your uncles may have served in the war before.

VA: No, but my Uncle Walt had served in World War I.

KP: In the infantry?

VA: No, he was a top sergeant in the Ordnance Company.

KP: You mentioned you liked to go to movies a lot, do you remember any movies that dealt with the military growing up? Did you see, for example, <u>All Quiet on the Western Front</u>?

VA: I saw that, but I don't remember when I, how old I was. I think that was when I was well along. ... The one I remember quite well was Lon Chaney in Phantom of the Opera.

KP: You remember that movie.

VA: That was a thriller.

KP: At Halloween they always show that movie in the chapel now; the Phantom of the Opera; it's become a very popular event for undergraduates.

VA: That's interesting, we saw ... it twice in Honolulu.

KP: You mentioned you spent a year in the Infantry, after graduation. What did you think of the Infantry? How did you like your first year in the military?

VA: It wasn't bad. [laughs] I was in the 18th Infantry which had two battalions at Fort Wadsworth and one at Fort Hamilton. And we went down to Camp Dix in summer and we also went to Camp Smith for firing one time, and I enjoyed it, it was a period of learning for me.

KP: In reading about the pre-war army, it was an army from what I have read, that did not have a lot of money, and a lot of old timers, people who had been in it for ten, fifteen, twenty years. What do you remember of some of the men you had in your first unit and some of the officers?

VA: Well the officers had been in grade for a long period of time. I think it was in 1935 they eased up the promotion and many of them finally got promoted, they had been lieutenants for ten or fifteen years, maybe even twenty years. And so the officers were generally high quality, there were some that were inclined to drink a little too much, because there wasn't any real training, like we had later on, ... it was a garrison type of operation where you just drilled all the time and handled training for ROTC and for some of the other civilian components. The enlisted men, the sergeants were quite capable, corporals too. But ... many of the enlisted men were not of the highest quality. Of course, we are sending people into the army ... they either went to jail or into the army. So the army got a lot of the dregs of humanity and the language was just terrible. Every other word was an “F” word and that kind of grated on me.

KP: I have read that the old army, the pre World War II army, was a hard drinking, hard fighting lot.

VA: That's right, and I remember payday was a great day. [laughs] Payday they all lined up and drew their pay subtracting out what they had spent on credit from the PX, then they went to town and the expression was get stewed, screwed and tattooed. [laughs] Some of them wouldn't show up for a day or so and then ... military justice would have to prevail.

KP: Did you serve on any court-martials your first year?

VA: My first years in ... the Regular Army I did, I started out as a defense counsel and I got several of the guys off so they made me Trial Judge Advocate, instead. [laughs] I got one or two guys off that were really guilty.

KP: It sounds like you remember the cases to this day; do you remember what cases you defended?

VA: No, I don't remember, but I got them out on a technicality I don't remember it in detail now.

SH: Maybe law was really your other profession?

VA: No.

KP: What about the equipment? I have read that the army did not have much up to date equipment.

VA: When you say my first year in the army are you referring to my year in the infantry or my first year with the Corps of Engineers?

KP: With the infantry, I will get to the engineers in a bit.

VA: Well, in an infantry company we had what the Infantry usually has: mortars and machine guns. And that didn't change very much, they didn't have very many vehicles. But I don't remember any striking shortages there and this was '36 to '37 where war was not imminent then and there wasn't any real pressure to be aggressive. We didn't have maneuvers, we just went out at Fort Wadsworth, which is a very small place, and did some minor maneuvers.

KP: It sounds like in some ways it was very relaxed service. You kept your men busy and did small maneuvers and you drilled and so forth, but there was not pressure to do a lot.

VA: Yeah, ... it wasn't a very exciting period I'd say that, compared to what happened in the following years.

KP: The pre-Pearl Harbor Army had for officers quite a level of social exceptions, apparently when you reported to a base you circulated your card to different officers.

VA: That's right there was a lot of protocol. You had to call on your commanding officer, your battalion commander; and they called on you.

KP: I remember someone was telling me he was expected to deliver cards, for example, to commanders who had unmarried daughters of a certain age, he was supposed to drop his card with them.

VA: You are supposed to drop a card for every adult member, I guess, of the household.

KP: Were you pleased in a sense to get transferred over to the Engineers?

VA: Oh yes.

KP: And you were sent to Panama. And what were your duties in Panama?

VA: I was a second lieutenant, platoon leader and a variety of jobs, like mess officer, supply officer in the company. And the sergeants did most of the training and the lieutenants were there to sort of keep an eye on things. We did some training too, but in Panama we went over to the other side. We were on the Pacific side and during the dry season we went over and engaged in construction work. And I was sent over, for example, the first few months I was there, I was sent over to carve a camp out of the jungle on the shores of Gatun Lake for the battalion to work on the road going up to searchlight site. And that was kind of interesting. We put up the tent platforms and to open up the quarry and learn about explosives. We had men that had experience in explosives; that was an interesting operation to organize. I was in charge of the quarry operation.

KP: It was a quarry for what?

VA: For rocks, we were harvesting rocks about this big to make a roadway.

KP: It sounds very exotic being in the jungle, it also sounds at times unpleasant, but what do you remember of that?

VA: Well, I remember getting stung by a scorpion once. ... My platoon leader had set the thing up and they were busy moving lumber so I decided to help pick up some of the two by fours and move them and when I did the scorpion got me and it wasn't a very pleasant experience; I remember that. It makes you kind of sick for a bit, it passed over. ... It was a pleasant camp once we got it set up though, we had to take medicine for anti-malaria medicine. And that wasn't too good, but ... I never got malaria, at least.

SH: Was there any interaction with the Panamanians at all?

VA: No, we didn't have too much association with the Panamanians. My wife had a friend whom she had known in New York, her family worked for the Panama Canal and she was of Swedish decent. And we got acquainted with them so we had acquaintance in the civilian community, but not with the Panamanians.

KP: I just need to flip the tape.

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

KP: How did you meet your first wife?

VA: When I went to Staten Island to go on my year of Reserve duty I inquired and I became a Scoutmaster at Staten Island. And my Assistant Scoutmaster was a nice young man that; I had this invitation for the Old Guard Ball in New York which is a very prestigious meeting of the militia from all over the northeast and I said, ... "I am looking for someone to take, that would be a nice gal to go." And he said, "Well, I know this nice little Spanish gal that he worked with." He said, "I'll invite her." So ... he talked to her and she consented to see me. So I went over to see her in her home. And she said, that I called her on the phone and said, "This is William Van Allen and I would like to come and meet you before we go to the ball." ... Have her check me out really. And she said, "Okay." And she hung up the phone and I was there in five minutes. [laughs] I called from up the street and she always told that story about me.

KP: You obviously had a good time at the ball?

VA: Yes, I met her mother and father. Her mother was a delightful woman and she took to me right away. My wife was reluctant to go, because she told her mother, "He's a soldier and I don't want to go with somebody in uniform." [laughs] But her mother talked her into it.

KP: How long after the Military Ball did you marry?

VA: About a year. I married her when I got my orders for Panama. It was a matter of going overseas without her or not going, well I was going to go, but ...

KP: You wanted her to go with you?

VA: I wanted her to go with me.

KP: Your first wife was Catholic and you were a Protestant.

VA: That is right.

KP: How did that work?

VA: Well, it worked out all right. We never had any children, so we didn't get into that argument.

KP: But she continued to go to Mass and you would continue to go to Protestant service.

VA: She would go and I went to some of the masses, too.

KP: Masses in the 1930s and 1940s were in Latin which must have been difficult.

VA: It didn't enhance my understanding of Latin. I had four years of Latin in high school, but it didn't help me at all.

KP: How did your wife like living in Panama? I guess, in general the different bases, the different places you were stationed?

VA: Well she enjoyed Panama very much; we accumulated a lot of goods there. We went down there with 300 pounds of household goods and 300 dollars that we had borrowed from her mother. We came back with, oh, a lot more. [laughs] I think about 2000 pounds, two nine by twelve Chinese rugs and chinaware, crystalware, a lot of goodies.

KP: Anything else about your duty in Panama that you remember? It sounds like it was interesting work.

VA: We also started building the base at Rio Hato which is outside of the Canal Zone. And I enjoyed that, because we were putting up water towers, assembling water tanks, building buildings. I would lay out the rafters to be cut by the soldiers and it was interesting work.

SH: And all this training came from Rutgers Engineering background from Rutgers?

VA: Well ...

KP: How much did you learn on the job and how much were you trained for; because a lot of engineers have said, you really learn how to become an engineer by actually being an engineer.

VA: ... I think I learned a lot of it by being on the job. ... Well I had worked on some building; I remember working on building a garage with my uncle when we lived in New Brunswick. So I was usually fairly handy in construction. The blacksmith shop was manual work, too and once you get into some sort of a thing like that, using your hands, you get familiar with measuring and doing what has to be done as a mechanic or a artisan.

KP: You mentioned that there was not much thought of war among your fellow officers in 1936 and 1937. Who did you think your likely adversaries would be or did you even worry about having a likely adversary? Did you worry about say the Japanese, did you worry about the Germans?

VA: I never gave it a thought. At Fort Wadsworth we didn't, but when we got to Panama then things were beginning to cloud up. Some of our good friends there were a captain who ... had been in Japan as a language student, he was working for I guess the forerunner of NSA and they were listening to the Japanese broadcast so there was a definite feeling of growing danger. And, of course, after the German invasion in '39 the ships were all lighted up with a big American flag on the side. I think we were really beginning to get scary.

KP: How long did you stay in Panama?

VA: Two and a half years, we extended for six months.

SH: Where did you go from Panama? Was this 1938 or 1939?

VA: '40,

SH: 1940.

VA: I was ordered to go to MIT for my graduate work. To get my master's degree in civil engineering so they sent me to Boston, Mass. on deposit until school starts. And that was June that we got there; and after I got there they changed my orders and said, "No, we are going to cancel out all of these young lieutenants going to school and you are going to stay on in Boston district." So I had made a one year lease which we expected to go to MIT and the district engineer was a great guy, said, "I am sorry, but we have to send you to Concord, New Hampshire to work on a real estate position." [I was] working for a Captain Hill up there who was the area engineer and I had to break my lease. [laughs] So, anyway I broke the lease, we went up there and I worked in acquiring land for this reservoir that was under construction, two reservoirs that were under construction.

KP: It sounds like that was a civilian project.

VA: Oh yeah, this was river and harbor work and I did a good job there, because the guy that was supposed to run it was an attorney from New Haven and he was very knowledgeable in the law, but he was no organizer. [laughs] So I had to get him set up so that we had a definite pattern of what to do, and I ride herd on him to make sure he did this, this, this, this, this, so we really got the thing organized pretty well. Meanwhile they began taking people away from the Boston office and after a few months; after our landlord was kind enough to give us this, it was a honeymoon cottage on the back of his house, we had to say, "We're sorry we have to go back to Boston." They moved me back to Boston to be the area engineer back in Boston and I ended up being the only other officer in the ... office, besides the district engineer. And then, about that time, Pearl Harbor came and I had to go back into uniform. We were not in uniform until Pearl Harbor.

KP: In fact, that is one of the things that marked the pre Pearl Harbor Army; there was a real tendency not to wear your uniform unless you were really on duty.

VA: Well listen, ... in an engineer district they wore civilian clothes.

KP: All the time?

VA: Yeah.

KP: When you would get dressed in the morning it would be just like going to the office?

VA: That's right.

KP: And after Pearl Harbor I am told an order came down that everyone was now to be in uniform.

VA: That's right, so I had to scurry around to get additional uniform, 'cause I'd come up from Panama which was mostly khaki, and we needed wool uniforms. I had one uniform, but I had to get another one.

KP: How surprised were you by Pearl Harbor? Were you surprised?

VA: I was surprised, I was shocked. ... We had been surprised.
...

KP: As an army officer who did you blame at the time? I mean you might have since reevaluated it, but you mentioned you were surprised.

VA: Well, I think the commanders there apparently they were not adequately prepared. The communication wasn't very good, from what I've heard living in Hawaii. ... There was this one lieutenant, I think, that reported that the blips on the radar and nobody paid any attention to them.

KP When Pearl Harbor occurred how did you think your career would change in the Army? Because you had been in the peacetime Army for about five years.

VA: Well, it was already changing, because people were being moved around. ... It was expanding rapidly. We were getting ready for war.

KP: Did you think there would be war against Germany?

VA: I think we probably felt that way, its kind of hard to think back remember just how it was, but I think we felt that we'd eventually be drawn into it.

KP: How did you feel about, as an Army officer about Franklin Roosevelt, and I guess generally in terms of his general policies, but also regarding the military? Any recollection how you felt at the time?

VA: I felt he did a pretty ... good job as President.

KP: But at the time did you think that?

VA: Yes, I think so.

KP: What was your assignment after Pearl Harbor? How long did you stay in the Boston Engineer district?

VA: I stayed there till October of...

KP: 1942?

VA: '42. We ... absorbed the Quartermaster, constructing Quartermaster Corps. The Quartermaster Corps was charged with military construction, so when I moved back to Boston I was the executive officer for the District. We picked up all of this construction work in the New England area, and we picked up also the quartermaster's work at all of the army installations. And I was also the dispersing officer and then they organized a new division office in New England. They moved my boss over to be the division engineer and he had me made the district engineer.

KP: So your responsibilities increased very quickly?

VA: Yes.

KP: What about your rank? Did your rank follow?

VA: Well, I was the second senior ... second lieutenant for a whole year, but then after that it moved pretty quickly. I got promoted every six months ... to major and I would have been promoted to lieutenant colonel, but one of these Quartermaster officers that we brought over he found out, said that I couldn't be promoted so quickly. I hated his guts for that. [laughs]

KP: One of the things I ask a lot of people who grew up in this area, Camp Kilmer just went up overnight and you must have been supervising these construction of projects where you have to build a camp.

VA: Yes; we built Manchester Air Base and Bangor Air Base we built those. ... And put in military housing and hangers and all the rest of it. Then we also built Presque Isle and Houlton Air Fields, they were major bases also. Presque Isle is still a major air base. Plus a big dock in Boston; there was a lot of work going on.

KP: And a lot of this was done by civilian contract.

VA: Oh yes.

KP: Any problems with civilian contractors on everything from quality of work to price gouging.

VA: No, we had good contractors. ... Most of them were very dedicated. They worked hard ...

KP: It sounds like you had good relationships with your contractors.

VA: Yes.

KP: What about any frustrations in terms of getting materials?

VA: Yes, we had a expediter, ... he was on the phone all the time, calling around the country to get stuff and some of the things we had to do were unfortunate. Like on this big pier that we were putting in, we were trying to get treated pilings and we had to put in untreated piling for

part of it; that was a sad situation. But he was really great on finding where the stuff was that would be stuck on the railway cars or something like that. It was really a very interesting and demanding experience. In addition, we were building fortifications at the same time, new six inch bigger casements for coast artillery guns which never fired a shot in anger.

KP: You mentioned the artillery never did fire a shot in anger, but at the time how concerned were you about protection of the coast?

VA: I wasn't worried about it, because I couldn't understand why they ... the West Coast was so excited. There isn't that much risk.

KP: You thought even at the time in '41-'42 that this was more to please the civilians than for military necessity?

VA: Yes; people are so apprehensive, they don't realize how big the world is. Even if they fire a shot at you the chances of getting hit are very small. So it's less dangerous than going out in the street now.

KP: You had grown up in New Brunswick and while you had gotten up to Buffalo it sounds like you hadn't really traveled much until the military. What did you think of going to Panama and then living in New England? In the course of your military career, you would be sent to different parts of the country and the world. What did you think of this experience?

VA: I kind of enjoyed it.

KP: Were there any surprises; especially initially when you set out about people doing different things, done different parts of the country and the world?

VA: No, it was educational, I would say. It was a good deal of learning on how the rest of the country lived.

KP: After your assignments in New England where were you sent next?

VA: Well my boss, the division engineer was sent down to Atlanta, Georgia to be the corps engineer for the Second Army Corps. And I was a young officer on duty in an office that did not require a young man so they brought in a retired Corps of Engineer officer to take my place and my boss heard about it and he had me assigned down to the 79th Infantry Division at Camp Blanding to take over the 304th Engineer Battalion.

KP: And that was a real shift, because you in a sense had almost a civilian job although you were in the military and now you went back in a sense in an infantry division.

VA: Yeah, we had lived a charmed life there in Boston; ... although we were working hard at least six days a week and sometimes seven days a week. I also had the use of the ... boat and we would go up along the coast inspecting various activities each weekend. [laughs]

KP: That sounds very pleasant, actually.

VA: So, it was part of my job to know what was going on ... from Boston ... from Cape Cod up to Eastport. ... And the Cape Cod Canal was also part of our operation; we operated the Cape Cod Canal. And one of the interesting things that happened there was the coal ship hit the bank and turned around and turned over and blocked the Cape Cod Canal. That was very dangerous, because that meant all the convoys then had to go around Cape Cod. So it was a matter of getting that ship out as quickly as possible; so we had a salvage company come in, they blasted this vessel down so the other vessels could get through. So that was an exciting period of time. We arranged that you know by contract; but we had some real good civilians in the office that could arrange contracts and do things like that. ...

KP: It sounds like you had very good leadership in the corps office in New England.

VA: Oh yeah.

KP: A lot of the people I have interviewed described the army as being notorious for bureaucracy.

VA: No, not the Corps of Engineers...

KP: No screw ups?

VA: No, the Corps of Engineers was a good organization and still is, they know how to get things done. With efficiency and unlike most government offices they have to live on what they do; they charge a percentage for the work. ... They don't get an appropriation to support them.

KP: So they actually have to be efficient?

VA: Right.

SH: Where did you go from Boston?

VA: I left you at Camp Blanding with the 79th Infantry Division so I had to go down there and get out of my physical training.

KP: So in a sense you had gotten a little soft in Boston.

VA: Yeah, I guess so. And then ... we underwent a rigorous training program there and I enjoyed setting up some field maneuvers for my battalion and we went down to a national, was sort of a federal, park I guess of some sort, and we assumed that we were defending an area and had river crossing operations and stuff like that. ... Around February we were ordered up to the Tennessee maneuver area and here again I got ordered out for the advance party and it was pretty cold there. We went up to the maneuver area in the mud and thaw, and it wasn't very nice. But

anyway we ... went to the Tennessee maneuvers and after that we went back to Camp Forrest. And from there after a month or two there they sent us out to the desert training center in Yuma, Arizona. And we spent the summer there; we got out there in August and we left on Thanksgiving Day for Camp Phillips, Kansas. And then from Camp Phillips we went overseas.

KP: You had a lot of responsibilities as a battalion commander; what was the hardest part of the job? Especially in the beginning?

VA: I don't know what was hard, I enjoyed being the commander. Getting things organized and I had some good people working for me.

KP: How many regulars did you have in your unit? How many were 90 and 120 day wonders in terms of your officers?

VA: I think I had one or two regular officers in my battalion, but the rest were, AUG or Reserve the senior ones were reserve officers and they generally knew their business; they had been in on active duty for a year or two and they were well qualified. We had a good battalion.

KP: What about the men?

VA: Many of them were very dedicated; we had a few oddballs that were troublemakers. But, in general, they were very motivated young men.

KP: You mentioned that your initial infantry unit had been, in a sense, a bunch of misfits from civilian society. It sounds like the quality of people had gone up.

VA: Oh yeah.

SH: Was a there real diversity of men from all over the country in your unit?

VA: I would say so; it was different than the National Guard outfit. Some of the National Guard outfits they were all from one area, but our people came from different areas.

KP: You mentioned National Guard outfits; was there a difference in effectiveness of the units if they were National Guard verses draftee?

VA: Yes, and some of the National Guard outfits had a lot of political influence. The officers were appointed by political [officeholders]. But, I think as they were in, they were gradually weeded out.

KP: It sounds like that was common. You and other regulars sort of knew that National Guards had problems with incompetent officers.

VA: Right; but some of the National Guard outfits were very good ones, like the 30th Division which was there campaigning with us. That was really a first class outfit; they had shaken down pretty well I think.

SH: In Kansas what did you do?

VA: We just trained. [laughs]

SH: More training.

VA: We didn't have any large training areas. I don't remember specifically; we were there, it was winter, it was pretty cold.

KP: It sounds like at the time you might have been wishful for Boston and your previous job.

VA: No; I didn't regret leaving Boston. I realize[d] it was necessary since I was young and should have ... do my part.

SH: You said you went through the winter in Kansas before we go overseas; what date, when did you go overseas?

VA: April 5, I think it was, 1944.

SH: And where did we go?

VA: Over to England; well we landed in Scotland. On the Firth of Clyde, I think it was. ... And then we took the train to a small town, ... a village called Leek, L-E-E-K, and we ... billeted there in various places. Our battalion was in a small encampment and the officers were apportioned in various homes. And we stayed there from April until I guess late May, while we were finishing equipping our troops. There was a matter of shaking down to make sure we had all of our equipment, because we were to go in on D plus 10 as part of the Third Army forces.

KP: Although you were in England only a short time, you really got in a sense a taste of English society, because they billeted you in peoples' homes.

VA: Yeah; we met some nice people there.

KP: Where did your first wife live while you were doing all this training and while you were overseas?

VA: She would go back to her family in Staten Island.

KP: Did she work at all during the war?

VA: Yes; she worked for Elco Boat Company in Bayonne making PT boats. She ... kept track of the records on the PT boats construction; they were building 27 PT boats for the Russians under the Lend Lease program.

KP: How often did you write your first wife?

VA: I tried to write her every day, but not always with success, but I tried to keep in close touch with her.

KP: Did any of your letters survive?

VA: Oh yes, I don't know where they are now.

KP: We urge you not to throw them out; consider giving them to Special Collections with any of your wartime papers. What did you think of the English society with the limited experience you had?

VA: I enjoyed them, they were kind of laid back; I felt a little bit English myself. My grandmother was from England, and I felt I am somewhat English in this position. Although my grandfather was from Germany and he accounts for my stern side. [laughs]

KP: Because a lot of people commented, for example, on the pubs, that they enjoyed the pubs a great deal.

VA: Yeah, they were fun. I drank my share of beer, off and off.
[Laughs]

KP: They were also struck that the English really did not have a lot compared to America. A lot of people grew up in the Depression didn't have a lot but then they went to England they would go to some of the small villages and people really lived hard lives. What about the village you were stationed in?

VA: Well it was more than a village; it was a small town. I think a population of maybe 25,000 or something like that.

KP: So it was a substantial community.

VA: Yeah, ... they didn't have much in the way of food of course. But they were surviving. They had more than the Germans had after the war.

KP: What about your commanders? Particularly a Colonel, I think it is Conklin.

VA: Oh, in Panama?

KP: Was that was your commander in Panama?

VA: Yeah; he wasn't much. They can't get me for libel can they? [laughs] They used to call him H.A. Conklin.

KP: What was the H.J. for?

VA: H.A.

KP: H.A.

VA: Horse's ... [laughs]

KP: So you did have your share of not-too competent officers at times?

VA: He was kind of autocratic and he graduated from West Point I think in 1916. When there weren't very many graduates and he got to be a general, though I don't know how. I think he was actually engineer of the ... Third Army under Patton. So I ran into him again. [laughs]

KP: In the Third Army.

SH: Did you really?

KP: When you ran into him, did you have significant dealings with him?

VA: Not really, I dealt mostly with the Corps of Engineers as division engineer.

KP: What about your commander in the 79th Division?

VA: He is a great guy; major general. He was a very strict disciplinarian. ...

KP: Wyche?

VA: Wyche, W-Y-C-H-E, and we had a marvelous Chief of Staff Kramer Thomas who was a very friendly to me. He used to refer to me as his oboe player. [laughs] He said, he said Engineers are like oboe players, when you talk about a bridge their eyes light up like an oboe player when he is playing the oboe. [laughs] But, he and I got along very well together, they were very friendly to me and I felt at home there.

KP: So you liked your division a lot it sounds like.

VA: Oh yeah.

KP: You mentioned that your commander, the commanding general was a strict disciplinarian, in what ways do you remember?

VA: Well, he didn't like the men to be away from the troops so he put a restriction of, I think it was two nights a week you could leave the cantonment. You could only join your wife a couple of times a week.

KP: So he in a sense wanted officers to be very involved with their men.

VA: Right.

KP: He did not go off base too much.

VA: Every time we moved, he said "Now send your wives home."

KP: Which I am sure there was some grumbling among the officers.

VA: Yes; but what do you do? Orders is orders. [laughs]

KP: You had never been to Europe before going to England?

VA: That's right.

KP: What did you think of your voyage over, and what type of ship did you come over on?

VA: I think it was ... either [a] Liberty or a Victory ship. We were stacked three or four high. [laughs]

KP: Even the officers were stacked?

VA: It was very rough; but we got over all right, the convoy got through safely and that was the main thing.

SH: After D-Day where did you go?

VA: Well, we landed I think it was about D plus six or seven. We were supposed to land later than that, but the 90th Division was in the Seventh Corps and they were not making progress and they decided to send our Division in to pass through them to stiffen up the attack. [laughs] So we were the first ones into Cherbourg when they swung off from Utah Beach. And after we got into Cherbourg we then we turned around and we faced south and we were on that line for quite a long period of time, until the breakthrough. It was an interesting incident that happened as we were fighting up the road to get into Cherbourg; our corps engineer went ahead and he got pinned down by fire and I was back about a block or two and I looked over to the right and there was this big opening that was the bottom level of the Fort du Roule I think it was, it was a five level fort that commanded the harbor at Cherbourg and I saw these people coming out, some of them were drunk, some of them were carrying stuff under their coats so I went over and found out that this was booze they were carrying out. So I put a guard on it and I went in to see what was going

on and there were these two very large rooms, wide as this, but very long, loaded with booze for the submarines, German submarines.

KP: Which men were helping themselves to?

VA: So I posted a guard to keep anybody from going in and I called the chief of staff and asked him, do you want me to start loading this out? [laughs] So we have dump trucks in the ... engineer battalion so we dumped the tools off; they were in big boxes, took the tools off; he said go ahead. [laughs] And we loaded out three truck loads of mostly (Hennesey's?) Brandy, but also 19 cases of Napoleon brandy, which I kept for my Battalion. [laughs] I sent one case on to the General; before the Corps came over and took over. [laughs]

KP: When did you consume this brandy?

VA: Well we rationed it out at dinner time, we had the troops come through and we poured a little in each cup.

KP: This must have been a big hit with them?

VA: Yeah.

SH: They would have followed you anywhere.

VA: It was interesting, because ... the bulk of it went over to the Division Quartermaster Company who had to put guards on it. That was most of the 500 cases; but we had our 19 cases of Napoleon brandy. [laughs] And we also had cointreau, you know what cointreau is? And I used to make, ... there is a drink you make with cointreau--a sidecar, you make brandy, cointreau, and lemon juice, the lemon powder from ... your rations. So we used to have sidecars. [laughs]

KP: So you had some amenities, even being in combat there were.

VA: Yes.

SH: Sidecars and K-rations.

VA: ... Putting a guard on that fort while they were fighting on the upper level was interesting, because a guy came out from the London Times with a ... trench coat wrapped around a case and he wanted to take it out and I wouldn't let him take it out. [laughs] All of these journalists, they got word of that right away, they have a nose for booze.

SH: Speaking of journalists, what kind of interaction did you have with them?

VA: Well they didn't like me after that. [laughs] No, we didn't much. Many of them didn't get down to our level, I guess.

KP: What was the most dangerous experience you had in the European campaign? Were you personally were in danger, do you remember?

VA: Well, we were shelled one night that was; we moved into this orchard and we lost a lot of men that night. ... The Germans had vacated the area and they shelled it. They left all these nice foxholes for us. But one close call I had, we were fighting in the Foret de Parroy, ... just east of Luneville ... in Lorraine and as we were coming back I was going up to see, my Battalion was putting a timber road through the forest to help the Infantry get their vehicles in and as I came back I saw this, there was a rock in the road I guess, and I told the jeep driver to stop and I'll take the rock out of the road. ... And he stopped and took the rock out of the road and we went on. But as we stopped a shell came over and landed about where we would have been.

KP: That is a pretty close call.

VA: Yes.

KP: Your biggest danger came from shelling.

VA: Yes.

KP: Did you ever have any contact with German soldiers and small arms fire, or were you far enough from the line to avoid that?

VA: Well, I got two Germans. The Company Commander and I were fighting in one of these towns and we went into this house and were looking out and as we were looking out one window the guy shot at us, missed, and we went to another window and there were three Germans across the street, and I had a Smyzer machine pistol so I let them have it. So I got two Germans; but as I think back, I think that was really a shame to do that. But that's war, I guess.

KP: But at the time it sounds like you had no choice.

VA: Well, I could have withdrawn with honor, but I couldn't resist I guess. ... I had been under fire on quite a few occasions, because I had to go up and see where ... the bridges had to be built and so forth. There was ... one case where I went into the Battalion Headquarters of the Infantry Battalion and said, Where is this bridge that has to go in?" And they said, "Well it's just down the road. We have a bridgehead around there." And he said, "You can go on down there." So I went down the road and before I knew it they were firing at me. [laughs] I came back and I said, "How big a bridgehead do you have?" And he said, "Well we have a squad across." [laughs]

KP: What were the range of things you constructed in Europe? You mentioned bridges, but what other types of tasks would your Battalion be called upon to do?

VA: Mostly mine clearing; which is the most dangerous and we lost a lot of good men doing that. And laying mines also and building roads on occasion. Laying gravel or laying pierced steel plank to facilitate the movement of the infantry.

KP: You mentioned clearing mines. How dangerous was that, and who would do the mine clearing, and how often during the European campaign?

VA: Well...

KP: There is a number of questions I asked.

VA: Well, quite often, because when you went down to a new ...on a new road ...

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

This continues an interview with Col. William G. Van Allen on May 10, 1996 at the Somerset Marriott in Somerset, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and

SH: Sandra Holyoak, intern.

KP: You mentioned, when we got cut off; I asked you a series of questions about mine clearing and how dangerous it was and I guess if you could talk a little bit about that. You mentioned when we got cut off that you were often called upon; it sounds like one of the things you did frequently.

VA: When we moved into a new area you had to check the roads to make sure there were no mines; this might involve probing with a bayonet, or visual inspection for personnel mines. And our troops were experienced in that, and unfortunately, they are tricky devices. I remember one very fine sergeant that was clearing what they call a long line like this and he was carrying it back to dispose of it, and it went off and just cut him in half. It's really a terrible risky job and as you have read about it in the papers, and ...

KP: There are ways to frustrate people trying to disarm them. How ingenious were German mines? Were their things you learned about them and did they change the way they operated in the course of the campaign?

VA: No, I can't say that I could add to our fund of knowledge in that respect, no.

SH: You needed so much equipment. How much scavenging did you do?

VA: Well, ... when we broke out of the bridgehead in Normandy we went south and then we went east. We were the leading element of the Third Army. Third Army took over and we made this dash across Europe. And we had to build bridges wherever we came to a impasse, but later on ... when we got up to the Seine River ... we were told just to go up to the river and wait, but we reconnoitered across. We found a dam we could cross over on and we also ... looked for a bridge site. And late that night; after dark the Third Army called us and they said they wanted us to cross that next morning. ... So they sent up a bridge train and we had a limited amount of ferrying equipment, and we had the Infantry cross on the dam and we moved across and we had

the Corps Battalion with the bridge train come up and put the bridge in. They finally got it in and we began crossing and we established a bridgehead north of the Seine River and then we occupied that for a couple of days, and that was a very interesting thing, because the Germans then tried to come in with airplanes and they had so much anti-aircraft artillery around that they really shot shells up and we were on the other side of the river ... and you could hear the shot coming down through the tree leaves.

So then they decided that they would have us move ahead, so ... they started the division out to march up to road and they weren't going fast enough so they gave us truck company to put the men in trucks and we went on up the road, because there was no opposition at that point. And we went, I guess, about 40 miles or 50 miles without any opposition, except occasional strafing from the woods and they'd turn a 50-caliber and strafe them.

And we got up to the Meuse River and we were going in two columns and the two bridges were out. One of the bridge site was one that we could use the treadway to cross on. And so we had the treadway trucks which we had with us, go up and build that bridge. We got up there it was dark. The other bridge site, we found seven "I" beams on site; apparently the bridge had been knocked out and the Germans had these "I" beams there and we, our engineers figured out, there was one long span and one short span. The long span took four "I" beams, the short span took three. So ... we put those "I" beams in place and we had lumber that we carried with us for the decking and we put that on, so by the time the Division was ready to move the next morning we were ready to go, the tanks crossed and we went on our way. And we ended up in Belgium, we had gone 120 miles in two days. [laughs]

KP: It sounds like, were you ahead of the Infantry? Or it sounds like you were with them.

VA: No, we were with them when the Infantry got there, we had to get their trucks and stuff across, tanks and trucks. They couldn't really go too far, without adequate bridges.

SH: From this point you are in Belgium, I know you are worried about the time, so from Belgium where did you go? Or how long were you in Belgium?

VA: Well, we moved from there down to the extreme right wing on the American Army. Way down to the right, and we, till they joined up with the forces coming from southern France. And from there we fought through Lorraine and Alsace.

KP: So you were there in December of 1944?

VA: Right.

KP: The Battle of the Bulge gets a lot of attention, but also the fighting in Alsace-Lorraine was just as significant. There was a major German offensive there too.

VA: Right, through the Vosges mountains.

KP: How surprised were you that the Germans launched this major offensive in December, because there was a lot of talk about the war being over by Christmas.

VA: We were crestfallen, to think that we had been surprised and that they had advanced as much as they had. We were into Germany, nosing into the Siegfried Line. And they decided to pull back when ... the Germans came through the Vosges, and they pulled out our ... 313th Infantry, one of our regiments and sent them up into the mountains to help defend against the German advance there and they gave us elements of the 42nd Division to replace them. But, they were inexperienced troops and they occupied the center section of our line, and we had this tremendous front, from the Vosges mountains all the around to Strasbourg practically. And the Germans came back across the Rhine and they'd find out where the 42nd Division was and they'd infiltrate through there and capture it, so we had to make two withdrawals and then we finally held the line there, for quite awhile. Meanwhile there was all this heavy fighting up to the north and the Ardennes.

KP: During this campaign did your unit, because of the infiltration, ever come under attack directly? Because of the lines not holding?

VA: No, we never had to fight as infantry, although, I arranged it pretty much.

KP: So you were ready.

VA: Theoretically, we were supposed to be able to fight as infantry if we were attacked, but I always had my people so busy on engineer duty they weren't available. [laughs]

KP: After the campaigns of Alsace-Lorraine where did you go to next after that the line stabilized?

VA: Well, after that we went into a rest area at Nancy, I guess it was, for a week or so, then they moved us up to the north again to become a part of 15th Army. A new Army and they were training them for crossing ... the Rhine River and we became a part of the British Army Group to attack north of the Ruhr and we practiced, ... I guess, a week or so, and meanwhile Patton sneaked across and the First Army captured the Remagen Bridge. So it kind of took the steam out of Montgomery's attack. Montgomery did launch a tremendous attack north of the Ruhr and we were in that attack, but they pounded the east bank of the Rhine so vigorously there wasn't much opposition and we got across with no great trouble. I crossed in one of these little ... amphibious jeeps, watching McDonald to make sure there was enough free-board. And we went into the Ruhr ... we practically ended the war then, ... because peace came shortly thereafter.

KP: You mentioned earlier in the interview the devastation of Germany, it sounds like you even were surprised at how devastated Germany was.

VA: Yeah, there were places where you drove block after block and it [was] just rocks, ... bricks stacked up on either side. It is amazing how quickly they recovered.

KP: You mentioned that you lost a number of men in your unit. What percentage of your unit did you lose?

VA: I think about half, maybe. ...

KP: Which is a heavy loss for an Engineer unit.

VA: Well, we were up with the Infantry. ... The division had about 100 percent casualties in the infantry as I recall.

KP: Was it ever a problem integrating new men, your Division had trained together quite a bit and then you get these replacements coming in.

VA: No, it wasn't any big problem.

KP: You never felt it was difficult to integrate new men.

VA: No.

KP: You mentioned you had to scavenge for construction material, but what about your other types of supplies? For example: food, hot showers, how often did you get a hot shower when you were in various campaigns?

VA: Not very often. [laughs] You got so you could take a bath in a helmet.

KP: What about food, hot meals, how often would you get a hot meal?

VA: Well, we did pretty well I would say, I don't remember any protracted periods of time, we ate a lot of K-rations and we had a five in one ration where you had five rations in a box. Five men would get around and you would heat it up with ... a small fire and heat it up. You had five different selections; roast beef was the hardest to find, because the ... rear area troops would steal that and we would end up with beef kidney stew, another one was sausage, another one was an ... egg mixture, and I forget what the other one was. There were five different rations, but we always used to get mad at the back area troops who were eating roast beef all the time.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the civilian population in that area?

VA: Yes, in Alsace it was kind of sad, we would be billeting with these people and they would be very hospitable to us and I remember that one little home we were in. The old man was great, he came in the morning with a glass of schnapps to clean your mouth out, ... and that was when we had to pull back. We couldn't tell him we were pulling back and I really felt bad about that, because we left them there at the mercy of the Germans, and we couldn't warn him. But, there were a lot of instances like that, when we got back, after the second withdrawal, ... the civilians got very apprehensive and they were counting the number of trucks going each way, how many people to see whether they should take off or not.

SH: Did you see any of the evacuation? Did they join you?

VA: Well they, many of them streamed back when they saw the American withdrawing even though it was a short term operation.

KP: Did you ever have any discipline problems when you were in Europe, men who went AWOL or men who could not take it, battle fatigue?

VA: Yeah we had some, we tried them. ... We had them court martialled.

SH: Were there any health problems? After all you were on K-rations and you were not able to stay that clean.

VA: No, not really I didn't hear of any exposure, trench foot or something like that. Our troops generally were able to pull back at night in most cases, different than an infantry, who had to stay up in the fox hole all the time.

KP: What about chaplains, how often did you encounter chaplains?

VA: We had a chaplain in our battalion.

KP: Which denomination? Do you remember?

VA: One of them was a Baptist and he was a holy terror. [laughs]

KP: You say a holy terror, what do you mean?

VA: He was a very strict guy, he didn't do so well, but we also had a black one and he was really great, he was a nice guy, we enjoyed him very much.

SH: Were your troops integrated at that point?

VA: No.

SH/KP: Just the Chaplain?

VA: Yeah.

KP: How did he come to this unit as a black chaplain?

VA: I don't remember that.

KP: And so he ministered to a white unit?

VA: Maybe, that was when I was in Korea, now I think I may be wrong on that. ... I do remember we had a black chaplain, it probably was when I was in Korea. We did have integration there, we had a black battalion and two white battalions, we intermixed them on our own.

KP: Since you brought it up and it sounds like you have to meet some people for lunch. You fought in a segregated Army in World War II and then an integrated Army in Korea, what were the differences and how well did integration go in Korea?

VA: Well integration went very well in Korea, we ... as I say we had the one black battalion, we put all the white replacements into the black battalion and the black replacements went into the white battalion and that really made the sergeants in those organizations spark up. In the colored battalion they had to compete with the whites and it worked out very well it improved the black battalion.

KP: Were you apprehensive at all about integration, before it took place?

VA: No, I was all for it.

SH: You were part of the occupying forces in Germany after the war?

VA: Yes, I ended up by being mayor of three towns. [laughs]

VA: Well, in charge of three towns, along with the British military government officer. We held court, tried people for all kinds of ... crimes and it was a very interesting experience.

KP: Did your unit come across, liberate any concentration camps, or come across any death camps?

VA: Not concentration camp, but we did supervise quite a large number of labor camps. A various number, we had an Italian PW camp and there was one big place it was Russian, and these were Russian workers I guess, they may have been Russian soldiers. There was a whole variety of different camps that we had to see that they had food and so forth. And then after we left the Ruhr we ended up in Czechoslovakia to. ... We had 50,000 German PWs there in Czechoslovakia, that we had to look after to be sure they had the essentials. One of the essentials was to build beds for them, cots so our company commanders went out and they located carpenter shops to make these beds for the ... prisoners, there was a big open area.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the other Allied Forces, other than the English?

VA: Yes, the Second French Armored Division, they were a great outfit. They were with us down in Lorraine, and they were putting mines everywhere and not keeping track of where they were. [laughs]

KP: Oh, that sounds like it must have been a frustrating experience.

VA: ... They used to have chickens on their tanks and when they got stopped, they'd stop and they'd pluck the chicken and then cook it, while they were halted. [laughs] They traveled in style. [laughs]

SH: Was there any interaction with the Russians forces?

VA: No, never had any.

KP: Did you have any problems with men engaging in petty thievery either in France or in Germany?

VA: There was a lot of [it]. Unfortunately, a lot of people took stuff that they shouldn't have taken.

KP: Any harassment of civilians either in France or in Germany? Did you ever encounter any problems with discipline; particularly that got up to court martial level?

VA: I don't remember any, talking about thievery, one of our senior officers in the division appropriated a major stamp collection, I remember that.

SH: Stamp collecting is one of your hobbies right?

VA: Yeah.

SH: So you were aware.

VA: I met some stamp collectors over there and traded with them, [laughs] on occasion.

SH: Had you been a stamp collector before the war?

VA: Oh yeah.

SH: I was just going to ask the other question I had about, after you are an occupying force you are sent to the Pacific theater?

VA: No, ... since I was Regular Army I had more points than anybody, but I had to stay over there while everybody else went home. [laughs] And I was ... assigned to Corps Headquarters in Bamberg, Germany. From there I was sent back on R&R in February of '46 and, to go to Fort Leavenworth for a course and then my R&R, I think was 45 days. I was going back on R&R for 45 days, when I was on the boat they changed my orders and sent me to school instead. So I got off the boat and my wife greeted me with this change of orders. [laughs] So I had to fight my way out of Camp Kilmer. I said, "Why can't I go now? This was at Jersey City and so I had a couple of days at home and we took off for Fort Leavenworth.

I went to a special course they had at Fort Leavenworth, they called it the Second Command Class so it was a five month course. And after that course they changed the rules and said that I lost my 45 days of R&R. And Major William Dean, who was subsequently captured in Korea, he asked me to stay on as an instructor, which I did. And so I stayed on for a year there. Then the chief of engineers told me that I probably should go to school, if I wanted to go to school, because it was long overdue. So I elected to leave Leavenworth early and went to the University of Iowa to get my master's degree in civil engineering.

SH: Now the decorations that you received, I know you got your Oak Leaves, were those presented to you stateside or did you receive them overseas?

VA: Oh no, I got them all through my career.

SH: There was one little piece I read; you were the youngest ...

VA: The youngest district engineer.

SH: The youngest civilian engineer...

VA: District engineer.

SH: District engineer, oh okay, and you got the Bronze Star?

VA: A couple of Bronze Stars, I don't know how many, several of them, several Legions of Merit and Croix de Guerre avec palm.

SH: Now were those ceremonies just held in the field or were you given those later?

VA: Some of them were held in the field; my last one was on retirement, I guess, at Fort Armstrong in Honolulu. The (Croix de Guerre?) I got; some French officer came down and passed them out to the people in the division that were entitled to them.

KP: After the war in Europe had you given any thought to leaving the army?

VA: No, I was in to stay.

KP: Really even having been through a war, you did not think it was time to get out?

VA: Well I went through the worst of it, I thought. [laughs]

KP: How do you think that World War II helped the army? Looking at the sort of pre World War II army and the post World War II army, what had changed within the army? Even though the army demobilized after 1945 and shrank again, what had really changed, that there was no going back?

VA: Well I think that the army became more professional; it recognized the need for field training which they didn't have when I went in, and much better educated officer corps, a school system which maintains that professional dedication.

SH: Is the army then which went into Korea much better prepared than the one in 1941?

VA: Yeah, I would say so.

SH: Regrettably I think the time is going to make us call this to an end; is there anything you would like to share with us?

VA: I think I've given you probably a pretty good rundown.

KP: We wanted to ask you a little more about Korea; but maybe next reunion if you're here we would love to continue this.

INTERRUPTION

KP: This resumes an interview that was interrupted by a uniform pick-up and lunch for the interviewers with Mr. William Van Allen. And I guess just before we had broken, we had talked a good bit about your transition to the peacetime army with a loss of leave; the 45 R&R days you lost. We only talked about the Command College a bit, but it sounds like you enjoyed that, both the classes itself and teaching there. What did you learn at the Command College that was useful, you had already had a lot of experience?

VA: Well I learned more about being a staff officer on a senior staff, even on the general staff and I instructed in the Command and General Staff School after I was kept there which is training for students to be a Division Staff Officers. ... I had problems on river crossings and retrograde movements that were quite interesting that I conducted.

SH: What did you do?

VA: Well we to write up a problem and then have it presented before a murder board to analyze it, to make sure that it was sound and then defend it; so it was quite an interesting operation.

KP: How did you like teaching?

VA: I liked teaching, because the military is really a teaching profession; which isn't commonly understood and I've always felt the desire to be in education. I like teaching people.

KP: So you enjoyed your stint in school; you were formally in a sense an instructor?

VA: Right.

SH: Do you have some good suggestions for educators having been on both sides?

VA: Well to be practical in their approach. I had quite a bit of experience with academe, because after I retired I worked for Bishop Estate, which is a large land-owning school, which owns eight percent of the state of Hawaii and it has got one of the richest endowments, ... richer than most colleges, so I got quite familiar with the way educators think and I feel that most of the academics are too formal in their approach ... to education and there should be more of a mix of people who come from practical experience. Rather than the internal educational courses which really don't give a practical solution to many of the problems.

SH: How long were you at Iowa, until 1948?

VA: Yes, I got my master's degree in '48 in Iowa, the State University of Iowa in Iowa City.

KP: And when you were in Iowa did you wear your uniform or did you just dress like a civilian?

VA: Oh no, that was civilian clothes.

KP: In a sense you were back to being a student.

VA: Yeah, after being out eleven years.

KP: You were also surrounded by a lot of GI's.

VA: Yeah, the place was loaded with a G.I.'s; many of whom were married and there was really a pandemonium on campus, but enjoyable to see ... these young people getting an education. That was a great act to provide education for them and it really raised the level of our society a great deal.

KP: When you say they raised quite a bit of pandemonium, in what way? We are now used to having "non-traditional" students go to college, but then people used to think of college as very, you were supposed to be eighteen to 22 and here you have these people in their thirties and sometimes as high as thirties and forties in college. How do you think that affected college, especially compared say to Rutgers?

VA: Well, I think the students were much more serious, as I say, many of them were married and had children and they were out to get as much as they could in the time that was available to them. And when I say pandemonium, I mean it was just a busy time for everyone and it was a crowded small town. The housing was very critical so that is the pandemonium, plus a flood on the river when I got there. [laughs]

SH: Oh no really? Did you set out to solve that right away?

VA: No.

KP: Where did you live when you were at Iowa, because you mentioned housing was at a premium, it was a premium after the war, for several years after the war. Where did you live at Iowa?

VA: Well, we found an apartment house with a very astute owner and he sold the apartment to us; but it was really camouflaged for extracting more than the allowable rent, because he had a condition on it that we had to sell it back to him as I recall. It was a pretty carefully thought out scheme on his part which would extract the most rent possible. It was a nice apartment, it had a Murphy bed in it. [laughs]

SH: In other words it wasn't very big?

VA: Oh, it was adequate.

KP: The civil engineering program, how good was it?

VA: It was an excellent civil engineering program and they had some outstanding professors there, and instructors in fluid mechanics. In fact, fluid mechanics, we had to go to summer school, regular summer school and then a special five week course after regular summer school, which was one subject four hours a day as I recall. And we had to absorb it all in about five weeks, that was really a tremendous input of knowledge in a short period of time.

SH: So from Iowa where did you go then, you were still active duty is that not right?

VA: Yes, ... I am trying to remember where I went from there.

KP: Because, it is not too long before the Korean War breaks out.

VA: I went to Korea in 1950. And I went to Westover Field, I was assigned to the air force.

SH: That was one of the questions I had from the flyer is it did say that you had gone into the air force, how did that transition work?

VA: Well that was interesting, I was in a category called Army special category with air force, and we were on loan to the Air Force, because they were short on certain skilled officers such as engineers. So I went to Westover Field where I became the engineer for the Atlantic Division of MATS, Military Air Transport Service. And I served there until I went to Korea in 1950, and while there I had to travel to our bases which were in North Africa, and Azores, primarily. It was an interesting tour for me. I traveled across the ocean on several occasions.

KP: You traveled by ocean, you did not fly?

VA: We flew regularly. We flew over to North Africa several times, and to Azores.

SH: I think you probably preferred the flying to the taking of the boat; you had talked about how you had gone across in a convoy your first time.

VA: Oh, there was no comparison, although airplanes then were not deluxe like they are now, frequently you were riding on a cargo plane. And they were slow.

SH: Just to back up a little bit, because of all the controversy over the dropping of the bomb in Japan, do you remember where you were and what thought? How aware were you of it ?

VA: I was in Germany when the bomb was dropped, we were just amazed by it we hadn't any idea that was ...

SH: You were aware of it.

VA: Of course, we were happy, because we were supposed to go over to Asia after we came back through the United States. Nobody was going to get out until the war was over. [laughs] ... So being in Regular Army, I was delighted to have the war end.

SH: It was interesting the different comments we have gotten about the bomb; but everyone I've interviewed has been grateful I think.

VA: Despite all the furor at the Smithsonian, these people who would revise history in favor of a more liberal outlook are very much in the wrong.

KP: How surprised were you by Korea? Because you mentioned you were surprised by Pearl Harbor.

VA: We were surprised there, too. [laughs] And we were just hanging on by our teeth when it went back to the Pusan Perimeter; before they were able to get enough troops in to hold it. So we were watching that pretty carefully.

KP: Where were you when you heard of the Korean attack? Do you remember?

VA: I was at Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa, where we were repairing the major air field there and they were getting it fixed up for B-29s.

KP: So you were in the Far East?

VA: Oh yes, in Okinawa.

KP: So Korea was very close to you.

VA: That's right.

SH: So you had gone in from the MATS to Okinawa?

VA: Yeah, ... they said, I had to do ... more foreign service; so they shipped me out to [Okinawa]. ... I had a deal made with an air force colonel that was going down to Bermuda to be the commanding officer and I thought I had that all fixed up, to go to Bermuda as the engineer in Bermuda for him, and unfortunately there was another air force officer, who was a good friend of the commanding general, and they decided that the Bermuda deal was too good a deal for an army colonel, so I got outmaneuvered on that one and I ended up in Okinawa. Because the Corps of Engineers had to send me overseas.

KP: Your are saying that you had to go overseas; in other words the rotation.

VA: Yeah, I was due again, in ... '50. ...

KP: Okinawa was the site of a hard-fought battle in World War II. What were your impressions of Okinawa? Especially, before the Korean war broke out?

VA: Well, it was really just recovering and there had been a terrible typhoon that went through there I believe in '48 which devastated the area and they were busy with a construction program, to construct typhoon-resistant buildings. So I did get a chance to talk to the district engineer, who strangely enough had been my company commander in Panama. So it was a nice association for me to go back there, and I was in the Engineer Aviation Group, three battalions on Kadena and here again we were operating another quarry and an asphalt plant to pave the new runway we were putting in.

KP: In many ways your duties were similar to the ones you performed in Panama. Of course, you were building different things.

VA: Well, it was a lot more sophisticated, we had much more equipment than we did in Panama. Panama was all hand labor really, but in Okinawa we had all new power equipment that we needed.

SH: Was your wife able to come to Okinawa with you at that time?
VA: No, she was not. When the Korean War came out, I was supposed to get over there in a year, but with the Korean War they stopped sending family over and then ... as they opened the bridgehead they moved our whole group up to Korea.

SH: Were you aware of any other Rutgers men during your military career? I know there was a Colonel Prout who was in Korea setting up communications?

VA: No, I don't remember running into any Rutgers people in command.

KP: Your unit that was sent to Korea, what tasks did it have in Korea?

VA: We were rebuilding the air field, the air fields had all been just really devastated by our bombing so we had one battalion at one place called Pusan on the west coast, another battalion

was at the air field outside Kimpo I guess it was, outside of Seoul and we were, our group headquarters was at (Suwon?) which was a fighter base, about 30 miles south of Seoul and again I was selected to go in. ...

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

KP: Just before we were cut off by the tape ending, you were talking about having the privilege of being in the advance party.

VA: Before the rest of the battalions came up there. We were worried about the water level being so high and I had some good officers with me, and the first thing we did was to go out hire a bunch of Koreans with shovels and ropes to dig trenches on either side of the runway to drain the water and get it off from [the field], preventing the ... runways from sinking down into the mud. And that was quite successful to see hundreds of Koreans working there, they had three man shovels and five man shovels. A three man shovel was a man on the shovel and ... two ropes on the shovel on either side and the two on the outside would help lift the shovel up to give a maximum throw and even some of them were five man shovels that throw the dirt way out, because we were digging these trenches about five and six feet deep in places to get the necessary pitch. I had one officer that was a surveyor and laid out the drainage system and it was kind of an interesting thing to get the water level to drop in the area of the air field.

KP: It sounds like the Korean War workers were very good workers.

VA: They were hard ... workers all right.

KP: How long did they work on this project?

VA: Well we were working on it all the time I was in Korea doing various things, but that project, the drainage system I think we did that in a week or two ... there were hundreds of them working.

KP: Did this pattern continue of using Korean workers?

VA: We hired contractors also, Korean contractors to do some of the work, too. And then we used the Koreans to supplement the troop labor. Each battalion had its own assigned task when they got there, but this drainage ditch was an immediate type thing that our advanced party took care of.

KP: Were you in harm's way in Korea, like you were in World War II?

VA: No. No, not at all. They had a bedtime Charlie that came around; ... sounded like a sewing machine. [laughs] He would come around and they would shoot at him a little bit and they made us go into the air raid shelter, but it really wasn't necessary to go into the air raid shelter, there wasn't any danger to us at all.

KP: Bedtime Charlie, would he bomb anything?

VA: No, I don't think so, I don't know really what he was doing except, maybe harass us, keep us awake or something.

SH: If you were to compare your foe, Germany vs. the Koreans, what would be your assessment.

VA: The Koreans were very primitive in their capability. Of course, they had a lot of manpower. It was fierce fighting for the Infantry, but I wasn't in the army, then, I was in with the Air Force; enjoying the life in the back area. [laughs]

KP: So how did it feel to be fighting a war from the rear echelon? It sounds like it was a very different war.

VA: Yeah, it was different, the only thing that was ... different, ... because I was what they call SCAWAF, Special Category Army With Air Force, it was hard to get our liquor and beer rations, because we'd go to the army and they would say, "No your with the air force, and we don't have any ration for you." We would go to the air force and they would say, "No you're army we don't have any ration for you." So we had to get that resolved.

SH: Were all the men that were assigned with you, were they Air Force or were they Army that came with you?

VA: They were all Army.

KP: How long would your status with the air force last? Would you end up ever going back to the army as a regular?

VA: Yeah, when I left ... there, I went back to the army. It was a three year course. And when I was in Okinawa, I forgot to tell you that I was taken out of the engineer group that I was in. ... The Engineer group was assigned to 20th Air Force and the general there was a real tough cookie and he had gone through several air force officers and engineers, ... that were installation officers, and they were tired of having them chewed up and they wanted to get an engineer officer in from the army. So they asked if I'd go in, so I said sure I'll go in, and I got along well with the old man, he liked me. And even the A-4 who I was nominally to be under, to work under, he really didn't give me any instructions, he let me deal directly with the general on engineering matters. And, so I enjoyed that part of my tour very much. However, when the general left the air force general staff, they really celebrated, because he had been such a tough guy.

KP: You had gotten along so well with him, but other guys he chewed up.

VA: I don't know, I followed instructions. [laughs] ... When he said, he wanted something, I got it to him. So they had the biggest party ... most of the General Staff got drunk; and he had been very good to me, he would invite me to his quarters along with other people, and we met Bob Hope there and people like that. A very delightful experience for me, and then ... when he

left they brought an air force colonel back to take over with the new commanding general, and they wanted me to stay on as deputy engineer, and I said, ... no thanks, after pulling their hot chestnuts out of the fire; to relegate me to the number two position, I thought was very unfair of the Air Force.

KP: What did you think of the air force, comparing it to the army, admittedly the air force had been part of the army?

VA: Well, I got along well with them. In fact, I got the best efficiency reports in my career from the air force, because I got along well with them. Most of them were younger people, pilots, they didn't know much about engineering and they were very appreciative of what I was doing for them. ... They held me in very high regard, and as I say I enjoyed it. The commanding officer in Tripoli used to meet me with open arms. And the guy in ... the Azores, they were always glad to see me, they had problems, I would try to solve them.

KP: You mentioned that a lot of the officers in the air force were pilots, did you notice any difference in the style of the service, of the air force vs. the army? Was the air force more informal? A lot of people in World War II have said that the air force could be a lot more informal than the army?

VA: Yes, ... some of the pilots were not really qualified in the technical area, like in engineering. So they were looking for somebody that had that kind of knowledge. And as time went on they gained that thing, by transfer of army people from the technical services as well as ... getting the pilots in. ... They absorbed a lot of army specialists.

SH: Then from Korea they sent you to Hawaii, is that right? Or did you go stateside?

VA: No, there is a long ways to go yet.

SH: Oh really, okay, I am trying to get you to the land of ...

VA: Let's see, from Korea, I was sent to Third Army Headquarters at Fort McPherson, Georgia in Atlanta. And I became the deputy engineer for the Third Army. Which was a big army and our principal job was really operating the Engineering ... on the post, the R and U so-called Repairs and Utilities and coordinating the new construction of Army Construction Programs. ... We had essentially a civilian, civil service operation there, but we also had a military division there to supervise the Reserve organizations. And I met some very good friends there, and maintained them for a long time.

SH: And how long was your tour there at Fort McPherson?

VA: ... I got there end of '51 and I left there in '54. To go to the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks.

SH: You were an instructor then.

VA: No, I went back to school, again. Which was something of the same type of school I had gone to at ... Fort Leavenworth, but it was a very relaxed gentlemen's school where we had great guest speakers to talk to us; and we had problems that we worked on, we would work in committees. Every five or six weeks we would reorganize into new committees and we would write up papers on various problems. In between we had lectures.

SH: Who were some of your favorite lecturers? More interesting?

VA: This fella who was on TV, who had been with ... the Russian[s], an expert on Russian affairs, just appeared recently [on television].

KP: George Kennan

VA: Yes.

KP: You heard him at the War College.

VA: Well, he was one of our speakers, he was a great speaker. And we had ... General Staff people come out and talk to us, many generals, top flight speakers. They covered strategic areas of world, ... our area study was the Middle East which was quite interesting. We had to write a paper on the Middle East and I guess we came to the right conclusion, it was a mixed up area. [laughs]

KP: And after the War College where did you go to?

VA: I graduated from the War College in '55, and I was assigned to the Army General Staff in G-3, Army Aviation; and I was not an aviator. And they put me in charge of the Operations and Requirements Division in Army Aviation. And I had a great boss there named Hamilton Howze, he was a major general. And I enjoyed that, but I don't think the aviators enjoyed working for non-aviator, because I was always pretty hard on them.

SH: Was this in Washington, D.C.?

VA: Yeah, in Washington. And I don't remember why, but somewhere after about three years, I was moved into the ... Under Secretary of the Army's Office and they were getting ready to set up FAA, Federal Aviation Agency. And, I don't remember the details on it, but I was working on coordinating that movement and they said, ... the FAA was set up to provide for the joint control of air space with the NCAA, I believe it was. ... It was the coordinating group for air space for the civilians and the Air Force and ... the Department of Defense. So prior to that the air space was controlled by each of these areas, and we had all these points of possible conflicts. So that the idea was to have one air space control which would be coordinated, and one navigation system. They had two different types of navigational aids, one was called TACAN and the other was called VOR, so they started to put in what they called VORTAC which a combination device, which would provide both VHF and Ultra High Frequency communications guidance and

then when you are setting this up somebody said, "Well why don't you volunteer to go over to the FAA."

So I put my name in and they selected me to go over, now I supposed to go over to the ... Airports Division of the FAA. And when I got over there they viewed me with great suspicion, because this was a very political organization. ... They had a relationship with all the communities, the states and they didn't want this army colonel coming in and screwing up the works. So they put me in an office to one side and they assigned me to certain project which I wrote up, and I thought I did a credible job on, one of them was noise patterns around major air ports and another one was on helicopters.

And I ... guess my displeasure was evident, because the head of the facility division called me up Joe Tibbits, and he was a great guy, he was a Mormon, but a very hearty man and very friendly, and he said, "I'm afraid that we have misused you, and we are going to assign you to another organization in the facilities division." Which they did, they assigned me to the Systems Staff Division in the head of a department in there called Systems Plans Department, I guess it was. So I had a small staff there of ... several people, and my job there was to develop the overall plan for the navigational system of the ... FAA. And we worked up the plan, we coordinated with the Air Traffic Controller, which was a major division, Flight Services and the other major divisions to assure the R and D, to be sure they had an integrated plan for these facilities ... from that a budget would be developed.

Meanwhile, the head of the Systems Staff Division was promoted to be the Assistant to Mr. Tibbits in the Facilities Division, the deputy of the Systems Staff Division was promoted to be the Chief and he made me the Deputy in the Systems Staff Division, which was a promotion. And that was quite a tribute, because it was equivalent to a GS-16, I don't know whether you are familiar with, civil service, but is in ... the super grade, so I served the rest of my career with FAA as the acting deputy chief of the Systems Staff Division.

KP: In a sense, you had ended up in Aviation?

VA: Yeah, still it was unusual, in that I spent seven years in Washington as a result.

KP: In a very exciting time, the aviation industry was really in your period growing into what we know it today.

VA: Well, the jets were just coming out, and Dulles Air Force Base was under construction, so it was an exciting period.

SH: With your background it must have been fascinating to watch, when you set up all these air strips all over the world. Now you are involved with the FAA.

VA: And from there, the Foreign Service call came in. [laughs] They said, "Where do you want to go?" They said, "Well, we have a position in. ... Oh, even before that, when my tour at the Pentagon was about up, this was in 1958, ... they issued orders for me to go to Naples, Italy. To

go over to NATO and I had the orders, we put the house up for sale, with the condition that if our orders were canceled, ... the sale was off. So we sold the house, with this condition on it. The people who bought the house would come around almost every day, waiting for us to get the order, but I knew this move to FAA was under way and finally we had to tell them, well the orders were canceled, and I was kept there to go to FAA. So they became good friends of ours, and we used to look them up every time I went back to Washington. They bought another house, but they always felt bad that they hadn't bought our house. [laugh]

And then, when ... my tour really came up, they said, "You got to go now." In '62, and I said, ... "What have you got to offer?" And I was getting close to retirement then, I had close to 27 years, I guess. Well they said, "We have a deputy engineer for Seventh Army in Europe, which would have been a nice plan. ... By then my mother-in-law and father-in-law were living with us, and I said, "No, that's not so good, because my wife was a cardiac patient and my mother-in-law was not in the best of health, and I felt it would have been hard on them to go. ... Since my father-in-law had died about that time, so I said, "What else do you have?" And he said, "Well, we can send you over to Honolulu as a deputy engineer for Pacific Ocean Command." I said, "Okay, that sounds good to me.

So we came over to Honolulu in '62 and then I used to go out at lunch time and walk around the downtown area and I saw, I used to go past this place, Bishop Estate and it said, "A foundation of the Kamehameha School." And I always felt that when I retired, I would like to get into education, because I enjoyed teaching. I kept my eyes open and an ad came up in the local paper for an Assistant Project Coordinator. ... It was a blind ad. I said, "Well I'll apply just to find out what it is." It turned out to be Bishop Estate. [laughs] Talk about chance, so I called them and made an appointment and I went to see them, and they interviewed me, and the department chief felt I was over qualified, but the guy I was going to work for said, well he'd take a chance on me, that I would stay with them. And they hired me at a very minimal salary, I told them I was interested in getting 10,000 dollars a year, which wasn't very much even then, but I wanted to get to work for Bishop Estate, and it was an entry level position actually, but in a few years, my boss retired and I moved into his position.

And a few years later, ... they had a management study of the estate, meanwhile, I had written a memorandum to the superintendent of the Bishop Estate outlining what I think should be done, based on my observations. I wrote that about a year and a half after I started to work for them, and I kept that memorandum and when the management people came in, I gave it to them. [laughs] And as usual, when a consultant firm comes in they find out ... what the people have to say, and they adopted my recommendation almost completely.

So I ended up by then being the number two man at Bishop Estate, which position I held for quite a few years. I was in charge of all of the staff sections and then we had three or four areas which were directly under the superintendent; but when he went away, I was in charge of the operations. He was about nine years younger than I, and I figured well, I'll serve out my time until age 65 and get out, and when I was about 65, he decided he would retire, and we waited to see who would be selected to replace him. But, the trustees of the Bishop Estate are notoriously slow to take administrative action, especially on personnel matters. On the very last day he was there, he

said, "You know, we have to have someone to take over." He said, "I'll suggest that you take Van Allen as acting chief of land league." Which was the man who controlled all of this land, eight percent of the state of Hawaii. And we had 25,000 leases out, it was a big operation.

So I ... took that over and they never, I don't remember them ever confirming me. I started out signing as acting director of land division, and I just adopted the title director of land division. And I served there until I finally got out, the retirement age was 70, but I told the Trustees when I ... approached 70, I said, "I am willing to continue serving here for awhile, as long as you give me a reasonable amount of time." And I said, "I'll give you so many months notice, I think, two or three months notice to get a replacement." So we went on that basis for awhile and then finally I figured, I'd had enough, because the trustee appointments were so political, they were all politicians being selected, and finally, I said, "Well okay, I'm ready to go."

SH; You said, Bishop Estates is an educational institution. What does the Kamehameha School do?

VA: Well, it ran a ... complete school from kindergarten through high school, for the education of the Hawaiian children. ... They have to pay tuition, but if a Hawaiian kid can't afford it, they will support him and ... they select the cream of Hawaiian kids out of the community, and it's really a nice school.

KP: But it sounds like you were doing, Sandra and I were commenting over lunch, that it sound like you were doing some of what of what you did back in Boston for the Army Corps, with deeds and contracts and land acquisition. The army trained you quite well for what you were doing.

VA: ... The work at Bishop Estate was very demanding, it required a lot of good writing. We were always writing letter agreements for sale of land and stuff like that. And so I did get a lot of training along those lines, and I still do pretty well on writing. Do you want some background on Bishop Estates?

KP: Yes.

VA: It's where eight percent of the land came from. Well Bishop Estate was set up in 1864, I think it was, when Princess Bernice Bishop died, she was the last of the Kamehameha family. ... She was the last one and about a year before she passed away her Aunt Ruth gave her most of the land and it amounted to about over 400,000 acres of land on the various islands. And she had married a New Englander, well he was actually from New York, from Glen Falls, New York. Charles Reed Bishop, and he drew up a will I'm sure, and the will said that land would be managed by five trustees for the education of Hawaiian children. With the direction that we set up two schools, one for boys and one for girls, which they did. And we started out on a very small basis, because they didn't have much income back in those days. So as time went on, it became a very powerful operation, especially after the war, there was a tremendous need for housing and they had developers come in and take over portions of the land, and develop it slowly, as I say they had over 25,000 leases, about almost 15,000 residential and I think 12,000

condominiums and about 1000, close to 1000 agricultural leases, and about three or four hundred commercial leases, so it was a big operation.

SH: Is the education standard or were they teaching native culture?

VA: It's a standard education, they emphasize Hawaiian culture. They have a song contest which is really something to see and hear. And they teach Hawaiian language, but it's a standard school, ... a large ... portion of the kids go on to university on the mainland.

KP: Did you get to do any teaching? You originally pass this school and the idea of going to teaching, it sounds like you did a lot of real estate work and management. Did you ever get a chance to do any teaching?

VA: Not with Bishop Estate, I didn't, except to instruct my staff.

KP: How big was your staff?

VA: I had about 65 people. ...

SH: We should introduce Mrs. Van Allen. Is there anything you wish to tell us about having met, and then we'll conclude the interview.

VA: I bring this up to, I retired in 1985, intending to spend more time with my wife, and she developed cancer of the colon about '87 or '88 and she died of cancer in '89 and then I was really lost. And I received a letter from, a note from Hazel who lived in the same apartment building, a condolence letter, and I saw her outside the apartment, the post office is right across the street. ... That was the first time I had really looked at her, I had known her being a neighbor in the building, and I'd known her husband too, that was the first time I had really looked at her. And I liked what I saw, I guess. [laughs] And ... we had both been invited to a party at that point in time, I said, "Well I will look forward to seeing you at this dinner party, that was coming in a week or so." And at the dinner party, the ... hostess set me in one corner of the room and Hazel in the other corner of the room, we didn't get a chance to talk all evening. But after, as the party was breaking up, I walked over to her and said, "I'd like to get to know you better, Hazel, and could we have dinner together?" So I called her and we made a date for dinner, and that was really an amazing incident, because we enjoyed talking about our interests. We had a remarkable coincidence of interests, we were both interested in charity, I had my endowment program at Rutgers, she had her foundation in Reno and we were comparing notes. We had the same interests, symphony and opera, music really struck it off right from the very beginning.

SH: Thank you for the interview.

KP: I have just one or two more questions. How did you like Hawaii? You had lived in a lot of different parts of the world by the time you got there and obviously it is a place that you wanted to stay. Or was it more an accident with the Bishop School?

VA: No, it was a place I would like to stay, when I went over there, I had planned to come back to Washington, D.C. In fact, I had kept my home there, and then I came back and sold it after I had been over there a few years.

KP: It sounds like you really enjoyed your military service, I mean you really convey a sense of really having enjoyed it.

VA: I have enjoyed all of my life, there are times when, you know, things aren't so pleasant. But I enjoy particularly our life now together, because we are getting the joy of giving. She has this foundation that is doing marvelous job with all of these scholarship endowments. ... And we spend forty percent of the income on education, thirty percent on social problems, twenty percent on culture and arts, five percent on ecology, and five percent on medical, the medical is not for research, it is for relief from suffering. So, for example, ... we support two hospices, one in Reno and one in Hawaii. And we also, in her foundation, we also support the Mayo Brothers, they have a special project there, this year, to enhance the communication between doctors and their patients, because there's a breakdown of communication, so their exploring that. We gave them 20,000 dollars this year for that. ... We really enjoy getting around and we visit all of these activities when we are in Honolulu, so we really have a very full life visiting and seeing, well like the kids, ... [on] Wednesday it's great to see them, see her kids at the various universities. It's really a great, great time for us, so we are both very happy.

KP: Do you stay in touch with anyone, any of the people you served with in the military? Have you been to any reunions at all after you retired?

VA: No military reunions, I ran into them time after time at the Pentagon. [wife whispered something] We like to go on the paddle wheels, steamers, I guess it was the year before last. ... We met a ... Colonel Allen and I saw him, and I thought he looked familiar, and I said, "Is that Colonel James Allen?" It was, it was a guy who was down in the Providence District when I was in Boston, I hadn't seen him in over 40 years. [laughs]

KP: Did you ever join, do you belong to any veterans organizations?

VA: No, ... I belong to the Society of American Military Engineers and I joined the Hawaii Society of Professional Engineers, and I was the state president of that, back in about '64 or '65, no '66 I think it was. And I belong to the TROA, ... Retired Officer Association, but I have never joined the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

KP: It seems like you enjoyed being a civilian as much as you enjoyed being in the military.

VA: That's right, when I left one area I've closed the door on it, I guess, and went on to get to the next chapter. When I married Hazel, I moved into a ... new area.

SH: Well we are glad that you came back to Rutgers.

KP: We are really glad you came back and had time for an interview.

VA: I have enjoyed this, I don't know whether you have noticed it or not. [laughs]

KP: No, you look like you have. I can tell you have enjoyed it. We've enjoyed it a lot, a lot of fun, we'll see you at the Old Guard Dinner.

VA: I think you pumped me pretty well, I tell you thoughts will occur to me for lots of incidents I probably couldn't recall, a little stimulation, but I think you have done a pretty good job of it.

SH: Since you said you are very good at writing letters we will expect, if you do remember something to drop us a line.

KP: Yes, please do.

SH: If there was an incident you would like to have on the record and put in the files.

KP: Or if there is any of your correspondence, especially from the war-time, historians and archivists really like that material for the writing of history.

VA: There are a few interesting things like that. When I was in Boston District, I pulled a coup on the Portland Cement Association. ... It's kind of a complicated discussion, but ... they had a system where the price of cement was always the same in every city, no matter who you asked, all of the manufactures would have the same price in each city. ... We were ... building a fortification in Portland and one in Boston, and we had to buy a lot of cement. And I figured out that what I would do would be to ask for the bids ... for each of those two areas and to give us the transportation cost in that price, and there was one cement mill in, ... north of Portland and ... another cement mill was in New York State. So when the bids came in the Boston price, of course, was based on the going price there, but the price in Portland was a different price, but when I subtracted from the cost, the cost to [transport]. ... I guess, I took the main bid for Boston and we subtracted the cost of transportation, so that we got the difference in transportation cost to adversely effect their bid. So we really got the cement so much cheaper by doing this subterfuge on my part and ... they really were unhappy about that, because I really had outsmarted them. [laughs].

SH: Well, these are the kind of stories we want.

KP: That was a great story to end with. Well, thank you again.

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

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