

INTERVIEW

Verne L. Markel

YEAR

2007

**GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

**NAME:** Verne Markel

**DATE:** February 22, 2007

**PLACE:** Cimarron Kansas

**INTERVIEWER:** Joyce Suellentrop

**PROJECT SERIES:** Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

**BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:** Verne Markel was drafted into the Infantry in February, 1944. He went to Camp Roberts, California, for Infantry basic training and after a short leave was shipped from Vancouver, Washington, to Hawaii. After a month's training there he went on to Saipan and joined the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He participated in clearing the Japanese from the Peninsula islands of Okinawa and was nearby when Ernie Pyle was shot and killed. He then, spent April and May of 1944 in combat to defeat the Japanese on Okinawa Island, the final island of the war. He was injured and sent back to Guam where he was at the time of the bombing and surrender of Japan. From there, he came by ship to California and was discharged. He came home to farm north of Ingalls, KS.

**SUBJECTS DISCUSSED/COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:** Wartime training and combat experience were discussed. His return to his farm in Kansas and purchase of a new tractor and car were talked about.

**SOUND RECORDINGS:** 60 minute tape

**LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:** 1 hour

**RESTRICTIONS ON USE:** none

**TRANSCRIPT:** 20 pages

**ORAL HISTORY**  
**Markel, Verne L.**  
**Interview Date: February 22, 2007**

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**  
**Interviewee: Verne Markel (VM)**  
**Tape 1 of 1**  
**Side A**

---

**JS -** We will range far and wide here. The first question that we normally start with is: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**VM -** I think I was at Ingalls on Main Street.

**JS -** In what kind of a car?

**VM -** Model-A coupe.

**JS -** What did you think when you heard the news?

**VM -** I thought it was a heck of a deal and it shouldn't have happened. Otherwise I didn't think too much about it at the time.

**JS -** Were you a junior or senior in high school?

**VM -** Yeah, I must have been a senior in high school.

**JS -** You were not registered yet for the draft?

**VM -** I might have been registered because I don't know when they started registering. Whenever they started I was registered for it.

**JS** - Were you drafted or did you enlist?

**VM** - I was drafted.

**JS** - When was that?

**VM** - February of '44, I think.

**JS** - After you got out of high school, what did you do until you were drafted?

**VM** - I was supposed to be helping my folks on the farm.

**JS** - But you weren't?

**VM** - I was, but I did a lot of running around, too.

**JS** - When you were drafted, you went to Fort Leavenworth or Kansas City?

**VM** - Fort Leavenworth and we had three or four days to mess around so I went to Kansas City, too. Fort Leavenworth was where I went in.

**JS** - Then you went to basic training?

**VM** - At Camp Roberts, California.

**JS** - What did you think about basic training?

**VM** - It made a lot of men out of boys.

**JS** - It was the physical basic training?

**VM** - It was Infantry basic training.

**JS** - When you went in had D-Day, the Normandy invasion, already occurred?

**VM** - I was in the Pacific.

**JS** - You went to basic training and then what?

**VM** - I got a furlough and came home for a couple of weeks and then I went back to Vancouver, Washington. I spent about a week there and we shipped out on a merchant ship that had five miles an hour as top speed. We finally ended up in the Hawaiian Islands at Honolulu, I think it was. We spent a month there and did some training there. After that I was shipped out to Saipan and then I was there about a month. Then I joined up with the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

**JS** - Your training was infantry?

**VM** - Yes.

**JS** - What did you think when you left the United States on that slow ship?

**VM** - Every morning I got up at what seemed like the same place that I went to bed.

**JS** - How many people were aboard the ship?

**VM** - It was loaded. It was a Merchant Marine ship and it was converted over to haul troops. I don't know how many, maybe 1500, but I wouldn't have the slightest idea.

**JS** - How many months or weeks after basic training did you ship out?

**VM** - About three weeks, I came home for ten days and went to Vancouver where we shipped out after three or four days.

**JS** - Did you know where you were going other than the Pacific?

**VM** - I think they told us we were going to Saipan, but anyway that is where we ended up after we went to the Hawaiian Islands. We took a months training there and went on to Saipan.

**JS** - What training did you do in Hawaii?

**VM** - It was infantry type training. There was one fellow from Gray County that I took training with in California and we went together to the Hawaiian Islands. After that he went somewhere and I went somewhere else. That is the only person I knew from Gray County.

**JS** - Then you went to Saipan?

**VM** - Yes.

**JS** - Can you describe what happened when you went up there?

**VM** - I suppose we took some more training on Saipan and that is where I joined as a replacement in the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. From then on I was with them.

**JS** - What was their objective or goal?

**VM** - It was an Infantry Division and before I joined them they had been on the invasion of Saipan and maybe Guam. I joined up with them right after that and we went around for some mop-up operations. Then we went to Okinawa.

**JS** - Did the training you received help you once you got over there?

**VM** - I think we would have been in bad shape if we hadn't trained.

**JS** - When you say a mop-up operation, what does that mean?

**VM** - After the area had been secured you go around and check all the caves and sections to make sure all the Japs were out and help gather up the equipment that belonged to United States. We got it all lined up again so it could be shipped somewhere else. It was cleaning up the island and getting rid of what few Japs that were still hanging around.

**JS** - Then you said you went to Okinawa, then what?

**VM** - We went in on the invasion, I think on April first of '45. Okinawa had an island itself and there was another little island connected to it. That was where the 77<sup>th</sup> Division went to clean that island out because they needed it for airbases for their planes. That is where Ernie Pyle got killed. I was about a couple hundred feet away when he got shot. After that island was secured, they could get their airbases built. Japan had some airbases there, but after we had it secured they made better bases for the American planes. We went back on to Okinawa and joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Division and a Marine Division. That is when we were at the south end and we started to work our way north.

**JS** - Was that a tough fight?

**VM** - It wasn't easy.

**JS** - Could you describe that? You were in a unit?

**VM** - I was in the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division; I don't remember what company I was in. I don't remember how many companies are in a division anymore. We were at the south end which was clear, but the farther north we went the more resistance we ran into. Somewhere along the line, I got hit with shrapnel. I was in a foxhole and an artillery shell landed at the edge of the foxhole and exploded. It gave me some shrapnel and damaged my hearing where I couldn't hear for about a week. That was the first time and the medics fixed me up and I never went to the hospital. I just stayed right with the Division and we fought our way north. The further we went the more the resistance was. The Japs got closer together because they didn't want to give up the island. Then on May 28<sup>th</sup> is when I got two bullets in the back on the shoulder. That is when I went to the hospital on

Okinawa. It was just a tent and they flew me back to Guam to the main hospital. I was in the hospital at Guam for six weeks. In the meantime, the atomic bomb fell and Japan surrendered. I wanted to go back to my outfit because they were going to Japan. They wouldn't send me back because they claimed they didn't need me. They shipped me back to Saipan and I drove a truck there for about a month, hauling supplies to the different bases. After that they rounded up a bunch of us, well, we volunteered. They wanted some people to go to some of the islands to disarm the Japs down there. At the time the war was going on they had bypassed a few islands and shut off all the supplies so they couldn't get anything to eat or anything else. They had just bypassed them and left the Japs sitting there. A bunch of us volunteered to go down there to disarm them. When we went to those islands we crossed the equator. I spent about two months there and I don't remember if I was in a company or if it was just a group of volunteers. Anyway, we got them rounded up. There was no resistance because all their ammunition had turned green from the saltwater that was there so there wasn't much danger.

**JS** - Did they know that Japan had surrendered?

**VM** - No, they didn't know it until we told them and, of course they wouldn't believe it anyway.

**JS** - When they surrendered to you what did you do with them?

**VM** - We rounded them up and put them on a ship and sent them back to Japan. I guess it is where they went.

**JS** - Were there a lot?

**VM** - There were several ship loads, so it was probably six or seven thousand Japs that we rounded up and shipped out. It was a string of probably ten or fifteen islands. After we got them all cleaned out of there we went back to Saipan and one day they came and asked me if I wanted to go home. I told them, "yes" so they sent me home on the aircraft carrier Independence that landed at San Diego or San Francisco. They sent me from there to Denver for my discharge. In the meantime my feet and legs all swelled up so they put me in the hospital in Denver for three or four weeks. I don't know if they found what was wrong or not. After that I got discharged. That was in March of '46.

**JS** - Could we go back to when you were injured the second time when you were shot? They took care of you right away and took you on to a hospital?

**VM** - The medics took care of as much as they could on the spot and then loaded me on a Jeep or something and took me to the hospital. I was in the hospital there for a week or so and they sent me on to Guam. Guam was a Navy Island

and for the Marines. There I was an Army man among the Marines and we didn't get along very well.

**JS** - Your back healed, did it?

**VM** - Yes, it healed alright but I was in there six weeks before they would release me. That was before we went to the islands to clean up. I got two Purple Hearts, one for my shrapnel and ears and the last one for my shoulder.

**JS** - When your ear was injured and you couldn't hear, you weren't fighting then, were you?

**VM** - Yes, I stayed right with the outfit. Really you didn't sit down and have conversations so I got along all right. After four or five days it got better so I stayed right with the outfit. The second time it took me out of commission and the war was over later on and I wanted to go to Japan with my outfit. The 77<sup>th</sup> Division went to Japan and I wanted to go with them, but they couldn't send me back there.

**JS** - You just wanted to get back with your outfit?

**VM** - Yes, I wanted to get to see what Japan was like, but they wouldn't let me do it.

**JS** - Where were you when you heard that the bomb had been dropped? Do you remember?

**VM** - I think in the hospital in Guam. That is where I was when Japan surrendered, too. I was in the hospital in Guam.

**JS** - What were the conditions when you were fighting off Okinawa? What kind of food did you have? Was it K-rations and was it hot?

**VM** - We didn't have a banquet for sure but we had the K-rations. If I remember right, they had a little can in there that you could light and heat up a cup of coffee or something like that. We lived on K-rations as long as we were in combat which weren't the best but it was better than some.

**JS** - Did you have tents?

**VM** - No, we would dig a foxhole and get down in it and about four or five days before I got hit the rains came along. We sat in the foxhole using our helmets to dip the water out. We had what they called a poncho, but it was a rain deal that you slipped over your head. Every time you lay down you tried to use it to keep dry, but it wasn't easy to keep dry. The foxhole got full of water and your feet got soaked up. It wasn't too good.

**JS** - It is a wonder you didn't get sick. Did they give you any medicine to take?

**VM** - I guess you just didn't have time to get sick. If you had gotten sick, it would really not have done you much good.

**JS** - What did you think when you were over there in the miserable conditions or did you have time to think about that?

**VM** - Before we went to Okinawa, we would get off for recreation for a week or two and play poker and stuff like that. I won enough money from playing poker that I sent enough home to buy me a new car and a new tractor when I got home. When we were on Okinawa, we had nothing. You were just on the front lines and that was that. You either stayed there until the war was over or till you got hit, one or the other. You didn't think too much about it because there were thousands of other people there who were under the same conditions. If it had been just me, it would probably have been a different situation. When you are with thousands who are under the same conditions, there isn't much thinking to do about it.

**JS** - Were you scared?

**VM** - Oh, not really.

**JS** - You knew what you were doing. You had training and skills.

**VM** - I really wasn't scared. It wouldn't have done you much good if you were. When we went into combat we had a choice of weapons and I took the B.A.R. which was a better weapon than the M-1 was.

**JS** - Why was it better?

**VM** - For one thing the M-1 kept getting plugged up in the dirt and mud. You would have to load it each time it fired. The other was an automatic that had forty rounds and had tripods up to the front. When you were in the foxhole you could set the gun out on the tripods and you had forty rounds. It was a pretty rugged weapon. As we would advance, we took whatever we wanted from the Japs. I had a saber that I took off an officer who didn't have any use for it anymore. If you knew how to read Japanese, it had the history of the Japanese on the handle. I got back to Saipan with it and we had a typhoon and it blew everything away. If it had it now it would be worth several thousand dollars.

**JS** - What was the typhoon like?

**VM** - A typhoon over there is the same as a hurricane in the Atlantic. I was in a typhoon when we were going from Saipan to Okinawa on a ship. Waves were

about fifty feet high. What they did was turn all the ships into the wind so the waves wouldn't hit the side of the ship and roll it over. They faced the wind and you went up and down. You didn't go up on the deck or you would get blown off. The other one was on Saipan before we went to the Islands near Okinawa. It blew the tent away and all our possessions and everything. They had two or three buildings that were really constructed for that. That is where we went while the typhoon was going on. Otherwise we were in tents all the time. Fact is, from the time I left the West Coast until I got back, all we had was tents. We were not in permanent building of any kind. When we were in combat we never even had a tent. We had a foxhole and a poncho.

**JS** - How would you dig a foxhole? Did you carry a shovel with you?

**VM** - Most generally there were two to a foxhole and you dug it deep enough that two people could sit down. You couldn't have your head above ground or it got blown off. I would say they were four to five feet deep and maybe four foot square or something like that.

**JS** - After you cleared out the enemy, you would dig another foxhole?

**VM** - We did most of the advancing at night and mostly stayed in the foxhole in the daytime because it was not very safe to be up where anybody could see you. Mostly we did all our advancing at night. We had artillery behind and there was a spotter with each company. They would radio back to the artillery to fire a shot and they would fire a shot. They would call back and say to bring it down or out further. Really, I think it was our own artillery that hit me because it was too short.

**JS** - You carried a shovel with you to dig the foxholes?

**VM** - We had one of those little folding shovels. You can buy them around in these Army Surplus stores. There are thousands of them.

**JS** - So, you would sleep in the daytime because you would be moving at night?

**VM** - You didn't do much sleeping. You would just doze for a few minutes and that was it. When I got hit and they took me back to the tent hospital on Okinawa, I don't know if they did anything to put me out or not. I was so starved for sleep that I slept through the whole deal there. When I finally woke up I was in a tent and they were already done operating on me and everything. It was probably a day or two later when I woke up. You don't get much sleep. You just get a chance to doze off for a few minutes and that is it. You don't pull up a pillow and go to bed and set the alarm clock.

**JS** - How do you keep going when you are so tired?

**VM** - Just tough, that is what all that training did. It really toughens you up.

**JS** - In the daytime when you were in the foxhole you were just sort of waiting?

**VM** - That is when we did most of our sleeping. That is why there were two in the foxhole. One was supposed to watch while the other person got some sleep.

**JS** - Did you have a blanket?

**VM** - No, we didn't. Just that poncho is all we had. We had a backpack that had our C-rations and ammunition but no blankets.

**JS** - What was the country like? Were there trees and was it hilly or what?

**VM** - When we went in on the islands around Okinawa there were quite a few trees around there. That is where Ernie Pyle got shot and killed. When we got back on Okinawa there might have been a lot of trees at one time. If there were, they were all torn up from the ships out there shelling the whole island. There were hills and those danged Japs had those hills so dug full of tunnels that some of those tunnels were probably half a mile long. They would get back in there and there was no way to get them out. If they were set up with flame throwers they could burn them out. Finally we got wised up that they had to have ventilation pipes every so far to get ventilation down in those tunnels. Every chance we got we would go to a pipe, uncap it, and pour gasoline down in it and throw a match. I didn't do that. It was the other outfit's part to do that, but that is how they got them out of the caves.

**JS** - You couldn't go in after them?

**VM** - You couldn't go in after them, because they were so well fortified that you wouldn't have had a chance. The only way was to try to burn them out and drop stuff down in the ventilation. Then they would run out and the flame thrower on a tank went off and they got fried.

**JS** - They really didn't surrender?

**VM** - Japs didn't believe in surrendering. They wouldn't surrender. I have this book about what went on everywhere. I would say during the whole combat time on all those islands, less than 500 Japs surrendered. They just flat would not surrender.

**JS** - What is the title of that book?

**VM** - In that Pacific part there, there is no makeup or anything on that.

**JS** - This was put together after the war?

**VM** - Yeah, they put it together as soon as the war was over and I got it when I was on Saipan.

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**

**Interviewee: Verne Markel (VM)**

**Tape 1 of 1**

**Side B**

---

**VM** - When they called me I was supposed to come down here, I had given this to my grandson to keep and I had to go get it to bring it in.

**JS** - You mentioned Ernie Pyle, so, he was there?

**VM** - He was over in Europe and when the war in Europe was over instead of coming back to the United States he came right to the Pacific to see what it was like over there. On that island that we had secured for airbases, we had a little road with ditches on both sides. This was before we had it secured, but I don't know why he did this. He and a couple of officers in a Jeep came down that road and the Japs started shooting at them and they jumped out of the Jeep and went into the ditch. Ernie stuck his head up and that is when he got it.

**JS** - He was very, very popular wasn't he? Did he write for Stars and Stripes?

**VM** - He stayed with the troops. Most of the reporters stayed in the back and wrote up what was told.

**JS** - You lost a buddy. You said you were very close; that must have been very difficult.

**VM** - About two hundred feet.

**JS** - Had he been with your unit for awhile?

**VM** - When he got over to the Pacific he joined up with the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He was with us the whole time. I don't know why he picked the 77<sup>th</sup>, but he did.

**JS** - Didn't they call him something like the soldiers' reporter because he did stay with the soldiers?

**VM** - He got up on the front lines, but he didn't carry a gun. He carried a notebook and papers. He never carried a gun.

**JS** - This does look like a good book.

**VM** - It is absolutely the truth. Most of these things you read about now are half truth and half guess, but that is absolutely the facts from start to finish in the Pacific.

**JS** - When you were over there fighting, were you aware of how many lives were being lost? Some of the men that I talked to said they knew lives were being lost but it wasn't till they got back home when they realized how many there were.

**VM** - Almost always when the island was secured, they would tell you how many got killed. On Okinawa in an eighty-one day campaign 12,520 Americans were killed.

**JS** - There were 110,000 Japanese killed. Were you there for the whole campaign?

**VM** - No, I was there from April first to when I got wounded on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of May.

**JS** - I know in Europe they established cemeteries. Did they establish cemeteries over there?

**VM** - I don't think so. They may have done that on Okinawa, but otherwise I guess they shipped the dead home if they could find them and get them gathered up.

**JS** - The training that you had received before you went over and in Hawaii; was that training sufficient or did you just learn while you were there, how to fight?

**VM** - It was basic infantry training. When I was at Camp Roberts, I didn't know whether I was going to Europe or the Pacific. They gave us training for the infantry which would have worked either way. It was good training.

**JS** - Did anyone give you any helpful advice about fighting like keep your head down?

**VM** - It didn't take long to figure it out.

**JS** - You learned on the job?

**VM** - That's right, it didn't take you long either.

**JS** - You said that you chose a particular weapon as you were moving in. Were you trained on that?

**VM** - We were trained on all types of weapons. When I was in Camp Roberts and our company was taken out on gun training, I was the best in our company

and I got a sharp shooter's medal for it. I am more proud of that than any of the rest of it.

**JS** - When you were growing up on the farm, did you hunt or why were you so good?

**VM** - I had done some hunting, but I guess I was just better than the rest of them. A farm boy always made a better soldier than a city boy and they knew it, too.

**JS** - Do you think you were physically tougher and mentally tougher?

**VM** - I think so and at that time young people still took instructions from their parents. Now, it would not apply.

**JS** - You met young men from all over the United States?

**VM** - Oh yeah, the fact is the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division is a New York Division. It originated in New York.

**JS** - Are there particular stories about good friends that you made during your time? Did you keep up with any of them after the war?

**VM** - Good friends that you made were not with you very long. Like on Guam when I was in the hospital, I was the only Army guy amongst the Marines and nobody got along with one another. On Saipan you had friends, but first thing you know one went one way and one went somewhere else. You didn't have any continuous friends. They were never the same ones.

**JS** - Were you able to send letters home and get letters from your parents?

**VM** - Yeah when you had time. On Okinawa I didn't have time to send any letters home. Other places where I was not in combat, I tried to send letters home. When you were not in combat about the only thing was to write home or play poker or something.

**JS** - You must have been a good poker player.

**VM** - I wasn't really good, but I made a deal of it. I think we got paid twenty-one dollars a month or something like that. When you got paid over there, there was nothing to do with it. There was no reason to have it so we would all get in a poker game. If I was the winner for that night, I would go and send it all home and then I wouldn't go back. A lot of guys would win one night and go back the next night and lose again. If I won it I sent it home.

**JS** - You said you had enough to get a car?

**VM** - I bought a new Nash for fourteen hundred dollars and a new Minneapolis-Moline tractor for sixteen hundred dollars.

**JS** - That was a lot of money for then.

**VM** - Yes, for twenty-one dollars per person, but if you had a hundred people sitting around with twenty-one dollars and there was no reason to try to save it. There was nothing to buy.

**JS** - Where did you learn to play poker?

**VM** - This buddy from down here by Montezuma that was on the Hawaiian Islands was the one who taught me to play poker and then he wished he never had done it.

**JS** - You probably took some of his money?

**VM** - He lived down here on a farm north of Montezuma.

**JS** - Were most of the young men married or not?

**VM** - Some were and some weren't.

**JS** - Did most of them smoke and did you smoke?

**VM** - All of them smoked. All of us smoked and the Army furnished free cigarettes in your ration pack for your meal. Everybody smoked.

**JS** - What about drinking? There were probably no opportunities to drink?

**VM** - On Saipan and on those Peninsula islands when we had a night off, a bunch of us might get together and buy a case of beer or something like that, but when you were in combat you didn't do any of that. You tried your best to stay alive and that was it.

**JS** - Certainly while you were over there, there were holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas. Were you even aware of holidays?

**VM** - They didn't mean anything. A holiday over there, at that time was just another day.

**JS** - Were you able to receive mail from your parents?

**VM** - Yeah, it sometimes would be a month or longer before you would get it.

**JS** - Did they send you anything?

**VM** - My folks did, they wrote to me quite a bit.

**JS** - Did they send packages? Some people said they got cookies but they were all crushed to crumbs.

**VM** - In the Pacific the humidity is always 100% and the temperature is around a hundred degrees so something like that wouldn't have gone over very well. Over in Europe that would have worked pretty nicely, but not in the Pacific.

**JS** - In your rations you got chocolate bars and things like that?

**VM** - Those K-rations had some kind of candy bar in them, but they were the type that didn't melt. I don't know what they were made out of but it tasted kind of like chocolate. Really when we were on those islands I ate in the kitchen and on Saipan I ate in the kitchen. In the hospital in Guam I ate in the kitchen, but other wise the C-rations were it.

**JS** - When you were sitting around visiting with your fellow soldiers, did you talk about what you missed the most?

**VM** - Oh, I suppose we would go around showing everybody pictures of our girl friends.

**JS** - When you started home was there one thing you wanted to do, a particular meal or something like that?

**VM** - Not really.

**JS** - Did it seem like a long time that you were over there?

**VM** - From the time I left home until I got back was a little over two years, but there wasn't anything that I really wanted.

**JS** - Just to get home and get that new car?

**VM** - Yeah, but I didn't have the new car then because the dealer was in Garden and my folks had him order it, but that was when they were rationed. I had to get home and the veterans had the first chance of buying that stuff so I had to get the papers filled out so I could buy it. It took a couple of months before I got home before they finally got it shipped. American Motors shipped it out. Everything was shut down for wartime. When I got it, it had wooden bumpers on it because they couldn't get any chrome. It had wooden bumpers bolted onto it and maybe four or five months later they got around to sending chrome bumpers out for it to fix it like it was supposed to be.

**JS** - Was rationing still in effect then, like for gas and sugar?

**VM** - That was over when I got home or I don't remember it. It was on when I left. I know you had to have ration tickets to buy gas.

**JS** - Even for tires?

**VM** - Yes, you had to have rations for everything.

**JS** - We will come back to when you came home. When you were in the Pacific, did they educate you in any way about the Japanese and how they fought before you went there?

**VM** - Yeah, they gave you an idea of what they would do if they got a chance to do it. That was the point; you didn't want to give them the chance.

**JS** - I know you learned to take orders, but when you look back at that experience, how else do you think that experience changed you or affected you in your life?

**VM** - It made you a lot stronger as far as all that training, and I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience then, but I wouldn't do it again for ten million. I don't know if it made any difference in my life or not.

**JS** - When you came home, did you talk about the war much?

**VM** - Not very much, not unless somebody was asking.

**JS** - Is there a particular story that you might tell them or an experience?

**VM** - No, I just went over there and was in the hospital and crossed the equator twice.

**JS** - You were coming home. Did you know what you were going to do when you got home?

**VM** - I was going to farm so I had a tractor ordered. Fact is I had some ground rented before I was drafted and the folks tried to keep the farm going so I knew I was going to farm when I got back. That's what I wanted to do too.

**JS** - How long did it take to get the tractor that you had saved money for?

**VM** - I think it only took about three or four months after I got out and got the papers signed. You had to have the papers signed to go get that stuff. You couldn't just go buy it. I got the tractor and I was supposed to pick it up at Dodge

City. I picked it up and rode it home on the highway. I'll bet there were a half dozen people that stopped me and wanted to buy that tractor.

**JS** - Did you tell them you won that fair and square through poker? Did it have the regular rubber tires on it?

**VM** - Yes, it had rubber tires.

**JS** - At that time you could just drive it on the highway?

**VM** - Yeah, they had rubber tires then, but I could have doubled my money on the dang thing if I had sold it. That wouldn't have been fair because I had the right to buy it, but I was supposed to keep it. That is what I did.

**JS** - What time of the year did you get home then?

**VM** - In February.

**JS** - Then you started farming then?

**VM** - I left in February and got back in February so I was gone two years, total.

**JS** - Then you got married?

**VM** - I got married the fifteenth of March after I got back. That is where most of my letters went to.

**JS** - Did she save your letters?

**VM** - I don't think so.

**JS** - Did you save the ones she wrote to you?

**VM** - No, you couldn't save them over there because you didn't have room. It isn't like these people nowadays on airplanes. I see them dragging along two or three bags. You didn't do that because there wasn't room for it and in the second place, they wouldn't let you do it anyway.

**JS** - How did you get water to drink?

**VM** - They had tablets when we were in combat; we would dip the water out of a foxhole or anyplace you could find it and that purified the water. It wouldn't clean it but it would purify it. That is how you got water to drink when you were in combat. When you weren't in combat you had regular water at the mess hall and stuff like that.

**JS** - Was it hard to drink that?

**VM** - Not when you were thirsty.

**JS** - Is there one thing that you think should be on tape that we haven't covered? Was there a particular fellow soldier or an officer that was significant or important or that you remember for a particular reason?

**VM** - In combat there wasn't. When you were back before that, you would have one that you liked better than the rest. In combat you just didn't have time to pick out the best or the worst. You would have a buddy in the foxhole and when we would move up somewhere else, they would change around. You never had the same buddy. They didn't want people to bet too buddy-buddy or they might forget what they were up there for.

**JS** - When you were not in combat but sleeping in tents, did you have a bedroll or blanket or something?

**VM** - It was these Army cots that you have seen that fold up. We had a mattress and a blanket or a sheet. They had a net that you could slip a rock in to hole down. In the Pacific if you didn't have netting, the bugs would eat you up at night.

**JS** - Were they mosquitoes?

**VM** - Yeah, mosquitoes and everything, all kind of bugs. You had the netting tucked under the mattress on three sides. When you got in bed you tucked it in the other side. If you didn't have that net you wouldn't sleep very much.

**JS** - Did you have any kind of insect repellent or did they even make it then?

**VM** - No, in combat you would be awake 99% of the time so if there were bugs you could swat them. You didn't get much sleep in combat. Maybe you would doze for five minutes at a time. That is why when I got shot twice in the shoulder at the same time, when they operated on me I didn't know a thing about it. I don't think they put me out. They just deadened it and I was so starved on sleep that I just went to sleep; and I didn't know when they moved me from one place to another. When I finally woke up I was on an army cot in a tent. Man, you can get so sleepy, but you don't dare to go to sleep. If you do you might stay asleep.

**JS** - When you are that tired, you probably would make mistakes, I would think.

**VM** - I suppose, but the other side could too, you know.

**JS** - When you were shot, did you know immediately that you were shot?

**VM** - I had a backpack on and it knocked me down. I didn't actually know I was shot. I thought maybe that it hit the backpack. It went through the backpack and into my left shoulder from the back. They told me later when I was in the hospital in Guam, if it had gone any further it would have stopped my heart, but it didn't quite get there.

**JS** - Would you have considered that luck or God looking out for you or would you have even thought about that?

**VM** - Luck, I don't think really anything was looking out for me. You either got it or you didn't. That is all there was to it. There were two different types. I had the million dollar type that meant you got sent back to the hospital. The other type was that you were dead. That was it.

**JS** - Is there anything else that you might want people who read these in the future to know?

**VM** - I know one thing. American had the best Army of anybody in the world. It was just so much different than it is now. That is what gets me.

**JS** - Certainly, in your lifetime you have seen a lot of changes.

**VM** - In World War Two we were attacked so we had a perfect reason to kill them because they attacked us first. This Vietnam deal and in Korea and Iraq, we weren't attacked. It seemed like when we were attacked, nobody could beat us, but when we weren't attacked it didn't go so well.

**JS** - It is not going so well over there now, is it?

**VM** - Guys over there, I know, are doing the best they can, but when you know you have got to do it or they are going to take over the country. Japan would have done that, probably, if they had a chance. It makes a lot of difference how you think about it and how you fight. When they are over there fighting over a bunch of lies that is a bad deal.

**JS** - When you came home was there any thought in you maybe wanting to go to Korea and fight?

**VM** - No way. I had two boys over there, though. Not in Korea, but in Vietnam. One of them got killed over there. We had three boys and two of them went to Vietnam.

**JS** - Did they ask your advice?

**VM** - Not really, they were in college and they joined up with ROTC and I thought at the time it was a good deal. It more or less made them grow up and made

men out of them. I didn't know that the Vietnam deal was coming along or I would not have let them go in. That is how they had to go over there. I feel sorry for them because they really didn't accomplish anything and they did their best.

**JS** - Sometimes it makes you wonder about war, period. Is there anything else that you want to say? I have covered the questions and you have talked about some things that other people hadn't. I think your memory is very good.

**VM** - At least I didn't go to Canada or declare as a Conscientious Objector. When you are attacked you should feel like fighting for your country. I probably would not have gone if I had not been drafted, but I didn't regret being drafted. I didn't regret being over there either. There was a purpose for it. Korea and Vietnam and this war, there is no purpose for it.

**JS** - When you went in, in your training, did they talk to you about why we were in and democracy and things like that?

**VM** - Everybody knew why we were in.

**JS** - When you were in combat, did you know how the rest of the war in the Pacific was going?

**VM** - You didn't have the slightest idea when we were in combat. On Okinawa we knew that was the last island.

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**

**Interviewee: Verne Markel (VM)**

**Tape 1 of 1**

**END**