Video Recording Log
Civilian Merlin Arthur Taber

1. Name and address of collector of interviewer.

Name of Donor/Interviewer: Jim Meadows
Address: 300 N. Goodwin
City: Urbana
State: Illinois
Zip: 61801
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Partner organization affiliation (if any): WILL AM-FM-TV

2. Name and birth date of the veteran or civilian being interviewed at is appears on the Biographical Data Form:

Name of Veteran/Civilian: Merlin Arthur Taber
Birth Date: 11/24/1926

3. Recording format
VIDEO type: Mini DVD

4. Estimated length of recording (in minutes): 94 minutes   Date of recording: 07/27/2007

5. Location of recording: WILL AM-FM-TV, 300 N. Goodwin Ave, Urbana, IL 61801

6. Please log the topics discussed in the interview in sequence.

00:00 Introduction
00:20 Background—grew up on dirt farm in Iowa—Quaker church and boarding school—mother’s side of the family Methodist
03:00 Quaker view of war—reasons against violence
04:45 Asked for Conscientious Objector (C.O.) status on religious grounds—3rd alternative to volunteer for medics
06:00 Decided proscription against killing was sound logically—Quaker in sympathy and intellect
07:00 C.O.—going against tide—4E status
08:45 Mother’s family tried to respect his wishes—stayed on polite side
09:30 Cousin in Navy—in medical field—knew other C.O. medics
10:10 Turned 18—sent to Fort Leonard Wood for exams—psychiatry exam
11:00 Called up—subject to authority of government, but C.O. camps administration farmed out to Quakers, Mennonites, Brethren—three peace churches—civilian public service camp—roads, dams, mental hospitals
13:00 Project to develop irrigation facilities on Columbia River, ND—mixed concrete, shoveled sand, made pipes, built roads, ditches in old C.C.C. building
14:40 Typical day—work, meals, discussion—barracks
16:30 Some not sure how they got there
17:00 His barrack—Midwest farm boys
17:15 New for him to see different kinds of people—dirt farm kid—did not see many types of people when growing up
18:00 College 1.5 years—William Penn College—Quaker
18:45 Structure and routine like C.C.C. Camp
19:30 Peace Churches paid for them—U.S. government did not
20:15 Trenton—gas rations—going to town—camp members got cold reception in town—got bad haircut because barber found out was in CPS camp
21:40 At camp March-June—war was winding down
22:35 Volunteered to fight fires in Southern California because bored—wanted to see world
23:35 Work at California—smoke jumpers, rangers, fire fighters—assigned to Ranger base in valley below San Bernardino National Forest
24:30 Fires—lightning fires
25:30 Forest Service barracks—Forest Ranger—boss
26:00 6 CPS people together in barracks
26:50 Forest Ranger—like ND managers—worried about fires only—worked hard
27:15 Got to L.A., San Diego—adventures
28:05 First experiences of segregation and race relations—trip South with friend
32:55 End of fire season—forest service wanted them gone
33:20 Volunteered for medical experiment in Philadelphia—yellow jaundice/Hepatitis A—wanted to see East Coast—unit set up in fraternity house—30-50 men in units—his unit about 12 men—his group caught Hepatitis A—several C.O. men died from Hepatitis A
36:45 Didn’t have clear picture of risk of experiment
37:30 Told not to do anything strenuous because would feel fine but really still sick—did not listen—took job as farm help—passed out and fractured skull
39:30 Sent to public charity ward because no money to send him anywhere else
42:00 Late summer, 1945—war ending—sent to Byberry
43:00 Sent to Byberry Mental Hospital in NE Philadelphia—“snake pit”—6,000 patients, 2-3 physicians—20-30 nurses, lots of attendants—hired unemployable people—20-30% elderly individuals, or syphilis cases
45:15 Assigned to violent building—day room—hundreds of men in room—job to break up fights
47:15 Started smoking habit
47:35 Unpleasant, difficult job—men unpredictable—would attack attendants and other patients
48:10 Humane type/naïve—felt sorry for patients—decided would have career in bettering mental health services
49:00 Career—grants and organizations to develop programs—community care
50:50 CPS—correspondence
52:15 Those in CPS didn’t expect to get same respect as those in uniform—didn’t appreciate it—self examination because didn’t join fighting Germany when it was the thing to do
Friend—photographer—took photos of concentration camps
Led to read world history, war histories—self examination
WWII—oil war
[Tape transfer]
Examining self—pacifist—C.O.—led to conviction of personal C.O. status—religious conviction and violence—self-defeating
Clear to a lot of people in 1938-1939 that Hitler should be stopped—lots of leaders dealt with him
At early stage international approval, economic constraints
A lot of businesses continued to do business with Germany—strategic bombing to avoid American interests
Civil War—hindsight—had to find because of the South—abolitionism provoked fear in South, was inflammatory
If situation had not been inflamed in South—could have come to political abolition of slavery
Lifelong preoccupation of studying war
CPS—mental hospital—discharge—closed unit at Byberry
Major in sociology—worked in factory as carpenter—MA in social work
University of Iowa hired him for project—got PhD in sociology—career in research
In touch with CPS later—not reunion person, no lifelong connections
Peace activism
Vietnam War—CPS—draft for Vietnam—traveled to D.C. to lobby against draft
Des Moines Register—sent letter to editor—explained why refused to register for draft because objection to war—men in suits came to village to ask people about him—FBI—never arrested but could have been
Vietnam protesting
Asked to talk at Champaign library on C.O. experience
Doesn’t know why people interested
Most difficult experience—mental hospital—changing bed of man with syphilis—was like a hollow shell
B-26 ward—most violent of violent men—heroic and beautiful—boxers from Philadelphia that became drug addicts—chained to beds
One man had to be taken to hospital
Siblings—brother C.O. in Korean War
Great grandfather C.O. in Civil War—father C.O. in WWI
Sons—C.O. in Vietnam war but not called up
Mother’s side—no C.O.s
Boarding school—Quaker meetings when young—Quaker college
Once you take a position, become stronger because have to justify having taken position
What people today should know—young men volunteering for service—disproportionately low income, from small cities—hope to find career, be useful, serve community—have no idea what they’re getting themselves into—become very disturbed
No draft for this war for political reasons—war wouldn’t last a week if there was a draft
Conversations with average people—easier to talk about issues than in past
Knee-jerk reaction to support president, war, troops
Change in nature of violence—reduction of violence
If people have a decent income they’re not interested in war—people with money don’t have to go
Terrorists have nothing to live for—willing to die for something
Came to Illinois because of job offer—assistant professor at University of Iowa
Teaching
Retired 1990
Vietnam War protests
[Wrap up]