

**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  
Telephone: 217-353-7300  
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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—3<sup>rd</sup> 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 His group ingested human waste—did not know it at the time
- 38:30 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

- 53:30 Friend—photographer—took photos of concentration camps
- 54:45 Led to read world history, war histories—self examination
- 55:20 WWII—oil war
- 56:15 [Tape transfer]
- 56:20 Examining self—pacifist—C.O.—led to conviction of personal C.O. status—religious conviction and violence—self-defeating
- 58:15 Clear to a lot of people in 1938-1939 that Hitler should be stopped—lots of leaders dealt with him
- 58:45 At early stage international approval, economic constraints
- 59:15 A lot of businesses continued to do business with Germany—strategic bombing to avoid American interests
- 59:50 Civil War—hindsight—had to find because of the South—abolitionism provoked fear in South, was inflammatory
- 01:01:30 If situation had not been inflamed in South—could have come to political abolition of slavery
- 01:02:15 Lifelong preoccupation of studying war
- 01:03:15 CPS—mental hospital—discharge—closed unit at Byberry
- 01:04:30 Majored in sociology—worked in factory as carpenter—MA in social work
- 01:05:45 University of Iowa hired him for project—got PhD in sociology—career in research
- 01:06:15 In touch with CPS later—not reunion person, no lifelong connections
- 01:07:50 Peace activism
- 01:08:30 Vietnam War—CPS—draft for Vietnam—traveled to D.C. to lobby against draft
- 01:09:05 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
- 01:09:50 Vietnam protesting
- 01:10:30 Asked to talk at Champaign library on C.O. experience
- 01:11:00 Doesn't know why people interested
- 01:12:00 Most difficult experience—mental hospital—changing bed of man with syphilis—was like a hollow shell
- 01:13:15 B-26 ward—most violent of violent men—heroic and beautiful—boxers from Philadelphia that became drug addicts—chained to beds
- 01:15:30 One man had to be taken to hospital
- 01:17:15 Siblings—brother C.O. in Korean War
- 01:18:00 Great grandfather C.O. in Civil War—father C.O. in WWI
- 01:18:30 Sons—C.O. in Vietnam war but not called up
- 01:19:30 Mother's side—no C.O.s
- 01:20:00 Boarding school—Quaker meetings when young—Quaker college
- 01:21:30 Once you take a position, become stronger because have to justify having taken position
- 01:22:10 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

01:25:10 No draft for this war for political reasons—war wouldn't last a week if there was a draft

01:25:45 Conversations with average people—easier to talk about issues than in past

01:26:30 Knee-jerk reaction to support president, war, troops

01:27:45 Change in nature of violence—reduction of violence

01:28:30 If people have a decent income they're not interested in war—people with money don't have to go

01:30:15 Terrorists have nothing to live for—willing to die for something

01:30:30 Came to Illinois because of job offer—assistant professor at University of Iowa

01:31:30 Teaching

01:32:25 Retired 1990

01:32:45 Vietnam War protests

01:33:10 [Wrap up]