

**A Veterans Oral History**  
**Vincent Rambeck**  
[2-2014]

**Heritage Education Commission**  
[www.heritageed.com](http://www.heritageed.com)  
Moorhead, MN

In 2000, Bev Paulson, Heritage Education Commission member, developed a plan to record Veterans' oral histories, starting with WW II Veterans. Bev made a significant personal donation to start our Veterans' oral history project, which was supplemented by other concerned individuals; we have recorded 65 oral histories of WWII veterans plus a few Korean War and Vietnam War Veteran. The project is ongoing.

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Interviewee: Vincent Rambeck (VR)  
Interviewer: James Soderberg (JS)  
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**Transcript**

**JS:** There. Get this going. I'll just set that closer to you. They want to hear you, not me. Can you just tell me your name and . . .

**VR:** **Vincent Rambeck and you want my . . .**

**JS:** Yeah. When were you were born and . . .

**VR:** **October 26, 1924.**

**JS:** Nineteen-twenty-four.

**VR:** **Reynolds, North Dakota.**

**JS:** Okay and who were your parents and where did they come from?

**VR:** They both – my dad was born right there a mile east of where I was born at Reynolds, North Dakota. And she was born down in Illinois and moved in there a mile south of where I was born. So they got to know each other pretty easily. And they ended up with six kids and a mortgage and finally wound up here because of that mortgage.

**JS:** Um hum. So how many brothers, you had six brothers and sisters?

**VR:** I had – there were six of us altogether.

**JS:** Um hum.

**VR:** I had two sisters and four brothers, you know.

**JS:** Okay and were they in the service too, or . . .

**VR:** The oldest brother was in the service but he had the easy end of it.

**JS:** Um hum.

**VR:** He went from the farm lean and hard and working and when he came back on furlough he had gained weight noticeably. I never gained any weight in the Army. They run my butt off. He got into something easy.

**JS:** And what branch of service was he in then?

**VR:** He was in the Army, too.

**JS:** In the Army, too? Okay.

**VR:** Yeah., he wound up in France as a mechanic for an artillery-spotting plane and, of course, then he went back behind the lines in a safe area. I was a scout out in front as we advanced. So . . .

**JS:** Um hum. And what did you do before you went into the military, or into the Army?

**VR:** I was – well I grew up on the farm there. And I was deferred one year by a farmer, who had a lot to do and no hired help. And then we came here and I spent three months here, and got drafted and gone.

**JS:** Okay, so you did get drafted then?

**VR:** Oh, yeah, yeah. Um hum.

**JS:** What year was that? Nineteen . . .

**VR:** In 1944. Getting late. I wasn't one – Pearl Harbor came along, I was only 17 years old; and just turned 17 and a senior in high school. I don't think I knew where Pearl Harbor was.

**JS:** Did you – do you remember that day Pearl Harbor was attacked?

**VR:** Oh yeah. Yeah. We heard all about it. Before that I don't think I knew where Pearl Harbor was. Yeah. There were two guys in my hometown that had – oh, they were older than me by two or three years; and they had joined the Navy. Oh, the depression was still going and there wasn't much to do and they just joined the Navy. And they were at Pearl Harbor onboard the Oklahoma, and they're still there, yeah – good-bye. That got our attention.

**JS:** Yeah, I bet it did.

**VR:** I knew them both.

**JS:** And you were in the Army, then, and where did you go for basic training?

**VR:** Camp Hood, Texas. It's the offshoot of Fort Hood, Texas. And I spent 17 weeks there; 17 weeks getting trained to know all the guns and all the infantry tactics and mortars and machine guns, and – oh, whatever – everything – hand grenades. We had to know all that stuff so we could step into the gaps in the ranks and fill in and be ready to go without having to get goofed up and scared. And we were well trained.

**JS:** What– what do you remember most about the training?

**VR:** The heat, Texas heat, it was hot there. “Cause we got there in April and we got through in August. It was hot. Yeah, but we were pushed pretty hard. We didn't gain any weight. I lost weight. I didn't have much to lose, you know.

**JS:** And so after basic training, where did you go then and what did you do?

**VR:** I should have gone to some unit in Europe right away, but there was a new division being put together at, oh, Fort Benning, Georgia. And I got sent to there and into that new division. Yeah and went across as a new division then.

**JS:** What – do you remember what division that was?

**VR:** Seventy-first here, one or the other.

**JS:** Seventy-first?

**VR:** Yeah, that's it. What's over here? Something different. It's a patch there, too, but I – that must be, must be occupation from Europe, yeah.

**JS:** Okay. So what did you do exactly? Was it infantry or . . .

**VR:** **Infantry and that. Yeah. Infantry. Yeah, we were attached to the Seventh Army to begin with, General Courtney Hodges. And then, when Patton's tanks got across the Rhine River, over that famous bridge that didn't fall down, then they took us away from the Seventh and got us into Patton's Third for that rat race across Europe.**

**JS:** Okay. So you shipped overseas from Fort Benning then?

**VR:** **Well, yes. We left, well – it was from Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. I got to stop and think of those things. It's so long ago. We shipped out of Camp Kilmer. Yeah. I remember it was kind of cold the first couple of days and then all of a sudden it was warm. We were into the current. What do they call that? That warm current?**

**JS:** The gulf coast, the gulf current?

**VR:** **The gulf stream, yeah.**

**JS:** Yeah, the gulf stream.

**VR:** **That's it, yep.**

**JS:** So when did you get aboard ship to leave for Europe?

**VR:** **Well, we didn't get over there until January of '45.**

**JS:** Forty-five?

**VR:** **Yeah, so we weren't in combat long, yeah. It was interesting and we were in convoy all the way and destroyers zipping around and destroyer escorts. I understand that we never lost a troop ship in World War II. They were pretty careful about them.**

**JS:** And how long was the trip over there?

**VR:** **Fourteen days. You're geared to the speed of the slowest boat; otherwise, you wouldn't be a convoy. You'd be stretched out. Yeah.**

**JS:** And do you – any special memories on the trip over or . . .

**VR:** **I was seasick.**

**JS:** You were seasick?

**VR:** **If the weather was choppy, I was seasick. Not everybody was, but I was. I was okay laying down, but standing up, ooh; I tend to be that way.**

**JS:** Were there quite a few soldiers, then, that were seasick?

**VR:** **Yeah. Yep. There was one guy there that never got seasick and he was giving me a hard time. He didn't help.**

**JS:** So did you get many special friends on the way over there?

**VR:** **Special friends?**

**JS:** Yeah.

**VR:** **Well, you always had special friends. Yeah, even in basic training, you know. Yeah.**

**JS:** Do you stay in touch with them at all or . . . keep in touch?

**VR:** **What you say?**

**JS:** Keep in touch with them?

**VR:** **There was one guy I kept in touch with. He's dead now, too. I'm one of the few left, if any. Yeah. It was one guy in basic training that I didn't know, 'cause I was new in this area, but we discovered we were in the same company down there, or same battalion as it may have been. He came over to see me different times. But he lived right here south of Mountain. I didn't know him. I was brand new here. I had no idea who they were. But he's dead and gone, too now, I think. Yeah.**

**JS:** And where did you end up landing at, in Europe?

**VR:** **Landing? Well, we got into, ooh, the south – south part of England there. I can't think of the town now. We spent the night in the harbor there. And the next day, in daylight, we crossed over to Le Havre; and we walked off onto the deck is all, nothing to do. The fighting was over in France somewhere. In fact, I think they were just hanging back waiting for the Air Force to soften things up. I think so. And so there wasn't much happening right then. And then finally we got going, moving up. We got up to where the Siegfried Line had been, or was. The Maginot Line had been but they tore that out. Once France fell, they had to tear that out. After spending all that money making it and then have to tear it out and kiss it good-bye. You couldn't even tell where it was. No. 'Course it had been several years gone by there.**

**When did France fall in three, nigh of '40 – 1940? I think so. And this was in '45, so you couldn't even tell where the darned thing had been. But we were moving up at night in the moonlight; and, all of a sudden, I came out of some trees, and here's this fortification facing me. If they'd have been in there I'd have been dead right there. But they had abandoned the line, getting back across the Rhine River, I guess. I assume that. Yeah.**

**But, pretty soon, we were detached from the Seventh Army and sent to be part of the Third Army – Patton’s Third Army. And we went across the river, the Rhine, on a pontoon bridge that had been built. But to get down there, oof, it’s steep, riding in truck, I was glad to get down and across and back up to the other side. I don’t like water. Yeah.**

**JS:** So did you happen to see General Patton at all or . . .

**VR:** Did I what?

**JS:** Did you ever see General Patton?

**VR:** Just one time. Yeah, when the war was over, they brought us back as far as someplace in Germany there. We were down in Austria and met the Russians, so we had a ways to come back. It wasn’t right away, but they had us at this famous place where – oh, am I forgetting names – big airport there. And he had the whole division massed on the airport. And Patton and other generals were up there on the stand. And he spoke to us and said that we were going to the Far East. He didn’t say maybe. He said we were going. And, of course, he didn’t know about the big bomb coming up. That altered the whole thing. There was no use to send a division of men there if they weren’t going to be needed. So we didn’t go and this was in June, I guess, and in July – in August the bomb went off. Is that right, in August?

**JS:** Yeah.

**VR:** Yeah and we didn’t have to go then. Why go when there’s no need for it? It’s hard to imagine a bomb going off and a whole city disappearing.

**JS:** Yeah.

**VR:** And when the second one went off, that got their attention, so good-bye. I wonder if they still believe that their emperor is god. They did then. The emperor was god. They’d do anything for god, well. So . . .

**JS:** So, what sticks out most in your mind when you were over in Europe?

**VR:** What was on my mind?

**JS:** What memories or . . .

**VR:** Oh, I got memories of the whole darned – Southampton, England, that’s where we docked. Now it comes.

**JS:** Okay.

**VR:** We docked there overnight. And that's all I saw of England. But I had caught a cold on the shipboard. It was so bad I was thinking maybe I'd have to go back there to a hospital, and it finally went away. It was a cold like I had seldom had and I was wondering if I'd be able to keep going but, finally, after a couple of weeks, it was getting gone. And they moved us up to where things were happening. And it wasn't very vigorous; the combat wasn't very vigorous at that time. Finally, when we got across the Rhine, then it was go, go, go across Europe. The Battle of Regensburg is one thing I remember. We crossed the Danube River at that point, at four o'clock in the morning. And the air was full of tracer bullets going. I remember that. And our artillery had been firing all night, starting about (3 sec) six o'clock in the evening the day before, I guess, when we got into position there. They just kept firing and firing and they were still firing when – no, they stopped at four o'clock. Then we went across and an assault boats that appeared out of nowhere. Somebody had their head working to have them there on time. A whole squad of men would get on that boat and go across and the operator would bring it back and get more. Yeah. (5 sec) I never did see Regensburg, itself, except from a distance; but funny thing, I remember the name of the two towns, small towns there that we were supposed to take. (4 sec) Barbing and Straubing was the name of those towns. Barbing and Straubing, S-t-r-a-u-b-i-n-g and B-a-r-b-i-n-g. Now, don't ask me why I remember those names, but I do, yeah. They were our battalion objective. But they weren't resisting a lot. I remember one guy was laying dead to my left, pretty quick there, it wasn't long. And a few others died that morning. But we got by easy. The guys that hit the beaches, they didn't get by so easy. And I was in basic training at that time – almost glad of it. *[You could pour a cup of coffee.]*

**JS:** So, were you over in Germany then when the war ended or . . .

**VR:** We were in Austria.

**JS:** Austria.

**VR:** Yeah, we went way down to – (4 sec) what's the name of that – the Enns River. The Russians were coming from the other direction. That was their stopping point and we were coming and that's as far – so there wouldn't be any altercations or mistakes. When we got that far, we stopped. And after, I think the next day or two, it was three or four of us walk across on a dam and went over to the Russian side to mingle with them. I don't know how smart that was. Probably wasn't too smart, but nothing happened, yeah. I recall seeing one Russian guy, getting down in his full squat doing that Russian dance, you know. I don't what they call it. He could do it good. Well, I could do it too, then. Yeah.

**JS:** So did you mingle with the Russians quite, quite a bit or . . . ?

**VR:** Just a couple of hours and then we went back. That was it. We weren't really supposed to do that, I don't think; but they were across there, and we could see them. Okay. Nothing happened. We were Allies then, of course.

**JS:** Yes.

**VR:** **Yeah. I wouldn't do it now.** (3 sec) *[Say, I put a potato in there. Give it to the dog. (3 sec) I give potatoes to my dog and cats. Yeah. ]*

**JS:** Okay. So how long were you over there? After the war ended, did you stay?

**VR:** **I had a whole year of occupation.**

**JS:** Okay.

**VR:** **Yeah and that was interesting. And everything went good. Yeah, everything went good. The Germans were easy to live with. Well, they were defeated. There was no use to be fooling around.**

**JS:** How did the Germans feel about the Americans then?

**VR:** **Well, you'd find an odd one that was pretty bitter. But, mostly, they were congenial. Yeah. But then I'm related to them, so why not, on my mother's side. My dad was a Norwegian.**

**JS:** So what were your duties after the war was over?

**VR:** **Well, just being there and occupying, is really what it was; just the fact that you were there. If anything popped up, you would be called on, but we – nothing happened. They knew they were defeated and that was it. Just like the Japanese when those bombs went off, well they knew this was it. Good-bye. Be decent or else. Might be a third city go. So, I'm glad I wasn't in Japan then, rather be in Europe – my ancestry.**

**JS:** Yeah. Um hum. So you say you have some German ancestors?

**VR:** **My mother was mostly German, yeah. She wasn't born there. She was born in Illinois. Yeah. So . . .**

**JS:** So when did your family from Germany come over to the United States?

**VR:** **I never knew. They were Pennsylvania Dutch and they came here early, and I don't think I ever knew when they got here. I never heard. I'm not sure if she knew all of it. I suppose she did. But she was born in Illinois and her dad was born in Pennsylvania and they left there when he was one year old. They left there in 1848 and he was a year old; and there were 12 kids in the family. He was the first one. Yeah, came by covered wagon up to Illinois. Ooh, it must have been a long drag with a little baby in – in the wagon and probably one coming, but there was new land in Illinois and good land and hard to turn down. Finally, they got up here to the Red River Valley, where there really is good land. Yeah.**



**JS:** So, what was your opinion on your visit with General Patton. What did you think of General Patton?

**VR:** **Why, I thought this: That I'd do whatever he said to do. I'd jump for what he thought. He was pretty stern. He showed it on his face. He was stern. Yeah, I wouldn't have wanted to counter with him in any way, yeah. He was a good general, though, one of the top ones. They held up on his fourth star. Yeah. The other generals, they all got their fourth star after that and he didn't get his until he had died. He got it posthumously. (4 sec) I was on guard duty the day that he died. We didn't know. How could we? But the Officer of the Day came and told us that – told me. I was the Sergeant of the Guard. Told me that we should lower the flag to half-staff – General Patton had died (3 sec) – total surprise. We didn't know why. It was a car accident, of course; car and a truck. But that got our attention. Yeah.**

**JS:** So, you were over there a year after the war ended and . . .

**VR:** **I was there a full year for occupation. They didn't need us all then. They were discharging. The guys that had the most service came home right away. Like my older brother there, he came home right away. Well, no more war; here or in the Far East. I came home on a ship; it took us 10 days to get home, I guess, instead of two weeks.**

**JS:** Okay.

**VR:** **And I wasn't too seasick. It was a big old ocean liner. I know the name of it, too. Kind of forgot. Was it the George Washington, or something – always forgetting. It was a long time ago.**

**JS:** Um hum. And when you got back to the States, where did you get stationed then?

**VR:** **Where did I get off?**

**JS:** Yeah. Um hum.

**VR:** **We came back to the same place – Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and got off. I caught the first train. Well, we had to go to – what's that base that's south of Minneapolis, that's Fort Ben – Fort Snelling, it was. We had to go there to be discharged.**

**JS:** Okay.

**VR:** **Yeah, we weren't out of the Army until then. And then I took the first train home and came right here. I haven't gone away a lot. Just was heaven by comparison. I don't like big cities. I don't especially like traveling either. I like it here.**

**JS:** So what did you – how do you feel about your Army service or getting out of it?

**VR:** How did I hear about what?

**JS:** How did you feel about getting out of the service?

**VR:** I was eager.

**JS:** Eager?

**VR:** Eager to get back here, yeah. I had no thoughts about signing up and being a career man, but some did. There were some that were going to make a career out of it. Yeah.

**JS:** And what did you do once you got out of the service?

**VR:** Came right back here, and I worked on farms and worked here on this farm, and eventually I took over. My folks were getting so they didn't want to be here anymore. And they were going to Texas for the winter, and I was married to the girl next door over here – her mother (*referring to his daughter in the room*). Yeah. And I just stayed here. This was good. Yeah.

**JS:** So, when did you retire from farming?

**VR:** I was 81 years old when I retired. Yep. I milked cows until I was 64 and I kept a bunch of beef cattle, over a hundred, not hundred cows, but hundred cattle. And when I was 81, my renter wanted to take over the beef, so I stepped aside and let him do it. I had to take care of my wife, Elin, “\_\_+”. She was getting poor. She was eight years and eight months older than me, so she was getting poor and needed help and . . . But the renter took over the beef and that lasted not even three years, when he had enough of that.

**JS:** Once you're out of the service, did you use the GI Bill for anything?

**VR:** They had some kind of a program, veterans program here at school; some kind of veterans school that I went to. We got 90 some dollars a month which was nice to get at that time; I mean, I had nothing. Yeah, that's all I used it for. I didn't go to school. I could have. Yeah. I'm happy at what I did. I'm satisfied.

**JS:** And how would you like to be remembered?

**VR:** Remembered? Oh, the way I am here, sitting with my uniform on. I couldn't get the pants on. Tummy was a little bit too big. But everybody knows, everybody knows me around here and I wear this darned uniform. I wore it last fall to the Veterans Day thing, you know. But it wasn't easy to fasten then. I'm sitting here all winter, doing nothing, too cold. Be remembered, gee? Just as a veteran and a farmer. That's what I've been. Yeah.

**JS:** And how many children did you have?

**VR:** **She's the fifth one and I hope the last one. Yeah. She's the only one close to home. The rest are at Grand Forks; Minneapolis; Fresno, California; and Honolulu. Get a picture of the girl. (3 sec) Yeah, a granddaughter in Honolulu that doesn't look like me. Doesn't look like a Norwegian. She's bringing that picture here – the girl.**

**VR's Daughter:** This one?

**VR:** **Yeah.**

**VR's Daughter:** This is Naomi. And there is “\_\_\_” family.

**JS:** Oh, okay.

**VR:** **That's what family?**

**VR's Daughter:** That was at Doug's. Yeah.

**VR:** **Oh.**

**JS:** (3 sec) And this is, who is this now?

**VR:** **That's my great, my granddaughter.**

**JS:** Oh, okay.

**VR's Daughter:** Naomi Pua Nani; Castro is her last name.

**VR:** **Oh, Pua Nani, I'd forgot that. That's right. What does Pua Nani mean, again?**

**VR's daughter:** Sweetheart or flower.

**VR:** **Beautiful flower.**

**VR's daughter:** Beautiful flower.

**VR:** **That's right. That's what it means, Pua Nani, beautiful flower.**

**VR's daughter:** You should tell them about your badges, Dad.

**VR:** **My what, my badges?**

**JS:** The medals?

**VR's daughter:** The medals, rather.

**VR:** I can't really see that much.

**JS:** We can see them.

**VR:** Here's a Bronze Star; that's . . .

**JS:** Yeah, that's the very top one.

**VR:** Is that coming apart?

**VR's Daughter:** No it looks – oh, yeah, I guess it is. I'll have to fix it, Dad.

**VR:** Oh. Gee whiz.

**VR's Daughter:** But your Bronze Star is up here.

**VR:** Yeah, where'd that go to?

**VR's Daughter:** I got it. I'll leave it off.

**VR:** Yeah. What does that say on there?

**VR's Daughter:** European African Middle Eastern Campaign.

**VR:** That's a medal for there. And I had a Victory Medal, Occupation Medal – they're all here – and a Good Conduct Medal. I behaved myself pretty good, yeah. And the Bronze Star was for being a darned fool, I always say. When I was a scout, all the way across Europe and they were out in front. Whenever we were advancing, they were out in front, trying to catch “\_\_\_+”. So (3 sec) and there's a Combat Badge here somewhere. I don't know where it is.

**JS:** That's CIB, right there.

**VR's Daughter:** Oh, that's unhooked, too.

**VR:** That's what?

**VR's Daughter:** I'll have to hook that one, too.

**VR:** Oh, why?

**VR's Daughter:** It's coming loose.

**VR:** Is it?

**VR's Daughter:** But I'll get it.

**VR:** No, he's fastened okay. He's just clipped on there.

**VR's Daughter:** It's okay.

**VR:** That one there was sewed on, I guess, or partly sewed on.

**JS:** So is there any final thing you want to say about your military service that you'd like to pass onto somebody?

**VR:** Oh, I think I'm about the last – bring that picture. That rolled-up picture. I'm about the last one of the bunch, I think. One guy I kept track of and he was a dentist in Pennsylvania, and he's dead and gone now. Show him that. (8 sec)

**VR's Daughter:** There is my dad in the corner. That was taken in Fort Benning, Georgia.

**VR:** Yeah, taken before we went across.

**JS:** Yeah. Okay.

**VR:** There's a bunch of names I wrote on the back there. The guys that were closest to me. (16 sec)

**JS:** Yeah, that's pretty nice. That's a . . .

**VR:** (3 sec) Oh, my eyesight is too bad.

**JS:** I'm going to have to get a picture of that uniform.

**VR:** Yeah.

**JS:** These are some other pictures?

**VR:** You want me to stand up.

**VR's Daughter:** Recently.

**JS:** Yeah, those were more recent.

**VR's Daughter:** Dad had a chance to go to the World War II Honor Flight, yeah.

**VR:** Honor Flight.

**JS:** When did you do that one? Well, how long ago was that?

**VR:** (4 sec) Oh, four or five years, maybe.

**VR's Daughter:** Either four or five. Yeah.

**VR:** I'm wearing the uniform in one of those pictures.

**VR's Daughter:** In most of these you are. Yeah and Dad had a picture of him in his uniform  
Somewhere when he was 23, but we don't know where it is. I think my brother has it.

**JS:** (6 sec) Ann Zets (sp?).

**VR:** Yeah. She was a commander up here at the air base and she spoke at something  
here and I wore the uniform.

**VR's Daughter:** That'd be Memorial Day.

**VR:** And somebody got me a picture of it.

**VR's Daughter:** So people around here just kind of expect Dad to wear his uniform on  
Memorial Day. And, Dad, you have a lot of pride for the service you gave.

**JS:** Well, he should have.

**VR's Daughter:** Yeah, he should and that's nice to see.

**JS:** Yeah. Um hum.

**VR:** (3 sec) Yeah. Is that – anything else we're forgetting? That's all the pictures we  
have, I guess. (10 sec) Oh, that was taken over at – that was – yeah. That was  
Memorial Day. I don't know where she went to, the commander – lady commander.  
Oh there's quite a selection here – pictures. That guy's dead and gone. He was  
from Edinburg. (4 sec) Yeah. But I was one of the youngest ones, so I suppose I had  
the best chance. (6 sec) This must have been the Honor Flight, I guess. There's that  
guy from Edinburg again.