

EI-415

WILBUR VANDERGOOT

BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 20, 1910

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 30, 1993

RUNNING TIME: 1:42:22

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, Ph.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY AND ROY SWANSON

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WAYNE, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1996

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

THE NETHERLANDS, 1928

AGE 18

SHIP: "THE VEENDAM"

PORT: ROTTERDAM

RESIDENCES:

- **NETHERLANDS: HERLINGEN, FRIESLAND; WEIPERT, SOUTH HOLLAND**
- **US: Metropolitan NY, NY & NJ**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here today in North Haledon, New Jersey at the Christian Holland Home, or the Holland Christian Home, I guess. And I'm here with Wilbur Vandergoot, who came from The Netherlands in 1928 when he was eighteen years old. And I want to say that I'm very happy to be here, and I'm looking forward to hearing, I know you have a wonderful memory, so it will be very good to have on record and in our collection your remembrances of coming from The Netherlands. Why don't we start, Mr. Vandergoot, by your saying your birth date?

VANDERGOOT: Well, I was born in August 20, 1910.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

VANDERGOOT: Uh, in the province of Friesland, in the city of Harlingen.

LEVINE: Could you spell that, please?

VANDERGOOT: H-A-R-L-I-N-G-E-N.

LEVINE: And did you live in Harlingen until you left for the United States?

VANDERGOOT: I left Friesland in 1927, and moved to the southern part of The Netherlands ----- because my dad and I, we didn't get along.

LEVINE: Okay.

VANDERGOOT: Him being an old man, and I was a young fellow. That's how it is.

LEVINE: So where did you move to?

VANDERGOOT: I moved to the city of the Weiport. That is spelled W-E-I-P-R-D.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, um, now, the first, in the Frisian islands, where you lived most of your life until . . .

VANDERGOOT: It's not an island.

LEVINE: No, it's not an island.

VANDERGOOT: It's not an island.

LEVINE: Oh.

VANDERGOOT: It's, see, let me say this. The Frisians, they were a kingdom by 'emselfes. That was the Germans, the Frisian Islands, the East Frisians, and the West Frisians. That was one kingdom. But during the thirteenth century, we had a terrific flood. The dikes broke, and about a hundred and twenty thousand people lost their lives. That's why in the Frisian we had ----- see, part of all that's below the sea level, way below the sea level, so they had dikes built. And the Romans, when they invaded fifty years after Christ, they showed the Frisians how to build the dikes. And during --- in the thirteenth century by King Plijold [ph] the 13th, the dike broke and that whole part of the sea washed --- the land washed away. That's why when you have the ebb you can see. You can walk through that. Then when it come back in again, of course, they --- they're covered. That's why the Zuider Zee is pretty shallow. And now in --- during the 1928, when they started building the dike from -- from Friesland to North Holland ---- that is a very large, thirty-two kilometers long. And you also have a wide road over it, also made it so a railroad could go from [Not understood].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VANDERGOOT: Now, do I say too much?

LEVINE: No, no, no, no. That's fine.

VANDERGOOT: You stop me.

LEVINE: No, okay. So, now, what part of the Frisian . . .

VANDERGOOT: The Frisians.

LEVINE: The Frisians were you from? The west? The east?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah, western Frisian.

LEVINE: Western Frisian.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Well, um, tell me about your, well, what was your father's name?

VANDERGOOT: Uh, Johannes, like John.

LEVINE: And your mother, her name?

VANDERGOOT: Geerdje

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

VANDERGOOT: G-

VOICE: Double E

VANDERGOOT: E-E-R-DJ-E.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

VANDERGOOT: Diemersma. D-I-E-M-E-R-S-M-A.

LEVINE: Okay. And, did you have brothers and sisters?

VANDERGOOT: I had ----- my mom had eight daughters and --- no, wait a minute. We

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had eight children. Three sons, and five daughters.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where did you fall in the birth order? Were you?

VANDERGOOT: I was the youngest.

LEVINE: The youngest.

VANDERGOOT: I never knew my mom. She died when I was six months old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see.

VANDERGOOT: Then my father remarried, but the lady had four children. So that made twelve. And he had two children by my second mother, so that made it fourteen.

LEVINE: And what was your second mother's name?

VANDERGOOT: Lykje Wynie. Lykje is spelled L-Y-K-J-E, and W-Y-N-I-E.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, what, do you remember the house you lived in when you were a boy?

VANDERGOOT: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Could you describe it?

VANDERGOOT: Well, it was a three-story house. And my three younger sisters and I, we slept in one bed. And they usually put me on the foot end, since I was the only boy. Uh, but I only lived there till three. Then my father --- since my second mother didn't like the city life, she was more a farmer

---and they were well to do ---- so they bought a farm. And they moved from Harlingen to the city --- to the place of Hictun, that's spelled H-I-C-T-U-N.

LEVINE: That's when you were three years old?

VANDERGOOT: Yes. [Not understood] It's only about fifteen miles away from there. So that's where I grow up on the farm. And that is was my best life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you remember about the farm?

VANDERGOOT: Well, what I remember is we all had our chores to do. Uh, when I was about five, I had to milk the sheep. And is a --- I remember we had thirteen of 'em, and that was my job. Six o'clock in the morning --- I am five years old --- get the sheep, milk 'em. And sometimes one was a bad sheep; he pooped right in the pail. And, you know, I'd used to take it and I --- I throw it out. And just -- of course -- In those days --- look, you couldn't throw any milk away. My other sisters, they had to peel the potatoes. That was her job. And so each had a chore to do.

LEVINE: What was the farm producing?

VANDERGOOT: Uh, milk.

LEVINE: Milk, uh-huh.

VANDERGOOT: My father had about forty cows, plus the young stock, plus hogs. Like --not as ---- my sister had to take care of the hogs. Feed 'em in the morning before she go to school, take care of 'em at night. So they each had, and there was no electricity. All lights were carbide lights. Some other neighbors had kerosene. But we always had carbide lights.

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Had much brighter flame. But they're dangerous, when you live on a farm. And, you know, especially in the wintertime when the cattle are in the stable. See, the Friesian farmers, they're under all one roof. All the cattle and the humans. All under one roof. And all the hay which been harvested during the summer, that's all on one roof. And you know the Frisians had those big, have you ever been?

LEVINE: No.

VANDERGOOT: Oh, you ought to s--, that is interesting. Solely on, those homes disappear. Because with the wind, -- and modern equipment -- they have no buck stalls [ph] and they milk with the -- with the machine. We had to milk by hand.

LEVINE: So this was one big structure.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then there were sections off for the animals?

VANDERGOOT: That's correct.

LEVINE: And the hay.

VANDERGOOT: And the hay.

LEVINE: And the house.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VANDERGOOT: So, we lived, all of us. Chickens, dogs, all cattle except the sheep. They were in [Not understood]. But, and the hog. But the rest of 'em, we were all under one roof.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what did you do for enjoyment? What was fun for you when you were a little boy?

VANDERGOOT: Well, in springtime we climbed the roof. See, those farm homes -- they all had slate roofs. We'd lift 'em up. And then the birds, especially the starlings, they make a nest. As soon as the --- and, you know, in no time they have four eggs. And I'll climb the roof, and I get the eggs. That's how I get the [Not understood].

LEVINE: What did you do with the eggs?

VANDERGOOT: Well, sometimes you have enough; you make a pancake out of 'em. Sure. But they're ---- they're edible. People think that ----- you know, today those people there in -- in southern Europe, wouldn't they give for a handful of those little eggs, sure.

LEVINE: How about music or dancing or anything like that?

VANDERGOOT: No.

LEVINE: Nothing.

VANDERGOOT: No. We are the type, we -- our -- we were very strict. Uh, we'd go to church. I'm not saying that's going to bring you to heaven, but that's how we were brought up. We go to church twice on Sunday, and they had special wooden shoes. They were black, and during the daytime

we had regular, unpainted shoes. But on Sundays you were in your best suit and wooden shoes. They were --- like --- all painted clean. And we walked four miles --- go to school, go to the church, and they come back. And then you asked 'em -- will you do it again? So.

LEVINE: What church was it?

VANDERGOOT: That's the Chadesa Mira Kerk [ph].

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

VANDERGOOT: Well, let me say it this way. That's the Christian Reformed Church. That would be better. That's [Not understood].

LEVINE: And, um, did you go to school?

VANDERGOOT: Yes. The same, we had to walk four miles and we --- we take our little lunchbox with us. My sister had to carry it in the morning. Because if I carry it, I eat the good stuff out of it first. So there were two sisters and I, we went to that school. The rest of 'em already had graduated. There were about forty-five children in that school, two teachers. They had teacher and the younger one. And it's had two rooms, somethin' like this here, with a partition in between. And that was our school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember, what do you remember about school? Was it strict, was it . . . ?

VANDERGOOT: Yes. Uh, they were strict in the sense --- we were taught to, there's a lot of discipline. No talking. You have your assignment. And what I mean by assignment, we ---- the teacher put it on the board, and we have to copy that. Like --- for instance, part of Yugoslavia ---- we would have to

draw that on ---- we had paper, all to scale. And one day was spent for that. And another day might be on the history of the wars, of --- and of agriculture. And, of course, we had A and B just like we have. I think I only had eight grades. That's all I ever had. That's all the education I ever had. But by being -- it was well taught us. We had to read the notes. Our mother- like - still today, I can't read music. Although we hadda. But we knew all the ---- I knew all the capitals of Europe, of -- of -- if -- all that. We knew the history of the world. From time it was created, to the time that we were living. I knew the countries.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular family member?

VANDERGOOT: Yes. My ---it's strange --- oldest brother, we were eight years apart. And my oldest sister, she was like my --she became my ma. I be --- we had a good relation with all of 'em. But-- like I said --- my brother left in December 1921 for South Africa. And my second brother and I, we had to take him to the train. Now, our farm was like on an --- on a lake, and we had to cross it. And it was in the winter. We hadda -- we had to cross the lake. And so we had a sled, put his suitcase on it. It was dark. Because we each had to get the nine o'clock train, because he was going to get to his uncle who lived in the city that was easier for him to go catch, go to the Rotterdam. So as we crossed the lake, nothing happened. Coming back with the empty sled, we fell through the ice in the lake. And we were there for about, oh, fifteen minutes. My brother shot under the ice. But he --- somehow we got up. But since I was small yet and I had hold of the sled, I could get out. But we were at least fifteen minutes. And we called for help. But don't forget. It's country. There's nobody. But -- and my ---and the family were, you know -- since my brother left -- they -- were --- had been crying. So it was, ---I would say that night my Pop would have lost three sons. But we came home and when they saw us all drenched and ----- well we told 'em what

happened. So that's what happened. And there were at least twenty-two foot of water measured. That's how much water was standing there. Well.

LEVINE: Why did your oldest brother go to South Africa in 1921?

VANDERGOOT: Well, you know, in those years, Europe was bad, right after the war, World War One. Uh, there was no opportunity for us. I saw it already when I finished my schooling. I couldn't stay in there. Because you have to work for somebody else, and for peanuts. Well, let me say this. When I was, left grade school, I was thirteen years old. I was rented out for one year. I had to work by a farmer for a hundred guilders, and room and board. But I was paid a hundred guilders which is, at the time, like a hundred dollars. Let's see, that's ----- equal amount. But I didn't get the money. My pop got the money.

LEVINE: A hundred dollars for how long?

VANDERGOOT: For the whole year.

LEVINE: For the year.

VANDERGOOT: For the whole year. So . . .

LEVINE: And what was that like being rented out that way for a year?

VANDERGOOT: You know -- uh, see, you don't know no better. Like I said, there was no television, no radios. We had to make our own entertainment. So when we were still ---- as a boy ---- my father had a man working for him who was quite musical inclined. And he was very good with his mouth organ. And somehow my older sister got me a little mouth organ. And

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I learned. Sol became quite efficient with the mouth organ, yeah. Now I have a great big one. And sometime next --- on the 7th of December ----I have to play for the -- some children in our school to ---- 'cause they don't know about mouth organ.

LEVINE: Do you have a mouth organ? You have it at home?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. Well maybe you could, we could record your playing and put it with your tape of your story.

VANDERGOOT: Well ----

LEVINE: That would be nice to have on record. Well, um, okay. Uh, so, let's see. Um, how about food? Did you, were there kinds of food that you ate as a boy that you remember with particular fondness?

VANDERGOOT: See, that's a standard for Friesian. We had --- our breakfast was black bread with plenty of cheese on it. And always had sausages, dried sausages. See, in this time of the year -- in part of November -- the farmers -- the sh--- have a slaughter. They have a hog about four, five hundred pounds. And all that meat goes into the chimney, in the smokehouse. And then that's what eat during the coming winter. And a big hog like that. And also ---- since you had your own cattle --- sometimes there is on a farm something that is, well, too old to sell. So then we butcher it ourselves.

LEVINE: Did everybody have a smokehouse?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah. Every --- every house had a --- you know --- every farmer who

lived in this --- in the big building like that, ---- they have a smokehouse.
Sure, sure.

LEVINE: Was that anything that you had a part in, doing the smoking of the animals?

VANDERGOOT: No. Only thing is when the sausages were ready --- they all dried, then they hang 'em in the living room on a rack. Oh, you come in, and it might be a hundred sausages hanging there, you know, all little tied sausages. And they were delicious. Sometimes we'd sneak one. But it --- my Pop used to count 'em. And he say, "Hey, who's got that sausage? There's a sausage or two missin'?" Well ---

LEVINE: [Laughs] Is there anything else that you think of when you think of your life at that time?

VANDERGOOT: Well, let me say it this way. I've been in the United States now for sixty-five, sixty-four years. It has been good to me, the United States. I worked hard. We have a nice family. But, closest, I'm still Friesian. I'll never forget that. I go every other year. I go up and see it. But now I'm eighty-three years old. The people I used to -- the kids that I grew up with, they --- most of 'em --- are gone. And then when I come back, I can see the change. And that I don't like. The change from what it is today. It's so different.

LEVINE: What are some of the differences now?

VANDERGOOT: Now? First materialistic. They're all for themselves. Even the Friesians are all for themselves. They -- every home has a light, electric light. Every home has a television. The --- what's called the -- the -- the ---- the communion to sit in the living room and talk --- and talk about,

over a cup of coffee or a little bottle. You know what a bottle is?

LEVINE: I think so. [Both laugh]

VANDERGOOT: Okay. Well, then you have fellowship, and that's gone. Only when I go back and the old timers yet ---- there's few living. Well, then we sit there, have our coffee, and --- we don't talk about what's happened today. We talk about the old times.

LEVINE: When you talk with your old friends that way about the old times, what are the kinds of things that come up?

VANDERGOOT: Well, let's see, we were about fifteen I suppose. That is --- then ---we knew -- had to learn about the girls. And then we usually say, "Hey." We used to say, "Remember her yet?" "Oh, yeah." "Boy, you ought to see her today. She's not, you wouldn't like her no more today." "Well," I said, "would she like me any more?" And that's the way -- you know -- we go. Or it might be, "Remember yet we used to go ice skating. And you know that Jack was so good on ice skates and you were trying to beat him. And you could never beat him?" I said, "No, because he had better skates. His skates go faster than mine."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you, I guess you skated a lot when you.

VANDERGOOT: I skated, yeah. We lived on the water.

LEVINE: Would you skate to go someplace, or would you skate for recreation?

VANDERGOOT: We'd go -- we're on skates. See, going to school we had to go through the pasture, through fields. Now, when ---- like I said --- in that part of the country ---- we are from the southwest part of Friesland, of all the

lakes. And then when the lakes were frozen, we'd go on the skates. What I'd do in walking in three quarters of an hour, I'd do just in fifteen minutes ---- you see? And that's why the Friesians, they used to be --- that is of record --- the fastest skaters in the world. Because they had to learn to skate on small ditches at first. And if you lear-- learn to skate not going straight --- you don't go like this, you lose too much distance. See, when you have a straight line; it's faster when you go like this, like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. In a zigzag.

VANDERGOOT: Straight is faster. But now, of course, today with the different skates, and different food --- what those athletes have today, those Frisian farmers could not compete with 'em any more. So.

LEVINE: So tell me about --- were there certain values that your father tried to instill in you?

VANDERGOOT: Uh, to be seen and not heard. Don't talk unless you're, you're asked to speak.

LEVINE: And how about your second mother or your older sister? Did they have any kinds of attitudes or ideas that they, that they tried to get across to you?

VANDERGOOT: Well, let me say it this way. My four oldest brothers and sisters ---- then my second mother came in, we had the same thing. She had, her four. They were the same age as my brothers and sisters. And that was difficult. Since she became the mother of the house ---- and she was closer to her children than my sisters. So my older sister --- before Pop could marry --- she ran the house, although she was young. But she ---

but then she was let down. That responsibility was taken away from her. And that was a rough time for her --- as a young girl to be set aside by a stranger --- and then have that lady -- her daughters -- tell my sister what to do. That was difficult. It were difficult years for her. I remember that.

LEVINE: What was your sister's name, that sister?

VANDERGOOT: Elizabeth.

LEVINE: Elizabeth.

VANDERGOOT: Elizabeth.

LEVINE: And, um let's see. So, and your oldest brother, the one that went to South Africa, what was his name?

VANDERGOOT: Jacob.

LEVINE: Jacob. And he went there really to, for more opportunity.

VANDERGOOT: Yes. And the first five years was rough for him, he used to tell me. But then he left the state of The Orange Free State. And with about fourteen black men, he went to Transvaal. As high as you could go, at --- and we -- what is called the town of Vivo. He established that state.

LEVINE: Spell that town.

VANDERGOOT: Vivo.

LEVINE: V . . .

VANDERGOOT: V-I-V-O. And that's in a small town, but it's right on the highway from Capetown to Zimbabwe. That's a straight highway. Well, anyway, he became a very rich man. He discovered salt in the salt mine. How he ---- see, there is a mountain range that's called the *Zoutpons Berg*. The Salt Mountain. And from that water, it's blackish. There's plenty of water in that area, but it's blackish. So his farm consists of sixty thousand acres. But he can only use fifty thousand acres because ---- it's been irrigated, and then ----but all that salt on, it has to lay idle another three years. So if that fifty thousand acres has been used, then it has to be layin' idle for three years. And then the other, that's a beautiful, he has a beautiful area. You know --well, he isn't ---- but he's dead. He died. So everything he had, he has to remove. So, he has children, but they're ---- we call 'em Boers. They're re---- opposite to having their country taken away from 'em.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now, were there many Friesians going to South Africa at that time?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah. There was quite a number of 'em, they gone to South Africa, yeah. And see, that was the land of opportunity.

END SIDE A, TAPE ONE

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Well, tell me about your leaving the town and going for one year, before you came to the United States. Where did you go then?

VANDERGOOT: Well, I went to, as I said, the Weiport -- you have it already. And I was hired for ten guilders a week with room and board. And see, I had put an ad in the paper. And I got three answers. One from North Holland, one from South Holland. Those are provinces. And one from Brabant.

So I took the one in the middle, and I could have nev--- took a better place.

LEVINE: What did you say in your ad in the paper? What did your ad say?

VANDERGOOT: I said well, I have to think about how I would say this. A farmer's son is looking for a good job and he will do his best. Something like that. And like I said, I got three answers on it.

VOICE: [Not understood]

VANDERGOOT: And the farmer, he --- we had to make cheese, all by hand. And, uh.

LEVINE: Could you just briefly say the process that you did, what you did to make the cheese?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah. Well -- you see -- since I was brought up on a farm -- on a strict farm --- and a strict father, I was a good --- good milker. And being young --- and I had a good head. There was a -- a Catholic girl. She was as a maid; she's older than I was. She showed me how to make ---- she was a cheese maker. But this farm, which we had a big farm, and they made cheese. They were about ten kilos. They were a big cheese like that, that thick. And the milk -- in the morning --- that goes in a big tub. And that stays there until the night milking. And then when that's combined --- they'd a --- put a solution in it that thickens the -- the milk.

And then you have an -- an --- a rack in your hand, and you move your arm --- with all edges on it, like steel is ---- the stainless steel like. And you break that solid form up in small. And you have for about a half hour. You see, today it's all mechanical. Then it was all by hand. And

then when it --- all of a sudden that, when it's all broken up --- that, that cheese --- it's not really cheese yet ---- but all that white milk that had been curdled is put in a cheesecloth, and to a form. And that was put under a press. And then the rest of it --- there's always some butter is in that ---- and that went to the hogs. So that this farm had, about four hundred hogs. So, that's ---- I did that for about a year.

Then my time came. Oh. I wanted to go to the United States so bad. 'Cause I was getting a little ---and read about that, but in. So I went to the mayor of that township, of [Not understood]. And he was just an ordinary person. I asked him what he could do for me, because I was a Friesian. And the Hollanders, they go much quicker than the Friesians. Well--- he said -- for a little cheese, he would do something for me. A week later, I had asked my boss if I could have a little cheese. He had some --- eat sometime. He made --and he --- I told him for what --- I want it for. 'Cause he knew. I told him that my time would come. When I go to the United States, I would have to leave him. Well, he gave me this cheese. I brought it to the mayor of that little town, and in due time I got my papers ---- ready for to the United States. See, that's [Not understood]. Uh, whoever's closest to the fire is the warmest. You follow that? And that's ---- it didn't cost me no money, but it cost me a little cheese.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what you liked about, um, I wonder If we could pause. [Gap] Okay, we're resuming now. Um, tell me what you liked about working that year before you came to the United States?

VANDERGOOT: First, the people were --- they --- they realized that they had a good help on me, and they appreciated that. And-- now for instance in that part of Holland, all movement has to be done by a little boat. In other words, if you take the horses from one field, you have to put 'em in a boat and

it's like a scow. And -- you know --- when I got there, the farmer says, "You don't have to do no work. Just look around. But tomorrow morning you're going to go to work." Well, that night he gets it ---- I gotta bring some horses away to the field. I did that, and when he came back and he saw that the horses, he says, "Who did it?" I said, "I did." He said, "You just a little fellow." "Well," I said, "Look. I'm a little fellow, but I -- I -- I came from a --- we did that." I say. Well, so I got -- not even working --- he gave me a raise. He says, "I'm going to give you twelve-and-a-half guilders instead of ten." And that --- when my time came to go, he cried. Now, he's a big man, much bigger than I am, and his-- his --- his wife hated to see me go. And they had a little girl about four years old and, you know, that's strange. About twenty years I met her in --- in Wayne. She came over for a year to work in a hospital, and I had to go to the hospital for something, and some nurse had told me, "You know, there is a Dutch lady here." That was that little girl.

LEVINE: Wow.

VANDERGOOT: So every time we go, I go, we see 'em there.

LEVINE: What's the name? What's the name of that family?

VANDERGOOT: Vanderlaan.

LEVINE: Vander ----

VANDERGOOT: Laan. L-A-A-N, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, um, what did you hear about the United States that made you want to come here so much?

VANDERGOOT: Well, first of all, the cowboys. Uh, and the Indians. I always been very favored for the Indians. I think they got the raw deal, just like the Friesians got the raw deal from the Dutch. And I remember when I came to the United States, like I said, on a Saturday, and I stayed with my sister, and we were living in Roseland. And there was a wooded area. So Sunday afternoons I had a big knife. I came from Holland with a big knife, you know, and we had a pistol. I was going to get --- see some Indians, but I never saw an Indian. They were all gone. That was still being a kid, and from a small country. You come to a country like this, like my bro-- the Cisco [ph] Dairy had a farm there. It was about three hundred acres. Well, it was terrific, you know, and a woodland. So I was right at home, but I never did find an Indian. No.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about leaving. Did you, you left the farm where you were working. Did you go home at first?

VANDERGOOT: Yes. I did. But my pop wanted nothing to do with me.

LEVINE: What were you at odds with your father about? Do you recall?

VANDERGOOT: Well I think he blamed me somewhat, that my mom, my mom died. Like I said mom---, but she was only thirty-five years old. And, you know, I have a young daughter. She's about your age, not married, and a couple years ago she came down with a Crohn's disease. Are you familiar with that?

LEVINE: No.

VANDERGOOT: A Crohn, that's only a disease that came out about twelve, fourteen years ago. Uh, and that's what she has. And that, I found out, came from my mom. That's a carrying over from – and, no, she's on --- on this

drug. She works in New York. She has a wonderful position. She works in New York Cornell University Hospital, and but, anyway, uh . . .

LEVINE: That's what was responsible for your mother's death.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah, my mother, yeah.

LEVINE: But your father was blaming you, because you had been born right before.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah. I think so. 'Cause I could never remember I sat on his knee. Never, you know. It's --I had, I cannot speak really good for him. Even when I came back from the war in ---- that was in 1945. When I came from --- I had my furlough. I went to --- had a jeep for the trailer. I went to Friesland. I came from Czechoslovakia, but he had nothing to do with me. Yeah. So.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about leaving. How did you, how did you go? Uh, from home to ----

VANDERGOOT: I said goodbye to Frie--- and then we got aboard ship -- like I said --- on the Veendam, my brother and I.

LEVINE: Now, where did you leave from?

VANDERGOOT: Rotterdam.

LEVINE: Rotterdam. And how did you get to Rotterdam?

VANDERGOOT: Well, by train. First from Friesland, that is, from the Lemmer, to Ankars

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[ph]. Well, today is practically dammed that used to be a boat, a ferryboat. So, from Friesland to North Holland, and then on a train to Rotterdam.

LEVINE: Did you take anything with you?

VANDERGOOT: A s- --little suitcase.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you had in the suitcase?

VANDERGOOT: You know, one set of underwear, a little wool underwear that comes up to my knees. [Laughs] Little drawers, heavy socks. Oh, yeah, we were -- we were really immigrants.

LEVINE: It was winter when you left.

VANDERGOOT: Oh, yeah, sure, sure. And a heavy overcoat. Like I said, my pop --- we came from a good family. We had good clothing and so on. But then ---that was --- at that time, the mode.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you paid for your ticket?

VANDERGOOT: No. That I ----- that would be it --- we would discuss that a couple of years ago, and I think it was a hundred and twenty-seven guilders --- a hundred and twenty-seven guilders for the trip. But my brother, at that time, said no. He thought it was more. So that I had no, I could not say actually how much that was.

LEVINE: When you got to Rotterdam, did you have examinations before?

VANDERGOOT: Oh, yes. And we had to be stripped. And the doctor examined you, just

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like you go in the army. And some of the men must have been in the army, so they knew what to ---- you come in your birthday suit. And if you had venereal disease, they wouldn't take you. No. If you had a skin disease ---- I've seen people, you know. We had a big room like this, and about three, four doctors, and you go to them. I see people just send 'em back out, yeah. But we were in pretty good shape.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, who did you travel with? Did you go by yourself?

VANDERGOOT: No, my brother and I.

LEVINE: Which brother?

VANDERGOOT: My second oldest.

LEVINE: And his name?

VANDERGOOT: His name was Sam. Later on he went to South Africa. Yeah.

LEVINE: So the two of you traveled together, and you were in what you called the tourist class?

VANDERGOOT: Tourist class, yeah.

LEVINE: On the boat. What were your accommodations on the boat?

VANDERGOOT: Well, I don't remember much because I got sick. I landed in --- in hospital. So all that twelve days we aboards ship, I don't know much. I remember yet see La Havre. I was still on deck. That's in France. They stopped there to pick up some passengers. That I remember. But shortly thereafter that I said, it was rough, real cold. And I landed in

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hospital. And just about two days before we landed in New York, they got me back up. Because they didn't want to send us to Ellis Island. If anything had been sick, we'd go to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: What was, what had you heard about Ellis Island? Do you remember?

VANDERGOOT: No, I don't know much about Ellis. I'd never been there.

LEVINE: I mean -- was that something that everybody tried to avoid?

VANDERGOOT: No. Because we didn't know anything about Ellis Island. We had no say over it in the first place.

LEVINE: Yeah. What, were you seasick? Is that what your sickness was?

VANDERGOOT: No. I had trouble with my throat, tonsillitis. Yeah. And I suppose coming from a little ----- a country like that and always amongst a whole group -- maybe I picked up something. don't know. But I had tonsillitis. And that's why I landed in hospital. And I must have been there for at least eight, ten days.

LEVINE: There was a hospital aboard the ship?

VANDERGOOT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the hospital?

VANDERGOOT: Not much, no. Because they kept me pretty [Not understood]. I had a high fever, they tell me. So, uh.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

VANDERGOOT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I remember this old lady, oh, yes. I've been up there three, four different times, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember how, did you know what she was when you first came to New York?

VANDERGOOT: No. I couldn't speak no – no – nothin' --- no. That was a whole, a whole new world for me, you know. Just like when you're, when you learn how to walk and how to talk when you're a baby. That's is just here. You felt embarrassed because a lady asked me something -- I couldn't answer it. And, you know, that --- that's strange how time has changed. Now my nephews and my nieces, they speak all English just as good as I can --- had to learn it at school. They have more education. But still they don't know as much as I do. They know --- well, anyway----

LEVINE: Um, let's see. I wonder ---

VOICE: [Not understood]

LEVINE Why don't we pause here, and then we'll resume again talking about this country and how things struck you here.

VANDERGOOT: All right.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine, and we're going to pause now. I'm talking with Wilbur Vandergoot. Okay. This is the end of tape one. It's November 30, 1993, and I'm speaking with Wilbur Vandergoot here in North Haledon, New Jersey. So we will resume now with tape two.

END SIDE B, TAPE ONE BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine, and this is tape two. I'm speaking with Wilbur Vandergoot, and it's November 30, 1993. So let's resume, Mr. Vandergoot, by talking about when you came into the New York Harbor, do you remember any of your impressions about coming to this country at that time?

VANDERGOOT: Yes, ma'am. The first one is there was a big, black man; and he was as drunk as a lord. The reason I'm saying this, we do drink in The Netherlands. It was free. But coming to the United States it's supposed to be ---- there was no --- it was a dry country ----1928. So I said to him, "Rozem [ph], look. He's as drunk as louses." Well, so he tried to get some money from us. Now, we couldn't understand what he said. But that was one of the things that kind of impressed upon me --- that a first man ---- first 'cause black -- I didn't never saw a black man before. And he was much taller than we were, and we were not the shortest of the Frisians. We were --- but my brother was a little taller than I am. But he --- he was about --- I would say --- six foot two, broad. But he was, he had too many. And that amazes me. I say we coming to a country I had never seen before. See, that, that is something.

But I had got --- in all my years --- whether I had in the army or in my own business; I've had a good relationship with the black people. When you can give some of yourself, they give double back. And I think, but like I said before, the thing has changed. I remember when, oh, about a month later, I was on the farm with my sister in Roseland we had a [Not understood] man. His name was Fritz. He was black. And, you know, he ate his sandwiches by the horse stable. And I said to my brother, "Why don't he eat with us?" He said, "We can't do that in here." He says, "He cannot be with us." Now I can see how things had changed for the better. And I have worked on a dairy for a while, but

farming was not to my liking. Especially, I like animals, but I don't like to milk. So when I decided I was going to go to California ----

LEVINE: Well, first, before you tell about that part of your life, when you first got to New York, tell me what happened. You got off the boat, and then where did you go, and did someone meet you, or ----

VANDERGOOT: Well, someone's supposed to meet me. That was my --- my sister's cousin through marriage. And he -- that was, my name it Short Cisco [ph], who became also a board member here, and when he died I took his place. I became his ---- but, anyway, they were well-to-do dairymen in Clifton. And when we missed each other, he thought we were coming from Ellis Island like the other---. But we landed in Hoboken -- and being strangers and on a Saturday morning --- if you go back to the calendar on the 22nd of 1920, that was on a Saturday --- and we landed there at one o'clock, don't know nothing, couldn't speak the language. We didn't know the value of a money. We didn't have no English money. And since my brother carried the billfold -- the money, he says, "Do you need to see, to get some money to--?" Well, if I remember, we had around about two hundred guilders. That is equal to -- at the time --- seventy-five, eighty dollars. Well, we had to go since we missed our sister --- and her cousin are the drivers --- we had to get to Clifton on his own. So somehow or other a fellow --- a young fellow who must have seen our predicament -- he said, "I'll bring you there." Well, he brought us, but with all our money.

LEVINE: Did you have a sign, or how did, did you know Clifton? Did you know ---?

VANDERGOOT: No. But we knew we could tell him we had to go 112 Rola [ph] Street. I still never forget that. Now the same person. 112 Rola Street, Clifton,

New Jersey. And, you know, when we say that ----- *honderd un twaalf Raya Straate* [ph] in Clifton. Well, that's the way we --- well, we got there, but without money. We had nothing left. But since my sister was pretty well off, so, and that's where (?). Cisco [ph] Dairy could only use one man on the dairy, but there were two. So they picked me to stay with my sister. And my brother Sam, he went to Hackettstown on a farm. So, from him – ah, forget about him --- because him and I were, we weren't doing too well. We never could. But I was very close to my brother in South Africa. Let's go back to, uh ----

LEVINE: Tell me what you were like when you came here. You were eighteen. Well, how would you describe yourself if you were, if you were to do that?

VANDERGOOT: Uh, paradise. To me it was paradise. You could do what you want. Nobody stopped you. You could drive ---- oh, since I knew how to drive a motorcycle, as soon as I had about fifty dollars I bought a motorcycle --- a Harley Davidson. A small guy like me buy the biggest, G274. If you look at the old man, he'd [Not understood] know. G274 is the largest motorcycle you have today yet. And well ----after --- they were a group of five Friesians, we all had motorcycles.

LEVINE: Did they all work on the same dairy farm?

VANDERGOOT: No. Uh, some of 'em; two of 'em worked on the dairy farm. The other worked for a shoe factory, and two of 'em worked for a Public Service. But if we all came together ---

LEVINE: In Clifton.

VANDERGOOT: My landlady. She had always --- she made booze. Even those days,

the Friesians made booze. And she went to the Christian Reform Church. And she made booze. How she got that, but we only got somethin' foor her. But it cost us, too.

LEVINE: Excuse me, were you living in Clifton then?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah. Of course, see, the dairy was in Clifton. And at the time --- my sister, her husband --- he worked for Cisco also. But then in '29 when --- but the --- yeah, I would say the banks closed --- you know. That was --- the whole world was topsy-turvy. You remember '87 -- '87 when this happened, too. Well, Cisco had a rough time. But they bought a place in Roseland, and they put my brother-in-law as a ---- a ---

LEVINE: Foreman?

VANDERGOOT: Well, as a caretaker. And but eventually he bought that. By the way, I stayed with him for a little while. Down in November 1929, I went to California. I told you that before.

LEVINE: Okay.

VANDERGOOT: Now I'll repeat that.

LEVINE: Well, we didn't get that on tape. So maybe if you could just tell about going to California.

VANDERGOOT: Well, I went to ---- my brother at the time was at Walker Gordon Dairy Farm in Princeton, New Jersey. I said goodbye to him. And on Highway 22/28 --- that's where [Not understood]--- there was no superhighways then, all the small highways. And around about nine o'clock, I noticed my gas gauge --- I was very low. And I didn't know

where the nearest gas station would be. They were far and few between. Uh, I went too fast, and I tipped over. [Sound] [Aside] What's that? And when I, when I got out --- and I was very fortunate. Nothing was --- I didn't hurt anything, but the wheels were off the car. The steering wheel was broken. And --- see, what happened --- that big [Not understood] that was in my rumble seat --- that had busted the car, too. Because that went rollin', too. Well, I had a flashlight. So after I had said a couple of bad words, I went up, got up to the fence, climbed over --- you know where the fence -- that's these little wire poles up there. I saw a light comin', car comin'.

And he stopped, 'cause I had my [Not understood]. Today they wouldn't do that, but in that day he did. And I don't always remember his name, but I can't remember it now. But he was a salesman for Bethlehem Steel, and they were located in North Newark on Verona Avenue. And when I told him what happened and he said, well, he wanted to take a look. "Well," he says, "Don't stay here. You lost your car." I said, "Yeah." He said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "Nothing." He couldn't --- but he said, "Look. Monday morning you come --." Well, he asked me if I had a job. I said, "No. I was going to California." He says, "We'll have a job for you." And that's where I started working for Bethlehem Steel. And from there I worked on the George Washington Bridge, catchin' rivets.

LEVINE: Tell about that job.

VANDERGOOT: Well, tell you when I got there, the first day --- being brought up on the water, water didn't bother me. And the height neither, because I used to climb the roofs of the big buildings and get the eggs. But trying to catch the rivets and -- you know -- I couldn't understand those fellows. They --- I tell you, I still don't know how I ever --- see, one man, they --

he gets the rivet. It's a big rivet. They were about ten inches long and an inch thick. And he heats 'em, but they're red hot. And he throws 'em to me; I have to catch 'em in a big funnel. And when I have 'em in a funnel like that, I turn around --- I'm standin' on a steel beam ---- I turn around, hand 'em to the fellow who takes 'em with a tong, and he sticks 'em in the hole. And the other fellow ---- well, he has the tong with him, he rubs 'em together. He welds 'em together, he presses 'em together. And that's how we worked. But it never dawned upon me that I'm going to fall. The first couple days, yeah, but after that, no. But I remember a section fell off. We had no safety nets, no safety nets on the bridge. I wanna --- no, I don't remember if it was on a Monday or a Wednesday morning --- a section of New York fell through, and a lot of men went down with it --- at least fifteen of 'em.

LEVINE: Hmm. With [Not understood]

VANDERGOOT: [Superposed] It's never been much --- been broadcasted --- that you never see in the paper, but I know. I seen it.

LEVINE: Did they die, these men?

VANDERGOOT: Oh, sure. You drop three hundred and fifty feet, ma'am. Look, that's --- and steel --- sure, they broke through. You -- It should be in the records somewhere. But --and I sa--- around about ten o'clock in the morning, all those men all went down.

LEVINE: Now, you said before that they were riveted together?

VANDERGOOT: They rivet, yeah. They're not welded. George Washington Bridge is not welded. They're all riveted. All the plates was on it. We ---- because two rivets, they're a in-- at least inch, inch-and-a-quarter.

Yeah.

LEVINE: So where were you living when you worked on the George Washington Bridge?

VANDERGOOT: Well, I lived in --- Seanor [ph]-- it's in Brooklyn. As if I know ----that I couldn't tell you, mum --- not this -- I haven't got that. But I do know that --- like I said before ---- we only worked one week, and then you get paid off -- laid off. But sometimes there was a little job in between, and that was in Hartford, Connecticut. I can tell you this, 112 Asylum Street, Hartford, Connecticut. That was another office of Bethlehem Steel. And we had to put up a wrought-iron fence. I remember that yet. Uh, around a park, there was about sixteen hundred feet, all wrought iron fence we had to put around that park. And the office was this --- on the tho--- Asylum Street ---yeah --- in Hartford, Connecticut. But then as time --- in 1932, I went to the army. And from then on, of course, that is a different area. I went to --- I landed in Schofield Barracks [ph]. Still couldn't talk much English. And I remember we standing for inspection, and the drill sergeant says, "Pull in your butt." Well, naturally "pull in your butt" --- I pull in my little hiney. But it was the bottom of my rifle. I didn't know that thing was called a butt. [Both laugh] He said, "Not that one, man!" So that's how I had my army, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you, did you, um, socialize with people from --- Friesian people when you were here? Did you, were you always around people, so that you could speak Frisian while you were here?

VANDERGOOT: Being young, you know, what you do when you're eighteen, nineteen or so. You look for companionship. And sometimes you have a Polish girl, because you can get some nice Polish girl in---in -- oh, in the --- they were very nice girls. So you pick up a little Polish, and they pick up

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a little Fries. Or sometime-- time you -- you have a Dutch girl. Or I had gone with an Irish girl. You know ---I mean, just normally you --- that is not that to say immoral, no ---- but companionship. And, you know, that --that's how you learn. And slowly on, you pick that stuff up. Pick up your languages, and the way of people living.

LEVINE: Were there things about this country that struck you as very different those first year or so?

VANDERGOOT: The greatness, the freedom, the wealth. You -- whatever if you had the money, you could do what you want. I remember, I readin' ---I think it was a radio --- that was going to be a race from New York to Los Angeles to make, and the winner would get twenty-five thousand dollars. I tried for it.

LEVINE: What kind of a race?

VANDERGOOT: A race. They still have it today. You run from New York City to the west coast. In those days, you're on your own. There might be, you know --- you see that you get there. But that's over. Like it's not too long ago I read it -- it was in one of the digests, the Reader's Digest --- that the first two, they never got paid. So a good thing I never went up there. I didn't. But I often had something like that in mind. My motorcycle --- had a motorcycle. We used to go mountain climb with the motorcycle. And those old motorcycle, they was the big ones, long wheels and so. And if you could make that with the Harley, boy, you were tough. But I could never make it. I always fell backward. Now, like the English motorbikes ---the Sincler [ph] and the Simplexes [ph], and -- and --- oh, there was a couple others, but they could make it. They was smaller. But . . .

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you were something of a daredevil.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah, yeah, I would say that. Because being the youngest, and living with fourteen other, thirteen others --- and they always pestering me 'cause I couldn't say --- I – I --- never could say the R. If – I had --- my name is Wiberin in Dutch, but I could never say it. I said Vibechin. And they always teased me about that. And then I got so mad. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, um, were you the, you and your brother the first ones from your immediate family to come here?

VANDERGOOT: Uh, my oldest brother went first. He went to South Africa.

LEVINE: Right.

VANDERGOOT: But -----

LEVINE: Then you and your brother were the second ones to go.

VANDERGOOT: And down – the state in Holland.

LEVINE: I see.

VANDERGOOT: See. Then the condition went better after, say, in the '30s. And they could have their own farms again. And so they had no --- only after the war, there was no opportunity that --- he will tell you about that. Then the people left Harlingen --- overpopulation. Big families, the oldest, you know, that was the old Dutch system. The oldest son gets everything. And the other ones get whatever's left over. So the oldest son would get the farm, and that's the way it went. When my mom died, she left us three thousand guilders. That's a lot of money in those days. I was only six months old. But by the time I wanted to collect my

money, it was all gone.

LEVINE: When did you meet your wife?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah, that's in the -----only mania I can't really say this, because then I'll get into trouble. I was going to get married with my Dutch girl. We went school, we kept writing all the time. And then in 1940 when the German invaded The Netherlands, I didn't see her since '45 when I came back. But to tell you what happened, we gonna to get married. I, when I left the Hawaiian Island, they gave me my furlough. In 1937, I was in Honolulu and I request my furlough. As I said before, who is closest to the fire gets the warmest. Well, in those days I used to chauffeur sometimes the General, General Trump. He was the -- the commander of the whole Hawaiian department. And somehow or other he liked me. 'Cause if he wanted me at six o'clock, I was at six o'clock. And I waited, no questions asked. So in '37 I had been away from, --- in the army since 1932, I thought I wanted to take a furlough. I had my furlough saved. So he said ---I asked him if I --- he said, "Sure." So now I was in Honolulu. How am I going to get to, to Friesland? There was the Qruje --- Quingy was leaving from Honolulu, had to go to Brooklyn Army Base. I was on that ---only soldier on the cruiser. As we halfway from Hawaii, this comes in --- mind now, the radio --- Amelia Earhart is lost. Our cruiser turn, and we search for her. When I say we, the crews searched for three days. But Earhart and Noonan had disappeared. Of course, today they don't know what happened to her. That's history. And then we went to Panama.

LEVINE: What was the name of the ship again?

VANDERGOOT: Quingy.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

VANDERGOOT: Oh – oh –oh –Q—

LEVINE: Qiungy

VANDERGOOT: QUINGY. Yeah.

VOICE: Q, I guess.

VANDERGOOT: That's a—

LEVINE: Quincy?.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah, Quingy. I – let's see ---Q-U-I . . .

VOICE: U-I, I think.

VANDERGOOT: N-G-Y. Quingy, yeah. And we went to the Panama Canal, and, you know, those cities, they were filthy. Both Panama. Uh, Colon and [Not understood] Arraijan?. Colon is on one side and, you know, well, anyway, it doesn't matter. Those two cities, they were filthy for---. They let young men coming from, you know, ---- young recruits, and they let 'em all pass. And they -- so many got venereal disease there. But -- never had that. S. Then from ---- through the Panama Canal, we went to Cuba. We stopped at Cuba. And from Cuba to the Carolina, and from Carolina we went to Brooklyn Army Base. And that's where I got my -- my furlough.

Through all those times, and then I went on the Holland America Line ---- that was The New Amsterdam --- and there was a group of Stevens

College in Missouri. And there were, I think, eleven girls -- all from Stevens College -- and one boy. I'll get his name later. Well, to say this --- this fellow, he became a pilot. And in -- at first, in July -- he was shot down right by us in the 79th Division. And I saw that. When that plane went, and Sleuter, William Sleuter. That's [Not understood], and I often wonder how, as a young fellow, I saw him. I was at his house later on in 1939, then in '40. Yeah, it was '44 ---- in July '44, he was killed. Well, anyway, as I -- we -- I got my furlough papers. And -- but the New Amsterdam, we went to Holland -- and got acquainted with my girlfriend. And we kept up correspondence, and I was gonna --- we gonna get married in November --- in September of '39, because I had furlough.

See. In the meantime I had gone back to the States, back to Hawaii. And then my time was up -- they gave you ninety days' travel. As I had my passport on --- it was the third of September -- I report to the Holland America Line in Hoboken. They took my passport away, because the war had declared. So I never --- I didn't hear from her no more. And, of course, the war --- there was no more communication. As the wa-- then in May, when the Germans invaded, I was in Louisiana. And I was anxious to go to help the Dutch, but the colonel at the time says, "Man, you'll have your time. You're -- this only the beginning. It's gonna be a long time before you're up there." Well, to make the story, I had -- all through the war and in, oh, May the 18th. We were at --- in General Patton's army, 79th Division, 304th Engineers.

I had permission from our colonel to go to Friesland. But they would not let me drive. I had a staff sergeant named Riel [ph] Hutchinson. He came from Kentucky. And we drove. But the bridge [Not understood], took us about three days before we could go that short distance from Ostend to Friesland. But I had a sister living in Kampen, and there were

the Canadians. So I said to the staff sergeant, I said, "[Not understood] You -- you stay with my sister here, and my husband, right in the city of Kampen -- a lot of Canadians. I'll take the jeep, I go up." And I did it twice. In July, we were then in Czechoslovakia. We drove again, past all of ---. And then they loaded like the quartermaster. Colonel, he give me all quartermaster stuff. I had a big trailer behind my -- my jeep, loaded up with coffee, sugar and all that. And, boy, I was --- they wanted to make me the mayor of my hometown, because it came it's ---. I said no.

LEVINE: Did you see your girlfriend when you went there?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah, oh, yeah. That's in with the sad part of it. See, when I knew I was going to go overseas; and it's always then the persons, you would leave someone behind. And I got married in Decem--- in November 1927, and on September 2nd, 1942, my girl got born. See. I knew this girl, but they never had -- I had knew her a little bit. But she had never not --- I was a soldier. They would have nothing to do with me. But at least I knew her for about three months. I know we gonna go overseas. She was Christian Reformed. She was from my brother's church, and -- but -- it was not --- we still married.

LEVINE: Now, wait. I got confused for a minute there. How did you meet your wife? This isn't the girlfriend you had . . .

VANDERGOOT: Yeah, well, see, I had no more communications.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VANDERGOOT: So I, I wanted to leave, if I could, a [Not understood] behind. I would like to have, you know, you figure when you go in the war, you might get

killed.

LEVINE: Right.

VANDERGOOT: I would like to have some-- carry my name. So I married a girl recommended by my brother, and she was the, from our church -- from the Christian Reformed Church. But she was all together different than -- just opposite from me. But we're still married, and we had a good life. We had three children, but now you ask me how I ---well --

END SIDE A, TAPETWO

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE TWO

VANDERGOOT: We knew I had to go overseas --- either go to Japan or go to Europe. And I had the opportunity to go to Europe. So that was the 79th Division. Before I said I'd go overseas, I'd want to get married. She was twenty-eight years old, I was thirty-two. And we must have hit [Not understood], because nine months later we had a little girl. And then I saw her ---- when she was born, I was in Camp Landing, Florida. It took ----she was two weeks old before I saw her. I saw her again when she was nine months, and that's ---- I didn't see her any more until she was five. Yeah. See, my wife stayed with her mom in Passaic, New Jersey, and that's where I had, you know, was her home.

LEVINE: What is your wife's name and her maiden name?

VANDERGOOT: Her -- her first name is Jeanette, and her last name is Snoop, S-N-O-O-P.

LEVINE: And your daughter's name?

VANDERGOOT: Betty Anne. Yeah. She's married and have her family, so.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you have grandchildren?

VANDERGOOT: I have a grandson, and great, two great-grandchildren here in the last two months.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VANDERGOOT: After being married --- after getting married at thirty-two --- and being in an Army hospital for three months, I've been very blessed, Ms. Levine.

LEVINE: So you were wounded?

VANDERGOOT: Yeah. And, not only that, I -- I lost a young fellow. He came from Louisiana, and he went to ROCS, like me, and we were kicked out. He had seven years of university -- college university. For what reason --- we still don't know -- but, anyway, he did -- he became my staff sergeant. And at the time I was a master sergeant. It was in 1942 -- and in the beginning of '42. And in I -- 19 December of '42, I became a warrant officer, in the 79th Division. And, durin' the war he, being in the engineers we had the water purification system. That's part of our system of the army. And one night the Germans bombed them, and -- and theresby he got killed. And it is --- the reason I always --- his name was Dave Crockerhand, and I named my son after him. See, he had a girl, like me. And she's born also December the 2nd, 1942. Yeah, like I said, I came out. So many others died. Uh, I landed the 9th of June at ---- yeah. Oh, I used to know these names --- those French --- at the beach.

LEVINE: Normandy?

VANDERGOOT: In Normandy, yeah. I was in, on the Utah Beach. And very easy. Much easier than we anticipated, because we lost a lot of men there. The Omaha Beach, and the [Not understood]. So I didn't land on the Sixth. I landed on the Ninth. So that is my --- I came out of the army hospital in 1947, the Walter Reade, and they condemned me for further military duty --- and I came home. Now what? Well, I worked in a little machine shop. That didn't last long. I couldn't stand it. I worked in a little corner, being outdoors all of --- all my life. Then I went back ---- went back on a farm. Oh, I was married, and -- and -- we had a little boy. But in 1950 I got operated on, and they took biggest part of my stomach. And since 1940 --- '52 I never been sick. Well, that did just for us both. The end?

LEVINE: No. I want to ask you, when you look back on your life, and starting out in Holland and coming here as a young man, what influence, what effect do you think that has had on the rest of your life -- the fact that you came to this country as a young man?

VANDERGOOT: Well, in Friesland I wouldn't have no opportunity. There was -- I would not --- and he would have been a laborer --- in those days. Times have changed. In those days, there was no future for me. Coming to the United States --- as I said before --- I had to wait four years before I was eligible on the waiting list. But when I did come here, I saw great opportunities. If you're willing to work, there is no stoppage. I had, after my --- I can prove this, after I had finished my army duties --- I became a contractor. I built my own home. And I'm sure I'm very precise. And when I built my home, people used to stop and say, "When you're finished, will you build one for me?" That's how I -----

LEVINE: Oh, that's what you did.

VANDERGOOT: Up till ---- I have never asked for or advertised my work. There was

always plenty to ---- plenty work for me. But my son, he worked with me. All the -- when -- whenever he had a vacation from high school or from college on, he worked with me. He's very handy, but he didn't want to take my business. He as a bookworm, like I said. He's a psychologist, and that's what he liked. That's his -- he works with handicap. My oldest daughter is married has ---- she's fifty, fifty-one. She has four children, and they have a good business, and my youngest daughter is just like me. Uh, she's almost forty, not married. She's been all over the world, travels a lot. But the last five, six years she's working for --- she is in charge of the finances of seven doctors who are all heart specialists, and see, on the fourth --- fifteenth floor, New York University Hospital --- and she has a contract of seven doctors.

LEVINE: What is her name?

VANDERGOOT: Janet Vandergoot.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Um

VANDERGOOT: Look it up sometime, yeah.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Okay. How's, how about this phase of your life? How is this phase of your life for you? Your retire--- how is your retirement phase for you?

VANDERGOOT: Well, I retired in 19 -- when I was seventy-five. And, well, actually, I retired when I was sixty-five. But I kept on. I can't sit at home much. I used to like fishing, but all that gets away from you. And especially when I became on the board of the Holland Home. I gave my time to the Holland Home, as John will attest to that. I enjoyed it. And that has

partly changed my life. I learned so much here in the home by being with people who're -- they -- seeing the end of their life. One has it very easy. They die in their bed. Others, they struggle. And then, you know, I said, here. See, they used to be seventy when you come into the Holland Home, and then later one they made it up to seventy-five. But they keep on living. They say it's the medicine. But then [Not understood] it is. I don't take any medicine, and I'm eighty-three. I have good eyesight, only I lost my hearing during the war, and I can watch you. But if --- if a group of people, of radio play --- then I don't hear anything. Then I'm confused. So that's why I left the board, after fif--fourteen years on the board. When you come in a big room and the people are talking, I'm lost. I don't know. I say yes, I should say no. And no when I should say yes, see. I says, "I quit."

LEVINE: Well, um, if you could divide yourself up into Frisian and American, what aspects of you would you say are Frisian, and what aspects would you say are American?

VANDERGOOT: Well, you must not forget, times has changed. People have changed. You're telling me, I'm in a generation, we're old-fashioned. We see different, from my own children. They are Americanized. I have never been Americanized. I think our bringing up has affected that. We were seen but not heard. Uh, then you have given a task to do. You do that task, or else. But sometimes, maybe, it's -- I could see it on my children. I have two children that strict on the children, to their advantage. But my oldest daughter is too lenient, and the girls go over, and she's paying for it today. Uh, maybe I'm too much regimented -- being in the military. But when I see my own family, that's the way I want to do it. If I had it to do over, I'd do it again.

LEVINE: In the last question, you mentioned you've watched people here near

death in the Holland Home. How do you approach death? How do you think about it at this time?

VANDERGOOT: Now, I speak personally. I cannot speak for anyone else. I believe in Jesus Christ. The reason, [Voice breaks] he died for me. I seen the hospitals, being in the hospitals so long. I seen the deathbeds of the men. I remember on the Haye du Puits in France. We lost the doctor, the dentist, five corpsmen of eleven, and seventy-nine wounded from a hundred and twenty-five men. We were practically wiped out. That was at La Haye du Puits in France. That's where I got wounded, too, but not too bad. I was officer of the day, and at night when we got shelled. It was on about ten o'clock. Uh, it was with 88's -- that's the German on the head -- low projectory. There was no defense for it. And they had --- the shells burst about twenty feet above the ground. And as they walked ---check up all the points -- the staff sergeant, name of Raymond Kema [ph], he was about three paces away from me.

We got hit. I don't know what did us, but they told me they picked us up. His head had rolled right off, and part of his shoulder. I was bleeding from my ears and from my nose. Well -- like I said --- we lost all those men, and in two weeks I was all right again. And as I said, from then on, it has worked on my system. And I think in 19-- -- must have been 19 --- in January '46, I was at Fort Lewis, Washington. And something hit me in the back. That it was nothin' [Not understood] inside, and I landed in the hospital again. And I came out in 1947. So that is the end of my ---. And you ask me why, uh ---

LEVINE: How you think about death at this time.

VANDERGOOT: Yeah. I --- I've seen death. I've seen it in the Home. But I have reassurance that Jesus Christ he died for me.

EI-415/VANDERGOOT

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very, very much. This has been a very interesting interview, and I'm so happy that I was able to talk with you.

VANDERGOOT: Well, it is a long story. I don't think you take it all, but you cut out what you don't want.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Well --

VANDERGOOT: A lot of repeat. See, you have to take [Not understood] and write it down.

LEVINE: It's perfect just the way it is. We don't have to edit it at all. [Laughs]

VANDERGOOT: You have an old man here. He's younger than I am, but he has a lot of experience.

LEVINE: Well, let me thank you again. And I've been speaking with Wilbur Vandergoot. This is Janet Levine, I'm at the Holland Christian Home in North Haledon, New Jersey. It's November 30, 1993, and I'm signing off.