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## Interview with Verne Martin

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## **Transcript of interview with Verne Martin**

War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends  
November 14, 2017

**Cherice Bock:** The following recording is an interview of Verne Martin for the project War and Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940–1975. You will also hear the voice of Ralph Beebe, one of the researchers for this project, and I am Cherice Bock, the other researcher. The interview took place at Friendsview Retirement Community in Newberg, Oregon on November 14, 2017.

**Ralph Beebe:** Welcome, Verne. What year were you born?

**Verne Martin:** 1931.

**Ralph:** I think it was December of '31. He beat me by about three weeks, or a few weeks. When you registered for the draft, what did you register as?

**Verne:** Registered as a non-com.

**Ralph:** Okay, and were you drafted?

**Verne:** No. I was ready to sign my first teaching contract. My coach at Newberg High, Earl Gillis, was on the Yamhill County draft board. So I called in to see if I was about to be drafted, because I didn't want to start teaching and leave in the middle of the year. He said, "No, we have enough volunteers to fill our quota, so go ahead and sign it," so I did that and started my teaching career in Sherwood in 19—fall of 1955.

**Ralph:** So, you weren't ever actually drafted...

**Verne:** No.

**Ralph:** Because of that. So you didn't have to appear before the draft board.

**Verne:** I had to take a physical, but I was never called before the board.

**Ralph:** Yeah. Well, how did you make your choice as to whether to become a conscientious objector, or allow yourself to be drafted?

**Verne:** I think I owe my country a lot. But at the same time, I could not line up my gun sights on another human being and pull the trigger. If I had been drafted I would have tried to get into the Medical Corps. I never was drafted. By the time I started teaching, we already had a son, so I was at first deferred to finish school, and then weren't drafting people with families at that point in time.

**Cherice:** Can you say more about the relationship between how you felt about your—you said you owe a lot to your country, so what was that like, in terms of making your decision?

**Verne:** Like I said, I think we're privileged to live in the United States. Excuse me. My dad asked me the same question when I drove to McMinnville to register for the draft, and that's just the way I felt about it. I think we owe the United States a lot. And I think I've got a lot more, so...

**Ralph:** And can you, let's see, tell a little bit more about what the, what the spiritual experience was that caused this decision?

**Verne:** My personal experience?

**Ralph:** Yeah.

**Verne:** I accepted Christ at Twin Rocks. (Because of my aneurism I can't control my voice sometimes, so sorry for that.) Our whole life has been built around Twin Rocks. I can stand in the back of the Meetinghouse and see the very, the very spot where I accepted Christ, the very place I was when God told me what he wanted me to do with my life, and the very place I was when I saw Helen for the very first time. So that was a long time ago. We've been married 64 years now.

**Ralph:** How old were you when you accepted Christ?

**Verne:** 1950, so I was probably 18.

**Ralph:** Yeah.

**Cherice:** And how did that impact your decision about how to register for the draft?

**Verne:** Well, there's a commandment that says, "Thou shalt not kill." I don't think I could do that. But at the same time, I wanted to serve my country in some way.

**Ralph:** It makes it a hard decision.

**Verne:** Yes.

**Ralph:** Yeah. Well, what did you do, then, during war—I mean during the time you would have been drafted?

**Verne:** Well, first of all, I worked. I worked at a sawmill run by Warren Moore and Wayne Reeves. It was out under the Round Top Lookout and Coast Range. We had to ride over there in the back of his pickup every morning. Marion, Marion Comfort and I worked at the mill. It was an interesting experience because we rode in the back of a Dodge pickup, had no jack, and had a lug wrench, but had no way to jack up the

car, and of course we had a flat tire. So, Warren's the type for guy that loves to figure out things like that. We were close to a place on the way over to the mill when we had the flat. He borrowed a pole from a stack of poles in the person's yard next to where we had the flat. He pried the thing up enough to block under the—to get the wheel off and get the spare on, went on to work, drove home without a spare, the next morning I remember there was still no jack in the pickup!

Warren was the type of guy that, he was close to 65 years old, and he was out setting choker in the woods and running the donkey to get the logs up on the—from the deck, all jumbled up where the cat skinner dropped them to get down before they get soggy logs.

Interesting experience. He was running a donkey this day, and he had the cable hooked up to the far end of the log and he thought he could come out of the stack, like pick-up sticks. And Marian whistled at me and said, "Watch Warren." I watched him, he would rev the engine up and pop the clutch and get ready to stand the donkey clear up on edge. It was just a Model A engine mounted on two big logs. So we kept watching, pretty quick he did it, and broke the cable. It came back through the mill like a snake. I don't know what Marion did. I dove into the sawdust pile.

**Cherice:** Wow.

**Verne:** So we weren't hurt by that. But Warren was a great guy. He loved working hard in the woods. And you would think that he would have had a jack in his pickup, but he didn't.

**Ralph:** But you, getting back to the military itself, I'd like to know a little bit more about what caused you to feel that you couldn't go kill somebody, even for the greatest country on Earth.

**Verne:** It's one of the Ten Commandments, Ralph! I was a hunter. Dad taught me to hunt and fish. I thought it didn't bother me at all to kill a pheasant or anything I was hunting for, but I don't hunt human beings, cannot hunt human beings. My competitive nature would make it easy for me to get into that, if we were fighting an enemy. That's why I would prefer to have been in the Medical Corps, and I wouldn't have to carry a gun.

**Ralph:** Fortunately, that commandment doesn't say, "Thou shalt not kill pheasants."

**Verne:** Well, for most of the time, I couldn't hit them anyway!

**Cherice:** So, you mentioned about being at Twin Rocks and that sort of thing, so have you been a lifelong Quaker?

**Verne:** Yep. I was raised in Newberg, at Newberg Friends Church. And sort of a rebel when I was younger. Several of us young guys ushered, and we weren't supposed to

usher with short sleeve shirts on, and all that stuff, but we made sure we did it anyway.

I, I used to hustle from church or hustle back from church and go to Sammy's Billiard Parlor in Newberg, so people walking back from the church to home could see me in there. Just twist the knife a little bit, I guess. And I wasn't the only one. He had a slot machine, or pinball machine, and we'd played that thing. And there was a guy, I think name was Stan Williams, that used to be sitting in there a lot, and if we had a break he'd get the machine, and invariably hit the jackpot within a few pulls. I thought later, I think Sammy was, hired him to do that so he got most of the kickback on the jackpot.

**Cherice:** So how did the rest of the Quaker community respond to those acts of rebellion?

**Verne:** Well, I was fortunate when I started dating Helen. Her mother, Marie Haines, knew a lot of people from Newberg, so she—I found out later that she asked some of them about me. If I had known that, I would've put on a show that I probably would've never been allowed to take Helen out again. But I, that was before I was a Christian, and I was, well I guess it wasn't I was so rebellious, but, I had great role models growing up at Friends—at Newberg Friends.

You asked me what I did during the draft days. We were also going to school. As you know, we had to go to Linfield or Lewis and Clark or OCE to get a teaching certificate, and I chose Linfield, and I think you did also. So, so I remember we were living—Helen and I were living—in an apartment above Norm Riley's studio on College Street. That's where we lived when Dan was born. Helen told me that we decided to go ahead and have a family so I wouldn't be drafted. I don't remember that, but that's what she claims. I guess I babied out of the draft, then.

**Cherice:** And did your, did your Quaker upbringing have any sort of impact on your decision to—of how to register for the draft?

**Verne:** Oh yeah, they, they all thought I should be a conscientious objector, but wasn't a complete conscientious objector, but, as I mentioned. So I guess I rebelled against some of that teaching a little bit, but I appreciate my Quaker heritage and my upbringing.

**Cherice:** How did they make it known that they would have rather you be a conscientious objector?

**Verne:** They didn't say anything about it after I, after I had registered. It was all before. They, they taught that that was the thing to do, and a lot of people did that, but I wasn't one of them.

**Ralph:** But today, are you a conscientious objector, if the draft was for 85-year-olds?

**Verne:** I'm not sure, Ralph. I, I still think I owe my country a lot. So I probably would register the same way. I might even volunteer to go, if I could get in the Medical Corps or something.

**Cherice:** I'd like to hear more about how the, how your Friends church did education. Did they, did they do formal education at youth events about the peace testimony, or did they talk to youth one-on-one, or how did they get that message across?

**Verne:** I think just generally through the time growing up in the Friends church, I got the feeling that that was what I was supposed to do. I don't remember a formal class being taught on the peace testimony, or anything like that. I said it in some sense, but not before a draft was—registered for the draft.

**Cherice:** So you just got the understanding that Friends had a peace testimony, but you didn't have necessarily a formal education, you just heard that in passing, maybe?

**Verne:** Call it conviction. I describe myself as the most non-pacifistic Quaker that ever lived. It didn't bother me at all to get involved in a fight at school if kids were duking it out or something. I, George Fox would be ashamed of me, but I've broken up dozens of fights during my teaching career. And they teach you now that you can't touch a kid. That's baloney, because if two big ninth grade boys are already throwing fists at each other, they're not going stop when you tell them to. You've got to get between them, so there's got to be some physical things happening there. People say I would get fired now, and I probably would, but I'd still do it. I'd also get fired if I stood and let two guys beat themselves bloody without trying to do anything about it, so... What they tell teachers now is a bunch of garbage, sometimes.

**Cherice:** So you, you feel like you, you said you're "the most non-pacifistic Quaker that ever lived," so say more about that. Just because you're not worried about getting involved in a fight?

**Verne:** It's not that I wouldn't, I don't, I believe I should not kill. I do not believe that I should not get physically involved in a fight, and when I was in a position of responsibility as a teacher, I had to do that. There's no way. I, I can remember getting between two boys on the playground at Sherwood, and having to take my hands and cut their wind off on their throats before they stopped throwing fists past me, trying to get to each other. Didn't bother me. I, I offered to put—in fact, I did put the boxing gloves on with a kid in the dressing room in Sherwood. He just about killed me. I figured I could—now, I had a paralysis the first year I taught, too. It paralyzed the left side of my face and the right side of my body. After that happened to me, I put the gloves on with John Banville, who was 6'1" in the eighth grade and outweighed me by 30 pounds, at least, and I figured I could be quick enough with my

hands, I could keep him from hitting me. That was fine, until he caught me with a right in the midsection, about tore my insides out. So I had to pop him. I wasn't planning to hit him at all, and I had to pop him in the nose to back him up a little bit. So, I can, I've done some stupid things in my teaching career! [laguther] I had to break up a fight in the cafeteria, which I had volunteered to supervise by myself at the junior high where I worked. They had 300 or 400 junior high kids in there. So I went up on the platform, eating my lunch with a mic set up, and if I saw—I did that because we're having trouble with food fights, and I told the principal I think I could stop it if you give it to me by myself. Teachers loved me because they didn't, they didn't have to rotate in there anymore. I had one fight below me, yelled at them to stop; they didn't. I got down, and had what I thought was the instigator laying on his back on the floor. I was sort of laying lightly across his chest to hold him down. The other kid got up and tried to kick him in the head while I was holding him down. That was one fight.

The other one was where I should have gotten fired, probably. Two big, nice big boys were fighting clear back at the other side of the room. I yelled at them. They didn't stop. I got down off the platform and went back there. Usually, in junior high, if a fight starts, kids ring around it so fast you can't get in to do anything. I got to these guys, and in the process of going back there, one threw the other one down with a hammerlock and broke his arm when he hit the floor because it was just tile over concrete. When I got back there, his forearm was sticking up on top. It's like, that's where I grabbed him to get him out. He, he was bigger than I was. He was a ninth grader. He came off the floor very easily. I said, "Oh, something's wrong." Found out that he had broken his forearm when he threw the kid down, and I'd picked him up on the break. I called his dad and apologized, told him what happened. He says, "Forget it. You had no way of knowing it was broken." Luckily, I got a good dad.

That's what I mean by being non-pacifist. It didn't bother me to get involved in a fight in school.

**Cherice:** Yeah.

**Verne:** I went to school one day and the principal says, "Come with me, Verne, I hear there's going to be a rumble." So we found ourselves, a bunch of ninth grade boys behind us and a bunch of high school boys carrying clubs and small lengths of chains walking down the hill to get to the ninth grade boys, and here the two of us are in between, trying to stop this mess. Luckily, we bluffed them. They knew better than to do anything. They'd have to kill us to keep from getting into trouble, then they'd be in bad trouble. Things like that didn't bother me. That's why I say I'm non-pacifistic.

**Ralph:** If you were 18 today, and the had the law the way it was then, how would you register?

**Verne:** Non-com.

**Ralph:** Okay. And does non-com—that sounds sort of pacifistic to me.

**Verne:** Well, it is, to a degree, I guess. Like I said, I cannot line up my gun sights on a human being and pull the trigger. Not going to happen. But if I had just gone straight into the draft, I would've had to carry a gun, and with the gun I would've been responsible for trying to protect my squad members, and so I didn't want to get in that situation.

I would—I've been asked if you were in the Medical Corps, would you have helped an enemy. Of course I would've. We help human beings when they need it. Does that answer your question?

**Ralph:** I think so.

**Verne:** Okay. I haven't changed my mind on that at all.

**Ralph:** Okay, let's, let's go back, then, to that first question. If the registration, if you were 18 right now, and the law was the same as it was then, you would register the same as you did.

**Verne:** Non-combatant.

**Ralph:** You'd do the—okay, you'd put the—

**Verne:** And like I said, I would probably volunteer so I could get into the Medical Corps.

**Ralph:** Yeah.

**Verne:** And I'm, my Quaker role models would tell me that you're still aiding the war effort, and I guess I was, I guess I would be. But we did it in other ways, too. I collected tin cans during the war to help the war effort, and I just don't agree with them that complete conscientious objector is the way to go. It's not the way I feel.

**Ralph:** Any other questions?

**Cherice:** What were the tin cans for? I don't, I don't know that part of history, I guess.

**Verne:** Well we, we were collecting tin cans. You—and during the war you couldn't buy gas without—what do they call it? They have coupon books, that you can get...

**Cherice:** Oh, like ration card sort of things?

**Verne:** My friend Roger Minthorn used to buy old cars just to get the gas coupons in the glove compartment. And he would take the old cars and put them up on blocks on the college campus and rent them to guys like Norval Hadley so they could sit there and talk to their girlfriends.

**Cherice:** So, so what were they tin cans for?

**Verne:** They, they wanted the metal to recycle, and probably, I don't know whether it was part of the ammunition they were making, or...

**Cherice:** Oh, I see.

**Verne:** We had another building here in Newberg, I found out since then, that they made life rafts, balsa wood life rafts, big like rectangles with the corners rounded off. I found out later they were making all the life rafts for the entire war effort, right here Newberg.

**Cherice:** Wow.

**Verne:** We used to go to take scraps out of their scrap bin to make model airplanes.

**Cherice:** So, it sounds like you're saying that the community supported the war effort in several different ways, and being a noncombatant was only one of those ways, in your thinking. Is that accurate?

**Verne:** Pretty much. I carried a piece of glass around in my thumb for years from that, picking up tin cans. Not until I build a cyst outwards until I could peel the cyst off, I got it out of there years and years later. But it was part of that.

**Cherice:** Yeah. And it also sounds like you were doing a lot of trying to make peace on the schoolyard, even if you had to get involved in some physically violent situations. So, sounds like you just had a little bit different angle on what peacemaking looks like.

**Verne:** I taught with people that would not touch kids during a fight, and consequently they did not break up the fights. You have to wade in and get between them. And do what you need to to stop them. I'm not going to hit them with my fist or anything like that, but you do other things to deter them. My normal procedure after a fight would be to talk to the guys and make sure it was over between them. Of course they would agree that it was to get me off their backs, and then they would start it up again right away. So...

When I was supervising student teachers, we had a fight break out in the classroom. I was the only certified person in the room. A student teacher was there, but the cooperating teacher was—had some family business that day, and what happened is a kid, fairly large guy, got up to sharpen his pencil, came back and decided for some

strange reason the little guy sitting next to him, he took the palm of his hands and popped him on both ears at the same time as hard as he could hit him.

**Cherice:** Ouch!

**Verne:** Of course the kid came out of the chair, swinging fists, so the student teacher got that stopped, and, but to the phone button (this was in a mobile classroom outside the building). He called security. In, in the meantime, I went over and talked to a table full of girls that had seen everything that happened. They told me exactly what happened. So the security got there, I told him what we knew, and they asked the kid, "Is that about right?" He said, "Yeah, it is." And so they hauled him off. I told the kid that stopped the fight, actually, not to be by himself in the hallways or anything. He said, "I'm not afraid of them." I said, "Yeah, you probably aren't, one-on-one, but if they have 12 of their buddies with them, then you can't do much."

There's always kids who are angry enough at themselves, and with each other, to start throwing fists. That doesn't stop immediately. It goes on for a while.

**Cherice:** So would it be accurate to say that you kind of view conscientious objection and non-combatant ideas similar to the playground situation of, the conflict or the conscientious objection is kind of like the teacher that stands aside and doesn't do anything to solve the problem, and the noncombatant is somebody that goes in there and is actively part of trying to build a peaceful solution?

**Verne:** The teachers that stand by and don't do anything should be fired. And you have a chance of getting fired if you get involved physically, too, but that's a chance I'm willing to take.

**Cherice:** Is that related to your, your—how you feel about conscientious objectors and non-combatants, too?

**Verne:** It's how I feel about kids.

**Cherice:** Yeah, right, but you were saying that as a noncombatant, you wanted to be part of making sure that you're supporting the, the war effort in the ways that are positive, right? And so it seems like you're sort of saying that conscientious objectors sit back and don't do anything—

**Verne:** No, I don't think that at all.

**Cherice:** No?

**Verne:** My father-in-law was a conscientious objector and spent—this was probably the First World War in France. I inherited one of his pocketknives. It had a big one out of the middle of the blade from cutting wires in France during...

But my uncle was a member of Pacific Yearly Meeting. He's a Quaker peace nut from way back. In fact, after they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he got together a group of college kids, raised some money here and went to Japan, and rebuilt a community center for the complex of homes around and give it to people. When I was there in 1989, I talked to a family that was living in one of those homes, paying one dollar a year rent. And the mayor of Hiroshima, they contacted my Uncle Floyd to get him, if you've seen the picture the Grand Torii, this Shinto gate standing out in the water. I saw from shore. But one of the logs had rotted off, so he—Floyd—had found a log, had it peeled, and had it on the docks in Seattle ready to send it over when he got word that they found a replacement. Because of my uncle, I got to meet the mayor of Hiroshima. I got to see Peace Park in Hiroshima named for him. He did the same thing in Nagasaki and the same thing in Seoul, Korea and was nominated for the Nobel—Nobel Peace Prize three different times because of that work, so...

And he, he and I think a little bit differently. He raised some nice boys and nice families, so I expect he got physically involved in separating them sometimes, but he thought he could never kill anybody.

**Ralph:** Well, thank you, Verne. Appreciate this.

**Verne:** Well, I don't have a lot to say on this subject. A lot of people, a lot of people here at Friendsview would have more to say, I think.

**Ralph:** Well, you've said quite a bit, so...

**Cherice:** Yeah, we appreciate it.

**Verne:** You're welcome.