

# Earl Vogelpohl

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# Earl Vogelpohl

Aviation Radio Operator with  
Navy Bomber Squadron

Today is February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1994. My name is James Will. I am a volunteer with the Rockford Museum Center which is cooperating with a state wide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in events surrounding World War II. Today we are in the home of Earl Vogelpohl who lives at 4325 Harvest Trail in Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Vogelpohl served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are going to interview him today about his experiences in that war.

**WILL:** Earl, would you please introduce yourself to us. Give your full name, place of birth and date of birth.

**VOGELPOHL:** Earl John Vogelpohl. I was born in Washington County near Okawville, Illinois on a farm. It's about forty-five miles east of St. Louis, Missouri. My birth date was July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

**WILL:** Can you give your parents names including you mother's maiden name?

**VOGELPOHL:** My father's name was Henry Christopher Vogelpohl and my mother's name was Anna Dorothea Austendorf. This was a German settlement obviously and in an area when I was small they still had 100% German services in the church that my parents attended. A lot of people spoke German and we were suspect of anyone especially the Irish at the time. For what reason, I don't know.

**WILL:** Were they born over here in the United States?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. Both of them were.

**WILL:** Okay. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

**VOGELPOHL:** I had two brothers who were quite a bit older. They had a son and about a year and a half later another son then thirteen years separated the youngest son to a daughter and she was about fourteen months older than me.

**WILL:** You're the youngest?

**VOGELPOHL:** So my mother had me when she was forty so they're quite a bit older then.

**WILL:** What were their names?

**VOGELPOHL:** Henry and Anna.

**WILL:** No. Your brothers.

**VOGELPOHL:** Oh, the names of the brothers. The oldest one was Harvey; the second one was Eugene; my sister was Bernice. We went to a rural school, one roomer. I think all of us did.

**WILL:** Are there any other special events that happened in your family's history before World War II that you'd care to share with us?

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, I had a great grandparent that almost got into the Civil War. He lived back in the woods and a bunch of fellows wanted to leave the little town of Ad-dieville and walk into St. Louis which is about forty-five miles and during the night it rained and he couldn't get across the creek to meet the boys. He went back home, got an axe and his little brother to go with him. He chopped down a tree over the creek, sent the kid back with the axe, the younger brother, got into town. The ones leaving had already gone so he went to the next town that was about four miles. They had gone from there so he chased them to the next town in [Mascoutah] and they were still

ahead of him. He decided he was going to try to catch them before they got to Belleville. After that the world became too complicated and he knew he wasn't going into St. Louis by himself. He never found them in Belleville so he turned around and went back home. He must have walked a total of forty some miles that day and he never did.

**WILL:** Never made it. What were you doing just before World War II? I mean what year did you graduate and where did you graduate?

**VOGELPOHL:** From an elementary school called Plum Hill and it was in Washington County.

**WILL:** You never went to high school?

**VOGELPOHL:** No one in our immediate vicinity. Very few went to high school. We weren't even in the high school district that I know of. Some went to a three year high school in the town and so I never got a GED or, I finally got a Bachelor of Music on the GI Bill.

**WILL:** What were you doing, what was your job just before the war in 1940 – 1941?

**VOGELPOHL:** Just living on the farm.

**WILL:** Doing farm work.

**VOGELPOHL:** Doing farm work.

**WILL:** Okay. What thoughts did you have about the war before the United States became directly involved?

**VOGELPOHL:** A lot of young people now get into dope and mind expanding things and I didn't know too much about that. I wanted to see the world and I wanted adventure. I read some books --three books in particular stand out about World War I. Two of them were concerning air groups. One was Wings. That was, I think, a Columbia or Paramount picture--Buddy Rogers and Clara Bow. The other one was--I've never been

able to find another copy was called Lilac Time and then, of course, I read All Quiet on the Western Front, a German infantry man, and I knew I wanted to get into combat. There was actually two things I wanted to really do and was to play a violin well and the other one was to go into combat and I'm still working on the violin. I'm in the Junior College Community Chamber Orchestra at Rock Valley.

**WILL:** Good enough.

**VOGELPOHL:** I was at the right age at the right time unmarried and no responsibilities when the war came along but I stayed with the folks on the farm until they could get things sort of packed in. My dad was in his sixties at this time. They retired from farming and I left for the Navy. I was near being drafted any way I think.

**WILL:** You were about what--Seventeen or eighteen?

**VOGELPOHL:** But I volunteered. I was nineteen. Just turned nineteen. I volunteered when I got the next--you know, about every six months you were reclassified. So I just told them I was ready to go. They sent me to Chicago for a physical exam and found out could get in any of the services--Coast Guard, Army, Navy or Marines. I had a friend that was in the Navy. He told a lot of pretty good sea stories so I decided to go to the Navy. Hoping to go by degrees, I was hoping I would get boot camp at Great Lakes but instead they put us on a train. I could look out and see license plates on cars that said Wisconsin so I knew we were going somewhere else.

**WILL:** This was in '43 or something like that.

**VOGELPOHL:** '43.

**WILL:** But before the war now, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, what were you doing. Where were you? Do you remember this?

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, we had a radio but we had company that Sunday. Being out on a farm, you're kind of isolated. I turned the radio on in the evening for some Sunday program. I think Jack Benny was one of them we always listened to and we found out Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Actually we didn't know too much about it. Both of my parents at this time had only been in two states so they never traveled widely

**WILL:** They didn't know where Pearl Harbor was.

**VOGELPOHL:** They had no idea but I had seen in the movietone [newsreel] or one of those March of Time [films] that we were going to be ready regardless at Pearl Harbor so I knew where it was but I didn't really know where the Hawaiian Islands were. It surprised us but it was a long way away so you really didn't get too excited in the mid-west.

**WILL:** You didn't have much reaction then.

**VOGELPOHL:** No. Not having come from a military family. I don't think I knew more than two or three people that were in the service before the draft in 1940, I guess it was.

**WILL:** Have you formed any opinion or beliefs about what was taking place in Europe and Asia.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. We were following the war in Europe, being Germans, I guess. Not having sympathy for the Germans part of it but it's kind of, we only took the paper in the winter time. In the summer time you didn't have time to read the paper so in the winter you'd take it for a few months, you know. Yeah we knew there was a war going on and there was rationing and this type of thing and tires were hard to come by.

**WILL:** You say you were of German heritage. Were there any people against you personally or anything like that?

**VOGELPOHL:** No.

**WILL:** Did they have feelings toward you after this?

**VOGELPOHL:** No. We did have a kid that I graduated from grade school with became a minister. He sort of leaned toward the Germans and he was kind of unpopular and he became a minister and he died early. I don't know what this means exactly but he was kind of unpopular at the time.

**WILL:** What were your thoughts on Hitler's speeches or anything?

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, we could hear some of them on the radio and my parents both spoke German. I just barely got by on it. They listened to his speeches. My mother couldn't believe that this was happening.

**WILL:** That he was doing what he was doing?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. Later on but in the first part they knew that Germany was in, had financially problems. They weren't very adamant about it.

**WILL:** What events led to your entry in the military service? Were you just waiting to be drafted?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. I'd been wanting to go all along and when your buddies keep going so then I decided I wanted to leave that fall. I probably could have gotten another.

**WILL:** Fall of '43.

**VOGELPOHL:** '43.

**WILL:** What was your response, what was the response from your family and friends about you going into the service?

**VOGELPOHL:** There were an awful lot of people going at that time. Almost every fam-

ily had somebody in the service and even though your parents not really enjoy seeing you go into the service that that will eventually or possibly lead you into warfare, I think they were proud of me. My two older brothers, the second oldest was physically unfit and my oldest brother was past the age at that time when they were drafting.

**WILL:** Talking about your basic training here, when and where were you inducted?

**VOGELPOHL:** I was inducted in Chicago. We went to Farragut, Idaho, for, it's right on Lake Pend Oreille in the upper stem of Idaho. When ever they were building bases, Eleanor Roosevelt flew across this area, looked down and saw this beautiful pearl of a lake, Lake Pend Oreille, and she said, "My that would be a nice place for a naval training station." Lo and behold, she must have told "Frankie" and they built a boot camp there along with some training school in Idaho.

**WILL:** I never heard of that.

**VOGELPOHL:** Oh, yeah. Farragut, Idaho.

**WILL:** Now you were what, nineteen at the time?

**VOGELPOHL:** Nineteen.

**WILL:** Do you have any special memories of your training or,

**VOGELPOHL:** The first time I had ever been this far away from home and I thought this is it. I'll never find my way back. It was beautiful country up in the mountains and the elk and deer running around everywhere. It was absolutely beautiful.

**WILL:** This is where you had basic.

**VOGELPOHL:** Basic.

**WILL:** What were you trained in?

**VOGELPOHL:** They said in the aptitude test that they wanted to send me to school so they just put down what they thought looked good. It was machinist mate and motor machinist mate and I don't know. You know these are all strange things to me. At boot camp one day someone from the office came through and got four of us out of a company out of about one hundred and thirty and said we would like to know if you would consider flying in the Navy? I think we all volunteered right on the spot. He said, "You'll have to take another physical and we're going to give you some more tests. If you qualify for this, chances are you can fly. We took the tests and whenever I got back, I had a leave after boot camp, came back home and then back to boot camp. Then one night my name was on a list to go to Naval Air Technical Training Center at Memphis, Tennessee, as an aviation radioman , They had me down as an aviation ordinance man, machinist mate and aviation radioman. Radioman came up. I guess they needed people there.

**WILL:** This is a choice they gave?

**VOGELPOHL:** No.

**WILL:** You qualified for all.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah.

**WILL:** What did you think of the training? Was it adequate enough?

**VOGELPOHL:** We went to Memphis, Tennessee, and we had eighteen weeks of radio and two weeks of super secret radar. It was a pretty hush, hush thing at the time and actually, I think possibly if it hadn't been for the radar in World War II there was a very good chance we would have had an awful time. I mean that. We would have probably messed up in the Battle of Midway by cracking the Japanese code and being able to find, England would most certainly would have had some problems if they hadn't had a radar net at the coast in the Battle of Britain. During this time I got the German measles

so they sent me to the hospital for two weeks not knowing exactly what was wrong with me.

**WILL:** This is in Memphis?

**VOGELPOHL:** In Memphis. So they put me in a ward with people with Scarlet Fever. Whenever I was okay after two weeks they sent me back to duty for one day and then I had to go back to the hospital for four more weeks with Scarlet Fever.

**WILL:** What next, huh.

**VOGELPOHL:** At this time, what we were learning basically was code—International Morse Code because at this time you had no way of communications of voice of this distance. We had to learn the code, be able to take coded groups at twenty words a minute and plain language at twenty-two words a minute. You had to be able to make up messages. This is kind of a tricky thing because just looking at a message you know who sent it, who it was going to, the time, Greenwich Civil Time, the urgency of the message and some other particulars about it that, so just making up a message was really

**WILL:** Can you explain Greenwich Civil Time?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. We were beyond the one hundred eightieth parallel which is where the day starts. Greenwich Civil Time is a hundred and eighty degrees some place in Scotland where it is noon whenever it's midnight.

**WILL:** On the other side.

**VOGELPOHL:** Right. On the zero parallel opposite.

**WILL:** Now in this training, what unit were you in. For the record, we have to have this. Was it strictly training in a group?

**VOGELPOHL:** We had classes.

**WILL:** Your unit wasn't designated yet.

**VOGELPOHL:** No. I was in radio school. They had ordnance school. They had Marines there that were in the same training. We had a lot of swimming and combat training, hand grenades, bayonet and all this type of happy stuff. We had eighteen weeks of that.

**WILL:** Do you remember the name of the camp in Memphis?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. Naval Air Technical Training Center and it was at Millington which was about twenty miles northwest of Memphis, make that northeast of Memphis. West would have been in the river somewhere.

**WILL:** Missouri or Arkansas. During your training or after your training did you have any leaves or passes?

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, just one from boot camp up to this time and graduating from the Naval Air Technical Training Center. The next step was you had to learn gunnery because in the Navy everyone has two things that they have to be able to do. One is you have a specialist rate. I was going to be an aviation radioman and radar operator and you also have a battle station. We can talk more about that later. But a battle station you have to know something about guns even though it may not concern guns. It may be damage control. It could be any number of things. We did have to learn gunnery, basically machine guns, thirty and fifty caliber. The next place we went was Naval Air Gunner School, NAGS, which was near Jacksonville, Florida, in some swampy land. At night all creepy crawly creatures would come out and crawl across the road, some had legs, some slithered and it was a lot of mosquitoes but it was a gunnery school down in the swamps near Cecil Field.

**WILL:** This is still part of your training.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. And you got, at that time, if you flew you got half again as much pay. In other words I was Seaman Second Class at this time getting \$54 a month. This meant I would get what, seventy something, you know. They took us up for the first time in a little SNJ, a two engine Beechcraft, to see how you could handle flying. I suppose there were some people saying I don't want to get in it but up to this point before they go any further.

**WILL:** How'd you do?

**VOGELPOHL:** No problems there. Then after that we went to Jack's Municipal No. 1 which is north of Jacksonville, Florida. It was an old CCC Camp so they had barracks out in the beautiful little piney woods. They build an airstrip there and this is where the Navy was training its PB4Y1s which is the same as the Army's B24. I was too heavy to get into some of the, too big, to get in some of the planes ship-board plane, this is what the PB4Y1 is. It needs a runway to take off and land. Some of the smaller ones, I was one of the two biggest ones in our group down there. To get into a, like a radio gun station in the back of a SB2C, which would be a scout bomber by Douglas which is a dive bomber or to crawl down into a TBF that President Bush flew, for example. It was kind of a bad spot because every time they crashed the radioman if anybody got hurt the radioman always got killed because he was down in the part that would always get smashed. There were SBD Scout Bombers by Douglas. There were also other flying jobs like flying the big cargo planes, the Coronados and this type of thing. This is what came up and this is what I took.

**WILL:** After your training was over ...

**VOGELPOHL:** We were still in training. Jackson Municipal #1 is where the crew got together. The Navy tried to keep people in combat in our type of work, in combat area no longer than six months. After six months they would send a crew home for more training the people then became the senior

people in the next crew. We had three people that had been out before at Guadalcanal. Our plane captain which was an aviation machinist's mate had been out before. Our first radio man had been out before and our pilot had been out before. Here's where the crew got together for the first time. You flew together and of course I was always the baseball fan of the St. Louis Cardinals and we got together just as the Cardinals and Browns can you believe it. It was the only time the Browns ever played in a play off I guess. They were playing in the World Series. I think this was about six weeks we flew together. We learned inter-plane communications getting familiar with each other and each ones—we dropped smoke bombs on targets. I'm not sure whether we had gunnery. We probably did but I don't remember it. This would be like a ship or a boat towing a spar on a long cable. We would shoot at the spar to see how close we came.

**WILL:** Target practice.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. Then after this we went for more training across the country to San Diego. We went to Camp Kearney that is across from the main gate of Camp Pendleton, the big Marine base. It was another B24 thing and we had—we went to different fields around there for different things. We had a lot of combat plane identification and we had mock-up models where a film would show you being attacked by planes and you would be in a turret and it would show you when you pressed a trigger where you should be aiming to hit this plane.

**WILL:** It was hi-tech in those days.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yes. It was pretty hi-tech stuff in those days. I'm surprised at this time you had a lot of unsophisticated people and to get an outfit that can go out and do the things that we did in as good a fashion as we did, it just amazes me to this day. Here's a farm kid, you know, that hadn't even been to high school and another one just like it from Oklahoma. Our pilot was from St. Louis.

We had two junior officers—one from Ohio and one from Long Island. Basically the rest were from the east, Elizabeth, New Jersey; one from Indiana; a couple more from Ohio, Pennsylvania.

**WILL:** These crew members—do you keep in contact with them today?

**VOGELPOHL:** A lot of them have died off. My pilot I met here in Rockford. He moved to Rockford. He told me he was going to start a—he was from St. Louis so he told me he was going to start a wholesale beer distributorship so he came with a real winner, Falstaff. Anyway the last I heard he was still over here on North Central and he's pushing Canada Dry. I don't know if he's still alive or not. I haven't seen him for about ten years. I went over to see him several times. He didn't seem very interested ... I've had several of the old crew members—a fellow from Pittsburgh come over. He had a brother in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and as he came around the bottom of the lake he would stop past and see me on ...

**WILL:** A few of them you haven't forgotten. Do you remember their names?

**VOGELPOHL:** Oh yeah. I remember the names of all of the men. Sure.

**WILL:** Can you name a few of them maybe, just for the record?

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, there was—the skipper was Frank Carlem(?). The two junior officers—the one from Ohio was Vogelstein(?); the one from Long Island was Langman. The plane captain was from Pittsburgh at the time. Later he moved to Chicago. I saw him out here at some air shows a number of times. There was Whitey Compton and the fellow from Oklahoma was a machinist's mate. He was Tommy Thomas and the one that I saw several times after the war was Robert M. Bennett. He was from Pittsburgh and later moved to Michigan some place. And the radio man we had Willy Williams.

He was from \_\_\_?\_\_\_. Osling was from Boston, myself and we ended up with a guy by the name of Sitaro who came from Elizabethtown, New Jersey. He replaced a kid from Texas that had gotten a venereal disease and they didn't feel that they could treat him out in the islands so he had to stay in Hawaii. That's where we picked this guy up. He had gotten that far and some time earlier and he replaced.

**WILL:** You have a good memory. After all of your training, you're out in San Diego for final training.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. We were out there for little over a month.

**WILL:** Did you get a furlough? Did you ever get back to Illinois?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. I had a little short leave after Naval Air Gunners' School in Florida. That was, I don't know, maybe a week. Then I had leave in transit. In other words they said we'll give you four days to get from Florida to California and so being not that far away I stopped in for a day.

**WILL:** On your way.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. St. Louis. But a poor buddy of mine from Pittsburgh at that time, Long Island, or wherever it was, I can't remember who it was now. They only had two hours and they had to get on another train. They couldn't get any plane. They didn't have a high enough priority so they were only home two hours. They took off again. This is a long way, chair car all the way from St. Louis to California. Promised a sleeper. They said it would get better at Kansas City. At Kansas City they said we'll have one for you at Ogden, Utah. At Ogden, Utah, they said forget about it. It won't happen here. So we got to, finally on the night after Christmas night we had the plane loaded down with gas, all of our gear in it and we took off for Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii.



**WILL:** This was Christmas must have been of '43?

**VOGELPOHL:** '44. Before this whenever they would fly planes over, they would just take about five crew members and the rest would come by ship. The pilots would say we want to stay together. We were over-loaded and kept topping off the gas tanks and we had two bomb bay tanks instead of bombs or anything you put two big huge tanks and I think they have about two hundred and eighty-five gallons apiece. They were locked into the bomb bay so you had an extra five hundred gallons of gas. It took us I think fourteen, twenty-two hours to fly from \_\_\_?\_\_\_ to \_\_\_?\_\_\_. We flew over there in a little over four hours when my wife and I went in 1980.

**WILL:** Times have improved.

**VOGELPOHL:** Then we had more training in Hawaii. We trained there for about a month. We had air to air firing \_\_\_?\_\_\_, air to ground bombing and so on and so forth. They sent us out at the end of January in 1945. At this time we were, I suppose we were ready. We had been flying together since September through the end of January. I ran into Army people up there, Army Air Force people that had never fired a machine gun in the air; that had never seen a smoke bomb dropped or a water bomb. He was just a gunner and he was on his way. He said, "The Army communicates in one way. If you want to call the pilot this is the way we do it. We have a number system. The pilot was 1, the co-pilot 2, the navigator 3; the radioman 4, the bow turret gunner and so on." Numbers all the way back so you would call a number. For example, I was 5 in the bow. It wasn't a battle station. It had two fifty-caliber machine guns. You could cut grass with two fifty-caliber machine guns. If I wanted to call the guy in the tail for example, maybe looking at something I couldn't quite figure out what it was say ten from five, "What do you see out there?" Everybody knew that the nose turret was calling the guy in the tail turret to look at

something he wasn't able to determine what it was. You see something on the water, we would go on patrols. Most of them were eight, nine, ten hours and you're just out there. Sometimes you see nothing but water. Water starts to look a like after six or eight hours.

**WILL:** Get kind of dizzy looking at water.

**VOGELPOHL:** But you see something and it could be a whale spouting or your looking for submarines and this type of thing so you have to communicate back and forth.

**WILL:** This is out of Hawaii then?

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, from Hawaii, we were supposed to take a plane, a new plane, to the Marshall Islands in [Eniwetok] so we left there near the last of January and we took off in the afternoon. We flew to Johnson Island which is hardly much bigger than about two flat tops put end to end. It's just a little rock. We staid there overnight. The next morning we took off and we flew 'til about three in the afternoon to [Eniwetok] and we delivered the plane. Then they put us in transit barracks and we had to wait for air service to come along. The Army, Navy and Marine stopped there, the different services stopped there moving people around by plane. While we were there, it's a big shipping area, a lot of ships in the harbor and we had submarine scares and not allowed to make a light, not allowed to light a cigarette at night. Sometimes no cooking fires so you ate cold Spam the next morning and this was a pretty introduction to what come later. Finally we got a ride out of there after three or four days and we flew to Guam and we were just there over night. Pretty primitive in Guam at this time. The next morning we got a flight with the Marines again to Tinian which was basically our home. Tinian became the island with, I think, five-eleven thousand foot runways and a B29s base. Of course, they had one at Saipan and they had one at Guam. Guam was a few hours flying time from Tinian so they had to load less bombs and more gas to go to Japan and fly

past Tinian to do it so figured the islands down there were better. They were still building these runways. The Naval Air Station we only had an old fifty-five hundred-foot strip up on top of the hill. It was a Naval Air Station. They worked around the clock, day and night any kind of weather, hauling coral, smashing it, putting down the runways for B25s so what they could do, if they only needed half the runways but if you got five of them here you can have five planes come in here. Five planes come in the middle. They all set, they all take off ten at a time. As soon as they clear you have five more coming in and five the same way with landing. Set this one down had to cross,

**WILL:** Saves time and,

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. And they had B29s up, this is where the Enola Gay came from that carried the atom bomb Anyway we got to Tinian and we were in the squadron VPB116 V means heavier than air; PB means patrol bombers and 116 was the unit.

**WILL:** That was your unit from the beginning.

**VOGELPOHL:** That was our combat unit. We had eighteen crews and fifteen planes so the junior group never had a plane to take up which was kind of good in a way because you did have to have somebody on guard duty there at all times, twenty-four hours a day.

**WILL:** They didn't rotate.

**VOGELPOHL:** No. The senior people had their own plane. We would fly this plane this time and this plane the next time so you never ...

**WILL:** Never had the same one.

**VOGELPOHL:** That was kind of bad because some people kept their guns in good shape; some people kind slip shod on them. Some planes were dirty.

**WILL:** Superstitions about the planes?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah and a little of that. Well we managed to hack it out for six months. Shortly after we got there—we got there I think the first of February or the second of February in 1945, the last year of the war and the Japanese were pretty well beaten down. They didn't have a lot of stuff. We only had a couple air raids while we were on Tinian and I don't know whether we ever—I don't remember any bombs falling. I remember air raids going out at night, getting into bunkers and stuff. But they had an interesting little thing. I have a picture of me holding a little goat. Ernie Pyle was on Tinian at this time and he wrote about a goat in his dispatches back here and it's the goat that I'm holding. About three days after the picture was taken the goat disappeared. The Marines had a barbecue one night. Nobody knows where they got the meat. Anyway the big thing that was happening was Iwo Jima was about to be stroked. I think they landed on there about the 14<sup>th</sup> or the 16<sup>th</sup> something like that.

**WILL:** Were you involved in that?

**VOGELPOHL:** We were later. It was a real toughy. I have some pictures of it. To try to pin down the—see if we could find any remnants of the Japanese fleet—we knew they still had tis big battle ship with the eighteen-inch guns. So we took off from Tinian and another plane had done this two days before. We flew in the Japanese islands up here and all around, sneaking and poking our nose around. Didn't see too much of anything but then we didn't have enough gas to fly back to Tinian so we were going to set her down on the old Japanese airstrip number two which was right along side of the south beach.

**WILL:** On Iwo Jima.

**VOGELPOHL:** On Iwo Jima. This was the first time I would see combat close up. At the end of the strip they had a ridge and it

had the Marines on our side and the Japanese were on the other side. Two days before a B24 had tried the same thing, came in, set down and whenever he got to the end of the strip the Japanese saw him come down and they put up a bunch of trench mortars and blew him all to pieces. They smartened up a little so whenever we tried it they had two light cruisers and about four destroyers plus some field artillery around Suribachi. They were firing and getting everybody to put their heads down before we came in and they started firing right over the top of us over the ridge. At the end of the strip we whipped it around and came back to the other end of the strip so we weren't hit. But when we took off we still had to fly out this way but they kept hammering in there and at this time there were ...

**WILL:** What were your feelings then?

**VOGELPOHL:** Well it was rather strange. You were up on the wing gassing up and you could here the shells going "fof fof fof" and singing and ran into a guy there. Everything was bad. Everything was torn up. There was junk everywhere. You would not believe the things that you see in a battlefield. Comic books, you know, bandages. Here's a place where they had a trench mortar and they still got about fifteen, twenty cases of ammo they just popped open, just sitting there waiting. You find a wire with a little red flag on it. Here's an unexploded shell that had come in but nobody wanted to mess with it. And food cans and clothing, you know, some nice looking stuff, bottles and cans. God it was awful.

**WILL:** Stuff you wouldn't expect to see ...

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. It took so long to take the island. The first night we were only there a short time. The next time we went we stayed over there three or four days and we built our own tent. Everybody slept with their head toward the middle of the tent because there were still Japs running around sticking bayonets through the side of the tents. We were there the night but were on

plane watch, another fellow and I, the night that over a hundred Japanese came marching four abreast right up the beach road. And they had a new Army guard up there or a Marine or somebody that didn't give the word and they got in among the P51 pilots that they were just bringing in. They killed over one hundred and seven pilots in one night just by throwing grenades in the tents. Take a bayonet, cut a hole in there and stick a percussion grenade in there. The Japs had good pyrotechnics. They had stuff that would go off. You're probably familiar with our torpedoes that never went off.

**WILL:** Oh, yeah.

**VOGELPOHL:** You hit a ship square—you hit it at an angle, it might explode. But there stuff always seemed to go. It was kind of touchy. But anyway we had—we finally got them calmed down and on Easter—no, on the first of July—first of April that year, we invaded Okinawa. It was April Fools' Day and it was Easter Sunday. There wasn't much going on. They thought there would be. The Japs decided at this time on Okinawa, they weren't going to fight them on the beach. They were going to let them come to us where we were set up and we would handle them. Of course we didn't really help them. After that it was just \_\_\_?\_\_\_ patrol. We eventually sank eleven Japanese ships in just our group. We damaged eleven. At least we get the credit for it and we shot down one Japanese plane. At this time the Navy was kind of "gung ho" on medals. For every five combat patrols, you got an Air Medal up to five of them. I had thirty-nine combat patrols so I only got five Air Medals but I did get a Distinguished Fly Cross on the sixth of May. We went out and sank four ships and shot down this one plane in about an hour and a half, I guess.

**WILL:** This was off of Okinawa then?

**VOGELPOHL:** No. This was down in the Nansi Shoto (?) group somewhere. I don't know exactly where it was. It was—which

would be south of Honshu, I think. I think the Nansi Shoto (?) Group is south of Kyushu. It would be not too far from Okinawa.

**WILL:** In all these adventures, how about casualties.

**VOGELPOHL:** We just had our first radio man had his second brother killed in the service. They sent him home. If you had two in the family killed, any other service personnel were sent home because they figured that was adequate after the Sullivan boys, five of them we had. The only one that really got wounded was our first radio man, a kid from Boston. He had a bullet come through the Plexiglas on the top turret and it broke up a bunch of Plexiglas that stuck in his face right near his eye. Other than that—we got hit a number of times, bullet holes ...

**WILL:** Your plane did.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. We had one that could almost be a comedy. A bullet came in through the side from a fighter and hit exactly in a spot no bigger than a wire that closed a parachute. Just as the tail gunner was having trouble with his guns—as he was coming out of his turret; he shouldn't have been out of his turret no matter what He thought there was something stuck underneath and he was going to fix it because he couldn't reverse his guns. Just as he got out, we had hatch guns here on the side \_\_\_?\_\_\_ and this was all open \_\_\_?\_\_\_. You got an area as big \_\_\_?\_\_\_ fifty stuck out of the side and on each side was a para, we never wore our parachutes because they are harnesses because we always flew so low we didn't have a belly turret, had a raid dome down in there for radar. We'd fly so low we didn't want anybody to get in under us. That was a no, no you couldn't defend. At the height we flew there was no point in wearing a parachute because you didn't have time to, I mean you'd be so close by the time you thought about it jumping out why it wouldn't even open. A bullet came and hit the mechanism of this wire through these two pegs sticking

up and you pull on the wire and you popped your chute. With all this wind coming in the back the slug hit this parachute and it opened up.

**WILL:** The parachute opened up?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. He thought it was smoke. He thought we were on fire. By this time the chute got over him, enclosed him and he couldn't get out and he didn't know for five minutes what was going on. He thought we had bought the big one, bought the farm.

**WILL:** Your crew more or less came through it.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. You also had little things like standing guard on the planes. The Japanese on their New Year were supposed to come out in a Kamikaze attack on Tinian on their New Years so we doubled the plane guards. All the people out on the strip and what it amounted to , . I don't think anybody even saw a Jap, although there were Japanese still running around on the island. We shot a chief and it was an ordinance man who was driving a truck pulling these little bomb "dealies", you know, little four "wheeler" where you have the bombs loaded on.

**WILL:** This was an U. S.

**VOGELPOHL:** Shot a chief and one guy that was a CB, maybe deserved to be shot and another one. Anyway a guy came to relieve a CB who was not used to guarding out on an airfield and the guard challenged him whenever the CB came up to replace the man and he said, "Halt. Who goes there?" The guy said, "So "solly". No Jap. Me a CB." The guy cut loose and killed the guy. Dumb stuff. The first night that they were under combat conditions there on Iwo Jima was bad. We were away from the fighting but there were flares going up constantly and just a roar of ammunition going off and it had to be tough.

**WILL:** How was the medical treatment?

**VOGELPOHL:** I thought it was good. Of course, I never needed a lot of it.

**WILL:** Top of the line at that time.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. We had good treatment. They did. It's kind of hard to, there was one time in there where we never really got out of our clothes for about a week or ten days. Everybody had like a fungus of the feet, athlete's foot type of thing and some on the hands and the back and the ears but it wasn't all that bad. Food was kind of "iffy". We would get Ten-in-One rations if we could which is a whole lot better than K-rations. Your mouth would get so sore from eating K-rations after a couple days you couldn't even swallow water. We ended up, the tour of duty got back to Tinian and we took a plane that had been, they were going to throw in the junk pile and we said, "Hey, let us fly back to Tinian. Give us gas." We had two other crews fly with us so we had eleven in a crew. We had ten, so there were thirty-two guys with no place to sit and it was about a four hour hop from Iwo Jima back to Tinian. We fooled around there because we figured the longer we fooled around to go back to the States to make up another crew and come back because at that time they thought Japan would not surrender until the last one was. . .

**WILL:** What were your thoughts on that at that time, how the war was going?

**VOGELPOHL:** This was what we were told they were going to fight to the last man but we had people coming out there. We saw some British ships. The war was over in Europe. The British were out there. We came upon Task Force 58 not knowing it was there just in a routine patrol and I was absolutely amazed. We came out of a cloud bank and here is this fleet spread before us and it was devastating. Could not believe, I mean it's a proud feeling. God, they must have had twenty carriers, battleships; they had the Missouri out there and Iowa, I guess. As far as you could see from being up several thousand feet, as far as you could see in

three directions nothing but ships. There were a couple of fighters just waiting for us as soon as we popped out of the cloud even though we had the IFF on which is Identification Friend or Foe they should be able to pick you up on the radio as being a friend, we heard on the radio, "Check them out. See who the hell they are." That's what the guy said. Here's a couple of \_\_\_?\_\_\_ sitting there and pulling right up along side of us, six feet between the wing tip, hot pilots. A day later we had a guy get too close. They fired tracers in front of his nose to get him out there. You're too close. Back off. They didn't want anybody messing around with them. God, they were rough.

**WILL:** So you figure with that many ships, you knew that the U. S. was,

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. They had been up bombing Japan with the [terrier] plane, you know, with a TBS and SBDs and SP2Cs. We never really ran into, we did silly things like one day we wanted to go up and bomb a, we had a lot of freedom to do what we wanted to do. There was a Japanese airstrip. It was really an auxiliary airstrip up at Honshu. We wanted to go up there and get there right at daylight and make a bombing run right down the middle of their field. Blow them up. Catch them in the chow line. This is something we wanted to do. It just never worked for us. Foggy. We couldn't find the place. Finally it's about eight o'clock. \_\_\_?\_\_\_ The mist is clearing up and the guys were in the chow line true enough, I guess. Anyway the planes are turning up. Trucks driving around even with the gas hose on them and they're filling gas in the planes. You know it's too late to make, the pilot said, "You want to go in and take them on"? I said, "No. Better not".

**WILL:** \_\_\_?\_\_\_ at night.

**VOGELPOHL:** Nothing in the air. But there were several planes turned up so we took off and flew up the coast ten or twelve miles and saw a little freighter sitting out there. We started making runs on it. First

thing we know there are four fighters on our back and they chased us out quite a bit and then they went back. We figured they went back in, so we decided we were going to go back in and get this freighter because,

**WILL:** You had enough fuel to turn around and go back?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. We go back in and this time they're waiting around and man the hammered this time. This was the time after May the 6<sup>th</sup> when we had all the good luck. Going in on a ship, you try to come in from after the quarter. In other words, this is the bow here, come in this way and rake him with bow guns, top guns and as you're swinging away tail guns. Just shoot up his armament where he can't bother you too much. Then you can go in and make the drop. We had planes that were so bad electrically the bombs wouldn't fall. We'd go over a ship six or eight times and the bombs would absolutely not fall so we kept an ordinance man to stand on the catwalk with the bomb bay doors open. The catwalks about a foot wide with a screwdriver in the shackles and when the pilot drop, he twisted the screwdriver and out the bomb fell. That's a bad way to bomb. Crazy thing. We got back to Hawaii. We stopped at the Marshall Islands again overnight at Kwajalein. Flew back with the Army I think it was. We got to Hickam Field. The pilot put us in for rest and rehabilitation. At this time there were only three hotels on Waikiki Beach, the Royal Hawaiian was one of them. The Navy had it for "sub" men and for air crews. They put us in for three days. Beautiful, food you would not believe, milk, fried eggs (after powdered eggs), ice cream, all the good stuff. The only bad thing was you had to wear whites to go down and eat. The last night we were there they had Ted, no, let's see, they had Bing Crosby's brother, Bob Crosby and the Bob-Cats there as a USO show out in the gardens with the waves coming in and everything. A beautiful sight. The next day we found out that an atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima but at that time it was called Hiroshioma. And we

said, "What kind of crap is this, a bomb that's bigger than all the bombs that have been dropped in the whole war.

**WILL:** You couldn't believe this.

**VOGELPOHL:** Then, of course, whenever we found out the next day or two, how the Japanese were thinking about quitting then we wanted to get home as fast as we could. No point of, so we came back on a Jeep carrier. It took a week. It was the only time I spent aboard ship in just about two and a half years in the Navy. Well it wasn't two and a half it was twenty-eight months, something like that.

**WILL:** Twenty-eight months on a ship?

**VOGELPOHL:** No, it only took us seven days to come back. That was the only time out of my time in the Navy that I spent aboard ship.

**WILL:** In all this time overseas did you write a lot of letters home? Did you receive a lot? Packages, letters, did it take a long time for them to get there.

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, airmail would take a week, five days sometimes. That's pretty good, not bad at all.

**WILL:** How often did you write home?

**VOGELPOHL:** I would write on the average of five to seven letters a week. I had a large family at that time. I'm the only one left now.

**WILL:** What kind of packages would you get?

**VOGELPOHL:** They would usually be hammered up, you know. Cigarettes. It was really silly to send cigarettes out because you could buy them for fifty cents a carton. On Tinian we had a beer ration of twelve cans a month. You had a card and you'd get your card punched. You wanted to get a hold of people who didn't drink.

**WILL:** Use their card.

**VOGELPOHL:** We got twenty-four cokes and twelve cans of beer, that you could steal from the Army. And that was easy.

**WILL:** Do you remain in contact with any of your . . .

**VOGELPOHL:** Not now I don't. My buddy that used to come see me here died. The one in Chicago, we used to exchange Christmas Cards and I haven't heard from him for two years. I don't know whether he's alive or not. I did kind of keep in touch with a guy from Oklahoma for a year or two. He got married and got a family and a business of his own and he got too busy to mess around with it. The pilot here doesn't seem interested in, I think I was at his place of business about three times and he never even offered me a beer so,

**WILL:** (Laughter) Or a cup of coffee.

**VOGELPOHL:** After the Jeep carrier got back to San Diego, I flew home with American Airlines a DC2 or something like that. Thirty day leave and I was hoping to get on some field in the mid-west somewhere instead they sent me back to California to San Francisco. They didn't really know what to do with us. They had need for about six radio men and finally there was fifty some of us. You could volunteer and I volunteered to get out of there and got into the shore patrol. Then again there's other places, you know you had different places where you could apply for. You could take a train that just ran back and forth between El Paso and, but then the train were sitting all this business, so I put in for San Mateo. There was a race track here. I didn't now it at the time but we put in \_\_\_?\_\_\_ for the whole racing season. Show up at noon. You're living on the beach. You're getting subsistence because you're not living on the base. You're getting food allowance. Show up at noon and the races are over by five o'clock and that's it.

**WILL:** Some time for yourself.

**VOGELPOHL:** They race five days a week and you only get one day off so you had to come in on Sunday and walk the beat or paddy wagon or something like that and that's how I ended the war. I didn't have enough points to get out but if you had the Distinguished Flying Cross at that time you could get out on request. Just before Christmas they called me in and told me I got the Distinguished Flying Cross. It was so close to Christmas I didn't want to be in transit on a receiving ship somewhere over Christmas so I just stayed in the Shore Patrol until I think the second of January. I went to the Federal Building and requested out and it took about two weeks to, we were on a train that was so old and decrepit, it had a coal fired stove on it. Going north, we had it on the front, you know the stove was on the front. We kept it fired up pretty good. Had buckets of coal there to do it with. At Ogden, Utah, where they make up a new train, they turned us around some way or other. Now the stove was in the back and up in the front it was freezing, it was cold. When I stepped off the train at Great Lakes, it was right around zero, and a high wind coming off of that lake. I had missed two winters in a row and it was fierce. I thought it was pretty bad.

**WILL:** So you were eventually discharged ,

**VOGELPOHL:** At Great Lakes, yeah.

**WILL:** Great Lakes in Chicago. Stepping back a few months, how did you hear about VE Day?

**VOGELPOHL:** We had Stars and Stripes.

**WILL:** Okay.

**VOGELPOHL:** We had little papers and some people were getting papers through the mail. They would be late but we knew about it. We knew it within hours when President Roosevelt died. It wasn't really all that remote, \_\_\_?\_\_\_ was a big place.

**WILL:** Because you were in there.

**VOGELPOHL:** It's still, you know. Communicate, you have planes coming through all the time and air service \_\_\_?\_\_\_ move on. They would bring mail and passengers, and people around, this type of thing. People had radios. You could listen to Tokyo Rose and get all the information you needed about what was going on in the world and hear good music at the same time.

**WILL:** You mentioned you were on Hawaii when the atom bomb was dropped, right?

**VOGELPOHL:** Right. On the way back.

**WILL:** So you must have been there, VJ Day?

**VOGELPOHL:** No. Two VJ Days were aboard ship coming back. Everybody was raising hell and,

**WILL:** Celebrating?

**VOGELPOHL:** As much as you can on a Jeep carrier. We had the whole hangar deck which is the deck below the flight deck with cots strung across. You had to remember where your cot was. Rescue gear was under the cot. It was like 26-52. You had to remember your cot was twenty-six rows back, or fifty-two rows back and then twenty-six over from the right side. It worked pretty good. There always was,

**WILL:** I suppose it was the best at that time.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. Anybody that was Second Class and I was Second Class Petty Officer at that time, Anybody below Second Class had to work in the chow line. Chow line, you're feeding all the time, going up the ladders and,

**WILL:** So many people.

**VOGELPOHL:** All these people aboard, they had a number of different kitchens and feeding areas.

**WILL:** When you heard about the atom bomb, what was your opinion?

**VOGELPOHL:** We didn't, we had no idea what it was.

**WILL:** You didn't know what,

**VOGELPOHL:** No. The only thing that we liked about it was that it was going to end the war. I had a real strange reaction when they, on VJ Day. It seemed like the saddest time I could remember.

**WILL:** On VJ Day?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. I don't know why. I mean here you're just focussed on something for so long and when it's taken away, you're just at a loss.

**WILL:** That's a different reaction.

**VOGELPOHL:** But I was glad it was over, to get out of there.

**WILL:** How about your opinion of the atom bomb being dropped on Japan?

**VOGELPOHL:** Today?

**WILL:** What's your opinion of it looking back fifty years?

**VOGELPOHL:** I think it was a wake up call. We were going to have to go in there and take this a foot at a time from the Japanese. On Iwo I think there were only about four hundred that ever came out. The only ones that I ever saw were nurses and doctors and they looked like drowned rats that came out of the holes. Iwo Jima is a stinking place, a lot of sulphur and fumes and mist coming out of the ground and its not a very nice.

**WILL:** Isn't that kind of a volcano island?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. It's one of the three volcano islands that's in the volcano group.



The other two are just mountain tops sticking out of the water.

**WILL:** What was your rank when you were discharged?

**VOGELPOHL:** Aviation Radio Man Second Class, Petty Officer.

**WILL:** Okay. And you just mentioned your decorations. You had,

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. I got a Distinguished Flying Cross, five Air Medals, Philippine Liberation, the Asiatic Pacific American Theater, and that's the Air Medal Bar. For each medal, you use the bar as one then you get four stars for five air medals. Like I say they gave them for five missions. This is the baby that got me out. I kind of keep him separate.

**WILL:** How many total? You were in thirty-nine flights—combat flights.

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. Thirty-nine.

**WILL:** How'd you get along with the men that you had the greatest contact with? Pretty good?

**VOGELPOHL:** Yeah. We got along pretty good. Everybody had his duty. It didn't seem right all the time. Like for example if you get a couple of good USO shows and you're on plane guard on both of them but this is just little "tinker" stuff. It's not worth ... We had a real good skipper of the squadron. When we got there—he was relieved, came back for his rest and rehabilitation, came back with his crew—but our Exec at that time was kind of a hard nose. Then we got an Exec that was pretty good but the skipper of the squadron was kind of a jerk. He wanted us to march out to the planes two abreast, all this kind of happy stuff. (Laughter). Mostly ignored him but he didn't last—Only had to put up with him maybe a month or so. Living conditions were—we went on rest and rehabilitation for a week to

Palilote. God what a place that is! The sand fleas started attacking about two o'clock in the afternoon. From your knees down you can hardly see any skin. They were just one right on top of the other. Just take your fingernails, you know—all these little creepy crawly things. You sleep under a mosquito net and laying there usually with just a pair of shorts on or something. The best thing to do is get yourself a little lizard about this long. Keep a couple of those in there with you. They'd run across your chest but they caught mosquitoes

**WILL:** They got fat on mosquitoes. (Laughter)

**VOGELPOHL:** There are some strange places.

**WILL:** I don't think you—Here's the question. You didn't have anything to do with. You never saw any prisoner concentration camps on your flights.

**VOGELPOHL:** No. They had the natives of the islands who were Korean probably on Tinian that did things like that.

**WILL:** Japanese prisoners.

**VOGELPOHL:** No. They were Koreans that lived there and they were farming. They had sugar cane and this type of thing. They had them dumping barrels, you know, of waste. Want something to drink? Francie, you want to get us a couple of cokes?

**WILL:** What is the most difficult thing you had to do during your military service? Is there anything that stands out.

**VOGELPOHL:** Well, I knew I wanted to—there was a time to do it and when it's done, it's time to get out. I enjoyed the last month the least probably because at this time I felt that—You know the war had been over since August. Here it is December and all these people are coming through—coming back to the States and you

were like war surplus. It's a little different whenever there's a war going on, everybody gives you a ride and everything, you know. You put up your thumb, you're gone. After the war, things kind of tighten up like they were. Almost like around Norfolk. Dogs and sailors keep off the lawn type of thing. I just wanted to get out. I didn't want to make a career out of it. I just wanted to—I got taken in by this far away places with strange sounding names. I had the song. You remember it probably. I'd done all of this. It's time to do something else.

**WILL:** You were never disabled then.

**VOGELPOHL:** No.

**WILL:** You ever have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

**VOGELPOHL:** I belong in my hometown to the American Legion for a few years.

**WILL:** What's your opinion of the VA?

**VOGELPOHL:** I'm not a club type. Some people like the Moose. They go down and drink beer and play cards and Bingo or whatever. I just was never into that.

**WILL:** You've never gone to any VA Hospital? You look pretty good and healthy to me.

**VOGELPOHL:** I'm not that great really.

**WILL:** How did your family support you during your military life?

**VOGELPOHL:** It was 100%. You know they were.

**WILL:** Your brothers and sisters?

**VOGELPOHL:** I would get, hear from some of the family probably twice a week. I had a sister, three brothers and my mother wrote. My dad may have written a couple.

**WILL:** They supported you.

**VOGELPOHL:** Oh, yeah. Different times whenever I'd be in a crunch for money just call my oldest brother. For example we were supposed to live on the beach now. You don't have a place to stay and you don't have enough money to feed yourself. You don't know where to go to get money to take you for the next six days because that is when the next payday is. You don't have any housing or food allotment at all so I'd just call him up and say, "Hey I need fifty dollars or a hundred dollars" or whatever and Bingo it was there. Telegraphed. This made it easier. A time or two I had to do that whenever I got, I was travelling. For example if you only get \$54 a month and \$6 of that goes for insurance, try buying a \$60 railroad ticket some where. It's tough. So you just pay it back when you can.

**WILL:** One last question here. Is there any one thing that stands out as your most successful achievement during your military life?

**VOGELPOHL:** No. It was the greatest adventure. It was exactly what I was looking for. Without it I think I'd, knowing what I know now, at least, I think I would have enjoyed life a whole lot less. So many things that refer back to, you know about something whenever you read a story of a different war, you know how people feel and how people react and it made life a whole lot more interesting. Because of the service, there was the GI Bill that allowed me to try to fulfill the other ambition that was to play violin reasonably well. I got a degree in music. I taught in the public schools in Illinois and in the high school for four years and in the junior high for three years.

**WILL:** Here in Rockford. You didn't do this right out of the service, did you?

**VOGELPOHL:** No, I fooled around. I just taught for seven years and ended up working at Camcar-Textron, supervisor there. I worked there a little over twenty-five years totally.

**WILL:** Where did you teach in Rockford?

**VOGELPOHL:** The first three years at Wilson Junior High was open in the west end. Little different now than it was then.

**WILL:** Music teacher?

**VOGELPOHL:** (Inaudible)

**WILL:** Thank you very much Earl. I guess that about winds it up. Do you want to say good-bye?

**VOGELPOHL:** Good bye.