

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
PAUL A. HIRSHRUNNER
United States Marine Corps, WWII
1996

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Hirsbrunner, Paul A., (1920-2000). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recordings: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Hirsbrunner, a veteran originally from Darlington, Wis., discusses his military career with the Marines and provides a vivid account of fighting out of Saipan as experienced by an officer in charge of a platoon of amphibious tanks. He tells that he was inducted as a private first class once he graduated as an agriculture student from the University of Wisconsin. He mentions boot camp training at Paris Island (South Carolina), officer training at Quantico (Virginia), and ship tank training at Camp Lejeune (California). Hirsbrunner mentions he didn't experience any cultural problems while stationed in Perris Island. He describes heading towards Saipan on landing ship tanks (LST), how rough the seas were, and realizing he was headed for an actual combat zone. Hirsbrunner provides information on how he and his platoon would get together on the ship and check the tanks, go over the battle plan, and where they would meet the infantry they were supposed to work with. He comments on trying to surprise the Japanese by approaching them by the western side of Saipan, but how all "hell" broke loose when they arrived inland. He reveals how the Japanese were firing at them with artillery and mortars, and how some of the men died and some didn't. Hirsbrunner describes the mission, artillery, mortars, and open top tanks in great detail. He states that he was wounded by Japanese mortar fire, and because of his wound he was no longer qualified for combat. He mentions that he was a Marine guard at Cape May (New Jersey) and at Great Lakes (MI). He states that he did not like military life. He mentions that as part of the GI bill he was a veteran's training instructor in agriculture. Hirsbrunner tells that he belongs to the Legion and is a life member of the Disabled American Veterans. He expresses dismay that Texas won't allow him to become a member of their VFW. Hirsbrunner comments on the relationship between organizations and use of benefits and briefly evaluates the veterans health care system.

Biographical Sketch

Hirsbrunner (1920-2000) served with the Marine Corps during World War II, he was honorably discharged in 1944. After the war, he lived for a time in Madison, Wis. and eventually settled in Texas.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcribed by Mary Lou Condon, Court Reporter, 2004.

Interview Transcript

Mark: Today's date is October the 30th, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Paul Hirsbrunner. Did I pronounce that correctly?

Hirsbrunner: That's correct.

Mark: H-i-r-s-b-r-u-n-n-e-r. Originally from Darlington, Wisconsin, a veteran of World War II, now a resident of Corpus Christi, Texas.

Good afternoon. Thanks for taking some time out of your day.

Hirsbrunner: That's great. Glad to be with you.

Mark: I appreciate it. Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Hirsbrunner: Well, I was born down in Lafayette County near Darlington. I actually wasn't born in a hospital, I was born on the farm at home. Of course, they had a doctor come out and attend to your mother.

At the time of the Pearl Harbor thing I was attending the University of Wisconsin. And I think it was on a weekend, I believe, when the attack was made on Pearl Harbor.

Mark: I suppose, just for anecdotal purposes, I'd appreciate it if you'd sort of recount the incident for me. Your own personal recollection of the Pearl Harbor—

Hirsbrunner: As I remember, I was staying in a fraternity house at that time, and something on the radio about an attack being made on Pearl Harbor.

Mark: And you were in college you said?

Hirsbrunner: That's right.

Mark: About 19, 20 years old or so?

Hirsbrunner: Let's see. That was in '41, wasn't it, the attack?

Mark: Yes.

Hirsbrunner: I was born in '20, so I would have been 21.

- Mark: As a young draft age military service age male, when you heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor, what was your reaction? Did you just think about finishing school or did you run right down and enlist? How did it impact on your life personally, I guess is what I'm getting at?
- Hirsbrunner: If I remember right, they had the draft prior to that, and I had registered for the draft. But then, of course I didn't run right down and enlist. What happened is, well I guess it didn't happen right away, but I played football. The Marines set up this Marine Reserve program for those that were seniors were allowed to finish school and then you were taken in for officer's training. So Harry Stoolder(??) called me up and told me to get down there and sign up to join the Marines. So that's how I got into the Marines.
- Mark: I see. Now, one of the questions I normally ask is why you chose the service that you did. There were many different service options.
- Hirsbrunner: Yes. Well, that in a nutshell is how I got into the Marines. Of course, I always had respect for the Marines, but with his encouragement I guess and a little nudge that's why I made the move and signed up.
- Mark: So why don't you just walk me through your induction into military service. I'm sure you had to go to basic training and the whole—
- Hirsbrunner: Yeah. When you signed up they actually inducted you as, I was inducted as a private first class, and then you were what they called on inactive duty as a private first class. And then, as soon as I graduated, well, not quite as soon. I graduated like in June and then I went home to Darlington and helped them on the farm, and in the middle of July I get my friendly orders to report to Paris Island, South Carolina for boot camp training.
- Mark: And I want you to describe boot camp to me. How long was it, what sort of training did you do?
- Hirsbrunner: Well, it's quite a jolt to get into boot camp. You figure you're a normal human being until you get off the train there and are met by your friendly sergeants and so forth. All at once you become the lowest form of life there is. You don't know anything. And you're corralled into your barracks and then run through the barber shop and get all your hair cut off. A really pretty shocking experience in a way.
- Mark: In what sense is that so shocking?
- Hirsbrunner: Well, you might be sleeping away and—well, for one thing, you get all the shots one day and you're feeling terrible, your arms hurt and everything.

Three o'clock in the morning the sergeants come in and blast you out of bed. Get out on the parade grounds for exercise, we've got to work that soreness out of you. Stuff like that. Of course, they have some pretty nasty terms for you if you don't perform everything to their satisfaction.

Mark: Yeah, especially in the Marine Corps. Now, some young men adjust better than others to the sort of salty language, I guess you could say. Did you have any troubles with that sort of adjustment to this new lifestyle?

Hirsbrunner: Well, no, that part didn't bother me too much. But some of it, like another thing they did was if you goofed up they'd put a bucket on your head and then beat on it with their baton stick. That didn't feel so good.

Mark: No, I imagine not. And in terms of weapons training, did you have much in basic training? Did you shoot a gun? What kind of gun did you shoot?

Hirsbrunner: We had a lot of small arms training, primarily rifle with the 30 caliber M-1. The first training you get is a lot of close-order drill. They get you out there and practice, practice, practice the commands at close-order drill and different formations and so forth. Then, after that, you would go out to the rifle range for shooting practice. And maybe we had practice with 45 pistols and 32 caliber carbines and grenade launchers. Mostly small arm stuff in boot training.

Mark: Now, basic training tends to bring together people from many different parts of the country. Was that your experience?

Hirsbrunner: Oh yeah. Yes. We had people there from the state of Washington, and I remember quite a few from Princeton graduates and Yale graduates and some from the South, Alabama and so forth. Quite a conglomeration of people.

Mark: Any sort of cultural problems, shall we say? For example, Southerners still fighting the Civil War or whatever the case may be.

Hirsbrunner: Nothing serious, just friendly. Friendly jab sets with one another now and then, but no serious stuff. I guess we primarily kidded each other, mainly about their football teams.

Mark: I suppose. You were a lot of college guys.

Hirsbrunner: Pardon?

Mark: You were a lot of college guys there.

Hirsbrunner: You had to be a college graduate. We were all college graduates.

- Mark: So, after the basic training, then, what happened after that?
- Hirsbrunner: Well, after that we were sent to Quantico, Virginia for officer's candidate school.
- Mark: And how was that different than boot camp?
- Hirsbrunner: Well, first of all you were treated a lot differently there. You were a gentleman then when you got into officer's training. It was more academic work on combat situations and combat strategy. There wasn't a whole lot of weapons training there, it was more or less academic stuff.
- Mark: And how long did that last again?
- Hirsbrunner: Oh let's see. They called us 90-day wonders, so it must've been three months.
- Mark: They were getting you out pretty quick, I guess. So then you were ready to command troops?
- Hirsbrunner: Yes sir.
- Mark: And you did.
- Hirsbrunner: Well, actually, after Quantico I had a short leave and then I was sent out to Camp Lejeune, California. That was a base where they had land tanks(??). And I spent some time there and then I had a friend in Oceanside, California in the Marine amphibious tank base, and I had a buddy with me there and I said, let's go over and visit him. And so we went over and talked to him and while we were there we found out their outfit was getting ready to ship out and go overseas. So this buddy of mine says, well, why don't we just—they were short of lieutenants, so why don't we see if we can get transferred over to get with them and get this thing over with. So we made a request and darned if it wasn't approved and we were transferred to this amphibious tank outfit. We were there, at Oceanside, California, for not very long, probably about three weeks, and we got loaded up and shipped out to Hawaii for our staging area for combat area.
- Mark: I would imagine this is your first overseas trip on a boat going to Hawaii?
- Hirsbrunner: Yeah, I believe the first time I had been on a boat of any kind. And when we left California we were on these, what they call landing ship tanks, and they had a flat bottom. Had us some rough seas, and talk about seasick. You've heard of the old adage about seasick, you hope you'll die.

Mark: That's true?

Hirsbrunner: You wish you would die. That's very true. It's a horrible feeling. About three or four days to get over that and things went a little better than.

Mark: So you got to Hawaii. I mean, up to this time there had been training, getting ready for combat. Once you got to Hawaii, did it start to get more real? Did it start to sink in what was going to happen?

Hirsbrunner: Well, yeah. Yeah, you got to thinking about it pretty seriously what you're getting into. And we spent a little time around Hawaii, not too much; we were only there about a month until we got some more equipment and used it in practice runs, practice landings, and then got it aboard and shipped out, again.

Mark: To where this time?

Hirsbrunner: Headed towards Saipan.

Mark: So you left from Hawaii to the actual combat zone.

Hirsbrunner: Yeah. It took us about a month to get over there. We were on the--seen a lot of the ocean.

Mark: Yeah, I bet you did. Now when you left Hawaii, was it understood that the next time you're getting off the boat was to invade something? Or were you not told?

Hirsbrunner: Yes, we knew where we were headed.

Mark: That must make for a rather long voyage.

Hirsbrunner: Oh yeah, that was a long one. And then, again we were on these LSTs, flat bottoms, and they get any rough seas and—but by that time my body was adjusted to the rough water and I didn't get seasick anymore. Then we had to go in diagonals. You'd go one direction a while and then change directions. The ships would try to avoid submarine attacks. It probably took a little longer doing that because we couldn't go right in a straight line towards some place.

But, as a whole, we had beautiful weather most of the time, and I can still see flying fish coming up and sailing in the water. And some birds followed us all the way over. They'd roost on the end of the ship at night and kind of follow it.

- Mark: So, during this month-long period on the ship, you're going to the combat zone, but you've got to fill up your 24 hours a day. What sort of activities did you do?
- Hirsbrunner: Well, I'd get together with my—see, I was in charge of a platoon of five tanks, and we'd get together and talk about any problems we had, communication. And then we'd check the tanks. These were down below in a hold, and we could start them up. We'd have to get the fans a going to remove all the gases and so forth. And we'd start them every once in a while to make sure they were operating right and try the radios, and then just kind of map out what we were going to do. We were given the plan, the overall battle plan more or less, where we were supposed to land and what we were supposed to do afterwards and so forth.
- Mark: I imagine you had some free time, though, to read books or write letters or something like that.
- Hirsbrunner: Yeah. Right. Of course, pretty decent quarters and we'd shoot the bull with your buddies and so forth. It didn't seem like the time dragged for any reason. We had plenty to do.
- Mark: I suppose we're up to the invasion now. Why don't you just sort of narrate your experience to me.
- Hirsbrunner: Of course this was out of Saipan. They were going to surprise the Japs. Normally you would consider going right in on the eastern coast there, but they figured they'd go around to the back side, the western side. And that was a coral reef, and there's no way you could get in there with the regular landing boats, Higgins-type boats. So all the landing had to be done with crawler-type stuff. They had these personnel carriers that had tracks on them. And then, of course, I had this platoon of amphibious tanks. There were crawlers, and they were able to hit the coral reef and crawl over them and get into the shoreline. Actually, the time of departure was real early in the morning. It was still just breaking daylight.
- I remember our lieutenant, Navy lieutenant in charge of our ship, he dumped us off out there and he was in a hell of a hurry to get out of there. He wanted to get back to a safer place, so he was always yacking at us to get off fast. Anyway, we got into the water and got organized where we were supposed to be in line with the rest of the troops.
- Mark: So you're how far from shore at this point?
- Hirsbrunner: Oh, we were probably about three miles. And then, at a designated time, I don't remember what it was exactly, we headed inland. And, as we were going in, why all hell broke loose. They had this area zeroed in with their

artillery and mortars, and they were sitting back in the mountain. And those things were just like raindrops falling into the water. And you knew you had to go through that stuff to get to shore. And some made it and some didn't.

But my first real jolt was I was crawling up out of the water onto the shore and these darn tanks had an open top, you know, a turret, and whoever was in the tank had to stick his head out and see where he was going, and then he would tell the driver how to drive by intercom. So I had my head sticking out there and wham, I heard this thing whistling and a big hunk of whirling metal hit me on my steel helmet. So that was a little jolt too. But it was just a glancing blow, it didn't do any damage.

Mark: So your mission with these tanks was to do what, precisely? I mean, I assume you had an objective or something like that.

Hirsbrunner: Yeah. Well, they had a 75-millimeter Howitzer on them and a 50-caliber machine gun and a couple 30-caliber. We were supposed to lead the way in, and of course whatever opposition you encountered you were supposed to blast that and make it safer for the ground forces to come in.

Mark: Right.

Hirsbrunner: Let's see. You want me to continue on the landing here?

Mark: Mm-hmm.

Hirsbrunner: Well, actually we were supposed to land and then go in a ways. There was a railroad track that they used to haul stuff to a sugar mill. We were supposed to make our way to that and then get together with the ground forces, infantry people that we were supposed to work with.

You get on shore and, let's see, for some reason, of course you still get sporadic mortar and artillery stuff dropping on you. Didn't see any sign of our ground forces. So you get into or stopped in an area near a grove of trees, and I thought it would be safer to get my crew out of the tank because if the darn mortar shell went down that open tank, everybody would be killed. So we got out of the tank and got in some foxholes to wait to see if any infantry forces are coming.

And while we were out of the dang tank, a Jap tank came right close to us. And he sat there a while and, well, what do we do now? I had a 30-caliber carbine, a small rifle, and I blasted a few rounds off his side and darned if he didn't take off and get out of there.

Then, after that another one came, so my gunner was right next to me and so I said, let's get to the tank, maybe we can get him. So we got into the tank and wheeled that 75-millimeter Howitzer around. They weren't a gun, they were like an artillery piece. They were meant for lobbing shells rather than a straight trajectory fire. But we were so close, we aimed that thing at him and we had some point-detonating shells, and dang if we didn't hit a tree right before it got to the tank, and the dang shell exploded. But then that scared the Jap, I guess, because he took off too. So we didn't see anymore of those tanks.

Then we got near that railroad track and held up there. I didn't want to go any further until we had some infantry with us. So by that time it was getting late in the day, so we got into some good foxholes or shell holes down there and we stayed overnight.

While we were there, there was some kind of a smokestack near that sugar mill. There must've been a damn sniper up on there and he kept sniping at us near the foxhole, but he didn't hit any of us.

Mark: Let me interrupt for a second. So you're how far inland by now?

Hirsbrunner: Oh, we're not very far, really. I wouldn't say over a quarter of a mile.

Mark: And you mentioned that you spent the night there.

Hirsbrunner: Yes.

Mark: I would only imagine that there's really no sleeping in a com bed(??). How were those sorts of things arranged?

Hirsbrunner: Well, we tried to have a couple guys on lookout and then maybe a couple guys tried to get a little rest, kind of take turns. But there wasn't much rest for anybody. One thing, they raised a lot of goats. They were running loose and you could hear something moving and you didn't know what it was, a Jap or a goat. I think a few goats got shot.

Mark: Better to be safe than sorry, I guess.

Hirsbrunner: Yeah. Well, let's see. The next morning our infantry that we were supposed to be working with, there still wasn't any sign of those, so I sent one of my men back down to the beach. Our unit was supposed to set up a command post there and told them to find that and see what the situation was. Well, he did come back and said that I should go back and talk to the colonel. I went back there and then he told me where the infantry was that we were supposed to be with. And so we got over there and got hooked up with our infantry during the day.

Well, there was a captain in charge of this infantry unit, and they were dug in pretty well and had a line of fire there and said they were going to make an advance the next morning, so to be ready. And he wanted us to more or less blast through, be with them and kind of lead the way and blast anything that was a problem. So, we, of course, got out of the tank and spent the night in a foxhole again.

We were supposed to make that advance at daybreak, this breaking day, and got the tank engine started and ready to roll, and all hell broke loose. They had that place zeroed in with mortar and artillery. So I went over to talk to my sergeant, he was in a foxhole, and I was on my hands and knees talking to him and had this Thompson submachine gun holding that, and kaboom, something landed right in front of me, either mortar or artillery shell, and I had had it. I was partially stunned and I knew I was hit bad. I rolled over into a foxhole and kind of reconnoitered to see if any parts were gone from my body, but everything seemed to be intact except I was bleeding badly.

So, I was still able to navigate to I told the sergeant to take over and I was going to head back to the beach to get some medical attention.

Mark: How far did you get?

Hirsbrunner: Well, I got partway there and I ran into a Navy corpsman and he gave me a shot of morphine. They had those big tubes of stuff, and that helped kill the pain. This is kind of funny in a way, but one of my men went with me, a real young guy, and then I get back to the base where they had kind of a gathering spot for wounded, and damn if they didn't get me another shot of that. I guess they didn't know I had that first shot, and wham-o, I was standing there and I just keeled over. And this young guy thought I was going to die, just collapsed. But it was just a momentary thing, I just kind of slightly passed out.

Mark: And when you came to, where were you?

Hirsbrunner: Well, I was still in that area. They kind of had a gathering place there where you would congregate there, and they conveyed you out to a hospital ship from there. And another little deal there, it was laying in that hot sand and the sun was hot as hell. I was thirsty, I couldn't get enough water. I asked this one medical man, I said you wouldn't have a shot of brandy. He said, what do you think this is, a nightclub? I can just remember yet how good a nice little shot of brandy would have tasted with throat dryness.

Mark: So your wounds were what, precisely?

Hirsbrunner: I got hit in both arms, and it had actually broken the bone in the left arm and sloughed off a bunch of muscle slices, and in the right hand and then in the right muscle area. And then I got some fine stuff actually in the chest area and then in my leg. Got junk in there.

Mark: So this required some surgery.

Hirsbrunner: Yeah. It went through a joint of one of my fingers, and that was hanging there. It was still hanging on, but it was useless. I finally got out to the hospital ship and spent some time there, about a week before they got a load of wounded, got filled up, and took us to a base in the Johnston Islands. And then spent a night there and they had a plane going from there that took me to Hawaii to a hospital there.

Mark: Now, I get the impression it was pretty clear from the start that the war was over for you, that they weren't going to send you back to the line, that your wounds were—

Hirsbrunner: Yeah, I figured there probably would be no more combat, at least, and might go to some office job or something. But I didn't think—any more combat, I didn't think.

Mark: I'm sorry, you were going to say something.

Hirsbrunner: I went to this Naval hospital in Hawaii, then I was there for a while and then went to a hospital by ship to California, to the Oakland area. They had a Naval base there. I think it was what they call Mirror Island.

Mark: And you spent how long in the hospital overall?

Hirsbrunner: Oh boy. Well, let's see. That was, I guess, the 17th when I got wounded, and that was in '44. After California I went to Great Lakes. I was in there quite a while. Of course, by that time I was pretty well healed up. I would say probably about six months. But that part in Great Lakes I hadn't been in the hospital, just kind of a recuperation period.

Mark: Right. But I would imagine there's some sort of rehabilitation going on there too. I think of the Bob Dole story, of course, following the news and all and his story of how he had to rehabilitate his arms and that sort of thing. I imagine you had to go through some sort of similar treatment.

Hirsbrunner: Well, actually I didn't have much rehab treatment really. Of course, I didn't have any limbs that were immobilized or dead or what you call it.

Mark: Yeah, I know what you mean.

Hirsbrunner: Physical therapy. It was just wounds that had to heal up mostly, and they healed up. There really wasn't any need for any physical therapy stuff.

Mark: So about six months in the hospital and you were discharged then? Or what was your disposition?

Hirsbrunner: Well, after I finished at Great Lakes hospital I was put on active duty again and sent to the East Coast to, what's the name? I guess my wife [asks wife location]—where was that we went on the East Coast? Cape May, New Jersey. There was a Naval air base there and they had Marine guards, so I was in charge of some of that Marine guard work. And they also had a brig there, of course, in connection with the Naval Air Station which the Marines took care of.

Mark: Were there any particular challenges in that job? Unruly soldiers, I would imagine.

Hirsbrunner: Not so much there. I did have one horrible experience there. Somebody caught a few Marines that were sent to that area that came back from overseas, and I don't know what, a couple of these guys were on guard duty, and believe it or not they got to playing Russian roulette, and one of them lost.

Mark: With the obvious results, I'm sure.

Hirsbrunner: Yeah. Yeah. What a stupid maneuver. I couldn't believe it, but that's what they were doing. And then, after that, I was sent back to Great Lakes and was in charge of the brig there for a while. And then I was finally released to inactive duty.

Mark: Was the war still going on by this time?

Hirsbrunner: No, the war ended when I was in New Jersey.

Mark: I see.

Hirsbrunner: But I was more or less sent back there to be separated from the Service to Great Lakes.

Mark: And you decided to get out of the Service at that point.

Hirsbrunner: As fast as possible.

Mark: I'm interested in why you say that the way you do: as fast as possible.

Hirsbrunner: Well, I'm just not a military-type man, I guess.

Mark: I see. I suppose you had had enough of the military lifestyle?

Hirsbrunner: Yes. Yes, that's for sure.

Mark: So did you come back to Wisconsin after that?

Hirsbrunner: Yeah. Actually, I got married in 1945. I was still in the Service. And then I had graduated and came back to Madison to the University. They were hiring people for their Extension service work. Harley(?) Muck(?), Sr., you ever heard of him?

Mark: Yeah.

Hirsbrunner: He was in charge of the Extension service and he set me up with a job in the Extension.

Mark: Doing what?

Hirsbrunner: Well, I was sent out to Grant County. You work with farmers on various problems and so forth, agricultural work.

Mark: Which you had had experience on, of course, growing up.

Hirsbrunner: Yes, I was an ag graduate.

Mark: How long did you keep that job?

Hirsbrunner: I didn't stay in Extension very long. Actually, another opportunity came along. They had needed some instructors in the veterans' training program for part of the G.I. Bill. And they had these set up throughout the country, so I took one of those as a veterans' training instructor in agriculture.

Mark: Oh, I see. In Madison or Wisconsin?

Hirsbrunner: No, that was down in Bloomington.

Mark: Illinois?

Hirsbrunner: No, Bloomington—

Mark: Oh, in Grant County.

Hirsbrunner: Grant County, yeah.

- Mark: So what about farming and the veteran? You don't often think about that. You think of G.I. Bill and going to college and that sort of thing, but those who had come from a farming background perhaps wanted to go into farming. For a veteran, what problems did he face trying to get back into farming or get into farming in the first place? And how were you able to help them?
- Hirsbrunner: Actually, it was to give them training primarily on different fertilizers, crop growing, livestock feeding, livestock breeding and so forth. Just give them education so they could do the job better. And, of course, the finances, farm accounting and so forth.
- Mark: Was this with the federal government or state government by some chance?
- Hirsbrunner: That was connected with the feds.
- Mark: The federal government?
- Hirsbrunner: Yeah.
- Mark: Financing too. Farming is an expensive business, as I'm sure you're well aware. There were various loan programs that veterans were eligible for.
- Hirsbrunner: Yeah. Well, of course, a lot of these were sons that were on the home farm, and then they would stay on the farm for a percentage. That's the way that most of them got started. It was pretty rough to go out from scratch and buy machinery and livestock and everything to get started that way in farming. Most of them kind of grew into it through their home farm situation.
- Mark: I see. Now I think, of course, of the phrase after World War I, "It's hard to keep the boy on the farm once he's seen Parie." I'm curious as to how much business you had. How many of these guys wanted to go back into farming?
- Hirsbrunner: Oh, there were a lot of them. We could only take so many and there was always somebody, more than they could handle really, wanting to get into the program. Of course, it was a good deal for them too because they got not only free, but they got paid for the classes.
- Mark: Was it with the G.I. Bill itself?
- Hirsbrunner: Yes. It was, yes.
- Mark: I know that there was an on-the-job training provision in that law.

Hirsbrunner: Yes.

Mark: That must be what that was, then. Being a veteran yourself, did you find that helpful in this particular work?

Hirsbrunner: Come again with the question?

Mark: In counseling veterans about getting back on the farm, did you find it helpful to be a veteran yourself? Or was the farming knowledge much more pertinent?

Hirsbrunner: Yeah, I don't think being a veteran made that much difference. It was just you tried to give them as much information as you could, what you would have picked up in the ag courses and so forth. And my experience in farming. But actually being a vet I don't think made—of course, you felt empathy towards them and tried to do as good as you could for them.

Mark: Did you keep this job very long? I'd imagine after a while all the guys who are going to want to get back into farming are going to get there.

Hirsbrunner: I guess I did that for about three years. I could see that it was a dead-end type of job, it wasn't going to last forever because they could just be entitled to training for so long and then you would run out of veterans eventually.

Mark: Right.

Hirsbrunner: So, actually I got a chance to go with Pet Milk Company, do ag work with them working with the farmers, the producers.

Mark: How did you get down to Texas? And when did you finally leave the good ol' badger state?

Hirsbrunner: We always had kind of a yen to get out of the cold winter weather. So, I don't know, we just decided to make the big move. It was kind of a gutsy move at our age to take off and leave without having a job promised you. But we made the move. And the reason we got to Texas, really, is that at the time we had a daughter whose husband was in school at Baylor. And we came down to visit them and goofed around Texas and saw quite a bit of it and liked the Austin area. We were in a travel trailer at that time and so we stayed around Austin. I applied for some work with the state health department at a dairy department, inspection department, and they hired me. And that's how we got to Texas.

Mark: I've got two more things I want to cover. First of all, being a wounded veteran I'm interested in your medical readjustment back to society. And the second one involves veterans' organizations and that sort of thing and if you ever joined any.

So, in terms of medical problems, Service-connected problems after the war, did you have any at all?

Hirsbrunner: Well, actually no medical problems, actually, from this condition from these wounds, I continue to have, like loss of muscle in the left arm and a little bit of nerve damage. And then, of course, my right hand, a piece of shrapnel hit the joint of my thumb and another piece went through one of the fingers at the joint and they had to take the finger off. But nothing to have to take routine treatment for.

Mark: It's nothing that seems to have hindered your economic prospects or job prospects.

Hirsbrunner: Nothing much, no. If I wanted to play the piano or something—

Mark: I imagine that the V.A. gave you some sort of disability rating of some kind before you left the Service.

Hirsbrunner: Yes, they did. Yes.

Mark: Have you had much contact with the V.A. medical system regarding your war wounds?

Hirsbrunner: Let's see. When I was in—not too much, really. When I was in Lancaster I—no, that wasn't even with the V.A. I guess the only deal was I had kind develop on my chest where that shrapnel hit me and I went to the V.A. here, but they don't have any treatment. They sent me to San Antonio [End of Tape 1, Side A] and they took out a cyst up there. Outside of that, I haven't had any V.A. treatment.

Mark: In terms of the psychological effects of combat, sometimes combat veterans will experience nightmares and that sort of thing a little bit after the war. Did you have such an experience?

Hirsbrunner: Nothing real bad. You think about those things every so often, but I don't think it affected me that bad. Sometimes you kind of, when you go back to the beach and saw all those Marines laying in the water there dead, it gives you some bad thoughts. Nothing real serious.

Mark: Nothing debilitating, obviously.

Hirsbrunner: Yeah.

Mark: I guess the last topic I want to discuss is veterans' organizations. I'll start out right after the war and did you join any when you first got out of Service?

Hirsbrunner: Yeah, I belong to the Legion. I guess I've belonged ever since I've been out. And then, let's see, I'm a life member in the Disabled American Veterans. When I was in Wisconsin I was a member of the VFW. And down here in Texas I was going to join up with a post and, damn, they wouldn't take me. They said I didn't have the right kind of a paper, some kind of discharge paper. So I thought to hell with it.

Mark: For what reason did you join these groups? Was it for social activities? For political matters? Or the heck of it?

Hirsbrunner: Well, I figured that veterans needed representation and you should join up for somewhat that reason. And, of course, there was a pretty good social factor connected with it.

Mark: Were you ever what you'd call an active veteran? Did you hold any offices in the organization or anything like that?

Hirsbrunner: Yeah, when I was in Belleville I held I think secretary of the Legion and commander one year.

Mark: Those are pretty much all the questions I had.

Hirsbrunner: Okay.

Mark: We've gone through my sort of routine there. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think we sort of skipped over or anything?

Hirsbrunner: Oh, I don't know if this is appropriate or not, but I had a strange experience when I got off the hospital ship in Hawaii. There was, I don't know whether he was a fake or what, but he had an officer's uniform on and he was standing there heckling us Marines as we got off, believe it or not. "I thought you Marines were tough," and he'd laugh. And we were both arms in a sling and he thought that was funny. And then I would say that our medical care was horrible.

Mark: At which point?

Hirsbrunner: Well, in the hospital in Hawaii. This doctor, all he would do is come around and, "How do you feel?" And he would keep right on going. And one poor Marine was trying to, hadn't had a bowel movement for a week

and was trying to get some attention, and he finally had to raise hell. The doctors were more interested in goofing around with the nurses than taking care of the patients. Just going to get the good bitches(??) medical people.

When I was on that hospital ship, too, that open wounds develop this proud(??) flesh. The damn arm was broken, but he tried to make me hold it up there so he could rub that wound with cheesecloth to slough off the—and he thought I was a big sissy because it hurt. I was complaining. Here I had a broken arm, which hurt like hell. They just treated the Marines like shit, to put it blankly.

Mark: That's odd. I've never heard a story like that.

Hirsbrunner: You haven't heard anything to that effect before?

Mark: Interesting.

Hirsbrunner: I would sure like to have had an investigation of the whole mess.

Mark: That is interesting. Well anyway—

Hirsbrunner: I hate to leave this on a sour note, but—

Mark: No, no, that's just fine. It took just about an hour, about what I expected. Again, thanks for taking some time out of your day.

Hirsbrunner: Okey-doke.