



**Interview Summary and Index**

**Interviewee:** Howard B. Vanfleet

**Interviewer:** Melvin P. Thatcher

**Date:** May 28, 2015

**Location:** Provo, Utah

**Summary**

Howard B. Vanfleet tells about growing up as a son of a guard, later deputy warden, at the state penitentiary in Sugar House from age 4 in 1935 until 1951. He also talks about his military service, work experiences, and education, all of which are intertwined.

Howard provides many insights into life at the prison including his first recollection of some children of a guard playing like they were chopping off the head of another, spending time inside the prison with his father, learning leather craft and metal work from the prisoners, prison breaks, apprehending escapees, and escorting a prisoner from back east in the family car.

Howard remembers having a worm business and the freedom won by purchasing a car. He speaks of his dog Vim who died after eating poisoned rats and the Sherwood's bulldog Chub who killed a prison hog. He recalls climbing up a poplar tree by his house to peer over the prison wall and watch a prisoner escorted to his execution. He also remembers throwing tomatoes with the warden's son at cars passing by on 2100 South. And he reminisces about hitchhiking with friends several times to Las Vegas while studying at BYU.

Howard also talks about his education and military service. He recalls how work experience in his teens convinced him to go to university. His schooling at BYU was interrupted when his number came up in the draft. In the army, he served in a unit that worked on development of the atomic bomb. After graduating from BYU, he worked in Texas before coming back to the University of Utah to earn a Ph.D in physics.

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<b>Time</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
00:00:00	<b>Introduction.</b>



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00:01:40	<b>Self introduction.</b> Moved into one of six prison guard residences in 1935 when father was hired as a guard at the state penitentiary [in Sugar House]. Father eventually became deputy warden. Used to having trustee prisoners around the house. Other prison guard families: Giles, Waite, Sherwood, Kapson, and Ipson.
00:04:05	<b>Earliest recollection.</b> Remembers the Giles children telling their mother they could not come in for lunch because they were chopping of Tom Sherwood's head.
00:04:55	<b>Friends.</b> Eldon Smart, Tom Sherwood, Jack Knaphus.
00:06:47	<b>Worm business.</b> Says his mother cut her expenditures for him because he made money selling worms. Saved money, bought a car, and was always gone thereafter.
00:08:13	<b>Pet dog.</b> Recalls how his pet dog, Vim, died as the result of eating rats poisoned by the prison staff.
00:09:13	<b>Military service.</b> Recounts being drafted into the army and applying for special weapons training which took him to Sandia Base, New Mexico and Killeen Base, Texas where he served as a clerk typist on the atomic bomb project.
00:12:10	<b>Time with father in the prison.</b> Remembers spending a lot of time with his father at work. Describes entering the outer part of prison where his father had a desk and going into the prisoner compound with his father, and sometimes his dog. Talks about the vehicle license making process that his father supervised.
00:15:37	<b>Inside the prison.</b> Recounts the history of the prison's construction from a hole in the ground where prisoners were kept ("The Hole") to the addition of adobe walls and finally sandstone walls. Describes how the four guard towers on the wall were manned.
00:18:14	<b>Prison workshops.</b> Tells of learning leatherwork from the prisoners inside their compound and describes the carved leather technique. Talks about making a watchband at the blacksmith shop which was located over the hill behind the prison.
00:20:18	<b>Warden's family.</b> Remembers spending a lot of time with friend Robert Harris and siblings in the warden's quarters next to the prison wall by the entrance. Tells of mischief pelting cars with tomatoes raised outside the prison wall along 2100 South.
00:22:28	<b>Peeking over the prison wall.</b> Talks about climbing a poplar tree to peek over the prison wall to see a prisoner escorted through the compound to his execution by firing squad.
00:25:53	<b>Trustee and prison farm.</b> A "trustee" was a prisoner who was allowed to



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	work outside the prison. Describes the extent of the prison farm south of the prison to 2100 East. Tells how the Ipson's bulldog, Chub, killed a prison hog.
00:32:07	<b>Prison breaks.</b> Says guards would go to an escaped prisoner's home to collect him and notes that prisoners were always escaping, usually in service vehicles that came into the prisoner compound.
00:35:27	<b>Work and education.</b> Recalls how work experiences helped him decide to get an education beyond high school. Jack Knaphus.
00:38:15	<b>Primary education.</b> Remembers being sent home repeatedly to fetch his glass by Mrs. Crakof, his second grade teacher at Garfield School. Characterized her as "tough lady" who held back all of his friends while he passed to third grade.
00:40:32	<b>Secondary education.</b> Says he was required to attend South High because of school boundaries while his friends went to East High.
00:42:26	<b>Boy Scouts.</b> Talks about Scoutmaster Alma Jenke of Edgehill Ward. Obtained eagle rank at age 13 along with 21 other boys.
00:44:13	<b>More friends.</b> Tells of hitchhiking to Las Vegas several times with Gilbert Christensen and Wendell Jensen between semesters at BYU. Fred and Mary Nesbitt.
00:49:00	<b>Brief memories.</b> Remembers candy store across from Garfield School. Did not frequent shops at 15 <sup>th</sup> and 15 <sup>th</sup> . Learned to swim at Deseret Gym. Took bus down 1500 East. Does not recall a trolley. Stresses difference between being drafted and volunteering for the army and recalls draftees hounding volunteers during basic training.
00:53:15	<b>Escorting prisoners.</b> Recalls going back east with parents in family car to collect a prisoner who had to be lodged in city jails overnight enroute to Salt Lake City.
00:53:55	<b>University education.</b> Received BA at BYU. Took a job in Texas. After seeing a Ph.D. holder earning ten times his salary for the same work, decided to enroll in graduate school at the University of Utah.
00:55:20	<b>University education (cont.).</b> Tells how Tom Parmley, [physics] department chair encouraged him.
00:57:25	<b>University education (cont.).</b> Shares how he was influenced by Booker, an army friend, to become an "A" student. Recalls helping fellow students solve problems in Professor Koefeld's class on electromagnetic theory. [Obtained Ph.D. in physics.]
1:01:40	<b>End time</b>