

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN "JACK" W. DUNN
Medic, 82d Airborne Division, World War II
1994

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Dunn, John, (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (114 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (114 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Dunn, a Milwaukee, Wis. native, relates his career as a combat medic with the 82nd Airborne Division during World War II and his later participation in anniversary parachute jumps. Dunn describes his basic training at Camp Grant (Illinois), medical training at Lawson General Hospital (Georgia), and surgical training at Northington General Hospital (Alabama). Dunn discusses military social life both in the United States and overseas including alcohol consumption, rules about servicemen dating nurses, fighting, prostitution, and sexually transmitted diseases. Dunn mentions his participation with the 82nd Airborne in Operation Market Garden (Holland) and relates the hardships faced by medics during the Battle of the Bulge, including common wounds treated by his unit. He discusses his continued service career after the war's end, performing plastic surgery in Alabama, and general medicine at Fort Bragg (North Carolina). He speaks with resentment about the length of time he remained in service, the ease of finding a civilian job, and use of the GI Bill. Dunn details his participation in anniversary parachute jumps, including one in Holland and another as a member of the Return to Normandy Group.

Biographical Sketch

Dunn was drafted into service in January 1944 and discharged in 1946. He served as a Technician Fifth Grade with the 82nd Airborne Division.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1997.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Today's date is September 14, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Jack Dunn, World War II veteran of the 82nd Airborne Division in the European Theater.

Mark: Good morning, Mr. Dunn.

Dunn: Good morning.

Mark: How are you doing?

Dunn: Good.

Mark: Good. I suppose we could start with some questions about your background. You were born and raised in Milwaukee?

Dunn: Yes, I was. I attended Washington High School and graduated from there and then went into military service.

Mark: The years you were growing up, those were the years of the Depression, huh? Was the Depression particularly rough for you and your family, or did you get by fairly well, perhaps you could describe.

Dunn: Well, we had to have assistance. We were on welfare; we lived in the fringes of the core at that time. Our family home was at 75th and Burleigh and my grandfather took it over for us because we were unable to keep it up and we regained it once my father was able to go back into business. My dad had been a contractor and of course, with the Depression, we lost everything. That's where I started my boxing career. Where I lived, if you were really angry with someone you told him that his mother wore combat boots and that was a horrible thing. And when we moved down into the core, I learned that you either fought or you stayed off the streets and never walked outside your house. So, I learned in a hurry.

Mark: I take it you are also of Irish descent?

Dunn: Yes.

Mark: Were you and your family and are you still today, involved in any sort of ethnic associations or activities?

Dunn: Oh, yes. My granddaughter dances with the Trinity Academy of Irish Dancing and then my other granddaughter, my son's young girl, is starting this year in Irish dancing. Irish Fest in Milwaukee is like a second Christmas for our family.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Is this something you grew up with? Irish culture and that sort of thing?

Dunn: My dad was a card-carrying Mick. I'm saying this facetiously, of course. There is only two kinds of people, those who are Irish and those who wish they were. My dad, if he liked, you know, a fiddler, he could find a reason his mother had to be Irish. I don't think there was ever a day in my life, that somehow or other he didn't mention our Irishness to us. My sisters never got really interested but it stayed with me and certainly have abused my family with where they came from and we're extremely proud of our Irish descent.

Mark: Do you know when your ancestors came over?

Dunn: Yes, my great-grandfather came over and to the best of my knowledge he came over around the potato famine time. So I would be third generation.

Mark: So you graduated high school in 1925.

Dunn: No, I was born in 1925.

Mark: Oh, I'm sorry. You finished high school then in '43? So World War II was already going on. Do you remember like when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Do you remember what you thought?

Dunn: Yeah. I was up at a place by the corner of Lisbon Avenue and Burleigh. There was a pharmacy up there and after Mass we used to stop up to have a coke. It's where the gang met. It was Poppy's Drug Store and what a wonderful guy ran the place and it was a hang-out and we looked forward to being up there with him. Then the news came over relative to Pearl Harbor and then at school the following day we heard President Roosevelt give his famous speech to Congress relative to the day of infamy and the dastardly deed that has been committed. Of course, I was aware of it before because back in those days movie theaters had what was known as newsreels. The thing that scared the heck out of me was the Stuka bomber attacks by Hitler and his group on the various countries and the use of that horrible aircraft to produce the devastation that it did. So, we were well aware that we could be involved and then, of course, with Pearl Harbor, we really knew that we were going to be involved.

Mark: Did you personally think like, holy crap, I'm going to be in the Army.

Dunn: We did. We knew it. Of course, I guess the nice part of it happening in '41 and not going into service until '44, you gave yourself a chance to prepare yourself for the whole thing. Obviously, it was still a big surprise when you got in but nevertheless, there was some preparation in your own mind, and of course, you

Interview Transcript (continued)

had a chance to educate yourself as to why it was necessary for us to be involved in the services for our country. There was never any doubt in my mind that well, that I wanted to participate. I was scared, but I felt very strongly that my place was serving my country in this event. I had gone to school with an awful lot of Jewish kids, 40% of Washington High School at that time were of that faith and they were wonderful people, many, many friends of that faith and of course, we certainly were sympathetic to what their relatives and their nationality and religion was going on over in Germany and Poland the other countries where they were being badly treated.

Mark: So, you were drafted?

Dunn: I don't think I had too much choice at that time. I wanted the Army and I think the Navy you could volunteer for, but if I'm not mistaken you had to wait for the draft for the service.

Mark: When did you get your notice, were you still in school? Had you graduated by this time?

Dunn: No, I hadn't graduated yet. I got the uh...we were processed in 1943, a wonderful fellow named Bert Banhauser, we went into service together, which I just saw Bert a short time ago at our 50th anniversary from graduation and we were taken before we graduated but we had enough credits so we were all set to go. It's just that we missed being there for the receiving of the diplomas and but we were already in service.

Mark: I see. So after you graduated from high school you must have gone off for basic training.

Dunn: Yes. I went to Camp Grant Illinois

Mark: After a couple of weeks

Dunn: Yeah, this was February of 1944, we went in together. I can't remember the exact date that we entered. We both went to Camp Grant together and we had a medical basic. Bert wound up as a straight leg infantry medic and I was airborne. I was pulled out of basic training, gosh I think I only had about ten weeks and I went to Lawson General Hospital in Atlanta, GA, right across from a Naval Air Base, and there I was trained to work in surgery and because of that, another one of my friends down there was a graduate of The Citadel and he had resigned his commission to go to Medical School, but well, you know, the thing at that time, if there was a shortage of people, the class would just be abolished and so anyway he wound up as a Private in the Medical Corps. We were very close friends

Interview Transcript (continued)

because we used to work out together and well, he wanted something more than something with a little more esprit de corps than just straight leg infantry so we volunteered for Jump School. Attended Jump School, then I got some work training in Tuscaloosa, Alabama at Northington General Hospital also in surgery because they were thinking that perhaps, we would be able to do major surgery on a Battalion need level. Now battalion need stations are around 500 yards behind the line and I guess something similar to what we saw in the movies, you know, the MASH unit and so forth because airborne troops oftentimes are isolated. They would have to traverse enemy lines in order to get the very badly wounded people back to an area where they could be operated on, so they thought, perhaps, this was the way to go. The program, to my knowledge, never really got off the ground. But I received the training anyway which I'm grateful for. It was excellent training, And, I had an opportunity to work with some very, very dedicated surgeons. I'm so proud of the people I worked with. These guys would work 15-16 hours a day. They were unbelievable. And, they didn't have to do so. They were very dedicated medical people.

Mark: I have some more questions about your training. To become A) a medic and B) in the Airborne Corps, I assume you had to take some tests somewhere down the line and you had to qualify for this. You don't just waltz in to this kind of occupation, I wouldn't imagine.

Dunn: Well, the airborne is a volunteer deal and then you get permission from the officers to get transferred over, so that was no big problem. I would imagine that somewhere down the line somebody thought that I had something on the ball, that I was sent to the tech school because not everybody had a chance to go and my experience was that those who became surgical technicians, maybe our school records were reviewed, I don't know but anyway, it was wonderful. I was very pleased that I had an opportunity to do it. I was the happiest guy in the world when I became a medic. When I walked into Camp Grant but when the guys found out what kind of a camp we were in, everybody was moaning and groaning that they didn't want to be medics, and Boy!, that's exactly what I wanted. I intended to get into some branch of the healing arts, I didn't know exactly where but I thought that was a good place to start. Plus, the fact that as corny as it might sound, I knew that medics were noncombatants and this was nothing to do with religion or anything like that, I just I thought that straight leg infantry I would have done what I had to do but I really didn't want to hurt anybody if I could possibly--I would rather be on the other end of it. So, I got exactly what I wanted. If I would have had to go to the Pacific, I would have been armed then. And, of course, I would have done what I had to do to protect myself or to... Maybe I thought too that a medic had a little bit of immunity relative to combat. Its not true of course, medics were really sometimes when everybody else was pinned

Interview Transcript (continued)

down the medic had to be out there to do his thing. So, I was a very happy guy to be in the Medical Corps.

Mark: Just to point this out when I was in the service, I was in the medical field myself so I was in a clinic though, I worked 9-5 everyday. So, it wasn't anything like that at all.

Dunn: Even in training, we put in some unbelievable hours, because if the surgeons decided to work, we had to--we were scrubbed up and--actually the nurses did some of the assisting of us. We were the ones that were scrubbed and not assisting in surgery but passing the instruments.

Mark: I've got some questions about your training actually. Let's start off with your basic training when you first went into the service. Learning how to march and salute and all that kind of thing. What did that sort of training entail in your recollection?

Dunn: Well, I was really very fortunate. The platoon I was in was with my friend Bert, but we were the two youngest guys in the upstairs of this platoon. We had almost I would say 90-95% of the guys were miners from southern Illinois and Doctor, I'll tell you, I've never met such fine men in all my life. They were the greatest guys in the whole world and they kind of treated Bert and I like--some of them were 35-36 years old, you know

Mark: Were they draftees or volunteers?

Dunn: They were draftees and they kind of treated us like their kids you know. We looked up to them and they looked out after us and I'm sure, you know, if we had looked like we were going to get in any trouble, they would have intervened. One Irishman, by the way, his name was Connolly, he was one of the oldest guys, he didn't have any hair at all and he was probably about 38 years old, but anyway he was really like my pop and anyway they gave me the nickname Pickles, I don't know why, and of course they were all waiting for me down in the latrine in the morning because every soldier had to have a shave everyday and all I had was peach fuzz and of course they all found a whisker here and I missed one there and so forth. Finally, one day I gave up shaving and I got heck from some officer because I had too much fuzz on my face. But, anyway, back to this nickname Pickles, I gave that to my daughter's daughter. So, to me it was a term of affection. He thought a great deal of me he was always trying to get me to go back to his hometown, he had a niece there that he thought a great deal of and he thought that I would be a nice young man for her. So he must have trusted me and thought there was something good about me. So now we call Kelsey, we call Kelsey "pickles" now; the name lives on!

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: At Camp Grant, was discipline during training tough, was it hard to adjust to?

Dunn: No. I was prepared for it. I went to Washington High School, by the way, Governor Dreyfus was a member of our class and Lee once said that if any of us had ever been captured during World War II, prison camp was a piece of cake because Washington High School was worse than any prison camp could be. Now, I have to be careful here--Washington High School was a fantastic place, but the discipline was rough--you had to toe the line and I'm very happy that we had it that way because I think for one thing, we were a better soldier because of it. You know, when somebody said "sit down" we didn't bother looking for a chair--you know? But we also had a very excellent platoon Lieutenant I mean he expected everything of us and he expected us to toe the line, but he also treated us like human beings and he was very, very good to us and our noncoms were excellent. I can't say enough nice things about the guys that ran that platoon. They were just great.

Mark: So this training entailed not only the marching and saluting but is this where you learned to fire a weapon and that sort of thing?

Dunn: No, being medics, we weren't given any training in that area. It was all medical oriented. And basic courses, obviously, because the guys that were going to be--these medics were, with the exception of ones that go to tech school, were going to be the field men--litter bearers and which I did a little bit of too, 'cause I was in combat and since our program on the MASH type unit didn't get off the ground, I was a combat aide man, although I did have opportunities later on to work in surgery, so--

Mark: Perhaps you could describe some of your medical training, you mentioned for example, participating in surgery. Was there a lot of study and that sort of thing? Anatomy lessons?

Dunn: Well, it was--well, no--we didn't get into that too often. When you're a scrub nurse it's a matter of knowing the routine, you have to learn about sterile techniques and scrubbing up for the surgery and you have to know if you're working you're going to do some belly work, what instruments and actually its to begin with its kind of like by guess and by golly. First of all, you start out observing and then once you get into it you are the man and of course you get chewed out every once in a while because you are not producing the right thing. You have to almost anticipate what the surgeon wants and it gets rougher when you get into hand surgery. Like my training at Northington General actually was in plastic surgery and but we had such nice people to work with that they were just great. I mean they were patient with us, and I remember very vividly a gentleman by the name of Steinreich was a plastic surgeon there and I really enjoyed working

Interview Transcript (continued)

with him. He was a very, very nice guy. And I learned a lot. The guy that wanted to chew you out all the time, I mean he got you so flustered you didn't know what you were doing after a while you know. The plastic surgeon you wanted to please him all the more and you worked harder. We were allowed to eat in the Officer's Mess by the way, which was kind of nice and Captain Steinreich would say, think nothing about coming over and after he got his food and sitting with you and talking, it was still Captain Steinreich, but he wasn't looking down his nose at you.

Mark: I see. I have a couple of more questions in the area of training and then we'll go overseas here. You did some training in the south and of course at Camp Grant too and I assume that sometime you had to get off the post. Did you have any free time and social activities?

Dunn: In Atlanta, we went into and that was pleasant, very, very nice. Enjoyed Atlanta a great deal. We found a what's known as the Venetian Club with a private swimming pool and we paid a fee to get in and there was a gazebo there where you could dance and sometimes there were some young ladies there that you could dance with. And Tuscaloosa, of course they had a place for the GIs to go to and we had the coeds from the University of Alabama used to come over and so you had some companionship, very, very nice young ladies. Came from very nice homes and so sometimes you were lucky enough like I was to be invited to Thanksgiving or whatever and this was after the war was over that I met a young lady there that I dated quite frequently and a few nurses, which was illegal because they were officers.

Mark: Was there a lot of fraternization between some of the enlisted guys and the nurses?

Dunn: Ah, well, yeah. It was very informal. With a dress uniform I used to wear loafers and we had a knit GI khaki colored tie and nobody in fact you didn't even have to wear a tie, you could go without and officers would see me on dates with nurses down there and nobody would ever turn in a complaint. Nobody cared. Fort Bragg, after the war was over, they were a little bit different. You had to be very careful if you had a date with a nurse you couldn't go into town--take her over to the Noncommissioned Officers Club. I think my biggest surprise came in Tuscaloosa after the war was over I was down there briefly because they were so short of medics. The racism. I couldn't believe it.

Mark: In the south you mean.

Dunn: Yeah. I mean I--where I came from in Milwaukee, I'm sure there was racism was present, but I played with Negro children when I was in the core area and one time

Interview Transcript (continued)

when we were in town (Tuscaloosa) and three guys came out, I was with two other medics and we heard this guy loud talking and all of a sudden they cut across and they all had what was known as the ruptured duck on their lapels (which meant that they were former GIs) and one guy said something to us like “Boy, I like those jackets (we had field jackets on). They had had quite a bit to drink and one guy had a pint bottle in his hand and he held it by the neck (down, like if you were going to throw it or swing it you know) and one of them said to us, “I think your a bunch of Yankee Nigger-loving sons of bitches.” One guy bristled and the guy with the bottle says, “If you hit him I’m going to break this bottle right across your face.” Of course, that took the fight out of all of us so we got the heck out of there and reported it to a police officer, which I’m sure the cop probably felt the same way they did. It really shocked us. I’m sure, let’s face it-- we had segregation up there, but I wasn’t really aware of it, we thought it was economics and it was, but it was segregation nevertheless. I heard things about a Black person going into a bar and they would break the glass or something like that or not allow them in or whatever, but I never saw anything like that and I never knew anybody who would talk disrespectful to someone of a different color, but I’m sure it probably happened. But I really couldn’t believe it at the time. It was a long time after that before I could make friends with any southern people. People from the south that come up here. In fact, one guy from Tennessee right now is a very, very close friend of mine and I told him that to begin with, I kind of hated you because you were from the south and I told him what had happened to me and obviously it’s not his fault and we are good friends and I’d forgotten about that, I don’t hate southerners anymore. But I couldn’t believe the hatred. Why would you even want to hit a white person that came from the north?

Mark: Did you notice that because you were in the south both during the war and after the war did you notice any change in race relations? Had the hostility increased or decreased before and after the war?

Dunn: In fact, the scenario that I just gave you happened after the war was over. Before that, I wasn’t aware of any racism. I had a little hint of it when we had our training at Lawson, one day an officer had gotten us together and I don’t even know whether he was a medical officer or not, maybe just an MAC, but anyway they were integrating the barracks and Black soldiers would be with us and he let us know in no uncertain terms that there wasn’t going to be any trouble at all, that the Black soldier was to be welcome with anybody else. Now, that was before I went overseas. I was kind of surprised at that because I didn’t even know there was segregation really.

Mark: It was kind of an eye opening experience for you.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dunn: After the war was over, that was a shocker you know. I thought I'd seen everything up to that, but I think that shocked me more than some of the combat stuff. Our country, that people would talk this way to you or because you can go in an area where Black people weren't respected. Boy, was I naive, huh?

Mark: It's a very interesting story.

Dunn: Thank you.

Mark: Let's go overseas here. When did you get your orders to go? When were you first assigned to the 82nd?

Dunn: I went over as a replacement in September. This was in September and then I was assigned to the 82nd and sometime in October. We went over on a boat called the Raingatata and it took about 12 days to get over. It was a big New Zealand vessel. It had been a luxury liner. Boy, it sure wasn't a luxury liner then! So, we landed at Liverpool and went down to Southampton and went across and then we bivouacked in Normandy and then I entered combat in October in Holland and we were holding a line right around Grosbeak and just to the east. Kind of a holding position. There was a forest there and the German border was just on the opposite side. Of course, I had casualties to take care of but nothing like the Bulge. We were pulled out of--want me to go ahead with this?

Mark: I was going to hold you back a little bit. We'll take each of these campaigns one at a time. I'm always curious about a Repo Depot is that what you were in?

Dunn: Yes. A Repot Depot is the kind of thing where you are reassigned. You're assigned to a unit and I don't even know where in the heck that was. We were in Normandy, that's all I can tell you. I think I realized what was coming and I was worried more about my survival than anything else.

Mark: I don't get the impression you were there very long. You seem to have been plucked right out of there.

Dunn: I've been trying to give you a time frame but I can't. But then it didn't take too long and we were, as I say, the weather was so cruddy too, by the way, drizzling all the time which didn't help your melancholia at all.

Mark: Yeah. I spent two years in Europe. I remember it rained all of the time. So, then you hooked up with the 82nd Airborne, so you weren't really a combat soldier.

Dunn: Well, yea, sure, I was. Not combatant, but as a medic.

Interview Transcript (continued)

- Mark: The question I was going to ask was how you got along as a replacement, did you fit in with the experienced soldiers? Because the 82nd had been in North Africa and Italy and D-Day and everything.
- Dunn: Of course, medics enjoy the respect, hopefully its deserved, and I never had any trouble at all. The only mistake I made to begin with was being a lonely kid and getting into this, trying to make friends all over the place. I think the first casualty I had, I was shaking so much, he was maybe three years older than I am, he says, "Hey kid, I'll help you." He did more of the bandaging than I did. But that wore off in a big fat hurry. But, I learned after while, I didn't make friends too fast after that because it was too hard to have to go out there and find out that a friend that you had made, grew close to, was now dead. You know about your own mortality and so forth more so.
- Mark: Was that a common--interrelating with other people do you think? From your experience? Getting too close and everything for a combat soldier?
- Dunn: Well, you know a lot of guys trained together and you know, in training, you just automatically became friends. It was rough on those guys when they lost a buddy. I met a guy when I went back a couple of years later to visit and he said, "You know, I couldn't have come here. I couldn't visit the cemetery; I couldn't have gone back to Normandy, too traumatic. But for me, I'm trying to make friends. Then I found out, boy, don't do that, don't get to know anybody too well. In fact, I'm a great lover of animals, dogs would follow us all over the place, for me to pet a dog once, I'm in love with it. See the animals get killed. I just stayed away from any animal that followed us around.
- Mark: I just got one more question before we go on to the campaigns. I'm interested in your impressions of the soldiers in the 82nd. These combat hardened veterans. Did they seem tough to you, like normal guys to you, how would you characterize them?
- Dunn: We had some that were just about three levels lower than the biker from the outlaw variety of biker, but they were good soldiers though. I sound like I'm very obsequious when it comes to the service, you know, but I think the officers we had were just fantastic. I mean, these guys, and I'm not talking just about the medical officers, I'm talking about the infantry. They had to jump out of the airplane; they were exposed to the fire just as much as the dogface. We were all in it together and we were well trained. I think that's where it's all at, you know. I went back to Normandy this year and jumped again with my comrades and now they're just sweet old men. The rough edges have worn off. What amazed me when we got off the lines, and I've got some dates here if you are interested, we were relieved on November 13 and then we went to Sesoul, France and the 101st

Interview Transcript (continued)

was quartered a short distance away from us and the guys used to go in to town and meet there. Here we got combat soldiers and they're brawling. They're fist fighting with one another. This is part of the airborne and why, after what you've gone through, would you want to go in and have a brawl with somebody in a bar.

Mark: I suppose there was alcohol involved?

Dunn: Yeah, and women, obviously. I'm sure that played a part. That was not my--I didn't care about drinking for one thing, and I was always an exercise freak so any chance I had, where there was a gym handy, that's what I wanted to do and I also box, so I wanted to pursue that, but as a medic, there was always plenty for us to do. Unfortunately, when you're off the lines a lot of times its venereal disease. So we had our share of that to take care of.

Mark: Yeah. I was going to ask some questions about the social activities of the GI. We can just do that right now I guess. Did you get--you mentioned getting in the Sesoul. Did you guys get much free time and how did you occupy what free time you did have.

Dunn: I don't really know about the other guys, as a medic I did not have a lot of free time. There was always plenty for us to do and then of course we were always getting ready for the next advance. It is not really known, but there were many, many times that there were airborne things being planned. Jumps and other action being planned for that you were not even aware of, that cancels for one reason or another...practical straight leg infantry has taken care of the situation so you're not needed. So, obviously, we didn't do anything until December 17 and that's when we the Bulge came about, we were needed, and then, of course, we fought it straight leg infantry and that was something else, I'll tell you.

Mark: We'll come up to that. As a medic there were certain insights into the culture of the GI that you got to see. For example, you mentioned the venereal disease. Was there a lot of prostitution? Where did it come from?

Dunn: It's rumored and it's written in books written by historians so I guess it must be true. I didn't know about it. I wasn't involved in it but apparently, the General Ridgeway who was commander at that time, who was a very religious man by the way, not a bad person, but he really believed that that was one way to keep the animals quiet was to have a house of prostitution. So, there apparently were prostitutes made available to members of the 82nd Airborne Division. And might have been for 101st as well, I don't know what General Taylor what arrangements they had, but we saw them back at camp when things started to happen with the genitalia we were consulted. But, I didn't get involved in it, I'm kind of glad they had what was known as prophylactic stations where after a soldier having sexual

Interview Transcript (continued)

intercourse could go in and I think they used the drug called Protargo if I'm not mistaken and this was injected into the urethra up into the bladder and to prevent I don't know whether it prevented syphilis, but I know for sure that gonorrhea was used to protect against.

Mark: You mentioned a bit of brawling and a lot of veterans I've spoken to also mentioned that there was sometimes a lot of drinking going on. Was this something you came across a lot? I mean in your personal experiences and in your experiences as a medic?

Dunn: Oh, geez, if I can give you an instance, I'd have to jump ahead to after the war was over, as I said I couldn't get out because of the shortage of medics. I was stationed at Fort Bragg at the hospital and the shortage was so acute of medics that we would scrub all day long in surgery and then at night we would have to pull night duty which meant emergencies and also meant doing the sterilization of the material for the next day's surgical schedule. And of course these guys would get into brawls or they'd get drunk and take a swing at a meter or a plate glass window and we had cuts and they'd get into a fist fight they'd get bloody that way and of course, I'm looking at life with the eyes of a police officer, you know, I mean he begins to think that everything is--in other words, when you're on night duty and you're seeing these things, you think that. To me it seems like there was a great deal, but then, of course, I'm dealing with this sort of thing because people were coming in there who had been involved in brawls and so forth. I would have to think there was quite a bit. There isn't an awful lot open to a GI, you know? And, of course, the first place you hit when you go into a town is some bar and you don't drink Coca Cola there.

Mark: One last thing before we get on to the campaigns and that's did you have much interaction with some of the natives where you were? For example, the Dutch or the Belgians or the Germans or that sort of thing?

Dunn: No. Language barrier for one thing. We just kind of waded in and we did take over homes in order to make a battalion aide station. On one occasion I had to go out and scout around looking for a farmhouse so we could, in the Bulge, so that we could establish something for the wounded. We were getting an awful lot of casualties and the weather was so ungodly cold, you know, that keep these guys who'd been hit until we could evacuate them. Whenever we could we would take over a farmhouse.

Mark: Let's do these campaigns. On this data sheet I had you fill out, you list three. Let's just go down the list one by one. Holland in 1944, is this Market Garden?

Dunn: Yeah.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Perhaps you could just describe your experiences there, what you did, what you thought, felt?

Dunn: As I said before, it was a holding action and we had casualties. There were patrols going out and patrols were coming in from the Germans, people were hit and on one occasion, I had a opportunity to be out there where there was both an American casualty and a German casualty and I thought the German needed attention first and so we performed triage and took care of him first and I think the men in the outfit was a little bit chagrin about this, but I tried to explain to them, I said that I hoped this never happened to you again, your wound is slight but if it does and you are hit, hopefully, and there's a German medic out there, that if your wound is more severe than someone else's that he takes care of you first, you know. So, we explained it away and it was okay, he wasn't angry about it anymore. But, your feelings rise and fall. One minute you don't want to hurt anybody and the next minute you'd like to strangle somebody. You see some atrocity committed, which I never did. I mean sometimes I thought they might be popping at me, but I couldn't be sure. I know when we first got into the Bulge, we got off the truck and this officer was sort of screaming, I didn't know what he was screaming about but it was at me and so finally he got a hold of me and he said, "What are you doing with that God dammed thing on?" I said "What?" He said, "Your helmet". I said, "I'm a medic" (my helmet had red crosses on it). Well, he said, "They're using that for target practice. Get rid of that God damned thing." So, I got rid of it. But I kept the ones on my arms though. I wanted them to know that I was a medic, not trying to show off, but I thought, "Jesus, I'm carrying a card in my pocket that says I'm a noncombatant" and, in fact I never had a combat jump, by the way, **[END SIDE A, TAPE 1]** but if I would have had a combat jump, I would have had a switchblade knife up in a secret pocket up near my collar bone and I would have had a knife on my boot, which is called a boot knife and the purpose of that is that you could use that to hurt somebody when you got down if you wanted to, but the whole idea of that was to cut yourself out of the chute if you got hung up in a tree or something. If you couldn't get your arms down to the boot knife you could get the switchblade near your collarbone. But if I'd have had a combat jump, I can assure you that one of the first things I did after I got my chute off would be to throw the knives as far as I could from my person, because I wouldn't want to get caught with anything. I was told one time to get rid of that stuff because that could be an excuse to harm you if you were captured. So, I had it all planned. Probably if I thought I was going to have a good landing, I would have ditched them before I even got down.

Mark: But fortunately, you never had to do that.

Dunn: No.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: What about the Bulge? It sounds like you were quite involved in that campaign.

Dunn: Yeah. The dates on that were--We entered--I just happened to have jotted these down because they were in the "Static Line" newspaper that I subscribed to some time ago. Each regiment has a column and the editor of the column was kind enough to provide us with dates of the various events dating back to Anzio, which I wasn't involved in so I didn't take it down, but we got into combat December 17th and we left from the Bulge in February 19th. So, I was active as a medic there and of course, once again, we were near Chapeau, Saint Viche in through there. We fought in that particular area and one of my very closest friends of the Airborne was with the 551st Parachute Infantry he jumped into southern France and I thought, God, when I came back people would talk about where were you and so forth and I couldn't really give them a lot of particulars. Naturally, you're not interested in the geography of the country. Survival was the big thing. You thought about this--this was always in your mind. One day you were worried about getting hit in the head and the next day you were--what if I get a spinal cord injury or whatever you'd seen the day before so I didn't pay a lot of attention. Maybe I was the only guy that did that anyway, this guy that was with the 551st, they also fought in the Bulge with the 82nd, a separate unit under General Gavin's command and he and I got to be very close friends and we've been parachuting together since 1987 that's when we first met. But anyway, I asked him (he was an officer) if he remembered all the places and he said that he didn't remember either! So, I didn't feel too bad after that. I've been trying to put all the pieces together.

Mark: That's what a lot of vets tell me, actually. That they don't know what town they were in, they have no clue.

Dunn: As I said, it was the last thing that I cared about. Now, I wish I knew more about it. Five years ago I jumped in Holland to celebrate that event when that happened on September 17. I met the historian of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment and I learned more from him than I did all the time I was there. Unfortunately, we got to be friends after he had gone to the Chapeau Saint Pete region, in fact, what he did was he brought back some MI shell casings and he was kind enough to give me a couple of them--they'll go into a collage. I wish I could have gone along with him. I'm still in a fog about the whole thing. I've read a lot of books and stories but I really haven't got it all cemented down.

Mark: And the campaign in Germany? I assume you were pretty mobile through this whole thing.

Dunn: Yeah, we were moving all the time, that's for sure. That's another thing that made it--but then on April 4th is when we were in the Cologne area and we were

Interview Transcript (continued)

doing forays across the Rhine and that was just about it. Then, of course, Gavin was very much opposed to us participating in a jump across the Rhine so I don't know if that was the reason for it, but the 17th Airborne Division was the one that wound up jumping in there. Then we were relieved May 9, 1945 when the war was just about over. Then it was back home and then I couldn't get out.

Mark: I got some more questions about Europe and then we'll get to the post-war experiences. In your own personal experience, which of the three campaigns that we just discussed was the most difficult for you in terms of work and....

Dunn: The Bulge was from the standpoint of not knowing where you were at and deep snow and sometimes you'd be out there and God, it looked like everybody disappeared and you were out there with the wounded man and of course you couldn't leave him and there was no way that 128 pounds that I was at that time, that I could carry a big guy out even if I put him on my back. I was in good shape, but with the deep snow and so forth--it was scary and the German Panthers were unbelievable and they would fire these treetop bursts and then you couldn't lay flat--usually during a bombardment you lay down flat on the ground, but when a tree top bursts you get splinters all over your body because the blast comes down on top of you. I guess the thing about the campaign that I hated most was crossing the darn river because I don't swim too well and with all the junk I had to carry, I would have made a good anchor--the crossing of the river, that bothered me more than anything else.

Mark: I would imagine that in the Bulge, the casualties would have been much more frequent.

Dunn: Yea, there was an awful lot, by comparison again to the holding action in Holland. I couldn't give you an estimate, once again, when you're involved in it, you're like a cop, everybody or back when my great grandfather came over from Ireland and every Irishman was bad. Signs up in the stores, Irish Need Not Apply. Every Irishman was bad. I don't know why. But to a medic, it looks like everybody is getting hit, because there is so much to do all the time. But, historically, yes, the casualties were higher.

[LONG BLANK PAUSE ON TAPE BUT IT CONTINUES ON SAME SIDE]

Mark: What I'm wondering is kind of casualties that you dealt with. Would you be able to even characterize like if they were more head wounds or leg wounds or what were the most frequent kind of injuries you came across.

Dunn: To the best of my recollection, well head wounds were always ungodly to take care of because you've got hunches to the final outcome but sometimes it was

Interview Transcript (continued)

deceiving because I'm sure you're well aware of it that a little but can produce an awful lot of blood when it's smeared around but I think there were actually more body wounds because those are the ones that usually the head wounds were the ones where they stuck their head up and got popped that way but the grenades and wounds from shrapnel from an 99 for example, those were unbelievable. You wouldn't know where to start sometimes and of course, when you're more experienced one of the first things I did was get the morphine right off the bat and then I marked on the forehead the time that it was given, so that they wouldn't be given more and overdose. Then, of course, a lot of it was reassurance. Everything is going to be okay. It seems to be less than what you think. The guy was always concerned and reassurance which is all a part of it. The whole thing is to prevent shock and use plasma. We always had plenty of that around. If I was up on the lines, I would do bandaging and sometimes I'd be back at the battalion aide station working with the surgeon himself where more work was done and then they would decide about trying to get the guy back through the lines or wherever. In the Bulge that was no problem, because we weren't isolated like the guys at Bastogne were, the 82nd never had that problem. We always had a back region just like straight leg infantry.

Mark: So you were how far from the actual front line fighting?

Dunn: Sometimes I was right up with them, even ahead. I would follow up, I could lay back just a short distance of the actual firing, but for example, if somebody got hit out there, then I had to crawl up and the guys had to watch out so they weren't firing my way. I still had to worry about a shell coming in or a grenade being thrown. As I said, the Army literature on a battalion aide station is 500 yards behind the lines. So you worked back there with the aide station. It's so screwed up--nothing goes the way it's supposed to. There were probably times when we were way out in front because someone doesn't say, "Hey we're moving back or we're doing this or we're doing that."

Mark: Were there a lot of medics who became casualties. It sounds like hazardous business.

Dunn: Yeah. There were a lot of casualties. But we always seemed to be fortunate enough to have enough replacements. I think the casualty aspect of it showed up later on because we couldn't get out of service, especially those of us who had experience in surgery. We were needed back then, because they weren't educating kids for that type of work at that time.

Mark: Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard that the Germans had surrendered?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dunn: No, I don't. I can't recall.

Mark: You were somewhere in Germany?

Dunn: Yeah. I can't put that one together. I guess I was in a fog at that time.

Mark: Did you think that you were going to have to go to the Pacific after that? Because as far as the point system you couldn't of had too many points compared to a lot of other people.

Dunn: We took off from Marseilles and the rumor--I could be mistaken about this but I think we were (unintelligible place name) staging area and which was a staging area to go back home or else go to the Pacific, I wasn't in Germany when the war was over, that was I think we were down in Arles when that was lost.

Mark: When the Japanese surrendered you mean.

Dunn: Yeah. Not VE day, it was VJ Day I was down there. I know Sentimental Journey has always been a favorite song of mine.

Mark: So you left Europe fairly soon after the hostilities ended there.

Dunn: Yeah, right.

Mark: You went from Marseilles to--?

Dunn: New Brunswick, NJ and Camp Kilmer and from there I went to Camp McCoy for my furlough, I got a month off, but there was still some talk about the possibility of having to go over with the occupation depend upon the medic situation. You know, there's always 1,000 of what used to be referred to as latrine movers, you know, floating around. But then I was sent to some damn camp in Alabama, I can't remember which one, but then they sent me back to Northington General in Tuscaloosa and I helped to close that up and then I went back up to Fort Bragg and then I was discharged up there.

Mark: So you weren't discharged until May of 1946 so you spent a year after the war ended still in service. What sort of duties did you do? You mentioned closing up a post.

Dunn: Well, surgical. Working in surgery.

Mark: On veterans now?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dunn: Well, down in Alabama, this was on war injuries. This was still plastic surgery. This is reparative work and we were trying to clear out what they had and then these men would be discharged and sent to VA hospitals for the final work that had to be done.

Mark: What sort of plastic surgery were you doing? Was it on the head or artificial limbs or?

Dunn: Oh yeah. Facial work. I can remember there was a very, very, fine young man who was apparently a gunner on one of the bombers. The story that I got was that the incendiary bomb got caught in the bomb bay and he picked it up by hand and threw it out the gun portal on the side. This is second-hand. Well, anyway, his hands were destroyed and he was getting hand surgery and all the hair on his head was burned off, his nose was burned off, ears were burned off, eyelashes, eyelids were all burned off. Little by little, they were restoring his face. I was so impressed with him because he was such a nice guy and had a marvelous sense of humor. I'd have been crying all the time, I think. But he was in an establishment too where everybody is a medic and they're understanding, nurses, surgeons and the medical corps. He had yet to have to go out into the public and have people staring at him. I hope to God everything worked out real well for him, but I assisted in surgery on him on numerous occasions. I remember one particular type of surgery, in order to get adipose tissue into an area that's been destroyed like you have in your cheek, what you would do is to make a parallel incision on the abdomen where you can develop a little fat and then a tube is formed, in other words you suture around, now the blood supply has been severed from, we'll say that its two vertical incisions, and a tube is formed and you lose the blood supply from east to west, but you're depending upon this tube getting this nutrition from north to south. Then after that is well established, then they used to sever the tube down south and reattach it way above the northern end of it and they would migrate it, called tubal migration, then they would take it up to the face and open up the tube and lay it down flat, so actually you have abdominal tissue on your cheeks to make up for what you've lost through the burn or shrapnel wound or whatever. It amazed me what these guys could do. I think a great deal of plastic surgeons, believe me.

Mark: I'm sure the veterans were grateful for it too.

Dunn: You didn't end up looking like Robert Redford, but who does?

Mark: So, when you were at Fort Bragg did you do the same kind of thing?

Dunn: No. That was at the station hospital and this was taking care of the barroom casualties and usual things that people come up with, appendectomies. We even

Interview Transcript (continued)

had circumcisions. We got just about everything under the sun. Down in Tuscaloosa for example, somebody was injured in an automobile accident, we were the closest hospital and they would bring those people in. That I remember quite vividly because here I am an 18 or 19 year old kid and I'm sent to prep a 22-year-old girl who was going to have surgery on the hip from an automobile accident. I'll never forget it because she was really embarrassed to have two 19-year-old kids shaving the body hair in preparation for surgery. Of course, her embarrassment made us embarrassed. But anyway, we gave her preoperative dose of medication and then when we were taking her down to surgery on a litter, and by that time the medication had started to work, and I thought we had Gypsy Rose Lee on the litter, she was trying to take off all the covers and she doesn't have anything but a pajama top over her and her lower body would have been exposed. We had a heck of a time keeping the covers on her. It amazed me what medication (drugs or alcohol) can do to you.

Mark: Any sort of foreign substance in your blood. I'm especially interested in the problem of veteran readjustment to civilian life and many of the problems veterans have are medical problems. The plastic surgery that you mentioned being one of them. From your perspective, as a medic, what sort of major medical problems veterans faced after the war.

Dunn: Gee, I don't know if I can answer that. I guess I get so involved in my own, going to school and so forth, I just didn't--most of the kids I went to school with wound up getting and going places, up at Lawrence College, a close friend I ran into, if I can give you this anecdote, we got talking and he said, telling me how rough it was up there and I asked him what happened and he said, Officers had to walk on one side of the street and enlisted men on the other and I thought, well, boy if you thought that was tough, you wouldn't be interested in what I saw. In fact, when I jumped in Holland there was an article in the newspaper about it and this guy's wife said, "Why didn't you ever tell us?" I told her that nobody was really interested. I didn't volunteer anything. My mother had worked at the Veterans Administration and it was her feeling, if this is any answer to your question, Doctor, that actually the care was very good. There was interest on the parts of the doctors and is that what you were after?

Mark: Yeah.

Dunn: There was willingness at that particular time to take care of whatever. I think that was just a little bit early for health insurance, the guys could come in for just about anything. The follow through was good.

Mark: You spent a year in the service after the war was over. I'd imagine you were kind of anxious to get out?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dunn: Oh, God, yeah. Fed up with it--the whole thing. I think I was a little bit fussed up too though. I didn't require any psychiatric care, but--as I look back on it now, I think I had a few problems. I felt kind of cheated--two years out of my life--I had education, things to do. My boxing career might have helped a little--I'd get rid of some of my hostilities that way. I think I might have been kind of a difficult person to get along with at that particular time. I'm glad that period of my life is over--dreams of falling and my parachute not opening--all that jazz.

Mark: So you finally got discharged in 1946. Perhaps you can describe to me going back to Milwaukee, I assume that's where you went back to.

Dunn: Well, I stopped off and saw Rhonda in Ohio. She was my mother's younger sister and we'd always been very close--she was much younger than my mom. I also went to visit some of my Irish relatives in Detroit and had a good time up there--big Irish family. Then I got back and they had the 5220 Club, which meant that you got \$20 a week for 52 weeks. I took advantage of that for two weeks but then I couldn't stand it. I got a--since my mother worked at the VA she knew people there and I got a job on the road crew. I operated a jackhammer. I didn't like sitting around.

Mark: There were some veterans who claimed they couldn't find work and one of the reasons for the 5220 provision in the GI Bill was to keep this massive flood of veterans from flooding out the work force like after World War I. Among, perhaps, some of your friends, did some veterans have trouble finding work that you knew of?

Dunn: Some of them weren't looking too hard. They liked it. They could buy enough beer for \$20 a week at that time. There was a lot of work. The only thing I did do that wasn't really kosher toward the end of that summer, one of my buddies dad was a mason contractor and they needed a couple of laborers to dig the foundation for a retaining wall for a drive-in on Capitol Drive so anyway, he said that after two weeks time, he'd lay us off and then we could draw unemployment and then we had a chance to go out to his cottage and spend a couple of weeks there before we started college. So we did that.

Mark: You went to Marquette. When did you start school?

Dunn: In September of 1946.

Mark: The campuses after World War II were flooded with veterans. Can you describe some of your activities on campus? Some of your social circles, did you hang around with the veterans or?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dunn: Yea. I stood with the older guys because strange as it is, you weren't that much older, but fraternities and stuff like that seemed like kid stuff. It was unbelievable because I noticed when you're in combat if you're 18 or 19 and you're with someone who's 21--he's so much older because he's been in combat. You mature very, very, fast in some ways. I guess I felt the same way with the younger guys at Marquette. I think one of the things that made me was that the classes were so ungodly large and if you needed any attention at all you couldn't get it. It was practically impossibility. I was very discouraged with the whole thing although I did have--I think one of the smaller classes I had was English and she was the most marvelous lady--she wasn't a heck of a lot older than I was really, and she was Dean of Women and young and a very attractive gal and I got an awful lot out of that course. It was a course in composition and I never realized it would be of any importance but later on I did some writing and boy, I was really grateful to her and also to a fellow by the name of Mr. Schniller who was my English teacher at Washington High School because I learned more about composition than I ever thought.

Mark: An important skill no matter what you do.

Dunn: I thought I was only capable of writing children's books--Jack sees the ball. The ball sees Jack. My own letters were horrible--what can you do--I saw five guys get killed today. Today was a better day only three got killed. In combat you can't make letters very entertaining unless you lie a lot.

Mark: When you went to college you majored in--you went in the medical field.

Dunn: Yes. Then I went to the Palmer College after that. I enjoyed Marquette from the standpoint that I made a very, very, wonderful friend there, my boxing coach Vince Migna, who had been a star boxer at the University of Wisconsin and just a wonderful, wonderful guy. He taught me a lot about the sport that I really enjoyed.

Mark: Did you box on a team?

Dunn: Yeah. I boxed on the team there and when I got into chiropractic school, I made another friend who had been a professional fighter and an ex-GI as well. We had a team at the YMCA and I fought up to the championship in the Golden Gloves in Moline, Davenport area. I fought in Sterling, IL and tank towns in Iowa and picked up what was known as expense money as an amateur and was able to support myself and my wife and the youngster that we had.

Mark: That's interesting. One of the things I'm interested in is your decision to go into the medical field.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dunn: That was made up a long time ago when I was a little boy--it was always my desire to get into the healing arts and I was encouraged by my parents. My father probably had gone through 5th grade although he was very knowledgeable. He had a lot of talents and he was very interested in politics. He couldn't write too well but reading, he had no difficulty at all with and he was an artist. He sculptured, cartoonist, many, many--the arts he was unbelievable. He could pick up an instrument and he could play it by ear. Obviously, he wasn't going to be a concert pianist, but he sure had a knack for doing things.

Mark: One of the things I was getting at was did your experience as a medic help you in your later career as a--I was wondering if it influenced your decision to go into the medical field.

Dunn: No. I decided to get into the healing arts--I was sure about that before. That's why I was so happy to become a medic and it was cemented to a great degree by my experiences. I think I was in a hurry. I was in a big sweat to get going with my life and I know I could have gotten into Medical School, since Megda's brother was an MD and I got to know him and he assured me I would have no trouble getting into Marquette Medical School. My dad had had an experience with a chiropractor and he thought it was something new and that was on the horizon and would be good, so he talked about it--he didn't shove me into it, but I wish I'd gone to Medical School now. Chiropractic is an extremely limited profession and many of them profess to be able to treat things that they can't and shouldn't be treating. Spinal manipulation is not the answer to all man's problems. Some seem to think that it is, but that part of it I detest. I wish I'd gone into medicine. I had an opportunity--I guess I was rather young looking. I got to know Walter Blount, an orthopedic surgeon and he was the co-inventor of the Milwaukee Brace which is used in scoliosis and I had taken a residency program later on in chiropractic, a three year residency at the National College to become board certified in orthopedics and I found out to my chagrin after all my work, that we had practically nothing in the field of scoliosis and so I heard about Blount through a friend of mine and I called him and asked him for some literature on it and when he found out I was a chiropractor he didn't want to have anything to do with me because he'd had some bad experiences with the profession and I assured him that I wanted to do things correctly and properly and so forth and he became my mentor and we became very, very close friends. He thought I was wasting my time in chiropractic and he would bank roll me as far as medical school was concerned. He didn't realize that I was as old as I was. I was in my 50's but looked 40 at the time. You'd put in another four years and by the time you finish your residency I'd be--it wouldn't be worthwhile--it would be a hardship on my family. So I had to pass up the opportunity.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Did you use the GI Bill to finance your undergraduate education right after the war?

Dunn: Even the chiropractic, they paid for that too.

Mark: So, basically, you got your medical training on the GI Bill?

Dunn: Yeah. It wasn't adequate. I had--that's the reason why I fought. I picked up \$25 a week on the fights and I would have been fighting just as hard down in the gym, sparring and so forth, so I might as well do it in the ring only with a little lighter glove on. 16 oz in the gym and 8 oz in the arena so I did that until my last year in school and then I--the cuts didn't seem to be healing as fast anymore so a good friend got me a job in a slaughter house (Oscar Mayer) oh, my God, what an experience that was. Clean-up gang. So I finished out my education the last year of school working 8 hours a night and it was like working in a steam room. Use extremely hot water to clean all that stuff. The government man that we had inspecting our floor at Oscar Mayer's he'd keep you there all night if it wasn't the way he wanted it. He was the boss, really.

Mark: Did you use the GI Bill benefits to purchase a home or anything like that. That was another major provision of the GI Bill.

Dunn: No. I didn't. My mother--the building and loan. It was called Badger Mutual and she had invested money over there, she knew the, building loans at that time were kind of family deals, so when I went to buy a home I went to the lady that ran the whole show there and I was treated very, very fairly. I did it without a down payment because my mother had some money invested in the place.

Mark: Did you join any veterans organizations right after the service, while you were in college, or afterwards? I know for example, that you've been to some reunions and you jumped in Normandy.

Dunn: No, I didn't. I wasn't interested. I was hustling too much to get on with my life. It didn't really interest me. I exercised, I studied a great deal. I was taking courses all the time, even after I was in practice.

Mark: But, you've been to some reunions.

Dunn: I joined an organization which is airborne veterans and that I really enjoy. Of course, they were active jumpers so that's what I wanted.

Mark: When did you join this group?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dunn: In 1985 it first came on the scene. I subscribe to this Static Line newspaper and I heard about this and I thought that's the kind of group I want to be with, where they're actually doing something. The nicest bunch of guys I ever met in my life. We had a lot of good times together.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe your recent trip to Europe and the jump for the 50th anniversary of D-Day.

Dunn: Well, I had to go back to Holland five years ago. I was asked at that time to participate in a jump on September 17th, which is the day that the 101st and 82nd jumped in and the British 1st Airborne jumped into Holland and the 45th anniversary. The 82nd didn't have a jump, but the 101st did so they asked me to go along with them and so I just put on a 101st Airborne patch **[END SIDE B, TAPE 1]** and away we went. We jumped in to celebrate the occasion and while I was there we were quartered in the Airborne barracks at Eindhoven and I met a fellow by the name of Dick Mandage and Dick got hurt and I took care of him in the parachute jump and we kept up the friendship. Dick got the idea when the Normandy celebration came up that we should be having World War II veterans paratroopers participate in this. They were going to have the young chaps of the 82nd jump in why couldn't we have a contingency of veterans from World War II, so I was contacted and invited to participate and fine, he knew I'd been jumping and was doing free fall and what have you, but the government didn't want to have anything to do with us because they were worried that we'd get hurt, and when you get close to 70, everybody's got an idea that you're really an old person, but the guys I was jumping with are all in darned good shape. They all work out. So we went ahead like we were going to do it. We went to San Diego in February and we did about three practice jumps, which we all did and then finally, Uncle Sam says, OK we'll let you participate. The French government was all in favor of it so we became the Return to Normandy Group. We went over and in an area between Umphreyville and St. Mere Ingles (a town that the 82nd Airborne secured). Umphreyville area I think that was the 507th. Continental Airlines sponsored us. They took us over for nothing. They quartered us after we got to Paris, there was a celebration in Paris at the airport and we met dignitaries from the French government and we met the Mayor of Paris at their City Hall and then from there we went to Euro Disney and we were quartered there for a night and we had a chance to go through Disneyland over there and I had a chance to get my bag pipes out and get them warmed up a little bit and I piped everybody aboard the bus when we left for the Caen area and there we were quartered in Dero Serada which is a town that was completely annihilated by the pre-invasion bombing in World War II. It's right near Caen. So we were quartered there with French families. Fortunately, a British paratrooper was with me, he's an American citizen now, spoke a little French 'cause he was captured right after he jumped into the Pegasus Bridge area which is the east end of the battleground on

Interview Transcript (continued)

the invasion date. So we could carry on a conversation with our people. Then the following day we went out to--had more training, but by this time Uncle Sam had provided us with Green Berets and Rangers who are paratroopers in the present Airborne and then we got instructions and then we had two planes, a C47 of World War II vintage and then somebody had donated a twin otter which is a French aircraft I'm told, and they took those of us that they thought were the more agile and put us in the twin otter because you can't stand up in it. You have to sit down and move your butt across the floor before you jump out and the weather was unbelievably bad. All the town it was either cold or raining and of course, the thing that we were really worried about would be that the weather would be bad on jump day, which was going to be June 5. Because actually the paratroopers jumped in before midnight on June 5 and the invasion took place on June 6. Mother nature was smiling down on us because the morning of June 5 the weather was beautiful, sunshine and good high ceiling and we had excellent training. The day before I was a little bit concerned because it didn't seem that things were too clear about the jump. I had my World War II helmet there with me with the crosses on it, but the jumpmaster insisted that he wanted to pad it out a little more to protect my neck. So, sometimes when your chute comes out it will hit the back of your helmet and tip it down into your nose or throw it back and you can hurt your neck and so forth. I talked to him and said that I was a little bit confused about this. He said, don't worry; it'll all be cleared up tomorrow. You will know exactly where you're at. We had a relief map, we knew exactly where we would be let out. We knew what to avoid, which was the railroad tracks and the Merderet river which would be at our backs. The railroad tracks we were to cross and then jump into the field between the railroad tracks and the reviewing stand. They also had a Major take my bagpipes to the drop zone and they would be in the middle on a table for me to pick up to pipe the guys in to the reviewing area. Well, the only trouble is that the winds had gotten bad and we couldn't get across the railroad tracks. We didn't want to land on the tracks or we could really get hurt. So I made just a little right hand turn and I landed smack dab between the Merderet river and the railroad tracks. They were also kind enough to send out some young straight leg infantry guys to pick up and carry our chutes for us. I felt so bad because the mud was boot top deep and well anyway we were spread all over the place that Gordon King and another Irishman, Bob Dunning from Georgia marched in together. I piped them into the reviewing stand. We were surrounded by the pipes. That brought the TV people out so we had our pictures in 1,000 different papers throughout the United States. Then we were trucked over by the United States Army to Saint Marquis and on the outside, all 41 of us got into a column of twos and we followed the gendarmes into the city and I had the opportunity to pipe our guys to the church where Private Steele, I guess he was a private, got hung up on one of the spires on the church during World War II. Then, of course, they had ceremonies there and then there was a big dinner--no not that night--then we met the people we would stay with and I was stationed

Interview Transcript (continued)

with a lovely family in Robbinsville, which is north of St. Mere Ingles and fortunately, they had an uncle from Paris and he spoke English so it was most enjoyable. He was so much fun.

Mark: Were the French receptive?

Dunn: Oh, God. They were so nice to us. Unbelievable, Doctor, I can't--I'm sounding obsequious again, but really, they were just fantastic. One lady--one of the gifts that we received--it looked like a yarmulke but it was a doily crocheted into the shape of a parachute, strings were attached and it went down to a little thing like you buy your plants in--a paper mache basket and in there was a plastic bag full of soil from Saint Marquis. She made one of those for every one of us--all 41 of us. So I wrote her a letter and of all the gifts I received, and we received a lot of nice things, I thought that was one of the greatest. She gave me some of her history. She did all but the knitting for [unintelligible name] in Paris before she retired.

Mark: The guys from Wisconsin, was it just you and Gordon King? Was there anyone else?

Dunn: Gordy and I were the only ones from Wisconsin.

Mark: Then I've talked to both of them.

Dunn: We could have done a rerun of Two Guys from Milwaukee; I guess that was just written up recently. Stanley Warner from WTMJ? And Jack Carson. Before your time. Movie actors, they did a movie called Two Guys From Milwaukee, because they were from this area. I thought maybe Gordy and I could be the two guys, but he's from Merrill so--

Mark: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Dunn: No. It's just that I'm so grateful that I was allowed to jump into St. Mere Ingles. Most of us felt that we didn't want anything to happen but--most of the guys were afraid of, is that if they got killed there it would spoil the celebration for everybody else. Not that they wanted to be killed, but their main concern was not them or their families, but that they didn't want to spoil the celebration for the other GI's. We all decided that if it did happen we wanted to be buried in that beautiful World War II jump suit. Only the Airborne to begin with was allowed to wear the jump boots. If you didn't have the wings on to prove that if you had those boots on, you were going to get the hell kicked out of you and you were going to walk home with your stocking feet. Those boots meant so much.

[End of Transcript]