

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RICHARD C. ELVER
Graves Registration Specialist, European Theater, World War II
1994

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Elver, Richard C., (1923-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 1 sound cassettes (54 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassettes (54 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Elver, a Middleton, Wis. native, relates his military experience serving with the 610th Graves Registration Company and subsequent military activities in the European Theater of World War II. Elver mentions basic training at Ft. Sheridan (Illinois) and Ft. Warren (Wyoming) and a trip to England on the USS Erickson. He speaks of his arrival at Utah Beach after the Invasion of Normandy, work removing the dead from the beach, constant threat of German shelling, and the establishment of St. Mere Eglise Cemetery. He refers to the independence of his company and cooperation amongst its members. He also discusses the executions of soldiers who committed murder or rape and the way executions were used to impress the need for discipline. He mentions participation at the Battle of the Bulge where he worked at Foy Cemetery (Belgium); working for a motor pool at Potsdam, infantry training at Copiague; and interactions between Americans, Russians, Germans, and the French. Also touched upon is the black market, free time, GI Bill, reactions of other soldiers to the 610th Graves Registration Company, and benefits of the VFW.

Biographical Sketch

Elver (b. August 1, 1923) was drafted into service in 1943 served with the fourth platoon of the 610th Graves Registration Company and later with the 84th Infantry Division. He was discharged from service in 1946.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

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 the 13th of October 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Richard C. Elver of Middleton, WI, a veteran of World War II.

Mark: Good afternoon Mr. Elver. How are you doing?

Elver: Fine. Thank you.

Mark: Good. Thanks for stopping in. First, we could start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born. And a little bit about your upbringing.

Elver: I was born in Middleton, Dane county, on a farm, went to high school in Middleton and a shortly after graduation is when I got inducted into the service, World War II.

Mark: You were drafted?

Elver: I was drafted.

Mark: When did you finish high school?

Elver: I graduated from high school in 1942.

Mark: And how soon after that were you drafted?

Elver: I was drafted on January 11th, 1943.

Mark: It took six months or so?

Elver: Six months. So, I had a working period there for awhile.

Mark: I see. What did you do in the meantime?

Elver: Oh, I was working for an ice cream company, and a, which was Techs, which is now out of business. Long out of business and from then on I went, drafted and that where it started.

Mark: Did you expect to be entering the service?

Elver: Yes, I did.

Mark: I see. So, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about you induction into the service.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: My induction into the service, of course I got notification and I went to Milwaukee to get my induction, my physical and immediately after the physical you got some, fitted with some clothes, you got a cardboard box to put your street clothes in and mail it home.

Mark: Is this where the haircut happens too?

Elver: No, the haircut happened at Ft. Sheridan.

Mark: Which was your next step?

Elver: That was my next step after the induction we left immediately, got sworn in, read the articles of war and immediately shipped to Ft. Sheridan.

Mark: I see.

Elver: That's where I got my haircut.

Mark: I see. So what happened at Ft. Sheridan? Was this the standard basic training that we've all--

Elver: No. This I assume is a holding area and I was there probably 3 weeks and as I understand it, at these various camps like I left Ft. Sheridan for Ft. Frances (unintelligible) in Cheyenne, Wyoming, as they had room for troops they called for them, and you went to Ft. Sheridan.

Mark: I see.

Elver: That's how and your basic training, in the 3 weeks that you were in Sheridan, though you had, you learned the right face, the left face and march and those sort of things and then you went on to, then we went on to Ft. Sheridan and that's where I was, where you got shipped basically.

Mark: That was in Wyoming you said?

Elver: Wyoming, yes.

Mark: You're the first person I've ever spoken with who went to basic training in Wyoming.

Elver: Oh, is that right?

Mark: Yeah, I never heard--what's the name of that camp?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: Ft. Warren.

Mark: Ft Warren?

Elver: Ft. Warren, Wyoming.

Mark: Um--

Elver: At Cheyenne.

Mark: Yeah, in so by this time had your military job specialty been determined or this was still--

Elver: No, it had not.

Mark: So what sort of training did you undergo in Wyoming?

Elver: I went through all the basic training of course. I went through heavy equipment training in Ft. Sheridan. I became a heavy equipment instructor at Ft. Sheridan. I was there a year and a half. Or thereabouts. I, uh--General Whittaker was the commanding officer at Ft. Sheridan at the time who later became the Pacific commander and uh--he was very much interested in sports and I was on the boxing team there and therefore, I became cadre for a year and a half. Then, and we went through all the basic training, so on, and ah there's where 610 Grave's registration was formed and that's where I went from there.

Mark: I see. Now was this, just to get everything straight. Grave's registration company, battalion, what was it called?

Elver: No, company.

Mark: Company. OK.

Elver: Company. Right. We were not a battalion. We were a specialized unit. We operated on more or less detached service. In fact, after we got into Normandy, I was in the second and fourth platoon. I was in the fourth platoon. The second and fourth platoon went across the channel first. The headquarters and the first and second platoon stayed in England. And it was sometime before I ever seen our company commander. It was in Mons before I finally caught up with our company commander.

Mark: And this unit was how big?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: Oh--

Mark: If you said it, I don't remember.

Elver: Company. It was just plain company. We had like ah--

Mark: I was in the Air Force so I--

Elver: You were in the Air Force?

Mark: Yeah. I don't know how big a company you had.

Elver: Oh. Company. Well we had a company that is, let me think--about 250 people. Maybe a little better than that, maybe.

Mark: I see. So after you got into the Graves Registration Company, was there any type of specialized training? Like schooling?

Elver: No. We had medics attached to each platoon and each squad. And we worked on special assignments. We worked detached most of the time. After we got into Normandy, we were all on, after we left England, we were on detached service most of the time. That's why we never got too close to our company commander. The company headquarters and the first two platoons stayed together. The second and fourth platoon went off in different directions.

Mark: I see. So, when did you leave for England?

Elver: I left for England, about the first of April in that area.

Mark: Did you leave from Camp Kilmer or somewhere?

Elver: Oh no. We left from Boston and went over on the USS Erickson, which was a luxury liner converted of course and a nice ride over. One of the sobering moments of, I think of the ones I experienced first, would be when your name is called and you go up the gang plank to leave the United States wondering if you're going to get back. And when you leave the United States. That is one of the moments, I have anxiety. Another one is when you got back on the boat to go the English Channel. That's another one. A third one is when you go down the ladder. The rope ladder. To get onto a landing barge. Then it's the real thing.

Mark: I see. So you arrived in England then.

Elver: I arrived in England.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Not shortly, but about 2 weeks?

Elver: Going over?

Mark: Yeah.

Elver: Oh, I think it was about 7 days getting over there. And I was at England, we went to Taunton, G-50 they called it. And this was a supply depot area and we worked, we worked long hours.

Mark: Doing what?

Elver: Unloading, loading equipment and materials getting ready for the invasion. Stuff coming in from the United States that was sort of a staging area for supplies and everybody worked. I mean it wasn't just the labor unit. Everybody worked. And it was long hours.

Mark: I see. So I don't get idea that you had too much spare time.

Elver: No, we did not.

Mark: I see. I was going to ask you if you got into any English pubs, met any of the English people or any--

Elver: No, I would assume probably the troops that were there long before that and were stationed there for some time did. But we didn't, because when we got there we had to go right to work.

Mark: I see. So, in the days leading up to the invasion, like the first, like say a month before the invasion, what did your activities entail and did you know that the invasion was imminent from what you were doing?

Elver: Yes, we knew the invasion was imminent because everybody was working long hours, things were moving, a lot of activity. So we knew it was coming, but we didn't obviously we didn't know when, because it was pretty secret.

Mark: Now you were in Taunton, you said?

Elver: Taunton, England.

Mark: And that's not on the channel is it?

Elver: No.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: So you had to move from there to the channel area.

Elver: Yes, we went from, we were, when we finally got our orders to go we went to Taunton. Er--we went South Hampton and we were in tents there about three or four days. Rainy, water up to your knees, not that high, but a lot of water, mud and water. And, we were there about a week before we finally got on the boat. It was so miserable we were glad to get on the boat.

Mark: That was approximately what date?

Elver: That was approximately, we got on the boat, and I'm going to say about the sixth, seventh of June. A little later than that. Let's see, we got on the boat, probably, I don't know exactly, I would guess we got on the boat about the twelfth or thirteenth of June.

Mark: I see. So you were in South Hampton then when the invasion started?

Elver: That's correct. That's right.

Mark: Do you recall knowing for the first time, do you recall learning that the invasion had started? Do you remember your thoughts?

Elver: I recall, ah yes, definitely know when the invasion started.

Mark: What tipped you off?

Elver: Well the news broadcast, it was obvious and we knew it was coming very shortly because of all the activity going on at the present time. We were told, we knew the next day after it had started and we knew we were headed there shortly.

Mark: I see. So, you didn't get to Normandy until a couple days after?

Elver: No, I didn't get to Normandy until about, I didn't get to Normandy until about the fifteenth.

Mark: I see. Perhaps you could describe your voyage across the channel and going to the beach. Which one was it?

Elver: Normandy.

Mark: Omaha, or Utah, or--?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: No, we went to Utah. But, we got on the boat, we loaded during the day and it was early morning and sat on harbor all day. And then we went across the English Channel. Blacker than black and that was sobering moments because number one, I couldn't swim. It was blacker than black and we weren't used depth charges that were going off in the mines. The ships had no lights on them. They navigated in the dark. And we arrived in Normandy on the beach in daylight, in the morning. We were on the boat all that day and we didn't get off until sometime late afternoon.

Mark: I see. What was the beach like? I assume there was no fighting going on.

Elver: There was no fighting. There was a lot of shelling, they were still shelling, they were still strafing attacks by planes.

Mark: By Germans?

Elver: Oh, yeah. At this time, Brittany had, I mean Cherbourg hadn't fallen, Lottsville hadn't fallen yet and at this particular time being in Graves Registration we were still taking bodies from the shore from the fighting battlefield onto the boat and we were loading. Many times we had a string of bodies going up one end of the boat and at this time we were getting American troops. They were bringing American troops off the front of the boat. Just my experience, is this, just being in England for a couple months we were subject to bomb raids. Sirens would go off in the middle of the night. The first 2 weeks, 3 weeks, 2 weeks probably you're there outside your barracks that had trenches. You were supposed to hit those trenches when they went off. Well we did for a couple three weeks and after that we just slept through them or didn't move off the bunks. Just from the standpoint of seeing the search lights going up and seeing Germans planes up there and this and that, you got kind of acclimated to it a little bit. It had to be a, it was a very scary thing for troops to come right from America right to the beach. That had to be devastating.

Mark: I'm sure. I was going to ask you when started to actually perform your Graves Registration duties, it was right when you got to Omaha beach?

Elver: Right. Right when I got in there.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe your, what your duties were. What did you have to do? I assume it was more than just piling them up? They had to be accounted for in some way.

Elver: When you went into battle, or you were assigned to an area of conflict, before you went in, everybody got new clothing. All your clothing, you had your last 4 serial

Interview Transcript (continued)

numbers stenciled. On your shirts, your underwear, whatever--leggings. Then of course, dog tags were the main thing. If dog tags weren't on the body, you couldn't use them. Many times they were blown off. But if three or four items of clothing matched, serial numbers matched, they could use that. Like I mentioned, we had medical staff with us that they used for identification. We set up, our company set up the first cemetery. We had a surveyor and medics and we set up the St. Mare Eglise cemetery.

Mark: In France?

Elver: Up to that time, most all the bodies were taken off the shore, on the boats back to England. Then as we set up the cemetery, we had a processing tent. My job, I was squad leader, was to pick up bodies from a given area and take them to the cemetery. And then, they processed them. If they couldn't identify them or what, immediately, they would take like the tooth charts, fingerprints and so on. They were buried then in an unknown plot. Your plots were 20 wide, 20 deep and numbered by grave. If a person was unidentified, immediately at the processing tent, they went with the unknowns. That information went to Washington DC and when they came back with positive identification, then that body was moved there to a positive grave. But, in my job, our job was to, as we got going, was to remove the dead from the battlefield as soon as possible so that oncoming troops wouldn't have to witness that. But, normally they witnessed a lot.

Mark: I imagine you have to.

Elver: Yes.

Mark: Sounds like very gruesome work.

Elver: You get used to it.

Mark: I was going to ask how people held up under that kind of stress.

Elver: We had no problem. It really got to be a real good assignment.

Mark: In what sense?

Elver: Well, because we, from the standpoint we were, didn't answer to too many people. Even to our own company headquarters. We weren't around them that much. It was a, oh I don't know we worked so independently from anybody else. It got to be--I thought it was a pretty good detail. We had all kinds of people or walks of life with us.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: I was going to ask about some of the other men you served with. Did they come from all different parts of the country?

Elver: Oh, yes. All over the United States and nobody freaked out. You get used to, you simply get used to it. You could do it, you maybe wouldn't like it. Some things you don't like, but you could do it.

Mark: When I was in the Air Force I used to work on the hospital.

Elver: Oh, OK.

Mark: So, I saw my small little corner of gruesomeness, I guess. Nothing like that but--

Elver: It's a good detail. It ended up, I would--there were other details I'd rather not have. Infantry, Rangers, Paratroopers, things like that.

Mark: I see. Let's talk a little bit about some of the other men you served with. You mentioned they came from all over other parts of the country. Were there regional differences and distinctions? For example, did the southern guys sort of set themselves apart? Was there any rebel versus Yankee antagonism?

Elver: No, we used to kid about that with one another. Cooperation was amongst everybody was excellent. It really was. All that stuff is bygones when you get into where you meet people.

Mark: Getting everything cleaned up after the Normandy invasion, took about how long? How long were you in Normandy?

Elver: I was in Normandy, the first of September.

Mark: Did you follow along behind the advances? Or, how did you move around?

Elver: No, Brittany had fallen. 610 Graves Registration and perhaps 6-9. I'm just guessing about 6-9. 610 was there and I think--see St. Lowe was going on at the same time, and St. Lowe was a real tough battle. I think 610 was assigned to that area. But those bodies were all brought back. The only cemetery that I know is in St. Lowe, is a criminal, American criminal cemetery.

Mark: American criminal cemetery?

Elver: Yes.

Mark: That's for--

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: American criminals.

Mark: American soldiers who were convicted of something?

Elver: Were convicted of murder, rape, things of that nature.

Mark: And executed?

Elver: Right. But 610 had that area. Then as we cleaned up and we got up to Cherbourg, then we moved our whole company for the first time, came together at Cherbourg. And we were on one side of the street in Blossvale, that's a sub--a little--like a little suburb of Cherbourg on top of a hill and 6-1 was across the street. Well, because we went into, we were one of the 6-11 or 6-10 and 6-11 was there, we got separated again. Our headquarters and first platoon went to LeMons. And the third and fourth platoon, I was in fourth, we went to, we went up to Brittany. The war was over up there basically. And we went up to clean up, up there. We went and we disinterred bodies from the pilots that were shot down, and all that sort of thing and cleaned up Brittany. Disinterred any Americans that were in the area. Put them in weapons carriers and took them down to LeMons. That's where the cemetery was. There is where I had my first experience with the executions.

Mark: You didn't mention that on your sheet.

Elver: No.

Mark: Which executions?

Elver: Well, this is where American soldiers had either murdered someone or this sort of thing and they were executed.

Mark: Oh, I see. How many of those were there?

Elver: I had experience with five or six, because you got Graves whenever death or bodies were encountered, you had to use Graves Registration. Form one in the military is a death certificate. It starts with that. That's how we got involved.

Mark: These occurred where?

Elver: All over. The first one I knew about was in Normandy where a soldier held a bayonet to a white nurse's throat. He got hung for that. General court martial. The next one was a fellow who was driving a truck, transportation, picked up some young gal. Young, I guess about 16, underage. He raped her in a grove somewhere and cut her breasts off and she got infection and died. He got hung.

Interview Transcript (continued)

The one in Brittany that I was on was a young fellow who was having sex with a young farmer's daughter. Her father came up on him and he up and shot the father. He got it. It goes on and on, there's quite a few of them. But anyway, whenever they had an execution, they had a battalion there and it straightened out the discipline. Right now. They had no problems with discipline after that.

Mark: Sets an example, I guess.

Elver: Definitely. When they say it's not a deterrent, I don't buy that.

Mark: It certainly was in that case, it sounds like.

Elver: Well no, it wasn't. It just straightened out discipline. One guy's sergeant had a conflict with his platoon sergeant and he went out and got all zapped up on Calvados and came in and sprayed the tent and got his first lieutenant, staff sergeant, three of them. In wartime like that they don't have time to fiddle around with criminals and things like this. They have discipline. If you read the articles of war, it tells it and every time you transferred from one unit to another unit one of the first things you got read to you was the articles of war. They went through it very rapidly and it probably wasn't as effective as it should have been but it got down to the nuts and bolts of things. It was reality.

Mark: After Brittany then, where did you go after that?

Elver: After Brittany, we went to--I had two battle stars, one was in Normandy and one was in Northern France. We got sent to Bastogne. Then we got driven out of Bastogne.

Mark: This is the Battle of the Bulge.

Elver: The Battle of the Bulge. Right. There is a cemetery at Foy. Foy Cemetery on the border of Luxembourg and Bastogne. Then we got driven out of there and then when things turned around, I guess they realized they didn't need all the Graves Registration personnel that they had available, so I got transferred from there back to Copiague, France where I went in training to go direct CBI. There is where shortly after I was there, is when the war ended. It was Germany. We were on maneuvers; we didn't even know it until a day or so after it happened. So, we had no celebration. We weren't around anywhere where you could celebrate. So that's what happened on our celebration. Then I went from there to--we were there for about another week or so after that. Then they flew us to Beetle fault, Holland and then I went to Potsdam. When I was in Potsdam, that's when the war in Japan ended. When the atomic bomb was dropped, that changed our program again completely. So I was in Potsdam, then in the Potsdam conference, I ran a

Interview Transcript (continued)

motor pool there. I was in a motor pool where at this time, all the military units were turning in their vehicles. We had thousands of them and we were dispatching them and things like this for different purposes. When a company needed to go for rations. So I was there maybe three, four weeks, five weeks something of that nature and then I moved to Berlin. So I was in Berlin about two more months before I left for home.

Mark: After the war ended, what did your duties entail? There probably weren't too many Graves registered anymore.

Elver: No, no. In fact, after the Bulge turned around, they didn't need--they only left a platoon or two at the Battle of the Bulge. That wasn't too big an area. So, I was transferred out of Graves Registration then and into an infantry outfit. 84th I think it was. That's where I went to Copiague for training for CBI. We were supposed to go from there direct to China (unintelligible) Well, then the war with Germany came to a halt and so then that changed things rapidly and not too long after--the Japanese surrendered. The atomic bomb was dropped. So then I was just on the move. Went to Berlin, Potsdam first. The rest of them were guards in Potsdam. They were our guards.

Mark: Is that right. How did you get along with the Russians?

Elver: Not too well. Not too well. The Americans, they were really different. They were really guttural people. They just weren't cooperative. We were glad to get out of there. Then I went to Berlin and was right across from the Nazi headquarters in Berlin for two months. Right across the street from them.

Mark: What was Berlin like? It had to have been pretty well bombed out.

Elver: Berlin was pretty well bombed out. But, it wasn't as bad as you probably thought. In the area that I was in. We didn't get too far into East Berlin too often, but that was probably more bombed out than where I was. But the headquarters right across the street was probably 6-8 blocks square. That was the Nazi headquarters at that time. That was all bombed out except for the swimming pool, the jail and one of the buildings. The rest of it was just all flattened.

Mark: How did the Germans get along with Americans or I suppose how did the Americans get along with the Germans after the war?

Elver: I think, very well. We--I was in Berlin and used to go down to the beer garden to trade cigarettes for different things. For awhile I was--flew special messenger to Paris, picked up 33 bottles of Cognac and an officer's bag, went back and sold it. Things like that. I enjoyed my tour in Berlin. The people were fine.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: No animosity?

Elver: Not really. Not that you couldn't get along or that you had to be afraid of them or anything like that. They were glad it was over. No, there was no animosity.

Mark: Was there much fraternization between Germans and Americans?

Elver: Oh, sure.

Mark: Because it is my understanding that initially at least, the American soldiers weren't supposed to have contact with the Germans.

Elver: Oh, we didn't have that at all. In fact, then after two months, in Berlin, I was shipped to Eeberg, Germany on the Nekar river about 10-15 miles from Heidelberg. We lived in a home there, upstairs, and downstairs was the people that owned the building. He was a retired Navy captain. They kept our apartments clean for us. We brought them food, we brought them (unintelligible). They were super. I think that there was no problem there. None whatsoever. No, I think they're as cordial as anybody.

Mark: You mentioned this incident with the alcohol and selling the alcohol. This brings up some questions that I generally ask all of my interviewees. That involves, when you had free time, during the war and then in the occupational duties as well, what did you do during your free time?

Elver: Well, in France, in Normandy as long as you mentioned this, in Normandy you fraternized less with the French, than you did when we got to Germany, when we got to Berlin. I assumed they didn't know whether we were going to be or not be there. They couldn't be caught fraternizing with us. They were, I thought, very unfriendly. I only assumed, under necessity. But in Brittany, we fraternized like crazy. Just fine. Where ever I went. Including Germany. So, what did we do with our time?

Mark: Yes.

Elver: Well, you know, it's interesting. There was--some groups would go here, some groups would go there. Myself and three other fellows had a little French tavern in Brittany that was about 20 miles out of town. We'd go down there on a Saturday night and they would feed us and we'd have a few pops, cognac, whatever.

Mark: A few Pops?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: Yah, cognac and beer, whatever.

Mark: I see.

Elver: We'd spend a Saturday nigh there and they were just happy to have us. So, that's what we would do a lot of times on the weekends. You'd get into poker games, things like that.

Mark: Was there much black market activity?

Elver: Yes, in Brittany.

Mark: I'm not going to ask you to embarrass yourself, but I--

Elver: You're not going to embarrass me. Because it went on--who cares. In Brittany, we went up there to clean up and disinter. Like we would go to a--most of the time, we'd go to a mayor of the city and we would ask them or generally--Graves registration would receive information from the Air Force where they lost planes and they lost pilots. We'd go in those areas and then we would check with the mayor and many times they would disinter or take a body from a plane and bury it in their own cemetery. They'd take the personal effects, whatever, to the mayor. We'd go to the mayor in that town and sometimes the mayors would contact Graves Registration in our area. We'd go disinter that body and take it out and so--We had disinterred, I'm going to say, something like 200 bodies and sent them back to LeMons. We received, we got our company commander, we received about 2000 mattress covers that we had sold. At the time, in Brittany, France, they had some kind of religious statue that went from town to town. As this thing went along, came right from town to town, they marched and paraded and they had a big celebration. This was, so to speak as I understand it, this statue made it all through France, the war was supposed to be over. Something like that. Anyway, when this statue come to town, these French people they were hanging out all these white sheets. They were all mattress covers painted with flowers. The company commander came up there and he went in to get a haircut and there's all these mattress covers. That's when things hit the fan. We had dysentery. We had shipped out about 2 and sold about 2,000. That went on--

Mark: What did you get for them?

Elver: Oh, \$30.00, you know. Whatever, trade 'em for this or that. That all went on. That's not the only thing. In Berlin--I never smoked when I was in the service and drank very little. I didn't learn to smoke until after I got out. But, anyway, the Bier garden in Berlin, I traded two cartons of cigarettes for seven nice diamonds.

Interview Transcript (continued)

They were hard up. They wanted things. That went on all the time. If you got caught, there was a problem. But--

Mark: What was a problem?

Elver: Oh, you'd get caught in, get some duties, threaten you with a court martial. Which never really happened, but they would trade. The big thing was to trade cigarettes for like a camera. Things like that. All kinds of stuff. Things you know, money wasn't any good to you. It was all phony money, so whatever you could trade for material things. It went on all the time. You'd have a Bier garden, it's like a big park in Berlin, couple thousand people there. GI sometimes, they would go down and comb the place and haul them out. That was common.

Mark: I see, OK. I've just got one last thing I want to cover about your previous experiences. Did you have much contact with the front line fighting soldiers? I'm interested in the relationship between the combat soldiers on the front and those in the rear.

Elver: We did, because we were in and out of it. Like they didn't want--they didn't like what we were doing. They'd say ICK. But I wouldn't trade what we were doing for what they were doing.

Mark: That's what I was going to ask. Did they--how did they see you guys? Did they say ICK or did they think, "Please don't come to get me" or what.

Elver: No. Not really, not really. There wasn't much conversation about that. What we would see when you went to--When you have a battle area, say you have the first division in there and you have Company A, Company B or C, they get a--when a conflict occurs they get a morning report. They have--they know about where, who went, they know who went and approximately where they went. So they would give--we would get the exact grid coordinates. We had section maps of every area. So big a map that would cover a certain area and very detailed. When say Company B or the first division, whatever lost 6 or 8 men or however in there. They knew it right away and then we'd get--they would give it to us and we'd get in there and get them out. So, we would run onto them all the time. Mixed with them frequently. In fact, because we were on detached service a lot of times, we'd just pull into their mess hall or their mess tent.

Mark: Was there any sort of friction between the front line and rear echelon troops? That you noticed.

Elver: Not in our area. Not in our stage of operation at all, no. No, not at all.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: I see.

Elver: There could have been with Red Ball. I don't know. I heard of some things but not that I witnessed.

Mark: So, would you say--Let's pose the question this way. In terms of the volume of your work, what was the worst battle or conflict that you experienced? Was it D-Day experience or The Battle of the Bulge?

Elver: Oh, no. I'll tell you what. If you're like in Normandy many times we were working with fresh bodies. This is tougher to work with than someone who has been buried a long time and you had to disinter them.

Mark: Why is that?

Elver: You could really get sick from their fresh smell of blood and the warm weather. You could get nauseated from that. More so than you could from someone's body that you disinterred or a bad odor. You could live with that easier than the fresh blood smell.

Mark: I see, OK. When did you leave Europe?

Elver: When did I leave Europe? Let's see. I left Europe--I came home--Let's see, I left Europe about January, the first part of January.

Mark: Of '46?

Elver: Of '46.

Mark: Where did you leave from?

Elver: I left from Harvard.

Mark: Excuse me.

Elver: Harvard.

Mark: Harvard.

Elver: We went--we went to, let's see, we went to Eeborbock. We left from Eeborbock. Then we--I left there, it was after Christmas. Around the first of the year. I'm sure it was around the first of the year. Arrived back in the states around the first

Interview Transcript (continued)

of February in New York. I spent about a week in New York getting processed. Shipped back to Ft. Sheridan and there about a week and then out.

Mark: I see. What were you thinking as the ship was pulling into New York Harbor?

Elver: As it's pulling out?

Mark: As it's pulling in. As you're coming back from Europe.

Elver: Well, really not too much. I think I was 19,20,21 I suppose. When I was over there, after you got over there, you got kind of acclimated to being over there and you just--I guess you had the feeling that you probably weren't going to come home. I guess you kind of adapted that sort of feeling. My feeling when I finally hit. I don't know. Happy to be there, of course.

Mark: On the ship, was there a mood of celebration or anticipation or--?

Elver: Not really. No big bangs at all.

Mark: So, you went from New York to Ft. Sheridan?

Elver: Back to Ft. Sheridan.

Mark: And got your free and clear discharge?

Elver: Right. Went through process in New York and then shipped to Ft. Sheridan. The final processing went on at Ft. Sheridan and then home.

Mark: How did you get back to Middleton? Did you drive? Take a train?

Elver: Train to Madison.

Mark: After the war, what were your first priorities for after the war?

Elver: Get back to school.

Mark: You attended to school?

Elver: Yes.

Mark: Did you go to UW-Madison here?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: No, I went to Milwaukee and went to Mortuary school. That was my first priority, get back into school.

Mark: I see, I see. Your GI Bill benefits paid for that I assume.

Elver: Right. \$65 a month.

Mark: Did it cover all your expenses?

Elver: No. But it sure helped.

Mark: So this was more like a vocational program that you were involved in?

Elver: Right.

Mark: What prompted your decision to go into that line of work? Was it your military experience?

Elver: No, I was interested in that prior to going to service. At the time I went in, you couldn't make any decisions. Because you knew you were going to go. Unless you were a 4F or couldn't pass the exams. But I knew that wasn't possible. So, that's how that went.

Mark: Your program of study lasted how long?

Elver: 2 years--4 years.

Mark: I see.

Elver: Well, it was 2 years apprenticeship and 2 years schooling.

Mark: Which school? What was the name of the school?

Elver: Wisconsin Institute of Mortuary Science--Milwaukee.

Mark: In the post war years, some veterans complained that there wasn't enough housing to be had. Perhaps in a large city like Milwaukee, did you have problems finding a place to live?

Elver: Not really. The school had dorms of course. But I didn't stay in a dorm. We didn't really have a problem.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: In the years after Viet Nam, people have come to understand that sometimes veterans after they come out of the service have certain readjustment problems to civilian life. Did you experience any such things? I for example had a WW II paratrooper tell me he had dreams of falling out of an airplane without a parachute. Those kinds of things.

[END SIDE A, TAPE 1]

Elver: Oh, I can believe that. Yeah, I can believe that. I dreamt for a long time. For many years, quite a few years about the hanging crew. I dreamt about that for a long time. I can believe that they have some thing, but I don't. Never interrupted my life I mean as far as--I don't know personally of anybody who has.

Mark: I've just got one last area I want to cover. That involves veteran's organizations. I'm wondering if you've joined any veterans groups.

Elver: I belong to the VFW.

Mark: When did you join the VFW?

Elver: I joined the VFW right after I got out of the service.

Mark: For what reason?

Elver: Well, at the time, they were helping veterans with insurance; they were helping veterans in different areas as far as legislature is concerned. It was a matter of--it was an opportunity to meet people in the same boat that you were in. It's hard to tell somebody what really happened. If you really tell them what happened, do they believe you? That's why I think this is a better answer than I can give you.

[TAPE ENDS HERE]

Mark: Were you an active member? Did you go to the club on a regular basis? Participate in the meetings and all that?

Elver: I lived in Viroqua for 15 years. I was more active there than I was or have ever been here. I've never been in the club here in Middleton.

Mark: I see.

Elver: Although I pay my dues.

Mark: Have you had any contact with some of the men you served with?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Elver: Just one. Bob Schumacher in Watertown.

Mark: I see. I suppose it's kind of a small unit.

Elver: That's a small unit. Like we don't have a reunion because it's such a small group. It isn't like--the Air Force, I think is more active. I think we have a division that's more active. We've never had one.

Mark: Those tend to be quite popular.

Elver: That's right.

Mark: That's pretty much all I had. The line of questions that I had. Is there anything you would like to add?

Elver: No.

Mark: Ok. Thanks for stopping in.

Elver: Ok.

[END OF WRITTEN TRANSCRIPT]