

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
John B. Kahoun
Radio Operator, Army, World War II

2006

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Kahoun, John B., (b. 1926) Oral History Interview, 2006.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

John B. Kahoun, a Biron, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as a radio operator in the 228th Forward Observation Battalion, 111st Corps Artillery, Third Army Corps in France and Germany during World War II. Kahoun speaks at length about growing up in Biron, a small, paper mill town near Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. He mentions his father was a grade school principal. The family moved to a dairy farm when Kahoun was nine and he recalls delivering milk in glass bottles. Kahoun attended high school in Wisconsin Rapids and mentions he played trumpet and coronet and wanted to be a musician. He recalls hearing the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor at the Biron community hall when he was a freshman. Kahoun addresses how his community was affected by the war. His friend joined the Marines in 1942 at age seventeen, and Kahoun's band teacher was drafted, which Kahoun cites as the reason he stopped pursuing music. Kahoun graduated from high school in June 1944 and enlisted in the Army in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He touches upon his basic training at Fort Sheridan (Illinois) and radio operator-repairman training at Fort Bragg (North Carolina). Kahoun suggests his musical background led to his being picked to learn Morse Code. He tells a story of practicing Morse Code in the newsroom where they decoded twenty-one words a minute, which helped Kahoun test out of the seventeen words per minute requirement in his field artillery battalion. Kahoun was transferred to Fort Sill (Oklahoma) to attend Advanced Radio Operator-Repairman School. Kahoun speaks in detail about his older brother, who enlisted in 1942, became a paratrooper, and died in Cherbourg (France) thirteen days after D-Day. Coincidentally, Kahoun was inducted into the Army the same day his brother died, but he did not discover this until he was at Fort Bragg. Kahoun explains how, concerned for his bereft father, he got up the courage to ask his battalion commander if his dad could visit Fort Sill, hoping the visit would reassure him and boost his spirits. The battalion commander agreed, and Kahoun's father took a train from Wisconsin to Oklahoma, which Kahoun states was the first train his father had ever been on. Kahoun describes how his father stayed in quarters at the PX, observed formations, watched paratrooper drills, and rode in the truck with the troops who acted "especially comical" for his benefit. Kahoun states his father "went back home with a different attitude" about the Army and the war. Next, Kahoun discusses his voyage to Europe. In March 1945, he sailed from New York to Glasgow (Scotland) on the *Queen Elizabeth*, took a train to Southampton (England), another boat to Le Havre (France), and finally a troop truck to Belgium, where he was assigned as a replacement to the 288th Forward Observation Battalion. Kahoun touches upon the challenges of being radioman in a forward observation battalion. He recalls being in Freising (Germany) near the Czech border when the War in Europe ended in May 1945. During the occupation, Kahoun states he was assigned guard duty at a displaced persons camp in Nuremberg (Germany). He describes how the Italian, Polish,

and Russian refugees had nothing to eat but soup while the guards had only C-rations and K-rations. Kahoun admits that his attitude “was piss poor” and he “hated the Germans,” which prompted him to apply for a transfer to the Pacific front. Kahoun humorously describes being pulled off guard duty suddenly and sent back to the U.S., which he speculates was because he could decipher Morse Code at twenty-one words a minute. Kahoun was taken to the coast of France and stayed at Camp Twenty Grand for ten days before he returned to the United States. He explains many soldiers got day passes to Paris, but he asked his commander if he could find his brother’s grave in Normandy instead. He tells an incredible story of taking a Jeep on bad roads through Caen and up the coast of Normandy to find the American cemetery at Sainte Mère Église. Kahoun comments that the city of Caen was leveled and blames the Germans and Americans equally for its destruction. Kahoun found his brother’s grave and took pictures of it for his family. He describes the cemetery vividly, stating it was quite “an emotional experience.” Next, Kahoun tells of returning to the United States via Camp Miles Standish (Massachusetts) and surprising his family in Wisconsin on a thirty-day furlough. He then took a troop train from Fort Sheridan (Illinois) to Camp Polk (Louisiana). En route, he learned the War in Japan was over. He describes the news as “overwhelming” and expresses approval of Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan. At Camp Polk, Kahoun befriended the mail corporal, and within six weeks, he replaced the discharged corporal and was promoted to Staff Sergeant at the Third Army Corps Headquarters. Kahoun jokes about showing off his stripes when he went home at Christmas. After his discharge in May 1946, Kahoun returned to Wisconsin Rapids and worked at a lunch cart at the paper mill. He tells of boldly asking one of the engineers how to get a job there and showing him some drawings. Kahoun had taken drafting classes in the Army, so he was hired as a draftsman in the engineering department. The interviewer remarks that the theme of Kahoun’s story is: “It never hurts to ask.”

Biographical Sketch:

Kahoun (b. 1926) was raised on a farm in Biron, Wisconsin and attended high school in Wisconsin Rapids, where he excelled in music. After graduating high school in 1944, he enlisted in the Army and became a radio operator and repairman with the 288th Forward Observation Battalion, 111st Corps Artillery, Third Army Corps. He served in France and Germany as a radioman and as guard at a displaced persons camp. In 1945, he applied to be transferred to the Pacific front, but the war with Japan ended before he was deployed. Kahoun was discharged in May 1946 at Camp Polk (Louisiana) with the rank of Staff Sergeant. After the war, he returned to Wisconsin Rapids and became a draftsman in the engineering department at the paper mill.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.

Transcript edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

- Driscoll: This is John Driscoll, and today is May 31, 2006. And this is an oral history interview with Jack Kahoun. Jack is a veteran of World War II. He lived in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, and, Jack, thanks a lot for coming down to this meeting today, and agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?
- Kahoun: I was born in a little village five miles north of Wisconsin Rapids called Biron.
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Kahoun: A little village of about, at the time, probably two or three hundred people.
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Kahoun: And a paper mill town. Right, and my folks lived in a home that was owned by the paper mill.
- Driscoll: Company home?
- Kahoun: Company home. Right next to the paper mill. Oh, gosh, in fact, I like to say that I was born in that house on one of the nights the whistle blew, to announce that there was a fire somewhere in town. And, of course, in our town, that is the way you got the volunteer fire department out.
- Driscoll: Sure.
- Kahoun: And there I was, at home, of course. April 12, 1926.
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Kahoun: And I went to grade school there. A great little village. If you ever, if you never lived in a little village, one of the things is that a village is a group of people who care about one another so much.
- Driscoll: That is a good point.
- Kahoun: And it is hard to bring an outsider in to that environment. Because it looks like people are nosy about everything that you are doing. But the trouble is, the thing is, that they really care.
- Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: And they want to know what is going on in everybody's life, and everybody wants to know everybody else. Well, anyway. Well, I was fortunate. My dad, at that time, was the principal of the grade school there. And he was a principal for ten years until I grew up and went to the first grade. And he didn't last any after that. I shouldn't say. But, anyway, he left and went to work for the paper mill.

Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: And I was glad of that, too, because he was rough on me.

Driscoll: I'll bet.

Kahoun: I still got a sore ear from when he pulled me out of class when I wouldn't go home because I had gotten, at recess, I had went out and gotten all wet, and the teacher told me to go home and change my clothes. Well, anyway, so that was where I was.

Driscoll: Okay. Brothers and sisters?

Kahoun: I had a brother, three years older than me. And a sister, twelve years older than me. And when I was about nine years old, my folks bought a farm. Forty acre farm, just outside of Biron, between Wisconsin Rapids and Biron. And we had some cows. Three cows. And I delivered milk. We had a milk route. I delivered twenty-one quarts of milk on my bicycle. Glass bottles. That was precarious. Well, anyway, that is some of the history. I graduated from grade school in Biron and, then of course, the high school is in Wisconsin Rapids. And I moved to the high school. For my principle interest was music. I was going to be a musician. And I was really heavy on the trumpet. Coronet and trumpet. And I worked hard at it. And I was quite good. People knew of me because of it. And whenever they would have, the Lutheran church's men's club, by golly, I would play for them. Several times a year. And I had lots of solos ready that I never even played any place. But I was known in high school for my playing. And while I was in high school, we organized a dance band, too. And we had a wonderful teacher. Well, anyway, so that is. And, but, my senior year of high school was from 1943 to 1944. I graduated from high school in 1944, June 3, 1944.

Driscoll: While you were at home, and while you were in school, do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Kahoun: Oh, yes.

Driscoll: Will you tell me about that?

Kahoun: Sure. I remember I was, for some reason, I was at the Biron community hall, when it was announced. And we didn't, wasn't aware, when they said that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, we weren't, I wasn't, that knowledgeable about how serious that was. What that meant. Immediately. Until, all of a sudden, and of course, there was no television then. It was all radio.

Driscoll: Yeah. Sure.

Kahoun: Boy, my dad was, and they would have news only at certain periods of the day. And then you didn't get any more, and that was it. And I remember, but, December 7, 1941, and I was, I must have been a freshman in high school then.

Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: No, I was a junior in high school, then. Because Bob, I am talking about this other guy. He and I went to high school together. Grade school together. And he was a wonderful guy. He saw the worst of it. God. He joined, between his junior and, his sophomore year of high school. 1942, he joined the Marines.

Driscoll: Oh, okay. Wow.

Kahoun: Seventeen years old. His parents had to sign for him. I never even gave it a thought. To tell you the truth. I enjoyed high school. And, but, going to school, to high school during the war, then it was all consuming. Everybody knew. I mean, everybody suffered. It wasn't like it is now. That is one of the things I feel bad about, the veterans today, in any of the wars that we've had. The people weren't a part of it to the extent that everybody was in World War II.

Driscoll: That's a good point.

Kahoun: And we didn't have gasoline to run around in the car, you know. We didn't, we had to be darned careful about everything. And we lived as well as we could under the circumstances. But, the number one objective, well, high school, and in the middle of my junior year in high school, this wonderful band director, who was really guiding me to be an excellent musician, was drafted.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Kahoun: And my progression as a musician never progressed, or improved, from then on. I still played, I still enjoyed it, but I didn't have the professional encouragement to do things right. And that really made a big difference in my lifetime. I was so serious about this that I had a matched pair of a cornet and trumpet. Do you know

the difference?

Driscoll: Well, one is smaller.

Kahoun: Well, the cornet is an instrument for solos and for playing events, and the trumpet is for, so I played the trumpet in the orchestra and the cornet in the band. And I played lots of solos with it. Well, anyway, because I was known, because of my musical stuff. I got to say, I was not great but I was outgoing. I was elected, our senior class was two hundred and five. And I was elected president of the senior class.

Driscoll: All right.

Kahoun: I had no talent really to be president of the class. Except that I could play that, and I loved it. So that was kind of those years. My brother joined the Army in 1942. He joined the 101st Airborne Division. He was a paratrooper. Wonderful guy. In June 6, 1944, D-Day, he dropped into France, into Cherbourg. And he lived thirteen days. Kind of a, in fact, he was killed on the day that I was inducted. June 19, 1944. I went to Milwaukee to take my examination, and I asked for immediate induction. And so I went right from Milwaukee down to Fort Sheridan, or whatever it was.

Driscoll: Yes. Yes.

Kahoun: Then I got on the train. Did I go through that already? Well, you know, you wonder as your life goes, what are the steps that make a difference in your life, that determine where you are going to be, what you are going to be. And everything else. Well, I went through the training, I went through the tests, and we all got on the train. These poor guys that were married and that were leaving kids and wives, I was just a punk. I didn't have anybody that I was leaving. We were on that train, I think, for three days to get to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And we get into the, pull into the camp, and they just called off, you know. Pretty soon they are calling off cannoneers, and they are calling off surveyors, and they are calling off whatever it was. But I was picked to be a radio operator-repairman.

Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: And I am sure that my musical training said that I would be good at Morse code. And in the field artillery, that is how you communicated mostly. Morse code. And it was fun. And it hadn't, Morse code made a big difference in my life later that I didn't realize but when we were in camp we had to take Morse code, in the field artillery, at seventeen words a minute. And my buddy, I met a guy from Florida, and we were pretty good friends. Of course, it was two weeks into basic training

that I got a letter from my sister telling me that my brother had been killed.

Driscoll: Oh, wow. Okay. Oh, wow.

Kahoun: I could have gotten a furlough to come home but it would have been a terrible mistake for me to come home and leave again. I had already gone through the leaving under good circumstances, and acceptable circumstances. So, but, my buddy and me, and he was quite musical, too. And we found out that in this radio operator-repair school, you had to take Morse code, and as soon as you could take seventeen words a minute and pass the test, you didn't have to take, go to the classes any more. That was great, you know.

Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: But, what the heck were you going to do instead of that? But, up at another level of the base, they had, they were sending news over at twenty-one words a minute. And if you go up and copy the news, it would be kind of interesting. And if you got to where you were good enough, you could take the test at twenty-one words a minute.

Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: And that made it, I thought, a huge difference in my life later. Because now we were pretty good, and after we had finished there, we went to advanced radio operator-repair school in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Fort Sill is the artillery school for officers and training and all of this stuff. Fancy place. I will give you a sidelight on this, too. My brother's death completely devastated my dad.

Driscoll: Yes, I can imagine.

Kahoun: And he was, he didn't accept it very well. He was, blamed God, blamed the Germans, he just was almost out of his mind. And he had regrets, because he had talked my brother into buying a house while he was in service, sending home money. Now, that sounds kind of strange, but it just happens while my brother was in service, my sister and her husband bought a home, moved in. Four hundred dollars down, I think it was. And just did not, could not, the floors were not level. And my brother-in-law just could not stand that. He decided he was not going to stay there. And they built a house. And decided, as soon as the house was ready, he was going to leave it and give up on that thing, and the down payment, he didn't care about. My dad thought, well, geez, if my brother would just take over the payments on that house, he would be all set when he got out of the service. Sounds good, doesn't it? And paratroopers got fifty dollars a month more than other people.

Driscoll: That's right.

Kahoun: Well, anyway. One of the regrets that he had, that my brother was not going to enjoy that money. Soon in the letters, I could sense that something was wrong at home. It happened at Fort Sill, being the artillery place that it was, every Saturday, we'd go out in the hills and observe field artillery exhibitions of field artillery in various circumstances. So I went to the battalion commander. Here I am, a buck-assed private, you know. A nobody. I got guts enough to go into the base building and say who I was, and "I got a problem. I think I have, anyway. My dad. I'd like to invite him up here to see just what goes on."

Driscoll: Oh.

Kahoun: The battalion commander says, "Great. We'll get it done. You get him out here and we'll show him." By golly, I don't think my dad had ever been on a train before, been out of the state, hardly. But, by God, he did it. He came out to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Driscoll: Oh, great.

Kahoun: And at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, we were in huts. I think they were six-man huts. And he came and the guys in the hut knew the circumstances, too. And the battalion commander said that he could ride out on the truck with us guys. And so, when it came, on that Saturday, we would all form up in formation, you know, and march to the trucks. And, of course, my dad didn't know, he was supposed to watch for me, but he didn't. And the battalion commander even went over, he knew where my dad was, he knew where I was, and he told my dad, "Up there, that group up there. You follow that group." And he followed the group, and sure enough, and we get to the trucks and the guys help him up on the truck. You know. And they were especially comical, and enjoyable, and having fun on this venture out into the hills. They really hacked it up nice, and my dad saw, because my brother was a paratrooper, and he knew how hard they worked. He thought everything was hell. He thought that they just went through. But, so anyway, we went out and we came back, and it was just great. Well, that night, my dad was staying, I had made arrangements for him to stay at the quarters over at the PX. I think the battalion commander helped me with that. And he says, "You can go stay there, too." And I did. So I stayed there, too. But, my dad got another exposure, too. Just happened that my group got in big trouble on Saturday and our, my hut and another, were to fall out on Sunday morning at six o'clock for formation to march, to go through, and I would have been AWOL. And those sons of guns, they talked someone in another barracks to fall out and answer roll, and when everybody made a left turn to go march, he made a right turn to go back to his place. When my dad heard that

story, it was just the top of his visit.

Driscoll: That's great. What a great idea, to ask him out there. I've never heard of that. That was wonderful.

Kahoun: And I really didn't know for sure what was going on because they didn't want to tell me. They didn't want me to feel bad or to worry or whatever it was. But I could actually tell from letters. And my mother had a nervous breakdown. She couldn't handle him. And he went back home with a different attitude.

Driscoll: Good. That's great.

Kahoun: Anyway, so then I had a seven day delay en route from Fort Sill to go to embark from New York to Europe. Went across on the *Queen Elizabeth*.

Driscoll: Oh, wow, first class, huh?

Kahoun: Sixteen thousand of us on there.

Driscoll: Wow.

Kahoun: And it went all by itself. It didn't go in escorted.

Driscoll: They said it was too fast.

Kahoun: But, they changed their course every seven minutes. And that dog-gonned ship was going this way, or that way. And when you are down in the butts, way down there, you are really up or really down. You know. My buddy and I on the ship, we figured out where the best place to be was, right back on the fantail. You know. You are turning like this, you know. But we weren't supposed to be there, because they had a different, you were confined to, they had red and they had green, and they had eight different areas by color. And that is where you were supposed to be. See, well, anyway, the guy who was in charge of our group, and found out about that, and, ah, God, we were in a lot of trouble. So we ended up, when we got to, well, we were assigned a baggage detail for the rest of the trip. And I will tell you more about that later. But, anyway, when we got a day out of Scotland, here we are down in the, underneath, all of a sudden we are hearing boom! Hearing depth charges go off. We didn't know for sure what it was, if we were in a battle, or something. Kind of scary, you know. They thought they had seen a submarine. And we were close to the shore, so, but they dropped anchor off Glasgow, and we get in small boats, and get on the train. Went down to Southampton, got on a boat, went across the channel to Le Havre.

Driscoll: Oh, you went right over.

Kahoun: No delay at all. I barely put my foot on the land. And Le Havre had been rebuilt, it was temporary. And here my buddy and I were told, okay, we are going to take care of all the baggage. And everything. So the guys all get off and they have a truck there. And they have to throw their duffle bags up onto the truck. Well, we had to stay with the baggage, so my buddy and I, we sit up on the top, on top of it, the truck goes, and here these guys are hiking along from the train and we're sitting there on the truck. Hi, guys! Get to the train and the baggage car, and all these duffel bags are put into the baggage car. And well, we had to stay with them, you know. And that is where all the food for the trip was, in there. The guys wouldn't sit in those forty and eight deals. And here we are stretched out on the, we give out the food for the trip, you know. It was one of those things. Then we landed in Belgium, or Luxembourg, or whatever it was. That is where we were to be reassigned to our outfits, then.

Driscoll: Okay. You didn't go over with your outfit? You went over as a replacement.

Kahoun: I went over as a replacement. I didn't know what kind of an outfit I was going to be in until, all of a sudden, there I am. I am assigned to a forward observation battalion, the field artillery, 288th Forward Observation Battalion. And I went over in March.

Driscoll: Of forty...?

Kahoun: Of '45.

Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: And the war ended in May. March, April, May. And so I only got there for the last two months of it. And the field artillery is not a bad place to be, but the forward observation battalion is not the place to be.

Driscoll: I know.

Kahoun: And the front was moving so fast that we couldn't keep up. In fact, we would move out as far as we could so we could see to bring in our flash posts and our sound posts. And by that time everybody had gone on by. And sometimes we were out in front of everybody. There wasn't anybody, everybody else was back there. It was a very kind of a strange situation. But, anyway, ended up in a little town of Freising, which is about twenty-five miles from the Czech border. And that is where I was when the war ended.

Driscoll: Okay.

Kahoun: Well, then, our outfit was pulled back to Nuremberg to pull guard duty at a displaced persons camp. Six thousand.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Kahoun: Six thousand. And this is a displaced persons camp was underneath a stadium, kind of like a football stadium, you know. But it was enclosed all around. And we had Poles and Italians and Russians, well, all different nationalities. I think slave labor. You know. And my attitude was piss poor. I mean, I was dangerous. I hated the Germans. And our job was to keep the DPs in and the Germans out. The DPs were getting pea soup, three times a day. And for a change they would get beet soup three times a day. We were, ourselves, on C-rations, K-rations, you know, and everything. Well, the bulletin board had a notice on it that the Third Corps Headquarters, of field artillery, was reorganizing to go to the South Pacific. And they would go back to the States for six weeks of training and then go to the South Pacific. So I signed up. And I went down, and was interviewed. I don't remember too much about it, but I know that happened. Nine o'clock, here I am, pulling guard duty from twelve to four, twelve midnight to four, twelve noon to four. Twelve to four. Twelve to four. All of a sudden, I am in bed at nine o'clock, top bunk. All of a sudden they come around and woke me up. And said, pack up. You are leaving. And I thought I was in trouble. I thought I was in trouble.

Driscoll: Sure. What did I do now?

Kahoun: God. And I was, just that quick, moved to corps headquarters, and that was living in a castle, eating steak and eggs and ice cream and rolls. What a different life. Mostly all officers. And I tried to think, John, "How in God's name did I get selected?" Twenty-one words a minute of code. That is the only thing that I could think of that would stand out as being different.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Kahoun: Think about it. I am guessing. But it could have been. So, anyway, here we are. Got in the outfit. By day, we start rolling to the coast of France. Get to the coast of France. They had tent cities there. And Camp Twenty Grand was where we were. And we found out it was ten days before our ship would be there for us to go back to the States. So they were giving passes to Paris to anyone who wanted them. I had the guts to get up again, go into the battery commander, and told him my situation, that I had promised my folks. I knew I was going overseas and I promised I would try to visit my brother's grave, if possible.

Driscoll: Let me flip this.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

Driscoll: Okay, there we are.

Kahoun: So, I have been helped along. Make the right decisions. Well, anyway, so here I am. I go in and tell him the story. He says-- I had gone to the chaplain. I had gone to the Red Cross. I had gone everywhere. "Well," he said, "How far is this?" I know he was killed on the Normandy Peninsula. I said, "The best that I can say is that he is somewhere near Caen." And he says, "How far is that?" I said, "It's about ninety miles." Well, anyway, he says, "Well, let me check." By God, the next morning, I was going by his tent and he high-signed me. "Come in, come in," he says. "If you can get two GIs to give up passes to Paris, you can take a Jeep, and load it with gasoline. Take two GI cans of gasoline with you. And you can head out."

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Kahoun: I had no trouble getting two guys to volunteer to go. And, in fact, the guys went around and found a camera, and film, which was just the hardest thing to get. So that I could take pictures of it. I mean, this is the service. And, on a Sunday morning, bright and early. Of course, this was in June, of '45. And, of course, at that time of the year, it is far enough north so that it's light longer. Anyway, Well, anyway, got up and, along the coast of France, many of the roads were busted up, and it was really, but we would go into, there was army posts. We could drive into the army posts that were there, go through the chow line, get breakfast, get back in our Jeep, and head on out. You know. And here is our passes made out to Caen. And we found it. Caen is a city about the size of Milwaukee. Big sign, big as that wall over there, "Off limits to all American troops."

Driscoll: I'll be darned.

Kahoun: We, like damned fools, drove right down through the town. And it only had, I mean, everything was leveled. It was, they had plowed out enough so a path to go down. Down and out again. And we didn't see anything. And then we did, as we got out somewhere, we inquired about graves registration. And we were told that there was a British graves registration somewhere around. But they told us what damned fools we were. The Americans had blown up the town. Our ships, warships, set off, and what had happened, when we chased out of Normandy, down around, those Germans came up and they holed up in Caen. Well, you know, war is war. And you don't give a-- well, that is where I found out where he was buried. They contacted the American graves registration, found out that he

was buried at Ste. Mère Église. Up on the coast of Normandy. Well, that was a little distance further, you know. And so they give us directions. We head up, headed up that way. It was kind of a dark-- not a dark-- it was a overcast day. Real overcast. And it wasn't raining, but it seemed like it could. And we figured if we could go through this, and the hedgerows, and all this, you know. And we inquire again. And finally, the last inquiry was, "yeah, you go-- the cemetery is just up here around the corner." What an experience. Because when we went around that corner and went in, here was the most beautiful circular flower bed you have ever seen. Lit up, lit up, by the reflection of the white crosses in the background, clear back, just row upon row. Reflected off the sky. Lit up that, I say, it would be like going through the Pearly Gates, honest to God. Well, anyway, what an emotional experience. For all of us. For the three of us. I was able to go in, I was able to get some flowers. I don't remember where I got the flowers but I got flowers to put on my brother's grave. And was able to take pictures of his grave. And us there. And the guys did take a picture of me standing at the grave. I was able to leave money there with the chaplain to have flowers put on his grave, on July 10. Which is my mother's birthday. And then we headed. It was a hundred and sixty miles instead of ninety. And so we put on that many miles that day going and coming back. On those roads, which were not, some of them barely passable. It was a most interesting experience.

Driscoll: I'll bet it was.

Kahoun: Well, then we finally got on a boat to come back, and, good God! Here we get back to the States, landed at Camp Miles Standish, up in Boston. Come in, you know. Heroes, or get a nice welcome back. The war wasn't over, but it was in Europe. Check in at Camp Miles Standish. Thirty-three day furloughs.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Kahoun: Now, I hadn't told my folks, I left, when I knew that I was coming back, I was going to surprise them. I wrote letters, several letters to be mailed several days apart, as if I was still there, you know. And I got to Camp Miles Standish, and I found out we were getting thirty day furloughs, I chickened out and I had to call my sister. I just couldn't, I called my sister and told her that I would be home. After the furlough, I reported to Fort Sheridan. The train grouped up. We got a whole train load going to Camp Polk, Louisiana, and we got as far as Texarkana, and the train pulled off to the side. And we figured, what the heck is going on here, you know? The war was over in Japan.

Driscoll: Wow. What was the feeling among you guys with that?

Kahoun: Ah, it was overwhelming.

- Driscoll: Had you made the invasion, you know...
- Kahoun: And I'll tell you. Thank God that Harry Truman had guts enough to drop those atomic bombs.
- Driscoll: Oh, yeah.
- Kahoun: Don't ever tell me that he shouldn't have done it. There would have been millions of us who would have died.
- Driscoll: More than a million casualties, I am sure.
- Kahoun: Yeah. And, I mean it was a terrible thing, but war is terrible. It's rotten. You don't care about civilians, or anything else. You think over in Europe those bombers that were going over and leveling those cities cared? Whether there were children, or anything else? That is war. Well, anyway, wow. So, here we end up at Camp Polk, Louisiana, then get assigned to our barracks, they didn't know what the hell to do with us. For two weeks, in the mornings, we would fall out for roll call, and they would send us back to our bunks. Laid around in the bunks. Well, I didn't lay around in the bunks. I had radios and stuff, and all the stuff in our supply room, and I'd go down and check out the radios. And well, I got acquainted with the people in the supply room, and the mail corporal. So I would go with him when he did his job. Just that quick, the mail corporal was eligible for discharge, and ready to go, and he looked around and there I was. In a period of six weeks, honest to God, in a period of six weeks I moved from buck-assed private to staff sergeant, and I went through every thing in between. And this was a regular army outfit. This was Third Corps Headquarters. So when I went home at Christmas, I had stripes. Lots of them. They didn't know one stripe from the other. It was, you know, and that was an interesting period. God, here Camp Polk was, they were clearing out everybody. They were clearing out, they were clearing out. And I got guys from our outfit, and we went and, if we didn't have the best counters, the best shelving, everything else, we went to one that was empty, got theirs, and took ours there. We built up the most beautiful supply room you have ever seen. Everything was, and then, fortunately, they didn't, in I think it was May, of '46 that I was discharged.
- Driscoll: Okay. That is a fantastic story. My God. Wow.
- Kahoun: Well, you got more than you bargained for.
- Driscoll: Hey, listen. When you got out, what did you do?

Kahoun: I went to work at the paper mill. And the first job that I had was running a cart that went through the mill with pop and sandwiches and that on it. That, they did that during the war. Well, they hadn't quite realized that the war was over and they still had this cart going around. And I was only four days a week, and on the fifth day you had to work with the cleaners. And it happened that the cleaners on that day, I was assigned to clean the windows up in the engineering department. I looked around and I said this looked like fun stuff. You know. So, when it came time for me, at noon, to go and eat, I stopped in at the chief engineer's, knocked on his door, and said, "How does a guy get to work up here?" "School." I had taken drafting in high school. "You got drawings?" "Yeah." "Well, bring them down." And so I brought my drawings down. They looked them over, and I got hired in the engineering department, as a draftsman.

Driscoll: If there is a theme to this story, it is: "Ask." It never hurts to ask. Listen, I am going to cut this. I have to go pick up my granddaughter. This is a remarkable story.

Kahoun: Well, I don't know.

[End of Interview]