

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DONALD J. KINDT
Infantryman, 10th Mountain Division, Army, World War II

1994

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Kindt, Donald J., (1925-2000). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Don Kindt, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, talks about his experiences in the Army's 10th Mountain Division in Italy during World War II. Kindt talks about volunteering for the Air Force but being unable to pass the physical and joining the Army's 10th Mountain Division instead. He describes the men in the 10th Division as eggheads and winter sport lovers. He speaks of joining the Division at Camp Swift (Texas) for mule training and playing war games. Kindt mentions crossing to Italy on the USS West Point and seeing convoy submarines surface. He describes the battle at Mount Belvedere: having smoke screen cover and attacking a machine gun nest. Kindt relates the death of two friends and talking to their families after the war. He talks about letters from home and types of German mines. He speaks about hiding in Italian towns, describes the people as supportive, and narrates the death of Mussolini. Kindt talks about sending a medic to assist wounded Bob Dole, who became a Senator from Kansas, and later telling Senator Dole about the incident. Kindt describes entrenchment by the Po River, watching the Germans through binoculars, warning some Generals about incoming air bursts, and paddling across the river on a DUKW. He speaks of volunteering to invade Mussolini's villa at Lago di Garda, instructions to blow up his tunnel if German tanks approached, finding Mussolini had already fled, and falling asleep on Mussolini's bed while on guard duty. Kindt describes a woman found in a cave who had sniped 400 German soldiers. He portrays the great esprit de corps and aptitude for fighting of his Division. He mentions a cousin who joined the Bund in Milwaukee, got drafted and placed in a submarine after going to Germany, and was presumed killed after no one heard from him again. Kindt compares different sorts of soldiers he encountered in the "melting pot of the Allied forces": Nisei, Senegalese, British, Brazilian, Australian, and New Zealand. He relates a story about being surprised by a spear-carrying Senegalese soldier. He touches upon the surrendering of German soldiers and he expresses how he enjoyed travelling in Europe with a track team after the war. Kindt recalls being among the first troops home because he'd been on a ship to Japan when the bombs were dropped. He mentions Senator La Follette's pulling strings so Kindt could stay in Wisconsin to be a valet for a Colonel Matthews and play for the Wisconsin-Madison football team, and he tells a story about surprising his boss, Chicago Bears coach George Halas, at a party held by General Omar Bradley. Kindt discusses a group veterans trip to Italy in 1994: revisiting battle sites and villages, paying their respects at cemeteries, and seeing the Colosseum.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.

Transcribed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcription edited and abstract by Susan Krueger, 2008.

Transcript:

- Mark: Okay, the date is June 16, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, the archivist at the state of Wisconsin Veterans Museum, and today we are interviewing World War II veteran Don Kindt. Say hello to the folks, Don.
- Don: Hi, Mark. Glad to be here.
- Mark: Okay. Let's get started with the interview here. Maybe you could tell me where you were born, what year; I don't know if you want to volunteer that information. (Don laughs) A little bit about your upbringing, where you came from, that sort of thing.
- Don: I was born July 2, 1925 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I had one older brother, and mother and dad. My dad was the Vice President of Wisconsin Telephone Company, and a man that was a graduate of Marquette University, which was a little bit odd because both my brother and I came up here to the University of Wisconsin. But my mother was born in Haumbegvize (Hambagweis ??), Germany, right outside of Frankfurt, a suburb of Frankfurt. Her family moved over here in the 1800s, the late 1800s. We were born and raised right in the west side of Milwaukee. So, I had a good life as an early boy, going to Washington High School and then going on to the University of Wisconsin. I had a lot of things happen to me in that period of time, playing football, going to school, fell in love with my bride. I started to like her in 5th grade.
- Mark: She was more than your high school sweetheart.
- Don: Yeah, it goes back to 5th grade.
- Mark: Wow!
- Don: And having two daughters and a son, and my son played professional football, too.
- Mark: Oh, is that right?
- Don: Yes, played with the Bears.
- Mark: What do you know.
- Don: Yeah, we kept him in the incubator too long. He turned out to be 6' 8" and about 260 lbs. Old dad was a little smaller.

- Mark: So, you played football in high school?
- Don: Yes, I played for Liz Blackburn, who later became the coach for Wisconsin, assistant, coach and then they wanted him to stay on as head coach and then went and took over the Green Bay Packers, wanted me to be his assistant up there; it's like turning your father down. I decided to go into the business world, after the war. I think the war had a lot to with that too. I also announced pro football, college football for six years. And I always say I was the first color announcer that was an ex-jock outside of Red Grange.
- Mark: For a radio station or T.V. station?
- Don: Well, Radio and T.V. I worked both ways.
- Mark: In Milwaukee?
- Don: In Chicago. I did the Wisconsin games through WTMJ, who did the University games, and then I worked with Mike in both college and pro football. The old Cub announcer Jack Quinlan and I signed a contract to do the Bear games and he hung up the telephone, went out to play golf, and got killed ten minutes after he talked to me. So I didn't want to work with anybody else.
- Mark: So, what year did you finish high school?
- Don: Oh, about 1943.
- Mark: So the war was going on then, by this time.
- Don: Yes. I came up here to the University because I was only seventeen years old; I wasn't in the draft at that point in time. Then I decided to go into the Navy Air Corps.
- Mark: So you volunteered for service? You weren't conscripted, you volunteered?
- Don: No. By trying to go into the Air Force, the Navy Air Force, I wanted to possibly go to Iowa pre-flight and then get into the V-5 program. And that was a big thing. They also had a football team, too. They did a few military manipulations that they got good teams, but no, I wanted to fly. That was one of the things I wanted to do. I couldn't pass the physical because of a bad eye. So I went to the Army Air Force thinking I was going to go down in Texas someplace and when I got off the train there was a huge transfer of Air Corps applicants that ended up in the infantry replacement training center, at Camp Wolters, Texas. And fortunately I ended up with a Sergeant, who a book was written about, the fellow that fought over in the Pacific, and he discouraged me from going on because they all thought

I could talk German, because they heard me use a lot of German, but being raised with a German family in Milwaukee I learned a lot. My grandparents couldn't speak English very well, and they talked in German and I could understand a few things there, and my mother when she would get mad at me she would use the vernacular a little bit in German. So, when I was interviewed, a lot of this, they said, "Do you have any German background?" And I said, "Yes, but I'm not fluent in German." Well, anyhow, I ended up going into the Navy Air Corps and going down, transferred, thinking I was going to the Army Air Force, I ended up at Camp Wolters, which was the infantry replacement, and then I was trained with Sergeant Nelson who was in *Guadalcanal Diary*. And he was the one who advised me. He said, "What you are being trained for, and you may go to a flight school, you jump out of an airplane and go behind the enemy lines, this is the training you're going to get." And I said, "Well, I still have that ambition to fly or if I could get in the Air Force somehow." And a fellow said, "Well, you from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, did you ever do any skiing?" I said I had been skiing since I been four years old. Cross-country mostly, but I did a little downhill and I did a little jumping, so he said, "Did you ever hear about the 10th Mountain Division?" I said, "There is no mountain division in the United States Army." He said, "Sure, at Camp Hale, Colorado, there is a complete division of ten thousand of them." It was a light division at that time, and he said, "Ninety percent of the kids there are former college students from out east, Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, the whole eastern group." We always said they were the only ones that could afford to ski in those days, right after the depression. They came from wealthy families but it was a unique group. We had a lot of fellows from Washington, Oregon and up in the northwest. A lot of them were mountaineers, but what actually happened was it was a composite of people who enjoyed winter sports and what have you, and a lot of good mountain climbers, fellows that had been all over the world climbing mountains. It was, as they say, an interesting group.

Mark: Sounds like it.

Don: They were all -- now just coming back from my reunion over in Italy, I forgot how many what we call "Eggheads" there were from the Harvard, Yale and Ivy Leagues. There were an awful lot of them.

Mark: We'll come back to that reunion in a minute, I want to backtrack a little bit. I wanted to know what made flying so attractive to you?

Don: Well, my dad had taken me to a lot of these air shows and different things. And it looked -- some of my relations, my fiancée at the time, brother-in-law was a pilot, he was a member of the Drought Tractor Company here in Wisconsin and he was flying, he was in the Army Air Corps. And I'd go out to the air shows as a kid. Flying fascinated me at that time, as well as skiing did too, but I didn't think there would be a specialty group in the United States Army that skied, never thinking

about the mountains and the warfare there. I just felt that if I was going in the service, I felt that I would do my best in flying. But I couldn't. The old eyes weren't there to meet the requirements.

Mark: So, you ended up with the 10th Mountain Division?

Don: Right. Just as they were, I didn't do any training with them, I went up to the camp after my—

Mark: You mean Camp Hale?

Don: Camp Hale, I went up to a, off of a furlough; I went to Milwaukee to visit my folks, came back thinking my furlough was destined to end me up in Colorado. I got there and the whole camp was empty, they had just moved to Texas, where I had come from. They went to Camp Swift down there for mule training and mule packing and all that. Some warfare, the mountains aren't the only place that you fight, you had to learn a little bit about the flatland and it helped us in the Po and that was as flat as a pancake, but Po Valley in Italy, but it was just kinda strange to me when I got in an empty camp, and then I found out they just put me on a train and sent me back to Texas to Camp Swift and there we learned to work with the mules, mule packing and all that, flatland fighting and it paid dividends for everyone that was in the group.

Mark: Oh good, because that's what I was going to ask. Did you find the training useful, in retrospect.

Don: Well, I had just come through the training, but I was trained more for espionage to go behind the enemy lines. They even wanted us to jump and learn. We had to mock attacks or infiltration, where I took a group of guys and we were supposed to capture a camp on the other side of the Brazos River down there. There was a guard walking on the beach on the other side, and we were supposed to get this encampment surrounded and capture it, that was it. Like war games. And they had never seen anyone breathe through a reed, and so I said we could stay underwater right until we get up to the shore and all we'd have to do was go up and point a gun at them and they were captured. Well, we went through and he never saw us, we would breathe through reeds going over there. And it was a lot of fun to get that type of training but, to do it under the regular circumstances it's -- you're walking on the edge of your lifeline.

Mark: A very different experience.

Don: Yeah, very different. And never thinking what I would do if I didn't transfer to the ski troops and I became a mortar man. They needed, in the 85th Regiment – see, one whole regiment of the 10th Mountain Division was taking up to Alaska on the

Aleutian Islands and that was the 87th regiment of the 10th Mountain Division, there was the 85th, 86th, and the 87th regiment. We called them the Kiska Kids up there. The Germans [Japanese] evacuated the night before under the fog and I guess they had just a little retaining force. And it was a few casualties, trying to get up the ice where they landed in their boats and they'd have to scale it and actually throw grappling hooks up there and try to scale the ice shelves on the shoreline. They lost fellows with full fuel packs and stuff that slipped off the ropes. They had quite a few casualties but there was just a small retaining force on the island. But they got more training down in Texas with us. When they all came back they went back to Camp Hill, and they formed it as a light division, about 10,000 personnel, and before we went overseas they added another 5,000 to make it a regular division size and they added a lot of the mule skinnners and what have you to attack in the hills of Italy. We didn't know where we were going but they did.

Mark: It all made sense in the end?

Don: Yeah, we had no idea where we were going, and we went across on a huge ship, the USS West Point, which was the USS America, the third largest ship afloat, and we had 10,000 going over there.

Mark: Where did you leave from?

Don: Hampton Roads, what is that, West Virginia?

Mark: It's Virginia.

Don: And to see that big luxury liner sitting out there, gosh, they had everybody. They had girl Marines, girl ferrying forces, that would fly the aircraft

Mark: Oh the WASPS?

Don: The WASPS went over with us. They had the Ortegas (??) Orchestra, an all girl orchestra was aboard. They were up in the upper. We slept down in the holds where there were maybe from six to ten high beds that were just swings, you could say.

Mark: Was that the most luxurious accommodations you ever had?

Don: Beautiful luxury liner, but down in the holds it wasn't. So I volunteered for guard duty a lot so you could walk around the decks. It was fun to see, submarines would come up once in a while around us, in our convoy.

Mark: Was that exciting?

Don: Yeah, it was unusual. You never saw a submarine come up, you didn't know if it was, no, they would of had the siren screaming if it was the enemy, but they'd pop up every once in a while.

Mark: Our subs?

Don: Our submarines, yes. They weren't the enemies. They were patrolling us, they were a convoy of protection, you got one whole division on that ship, and they, what was interesting too, was every once in a while, off in the skyline, you'd see the top of a destroyer, and you'd know you were in an escort, which was reassuring to us that we weren't out there alone with the German subs. It was particularly interesting when you left the coastline of the United States because the Germans had a lot of subs off the coastline. All the way from Florida to Hampton Roads.

Mark: They were pretty effective as I understand.

Don: Yes, they were, especially with the merchant ships. We went out with no incidents at all. So that was very nice. We landed in Naples, Italy and that's an awesome sight to see Mount Vesuvius behind there and it was -- had blew up a little earlier in the year.

Mark: Oh, is that right.

Don: I hiked up to the cauldron and that's interesting and a little scary because every time it belches some gas the whole ground would shake that you are standing on, on the rim. You thought they were going to have another eruption.

Mark: So this is in '44?

Don: This is back in '44. December, I forget what it was, right about the last week, just after Christmas, when we made the landing. In Naples, they put us on LCIs [Landing Craft, Infantry] and took us up the coastline from Naples to Leghorn, what we called, there was another name for it, but we called it Leghorn. It was just a few miles from Pisa. The name is escaping me.

Mark: I know what you mean.

Don: Livorno. I think it is Livorno and then we had an encampment there. We got off the decks of the ship. We had a little area there, we all pitched our tents and then all marched to see the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which is within the sight of our campgrounds, which was interesting. I just saw it last week again.

Mark: So, did you spend much time in Naples?

Don: No. We never got off, we just went from one ship to another, we had no encampment at all. We stayed on the ship and then just transferred right off the other ship and then had escorts up there. They had a lot of PT boats as we went up the coastline. We had no idea what was going to happen because the battlefields were on the last ridge of Mount Belvedere and that area, and that was the next assignment where we went into battle at Mount Belvedere.

Mark: That was the first combat.

Don: That was our first combat, and that was a big one.

Mark: Why don't you go with that a little. Explain how you got to the battlefield and what were you thinking and what you were feeling.

Don: Well, we knew we were going into battle and there were very few fellows that had seen battle before. Some of the transferees into the 10th Mountain had seen some battle elsewhere but most of these fellows were all college boys, young boys, and the mule skinnners from the South and there was a lot of apprehension never seeing combat before. I felt that this was quite an experienced group in the mountains so I felt the fellows wanted to go in there and get the thing over with. We had no -- it was kind of awesome when we got up there, and they hid us in towns, in and around the Belvedere area. And they smoked the valley, they had these smoke machines, then they had huge search lights that would light up the sky, but it would blind the Germans that were looking down at us from the mountains. So we would go under the cover of the smoke screen and the blinding lights and they would hide us out in towns in and around the objective, Lizzano and Belvedere, we'd hide in those towns and when the attack started then we'd go up in our lines and we each had an assignment to do on the mountain. There was a little confusion up there when the battle started, because some of the outfits that were suppose come in from the side of the mountain and come around at the peak. There was a little confusion; we hit one another half way up. That was my first experience at seeing the enemy when we were halfway up Belvedere. My trip over there last week, I went back to the area where I had my first contact and a good friend of mine, who was a lieutenant, a captain of I Company of the 85th, Butch Luther, Capt. Luther, he was an all-American football player from Nebraska, and we used to play a lot of touch football in Texas. Butch was with the I Company. He was supposed to come up the backside of Belvedere and we were attacking the frontal area. Being of German extraction I could understand a little bit of it and I heard a couple of Germans talking so I fell into a little foxhole going up the face of Belvedere and I listened and listened and all of the sudden I looked over to the right and just twenty yards from me there was a machine gun, a German machine gun nest. We could see the outline of their helmets. It was a

pretty bright evening and I was laying in there trying to listen to what they were saying and they thought they heard something out there. This was in an area that was pretty heavily mined, and all of a sudden a body came falling in on me and I stuck a trench knife in his throat and asked for the password. I got a few of the vernaculars back. "Kindt this is Butch Luther, Capt. Luther." And I was very explicit in saying, "You're supposed to come up and attack from the rear." Actually it was the side of the mountain they were attacking up that, our left side. He said, "I don't know, we got all mixed up, up there. Some of it was a vertical climb, something we didn't anticipate so we came around." Anyway I said, "Don't talk so loud, there are two Germans fifteen to twenty-five yards. Wait until you can see their helmets." And then the cloud formations cleared off a little bit and we could hear them, as plain as day, talking. They were saying, "They are out there." You could hear them.

Mark: They were pointing a different direction?

Don: They knew, they could hear our voices and they knew there was somebody out there who was speaking English. I said, "Just wait, look up there twenty-five yards from here." He could see them. I said "Do you have any grenades?" I had six of them. We had those parka hoods, reversible, camouflage parkas. I had the grenades in there, and I handed him a grenade and I said, "Now, we throw it together and make sure it explodes in the air right above them." So, we got up, there was a little machine gun fire at us, the grenades went off, we heard them scream. I had a bracelet on like this gold one here, only it was sterling silver. I gave it to my daughter when I came back, actually just a couple of years ago. I was superstitious, my wife had given it to me. I checked it and it wasn't there, I said "God, that flew off when I threw that grenade, it had to of." I went back to pick up the bracelet and there was Butch laying with a bullet right between his eyes. That's how close you came to death. Later on when I got to playing professional football, I made it a point to go back and we played in Nebraska, and I went over and saw his wife. I told her what he did and that he was a good soldier and everything, that was kind of hard to do though. A very emotional thing, but I felt she wanted to know what happened to him. I told her he never knew what hit him. So, that was a little pleasing to her to know that he didn't suffer at all. I did it a couple times, fellows that died in our arms. That night is a very emotional thing and I had the opportunity to travel around the country, travel quite a bit with the teams. Omaha, Ted Simon was another one that got it, he was a very religious boy. He went to the University of, what was it, I think he was one of the Dartmouth boys. But, Ted was very religious, he always had the beads in his hands, and when he got it, he died in my arms going up another one of the hills. He ended up sitting there with the rosary in his hand and died with a smile on his face, I couldn't believe it. I went to see his parents too. That was, it's a comforting thing to know that they accepted that he was gone. When somebody dies overseas you never, but Ted -- I went to the cemetery a couple weeks ago and

we had a list of all the people in that cemetery and we had a great affair there. All the people that traveled over, some 340 of us that went over a couple weeks ago, we had a ceremony there and the Italian partisans sang for us. We had a service, somebody from the Vatican came up. We had a pre-Rome trip, so that was nice. We went to the Vatican and saw that. But some of the priests came up with us and they joined our ceremony there. It was very impressive. I can't believe a cemetery is as well designed as that. The great majority of the fellows that lost their lives were still there. So that was a lot of fun. Not fun, but it was a serious thing but it was something to see that they had placed them in such an honorable place, gorgeous.

Mark: A worthwhile activity.

Don: Oh yeah. It was very worthwhile to all of us that returned. It was very emotional again, a lot of the guys broke down, but everyone went out to see their buddies out in the field. Searched them out. We had a list like we have here, see the Florence American Cemetery and Memorial and we had the burial site, and each row and we could go right up to their grave, so it was very nice. To see the battle grounds and how they in some of the areas they didn't want you to walk, because the mines were still there, they shocked us a little bit in telling us, some of the unique Italian people had gone out looking for mementos of the war and they picked up lots of things: Helmets, abandoned guns, K-rations, C-rations out of fox holes and stuff. I was curious to look for my foxhole on Belvedere but it was in an open area alongside of a rock formation, like a spine of an alligator, it just opened up right around the area that I was fighting in. Apparently they tried to farm it right around there, and everything was gone. I found a couple of machine gun nests that we threw grenades at the Germans had had on the side of the mountain. They are still in a pit, we went in quite a few of them and somewhere there were a few cartridge casings in there the guys picked up. The collectors have done a tremendous job and put them in museums. They had scavenger hunts out there, and they picked up some amazing things. The shoe mines that were designed by the Germans, they were made of wood and they had the explosive in the middle, it was designed to blow, or to injure you in the leg, so you couldn't fight anymore.

Mark: That's why it was called the shoe mine?

Don: Shoe mine, to blow a foot off. There were a lot of those he said he found and deactivated, they used mine detectors to try to free up the whole mountain. There were a lot of people who were walking around on this trip, but they said to stay on the paths and don't go walking freely in the area even though you know your foxhole was out there. We were assured that if we stayed near the path we would be alright.

Mark: It sounds like a very well-preserved battlefield, actually.

- Don: Yeah, but the alarming thing, I brought some pictures to show you, I think, down here in my briefcase, but to see what it is today it blows your mind, because you've got fifty-year-old trees covering the whole mountain, and when we saw it, and I'll show you the pictures, it was bald, there was nothing. The trees that were there were blown apart by the shellings and the mortar fire and the artillery barrages, and the aircraft. We had a lot of bombings in there to soften them up before we made the attack. But, to see it in its full foliage was an amazing thing. It looked like looking at the mountain ranges in Denver, from the city of Denver and seeing all forest up there and very mature trees. That is what made things so difficult to find foxholes, but a lot of the fellows did.
- Mark: Is it a park by some chance?
- Don: No.
- Mark: It's just farmers' fields?
- Don: The owners went right back in there and that's where a lot of people right after the war had a lot of problems with the mine fields and stuff.
- Mark: I'm sure they did.
- Don: Usually the Germans marked them off with a smooth wire, you know so they wouldn't get involved in it if they happened to be there, having to walk through that area. They knew where the mine fields were. They had the plots laid out, but we didn't know where they were, nor did the farmers after the war, they had to use mine detectors. Some of the Bouncing Bettys that were found, and the Shoe mines -- a lot of people didn't realize you couldn't detect the shoe mines with a mine detector and they got injured. What was alarming, you know we lost a lot of guys up on that hill.
- Mark: At Belvedere?
- Don: At Belvedere and other actions that we had and then we fought on. Our next big battle was the Hill Country, and there again we were hidden. We visited some of the families that hid us.
- Mark: Is that right.
- Don: Yes, that was very much, the destination of every guy, they wanted to go back in the hill towns, and the people that hid them or the people that they acquainted themselves with before and after the battle. They had celebrations for us that you wouldn't believe: dinners, singing and—

Mark: I was going to ask about how you guys got along with the Italian people, so maybe we could just go with that. Okay, when you were hiding out in one of these villages, describe what happened.

Don: Well, you had to keep all noise and talk to a minimum because you are hiding in a town and the Germans are scouting out the various villages, trying to make contact with us, we were the so-called enemy. But under the fogging and the lights and everything we would go in these towns, the people were very much for us, the townspeople. Hitler and Mussolini collaborated but I think the heart of the people wasn't with the Mussolini. I guess economically, in Mussolini's regime, did a little bit, brought some of the economy back, but when he hooked up with Hitler, Hitler dominated the whole thing and pushed him around—in fact, put him under house arrest, and that's where his son had to retrieve him. Hitler shot himself and his son went up there and got him at the Birches Garden and brought him back home, but that's when Sandy Sabotini (??) was waiting for him and he was with the Italian partisans and the underground and they knew exactly where he was when he got to the villa, which I'll tell you about later, they picked him up, he and his wife or girlfriend, I don't know which. But they shot them both down a couple of tunnels from the villa, and then they put him in the back of his fiat and drove him into Milan and hung him on the marquee.

Mark: I've seen that photograph.

Don: I was going to bring them along today, I can't find them. The letter from Dole and the two pictures that I had of Mussolini hanging there, I've got them in a scrapbook but I couldn't find them. I've got them though, I'll get them to you. I want you to have a copy of them. You've seen the pictures probably.

Mark: Yeah, in history books and that sort of thing.

Don: Right, well I thought they would be in this book I've got here but it wasn't in there. It was a interesting thing, because as we travelled northward across the Po, I had great experiences, humorous experiences too, in combat, that can be -- we broke into the Po Valley after going through Belvedere. We were attacking the hill country right coming into the Po. We had to take hill 913, which was a bloody battle for K Company 85th Infantry.

Mark: That was you?

Don: Yes, that was us. We got a lot of casualties and a lot of things happen there. The Germans were pretty well entrenched and we had a terrible battle. We, K Company, lost a lot of guys right at that point. Fortunately, I was a survivor and that's where I had my discussion with Senator Dole. He keeps on saying that he

was wounded on hill 883. Well when we were there two weeks ago—883 is right on hill 913, they say the bottom of the hill, well it was a long thing and he—I told him I sent the medic down to him. There is some confusion in the battle. He was wounded quite severely in the shoulder and he has a paralyzed arm, but the medic that came up in my area I almost shot because he didn't know the password. He said, "Somebody was wounded up here," and I said, "Who are you looking for, there's a body back there that went down," and I said "Just keep down." Because just 200, 220 yards or so from us there was six fellows with our uniforms on. I didn't realize it, I waved to them and I went up to the forward observation post they waved back to me, they had our parka hoods on, they turned out to be six Germans. And I had no idea, I saw them set up a mortar and I thought, that's unusual they got the thing pointing backwards, you know, set up the bi-pod and the tube, I should say, they aimed it back, who I thought was Dole, was coming up to see the forward observation himself. I was told that he was coming up, well, somebody went down, I fired sixty-two rounds at the bunker and I had a lot of ammunition with me and I had a carbine and I kept on putting one clip after another in it. I drove those guys out of that bunker at least so they couldn't fire anymore, and they started to go down the hill. I telephoned back to the gunner, I said, "Tell one of our Sergeants that we need medics up here." Well, That's how the medic came up and actually, these fellows set up the mortar down where I couldn't see them and fired a couple more rounds and this guy laid on who, I thought, was Dole. I still think it was Dole.

This kid took some hits, so years later when I saw him, and Elroy "Crazy Legs" Hirsch and I were at a sports show in Milwaukee, the Senator was campaigning and the two guys guarding him were two former pro-football players from the Chicago Bears, two former teammates of mine, Binignee and Callahan, and I said, "Senator, when you are through talking to this high school boy," who was interviewing him for the school newspaper, I said, "I'd like to talk to you. I think I sent the medic to you, and if you ever see him, these fellows can find him, they are former teammates of mine, I know they should be able to find him. He lives in Estes Park and he had a mental problem and he is living out there above Denver in Estes Park and all he does is hunt in Estes Park, which is illegal. And he lives off of what he shoots. They can find him, but he is the fellow that saved your life, and he laid on you for a while." I saw him later and he was wounded at the time. Well, whether it happened, Dole thought he was down further, I said, "Well, you could have been down further, but I know he laid on top of you because he was wounded when he came up to me." Well, anyhow, Dole sent me a very nice letter, saying he looked into it but now that I went back I know that he was on 913.

Mark: And you saw him just recently, too?

Don: Yes, I saw him last week. Shook hands with him and he remembered the incident.

Mark: Well how could he forget?

Don: Yeah. Well, the incident of meeting me before. I got to see him three or four times. And he's too busy with the White House now.

Mark: I'm sure it's a busy occupation.

Don: Yes. He's having his problems there too.

Mark: Everyone is having their problems.

Don: Yeah.

Mark: We can go into the Po Valley—

Don: Well I had another one, when we hit down in the hill country and went through all these towns where they hit us again. We had to breach the Po, we thought we'd have a big problem. I never knew how wide the Po was or what it looked like, but it was something that, in the back of my mind, it was like the Mississippi River at Prairie du Chien. Well, it wasn't that wide and we were at a dike, our company was entrenched about a mile and a half to the west of Bologna down the Po River. We were going to make our crossing there. Well, the Germans blew the bridge. We came out of the mountains into that area and we looked for the crossing and all the bridges were blown up on both sides of us. We entrenched there, and I was, again, the mortar observer so I went up and built my foxhole right on the top of the dike. I would look across to see if we could fire. A 60mm mortar has got a specific range and I didn't know if we could reach across the river at that point, but I thought we could, put all the increments and all the explosives on it we could probably drop one, or if they started an attack we could drop it on their attack boats. But, as I noticed looking across and under observation, I could see a German looking right back at me, with binoculars, I could almost see his face. It was comical because we made a few motions at one another, and I was just wondering if he was looking at me, he saw what I was doing. It was comical, it was one of the humorous points, but, right prior to that every time I would see him we'd get flack right above us. So I tore a barn door off and put three feet of dirt over it, because the shrapnel is coming all around me and my, Don Todd who was the gunner at that point, was right down at the bottom of the dike and he had the mortar there and he put something over the other half of the door over his entrenchment. We threw up a couple rounds to see if we could get them across and that sort of stuff. This fellow all of a sudden, six German helmets popped up over there. So, I knew they were on the move and we could see far to our left to the west of us, the Germans were just taking everything. They were coming in

vehicles that they stole, bicycles and they were running back to the Northern border—

[End of side A, tape 1]

- Don: —to see if we could get them across and that sort of stuff. This fellow all of a sudden, six German helmets popped up over there. So, I knew they were on the move and we could see far to our left to the west of us, the Germans were just taking everything. They were coming in vehicles that they stole, bicycles and they were running back to the Northern border of Italy. They were not a fighting force anymore, they were in complete retreat, but they had some forces that we didn't know about, and those fellows looking at me across the bridge, apparently had an 88 over there because they were giving, shots fired right over our area. Well, all the sudden a tank pulls up and parks about six feet from where I had my hole on the dike and I looked up and there's Field Marshall Alexander, head of the whole Mediterranean theatre, and General Hayes standing there. They took my binoculars and I looked up and they were wearing the helmets with the stars on it. I looked across the river and the German is looking at the tank and the Generals laying there, I said "Sir, there is a German looking right at you, he sees who you are I think and in less than a couple second you're going to get a lot of air bursts." And he just looked down at me, didn't say a word. There were three of the biggest bursts right over their head and I had one of the Generals in my foxhole and another one was under the tail of the tank, which was -- and the only comment I had was, "I told you so," and there were no remarks made. "How long have you been here soldier?" And I said, "About forty-eight hours so they are watching us." But they found a bridge intact down to the east of us. [Interruption in tape]
- Don: They had to go up and drop off about six or twelve ducks that were the six-men ducks, the shovel nose with the paddle and stuff, so my foxhole partner and I found one that was slid off on the side, we shoved it in off the dike, and we paddled across, just hoping that those Krauts that were looking at us had evacuated, because we were like ducks on a pond. So we landed on the other side, we crawled up the dike on our bellies, and we could see the Germans taking off about a mile to our left on the highway going north. I said, "Well, I think we were abandoned here, we better walk toward Bologna because I think they pulled out and went down there." And sure enough we walked about a half a mile to a mile and here comes our company commander and first platoon leader and third platoon leader. "We had you guys marked missing in action." Because they called up to us and didn't see them. (Don laughs) We just kiddingly said, "No, we crossed where we were supposed to and took the beach ourselves." All I got was "Get back and fall in line."
- Mark: No wise-cracks.

Don: No wise-cracks, but it was, we knew one another very well. Gene Haynes was our Lieutenant, he was a very fine guy, he just said, "Just get in line." We kept on going up and the Germans were fleeing as far as they could so then after that we got up in Lago di Garda area and that's where I volunteered to go get Mussolini, to go across Lago di Garda on a duck. That was not the wisest thing I should of done because that was around that last day of the war, and we didn't know. We could see the tanks driving up in the, about 200 feet above the lake, there were a bunch of archways, which was the roadway that was carved, we were told, in 56 B.C. You could see those big tanks going through and there wasn't much clearance when a tank got in there, especially a tiger tank. I just went through them two weeks ago and they still didn't widen them any. They are very narrow and our buses, two buses passing in there was very critical, you were within inches of one another, but, we could see them going up. When we landed I went over with a group at midnight on two ducks, I would say there were about sixty of us that hit and they didn't tell us until we got out a little ways off the east side of Lago di Garda that we were going after Mussolini, his villa, we were going to attack his villa. So, one of my assignments was to go up to the tunnel, first tunnel above the villa, and if the tiger tanks came back I was to blow the tunnel. They gave me a satchel charge with high explosives. I looked up and I thought there was about 2000 feet of solid granite above me, that if I blew that tunnel it would take me with it too. I looked off for an escape route and the vista, the openings they had for the tunnel to view the lake, they had little vistas there. I stood on that, I was about 200 feet off the water I thought, if I set the thing on the time situation, I'd dive and go into the water, as cold as it was, I would go in the water because I thought the whole side of the mountain would come down.

Looking down at the villa we found out the Mussolini had pulled out with his fiat and he went down three tunnels on the other side of the villa, and Sandy Sabotini, who was with the Italian partisans, later was a ski instructor out at Aspen, Colorado. Sandy came down on ropes. They went into Switzerland and then they belayed down on ropes and set up a road block. And when Mussolini pulled through one of those tunnels they were there, they pulled Mussolini and his girlfriend out and shot them right there, put them back in the fiat and drove to Milan and hung them up on the marquee. Those were famous pictures that had been seen right after the war, what was the outcome of the Italian people, but I went down then that night and guarded the villa and I was asked to stay and the rest of the fellows returned on the ducks or they were picked up in trucks go up to Riva on the north end of the lake. I was asked to guard the villa, there were about three or four of us that guarded the villa. That was a very exciting experience for me two weeks ago to go back to the villa and see the villa. We couldn't get into it because an American real estate firm bought it; it was a museum, we were told it was a museum. I wanted to get in and show -- they filmed the movie *Mussolini* in the villa.

Mark: Oh, really.

Don: Yeah, George C. Scott played Mussolini. And they filmed it in the villa. I wanted to show where the desk was and the four posted bed because the two generals found me sound asleep in the bed. I hadn't slept in about four days, other than sleeping while you're walking—closing your eyes or riding across you took a snooze, you were out, actually foggy, mentally, because of lack of sleep. But, when we went in on the ducks to the villa, your adrenaline started flowing again you knew you were going to be in contact with the enemy so you come back to life, but boy, when I got in the villa I sat at his desk and I started looking at all the documents from Hitler and the correspondence and I laid it there for the generals, because we knew they were coming over, and then all I felt when I laid on that canopy bed. I said, "I'll just lay here and rest until the generals come." Apparently I dozed off and I was awakened by my sergeant with a riding crop of Mussolini's hitting me on the calf of my leg saying, "Kindt, the generals are here." It was a little embarrassing to get up in front of the Divisional Commander and the head of the Mediterranean Theatre but all I heard was, "When was the last time that young boy had any sleep?" And he said, "Four days ago." So I just stayed there and guarded it until they left, and then I got in a truck and I went up the west side of Lago di Garda and then up to Riva and then again later on I got assigned again to guard some of the generals going up to Torbole, north right on the Yugoslavia border, or not the Yugoslavia border the Austrian border. Then after that we went back way over to the westside of Italy, Cividale right on the Czechoslovakian border. I went up into Czechoslovakia had another experience there where we crossed the border and that's where a lot of the German soldiers retreated through Yugoslavia and when we got there I think it was General Hayes and our Divisional Assistant Commander who I was guarding and we got sniped at. We had a big white flag and an American flag on the back of the jeep, and I said, "That gunfire came from that rock prominence over there and I think there is a cave right at the bottom of it. Look at the boulders rolled in front of it." We found a woman that had spent a year and a half in that cave and she said she killed 400 German soldiers from that point. We could tell there were a lot of dead bodies down there. By the smells. It was terrible, but this old lady, they air dropped her food.

Mark: This was in Yugoslavia?

Don: This was right on the border. That was the last thing I had, then we went back. We stayed in Cividale for a while and somebody got the bright idea that the war was now over.

Mark: Officially?

Don: Officially.

Mark: Well, VE Day anyway.

Don: Well, capitulation was taking place and we were assigned to go to the town of Cividale and get new equipment and freshen up, shower and what have you. Somebody in our division said there was going to be a track team organized. The war was over, so we had a little track meet in Cividale and I had a great vacation from there on in. I travelled all over Italy with the track team. We had some of the 92nd Division, was our all black division, it had three or four world record holders in there—Harrison Dillard, the world record holder in the hurdles, and we competed against Autral [Adolfo] Consolini, who was the world record holder in the shot and disc. We formed quite a group of guy from Tuskegee College and Notre Dame and the Big Ten, and we just had a wonderful time after that. It was like a big vacation for me.

Mark: A nice respite after all that time.

Don: Oh gosh, yes. I had a lot of things happen to me when I got back. Senator La Follette got me stationed at Madison.

Mark: I'll make a note of that. I want to go back to—

Don: Any more detail, if you would like any more detail I can go into more detail.

Mark: I'm interested in some of the guys in your unit. Let's get back to that sort of thing. You mentioned that—

Don: Torger Tokle was in our outfit, he got killed up there, he was the world's record ski jumper. As a kid I watched him jump.

Mark: He was in your unit?

Don: No, Torger was in, I think he was in the 82nd Regiment, I could probably tell you here. Butch Luther was the guy that got killed with me, but he was, where the hell is Tokle, I saw his name in here (looking at a listing) I'm sure he was with the 82 Regiment. He got killed, god there were a whole mess of famous guys killed in there. Everybody knew Torger because being skiers—

Mark: But there were a lot of athletes such as yourself?

Don: Well, yeah. Bull Briney, who was in my platoon, was a guy that played football in the Ivy Leagues. See most of our boys, as I say, were from Dartmouth.

Mark: Yeah, the eggheads, I was going to get you to comment on them.

Don: They were a bunch of fun loving guys and they came from wealthy families. You know, extremely wealthy families. I would say their ability to fight was a good as anybody's. They had a lot to live for and I felt that they, all the soldiers in the 10th, they just impressed everybody because of their mental attitude to it, we got to get the thing over with, go in and fight, and we saw a lot of the, what I call, the up-hill fighting is the toughest, because you're going up a mountainside. With each and every step you look for something to protect yourself. Because they had complete observation fighting in the mountains, they looked down on you. It's a very difficult type of fighting because a lot of their stuff is camouflaged and they had the complete observation to look down your throat. And they were very good with machine guns and there were a lot of the mountain troops.

Mark: The Germans?

Don: The German mountain troops were great fighters, you know, they didn't get up and run. I guess the fugaliens (??) at the end of the war up north of us in Germany, there were a lot of them that gave up very easily. These fellows didn't give up very easily. Once you got them, I actually saw one incident up what I would say was about the last day of the war, where one of the Germans came up and kicked the dirt on the parapet of his foxhole trying to surrender and the kid was sound asleep and he was kicking dirt on top of him, you know, with his hands up behind his head and he wanted to give up. He marched and we found out after interrogation, that he had walked a couple miles to get to the lines just to surrender, because he knew the war was completed. He said after interrogation, they said that there was very poor relationship with the commanding officers. They were all fleeing, it wasn't a superior officer reprimanding them for trying to run home to the borderland of Germany or wherever they wanted to hide out, they let them go. Everybody was to the point that they knew they were beat. It was a blessing to us to have that attitude right at that time. The SS troopers or the tank commanders were different mental attitudes. The tank commanders just fought until you blew them up, they just didn't give -- I only saw one tank give up.

Mark: A German tank?

Don: One German tank. Normally they, I saw a lot of them go down to the west of us and fighting and turning around and shooting and stuff but other than that, I felt that the average German soldier was a well trained soldier that wouldn't give up much and we had a boy by the name of Monty Weirland who was born in Germany. And he was our interrogator and he'd ask a lot of questions and we always thought maybe he'd find one of his relatives or I'd find one of mine.

Mark: Well, I was going to ask about that.

- Don: I'd always ask for a Hoffman or a Kindt or and Oberdraise and I knew back as a young boy before, oh, I was in junior high school, high school, I had a cousin who was a great big fellow, about six foot two inches, a very aggressive fellow, but he—remember the American Bund, in Milwaukee was a very heavy organization—and he got in it. All the relatives looked down their nose, they said he was doing the wrong thing. This was in '37, '38 right around there, and they actually disinherited him. They just said go on, they kicked him out of the house. He was a rebel rouser. Well, he got involved in the Bund thing and he later earned enough money and he went back to Germany to visit relatives. And he never got back. Hitler put him right in the service and we got a letter from him. He was in a German submarine and they never heard from him after the war.
- Mark: Probably dead, they had about fifty percent casualties.
- Don: Oh, more than that, they had incredible casualties. We never heard from him.
- Mark: Just out of curiosity, I did my senior thesis on the Bund in Milwaukee. Do you remember this going on?
- Don: Yeah, as a kid.
- Mark: Among the German community.
- Don: Yeah, my grandfather, who was a house painter and he did construction work, thought they were all crazy. He got away from all that military stuff and they came over in the 1800s. He was converted, he was the one who liked the American movie, he'd sit and fall asleep in the theatre. The theatre would call, "Could you come and pick up you grandfather?" But he worked. There were a lot of artists in our family and they got some interesting stories, but the Oberdreis part of the family was so concerned about their son because he started going to these Bund meetings, and my grandfather was so mad at him because he called him an idiot all the time. He said, "That's why we left Germany, they were taking over everything." Well, let's see, he came over, well my mother was just a baby, but my mother would not console him but she'd go after him and say, "Take everything out, go back. If you want to go back, go back and stay there." My dad was a very intelligent men, he had a really high IQ and he was the management team of the Bell system when they used to have the switchboard operators, and he lead the committee and that was the AF of L-CIO, and the old mafia got in. They tried to control the unions at one time. The communication, my dad would go out and fight with them. He would come home just beat, they'd go all night long and sometimes he'd stay up negotiating for two nights. They wanted to take over like the CIO, AF of L and things like that, communication. They could of paralyzed the whole country with communication, in those days. It was long distance operators.

Mark: Still could now probably—

Don: Well, if you took the communications, but he was a Marquette law graduate and a super-intelligent guy and he knew how to handle people so I was very lucky to have him. He had nothing, he didn't know anything about the military, and he would write me the longest letters. I'll tell you it was very consoling. My mother was on her death bed when I went overseas, and she had a lot of problem and she had a brain hemorrhage and what have you, and she pulled through. She lived until she was ninety-six.

Mark: Wow.

Don: So, but it was lucky, he informed me of everything day by day, he never failed to write me. He dictated to his secretary and she she'd make little comments.

Mark: So it came typed?

Don: Typed, yeah, I'd read them in the foxhole. If half of it was typed and half of it he'd remember something and go home and hand scribble it, but he always left the message to me, "Just hang in there." Very encouraging. He'd try to say the war has to be fought. Unfortunately, the young people -- he was a philosopher, you might say, saying that, trying to keep your morale up. I even called him on a furlough off the line furlough, I got through, only through the power of AT&T. I actually called him twice. Once from during the war and the other time when I got on the track team, I called him from Florence, Italy. I got through and he wrote me in a letter how to do it.

Mark: It was no easy trick I'd think.

Don: Well, if you could imagine, I used to tell my dad every once in a while, I'd say, "Dad, you have been reading Buck Rogers too much." Do you remember the comic strip Buck Rogers? When I was a young man he told me that we would put a satellite up and bounce a sound wave off the satellite and come back and communicate all over the world. I said, "Oh, you have been reading Buck Rogers," and it came true with the satellites. He knew all about that through Bell Laboratories, every year they would take all the presidents -- Wisconsin Bell was in a separate unit, Illinois Bell, and all, then they went in to split it up, Ameritech and all the other ones. Dad, he was on the scientific committee and I couldn't believe it but that is the way I was raised. "You're gonna see stuff," the movie *Things to Come*.

Mark: I don't think I've seen that.

- Don: No, I don't think you were born when that movie came out. Neville Chamberlain, not, he was the—
- Mark: Neville Chamberlain, British Prime Minister.
- Don: British Prime Minister, but his name was Chamberlain. He was a movie star, he was the lead in *Things to Come* and in that movie it talked about the future, about travelling to celestial bodies and it came true. Boy, when you're talking things, that you're going to have somebody walking on the moon, we all thought he was a little psycho.
- Mark: Loony.
- Don: Exactly. But it came true, but that's the kind of background I had as a kid. Scientific background, all my dad's brothers, one was with the telephone company, the other always had some sort of research in that part of the family. My cousin, Warren, was the vice president of GE, and it turned out he was not an athlete. I was the athlete of the family, my brother was an athlete too, but he died at an early age of a heart attack. That's how I developed my love of sports. And my dad, I don't think he participated in any -- he golfed a little bit. He would go to the turn grind and work out, but nothing in sports at all. It was all—
- Mark: Brain power.
- Don: Brain power. My mother was a happy-go-lucky, young, card-playing German gal. She'd do any card game, poker, anything she played.
- Mark: I wonder if you could tell me, it's my understanding, in Italy there was more than just the American Army, there were lots of other allies, there were Polish troops there.
- Don: I could go in and give some great detail on that.
- Mark: The Nisei Regiment was there, for example, and the 92nd you mentioned already.
- Don: The Niseis, well, there was an unfortunate incident with the black troops there. They shoved off and the Germans pushed them back almost thirty-two miles.
- Mark: This was where?
- Don: This was up Northern Italy, Northern Apennines, right before we landed this happened. The Niseis were taken and put to their, to take the land back and they took the thirty-two miles they lost right back. The, we had a lot of contact with

the underground, but the, what do I want to say, the Mau Maus, the guys that were all about seven feet tall, came up from – Senegalese. The Senegalese.

Mark: They were with the British?

Don: They were attached to the British part of it. The British were fabulous fighters, boy, I'll tell you they, facing death didn't mean much to them they would just say, "We got orders, we go through with them." I admired them an awful lot. Because they just knew there was a responsibility to go take care of it, no matter what the casualties or the odds were, they did it. The biggest scare I think I had in the whole world was that my sergeant called me up and I was on the forward slope again as an observer and he said, "We are going to be replaced. I'm not sure which outfit is going to replace us." Because some of them came up with banjos, the Brazilian troops, I couldn't believe it, they came up like it was a big party, they'd be singing and have the ukuleles, the mandolins, kind of a pot shaped deal, and they'd be singing and it's like there is a war going on. There are Germans right there. But they'd be singing.

Mark: Did they fight?

Don: Yeah, they fight, well, they helped. They never put them on an attack. If we took the ground they would always hold it and we'd go back out and attack again. But, I was glad that's all they did, because they wouldn't of done anything, god, I couldn't believe it. I was sitting in my foxhole and I was writing a letter and my sergeant rung up on the Double EA phone, and said, "Don, there is somebody coming up to replace us, I don't know what outfit. It may be the Niseis or maybe somebody else, but I think it's going to be attached to the British division." So he said, "I'll tell ya, I'll call you later." Well, he never called me because I think something happened to the communication. All of the sudden I was just getting up, I had the hole I crawled out of no bigger than that box, and here is this face looking in and all I saw was this spear and he had a sheet around it. He was seven foot some inches tall and he said, in a British accent, "Hey, mon, I'm replacing you." I said, "You just about lost your head." Because you know he didn't make any noise, his face just popped through his thing, I never heard anything at all. He scared the, I think I lost ten years off my life. And this was right at the end of the war, and they replaced us and they took over the whole, this 913, this was right before the Po. And man, oh, Man, I didn't know they were over there, you know.

Mark: I didn't either.

Don: And oh, they were huge guys. I don't know how they walked on those things, they stuck out like a sore thumb. You know, they'd walk on a forward slope and one of those snipers could pick them out.

- Mark: A much bigger target.
- Don: Oh, yeah, targets. But I didn't see any guns on them. Apparently they had a belt on under that sheet. He had a spear. I made the crack, "What are you going to do with that? Cut my head off or something?"
- Mark: Did he have an answer?
- Don: No, they just stare at you, they are very quiet people. They only said what they had to say. And I'd, you know, I asked him what the password was. I didn't know what the heck. Nobody told me there was going to be a Sengali or something coming up here, and I got on my sergeant's back all the time. "Geez," I said, "God, you let the guy up there, I damn near killed him." I see this thing and he knew the password, but I stuck that gun right in his face.
- Mark: Did all these various countries—
- Don: The ethnic groups?
- Mark: Did they all get along?
- Don: Yeah. The Brazilians were, I don't think they spear-headed anything. I think they took over the stuff that you captured because they were a happy-go-lucky group, all black outfit. As I say they didn't keep them on the line. The Niseis were committed all the time, the Japanese-Americans, they did some great fighting.
- Mark: Yeah they were tough.
- Don: Yeah, the Aussies were good guys too, that came up from Africa through the desert group. They fought with us a couple times and then I met a lot of them after the war. I participated in the track meets with them. Good guys, they told me of some of their experiences, and I felt they were excellent troops, but they were really, you know, they did the whole desert thing and they had been there for many months, and they were fatigued.
- Mark: Ready to go home.
- Don: Ready to go home. The British were good. I felt they were well trained, and boy, they had, what do you call it, esprit de corps and a lot of loyalty to the country, the king and the queen, and that's all you'd hear. I enjoyed fighting with them and participating on track and stuff after the war was over. Learned a lot about guys coming from Australia and New Zealand. The New Zealanders were good guys, god, they fought well, and they had come through that African campaign, a lot of those guys. You fight in the desert and then you come up and fight in the

mountains and then you -- it was very different. A different type of activity. I don't think I could have ever fought in the desert, god, I'd have died. I'd a been—

Mark: Tough enough today.

Don: When I played pro football I lost as much as fifteen pounds a game, just dehydration. I still do. I drink Gatorade like it's going out style, because I get leg cramps all the time. I have to have replace electrolytes. I watch myself and I drink almost two gallons of water a day, but I perspire something awful. That's why I didn't want to go, that's why I joined the ski troops. After my sergeant told me, you know, he was at Guadalcanal. *Guadalcanal Diary* is a lot about Sergeant Nelson. He told me, he said, "They got you down there speaking German."

Mark: Which is probably a very valuable resource.

Don: Yeah, but I denied it all the time. You know, I could understand it but I couldn't speak it. I knew all the swear words.

Mark: The first thing everyone always learns.

Don: Yeah, as a kid. No, but I felt that the training we got, the training the 10th Mountain got -- and Camp Hale was the most unique stuff, you know, they—

Mark: Which you didn't get to experience.

Don: No. I had been a skier as a kid and I knew these fellows that came from all over the country, and the only thing I was -- and I think there was some apprehension of guys that came from families that weren't as wealthy as some of these fellows are, is are these guys going to make good soldiers or, are they—? Boy, that really didn't make any difference what your background was, that you had something to do with the esprit de corps of this outfit is unbelievable. They, no matter where they came from or what level of sociability they had, they all fought like hell. And that was remarkable to see. The bonding, I wish everybody had a chance to be with this group we were with the last two weeks. The bonding of that group and the stories that came out and the accuracy of detail. And seeing the city again or seeing the village that they stayed in, well, and experiencing -- this fellow that was only sixteen years old during the war took us in and showed us stuff and he said, "We hid you." And he went back and he knew the names of the fellows, there were about four fellows that were in this, and having my daughter see all this camaraderie and sharing the food. They didn't have -- they are still very poor. But, they wanted to be part of this things, they -- we liberated them. See, the average attitude of the guys said, even after the war we discussed it, felt that Mussolini as a dictator did a lot for the sociability and the status of Italy and started to bring it back from the depression. But, and he was correcting a lot of

the wrongs and that, but he then got a little cocky and when Hitler dominated him and put him under house arrest, then they realized how wrong they were. So, we were treated not as the, well, we were treated as liberators of Italy at this trip. They weren't the enemy or we were the guys the beat them, we were treated as the liberators because they were under—I guess right at the end that Hitler's troops just took over. And all the Italians came over and started helping us, the partisans. And that was -- probably saved a lot of lives of our divisions over there. I'm trying to think of the one division that was up to eighty -- they had been all the way up the line, they went through Anzio, Salerno-- my memory -- But anyhow they fought through a lot of battles. They were a tough outfit, they had so many replacements. They had big casualties in Anzio, Salerno. Those fellows fought alongside of us for a while. We called it the “melting pot” of the Allied forces, over there.

Mark: Yeah, it sounds like it.

Don: Because you had everybody. It -- I think they all did a good job. The commanding officers were, well, I talked to Hugh Evans who was one of the commandants of our outfit, on this trip. All of us who were peons congratulated him because we lost a lot of guys, but we did the job. And I felt that that was the big thing, that the ski troops was sort of a big boost to the other. This guy's been fighting so long. It is always better to have fresh troops up there because they don't know the consequences. To face death like that every day, well, you see some guys crack. I only saw one guy go berserk—

Mark: In combat?

Don: In combat, that was unusual, just one.

Mark: What did he do?

Don: Started to cry, broke down, he couldn't coordinate himself. It was like a mental breakdown, and it effected him physically. You know, he just shook. You don't want other guys to see this, so you kind of shove him off. The average age of our outfit, I think, was about twenty years old or less, the ski troops. It was a young outfit, but we had good officers and that helped. Is there anything else you wanted?

Mark: Yeah, I wanted touch briefly on some of you post war experiences. After the war ended you had your track experiences. I'm interested when you came back to the states, you went back to college—

Don: I got to tell you something. In 1948 I got, well, I got to go back, I'll just explain this incident. 1948 I was playing with the Bears. While I was in Madison, Harry

Stuhldreher really did things for me. I'll start with saying when I came on my overseas furlough, my wife Nancy was at school, we weren't married at this time, and I wanted to go up to Madison. Harry Stuhldreher, my coach, said, "Don, get a sweatsuit and come out and work out with the team," so I said, "Alright." I went up to old Doc Bokee (??), threw on a sweatsuit and football shoes, and started running around. Here is Senator La Follette standing on the side, "Hey, Don." He'd watched me play earlier. "What are you doing back?" I said, "I'm back on overseas furlough, I got to go back to Camp Hale." He said, "How many points you got?" I said, "Not, enough, Senator." So, I worked out some more and he didn't leave. He came over to me and he said, "Where you staying?" I said, "Over at the Psi U fraternity house," I said, "I got a couple of high school roommates over there." He said, "Don't leave town." I said, "Senator, I only got one more day and I gotta report back to Camp McCoy." He said, "Don't leave town." So I didn't leave town then. The day I was supposed to report to Camp McCoy, I had to get up there by six o'clock in the evening and he was still saying don't leave town. Finally, I stayed at the Psi U waiting for this telegram and doorbell rings. "Don Kindt here? Private Kindt?" "Yes, sir." It was a telegram. "You are to report to Colonel Willis Matthews at the University of Wisconsin ROTC to teach mountain warfare." I broke up, boy, teach mountain warfare in the ROTC. It was signed, "You are to report to Colonel Willis Matthews." Well then I find out he is a West Pointer, he was on MacArthur's staff, this guy is really a high ranking guy. Well, I turned out to be like his personal valet. He wanted all my experiences in the war, being on MacArthur's staff and everything. I thought, "This guy's really interesting." So I got him tickets to the football game, and when we played Navy—

[End of tape 1, side B]

Don: —being on MacArthur's staff and everything. I thought, "This guy's really interesting." So I got him tickets to the football game, and when we played Navy I took him out to the game and got him tickets. Had a ball with him. He wanted to know everything that I did, combat and everything. In 1945, in '46 I stayed at Wisconsin and we were going to play Navy, and then I got to see him again. Well then in 1947 I was drafted by the Bears. He is now a two-star general and he is on Omar Bradley's staff, and I didn't know this. So, I didn't know this and Harry told me, he said, "Don, your old friend is now a two-star general." So here I'm playing for Halas, and Halas was on Admiral Nimitz's staff during the war.

Mark: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Don: Yeah, he was on General Nimitz's staff. I went up to him and I said, "Hey, George, we're going to play the Washington Redskins and I know you are going to the Admiral." But I said, "I'm going to see my old general." He said, "What was your rank?" I said, "I was a PFC in the ski troops, that's equivalent to a

Lieutenant Commander in the Navy.” He says, “Get your ass out of here.” I kept on saying this. So he didn't believe me. So we went out the Griffith stadium and we worked out. I looked out there, there was four-stars and a chauffeur driven thing, the Admiral. (laughs) The Admiral was going to pick up Halas. And then, who's parked right behind him but the four-star general to pick me up. Now he's a two-star general, and he's on Omar Bradley's staff, and he sent Bradley's staff car to pick me up. All the guys, “Kindt, Kindt, your buddies are here.” And nobody - - Halas was in the shower, and I waited for a while, a little stall. “Hey, George, your staff car is here. The Admiral sent a staff car to pick you up. I'll see you later tonight out at Ft. Meyer.” That was where all the commanders were. I said, “I'll see you out tonight for dinner. I got an invitation from Omar Bradley.” He said, “Get your ass out of here.” He thought I was pulling his leg. So I said, “Well, get out of the shower and I'll show you.” And here Omar Bradley's car was picking me up. All my teammates came out, Johnny Lujack and George Connor and these guys from Notre Dame, “Hey, Kindt, you son of a gun, is that for you?” And I said, “Yeah, I'm going to dinner tonight.” Nobody believed me, not a soul on the team. They thought I was BS-ing them. So, the guy was a Major sitting in the back of the car and he had a sergeant driving the car, and I came out in civilian clothes, a shirt and tie on. I said, “Could you hold off for just a second? I want my boss to see this, he doesn't believe me.” They said he was talking over something about the game and he said, “No, Don we really got to go. There is a cocktail party tonight. You'll see your boss tonight.” I said, “My boss, what do you mean?” He said, “Well, you're going to go to dinner tonight.”
[interruption in tape]

Mark: It would be in theatre tomorrow.

Don: Well anyhow, I put on my civilian and here is this staff car out there and I said, “Well, where are we going?” He said, “Well, we are going to take you over to Ft. Meyer.” And he said, “From there you are going to meet General Omar Bradley, and he said all of his staff, but he wants you to go to his residence first.” And I thought, “Oh, Halas wouldn't be there.” So I'm out there having, you know -- Omar Bradley would be like meeting your father, you know, a real, I mean, unbelievably—. He would put his arm on your shoulder and shake hands with you, and “We heard so much about you from General Matthews.” I said, “Well, he was really good to me in Madison, we exchanged a lot of stories.” He said, “Well, I want you to introduce me to your boss tonight.” He says, “I've heard about the Bears for a long time.” I said, “What do you mean tonight? I've got a meeting tonight.” “Oh, no. You're going to have dinner with us tonight, over at Ft. Meyer. Your boss will be there with the Admiral.” I said, “Well, gee, I didn't get any permission to go this, I have to get some.” He said “Son, it'll be taken care of. Don't worry about it.” So, gosh, I'm waiting there, and this staff car comes out. They take me over to Ft. Meyer and then over to his residence there. I mean his son was a general, I didn't know that. And Matthews was there with his

wife, and I knew her from back at school. It was just terrific having cocktails with them. They said, "Okay, we are going to go over to Ft. Meyer." So, we went with all the Army guys but I didn't see any Naval Officers at all, and I said, "This is a little odd." I said, "Don't you fraternize with the Navy?" They said, "No, they are in the other wing. Your boss is sitting over there with the Admiral." I said, "You've got to be kidding." I said, "Could I say something to all the wives here? My boss uses a lot of four letter words, so hold your ears when he comes in because he is going to say something nasty." I felt obligated to say that because Halas really uses some foul language, I'll tell you. So, I backed up my chair and I looked down through the opening, and there's Halas, his back was to me. He had the only civilian clothes on. So, I went (clears his throat) like this in the doorway, coughed, and the Admiral turned around and I pointed like that to Halas. He saw me in a suit, so he poked George. George turns around and sees me standing there, I went, "Hi, coach." He said, "I'll be a son-of-a-bitch if the kid didn't tell me the truth." He jumped up and the Admiral, so I ran back to the table and I said, "Ladies," now here I am with all the general wives too. I said, "hold your ears when he comes in because he is going to swear again."

Mark: Did he?

Don: He came in and before he could say a word he walking in, he was awestruck. He saw me sitting around five generals or so, sitting around the table, four-star, three-star. And I said, "Here is the guy that started the NFL, he is the owner and coach of the Chicago Bears and my boss, and he doesn't believe that a PFC in the ski troop is equivalent to a Lieutenant Commander." And all the generals said, "Yes, sir, he is." Halas said, "You son-of-a-bitch," and they broke up laughing. I'll tell you, it was the most humorous thing I have ever experienced. Halas couldn't believe it. He said, "How did you ever do that?" I said, "Well, I told you the ski troops were a unique outfit, George, and you didn't believe me."

Mark: That's a great story.

Don: I'll tell ya, I've told that in many meetings and stuff, and he, Halas, just couldn't get over it. He said, "How did you ever pull that one off?" I said, "The power of West Point." I said, "General Matthews never forgot things, and I took him to football games and introduced him to the players and he would come out to practice every night with Senator La Follette and the governor would be out there to watch practice and I would introduce him to my teammates and stuff." And the 10th mountain division was a unique outfit.

Mark: Yes, it sure was.

Don: So, they all wanted to hear about what you did and what you thought about the war. I learned a lot about the Pacific campaign that I would have never known,

because he was writing memoirs and stuff. But he didn't know much about the European campaign. I didn't either until the war was over, about how the things were going up North, because we were fighting. It all turned out well. Did you see this, before I forget it, I just bought this book, but if I can get another one—. See this is all in Italian.

Mark: Oh geez.

Don: This is the history. This is really comprehensive, and it's got great pictures in it, and I thought I was on one of the pictures. The guy that wrote it --

Mark: That's really interesting.

Don: Yeah, I bought it because I wanted -- my nephew can speak Italian pretty fluently, and my brother's daughter married an Italian boy who could speak Italian fluently and he said he would— This volume did publish in English but it sold out so fast, it was unbelievable. I bought that in Italy. Here, I'll show you a picture, what the hell was her name, not Clara Boothe [Clare Boothe Luce] -- was a Senator, Clara, during the war. She was a woman Senator.

Mark: Oh, from Massachusetts? [Edith] Nourse Rogers was her name, I think. I don't know, a Republican from Massachusetts.

Don: Some prominent, I thought she was in the Senate someplace, came to our foxhole, and we were surprised to see a woman on the front lines. They had photographers all over the place. This one photographer that took a lot of pictures during the war was back there with a camera again. I'm on here someplace.

Mark: Where was this? Oh, New York, coming home.

Don: USS -- This is up the Hudson River, they had all the models meet us and all that stuff. We were supposed to go to Japan, that's why we were the first troops back, and oh, all the divisions over there were really mad.

Mark: When did you come back?

Don: The atomic bomb was dropped two days after we went out on the ship. The second was dropped right before we hit the shore, and the war was over. But they had all those powers models, I don't know if they have a picture of that where the girls greeted us. But here, I thought I could find my picture in here someplace. But here's those maps I told you about. These are all of big medals here. See, here is Belvedere, see, 3rd Battalion, 85th, that's us. We went up to the top. Right here is where I had the incident with the grenade about halfway up. Della Torracia, these were all the hills that we or the mountains that we hit. Then we

got over here and, where is 913, right here. He [Dole] said he was hit on the 883.

He was right here, he was replacing the guy that got killed. That's me. I didn't want to embarrass him or do anything, I just— See here, there is our crossing, that's our guard crossing. This isn't it. See we kept leap-frogging one another and it was – They got the Po. If I'd of known what I'd did then I -- my mother didn't raise any foolish children but when I volunteered here, crossing Lago di Garda, that's when we went to get Mussolini. God, that was terrible that night, it was about the last day of the war, we were like ducks on a pond, two of them.

Mark: Now, where is this tunnel?

Don: See, Limone -- this is a better picture of it. Here is where we crossed, here's Limone. Wait, I got to look at this differently. Where in the heck is -- actually, here is where the ducks went, if you see something.

Mark: It looks like there were all kinds of them along here.

Don: Yeah, well the villa is right here, this is where we made the crossing. They got that crossing too high, because that is where Mussolini's villa was, god, they got it in Limone. That's the duck patrol. Where is the crossing? I wish I had the other one, it's got two stripes down at di Garda, at the villa. It says villa here, but see these tunnels right here were above. It could of been at Limone and I kept thinking we were at Garda the other night. Oh, I know what it was, we had the party at Gargnano the other night. Let me see, I think I got another thing here and it shows it better on a different map. I got a little hand book that we had from our trip overseas that laid it right out, here, it could have been—here is a couple of pictures of how it looked when we were fighting.

Mark: Pretty snowy. Snowier than I would have thought.

Don: Well that's some of it.

Mark: This is what time of year? This is the end of the war?

Don: Yeah, that's right at the end of the war. That was taken by a couple of guys in our outfit. We weren't supposed to have camera but they did. Don Todd is the guy that took all the pictures and brought them home. In combat he took a lot of pictures. There was another thing that happened up here, when we were going through the tunnels. They took a tank, a German tank, and they shot right down the tunnels and it exploded and all the shrapnel bounced on the granite wall and a whole mess of guy got it, oh god was that sad. It was right ahead of us. We were, that's where -- the tunnel before we got asked to volunteer to go get Mussolini, and I had never seen a duck before and I said, "How the hell are we going to get across here." But those things could handle a lot of people and they drove right

down, and that was the only place they could get from—the tunnels were about 200 feet above the water level—but you had to get a road that went down there. And if you look at, you figure these tunnels up here are about 200 feet above, some of them are a little higher, some at the beginning are real high up here, but we had to get to a town where they had a marina to load the boat and everything. That was sort of a hair-raising experience that all occurred that night. Here is Darby, Task Force Darby. I was just there, I can't remember the name of the town above the villa. I'll show you the pictures when I develop them.

Mark: That will be interesting.

Don: I took about sixteen rolls of filming.

Mark: That's not cheap either.

Don: No, but that's a once in a life time. I hope my daughter's -- my daughter took about ten, fifteen rolls too so this can be interesting.

Mark: I just have a few more questions. You went back to school, did you use the GI Bill, did you need to?

Don: Well, yeah. When I was with the -- stationed here I was still going to school but the Colonel made me, he said, "You got to skip class if I need you to pick up some generals coming in." I said, "Alright, anything you want. I'll just go on to school." I'd been in the engineering school, and it wasn't an easy task for me. Mathematics was easy but some of the other stuff wasn't so I finally went and said, "I'll end up coaching anyhow." I thought I would be a high school coach or a small college coach. I never thought I would play pro ball either. So, when the situation all occurred and I got drafted and all that, everything changed. My whole life turned around then and that was interesting because my wife is a professional occupational therapist, she works with preschool, blind and retarded kids, and she has been doing that. I said she had an easy job, she married me, I was blind and retarded too. I enjoyed everything that happened going right up into professional sports and broadcasting and everything and I had very understanding bosses too. I worked thirty-two years with Badger Meter. And then when we got into the Vietnam War and Korean War we made all the bomb fuses and a lot of top secret stuff for that, Army and the Navy. They made me personnel director for the company. Fortunately we had a gal that was in the military that was my secretary. She would take off for her summer encampments and stuff, and she was really sharp. She understood. I'd take her to lunch every day and she would want to hear some war stories, so it kept me refreshed.

Mark: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Don: No, I think, well, I'd advise anybody to take a trip to Italy now. To see, they have preserved the art over there splendidly and to go to the Colosseum. One of the big reactions I got when I got in the Colosseum, and we went out on the floor of the Colosseum, although it looks like it is further down than the actual floor—I think they had a floor above it because where the animals come up; they figure you stand on that floor then all the sudden a door opens, a tiger comes out, and you have to fight it and you can't visualize this—but the thing that is the most startling than anything in Europe is to figure most of the marble came right from Italy. But when you see how big the slabs are and how big the columns are and what tools they had to work with is to see the carvings of the statues and the intricacies making the eyelids and the eyeballs and nostrils and genitals and everything. They are all there and how did they do it, in marble? That's amazing. And how big the pieces are when they make a column those pieces are maybe two yards across at the bottom and then they put them all together beautifully done and they are still well preserved.

Mark: For 2000 years.

Don: Oh, yeah. When they start throwing the art work at you and you go into each one of the churches in Florence and you go to Pisa and you go down to Rome, and then they tell you the ceiling over here was done by Michelangelo and then they just had restored all this stuff, the pigments, oh, it's bright. What artist, they almost look like 3-D movies, so it's well worth the trip, plus seeing all the battlefields to is great to see again. But what a shock. You saw the battlefield there. Did I show you that picture in the book, of Belvedere?

Mark: No, I don't think I saw that. What it looked like afterwards.

Don: I couldn't believe it, here just look here and if you could imagine a dense forest, this is how everything looked. Barren and a few tree there. But, Belvedere is in here, della Torraccia is in here. See after the snow melted and you saw one of these, that's how it was in December. Let's see, there is a big picture. You didn't see any forest out here, see here the buds are just coming out here. But they had this line, the cable came down and our engineers put this up, and this is how they brought the wounded down from Belvedere. Look see here.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Don: You see how barren it is. This is how it looked to us. Look at here this is all stripped, but that was shelled and bombed and, there is a picture in here of Mount Belvedere. I got this thing too.

Mark: Is that a painting? Or a lithograph?

- Don: A beautiful lithograph, I've got it hanging up in my summer home.
- Mark: Was that like your uniform?
- Don: That's our uniform, that's exactly how it looked. That's when we fought in the snow fields. And this was reversible, Khaki on the other side, and that had a big pocket in it. Well, this is how it looked some part in December, look here, that could be Belvedere in the background. What does that say here?
- Mark: Platone, that means platoon, kenovakia, I don't know that one.
- Don: Well, here this is -- that looks like a house that I stayed in. I try to find the Castel d'Aiano, see we were on Castel d'Aiano too, part of our outfit.
- Mark: That looks pretty barren.
- Don: Yeah, this is down the ridgeline from where we were. Company 87th, they got the hell kicked out of them up there. Ausgio (??), Montano, god that was a vicious fight over there. We were fighting out at the next mountain, 913. Gorgolesco, that's a big town where we had one of our parties. Look at how barren, and now it looks like Washington Park. Here it is, Mount Belvedere.
- Mark: Yeah, that looks pretty barren.
- Don: Yeah, there are a couple others you just can't believe. Trees are this big around and fifty feet high, and you can't believe how it grew. Some of those came back. But, this was near an old ski resort, but this is a church way up on the top of the mountain. You can't believe what they built, those watch towers, those ancient watchtowers, on the Roman roads, they sit up there and they were built right around the turn of the, well, B.C. I can't think, but there were three or four chapels there that they built before Christ. You should see the work. That blew my mind to see that those guys could build that way. I forget, they told us how many slaves had to pull. They had those pulley systems to move those big pieces of marble, but you go into the average bathroom and you think you're in a palace. Everything is marble on the floor, your commodes and then they have a bidet for the women. Everything was marble, even in the old houses. Well, is there anything else?
- Mark: No, that's all. I thank you.
- Don: Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]