

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

DAVID O'DEA

Rifleman 5th Division 11th Infantry Regiment, Army, World War II

2002

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David O’Dea. Oral History Interview, 2000.

Master Copy: 1 video recording (ca.75 min.); ½ inch, color

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 75 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

David O’Dea discusses his service in the Army during World War II with the 11th Infantry Regiment, 5th Division, Company I. He talks about basic training in Spartanburg (South Carolina) and advanced training in Fort Custer (Michigan) as a “riflemen [and] all around soldier.” He mentions training on the Browning Automatic Rifle, light machine gun, and Springfield ’03. O’Dea talks about the occupation in Borgarnes (Iceland): weather, Army-issued food (D bar), German spies, free time, and fraternizing with women. He also comments on guarding duties, cold-weather training, “old Army men,” and bootlegging. O’Dea relates his experiences at Tidworth Barracks (England) and Camp Ballycumber (Ireland), including advanced training, accidentally entering neutral territory (Eire), and Sandy’s Homes (British Red Cross). He recalls traveling around France so frequently that they didn’t always know where they were. He describes his first combat experience, receiving the Combat Infantryman’s Badge, the first two casualties in his unit, and his duties as a Messenger. He describes the bombing at Saint-Lô (France), being fired on, and taking over Angiers (France). He mentions picking up a Nazi flag and other German supplies in Chartres (France), and visiting the cathedral in Chartres. O’Dea reflects on food, K-rations, and running out of food. He talks about the use of tanks, and mentions Yank Magazine taking pictures of the soldiers and prisoners. He recalls traveling with a “six-by” and tanks, being fired on, and being shelled. He reflects on the effects on a fellow soldier who saw a man blown up, and discusses the difficulties new soldiers encountered due to lack of experience and needing to adjust psychologically. He also describes learning sounds of combat and of different weapons and artillery, and talks about being hit with friendly fire, receiving Christmas presents while in German territory, and using an RDX (Research Department Explosive). O’Dea discusses traveling to reach Luxembourg City (Luxembourg): covering up in white sheets to blend in with the snow and being mistakenly engaged by American forces. He talks about crossing a river to reach Rhineland (Germany) and his fear of water. O’Dea recalls the end of his war experience: working as a Company Clerk for a Sergeant Major in Frankfurt (Germany) and Bad Homburg (Germany), then being transferred home and discharged in September, 1945. He also discusses life after the military: buying a home with a loan through the G.I. Bill and working for the Forestry Department, Glenway Golf Course, Bancroft Dairy, the Street Department, and Madison Housing Authority, all in Madison (Wisconsin), raising a family, and joining the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Knights of Columbus, and South Side Men and Women’s Club. He talks about keeping in touch with soldiers from his unit and receiving badges, campaign stars, and ribbons.

Biographical Sketch:

David O’Dea was born in Madison, Wisconsin in February, 1920. He was drafted into the Army in November, 1941, as a Rifleman, and later served as a Messenger and Company Clerk. He served with the 11th Infantry Regiment, 5th Division, Company I, and was stationed in Iceland, England, France, and Germany during World War II. O’Dea was discharged in September, 1945, and returned to Madison, where he used the G.I. Bill to purchase a home and worked for the city government, Glenway Golf Course, and Bancroft Dairy.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002.

Transcribed by Mitch Arnold, 2012.

Reviewed and corrected by Amanda Axel and Morgan Ayres, 2012.

Abstracted by Liz Van Deslunt, 2013.

Interview Transcript:

McIntosh: I'm talking to David O'Dea, 24 June, 2002. You were born in Madison in February, 1920—is that correct?

O'Dea: In February 1920, correct.

McIntosh: Now we're up to speed. And, on Pearl Harbor Day, where were you?

O'Dea: I was down in South Carolina, in Spartanburg.

McIntosh: In the Army?

O'Dea: In the Army. Yeah.

McIntosh: You'd been drafted, or had you enlisted?

O'Dea: No, I was drafted. I was drafted and—

McIntosh: For one year?

O'Dea: For, ah—well, they didn't specify, I don't believe, in those days. It was kind of “iffy” by then.

McIntosh: Oh really?

O'Dea: Yeah.

McIntosh: When do you recall when you went into the Service?

O'Dea: Ah, that was November 7th, 1941.

McIntosh: Army—U.S. Army?

O'Dea: U.S. Army.

McIntosh: 1941, November. And, in South Carolina, you were undergoing basic training when the war started?

O'Dea: Basic training, yes.

McIntosh: Uh huh. South Carolina?

O'Dea: South Carolina—yeah, right outside Spartanburg.

McIntosh: How long was basic training, then?

O'Dea: It was supposed to be thirteen weeks, if I recall. But they cut off a few weeks after Pearl Harbor.

McIntosh: They sped things up?

O'Dea: Yep. Then, they started sending us north.

McIntosh: Was the training difficult for you?

O'Dea: Oh, yeah; fairly so, yeah; it was—

McIntosh: You were pretty soft when you went in?

O'Dea: Oh yeah, sure—in gas stations and that sort of thing. Golf course work, you know; it isn't like jumping up over barricades.

McIntosh: What were you doing in Madison before you went into Service?

O'Dea: Well, I had gotten a job that summer on Monona golf course. I was working as a greens keeper helper, and that sort of thing. And, I'd spent about three months there before I went into the Service.

McIntosh: After you finished your basic [training], you got an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] number?

O'Dea: Three-six-two-two-seven-eight-six-one.

McIntosh: Which was?

O'Dea: My army serial number.

McIntosh: Well I know but—

O'Dea: Oh.

McIntosh: Your MOS, your specialty number?

O'Dea: Oh. Rifleman, I guess is what it was. What is it here? It might be in here.

McIntosh: Where did you go then?

O'Dea: Then I went to Fort Custer, Michigan.

McIntosh: Fort Custer—as a Rifleman, in a rifle company?

O'Dea: Yes, yes.

McIntosh: And, tell me what that Unit was.

O'Dea: I believe at that time it was the 5th Division—the 5th Infantry Division—and, I believe, we went directly into Company I.

McIntosh: Which regiment was that?

O'Dea: That was the 11th Infantry Regiment.

McIntosh: [Apparently writing this down] 11th Infantry Regiment, 5th Division.

O'Dea: 5th Division, yeah.

McIntosh: And, did you get more training there?

O'Dea: Oh yes—advanced training there, lots of training.

McIntosh: As a rifleman.

O'Dea: Rifleman—all around soldier.

McIntosh: Did you do mortars too?

O'Dea: Oh, mortars, yeah. I had training with the machine gun, and BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle]. They had the light machine gun; I got the—what was I—Expert, or something on that? Anyhow, [I qualified as] Marksman on the 'O3 [Springfield 1903 rifle, used in both WWI and WWII], and Expert in the machine gun, and BAR Browning Automatic Rifle. And so, I just happened to know where to aim when I fired it. It was quite extensive, the training there.

McIntosh: So how long was the training at Fort Custer?

O'Dea: Oh, well we shipped out April the 7th, 1942 to overseas.

McIntosh: Where?

O'Dea: [Checking himself, speaking slowly] At the Brooklyn Navy Yards, I believe. Right out of the Brooklyn Navy Yards, headed for Iceland. Yeah.

McIntosh: You mean you got off at Iceland, or you just stopped there?

O'Dea: We got off at Iceland. We went to Iceland.

McIntosh: How long were you in Iceland?

O'Dea: From that April, until July of '43, and we had to occupy. The rumor, at least, was that we had arrived just about twenty-four hours, or so, before the Germans expected to occupy, because they had repaired the roads up there—had them all built up—except military traffic, and that. So, they were going to use it as a base. And the British had jumped in—well, the British actually had done the jumping in before them. And then, we took over for them. That's the way it went; we took over. We were invited, officially, by the Icelandic government to come in.

McIntosh: The Danes, the Danish government?

O'Dea: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay, what was life in Iceland like?

O'Dea: Oh, that wasn't too bad. It was warmer than it is in Wisconsin. In the wintertime even, it didn't get too cold unless you went inland, and get into the glacier areas. We did that once; we had to actually go on a trip to—I think they called it “Sticky Homer” [[Snæfellsjökull](#)]. They had it that the civilians had reported that the Germans—somebody—had brought in a submarine, and they suspected there were spies that had gotten off. They didn't know if anybody got off, but that was what they thought, because they had previously done this sort of thing. So, we went across the mountains to “Sticky Homer” to check that out. That's where I had lost my taste for these extra vitamin-filled chocolate bars that—they called it the D bar I believe.

McIntosh: Army issue?

O'Dea: Army issue. I ate the whole thing on the way across the mountains, and I never wanted to taste another one. It wasn't like Hershey's Milk Chocolate [laughs].

McIntosh: What did you find when you got to—

O'Dea: Well, nothing really. As usual, it was nothing when we got there.

McIntosh: So, was it a company, or a platoon—or what size?

O'Dea: Well, I think we had a good share of the company with us, and our Jeeps and what not. The Jeeps got so far and then they had to quit.

McIntosh: So you hoofed it?

O'Dea: Yeah, we got to the top of the mountains, and the plateau areas, and then the ground became too—

McIntosh: Mushy?

O'Dea: difficult for the Jeep to maneuver. Yeah; there were chunks of ice, and snow and all that stuff on top. That didn't melt as often as it did down by the coast, so— There was nothing there, of course. But, as it was, there were— A lot of people in Iceland were friendly to the Germans. In fact, they had spies, there were spies—not that the Icelanders had spies, but there were spies there.

McIntosh: There were—

O'Dea: In fact, right among our people at the command post, if I'm not mistaken—and the parties, and stuff; he was right there as an interpreter. He was shot according to what the British told us later. He was shot because of being a spy, broadcasting directly from the bakery shop to Berlin, or one of those places in Germany.

McIntosh: [Sarcastically] They probably wanted weather reports from him.

O'Dea: Probably. Yeah. So, that's what the British told us, so—and we believed them. We had no reason to doubt it. He was a personable guy, though. Really, you would never suspect him of being a spy. Looked like one of these pedagogues, or a school teacher—something of that nature, wearing these flannel suits and so forth; very nice fellow, so—

McIntosh: How was life in Iceland? Did you get free time and mix with the natives?

O'Dea: Oh yeah, we had some. I mean we had to be careful. They were touchy. They didn't like military up there.

McIntosh: They didn't?

O'Dea: Oh, no no no.

McIntosh: You didn't fraternize with the girls?

O'Dea: Well, we didn't, no. We would never think of fraternizing with the natives.

McIntosh: Oh?

O'Dea: [Laughing]

McIntosh: You're the first service man I've talked to out of a thousand who would say such a thing, so you'll pardon me if I don't really believe that.

O'Dea: Well, I'll tell you. I had a friend named Andy Queeka; he was from New York City, and he was a kind of a lanky guy. He was the kind of a fellow that would take his trousers and that, and he'd put— And, he had a big box under his bed, because we had these folding army cots. He'd put that under there, and he would sleep in between the blankets. He would have his suit underneath there—his clothes—and he'd keep those pressed. And then, he'd do it all up, you know. He was going to really carry on.

McIntosh: Going to make a pass on somebody.

David [Laughs] One time, we were walking down a street in Borgarnes, where we were stationed. He says, "O'Dea! look at the tomatoes!" I said, "Tomatoes?" I knew they grew some crops there; there's lots of sunshine to grow crops [and] I'm looking around. "What tomatoes—where?" "The tomatoes, the tomatoes," he said, "over there—**the girls!**" These Icelandic girls, of course—they were beautiful girls. They're blonde, most of them.

McIntosh: But they didn't encourage you at all?

O'Dea: Not too much.

McIntosh: So you went to USO dances for the servicemen?

O'Dea: Well they—not us, no. We were in Borgarnes; that was a little outpost, you know—about the size of a, probably—a backed up company, you might say, of people. See, we were across the fjord, and across the foothills from the fjord, that had about half of the U.S. Navy parked in it. So we were guarding, of course, there. And then also, we had to receive the bodies that came up from the Merchant Marines and different ones that had been sunk.

McIntosh: And floated in to shore?

O'Dea: Yeah, from the [German submarine] wolfpacks out there, 'cause when we went overseas, why, we were— They claimed we were followed by wolfpacks.

McIntosh: Sure; they were all claiming that.

O'Dea: In fact, the Germans broadcast the [USS] Orizaba had been sighted and sunk within twenty-four hours after we sailed.

McIntosh: Standard stuff.

O'Dea: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: So, what did you do with those bodies?

O'Dea: The bodies? They were— No, we actually—we didn't handle them at all. They were placed—they were sitting there by some of our buildings, waiting for the quartermasters to get shipping for them, to ship them out to— I believe they were headed to the States; that's where they went.

McIntosh: So, other than this trek over to this place looking for spies, what did you do there?

O'Dea: Well, we trained. A group of our people, a good share of them, went up to the glaciers for cold weather training. And of course, we thought we were all going to Norway.

McIntosh: That was the assumption—that you were planning an assault on Norway?

O'Dea: Yeah, that was the standard one—and so, these guys trained—and, while they were training, I was lucky enough to pull guard duty at that time. So, I'd be on eight and off eight hours—sentry duty—and that got pretty boring; anyhow, it was kind of a boring place. They had no trees to speak of, just the bushes they called the woods—tall, arctic-type bushes. Trees make the landscape, really; if you don't have them, why, you kind of get bored with it, but we didn't do a whole lot. We'd—

McIntosh: But, they had a club there for you.

O'Dea: The officers had their club, and so forth.

McIntosh: What was your rating by this time?

O'Dea: My rating was—I was still Private. I became a PFC, Private First Class—I think I was—or was I in England by then? I don't think I made PFC while I was in Iceland. Only the people that were coming into the service—they were becoming Staff Sergeants, and everything else, in the States [laughs].

McIntosh: They forgot about you?

O'Dea: Well actually, I was in a company where fifty percent were old Army men. People in our outfit claimed to have been running from the law, most of them, when they got in the Army [laughs]—bootlegging and all that sort of thing, you know. I know one fella in our company claimed

that he used to run sugar near Florida somewhere with a pretty good-sized power boat. Of course, the only reason they had sugar was for making booze.

McIntosh: Rum.

O'Dea: Yeah, so—but he was quite a character, too. Poor guy; he got himself killed too, before long. But anyhow, to stick with the Iceland business—

McIntosh: So, on July '43?

O'Dea: July '43, we sailed for England.

McIntosh: Where were you stationed then?

O'Dea: We went to Tidworth—Tidworth Barracks.

McIntosh: T-I-D-W-O-R-T-H?

O'Dea: Right.

McIntosh: T-I-D but no “e” after the “d”?

O'Dea: Not that I know of.

McIntosh: Tidworth—okay. And, what—were your duties different there?

O'Dea: That was more training, plus—

McIntosh: Regular army training?

O'Dea: Regular army rifle training; hikes—lots of hikes, of course. In Iceland too, we had hikes. We had many miles of hiking [at] as fast a pace as we could take. The oxygen seemed to be at a lower rate than it is in this area of the world.

McIntosh: You're still thinking about Norway then?

O'Dea: Oh yeah, sure. I didn't know I was within a few miles of that Stonehenge. I didn't know it existed there. But I was, I was close to that.

McIntosh: I've been there a couple times. Fascinating.

O'Dea: If I had known—if I could have got off—I would have gone, but anyhow— Yeah, we trained there for some time. And then, we also went to other places—what do you call it—groups of us, to prepare the

barracks, and that—prepare sleeping quarters, and that, for guys that were being shipped in from overseas, from the United States. New units would come along, and we would have to see to it that they had places to sleep—barracks, and all of that. So, that's one of the things we did—and, of course, that was good duty because, if you had an officer that was real lenient, you know, as long as you got the work done, why, you could do what you wanted to otherwise—have a good time when you were off duty, and so forth, so— But, I think we— [If] I'm not mistaken, we only spent about three months or so in England. And then, we were shipped to Ireland.

McIntosh: What for?

O'Dea: Training. More advanced training.

McIntosh: What did they do there that they weren't doing in England?

O'Dea: Well—not, I don't think, a whole lot more than what they were doing in England—more field problems, I believe. They had a little more range to travel, you know, in the field problems, where we would get out, the ersatz war would be going on. In fact, we strayed over the border into Éire [neutral Ireland] there one time—just a mile or two over the border—and didn't realize. When we found out, we got back quick into Northern Ireland again, to Ulster, because we were combatants, and the Éire [Southern Irish] people were neutral. So, we would have been incarcerated if the authorities would have found us there. I don't think they were looking too hard, though.

McIntosh: So, you were just in Northern Ireland, then?

O'Dea: Northern Ireland, yeah. We were at Camp Ballycumber. That was, of course, a British unit.

McIntosh: Did you off and go into any cities? You went to Londonderry—that's about it?

O'Dea: Belfast was a place you would go if you wanted to really—well, but, when we wanted to go on a little vacation-type trip, why, we would go over to a place in Northern Ireland on the coast, and that. It was kind of a tourist place—lots of hotels, and all that. We had a good time. Lenny Casterin and I, we—I met him there. He was a little French guy from Brooklyn—or Queens, I should say.

McIntosh: They have any tomatoes there?

O'Dea: There were tomatoes there, yeah; there were lots of tomatoes in Belfast.

McIntosh: I'll bet.

O'Dea: Yeah, I think some of them were overripe, and spoiled, and so forth, but they were [laughing]— But, there were some really nice, ripe tomatoes there.

McIntosh: You didn't date any of those girls?

O'Dea: Not really.

McIntosh: Did they have anything for the army? A get-together—little dances or things?

O'Dea: I couldn't swear to that, to tell you the truth. I really don't know. I think I was probably too busy. I don't remember—oh, I think probably in the Red Cross. They did have Red Cross establishments. Well, they had Sandy's Homes in Ireland. That was the same type [of] thing as a Red Cross for us, but Sandy's Homes were for the British troops.

McIntosh: Was that what they called them—Sandy's Homes? S-A-N-D-Y-apostrophe-S?

O'Dea: Sandy's Home—I think they called it that.

McIntosh: I'm trying to get the spelling of that word.

O'Dea: Sandy. Well, that I think would be—

McIntosh: But it was two words, wasn't it?

O'Dea: Yeah, oh yes, yeah—Sandy's Home. Well, that's what I assumed it was.

McIntosh: Anyway, you still got donuts and coffee, and something—

O'Dea: Yeah—and they had cakes and these crumpets and all that sort of thing that the British eat. The Irish eat the same as the British, you know, pretty much.

McIntosh: Well in Northern Ireland, they really are British.

O'Dea: Yeah—there are a lot of Irish there. And there were a lot of Southern Irish there—there, and in England, too, working in the factories, and that. In fact, we were riding home from one of our trips one time. It was near Christmastime, and they were singing their songs, "Where the mountain go down to the sea," [possibly] and all that sort of thing—and just a

hootin' and a hollerin' just like a bunch of Americans would be—heading for home from their jobs for the Christmas holiday. But we got along with those people real good. They're very nice.

McIntosh: So, you're in Ireland. Now in '44, what went on?

O'Dea: Well, in '44, we headed out to France, from Ireland.

McIntosh: When did you land in France?

O'Dea: We landed in France approximately the 9th of July. Things were settled down pretty much along the beach, but they still had the ramps out in the water, and used those. The current there was so strong; we had the ramp up—say, table high, above the water. When we opened up the gate of the landing craft, as we started walking off, as the last guy was out, he was up to his waist in water [and] that water was rushing toward the shore. But, anyhow, things were— Outside, once in a while, there would be a place [that] came over, and so forth.

McIntosh: You were still in the 5th Division?

O'Dea: Yeah. 5th Division.

McIntosh: So, where did you go in France?

O'Dea: After our first staging area, and all that, we headed for Coumant Hill.

McIntosh: How do you spell that?

O'Dea: That's C-O-U-M-A-N-T, if I'm not mistaken.

McIntosh: Not M-O-U-N-T, or M-O-N-T?

O'Dea: Caumont—no M-O-N-T, as far as I know. Wait; I'll tell you how to spell it! Just hold everything. Just a second, if you don't mind. I have got a little book here, and this here person could darn near copy the whole thing right from this. We each one of us got one of these. Here is the 11th Combat Team right there.

McIntosh: C-A-U-M-O-N-T. Caumont—that's where you were?

O'Dea: Yeah, that's where we—

McIntosh: For ten days. You went to Cerisy-la-Forêt?

O'Dea: See, a lot of that I don't remember because I never knew where we were.

McIntosh: You were in the 11th Combat Team?

O'Dea: Yeah. We were the first unit of the 3rd Army to land on the continent. There wasn't room on the beach heads, and all that, for a whole army to get into. So, we held the forward point of the line while the British—

McIntosh: I also got a copy of this.

O'Dea: Yeah; see, they only printed it up to Metz [Metz, France].

McIntosh: I see that.

O'Dea: They didn't have any more information after that.

McIntosh: Okay. So, did you finally get up to the line there?

O'Dea: Yeah, we were right on the line there. That's—

McIntosh: What was your first experience in combat?

O'Dea: Yeah.

McIntosh: Tell me about that.

O'Dea: In fact, before we had the first experience in combat, as we were going up to the line, we got out of the trucks and we started walking. It was dawn, just daylight coming. You could just barely see things on the ground. You'd see these lumps, or humps, or whatever they were—piles of dirt?—on the pavement. It turns out they were bodies there from—German bodies; they had been in action there in the recent past. In fact, when we got up to one area there, where they had some dugouts, and what not, somebody had opened up with some mortars or something. Of course, we didn't know what was going on. We went into those fox holes, and what-nots, and of course some dirty dog had relieved himself right at the entry way inside so that, when I jumped in there, I had slid right through whatever he left. I saw that more than once in various places—where they knew we'd be getting behind a post or something when the firing started. That's what they'd do; I think they did it on purpose.

McIntosh: Sounds that way.

O'Dea: Yeah. So, we finally—we got up to Caumont Hill, and I think part of that we traveled in the dark. But, we relieved whoever was up there; I don't remember who it was. They threw a patrol in force, or whatever you want to call it; [they] had it to feel us out—to see how strong we were, and what

not. And it was quite an action, in fact. Some of the guys that were in the foxholes in front of us, they'd come running back through us there, and so on, but not all of them; we held on. And, right after that was when we all didn't run, [or] take off. We got the infantry combat badge—or Combat Infantryman's Badge. And, there was lots of action there, and that time, I was carrying the radio.

McIntosh: You were using your M1 then?

O'Dea: No, I carried a carbine—.03 carb—but it was a little short carbine, you know—a light weapon. They didn't want us to carry around .45's and that sort of thing, you know—even though some of us did. I had the carbine, and I had the 300 radio [Motorola SCR-300 “walkie-talkie”], carrying [it] on my back. Officially, they didn't have any designation except “Messenger” in the Table of Organization.

McIntosh: Yeah, you said they made you a Messenger. But you weren't doing that before.

O'Dea: I had trained while in Ireland, though; I had trained in that. I had trained, and that's one thing I did there. We learned the semaphore signals, Morse code and radio operations, and all that. In training, I used an artillery radio, and carried that—kind of a “square box” radio. I think it was a 536 [the hand-held Motorola SCR-536 “handie-talkie” radio] or something like that, but I'm not sure of that. But the 300 I know weighed about forty, [or] fifty pounds with the small battery, and the big one that weighed more. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** So, in that action, I didn't have much traveling to do with it. I just—

McIntosh: You just followed the Sergeant around.

O'Dea: I just had it available.

McIntosh: Was it the Sergeant or the Lieutenant?

O'Dea: Company Commander.

McIntosh: So it was a Captain then?

O'Dea: Yeah, he was— At the time, I think, he was Lieutenant yet. Frank Smith was the Captain—or the Lieutenant—at the time. That was when we ran into our first casualty, [a] guy named Badgerole, and Cardarella I think is the other guy's name—young fellas. And they got caught in the chow line with the mortars [which] killed them. I never forgot those two casualties.

McIntosh: Was everybody at chow?

- O'Dea: They'd take turns having chow. They'd bring up the Marmite cans, and that, on jeeps and that, and then they would serve these guys. And, they would come in by platoon, I guess, and that sort of thing. So, they would have to come back from their positions, and be fed—and the Germans knew that, of course, because they knew everything. So, there we also learned not to use field glasses, the reflective surface on them, because they would spot you.
- McIntosh: They would fire [on the field glasses].
- O'Dea: You bet; they could put the bullet between your eyes with that.
- McIntosh: When you had two of those glass things to look at, they assumed your head was right in between.
- O'Dea: Right—you betcha, you bet. Yeah. So, we were there a while, and I don't recall just how long that was. Then, we were relieved by some troops from New Zealand. And, I think they put probably a heavy platoon of some kind in place of the company that we had there. Of course, they were there—not only for holding action, but I think for taking over as soon as they began to move the lines. See, the British were up in Caen and the Americans were down in Saint-Lô—being held up. So, we went to the rear, then, for some R&R [Rest and Relaxation] and mainly sleeping in pup tents until we could do something else. And, the bombers came over. The sky was black with bombers, and you could hear up ahead just a rumble—continuous rumble—going on at Saint-Lô. They really blasted that town; it was a fortified town, is what it was—[a] big fortress area. And finally, then, they broke some kind of a hole open. What I remember next was that we were told not to have a single vehicle move until it was loaded with infantry—tanks and TD's [tank destroyers], trucks of all kinds, and so forth—jeeps. So, we loaded up on all the vehicles. I went in, usually, a 19th Field Artillery truck, and we took off through the hole they busted in Saint-Lô. See, the guys that were there at Saint-Lô opened a hole there then, and we went through it, heading for Angiers. Information came back that there was nobody there—somebody got lost, they came back through. They didn't see any Germans—all the way back to our lines, so— Later on, when I was home, I read that Patton said that he was going to take a calculated risk; well, I didn't know it at the time, but it felt like he was taking one. So, we went all night long traveling toward Angiers.
- McIntosh: Were you under fire then, or were the Germans not around?
- O'Dea: They didn't at the time, but there would be reports [which] came in that there was a Panzer division off over on this road heading—and we would

intersect with them someplace along the way, and so forth. Of course, we rode in the truck seeing what went through after we'd been there—you know, usually the way soldiers ride—so, we kept going. The FFI [French Forces of the Interior], the French Resistance, had reported they had captured the town. All we had to do was walk in there and take over.

McIntosh: What town?

O'Dea: Angiers. We got near the vicinity of Angiers and we started up the road the back way, and another unit went around towards the front, and we started up there. And, the first thing happened is—I bummed a ride on the jeep, a munitions jeep; it was Smitty, the guy that was a jeep driver. I had the radio up there with me, you know, and so I set it down on the seat, and so forth, and I was riding along, waiting to get into town. The first thing that happened—crackity-crack, go snapping over our heads and that, and the bullets flying to beat heck. And, we headed for the ditch, hoping there were no booby traps there. We got down in the ditch, and well, I had wondered what you do—do you surrender when they surround you and threaten to mow you down and be a coward, or what do you do? We didn't know. But anyhow, we thought we were maybe going to get it. But, what happened there is, Freddy Page, from Northern Wisconsin—he'd had a little training in the bazooka—and a couple of trucks and scout cars came up from the rear that were German. They came behind us, and they came up our road there, and they didn't know who was up here—[or] who we were.

McIntosh: You were in the ditch, so they didn't see you?

O'Dea: Well, our units—our vehicles and stuff—were on the road, though.

McIntosh: Oh, yeah.

O'Dea: All they knew was they were enemy vehicles. So, they started firing on our jeeps and stuff, you know. You'd see lines of smoke flying in the air. Freddy Page—he was called up with a bazooka, and he went back and lay on a rise in the ground. And, according to what they told me, he put one of those bazooka shells right through the cab window on one side and the other of the first vehicle [laughs]. They all turned around and went the other way; they took off. That saved us, right there; Freddy saved us [laughs]. Those guys didn't know what was going on at all. So finally, we were pulled out of that area. What we ran into was a, uh, one of these booby—or these—oh, what do you call them when you suckered into a—I can't think of it now.

McIntosh: Well, it was a trap of some kind.

O'Dea: Yeah, yeah; well, anyhow— I always called it by the name of our company, because it seemed like we were always called up whenever they didn't know what was going on. So then, in that case, the radio I had on the jeep was put out of action.

McIntosh: You didn't get into Angiers.

O'Dea: Oh, yeah, yeah; we went around the other way. We pulled out of that area. The radio wouldn't work. I pulled it down into the ditch there before things were quieted down. I finally got up and got it, and brought it down. [I] Didn't know if I should use a hand grenade on it; in case we did get captured, I'd have to do something with it—blow it up—because all that was secret in there, in that radio. But it had a hole through it; the rifle fire had nailed it, so I had to have that replaced. But then, we went around the other way—and I think it was at Angiers that we came to a big long railroad trestle. We went under an arch bridge, and then out on a railroad trestle. I bet that thing was at least three-quarters of a block long. And, there were snipers off in the distance, but they were too far away; they didn't have too good an aim. But, I ran as fast as I could with that radio. Anyhow, we got over there on the other side, and there was a tank sitting up there that had been hit with some kind of fire. And, he had shells and stuff exploding in there—and, I believe, an ammunition truck too, because we had to get right down on the ground flat, because there were shells flying all over the place in those burning vehicles. Finally, a unit of tanks went up and started trying to loosen things up a little bit around the group of buildings that went into town. So, they finally loosened things up a little, and we attacked them, and went up through the gates, and different things, and the action finally was over. We occupied the town, but in the meantime, our company commander—I don't know if he was a Captain yet or not; his name was Frank Smith—he was leading Company K, leading our company, leading some artillery unit and, I don't know, some scouts and so forth. He had all these people that he was handling at once. He was quite a leader [of] people, you know—like they had been sick, or got killed, or injured, or whatever. So, we finally took Angiers, and at night, we pulled into the main part of town. And, there wasn't a soul there—not a soul—so we camped out in the park that night. The next morning, it was like going out here to West Towne or East Towne—it was just loaded with people [laughs]; and, indeed, the cafés were open, and everything, and we went in and had some—

McIntosh: Like nothing had happened?

O'Dea: Yeah, we went in there, and they had some beautiful colorless wine, there—white wine; and—oh, did that taste good! They gave us wine and everything else. They were happy.

McIntosh: Well, you saved them.

O'Dea: Well, I guess so. They treated us real good there, so. I don't know where we went after that to tell you the truth. That was the big start of things. So, I don't know— I think we drove around—got on jeeps and stuff, and [other] vehicles, and started zig-zagging through the streets and highways around Brest, and I think we were pretty close to that citadel at Brest—only we didn't go up to it; we just bypassed it. There was another unit [that was] going after that. The next real action that I can remember, really, is when we got to Chartres—we were fighting for Chartres. We finally overcame those people, and went in and checked out these warehouses, and that's where I picked up the nazi flag.

McIntosh: It was in the cathedral?

O'Dea: No it was a warehouse—wehrmacht.

McIntosh: In the city though?

O'Dea: In the city—yeah, yeah. They had lots of German supplies there. I even picked up knives and forks and all that sort of thing. I was going to get married when I got home—and I thought, “Well, this is a good start here.” We got our silverware. It got as far as I think the mail point in Europe, there, and somebody or other needed it worse than I did, so it never made it to the States. I hand-carried my flag and that with me—kept it with my equipment—so that made it. That was a beautiful cathedral, that I can say, except for the stained glass windows they did have in there; they, of course, had been removed and saved. It seemed like they didn't try to damage the cathedral. They would have probably, had there been more action there. But they had quite a bit of it as it was, though.

McIntosh: What was your next action?

O'Dea: Well, there was all kinds of action all the time, but there were strong points here and there and every place—and, battles galore.

McIntosh: But generally you were pushing the Germans back on each occasion?

O'Dea: We were trying to find them; they were trying to avoid us. They'd set up a strong point—a whole unit [that] we'd run into, and then we'd have a good size battle. We were trying to keep them confused, and the big idea behind all of this, at that time, was to close the Falaise Gap up in Northern France. The British were up in that area, and we were circling down around—and we were going to come in from that eastern end of that gap. The German 7th Army, I think, was in there. So they were, as everybody

knows from TV, and what not, that they suffered some pretty bad casualties up there—the Germans did.

McIntosh: Did the food keep following you? I mean, did you always have good food? Or did you, were you—

O'Dea: We outran our food, and gasoline, and everything else.

McIntosh: So, sooner or later, you had to stop for the others to catch up?

O'Dea: Yeah, we— Occasionally, we had to pause. One time, we paused and we spent about fourteen days on K-rations, because they couldn't get any kitchens up there. I remember getting into one of these fields, meadow-like, where there's quite a few bees, and had these fruit bars for the noon ration. And, I thought to myself, "Gee, I got to be careful. They might get on that fruit bar when I'm going to eat it!" And, sure enough, I bit into one, and there was something else in my mouth, and he stung my tongue before I got rid of him. So Lenny Kastern happened to be along at the time. We'd got pretty close by then [and] he pulled the stinger out of my tongue. And, right after that, I took another bite of the bar—and another one! I spit it out soon enough.

McIntosh: Before it bit you?

O'Dea: Before it got me, yeah—I had a pretty darn sore tongue for a while.

McIntosh: I'll bet you did.

O'Dea: Gee whiz. Some of the guys went out, and pilfered some eggs here and there, and what-not. I think next we headed mainly down to Fontainebleau, below Paris. I think it was below Paris; I'm not sure. We never got to Paris at all; we went around. And Fontainebleau, we crossed the same river there. They had a pretty good road block in that area. They brought up some tanks to blast out the emplacement they had at the road junction. First, they put up a light tank up there with their guns, and we went down the ditches; we started marching right down there on each side of the road. That tank would let loose—boom—and everybody's head would bounce down. So then, they brought up a heavier one because this gun was firing back at the tank, you know, and they figured he would probably penetrate it pretty soon. So, they finally brought up a heavier tank, and I guess he had the next model of gun on his; his big rifle there was heavier. And I said, "I hope you don't fire that thing just when I get beyond the muzzle." Sure enough I was just ahead of the muzzle—I wasn't any farther than this table from the end of that muzzle—and he let loose, and I thought someone had hit me with a sledge hammer.

McIntosh: It knocked you down, I'm sure.

O'Dea: Not [knocked] down—bounced down, you know. Your whole body went; you were about that tall [laughs] before it stopped. But anyhow, everybody this happened to—you could see them right down the line; it was quite interesting. So finally, we took out that road block, and “somebody from *Yank Magazine*,” they said, came up. They were taking pictures, and I often wondered— I know they took a picture of us with the German prisoners at that time, and I never have been able to find where that *Yank Magazine* picture might be, if indeed it ever did exist, but they did take pictures.

McIntosh: How many miles would you go each day when you were doing this?

O'Dea: Oh, we'd go anywhere from thirty or forty miles; there were times [that] we went as far as, I think, sixty-five miles—almost to eighty miles.

McIntosh: Well, at that time, you must have been going on a “six-by” (a 6x6 military vehicle or truck with six wheels rather than four). You couldn't walk all that.

O'Dea: Well, we didn't walk all that; we had periods of walking. We'd take and go around the enemy and go out in front of him, and try to take up the positions to prevent them from taking positions in the same area, and so forth. The idea was to keep them rattled, and broken up. See, this was Patton's idea, you know—to just keep going.

McIntosh: So you walked some and you rode some? Like that?

O'Dea: Yeah, yeah—that's what we did, and we ended up coming into Verdun, from World War I. And, those were holes in the ground, I'll tell you, and those woods, and those holes—

McIntosh: Had the Germans stopped there—you had to fight them there—or they were just passing through?

O'Dea: They were passing though. We ran into this area, [and] went through it to make sure there weren't any Germans there; there were plenty of holes for them to hide in, if there were. The idea was— We were approaching Metz at the time, and they had left the forts at Metz. Some recon cars that were with the American units went up into the city of Metz, and passed out candy to the kids and everything else, and came back. But then, we ran out of gas—too much cruising around for the politicians and things, I guess; it was what everybody thought, and so we had to wait for gas to catch up to us. All these tanks and that—they would not move; they had to stay by their gas dumps. They would not take off by themselves for any

reason—except for Company I; Company I they would stay overnight with. Many actions we had, we had two or three tanks with us, and they would stay. We'd promise them we'd keep people guarding them all the time, because they couldn't see very well. The enemy would put a bazooka (a portable recoil-less rocket antitank weapon) into them—and put them out of business. So, we were one of the few infantry units that had tanks that would stay overnight with them—which made it a lot better for us. Then, we approached Metz; we [had] finally got the gas back. [It was] about twelve days or something, I think, [that] we got held up. By that time, they had reoccupied the forts between Metz and Nancy on the Moselle River—and we got in there, in this little town of Dornot—and, I've got to say, we got ourselves kicked to pieces. We were opposite the north south [River] Somme group forts, and another company had gotten across the river, and they were heading for the forts. They got right up to the gates—there were high gates there—they had moats dug in, and then they had people coming up behind them with guns, and that, through tunnels, and that, and they had to fight their way back down to the river again. But there was an awful bunch of casualties. They had these elevated guns in those forts, and they'd fire direct fire down into town and at the people that were across the river. Finally, we were told to get off the streets—get into buildings, and wait our turn to go across. We were sitting in one of these buildings, with our backs to the wall, and a shell lands right in the entry way in one of these enclosed entries. It landed right in there; everything turned black as coal—just the slightest bit of sparks light—and blackness exploded. And, right after that, I heard somebody screaming outside; and, I found out it was Bud Hill, one of our guys. And, he had seen this other guy blown up with that shell, you know—right in front of him, or right near him. And, he lost it completely, there, and I never forgot that. That was the way things were happening in there. Our company commander—he was helping down at the river, getting boats back from being shot full of holes, and everything, getting wounded back over—and, apparently, he got his legs damaged pretty badly. He got taken back to the hospital.

McIntosh: This guy that went nuts—he was sent back the other way?

O'Dea: Yeah, yeah. Bud Hill, yeah. He had gone completely out of it.

McIntosh: Did he recover quickly?

O'Dea: I don't really know. I lost track—

McIntosh: You never saw him again?

O'Dea: I don't remember seeing him again, no. I could have, but things are so vague at times. We used to feel sorry for the guys that were replacing the

men that we lost because they didn't know anything. Our people would be assigned to each one of them to kind of help them along.

McIntosh: Sure; show them the ropes.

O'Dea: Yeah; but we knew that fifty percent of those guys would be gone before a day or two has gone by.

McIntosh: The new guys?

O'Dea: The new guys, yeah.

McIntosh: Why?

O'Dea: They would probably overreact at times, and they would either run away—which would be the first thing anybody with any sense would do, the first time they got shelled—or, get to open up with small arms fire, you know, and have those things [enemy bullets] cracking overhead and around you. But, they also would not know enough [and] expose themselves at the wrong time, and so forth. It takes quite a while before you—if you last long enough—to learn that.

McIntosh: Is it learning sounds? Is that what you're learning?

O'Dea: You learn sounds, you bet. You learn when it sounds like a shell is going to come into your area, or if it's going over; you learn to—you can hear that. You also learn where the weapon is that is firing at you by listening for the second sounds.

McIntosh: What's the second sound?

O'Dea: Well, that's kind of a thudding sound.

McIntosh: Or is it going fast?

O'Dea: No, the bullets go past you first; they go cracking by, like firecrackers snapping. That's the first sound.

McIntosh: Okay.

O'Dea: And, if it's a machine pistol, why it will go, "Pop bid-dit-dit-dit," like that you know. Those will go by you. Those will all be snaps like cracking sticks, or small firecrackers snapping. Then you'll hear, "Bumple-dee-bump" like that—not that low; I mean, it's a sharper sound than that. But, you can tell it's different than the sound you just heard—and that's the one that fired at you.

McIntosh: That comes second?

O'Dea: Yeah, oh yeah; they go faster than the sound did—the bullets did. If they're going "zoooooom," why, they're a ricochet, or something. They can still hurt you pretty bad, but it's not the direct shot; so, if you get through that first sound—if it's a machine pistol—you're usually alright; you get on the ground quicker, or behind some leaf, or something. Why? They usually will miss you, because they fire up; usually, it's almost impossible to hold them down when they start firing automatic fire. They're driven up like a space rocket is. Then, they also had their machine guns, which were along the same principle; they were excellent machine guns. Yeah, I don't know where I was at the time now [laughs]—oh, I do—oh, in that action in Angiers. Sometimes today, I blame this ear on that, because one of those bullets went by my ear so closely that my ear rang for—I don't know for how long after that "CRACK!" right beside my ear. Another time, when we were going back into the Bulge—there, on top of a bluff area there, the enemy [soldiers] were crossing the river and [advancing] down a highway or road—in American uniforms—down below us. And, they sent a unit up to see if things were clear up above—and they weren't; we were there. I remember when they opened up on us, why, something went under my armpit as I was lying on the ground, there; I never got hit with it—it just went through. And then—let me see, now—I think— Oh yeah, the Bulge came—wait; Metz was first [**End of Tape 1, Side B**]; then, the Bulge came later.

McIntosh: November. Yes, the Bulge didn't come till December 16th. The story here is, you're on the 11th Combat Team—[and it] stops at November 21st, at Metz.

O'Dea: Yeah, yeah, that's— So, we finally—

McIntosh: If your designation changed, why did they stop printing?

O'Dea: Oh, that's because the actions either hadn't happened, or hadn't happened enough—

McIntosh: So this was printed before.

O'Dea: Yeah, before we got done. They had to find a printer and get somebody to write up the stuff you know, too. So it took awhile.

McIntosh: So, after Metz, you headed north?

O'Dea: After Metz, well, we held them—we ended up starving them out, so to speak. We opened up; the artillery would match their [the German] gun

fire with their own artillery fire, and they'd pinpoint the blast, and knock out a weapon—and we finally could get around them.

McIntosh: So what was your duty there?

O'Dea: Well, I spent some time there running wire out to listening posts—and that at night. And, a time or two I got called to do that. And I'll tell you, I never had wished for a bottle of oil more than I did there, because that little reel would squeak, squeak, squeak; it was the loudest squeak I had ever heard.

McIntosh: It would attract German attention.

O'Dea: Oh, hey—the moon is shining up here, and we're out—

McIntosh: You thought of yourself as a target.

O'Dea: Yeah, here's our people behind us here, and we're out there—and, of course, these guys in this place up here, wherever that is, and we're trying to find them, and run the line up to them—a telephone line.

McIntosh: And they're doing the same thing?

O'Dea: But you don't know who they got roaming around—the patrols, and—.

McIntosh: Did you ever get shot?

O'Dea: I never actually got hit with anything.

McIntosh: You're lucky.

O'Dea: Our own artillery hit me, but I never actually got hit by the German fire. I heard this crack by my ears, like I said, [and that bullet] under my armpit, and various things; but, it took the Americans to blast my helmet off my head, and put out another radio.

McIntosh: So, the artillery shelled it?

O'Dea: This was going back into the Bulge, then.

McIntosh: You were heading [there] before the Bulge started, or afterwards?

O'Dea: After the Bulge had started; we were going back into it.

McIntosh: I bet it was towards January.

O'Dea: Mmm-hmm. [affirmation] Yeah, what happened was, we were back at one point for Christmas presents—whatever presents they could get up to us, you know—packages of some kind. [I] think it was around the 7th of December, I believe, and we were in— By then, we were in what the Germans claimed was their territory—in part of Alsace-Lorraine, and so forth. So, in there, we were, you know, resting a little bit, and the 95th Division was up in what we called Saarlautern. Today it's known as Kaiserschlacht, and that is what it was originally named, I found out later; but, Hitler had it changed to Fraulautern and Saarlautern—a great big railroad area—and we had to go up there, and help the guys out from the 95th. So, we only had a few houses, and one street, left to go through—going through one wall to the next, you know, through the rooms and that. That's our first use of RDX [Research Department Explosive] paste-type explosive. You could just put that on the wall, and put a—what do you call it, in there to fire it—

McIntosh: A cap.

O'Dea: Cap, yeah. So, we were just about through with that, and I noticed that the German artillery fire sounded like American artillery fire. It was the first time I had ever heard them fire it so it sounded like machine fire. The Germans always said we had some kind of artillery machine guns. It's a matter of timing of course, the shells. But, that's the first time I'd ever heard them fire that way. But then, we then got the call to go down to detach from the 5th Division—or the 5th Division was detached— Let's see, what was it—was detached from the 3rd Army. See, at one point, we were with the 1st Army at Normandy, and then we were with the 3rd Army. Now we were detached from the 3rd Army, and [on] our own; the 5th Division went on its own—filling in wherever we could—when the Bulge happened. I was up playing a piano, in one of these blasted houses, when I hear the news the Bulge occurred—breakthrough by [German Field Marshall Gerd] von Rundstedt. So, we went down in the area of Luxembourg—Luxembourg City; we went down, and outposted that area. And then, we drove through—went through our own lines—heading out to penetrate the Bulge. And, at the time, they would have like a half-track here with a few—two or three—water-cooled machine guns, or something; they were supposed to be anti-aircraft outfits, really, and they would be holding the line here. Down—maybe two or three miles down the line—there would be another one, and so forth, and that's how lightly the line was held. So we went through there, and it was cold at that time, [with] snow. And, that's when we picked up sheets out of houses; we'd get sheets to put over our helmets, and over our clothes, so we would blend in with the snow. I know that we were in one action there where we got to the top of the hill—and there was a long area here of hill top [which was] pretty wide open. And apparently, the artillery observer had been killed that morning. Now the artillery observers would travel with us.

Our captain had me and this Kastren who had a little handie-talkie radio. Each platoon had its own handie-talkie radio.

McIntosh: Walkie-talkies.

O'Dea: Yeah. I had the walkie-talkie—the one you carried on your back—so we were all with the artillery observers and some other people that came up from the rear. The Company Commander called us his forward C.P. [Command Post]—and, of course, he traveled all the time; he had to be where the action was, so we had to travel with him. The Major gave him hell right off the bat for not being by his radio, so I had to stay with him—and, most of the unit was up here with him. Anyhow, we went down to the right, and we were on the right flank of the American lines. Well, there was supposed to be another, we thought, American unit or an Allied unit come in from our right. And so, we went down through this valley—and we were firing on the enemy, and they were firing on us. Pretty soon, in the back of us were these tanks, and what-not, up here on the hill back up in there. And they started opening fire on us. You could tell they were American shells because [of] the sound when they exploded; they had more of a metallic ring to them when they exploded. Well, the radio could not get to them, so we went back. The Company Commander and I went back—oh, I don't know, a city block or two, and up above—where we could get radio contact. So, before we got that far, why, some of the shells came over, and they landed in the trees just above my head. Of course, by then, I knew enough to hit the ground when I heard them coming, and they burst above me somewhere up there—and my helmet went off my head like somebody had kicked me in the head with their heavy boot, and the radio was knocked out, because I didn't know it until I got up to the top of the hill with the Company Commander. He said it was a hole as big as my fist in that radio—and, under my cloth in my helmet—that sheet was all full of pieces of copper, in the little holes in that helmet. Well, on the way back—we went back farther then; we had to get a new radio, and so forth—this buddy of mine, this Freddy Kastren, he was back with the rear CP [Command Post? Communications Post?]. And he was lying on the ground there, and he got hit in the thumb, or something, with some kind of fire, so I passed him, and said hello, and all that. Anyhow, the Captain, he went to see if he could stir up a radio, and he told me, “Why, you hang around, and go back up if you want to the Company.” So, I decided I would stay around there, and look over the guys in the hospital there—you know, the first aid and what not. [I] saw some of my friends, [including] a guy—a little guy—that had been a jockey at one time; he'd got hit in the rear [laughs gently], and hadn't had his butt down low enough. Let's see, then—what did we do?

McIntosh: Did you stop the Americans from firing at you?

O'Dea: Eventually they did, yeah. They found out that it was a mistake, eventually there, yeah. And, that was another thing he was trying to do; he was trying to get contact with him when he couldn't use the radio. So, apparently he did, because they did quit.

McIntosh: So then, where did you move?

O'Dea: Then after that, where did we go? I don't really remember.

McIntosh: After Metz, after the Bulge area?

O'Dea: After the Bulge, we started heading into the Rhineland area. I know there was one river crossing we had to make—at night. And, it was in flood stage, the river was; it was definitely in flood stage. It sunk a lot of boats heading over there. I was due to get on that boat, but I told the Company Commander—I said, “I can't go on that boat. I'm going to screw things up on this radio, or something, when you need me,” because I'm just about ready to blow; I blew my stack, is what was happening, you know. I was just—“battle fatigued,” they liked to call it. The thing was, see—when I was a boy—[when] I was ten years old—my two older brothers drowned when they were showing me how not to go out this far in the water. One stepped off the drop-off, and he started to try to swim, and drowned; and, the other brother happened to be swimming alongside, and he took me in. And then, he went out, and then he got stuck in the mud, and he held the brother up, and he couldn't hold him any longer. The only sister I had that could swim good—she wasn't there; all the rest were there, but they couldn't reach the first one. And so, he had to let him down, but by then, he was stuck in the mud. In fact, one of the guys that came to help out eventually, he darn near drowned there in that muck. But anyhow, I was deathly afraid of water, as a kid of ten years old, all my life. Well, you know, that water and that river—that's what stopped me; it wasn't the enemy—the enemy I knew about, pretty much, but that water. And, sure enough, finally he says “Okay, go ahead.” He gave the radio to one of the other guys, and sent me back to forward battalion CP you know, until we got done. And, this Joe Lively, who took the radio—he told me afterwards—“Yeah,” he said, “when we got into the boat [and] went in the water, the engineer turned it upstream, and it flooded right away.” And, he said, “I managed to get enough bounce from the bottom of the river; there was something down there—like a boat, or something. I got a bounce, and pushed myself, and got above the water again, and swam to shore.” Well now, he was a good swimmer. We had overcoats on and everything, and the radio, but he made it. I would have been dead right then, because I could barely dog paddle at the time—and that was when I left the front, actually, because they sent me back to work as a company clerk then.

McIntosh: From there, you kept moving back until the end of the war.

O'Dea: I traveled with the rear echelons. I was short-stopped by a Sergeant Major somewhere along the line—he found out I could type. Why, I had to type for him. I guess I was in the hospital at the time, so they said.

McIntosh: How long were you in the hospital?

O'Dea: Oh, I don't know. I think it was—it must have been a month or two, at least.

McIntosh: You just started lying around, getting your head back together?

O'Dea: No, I wasn't in the hospital. I was working for the Sergeant Major, doing his typing for him. He short-stopped me.

McIntosh: Oh, I get it.

O'Dea: No, they weren't sending me to the hospital. They were sending me back to work for the company clerk. He was going to be rotated to the States. They had this plan now where the individual could go back and have some R&R, and then return or be reassigned. So, I had to take over from him. I'd helped him in the past a time or two.

McIntosh: How long were you there?

O'Dea: Oh, I was with this guy for a couple of months, I think, or so. Then, I finally got back with the rest of the company clerks, with Personnel. Well, that was right at SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force] headquarters there, in Frankfurt and Bad Homburg, [The town's formal name is *Bad Homburg vor der Höhe*] near Frankfurt Am Main. The only officer there that anyone ever saluted was a Major at least, or a Colonel. A poor little Second Lieutenant was walking down the street one day, and I looked out the window. I saw him there, and I felt sorry for him—he looked so lonesome. He just had a little gold bar on there, and he didn't fit in [laughs].

McIntosh: So when did they send you home?

O'Dea: Well, after the war, we were transferred over to the 104th, I think it was, Division. It was a Cactus Division anyhow, for occupation duty. All the high point men and low point men were transferred back [with] a few other units to the States—for retraining, and possibly to go over to the Pacific. And, of course, the war ended in the meantime in the Pacific, so we came home then.

McIntosh: When did you come home?

O'Dea: We came home in September.

McIntosh: September?

O'Dea: Yeah, September of '45.

McIntosh: Did they discharge you right away after you got back to the States?

O'Dea: Yeah, right. In fact, I closed the books on the company that I was in. I don't remember the number of the Company at that time in this unit, but I was the only enlisted man left in the company. The Company Commander and myself were transferred out then, according to the papers.

McIntosh: Did you use your G.I. Bill when you got out of the service?

O'Dea: Yes, I did. What I used on it was a loan for the house. Now, I'll tell you something. When I went to buy a house, Dorothy and I went up, and we went to one of our local people, money people. And, they told us, "How much are you making? What's your salary?" I told them. "Well, you go get yourself a house for about \$4,000, and come back and see me." So, I went up to the Bank of Madison, where I had traded before at one time or another. [I] went in there. The last question he asked me was, "Oh, by the way, how much do you make?" I told him, ok. And, I got the loan—\$7,500; that house cost us and lot. What do you think it costs today? I'm not going to tell you [laughs].

McIntosh: So you settled in Madison, then?

O'Dea: Yeah.

McIntosh: What did you do for work?

O'Dea: For work, I went back to work for the City. I believe the first job I had then was in the Forestry Department, trimming trees. Then, I went over to the golf course; that was it—I went to work on the Glenway Golf Course. And then, I believe, is when I went to the Bancroft Dairy, because I had to get more money. And, I worked there for about nine months, but I couldn't take that—with the "go get the money, get the dough," and all that;" that was too fast a pace. So, I went back to the City. I went and worked for the Street Department. I also went to the Board of Education from there. Then, I went over to the Department of Housing—Madison Housing Authority, they called it—and worked there. I was in the Zoo—let's see; I worked for the Zoo before I went to Bancroft. That was it. Yeah.

McIntosh: So you raised a family?

O'Dea: Raised a family, yep.

McIntosh: How many kids?

O'Dea: [I've] Got three kids. I've got five grandchildren, one adopted—five grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter; and, one of my granddaughters is about to get married, and she is going to be inheriting two more children.

McIntosh: Did you join any Veterans organizations?

O'Dea: Yeah, I belong to the V.F.W. [Veterans of Foreign Wars], Post 1318—that, and the Knights of Columbus, and South Side Men's and Women's Club. Yeah, I've been with the Veterans of Foreign Wars for quite a while now, but I didn't join them at first. They assign themselves commander. I said, "I don't want any more commanders—I just got done with commanders."

McIntosh: You did that.

O'Dea: Yeah. And so, about the time they were burning flags up here on State Street, and that, I joined.

McIntosh: Do you keep track of any of your buddies?

O'Dea: Not anymore. Lenny Kastren came to see us one time on his honeymoon; he got married, and he came by to see us. There is lots of stories with Lenny Kastren. We would be assigned to find a place for a headquarters for our company, you know—and, of course, want to get into a nice house of some kind, and all that. Well, Kastren being Kastren, and me being me [laughs], the finest things would naturally go to us; and, the next finest, of course, would go to the Company Commander, and everything. That was kind of stinky, but I got a kick out of one place we were in; we had a city park there, where the company was camped. And so Kastren—he could speak French like a Frenchman; see, his father had gone to France many times for grape shoots, and all that, for California—he and his grandfather. But anyhow, Kastren—he had been there, and he could speak it. So, we'd go out, and we got us a nice room with a double bed—a great big one with sheets and everything—and we're laying up there. Then, we go to the window [and] we look down. Here, everyone else is down there in the park, and he's chuckling away [laughs]—

McIntosh: Did you win any awards?

O'Dea: No, I didn't win any awards. I got this badge right here that I wear on my hat right now, and that's what I'm proud of—proudest of that. I put—what is it—one, two, three, four, five campaign stars on there. Actually, you get the silver one for four, I think. Then, this was the 11th Infantry Regiment, right here.

McIntosh: Do they have regular reunions?

O'Dea: No, I haven't heard of one for a long time now. I think they had one or two, but I haven't heard [of] one for a long time; yeah. This [badge] I got from the Air Force for Ground Observer Corps, after the war and that, and this is what my wife wore during the war, quite often. These are the other two ribbons—Good Conduct, and American Defense, or whatever they call that. I think there are two or three others I could have [had] if I went after them. And then, I got the one from France, of course. You probably saw that—this one here. That was very nice of the French government.

McIntosh: Yes, hold that up. I want to get that in there. Hold that up, right like that.

O'Dea: Okay.

McIntosh: There. Good. That'll do it. Thank you.

O'Dea: Okay. You betcha. **[End of Tape 2, Side A].**

[End of Interview]