

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcription of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JOHN D. WINNER  
Officer, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, Europe  
1995

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**Winner, John D.**, (1921- ). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **Abstract**

John Winner, a Madison, Wis. native, discusses his R.O.T.C. training and World War II service as an officer with the Third Infantry Regiment in the European theater of operations. As a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Winner was active in the R.O.T.C. program he talks about the training, changes after Pearl Harbor, and his expectation he would enter service as an officer after his R.O.T.C. experiences. Entering service as a Private, Winner describes basic training at Fort Benning (Georgia), assignment as a Second Lieutenant to Camp Butner (North Carolina), and his feelings about giving commands to soldiers older than himself. Winner touches upon the tension between Infantry men and paratroopers, military life like drinking and fighting, and his arrival in Europe. He details establishing a prisoner of war camp at Rüdeshelm and Dietersheim (Germany) including separating the different nationalities of prisoners, recognizing war criminals and members of the SS, and imprisoning Russians. Stationed in Berlin at the end of the war, Winner talks about recreation activities like the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Football League, the black market, and trading with Russian soldiers. He mentions use of the GI Bill, changes on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus due to returning veterans, and the housing shortages on campus. Winner entered the Reserves and mentions his involvement with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division Wisconsin National Guard as the JAG and his feelings about participating in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Winner (1921- ) served as an officer in Europe during World War II. He served in the Reserves until his resignation in 1962 after serving as a Captain and as the JAG for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division, Wisconsin National Guard.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcribed by WDVA Staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

Mark: Today's date is October 3rd, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. John Winner of Madison, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Second World War Good afternoon and thanks for coming in.

Winner: Thank you. I'm pleased to be here, Mark.

Mark: I absolutely appreciate it. I suppose we should start at the top as they say and have you tell me a little about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Winner: I was born in Port Washington, Wisconsin in 1921. In 1930, we moved to the Milwaukee area and lived in Whitefish Bay for a couple years and then lived in Shorewood outside of Milwaukee for 3 years and in 1935 we moved to Madison. I attended Madison West High School in Madison and then attended the University of Wisconsin starting in 1939.

Mark: Now these were the depression years and you were able to get into college. Did the depression affect you economically in an adverse way? Did it make much of an impact upon you or your family?

Winner: Well, it didn't cost as much to go to school in those days. As a matter of fact, if I recall correctly, the tuition was \$28 a semester. We went to school then and when I did, my father worked for the state. He did not have a big income. We rented a house and I think that my family gave me \$10 a month to help cover expenses going to school. I lived at home and would take the Madison bus to the University and I think the fare then was 5 cents to travel the bus. Then I would work during the summer and try and earn enough to cover the rest of the expenses.

Mark: What did you study? Or, did you get that far?

Winner: Yah, I got that far. As a matter of fact, I studied what was called American Institutions was my major and I joined the R.O.T.C. and we were able to stay in school until 1943 when we graduated. As a matter of fact, I was President of the senior class in 1943 and we stayed in the University because we were members of R.O.T.C. and in January of 1943 they announced that they were changing the plan and that they were not going to commission people who finished R.O.T.C. but that we would enter the Army as a Private and that we would get an opportunity to go to OCS though. Then shortly after that, they announced that the OCS would be changed from 3 months to 4 months so we entered the Army then in July of 1943 as a Private.

Mark: Now as for joining the R.O.T.C., when did you do that and for what reason? Was it war-related or was it something you had been interested in already?

Winner: No, it probably was a little bit war-related in that, you thought you might as well try and become an officer if we possibly can. So I joined as a Freshman in 1939 and then took the senior R.O.T.C. which you take in your junior year.

Mark: What was involved in being in R.O.T.C. at the time?

Winner: R.O.T.C., I think that we had--we had to wear a uniform and I think we had it 2 or 3 hours a week if I recall. Maybe it was less as a freshman and more when we got to be a junior and senior. I think that we got one credit for being in R.O.T.C. if I recall correctly.

Mark: What sort of topics did you study?

Winner: Well, I was in the Army branch of R.O.T.C. in the Infantry, so we studied the usual courses that the Infantry takes. Everything from scouting and patrolling to leadership to--

Mark: I suppose some military history in here?

Winner: Military history in there. As a matter of fact, if I recall correctly, one semester our military speech program was by Dr. Weaver. You'll recall that his son ended up as President of the University some years later. So he was one of our teachers.

Mark: After the attack on Pearl Harbor, did your R.O.C.T--R.O.C--

Winner: R.O.T.C.

Mark: Thank you.

Winner: Reserve Officers Training Corps.

Mark: I just can't talk this afternoon.

Winner: Alright.

Mark: Did it change at all? I mean, did it become more serious?

Winner: Yes.

Mark: Did more people start to join it? What sort of changes did you see in the R.O.T.C. and the University in general.

Winner: It was--it changed and it became a lot more intense. Everybody knew that they were going to go into the military at the conclusion of it. I think that they took the courses more seriously and I think that the instructors, a lot of those were then not regular Army people but were people who were in the reserves who had been brought into the Army. We even had some instructors that were originally from Madison that went into the service and then were re-assigned here to the University. Of course, we all met in the big red gym.

- Mark: That was the center for that sort of thing at the time. So in '43, you graduated and it was time to go in as a Private. I'm sure it wasn't what you expected.
- Winner: It wasn't what I expected when I first joined R.O.T.C. If you want to know a little bit more about what happened after that.
- Mark: I am. I'm interested in your thoughts about going in as a Private after--expecting the amenities of an Officer.
- Winner: It was mixed. I felt that I would be able to complete R.O.T.C. I went in as a Private because I thought really the training I had in R.O.T.C. would not make me a particularly good or experienced Officer and that I should also have some experience of being a Private. So, we went from Madison down to Camp Grant which was outside of Rockford at the time. We all went down there by bus. Interesting experiences down there. We got down there and of course our whole company was 4 year R.O.T.C. people. All of them who had either graduated or were within a few credits of graduating. I can remember a very interesting experience down there. We came out the first morning and there was a Japanese American who was the Corporal in charge of us. He had us all line up and we all lined up and he said "OK, now all of you guys with a college degree take one step forward." So some of us very proudly took one step forward. He said "OK, I want all of you guys to go around and pick up all these cigarette butts and trash around here and the rest of you dumb bastards watch them and learn something, will ya." Which is a cute experience going in as a private and they suddenly put you in your place. From there we went up to Camp McCoy and started taking some basic training. We were up there for a few weeks and then they sent us to Fort Benning, Georgia where we took some more basic training.
- Mark: What sort of basic training was this?
- Winner: Well--
- Mark: Was this how to fire a weapon--
- Winner: Marching, firing weapons, how to pack your pack, how to take care of the barracks and so forth. Then they took the 4 year R.O.T.C. graduates and put them in 2 companies down there. The first half of the alphabet was in OCS Class #309 I remember. The second half were in 312. Then it became a lot more serious because their policy down there was 'We will flunk out 50% of the class'. You look around and your whole class are all 4 year R.O.T.C. people. So you knew half of them would be privates before they got through.
- Mark: It was probably going to be tough competition.
- Winner: So it was tough competition.

- Mark: I went to basic training about 40 years after you did and I remember drill sergeants screaming and yelling and abusive language and all that sort of thing. Was that your experience when you went to basic training? The Marine Corps stereotypical sort of thing or was it different?
- Winner: I don't think it was quite that bad. I think that was the exception with my experience. Marines might have been a little different. They were a lot more physical.
- Mark: OK. So you finish your basic training. Did you stay enlisted or did you end up in the Officer pool?
- Winner: No, I made it through. We--I don't know how deep you want to go into this. Well, anyway, when we got out they sent us home and we had something like a week leave or something and came back to Madison. Then I was assigned to Camp Butner, North Carolina, which is between Durham and Raleigh. It was a temporary camp used in World War II and I was very fortunate in that I was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment is the old Guard. They had originally been up at Minneapolis, St. Paul at Fort Snelling. They were the first unit called up in World War II. They had gone to New Finland, Iceland and Greenland. They were reorganizing after about 3 years overseas at Camp Butner, so they put a lot of us new lieutenants in there. That's when we joined them. We stayed at Camp Butner from January until about, oh, I think about May or June.
- Mark: What did you do all that time?
- Winner: All basic training. Training new draftees. It was interesting. Here I am a brand new 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and I go in my company and my first sergeant had 27 years in the Army and they assign me to an Anti-Tank Platoon and my platoon sergeant had 17 years in the Army and of course, I had then, about 7 months in the Army.
- Mark: Did you feel kind of outranked I guess you might say?
- Winner: Well, I felt certainly out-experienced. The first night they say "OK, lieutenant, come on we're going over to the PX." So, what are we going to do? They said "You're going to buy a couple cases of beer and we're going to induct you." So that's the way we got inducted and got to know the platoon.
- Mark: Was that helpful?
- Winner: It broke the ice a little bit.
- Mark: I would imagine it would be a tough situation to have to learn from these men and yet maintain command of them. How did you handle that situation? It seems like a fine line for a 22 year old kid to have to--

- Winner: Well, I spent a lot of time learning from them. But then I had a few things that they didn't have that I learned over the years too.
- Mark: Like what?
- Winner: Well, like certain ways of instructing, certain ways of running classes and the method to do so.
- Mark: Now, I looked up the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment. If I read correctly and it was confusing, it was not attached to a Division. Is that correct?
- Winner: It was never attached to a Division.
- Mark: It was sort of a separate thing?
- Winner: Until, we went to Europe and then it was attached to the 106<sup>th</sup> and was attached to the 106<sup>th</sup> after the Battle of the Bulge as a replacement regiment. That's the only time it was attached to a regiment. It was show troops in Washington D.C. now.
- Mark: Oh, is that right?
- Winner: They're the ones that take care of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and do the parading when any dignitary comes in.
- Mark: I learn something new everyday.
- Winner: Don't we all.
- Mark: So, these soldiers--the average soldier coming in to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, did you get a sense of how qualified they were? Their backgrounds? Were they good troops or were they scraping the bottom of the barrel by this time of the war? How would you characterize them?
- Winner: Well, the--first, we had all these old veterans in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry at the time. But the new guys that came in were just the guys that had gotten of age and it was time for them to be drafted. But it gave you a feeling of--of the different backgrounds that people had. You would run into people that had never been more than 50 miles from home. You'd run into people where you had to go into the platoon and say "OK, I want everybody to change their socks today." Because some of them wouldn't do it otherwise.
- Mark: Or take a bath or whatever the case may be?
- Winner: Yah. You'd tell them to take a shower everyday.

Mark: As a young officer, was it a challenge having to administer the company with the cultural differences as we would say today?

Winner: No.

Mark: Was it much of a problem?

Winner: No, it was very interesting. A very learning experience.

Mark: But, did it affect your administration of the Regiment? Did problems crop up, say between the Northerners and the Southerners or that sort of thing?

Winner: I didn't see any of that.

Mark: So, when did you go overseas then?

Winner: Well, from there we went back to Fort Benning. We were the show troops at Fort Benning. In other words, we put on all the demonstrations for the Officer Candidate School and for the Officers Schools and the advanced courses and things like that. Then, we stayed there until January of 1945 so we were very, very fortunate in being able to stay at Fort Benning at the Infantry school. At that time, there were 200,000 soldiers at Fort Benning.

Mark: I'm sure it was vastly expanded. There were lots of other military camps in the South too while you did your training down there. Was this the first time you had been in that part of the country?

Winner: First time I had been in Georgia.

Mark: Did you have any sort of impressions of the region, when you traveled about in that area for the first time? Most of the trainees went to that part of the country and it was the first time they had seen a different part of the country. I'm interested in your impressions if you had any at the time.

Winner: Well, I had a hard time getting used to all the Southern accents that you'd run into. But, it was interesting to see that part of the country. I was impressed with all the red clay that there is in Georgia, which surprised me. We'd meet local people and occasionally date local girls.

Mark: I was going to ask, did you get off the post much? Part of the legend of World War II, of course, is that the soldiers would get a pass and they'd go into town and drink and do all these kinds of things. So, I'm interested in some of the social interactions you had.



- Winner: We had a few dates down there. Not too many. We used to kid them a lot because we were from the North and I used to tell them that I was from Grantsville, that's up in Sherman County in Wisconsin.
- Mark: Did they appreciate that terribly much?
- Winner: Not very much.
- Mark: This sort of thing was a joking kind of thing?
- Winner: Sure.
- Mark: I mean there were some instances where that sort of thing would turn into fist fights and that sort of thing.
- Winner: That's right.
- Mark: That wasn't your experience though.
- Winner: No, no. Fist fights would frequently occur across the river over in Alabama in Phenix City. That was a favorite hangout of the paratroopers. As you know the paratroopers got their training at Fort Benning and we were the first outfit to wear the combat boots and that created a lot of fights between our regiment and the paratroopers who didn't think that anybody but paratroopers ought to wear combat boots.
- Mark: Sort of a pride thing, huh?
- Winner: Sort of a pride thing, but some of these young paratroopers found out that some of the old sergeants with 17 and 20 years of service were pretty tough guys too.
- Mark: Not to be messed with.
- Winner: Not to be messed with.
- Mark: So you went overseas then in January of '45. Why don't you describe the process of going from, Fort Benning I assume to England. Is that where you landed? Or was it France?
- Winner: We went from Fort Benning up to Boston at Fort Devins or something like that up there in Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. Then we sailed overseas in a convoy, went across the North Atlantic. I can remember that it was pretty rough and of course they coddled you in pretty much. I can remember 1 night for dinner, there were only 3 of us in the whole mess hall that could eat. Everybody else on the ship was seasick. We landed in France at an area not too far from Le Havre and they had temporary camp set up there and they were named after the cigarettes. We were sent to a camp called Lucky Strike which was just purely tents and it is to receive you and then make

the assignments as to where they were going to send you after that. Of course, I remember landing in France and the first night that I got in I said "Well, we made it across the Atlantic," got in the tent, at about 10 o'clock at night, some soldier came down and said "You, Lieutenant Winner?" I said "Yes." He said "You have a telephone call at headquarters." Well, you just assume it's something bad. So I had to walk about a quarter of a mile to the other end of this tent camp and I got in and got on the phone and said "This is Lieutenant Winner." "Well, Welcome to the ETO, this is Jack." It was a friend of mine from college who was in the Signal Corps and knew every outfit that came over and when they landed. So, he just called me on the phone from some place in France to welcome me to the ETO, which was a cute experience.

Mark: Very nice.

Winner: Yah.

Mark: Hospitable.

Winner: Hospitable.

Mark: So, how long did you stay in Camp Lucky Strike? A couple--

Winner: Just a couple days I think it was. Then they took us by train and we went to... had some training in the fields and just regular basic training and then as...the week before the war ended, they sent our outfit up to a town called, well it's 2 towns, Dietersheim and Rudesheim and said "You boys will run this prisoner of war camp here" and so we went out and looked at it. I don't know how far you want to go on this.

Mark: I'm interested in the prisoner of war camp actually.

Winner: Alright. Well, we went out and looked over the camp and I don't know if you had experience in telling how they set up these original field prisoner of war camps.

Mark: No, not at all.

Winner: But they would set them up on a rectangular basis and there would be a barb wire fence all around the outside and then there was a barb wire fence just inside of that maybe 20 feet inside of it. Then inside of that, there was a pathway down the center and then they divided it up into 20 different units and each unit was for different types of prisoners of war that came in. I was then assigned as supply officer for the prisoners of war and I remember we made contacts with bakeries and things and got a bunch of food in there and they said "You'll have 1 week to set this up. Then you will start receiving prisoners of war." The war was still--just about ending then and so we worked during the day, went back and had dinner and then had--sat down and had a little cognac with somebody that appropriated from some place or another and the field telephone rang and they said "You've got a train on the tracks, go on down and

get it unloaded." So, we pile in our jeeps and it's dark and of course there's no electricity around there and we arrive outside the camp and the railroad tracks are at 1 end of the camp and here are all of these cars, railroad cars all sealed up, cars that Patton had sealed up some 10 days before from prisoners that he had captured in Bavaria at that time.

Mark: Now, what part of Germany are you in?

Winner: Dietersheim, Rudesheim.

Mark: Yah, which is where?

Winner: Dietersheim, Rudesheim is near Mainz not too far from Frankfurt. Maybe, I don't remember, 50 miles from Frankfurt in that general area.

Mark: It's not in Bavaria?

Winner: No, no, we're a long ways from Bavaria then. So, I said "How we going to get this train unloaded? Do you speak German, Joe? No. Do you Gil? No I don't either. How we gonna get this unloaded." So we opened about 5 cars, put some 2 1/2-ton trucks along there with lights on and then after we opened them, we said "Any you bastards speak English?" Some guy said "Why, old man, I speak English very well, don't you know." We said "Well, who are you?" He said "My name is Safar." We said "What's your rank?" He said "Well, I'm a sergeant". I said "What's your nationality?" He said "Well, I'm Austrian." "What did you do in civilian life?" He said "Well, I was Assistant City Engineer in Vienna." "Where did you learn to speak like that?" "Well, I spent 17 years in England." We said "OK, you're camp commander, get your god damn train unloaded." You would appoint a high-ranking non-com as your camp commander and then he would appoint other non-coms. You couldn't appoint any officers and so by morning we had the train unloaded and had 10,000 prisoners in our camp. They said we could have 1 week before you started receiving them.

Mark: That's an awful lot. Was your camp big enough to hold that many?

Winner: Oh, yah. Well, within the week--at the end of the week, we had 100,000. You'd open these trains and of course Patton had put them in there a week or 10 days before and you'd find a few dead, find people with limbs missing and you divided them up in these compartments. You put the Austrians in one, the German draftees in another, the SS in another, the officers in another, the Generals in another, the Hungarians or hunkeys in another one, the Russians in another one, set up one for a hospital, have nurses maybe in another one, and then the--we called the "feldmatroses" or the field mattresses, the woman that belong with them in another one. You'd appoint a commander for each compartment.

Mark: Who would be one of these NCOs?

- Winner: Yah. Except in the officers, you'd appoint one of those, in the Generals you wouldn't appoint anybody.
- Mark: What did you--what sort of impressions did you get about the German Army at this time from dealing with these people?
- Winner: Well, they were a sad lot then. They would be--we just had a hard time feeding them. We didn't have enough tents. They were in the open just like they'd be in combat. If they had a shelter half fine, if they didn't they'd be subject to the elements. Then the war ended and our job was to process them and make sure that all of the possible war criminals and SS were segregated. Those who were purely draftees would be released and sent home.
- Mark: Did you find any suspected war criminals? You mentioned the SS, I assume there were some.
- Winner: Well, we had a lot of them who were suspected or were SS and we would just turn them over to--I don't know, Military Intelligence or something and let them decide how dangerous those people were. We had--I recall at one time we had 17 Generals in there though.
- Mark: That's quite a few.
- Winner: Yah, that's quite a few.
- Mark: In these areas in which they were segregated, I'm interested in--like you got the Hungarians and the Austrians, I'm wondering if you can tell about the quality of the troops and the morale within these different groups, like the Hungarians for example, would they have been less-motivated?
- Winner: Hungarians were less motivated. They figured they had all--they were all slaves of the Germans. That they were there--
- Mark: What did you do with them?
- Winner: Not very voluntary. Well, we tried to send them back to Hungary by way of train.
- Mark: They weren't much of a security concern?
- Winner: No.
- Mark: What about the Austrians?
- Winner: Well, the Austrians, some of those ended SS and we let the Military Intelligence people segregate those and those that were purely draftees, they were sent home too.

Mark: You mentioned Russians. Were they communist Russians?

Winner: Well, you remember there were a lot of Russians that deserted the Russian Army and joined the Germany Army.

Mark: There were also a lot of people who were--

Winner: Were captured and drafted into it. We let somebody else decide that. What happens to them.

Mark: I see.

Winner: We ran that camp until about January.

Mark: Of '46?

Winner: No, I was wrong. We ran that camp until about June and then they sent us to start another camp at Darmstadt. That was a camp of people who were segregated that may or may not be able to go home right away. We had about 20,000 there. That was in an old Cassern in Darmstadt. We stayed there until about January of '45 if I recall. Then, we were transferred to a town called Clornwestheim. Clornwestheim is outside of Stuttgart. There I was camp commander of a camp with 4,000, all SS and I was also assigned a Polish company there to help as guards. Of course, the Pols has no hesitation in shooting somebody if they tried to go over the fence. The Germans have their own system of discipline. For example, in these camps if somebody was stealing food or clothing or something from another prisoner, there punishment by their fellow prisoners was you will try to escape at 11:00 tonight. Then they would call us, and we didn't catch on at first exactly what they were doing, "There's going to be an escape at 11:00 tonight over in pen number 10, watch for it." All of a sudden you'd see this guy climbing it, it was the German form of discipline.

Mark: Was he shot then?

Winner: Yah. From there we went to Berlin. We were like the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry is in Washington D.C. now. We were the show troops in Berlin and participated in all the parades.

Mark: I see. I want to go back to this POW thing for a second.

Winner: Yah.

Mark: This was one sort of discipline problem that one might expect in a prisoner of war camp. Did you have any others? The one that's interesting to me, is the fact that you're holding these German prisoners within Germany. I'm wondering if there were security concerns about that sort of thing and the interaction between the camps and the occupied German people?

- Winner: No. There weren't any, in fact, we would have to rely upon the local German civilian population for assistance in running bakeries and things like that. Of course, as the war ended, we took over their homes and our troops lived in the homes and they would have to crowd together wherever they could.
- Mark: So there was no major sort of resistance from the civilian population that you noticed.
- Winner: No. They were all claiming they were non-nazis then.
- Mark: What did you think of that at the time? Did you think--sure it's feasible or hold it or--
- Winner: I thought, well, there are a few of you that are probably telling the truth, but most of you were probably cheering like hell for Hitler at the time.
- Mark: Did you have much other contact with the Germans when you got off the post?
- Winner: We got off a little bit. There were some friendly ones and we got to know some of the local people.
- Mark: Now, there was initially a non-fraternization rule.
- Winner: Right.
- Mark: Was that followed much.
- Winner: Pretty much, pretty closely, in our area at least.
- Mark: In some areas they apparently had problems with that sort of thing.
- Winner: Yah.
- Mark: Especially when it came to the women.
- Winner: Yah, well, that's true. The--I'm sure that there were some fraternization problems, but most of them were not very serious and were pretty much overlooked.
- Mark: So you went to Berlin then.
- Winner: We went to Berlin.
- Mark: More garrison duty? Is that what you call it? Garrison duty?
- Winner: Well, it was--we were sort of the show troops there. We put on all the parades with the Russians and the British and so forth and we were sort of policing the area. Our headquarters was in the Tellefunken building. I remember, that's an electronic firm

from Germany from prior to the war. We had new people that would come in then too. People that were lately drafted. So were there until they sent us home in May.

Mark: May of '46?

Winner: '46.

Mark: Now, there's a well-worn phrase in military history that "there's one thing worse than having an enemy, it's having allies." You were in Berlin and the Cold War is starting to develop at this time. I'm wondering from the perspective of a young officer, did you notice this sort of tension building between the East and the West? Or did you get along well with the Russians?

Winner: They had segregated areas in Berlin. There was a French territory, the British territory and the Russian territory. But at that time, you could go from one to another and we didn't have any problem with them. I remember going down to visit a Russian Officer's Club one time and I remember a bunch of us going down to a tavern that was in the Russian district. The Russian soldiers in there, they'd get drunk, and they all carried machine guns and when they'd get drunk they'd sit there and just shoot their machine guns on the wall.

Mark: That's not something you would normally have seen American soldiers do?

Winner: Americans didn't exactly do that. But you couldn't travel out beyond Berlin into the Russian territory.

Mark: I see.

Winner: The first time that we went to Berlin was in the Fall of 1945. One of the interesting things about the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment was that when they were at Fort Benning, they sent a lot of the star football players down to join the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment so they could put on good football games between the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry and the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry at Fort Benning for all the Generals there. So we had guys on our football team who were All-Americans like Billy Hillenbrand who played for Indiana, our quarterback was Lou Savin who you may recall ended up as the coach of the Buffalo Bills, and he was coach of our team. So we had some pretty good football players. So when we went over, another one of our great claims to fame was we had a good football team. So we joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Football League and saw some great football games. We were the only individual regiment. Everybody else was a division in the thing.

Mark: How well did you do?

Winner: We ended up undefeated, I think it was until we played for the ETO Championship and we lost in the final game for the ETO Championship.

- Mark: Now, I suspect, there was probably some familiar people who wouldn't become familiar names except for playing in those leagues.
- Winner: Oh, yeah.
- Mark: It's before my time, obviously.
- Winner: Well, Billy Hillenbrand was an All-American from Indiana who played with us. Of course, Lou Savin continued in football and his son is now the coach of one of the teams. I can't remember which one. We had some linemen. Tommy Mock was an All-American. We did pretty well. That was our first experience of Berlin. Because in the Fall, we went up to Berlin to play the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. We played in the Olympic Stadium. The regimental commander authorized a convoy to go up there. I was officer in charge of the rear of the convoy to make sure that we didn't leave anybody straggling. I remember we changed the guard for the Russian Army along the Audubon between \_\_\_\_\_ (Helmstadt) and Berlin when we were in the Russian territory because they would have guards, the Russian Army, and when their tour of duty was over, it was up to them to figure out how they were going to get back to where they were supposed to be. So, they'd stop us and they'd point "Can we ride with you"? and we'd give them a ride for 10 miles or something like that and then let them off.
- Mark: Did you have any particular impressions of the Russian soldiers?
- Winner: Yah, they were--the Tier Garden which is a famous park across [unintelligible] in Berlin was the biggest black market in the world at the end of the war and the Russian soldiers were not paid. If you survived, you got paid. So some of these guys were paid for 4 years after they got there. The money we had was what we called invasion money. You undoubtedly heard of it. It looks all the same. Part of it is put out by the US Government, part by France, part by Britain and part by Russia. The only way you can tell the difference is with the serial number. I've forgotten which way it goes, but I think the U.S. one serial number maybe started with a zero, the British with a one, I've forgotten what the French and the other. So you'd go down in the Tier Garden whenever you needed any money and sell the Russians a carton of cigarettes for \$200 bucks. You were then buying them for 50 cents a carton at your PX and our guys had Mickey Mouse wristwatches sent over because the Russians really loved Mickey Mouse wristwatches. So, their relatives were sending them Mickey Mouse wristwatches which they'd sell to the Russians. The Russians were anxious to buy wristwatches. If you had a good waterproof wristwatch they wouldn't buy it. Because if they couldn't take the back off to see the works inside, they didn't want it.
- Mark: They had been ripped off one too many times, perhaps?
- Winner: I don't know. Maybe. I first thought the Americans in Berlin started the Cold War because I remember the boys from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne would tell us they'd get these Russians and bring a tank down and ask them "How'd you like to buy an American



tank?" "Oh, god, we'd love to buy an American tank." Of course, they got all this money they didn't know what to do with. So they'd sell them an American tank and the Russians would get in it and go for about half a block and then the other boys that were in on it, were in MP uniforms would stop them and say "Alright, get your ass out of there."

Mark: That's kind of an interesting insight into the origin of Cold Wars.

Winner: Maybe it is. Oh, well, I'm talking too much.

Mark: Oh, no, that's very interesting actually. Now, before we turned this on, you showed me your photo album. We looked at some pictures of post-war Germany. It looked pretty "banged up," I guess you would say. I'm interested in your impressions of the condition of post-war Germany, just how devastated it was and then to go along with that, what was, sort of the American soldier's attitude towards the Germans. We touched on this a little bit, I'm wondering if you could expand on it a little more.

Winner: The Germans were--some of their cities were just absolutely disastrous. You could look over an area and see nothing standing above 10 feet for maybe 10 blocks in some areas.

Mark: Now was this from the bombing from B-15s or was it the invasion coming through or a combination?

Winner: Everything. Well, artillery and from—well for example, we were in Darmstadt and Darmstadt was 80% destroyed. Darmstadt was a city about the same as Madison was prior to the war, about 100,000 and 80% of it was destroyed in one bombing where they were supposed to bomb Frankfurt and Frankfurt was clouded over so they dropped them all on Darmstadt, which is, I don't know, 50 miles away or something like that. I've got some pictures of Darmstadt here. All the Germans were--that we ran into--were as you would expect Germans from past history, were energetic and were trying to rebuild. We could see them out there knocking the mortar off of bricks and building them. Used to tell an interesting story that in certain areas when you get down in Southwestern Germany that you wouldn't know whether you were in France or whether you were in Germany. The towns all looked pretty much alike. The way you could tell whether you were in France or Germany was if you were in Germany, everybody was out knocking mortar off and sweeping the streets. If you were in France somebody would stop you and say "When are the Americans coming in to clean up this area." Nobody was doing anything to try and rebuild. But, they were trying to rebuild.

Mark: Now as for, as for Nazis and their penetration into society, as you mentioned earlier, most Germans would claim not to have anything to do with Nazis, but was the average GI suspicious of that? That's the impression I get.

Winner: Oh, I think the average GI was suspicious of that. We could tell from certain prisoners whether they really were gung ho on Nazism or whether they were just serving their country because they were drafted.

Mark: What sorts of things would tip you off?

Winner: Well, the way they talked and things--I mean you'd get in informal conversations with them. Hard for me to remember all these conversations from 50 years ago.

Mark: No, I understand, I understand. Like I hardly remember yesterday myself sometimes.

Winner: Right.

Mark: So, it's June of '46 and you go home. This is on a point system I take it.

Winner: Well, I had low points because we had 2 battle stars. A lot of these guys that had a lot of combat went home first, but it was our turn next.

Mark: Yah.

Winner: So, we went home.

Mark: In June of '46. Now were you out of the service completely after that or did you stay in the Reserves or something.

Winner: Well, I got out of it and I was not very happy about staying in the Military.

Mark: Why was that?

Winner: Mainly because I was sick and tired of some of the discipline but more than that some of the absolute stupid people who had authority and you ran into people who for example were in the Military before the war and had a Reserve Commission and they were maybe a sergeant and then all of a sudden they became a Captain. They were not particularly intelligent. A lot of them were alcoholics. I remember we had a lieutenant colonel that had a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education and he just spent his Monday evenings or something going to Reserve and got appointed

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

and I thought, well, I just don't want all those people guiding my life.

Mark: Yah, there was a term used by a lot of GIs in World War II. Chicken feces, I guess is the nice term.

Winner: I suppose.

Mark: This seems to be what you're describing.

Winner: Well, yah, I was just tired of it all. But, I stayed in the Reserves figuring I wasn't going to do anything. Then in 1948, a cousin of my Mother's said "I've been asked to command a battalion in the Wisconsin 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. Would you like to be one of my staff officers?" I was then a Captain and I thought well, with a relative in charge, I can always quit and say no, but maybe it will be alright. The way things are going, I thought who knows, we may be in another war and I'm sure not--don't want to go in as a Private again. So, maybe I ought to at least keep up my commission. So, I ended up as a Plans and Training Officer for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division.

Mark: Wisconsin National Guard.

Winner: Wisconsin National Guard.

Mark: What sort of duties did that entail? What sort of commitment did it take of you?

Winner: The commitment it took of me was--at that time the units would meet every Monday or Tuesday nights and our units were located--the headquarters was in Elkhorn, we had a unit in Stoughton, we had a unit in Platteville, we had a unit in Monroe and we had a unit in Beloit. So, every Monday night you would have to visit one of those units. Then, usually there was a couple weekends a year you would have to do something and a 2 week camp.

Mark: You'd go out and just do some Army training.

Winner: Yah, right.

Mark: Now, that was probably fairly tranquil business until the Berlin Crisis. I noticed you mentioned that on your data sheet.

Winner: So, it was pretty tranquil and most of the training was done at--in the summer time was at Camp McCoy there in Sparta or at Camp Riply in Minnesota, which is up near Brainard, Minnesota. Then in 1959, the JAG job opened up in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division, which is Judge Advocate. I had been District Attorney of Dane County and I had also been Deputy Attorney General of the state, so they asked me if I would take the JAG job. I thought, well, I'm old enough now, I don't need all this traipsing around the countryside. So, I accepted the JAG job and then in 1961 when Jack Kennedy was trying to start World War III, they called up the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division.

Mark: As the JAG, what did you do? Did you go to Fort Lewis with them?

Winner: Sure. I went out to Fort Lewis with them and when I got out to Fort Lewis, I decided that this was all not worthwhile and that Kennedy was really trying to start a World War so he could be a war-time President. Because when we went out there they said

"Well, it's of course because of the fact that Russia will not sign the treaty over the Berlin thing." When we got out there, nobody knew what that treaty was all about or anything and we got out there and within a few months, they said "Well, of course, the real reason you're here is because of the Cuban Crisis." So they would send some troops down to California and train to go to Cuba and when that all blew up and Kennedy couldn't start a war down there, then they said "Well, of course, the real reason you're out here is because of Vietnam." That was his 3<sup>rd</sup> shot of trying to start a war. So, I sent in a letter to the Commanding General and I said "I hereby resign my commission effective the day we are off active duty whatever day that is." Because I wasn't going to stay in with Kennedy as President.

Mark: Now, when you went to Washington State, at the time, was there a real war scare. I mean, did you really think something was going to happen?

Winner: I didn't think anything was going to happen as soon as I got out there. In fact, I came home at Christmas and I said "This is all a great big Kennedy scare trying to start a war." I said "Why don't I try and rent a house and bring the whole family out here." So we searched around and did rent a house and brought the family out to Tacoma and we had a house in Tacoma that we rented.

Mark: Now, you were finally released from active duty in June '62 or something like that?

Winner: We were--it was actually July '62.

Mark: Then you resigned and that was it?

Winner: I was out and that was it.

Mark: That was the end of John Winner's military career.

Winner: Yes, the end of my military career, almost.

Mark: Oh, OK.

Winner: I thought it was, but apparently after I resigned, they put me in some reserve unit out of Minneapolis/St. Paul and I didn't know it. I didn't do anything and I didn't go anyplace and then when Mel Lehred got to be Secretary of Defense, in the meantime they had passed a thing saying that if you have 20 years of service you can get some sort of retirement at the age of 60. So, I wrote to Mel and said "How much time have I got?" That's when I learned that I had been put in some unit up in the Twin Cities area that I didn't know about so I got a letter back, obviously not from Lehred but from somebody else saying "You have 20 years and 3 months." So at age 60, I did get some sort of retirement anyway.

Mark: Ok, so that's the military career. I'd like to go back and talk about some post World War II type things.

Winner: OK.

Mark: For example, when you got home you resumed your studies and went back to college at the U.W. Or, you had finished college by that time. So you must have gone right to a Law School.

Winner: I got my degree in 1943 and it was in--called American Institutions which was the course that they recommended at the time for anybody who was interested in Law School.

Mark: Right.

Winner: So, when I came back in--about the first of July I think it was by the time we got home, enrolled in Law School in the end of August of '46. At that time, they had Law School--it went year-round. So, we took the 3 year Law School course in 23 months. Unfortunately, I got through that one too.

Mark: Now, one of the more noted veterans programs at that time was the GI Bill. Did you use the GI Bill to finance your--

Winner: I used the GI Bill, they paid for the tuition and I got \$75 a month from the GI Bill for--to live on.

Mark: Was that sufficient?

Winner: Well, it was sufficient, because I was not married, my father had died during World War II and I lived with my mother and grandmother so I got by pretty cheaply.

Mark: Again, your expenses were a little lower than most.

Winner: I had to keep them low.

Mark: Now, in your classes, were there a lot of other veterans?

Winner: Well, I don't know what the percentage was but it was almost 90% I would think. I may be wrong but, pretty near everybody that was in the class was a veteran.

Mark: Now, you had gone--you had been on campus before the war started and then afterwards. I'm interested in trying to assess the impact of the veterans on the campus, so I'm interested in your impressions as to how things had changed.

Winner: Things had changed, of course, everybody was at least 3 or 4 years older. They were much more mature. They were more interested in career achievement and getting it done as fast as they could and getting out into the world. There were a lot of the veterans who were married. Housing was very short. They still had a lot of the

quonset huts on the campus where they held some classes in fact. They had housing for the veterans up at Badger Ordinance and a lot of the veterans would commute from Badger Ordinance.

Mark: Long, long way.

Winner: Long, long way. I would still take the bus.

Mark: Now, in terms of classroom discipline and studying and that sort of thing. How were the veterans in that?

Winner: I think that they were more zeroed in on what they wanted to do. In other words, after 3 years, they weren't about to come back to school and do something just to have a good time on campus. Which a lot of people do now and did before the war. But, most of those that came back were older and they wanted to get going and if they came back to study whatever it was, Medicine, Law or Engineering or Literature it was because that was what they wanted to do. More of them knew what they wanted to do I think.

Mark: Would you have gone to Law School, do you think, if it had not been for the GI Bill?

Winner: I probably would have. Yah, I think so.

Mark: It didn't hurt.

Winner: It didn't hurt to have it.

Mark: Now, you mentioned housing was a problem as well.

Winner: It wasn't for me, of course, because I lived in an apartment with my mother and grandmother.

Mark: But some of your--among your fellow grad students, you know--

Winner: A lot of them had trouble finding places to stay.

Mark: In terms of social activities, did you socialize with other veterans? Or did you even have time for that?

Winner: Oh, yah, there was a lot of socializing. A lot of partying, a lot of people doing exactly as you and I are doing, telling war stories.

Mark: Is that right. You mean after class--

Winner: Oh, yah, oh, yah, they'd meet at various places. The favorite hangout before the war of course was the Cuba Club out on University Avenue.

Mark: The Cuba Club?

Winner: The Cuba Club. You mean you haven't heard of the Cuba Club? The Cuba Club was an old farm house that was located where the UW Credit Union building is now located on University Avenue.

Mark: Oh, the Shorewood Hills area.

Winner: In the Shorewood Hills area. It was the most popular hangout for the whole campus. Almost everybody who would go out would say "Well, let's go to the Cuba Club." The Cuba Club was run by a couple named George and Bessie Fields. They were great people and great characters. In fact, you'd come back on a leave or something and they'd always welcome you and say "Here, take a bottle of booze back to the boys from Wisconsin when you go back to camp." They--the Cuba Club after a football game, they would have several Sheriff's Deputies outside because they wouldn't let anybody in until somebody went out and you'd go in the Cuba Club and it might take you 45 minutes to get up to the bar and get a drink because it was just people on people. That was a great hangout.

Mark: I'm surprised I've never heard of the Cuba Club before.

Winner: Anybody, my age.

Mark: I can't count the number of UW veterans that I've interviewed and--

Winner: Maybe that don't talk as much as I do.

Mark: No, no. I had one gentleman fill up 4 hours of tape, trust me.

Winner: Oh, really. Well, the Cuba Club was the great hangout. I remember after the war, or was it before the war I guess, yah, it was before the war I guess. He bought the Cuba Club and they had dinner and of course a bar out there, but they had the student delight which was a tenderloin steak, French fries and a salad for a dollar and a quarter. That was the favorite order.

Mark: You can't get a damn Big Mac for that today.

Winner: No, you can't.

Mark: So, you finished school, you finished grad-- Is Law School grad school, is that what you call it?

Winner: Finished Law School.

Mark: It was time to get a job.

Winner: Right.

Mark: Did you have trouble finding work at all?

Winner: Well, I was very fortunate. I made a lot of applications and I finally got a job with a law firm here in Madison which was called Roberts, Rollin, and Boardman. It's now called the Boardman, Suhr, Curry & Field Law Firm in Madison. They were located in the Tenney building and they were very generous. I was paid \$100 a month.

Mark: Which at the time was probably a lot of money.

Winner: Not really. It wasn't much more than than it is now.

Mark: But you were able to move on.

Winner: I was able to move on. I'm up to \$200 a month now.

Mark: You mentioned, maybe I'm mistaken here. Your father worked for the state. Did you work for the government at all?

Winner: So, in 1956, Dick Bardwell was elected judge here in Dane County, which left the District Attorney's office open. Governor Walter Kohler appointed me District Attorney in Dane County.

Mark: That was an appointed position?

Winner: It was appointed because there was a vacancy.

Mark: Yah. I'm trying to get at the Veteran's Preference Laws, if there were at the time.

Winner: I never had any civil service job.

Mark: Yah, that was the sort of thing I was trying to get at. I'm trying assess the use of veterans benefits and that sort of thing. I've got one last thing in terms of veterans benefits and that involves housing loans and programs and that sort of thing. Did you have to use any of those to finance a home? I don't want you to go into your financial details, obviously, but did you use those sort of programs after the war?

Winner: I did not use one and I didn't buy a home until 1959.

Mark: You financed that on your own?

Winner: Well, the bank paid most of it.

Mark: Yah, but I mean without the veterans--



Winner: Yah, without the veteran--

Mark: OK. I've got 2 more areas I want to cover. This side of the tape is going to end fairly soon so you'll hear it click.

Winner: Right.

Mark: Two more areas I want to cover. One involves physical and emotional re-adjustments back in society and then I want to cover veterans organizations and that sort of thing. Neither of which might--might not apply to very much. First of all, when it came to--when it came to re-adjusting back into society, you weren't in combat at all, so you obviously didn't have any sort of gun shot wounds or anything. Did you have any other sort of physical problems that may have originated from the military?

Winner: Not that I know, no.

Mark: In terms--

Winner: You could clean up your language a little bit.

Mark: Excuse me.

Winner: You have to clean up your language a little bit.

Mark: Well, this is some--OK. That was a challenge for you shall we say? Your language deteriorated?

Winner: No, I never swore very much,

Mark: But more than you would have, perhaps.

Winner: Maybe.

Mark: There's the famous--I forget who said it. But the veteran comes home and asks his mom to pass the 'effing potatoes—

Mark: OK, we're talking about some adjustments you had to make to get back into society. Watching your language was one of them.

Winner: Well, after 3 years of not hitting the books. It's an adjustment to make to spend each evening almost, reading law books and trying to study courses and taking exams too.

Mark: Getting back into the swing of studying and--

Winner: Right. Then when you got a job you're starting at the bottom. You're back as a Private again.

Mark: But you had been there before. You could work up that way.

Winner: Right.

Mark: In terms of veterans organization, did you join any after the war? Did you join any later on in life? For example, when you got back, did you join the Legion or did you join some group on campus or anything like that?

Winner: When I got back, I didn't join any veterans organizations.

Mark: Is there a reason for that?

Winner: Because, I just didn't see any need to join them. I did--starting out as a lawyer, of course, you enter into small claims court a lot in Dane County. They then had a judge of the small claims court by the name of Douglas Nelson. Douglas Nelson was a great American Legion guy. He practically told each veteran young lawyer as they came in there that they would do much better in this court if they joined the American Legion.

Mark: I take it, he's a World War I veteran?

Winner: No, he was World War II.

Mark: World War II?

Winner: Yah. He was a little older but--I think I did join the American Legion if I recall for about 2 years, but I don't think I ever went to a meeting.

Mark: So, you joined under coercion and the you sort of faded off?

Winner: That's right.

Mark: Did you rejoin later?

Winner: No.

Mark: Never did?

Winner: No.

Mark: Any sort of smaller groups? For example, Regimental Association or have you attended any reunions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry?

Winner: No.

Mark: Is there a particular reason for that?

Winner: Because I don't think the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry ever had any reunions. [laughter] They might have it, but they're a regular Army outfit now and I don't think that they--that they would have reunions.

Mark: As you mentioned, you've been involved with state politics for awhile.

Winner: Well, I ran as a Republican in Dane County. In 1956, you didn't run as a Republican, in fact there was only 1 other guy on the ticket and that was some butcher out on Johnson Street who ran for Sheriff and I had a lot of fun campaigning. I didn't particularly want to be a politician all my life, but it was good training while I was DA. Came November and at 10:00 at night, I was 2,000 votes ahead and had carried Dane County. I said to myself "My god, I might have to keep this damn job." But rural Dane came in and they voted straight Democratic and I lost by about, I think, 5,000 votes. So, then I was out of a job again. Stuart Honek was elected Attorney General for the state and he asked me whether I would like to be his Deputy. So, I was Deputy Attorney General for 2 years and then Stu was beaten so that's when I decided I'd open my own office and then only my landlord could throw me out.

Mark: I was going to ask you, if the fact of you being a veteran had any impact at all on your career in political office? Appointed and elected.

Winner: I don't know. I don't think so. But when you're appointed, I think the Governor might have taken into consideration that he would probably prefer to appoint a veteran than a non-veteran with everything else equal.

Mark: But nothing terribly obvious to you.

Winner: No, no.

Mark: OK. You exhausted my line of questioning. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think we glossed over? Skipped?

Winner: Not anything that I can think of. I don't know what else you'd be interested in. Maybe--

Mark: I think I touched all the bases.

Winner: Do you have any interest in looking at some of these pictures, we could look at those and if they invite anything else, we can discuss it further.

Mark: OK, well, we'll take a look at them and if they do, I'll turn this back on.

Winner: Alright, fair enough.

Mark: Thank you very much.

Winner: You're most welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]