

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT L. DEAN
USAF, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam
1996

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Dean, Robert L., (1923-). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy:

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 74 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

ABSTRACT

Dean, a Scandinavia, Wis. native, discusses his Air Force service career spanning from World War II to the Vietnam War. Dean touches upon his draft notice, decision to join the Air Force, basic training at Churns Air Force, Utah (formerly Army Air Corps Base), and attending medical technician school at the base. He describes receiving further medical training at Belmont General Hospital, Texas and subsequent position at a station hospital in Oscoda, Michigan where he describes his interactions with the Tuskegee Airmen, and instances of racial discrimination. He discusses his training to become a pilot, first as a Qualified Aviation Cadet at Miami Beach, and then at Lapland, Texas (formerly San Antonio Aviation Center). He relates his transfer to Naples, Italy, and experiences with Italian citizens, the black market, and as a War Brides Officer. Also recounted are reactions to V-E Day and the atomic bomb. Dean relates his return to the United States and use of the GI Bill to attend college, treatment of veterans, dislike of civilian life, subsequent service as an aircraft controller at Kaiserslautern, Germany during the Korean War, and Cold War tensions military personal faced in Germany. He touches upon raising a family while in service, research at the Tactical Air Warfare Center, Florida, and brief service at Ton Son Nuet Mack V headquarters, Vietnam. Dean refers to his experiences with the Veterans Administration, VA clinics, and involvement in the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Mediterranean Air Transport Service, and attending reunions of service personal.

Biographical Sketch

Robert L. Dean (b. June 15, 1923) entered active duty in 1945 and retired from service in 1969 eventually settling in Florida. Serving in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, Dean achieved the rank of 1st Lieutenant.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, n.d.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Mark: Today's date is February the 6th, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. I am doing an oral history interview by telephone this morning with Mr. Robert L. Dean. A native of Scandinavia, Wisconsin, presently a resident of Florida, the Sunshine State, a veteran of World War II, the Korean Era and the Vietnam War. Good morning.

Dean: How are you Mark?

Mark: Thanks for taking some time out to talk with me this morning.

Dean: My pleasure.

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

Dean: Okay. Well, I was born in Scandinavia, Wisconsin, a very small community composed mostly of Norwegian-type people. My father was English, but my mother was Norwegian. I graduated from high school there in '41 and went to Luther College in Decor, Iowa as a pre-med. student. I was in my second year of pre-med. when I got my draft notice. I did not sign up in any of the programs that they had, before reserves. Which allow you to stay in college and they would call you after you graduated. But, I got drafted in away and since I was drafted out of pre-med. it was natural that they put me into the Medic in the Army.

Mark: Now, when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, you were in college then I take it?

Dean: Yes.

Mark: I ... do you recall the incident? I mean for antidotal purposes if nothing else, do you recall when it happened and your reaction and those around you?

Dean: Yeah, I do.

Mark: Especially in young men in college. I mean this is obviously going to affect you?

Dean: Well, I was walking across the campus; there was a lot of snow on the ground. This was Iowa, you know, on December 7th, 1941. And we had a path plowed out across the campus. And I was halfway across the campus when we got the word, part of it over the loud speaker, of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Then of course, it was the normal type of thing, where all of the conversation all the students had.

Mark: Yeah, you had a lot of young people gathered in one place. I mean, did you discuss the fact that you might be venturing overseas should we say?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Well, yes, there was a different kind of conversations. Some of them, you know, well, like you know, I've got to go, you know, I want to go. Others said, "Well, maybe I will have to go." So, I will say there were both sides. Most of the young fellows that I knew were upset, to the point that we got to do something.

Mark: Yeah. So, you eventually got a draft notice?

Dean: Yes.

Mark: Did you expect that? or was it a surprise?

Dean: Well, I kind of halfway expected it. I thought, being a pre-med. student, that they may not call me, they may defer me. But, I really wasn't that knowledgeable in what was... and you know, many, many years later, of course, if you were in college you were deferred.

Mark: Right.

Dean: But back at this time, that wasn't the policy so I more or less thought I would get called and I kind of thought that would be proper and I kind of halfway wanted to go in anyway.

Mark: Umm. Why?

Dean: Well, I don't know. My dad was in WWI and my great-grandfather was in the Civil War. I guess it's part of our family heritage or something, that we are just those kinds of people. The patriotic type.

Mark: Yeah. So, your actual entry into the military, I entered the Air Force, in fact, but more like forty years after you did. I'm sure some things were the same and some things were different. So, why don't you describe for me your actual entry into the military, from the physical examination that you had to take, getting on the bus, getting sworn in and going to basic training? Sort of walk me through those steps.

Dean: Okay, we, ah, I left by train from Waupaca, Wisconsin and went to Fort Sheraton in, near Chicago. It was very, very cold because it was January. I know we got into tent-type of quarters with the old coal stove running. It was miserably cold. About the only thing I remember, just a few days of getting our clothing and taking all those shots. Outside of that there was no training or anything like that because we were immediately marked for shipping out.

Mark: Yeah, and you shipped out where?

Dean: To Salt Lake City. Well, near Salt Lake City, Churns Air Force. Well, it was called Army Air Corps Base then, just outside of Salt Lake City, Utah.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: What happened from there?

Dean: That was a medical technician-type school and we had basic training, of course, with all the typical type, but excuse me. I said it was medical training. It wasn't. It was strictly basic training with all the, what have you.

Mark: Was the drill sergeant yelling and that sort of thing?

Dean: Oh, yeah. All that and, of course, things like, ah, well, I don't know. You didn't have things like that, but short arms inspection. You may have heard of it.

Mark: Umm, hum.

Dean: I can remember very clearly, especially those cold mornings, you would get out of bed at maybe two or three o'clock in the morning. A lot of long marches a lot of the regular basic training and we did get to fire the Springfield rifle.

Mark: I was going to ask you if you had weapons training and you did?

Dean: Well, only at the rifle range.

Mark: Yeah. And this training lasted about how long?

Dean: Well, lets see... I was there from the later part of January in '43 and I completed it in April.

Mark: Umm, now, was this the first time you have been out of Wisconsin or traveled around the country at all?

Dean: I had been to South Dakota with my parents.

Mark: What I am getting at is that at basic training you get a mix of people from all walks of life and all parts of the country. Even though it was Army Air Corp, which was a little more exclusive than the regular Army basic training, I suspect that you still had a good mix of people from different backgrounds?

Dean: Most certainly.

Mark: I am interested in how the different people from all the parts of the country got along during basic training?

Dean: Well, one of the things I had, was my cousin went in at the same time that I did. I met some others in the local area. We did feel a little more comfortable, if we had someone that was from your same general area. Although it didn't take long, we soon learned that

Interview Transcript (continued)

we were all GI's and got the same place and same mission and everything else. To me, I had no trouble at all. I got along real fine with everybody and made a lot of friends.

Mark: Was that always the case though?

Dean: Always.

Mark: Is that with you personally?

Dean: I never had any trouble with associating with anybody.

Mark: What about those around you? One of the things I hear is sometimes, not always, is sort of a North, South tension. You know, how some guys are still fighting the Civil War and that kind of thing?

Dean: Well, in this case, of course, there was complete, you know, separation of the races.

Mark: Oh, the races, yeah.

Dean: Yes, so we had nothing like that. The only thing that I can remember is the guys from the South were definitely marked because of their accents. But most of the time that was just humorous. And then they treated us the same way, you know, the Wisconsin twang.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: Type thing, otherwise, where they came from or anything like that. Nothing they were just guys.

Mark: Umm, okay, so, after basic, so, you eventually, went from basic training to actually flying an airplane?

Dean: No. No, I went from there out to this medical training.

Mark: Oh, okay.

Dean: And that was...

Mark: I got "pilot" here on your military occupation, which must have been later?

Dean: Yeah, I get into that later.

Mark: So, you went off to medical training then?

Dean: Yeah, right, that was in El Paso at the Belmont General Hospital. It was a Surgical Technician School.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Anything remarkable about that experience at all?

Dean: I can't think of anything, except that it was so dry...

Mark: In El Paso you mean?

Dean: And hot. Yeah, because, well, this was in April when we went there and I graduated in June. It was so hot and dry that I remember that, they let us out of the class one time to see the rain drops on the roof. You could still see the marks.

Mark: Did you get off the post by this time at all?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: Did you get to go into town?

Dean: Yeah, we got into town to see El Paso and I did also get to Juarez.

Mark: Which is kind of notorious sometimes.

Dean: Oh, yes, that was quite an experience.

Mark: It still is actually, from what I gather.

Dean: Right.

Mark: And after your medical training umm, umm, describe what happened after that?

Dean: Okay. Then I was shipped immediately to Oscoda, Michigan where, they had a station hospital. Now, this is where the 99 Fighter Squadron was transitioning in the P-40 airplanes. It was all black, except for the station hospital. So, I was a surgical technician there but while I was back at school I had applied for aviation cadet and this is why this is coming up.

Mark: I see.

Dean: After, I had been at the Oscoda, Michigan after awhile then I transferred. I might just mention one kind of interesting incident, if you are interested in that?

Mark: Oh, sure.

Dean: Okay. While I was there, I was in charge of this one ward. And in comes this young, black pilot, lieutenant. All bloodied up type thing and he had, had a mid-air collision with another P-40. They got too close and the prop went through the canopy of his airplane and he got a lot of superficial-type of wounds. Both of them got down okay, but

Interview Transcript (continued)

this guy was in my ward. His mother came to visit and she was from Chicago. Now these are the Tuskegee Airmen the Nine, Nine, you probably saw the movie or something?

Mark: Umm, I've seen parts of it. Actually, I am familiar with the story in basic terms anyway.

Dean: Well, anyway, this guy was obviously cream of the crop. He was well-educated and a nice guy and a wonderful person. And of course, I had no trouble associating with blacks, because I was born and raised in Wisconsin and we never saw them, no associations. But, anyway, the interesting thing is a couple of years later, after I had gone through flying school and I had gotten my commissioned wings, I am sitting in Naples, Italy, a black captain comes up to me and says, "Hey, I know you." It was this guy. So that is real unusual.

Mark: Hum, it's a small world I guess?

Dean: It sure is. Why he recognized me-I was a PFC then and probably in hospital clothes but yet he remembered me for some reason? I must have an unusual face?

Mark: It sounds like it was probably an interesting experience, to be at that base with the Tuskegee Airmen. I mean, they are kind of famous now. Did people know about them at the time?

Dean: No.

Mark: It is sort of an unusual thing?

Dean: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Anything, any other particular antidotes having to do with these Tuskegee Airmen?

Dean: Yeah, there were a couple. We had another guy come in and he was on the flight line. One of the sergeants and he had, well, what we did was like dry-cleaning our woolen clothes with that 100 octane gasoline-type thing and he got burned real, real bad; second and third degree burns all over his body. He was a wonderful piano player but he pretty much lost that, because I still could see his one hand all crippled up from the burns. Now, I know this guy by name, I got in touch with the Tuskegee Airmen. By the way, they are trying to find this guy that I was telling you about, this pilot. There are 37 chapters in the United States somewhere and they are trying to find this guy. But I do know the name of this other guy and I have been in contact with some of them. So, we have been actually quite close, you know, some commonalties.

Mark: I will try to remember to come back to that because I have some questions about veterans groups, reunions and that sort of thing. I'm making a note as we speak. Umm, now, the

Interview Transcript (continued)

hospital that you worked at, describe a typical day at that hospital. What sort of things did you do, what sort of patients did you have, etc., etc.?

Dean: Well, even though I was a surgical technician, I never did get into surgery. I worked in the ward, running the ward. I do remember taking care of some of the patients. I did,

one evening, have an incident where one-of course he was colored-was really, really having a lot of pain. I had to wake up the duty officer. The doctor and he came in and inspected him and so on and felt all over his stomach, because that is where he was having so much pain. He said, "Well, give him a quarter grain of codeine." which I did, but it didn't help. So, I had to wake up the doctor again, because he was making so much noise with moaning and so on, he was keeping everybody else awake. The second time he looked him over a little closer and said, "Well, just give him another shot." which I did and it still didn't help! And so, the third time he says, "Well, give him," if I remember right, "a quarter grain of morphine." and then that did it. He was fine after that. Except I went off of ward. The next day, I found out that they air evacuated him down to South Ridge, farther south in Michigan, and he died en route from a ruptured something. I don't know what it was?

Mark: Now, in Aspen, in a hospital situation like that, I expect that you worked with nurses who were probably women?

Dean: I don't remember seeing a nurse.

Mark: Oh, really?

Dean: No.

Mark: I thought for sure there would be a contingent of WACs or Nurse Corp or something like that?

Dean: Nope, I don't remember seeing a female at all. Doctors and technicians but a...

Mark: That was it, huh?

Dean: Right. I don't remember seeing a female at all.

Mark: That is peculiar. That is not what I would have expected.

Dean: No. Well, we had male, more or less, nurses and doctors.

Mark: Well, that is what you guys were there for. I, just, ah, well, in a hospital situation you naturally think of...

Dean: Well, certainly. When you asked that question, I'm scratching my head, but I can't remember them. There may have been some but I can't remember them.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Um, so, how long did you stay there in Michigan?

Dean: Okay, I was, let's see, I was there from June 11 to September 13th. I got word of being accepted to the aviation cadets and I moved out the next day. I went down to Miami Beach.

Mark: And what did you do there?

Dean: I was what they called a QAC, a Qualified Aviation Cadet. I went to Miami Beach. They had some requisitioned hotels down there. The Betsy Ross, I remember is the hotel I was in. Which by the way, oh, what's his name? The movie star was in...well, anyway...

Mark: Well, there are too many of them. Who knows?

Dean: Yeah, right, at that stage of the game. There was just mostly, there were physical evaluations and physical conditioning and some marching. But, most of it was just staging, just getting ready to go to the next assignment.

Mark: Now, those who had been selected for the pilot training, were they such as yourself? People who had been through some college and that sort of thing?

Dean: Yeah, pretty much so. Not all, but most of them had some college at least.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: Quite a few of them were college graduates.

Mark: So, to qualify for this kind of training, I'm interested in what sort of criteria they were looking for. And how you managed to fit in there and how some of the others did? I assume there were like some sort of intelligence tests or that sort of thing that you had to take?

Dean: Yes. It was when I was down in Texas, when I had my application; there were a lot of questions and a couple different meeting and so on. And they reviewed this and that, but a lot of that was your physical condition was the key. But particularly eyesight and you had to go through a very rigid physical and then also a written exam. And, of course, having had college was a very important factor.

Mark: So, you stayed in Miami Beach for a while and then I assume you went off to finally go sit in a cockpit?

Dean: No, no, not really. We went to what they call 'CTD' which is College Training Detachment and that was in Memphis, Tennessee at the South Western College. It was a real good assignment except we went to school. We took real high-level classes-physics and things like this, right along with the other students and, of course, physical training.

Interview Transcript (continued)

And then, from there we went to flying. But while we were there we did get indoctrinated into the cockpit just a little bit. It was with this old, small airplane-type thing, the Piper Cub. We got a few hours but that's all.

Mark: So, from Memphis, where did you go after that?

Dean: Then I went to San Antonio.

Mark: Lapland, Kelly or one of those?

Dean: No, it was San Antonio, which is what is now called Lapland.

Mark: I see.

Dean: It was the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center at that time and it is the same place over in Lapland is now.

Mark: Yeah, if my calculations are correct we are getting pretty near V-E and V-J Day?

Dean: Yeah, this was. I was in Memphis on October 10, '43 and after these courses in math, physics and geography and this and that and so on. And by the way, I played in the college band and stopped and had that, first flight in the Piper, because then on February 11 of '44 I graduated from there. Then on March 14th I went to this Wright preflight school in San Antonio. May 24, I just happened to have this in front of me so I am reading it. I completed preflight and was shipped to Ballinger, Texas, which is primary flying school.

Mark: And this is where you first get behind the wheel, so to speak, of the airplane?

Dean: Yeah, now I finally am in flying school.

Mark: Yeah. I'm interested in your, in the first time you flew the plane and your physical and emotional reactions to it? I have never done it myself and I expect it is quite a thrill?

Dean: Yeah, it was. And in particular, because my instructor, the first flight was from Antigua, Wisconsin and one of his firm beliefs is, to teach his students aerobatics. The first flight he gets you up there and had us on our back! And hanging onto the safety belt and he says, "I want to feel your feet on those rudders." We are practically hanging out of the cockpit. Those were open cockpits, those old PT-19s. But, he was a firm believer in this and that was really my first ride. It was more aerobatics than anything else was, but it was quite interesting. Anyway this saved me later on because the whole class went through a rigid check later on with Army check pilots and this guy was civilian. What they did was, one of the first things they did was got them in aerobatics. A lot of the instructors were not teaching aerobatics and every one of the students there had no problem. They whizzed through it.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: And this training lasted how long?

Dean: Lets see, we went, I soloed in June and graduated August 4 of '44.

Mark: And I suspect that the training got fairly rigorous?

Dean: Yeah, they call it preflight and then basic and then advanced the three stages. So, this was primary in PT-19s and which I graduated and transferred to basic in San Angelo, Texas. And then we flew the BT-13 and, of course, here there is a lot of physical training and a lot of code work and aircraft identification, plus flying. BT-13 is a basic trainer. And then, I graduated from there in October and went to Enid, Oklahoma. No, wait a minute. I have this wrong. I was at Good Fellow in August, yeah, and we had an extension of five weeks. The whole class was extended five weeks and I went up to Enid, Oklahoma still flying the BT-13 before I went to advanced. Advanced was in November in Ellis, Oklahoma and that was a twin-engine airplane.

Mark: So, as your training, had they at, what point did they determine what sort of plane you would be flying like a fighter versus a bomber or transport? When was that decision made?

Dean: That was made in advanced and that is probably more than halfway through advanced and they ask what you want. Then, you get recommendations from your instructors. I wanted fighters.

Mark: Why was that?

Dean: Well, I don't know. I just...

Mark: The romance of it I suppose?

Dean: Well, I have always had an interest in flying and, of course, fighter airplanes appeal to me more than anything else did.

Mark: Well, I find that choice is very common among people who went into flight training. I am trying to get at why it was so popular.

Dean: Well, I wasn't a real big guy either and, I don't know, it was kind of a little bit of cockiness-type of thing in you I guess. You want to be a fighter pilot. And I was recommended for it too by my instructors. But that isn't where I went.

Mark: Why not?

Dean: They sent me to, well, twin engines. From there, when I graduated, I went to, well, I was supposed to be an instructor but I went straight to overseas. Supposed to be B-25s and ended up with C-47s troop carrier outfit.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Is that just one of those, just one of those things?

Dean: Yeah, it was one of those things. For example, one of my friends, he wanted one of the biggest dogs on airplanes there was. And where did he go? He went to fighters.

Mark: I suppose the military in its infinite wisdom? So, in these various schools you went to in this whole series of training programs I would imagine there was a washout factor?

Dean: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Where a lot of guys didn't get through the program.

Dean: This happened throughout, yeah.

Mark: How significant of a washout thing was there? For example, of all the people that you started with in your primary, how many do you know of, or do you suspect, ended up actually flying planes?

Dean: Well, when I was in primary, you know, I mentioned about that the, our instructor teaching us and getting us through an area when it got real rough, when the army test pilots came in there. They washed out about 30%, about 1/3. So, that was a big loss there but that was a special--otherwise, it would have been closer to...oh, well, primary is quite, pretty heavy. Anyway, maybe 15%. Then, in basic I would say, ah, 10 or maybe less than 10% and it was the time I was going through. And then in advanced there were very few that did not get through but there were a few but not very many. I would say down around only, less than 5%.

Mark: Um, so, you did eventually get overseas?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: And before the war ended, too?

Dean: Right, I got into the tail end of it.

Mark: Yeah, why don't you just describe where you went and what your voyage was like getting over there.

Dean: Okay, when I was reported it was supposed to be a basic instructor, but they changed it as soon, next via came in on the weekend and on Monday I had my orders to go overseas. So, I shipped over to the East Coast and after they gave me some extra leave. Then I went by ship, it was the former America, USS-it was a good ship-shipped over to Naples, Italy.

Mark: What was that voyage like?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Well, it was quite pleasant actually, except for a couple of stormy days. But we were fast enough, we did have to...it was a fast ship. We didn't have to zigzag. We didn't have much danger from submarines and some of the slower liberty ships.

Mark: Now, I have talked to a lot of regular GI infantry guys who went overseas on the ships and they describe all this seasickness and that sort of thing.

Dean: Well, there was.

Mark: Now, you would have been up in the air and perhaps you were a little less susceptible to that sort of thing?

Dean: Well, no, there was quite a bit of it even with us guys who were pilots and what not. There was still quite a bit of it. There is something different about the motion on that ship than the motion on an airplane. But what was worse was I was commissioned out as an officer and we had better quarters. The poor guys that were down a little lower and stacked up in hammocks and things like this, which was miserable. And all you need is for one guy to get sick and then the stench, you know, and then pretty soon the whole thing was sick. It was mostly just during, oh, two or three days of real bad weather.

Mark: But you eventually, got over to Naples?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: And what did you do then?

Dean: Well, it was another one of those things, where you start out somewhere and end up somewhere else. I was supposed to go to a B-25 outfit and I ended up in Catena in Naples in a C-47 outfit, a troop carrier.

Mark: Troop carrier, that was your mission then?

Dean: Well, it was a faring squadron at that time and what we did was fly mail, passengers. We went up to the front lines to pick up litter patients, and then we would bring them back to the hospital. Ferrying cargo and personnel.

Mark: I see. You were flying about how often? Seven days a week? And how many days were you?

Dean: No, no, we weren't flying that much. To start out with I was only flying about, oh, maybe three days, four a week at the most. And then later on, I got into a job, an assignment and office job-type thing and I ended up not doing so much flying.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: I see. Now, the Italian theater is kind of interesting and the more I talk to veterans the more I realize how interesting it was. It was a mix of different armies and all this sort of things. I suspect Naples was pretty cosmopolitan at the time?

Dean: Oh, yeah.

Mark: If you would describe what Naples was like for the GI or, in your case, the pilot in the latter stages of World War II.

Dean: Well, I can say there were predominate British-type there besides us Americans more so. I didn't see too many of Nationals we...

Mark: Hold on, I have another phone in here.

Dean: The city itself, of course, was great, except it was bombed out and in real bad shape and things like this. It wasn't too long since it got hit pretty hard.

Mark: Yeah. Did you have much, many dealing with the Italians?

Dean: Oh, yes.

Mark: Can you describe the relations between Americans and the Italians?

Dean: Well, one thing you have to remember they were very poor and really hard hit and we had a lot type thing. There was a lot of trading of course, involved. We had things that they really wanted and if they could get the money, they were willing to pay for it. Of course, that involved cigarettes and things like that. You have probably heard quite a bit about selling cigarettes for a pretty good price.

Mark: Yeah, I hear, I hear rumors that there was a black market in some places? Are you willing to tell me if that is true?

Dean: Well, I did almost get involved with one that was involved with financial finagling, money handling-type thing. It involved flying from Naples to Athens to Cairo, and I was told what a real wonderful deal this was. But, I was afraid of it and I just didn't do it and I am glad I didn't, but there was a lot of money made on that thing. There was quite a bit of this other black market too with material and, of course, money exchange.

Mark: So, V-E Day, you were in Naples?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: Do you recall the actual event?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Yes, I do because I remember in particular; I was heading to the officers club. But, somewhere there must have been a tent and we had, had a few drinks there first. Then there was this ditch right in front of the officers club with a bridge across it and I missed the bridge and stepped in the ditch. I don't think I ever drank that much again ever. But, that was about the whole thing. There was a lot of real, real celebrating.

Mark: Yeah, I don't suspect it was a surprise?

Dean: No, no.

Mark: I mean Germany was to be defeated eventually?

Dean: Oh, no because a good example of that, I had a mission up to Char, Yugoslavia. I was taking a Merlin engine up there for the British. When we were there, this ME-109 German fighter circled the field and, of course, we were all wondering what's this? We didn't know whether to duck or what? And the guy was just circling the field and he came in and threw up his hands and said, "I quit. We got no gas," this that and so on. This is what was really happening. The Germans were in retreat. The northern part of Italy, they were moving out fast. Their Air Forces did not have gas and things like this so, the end was very, very obvious coming.

Mark: Now, did things change after the actual German surrender for you in terms of your daily duties and that sort of thing? Or were there none?

Dean: Well, see, I really didn't get into combat.

Mark: Yeah, I understand but from your perspective, even, was there less air traffic for example?

Dean: Oh, no. In fact, there was probably more, because we did so much moving cargo and personnel around. I got involved with the Theater Air Priority Board. I was executive of it and which I assigned priorities for cargo and for personnel to travel between the United States and the Mediterranean Theater and that kept me in the office all the time. It was just like not being in the military.

Mark: Now, I expect the Japanese surrender was a little bit more of a surprise?

Dean: Well, to us it was.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: And, of course, you know the big bomb.

Mark: Yeah, right.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Which was the cause it to be in a hurry, although most a lot of us, we weren't too much aware of what was going on, as far as future plans, invasion and things like that. We weren't too much up to speed on that so, in my case it came as a real surprise.

Mark: Yeah. Now, I was going to ask about the bomb and you brought it up and it's been, as I'm sure you are well aware, a controversial subject in the last couple years.

Dean: Especially at the Smithsonian. Yeah.

Mark: Yeah, so, I am interested in your, what you thought at the time. If you can recall your thoughts at the time about the atomic bomb in particular and your reaction to the recent controversy if you might skip ahead in history here a little bit.

Dean: Okay. Well, I was in a Repo-depot when it happened in, just south of Naples and we were being shipped to the Pacific. The war was over in Europe and we were going to be shipped over there. Then this came up and this stopped it. And then I, of course, stayed over in Italy for a while longer. But the general feeling was Hurrah! Great! Wonderful! I don't know of anyone who had any feeling other than that.

Mark: Yeah. I know we are familiar with nuclear weapons radiation and this kind of thing. Was that sort, or did you realize that sort of thing at the time?

Dean: No, no, myself, and I don't think there was anybody that I could think of, that had the knowledge at that time.

Mark: Yeah, but like you mentioned you were headed to the Pacific?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: You were sure of that?

Dean: Yeah. We were in the replacement depot. We were processed and all ready to go. In fact, I think within the next day or two we would have been onboard ship.

Mark: Some veterans say that that bomb saved their lives. Is that your, do you have that reaction?

Dean: Yeah, I do and, in fact, have you read that book that was written on the Enola Gay? Gee, this guy, I don't have his name.

Mark: There have been a lot of different things...

Dean: There is a lot of them. This one was real good. This guy did a lot of research on both sides and got all the opinions of VIP-type people, the media and everything else. I didn't particularly like what this guy wrote but my personal feelings are, yes, I think Truman

Interview Transcript (continued)

made the right decision. That, if he hadn't, we were doing a lot of fire bombing over there and it was doing probably what would have continued. There would have been even more lives and Japanese lives lost and then, there was an invasion plan. And, I know, there was a contract out, as I understand it. The Japanese had said if an invasion starts against them, automatically every POW would be executed. I understand that to be true, beings that is what I've heard. Now, with an invasion there is going to be a lot of American lives lost also, so my opinion is that it was a good thing, we did save lives.

Mark: Now, this is kind of jumping ahead in history and I hate to do that. I like to take chronological but we are at the topic now. Your reaction to the recent controversy at the

Smithsonian, there is a lot of talk about revision and these types of things. I'm interested in, from your perspective, as a veteran and one who was heading over to the Pacific at this time, your reactions to that controversy if any?

Dean: You mean this Enola Gay thing?

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: Um, well, I am completely with the American Legion position on that thing and the Air Force Association. I agree with them. I think the people at the museum were wrong. I think they are out of line. Um, now...

Mark: Out of line or out of touch?

Dean: Well, I think it is because if those people themselves had been over in the jungles in the Pacific and seen what had been going on, would have been closer to it. You know, I think they are all people who came after the war. They just don't know the atrocities that had been going on. To try and turn around and give any justification for the Japanese actions, I just don't understand that. That's my opinion anyway.

Mark: Well, that is what I was asking for.

Dean: Right.

Mark: Okay, lets go back to 1940s then. Um, after the war was over, could you just describe what things were like for you after the war was actually over. From that time, until the time, you actually got back to the U.S. and got your discharge in '47?

Dean: Oh, okay, of course, from the reple duple then I went back to work in Naples. And I was working again with the sprites and the traffic business and so on. I stayed there until, well, we moved everything out of Naples and we moved up north. I was assigned up to Pisa and while I was there most of us were getting oddball jobs.

Mark: Like what for example?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: A little bit of flying. We had not mission as far as flying except for some transport. I got assigned as a supply officer for a while and one of the good jobs that I had was War Brides Officer.

Mark: War Brides Officer?

Dean: War Brides Officer.

Mark: What did that entail?

Dean: Well, they had all these Italian girls that were marrying GIs, had to be processed for shipment for the United States. I had to get all their paperwork in order and so on. And as they were getting ready for shipment to the States they were all staying at the Virago Hotel, up in that big hotel that they had for them. We made sure we got all the proper paperwork done for them and so on so when they got onboard ship there was no problems. And that was my job.

Mark: Any particular challenges? Or was it interesting work?

Dean: No, no. It was kind of an interesting one. I don't know if I should tell you this one or not but there was this one Italian girl, back years before that was, as the war is ending and the guys are going back to the States. She was, um, well, not too good character-type and she was being handed from guy to guy as they were being shipped to the States. So, her reputation wasn't very good. It turned out that we had a mechanic on the flight line or electronics who was an alcoholic but he was a wonderful technician, a wonderful mechanic, and we trusted him even though he was an alcoholic. He would get his vodka in the morning or he was a mass of nerves if he didn't. He ended up marrying this, or wanting to marry this girl. He asked the chaplain about getting married to this girl and the chaplain said, "You do know whom she is don't you?" and he said, "Well, she is no better than I am." And so he married them and I processed her because I was War Bride Officer and the two of them probably made a real good couple.

Mark: So, what kind of things might get a War Bride rejected if anything?

Dean: Well, not very much. Just a reputation like that I don't think would. But if there were more serious criminal-type background, that would.

Mark: And so, you were, like, checking criminal backgrounds and that sort of thing?

Dean: Part of it. And then making sure that the girl was cleared with her parents and things like this, especially if she was younger.

Mark: Yes, I see. Now, in terms of medical problems and disease and that sort of thing, did you check for that sort of thing as well?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Yeah, that was part of the process, but I didn't have anything to do with that part. Oh, yes, they had to go through a physical.

Mark: Like to make sure they don't bring TB and...

Dean: Right, venereal disease was the thing. There was a lot of that, of course.

Mark: Yeah, okay. Um, so, you were the War Brides Officer for how long?

Dean: Oh, that wasn't more than a couple of months.

Mark: You just got shuffled around from job to job?

Dean: Yeah, right.

Mark: Until your points came up?

Dean: Well, I then got fed up with the whole thing and decided that I wanted to go back to school. So, I applied for release from active duty and that was, let me see, oh, that was in '47. We closed up and moved north. I was up there in April, okay, in March of '47 I transferred up to Wiesbaden. In the meantime my paperwork hadn't been processed and I was more or less just sitting around there with everyone knowing I had my application in for release from active duty. I just had nothing to do practically and that only lasted for several weeks. Then I shipped back to the States.

Mark: Back to the U.S.?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: And you got the discharge?

Dean: Yeah, and, well, I was put in the Reserves.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: Was released then in July. Well, it was actually, I was released the last of May but I had 60 days terminal leave.

Mark: Um, and did you go back to school?

Dean: Yeah, I went back to the same school.

Mark: You went back to Luther College?

Dean: Luther College in Colorado.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Did you use GI Bill?

Dean: Yes.

Mark: Was it helpful for you?

Dean: Certainly.

Mark: Do you think you would have finished your school without the GI Bill?

Dean: Well, I don't think, I don't know. My parents weren't that well off-he was a rural mail carrier-but I would have had to work besides. Of course, with the GI Bill it was a lot

different. If I didn't have it, it would have been touch and go. Actually, it never would have happened because I changed my mind. I didn't want to go into medics anymore. Part of it was I was older and some of my background also. I had a very good friend of mine at Luther whose father was a doctor and he wanted to be a doctor. They wouldn't accept him into the medical college because he didn't have ah, A average, he was a B student. At that time, they were pretty much demanding As and I wasn't much better than him. So, all of that put together I said, "To heck with it."

Mark: So, what did you finally study?

Dean: I went in for just a regular education degree for teaching. I had quite a bit of credits so I had two composite majors-Science and Social Science.

Mark: Now, I have interviewed a lot of veterans who went to the University of Wisconsin here. It is a pretty big school and they tell me how the campus was crowded with veterans and that sort of thing. What was a small college like Luther College like in terms of the student body and veterans services for veterans and that sort of thing?

Dean: Yeah, that's an interesting question because, um, coming back from the war at that time is an awful lot different than coming out of Vietnam.

Mark: In what ways?

Dean: We were looked at as more or less heroes, you know, and we were respected. Not only for where we had been, but also we were older and more mature. [END SIDE A, TAPE 1] We pretty much knew where we were going and we knew how to get there-type thing. Of course, we were probably a little more popular with the females so the guys didn't like us too much for that. But, ah, I would say generally we were, you know, we were looked up to by most of the students.

Mark: Now, about what percentage of the student body do you think at that time, were veterans? Were there a lot there on campus or were you a fairly distinct minority?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Oh, we were a minority, yeah. No, I would say that we weren't more than 10 or 15 percent.

Mark: Really.

Dean: Oh, yeah, we weren't that many. I am guessing but I have a feeling that there just weren't that many.

Mark: So, in terms of housing for married student veterans and that sort of thing, were there any sort of programs like that at a small college like Luther or were you...?

Dean: Yeah, Luther always had a program for anybody. It wasn't just because of this time or anything that they would help students either. We did have dormitories but there were

also homes around the Decorah, Iowa area that would allow students to come in. I went to one for a while that this lady was alone, she lost her husband and, ah, but she had several college students at her home. There was a lot of that in Decorah.

Mark: That's not a very big town either?

Dean: No, no.

Mark: I have actually been there, so.

Dean: No, it's not big at all.

Mark: So, you finally finished school. What did you do after that?

Dean: Well, I got my degree in education and I took a job teaching high school science in Iowa, Lamont, and I was also coaching basketball and baseball. I was just kind of getting fed up, with the whole, I see the salary of teaching and I got extra, because I was coaching. But, I got more money as a lieutenant than I did teaching school.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: And then I did like the military, really. I got along real good in the military. I enjoyed it really. And I just wasn't really too happy in the civilian life. So, I put in my paperwork and said, "Hey, this Korean War is going on and if you would like to have me come back I would like to come back." I put my paperwork in then and I did get recalled then.

Mark: So, describe for me your experiences during the Korean War. You volunteered to go...

Dean: I never got to Korea. No, I, I, ah, when I got recalled they sent me straight to air controller school down in Florida. As soon as, I graduated with it I went straight over to Germany.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Where at in Germany?

Dean: At this time it was in Kaiserslautern, and I was an aircraft controller and I stayed there for that period of time. I finally got into some other research development-type work in new equipment.

Mark: Now this time, you stayed in active duty for a while?

Dean: Yeah, I stayed in now until I retired.

Mark: You went the career route that time? How was the military different from the wartime, from the World War II period through the period you were inactive duty. What had changed and what hadn't?

Dean: Yeah, there were a lot of changes, of course. When, I...over in Italy we were all very casual. We weren't, I wouldn't say, sloppy but you probably heard people talk about a 50-mission slump in their hat and we wore Cairo boots. I don't know if you have ever heard of those?

Mark: No.

Dean: They were leather boots that came halfway up. We used to get them from Cairo.

Mark: I take it they were non-issued?

Dean: No, no, that is exactly right. They were non-issued but we could do things like that. We would be running around town with our khaki shirt wide open, with the collar and so on. Of course, that is quite a bit of difference when I got back the next time. And, of course, the uniform is now in blue and it is the Air Force now. That was part of it. The casual sort of, now the war is over, we were there, the war is over and this and that and we are kind of hotshot-type people and now it is an all new mission with the Air Force. It seemed like everything was a little more serious.

Mark: Was it because of the Cold War do you think?

Dean: Yeah, I would say so.

Mark: Now, you were stationed in Germany, at least once. Perhaps even several times in your Air Force career?

Dean: That's right, three times.

Mark: That was kind of the front lines for the Cold War in Europe?

Dean: Right.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: So, I am interested in, from a career Air Force officer's perspective, the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. How serious did you take it? Where there any particular threats that you noticed in your work?

Dean: We were always watching the border-type thing, with our radar. There were some accidental penetrations on both sides; on our part and on their part. And they did create incidents. It was a little touchy type thing.

Mark: On purpose or by accident or both?

Dean: Beg your pardon?

Mark: These accidents, were they on purpose or accident?

Dean: Oh, no, they were accidental. You know, because of, well, in one case it was loss of some navigational equipment either on the aircraft or on the ground. Pilot error, possibly, not intentional. Except this one incident over in the Czechoslovakia border. They kept penetrating with their Mig-15s to the point we started running patrols up and down trying to see how come they would start coming in and then they would turn around and go back again. We ended up losing an F-84. They got, they came across and we just happened to be there in time to catch them. They went around in a circle glaring at each other and they fired and hit the wing of this one aircraft, he couldn't fly and he bailed out. But, you know, the shells, we found them afterwards were definitely on our side of the border, but they had penetrated. But, the whole reason, we found out later, was they were just doing exercises over there and it was part of their pattern. And it was not intentional on their part. Apparently it was just one of those things that just happen.

Mark: Yeah, but I expect it raised your blood pressure a little bit?

Dean: Oh, yeah, we were touchy about it before and touchy about it after, of course.

Mark: Now, in terms of what had changed in the military from World War II to your, the period you were in the career Air Force officer, was racial integration?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: And, of course, you had been with the Tuskegee Airmen at one point in time. I am interested in, your perspective on how that may or may not have changed the military. Was it a traumatic experience to integrate racially or did it go fairly smoothly?

Dean: Well, when I was up there in Michigan if we, off duty, would go downtown and, of course, all of the black soldiers were all together. There was no mixing. We had our own club somewhere or a place to go and they didn't go there. We kept separated all of the time. I don't remember any incidents of fighting or anything like that. It seems like we got along real good other than we kept away from each other.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: That's in World War II?

Dean: That was in World War II, right. Then, when I got back in '47 or, well, let's see, '52, then, when I got back in, um, there was, ah...well, of course, myself being from Wisconsin, I am different from someone from Georgia.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: And I think that is really the only difference. There were quite a few Southern boys who still maintained their, you know, their attitude.

Mark: And didn't mind telling you about it?

Dean: Right, of course, you know, in their little groups or with others.

Mark: Now, you know, some parts of the country were segregated, you know. Drinking fountains and that sort of thing. The military is federal. Were there any such things as segregated? Anything within the military itself? And how did the customs of one part of the country affect, um, the military if at all?

Dean: Okay, ah, as far as my associations with them, I never saw any problems at all. If there was, ah, for example, this one project I was on, this colored lieutenant got along well with everybody and everybody got along well with him. He did his job and everyone was happy. Everywhere I went it was along that same line. There still were some of these people that took offense. For example, when I was stationed in South Carolina we would have a home golf match between the golf club downtown and the one on base but we didn't dare have any colored golfers on our team. And also, at that same time, I remember on the golf course this colored golfer who was not playing with us but was playing somewhere else went to the water fountain and really upset the guys I was with from this downtown outfit. You know, those things were happening, but as far as the military people themselves I don't think that, you know, I think that integration just worked. If there were any hard feelings, it would not have been on a colored side as much as it would be on the Southern boy, a white boy side.

Mark: Yeah, and the military took steps to, um, insure, well, if possible good relations?

Dean: Certainly and there would be no favoritism or opposite, right?

Mark: In the period that you were in active duty, did you notice any particular changes in the Air Force itself?

Dean: Changes in the Air Force?

Mark: Yeah, just in general? You know, in terms of, well, we have already talked about race relations. Discipline, family life, you know. There is this proverbial military brat, um,

Interview Transcript (continued)

just sort of general impressions may or may not have changed during the 20 years you were on active duty as a career officer?

Dean: Well, during World War II, of course, there wasn't much concern about family that I was involved because I was overseas all the time.

Mark: Yeah, right.

Dean: But, when I got back in again afterwards the Air Force was as an organization that was very family orientated. We were all, a family-type thing as far, as housing, ah, and things like that. To me I was very impressed. The Air Force really wanted to give their people a feeling that we are a family. All of us, no matter what your rank was or what your assignment is or anything. And I felt that, that was quite strongly done by the Air Force throughout my experience.

Mark: Did you have kids and did you raise them in a military setting?

Dean: Yeah, I had one born in Germany and one born in South Carolina.

Mark: Yeah, how was that?

Dean: Well, the one born in South Carolina was first and went over as a very young baby to Wiesbaden, Germany. We had no problems. We had a very good hospital and medical care and things like that. Then while we were there, the other one was born and everything was fine. We had no problems with anything, even the paperwork as far as citizenship and so on. Everything was more or less greased I guess.

Mark: As they got older and went to school, I mean military families move around a lot, did that cause any problems or was that not a problem?

Dean: No, in my case it wasn't because I was late with my kids.

Mark: I see.

Dean: They were very young the time I was getting out. Some did if they had kids in school. But there was no problem. It was no different than anybody else. We were living off base, you know, we were almost like civilians, except I had a blue suit on when I went to work.

Mark: Yeah, um, okay. I suppose we could talk about the Vietnam War a bit and your involvement in it.

Dean: Yeah, it was a short period of time. I was in research and development in the Tactical Air Warfare Center at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. We tested a lot of new equipment to make sure it was ready before it was shipped over to Vietnam. The commanding general

Interview Transcript (continued)

of the Tactical Air Warfare Center, it was his policy that the project officer and any of these pieces would go with that equipment to make sure it was installed properly and used properly and that's how I got over there.

Mark: What sort of equipment was this?

Dean: This was radar and communications equipment.

Mark: I see. So, you went to Vietnam a couple of times?

Dean: No, just once.

Mark: Just one time?

Dean: I was only over there a couple of months.

Mark: Why don't you describe it for me?

Dean: Because we were developing a total computerized control, you know, a radar control-type thing, air defense and so on type thing. We were getting it computerized and using this newer equipment and I was on the team that was working on that so, that was the reason to go over there was to help these people to learn the new system and use it. We had to develop the whole operations plan. It changed a lot of tackle operations. That was the purpose of this team that went over. I was part of this team so, it was TDY. It wasn't a permanent assignment. The purpose of that team was to develop the new OPS order and to integrate in this new system.

Mark: So, where in Vietnam did you go? Was it Ton Son Nuet or some...?

Dean: Yeah, it was Ton Son Nuet Mack V headquarters where we worked very closely with.

Mark: Yeah. What were your impressions of the country and of the war and the war effort what was going on there?

Dean: Well, it was a new place for me. And, of course, the first things that I think of is those heavy rains.

Mark: I seem to have got there in the monsoon season.

Dean: Yeah, and very dusty and so on. But there was always that there, you know. They had rockets come into Ton Son Nuet once in awhile.

Mark: Yeah.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: And you never knew where the guys were, the other guys. If you went from one base to another and so on, you were in possible hostile area all the time.

Mark: Yeah, now this is what year? Do you recall offhand?

Dean: Yeah, I've got it written down here somewhere. Let me see, if I have it. '67 but I can't find it here. It's got to be '67.

Mark: Yeah, um, as far as, the moral of the troops there and everything? Did you pick up on the war effort and the soldiers or the airmen in this case, the views on it and that sort of thing?

Dean: Well, everything I saw was definitely high level. They were well trained. They knew what their job was. They knew what their mission was. The spirits were high. The moral was high. I didn't see anything other than that.

Mark: Yeah. So, in terms of Vietnam and how it affected the military in general, do you have any particular impressions on that?

Dean: Only that if you have never been to Nam and you were in the Air Force, I don't know, I think you were respected a little more if you could say, "Oh, yeah, I had my time in Nam."

Mark: That you had been there?

Dean: Yeah, and, ah, because there were a lot of people, because of their assignments and so on. It's not their fault always that they just never got there. But if you were going, especially if you have a career in the military and if you went through the Vietnam time period, ah, it would seem like you should have had some time in Vietnam.

Mark: Yeah. In terms of the moral in general in the Air Force at the time, did the war have an effect on that at all? For example, in the Army moral went way down, so, that by the early 1970s the military was at perhaps its low point in the 20th century. Now, I realize that you got out in 1969 but I'm interested to know if you detected any sort of changes in attitude and morale in the Air Force as a result of the war?

Dean: It's hard for me to answer that one on the basis of my assignment. I didn't really get a chance to because we were very high tech, high level type. And, you know, everybody had a real important job to do and, you know, I don't think I could see that the normal Air Force person his, life was different. So, you know, first the name of our outfit, Tackle Air Warfare Center, you know, we had a high tech mission and moral was real high. Now, I could detect a normal, necessary, what normal-type assignment in the Air Force there might have been a moral problem.

Mark: But from your perspective you didn't see any?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: No, I sure didn't.

Mark: Okay, so you got out in '69?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: For what reason?

Dean: Well, I retired. I was retired for disability though. The Air Force gave me a 40% disability.

Mark: Was it something military related?

Dean: Yeah, but not combat.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: But I really wanted to stay in a little longer, but I went through the evaluation board. And I wanted to get to Nam again on another piece of equipment that I was working on but they wouldn't let me stay in.

Mark: Um, okay. So now you're really a veteran. You are out completely now?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: Um, I'm interested in, first of all, as you indicated there was a medical reason for you to get out. After you got out how was your relationship with the Veterans Administration? Did you have any at all?

Dean: Yeah, I sure did and all I can say is, is they are a wonderful outfit. They really took care of me and they, well, they raised my disability too. But the whole thing is they did send me to a rehabilitation school and things like that. I go to the VA clinic regular and I hear people griping, moaning and groaning and so on but I don't think that is really right. I think they are a really terrific outfit and they have been real good to me.

Mark: Just to get the facts straight, after you got out of the service did you come back to Wisconsin or did you go to Florida right away or where did you go?

Dean: Okay, when I got out I went back to South Carolina for a short time and then moved down to Florida and then got out from there in '69.

Mark: I see. Um, now, in terms of veterans organizations and reunions and that sort of thing, your case is sort of unusual in that you spent a career in the military opposed to just one conflict. But I will pose these questions anyway and we will see where we go with them.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Did you join any of the major veteran groups at any point, like the Legion or the VFW and that sort of thing?

Dean: Yeah, I, yeah. I had belonged to the American Legion when I was going to college. After I got out that first time but I didn't stay with it. And then, when I got out this last time and, of course, with a disability I got into the DAV. Then maybe a couple of years ago I also joined the American Legion again so I belong to those two.

Mark: Yeah, let's try to take a look at this more closely. When you joined the VFW in college, um...

Dean: No, it was the American Legion.

Mark: American Legion, I'm sorry, in college, for what reason did you join?

Dean: Well, I guess the big reason was that they had an American Legion Club up on the hill, which were a bar and a dance hall. It was off limits to the college students because Luther College was a church school.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: And I was a veteran and so I think that was the key reason.

Mark: Yeah, so it wasn't the Legion's policy on communism. It was, um...

Dean: I never went to a meeting during the time I was there. All I did was have the card that got me into the place.

Mark: And when you joined for the second time?

Dean: Well, that was the DAV, or the Legion the next time.

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: Um, I have gone to very few meetings and one of the reasons is I was given my membership free because I did a lot of computer work for them.

Mark: So, I see.

Dean: And I, they wanted to pay me and I said, "Nah, I don't want any pay for it" and stuff. We finally got around to this so, I haven't been to many meetings but I get the American Legion Magazine. And, of course, I know the American Legion position and on some of their areas and I agree with them. The flag burning, the Enola Gay thing and so on.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: The DAV, they are a little different and you joined them when you got out the second time. How did you get hooked up with them?

Dean: Well, because of having been qualified right away, you know, you had to have special qualifications.

Mark: Yeah, right.

Dean: Then the only thing that was different with them and the American Legion, the DAV is socially, is far behind the American Legion. I did find quite a few people that did do quite a bit of complaining about their ills and this and that and not getting proper treatment. There was quite a bit of griping going on in this outfit. Very seldom did I hear anyone give praise to the VA or the VA clinic or anything like that. That was the big difference I noticed between the outfits.

Mark: Now, in terms of reunions, have you attended any or are you involved in any sort of unit coordination or that sort of thing?

Dean: Oh, yeah. My aviation cadet class, 44K, I got very closely involved with them as far as lining up our membership and getting in touch with everybody. I kept the database on it and published the membership list, but I never got to one of the reunions and they have had three of them. They have always been so far away and I have had other commitments at the time.

Mark: When did these activities start, these reunion activities?

Dean: This one in 44K, well, let's see, that started about four years ago. So it was, we didn't have it before so it is relatively new.

Mark: These are guys that are a little later on in years.

Dean: Yeah, oh, yeah, very definitely. And, um, there was a lot of these guys that were in these classes that, of course, belonged to different bomb groups, fighter groups, this and that but who had reunions that they went to. Now, I do also belong to one called Mediterranean Air Transport Service who is North Africa and Italy '43, '44 and '45. And just recently we have gotten together on this and I am just now, or I had been, publishing the membership list for it and I just started. In fact, I got the first page almost done of a newsletter which is just starting that I got stuck with. So that is a lot of people have some real interesting war stories. I suggested it on the basis that not only the history of the outfit would be of interest, which I have done a lot of research on. And especially over at Maxwell Field, they have a lot of things over at classified that are now declassified and are available now. And then, besides the history, I know a lot of guys have got stories to tell.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: And so, I suggested this and boy I got response and then I ended up being stuck with it.

Mark: That is what you get for speaking up. That is one thing you learned in the military, don't volunteer.

Dean: Exactly and it is a lot of fun too. It's interesting; it takes a lot of time.

Mark: Yeah, but it is probably worth it?

Dean: I am enjoying doing it. I know the others are going to enjoy it.

Mark: Now, I have this note that I took earlier about the Tuskegee Airmen veterans and their reunions. You have had some contact with them and you're not a member but you have had some dealings with them?

Dean: Yeah, what happened was in the Air Force magazine there was an article here, oh, probably pretty close to a year now about them having a reunion and they had a name of a person. And, of course, since I knew that the 99th was up there and I was up there and so on, I wrote to this person and told these incidents that I have told you and so on, and I

got an immediate reply. This person was in charge of this reunion and so they gave me a name of somebody that I got in touch with who had written a book-type thing and so on. In fact, I am still, in fact, I just sent a letter to him just yesterday again and it was, I found out from him that, there were 36 or 37 chapters throughout the United States. So, they said, I have seen a couple of histories on them and a newspaper article printed and so on and, in fact, I have a copy of it, I think. It was the Tuskegee Airmen. I think I taped it because I had been associated with them.

Mark: Yeah. You pretty much exhausted all the questions I have. Is there anything you would like to go over a little bit again, anything skipped over?

Dean: Yeah. There is this one thing, I just thought of just once and I jotted it down here as a reminder. When I was in Italy, and at the first part there in flying transport missions this one day, I was assigned to take a diplomat from Naples over to the supply of Bulgaria. We had dealings with the Russians, were very touchy, we had to have a clearance well in advance before we could fly into any of those countries like Bulgaria. We had to tell them who the crews were, the numbers of the airplane, and this and that, and so on, and they were very strict on this. Well, it turned out that when this flight was ready to go the pilot that was supposed to do it-I don't know for what reason he couldn't-but I got his ID card. I was Lieutenant Smith if I remember right. That took care of that part of it. And then the aircraft tail number had to paint over because the original airplane was in for a hundred-hour inspection. So, we had an illegal number and I am an illegal person flying it. We get to supply of Bulgaria and the Russian soldier comes out looking at the manifest. And he sees this diplomat, his wife and baby and he looks at the manifest and the baby's name was not on the manifest. And he said, "Okay, you cannot get off of the airplane." I wish I could remember the name of that diplomat. But anyway, they told us

Interview Transcript (continued)

you got to leave; you have half an hour to get out of here. I said, "Wait a minute. We used up about half of our gas. Can we get refueled?" "Nope." And I said, "How about a weather briefing, I know there is some bad weather coming in over the Apennines to get back to Naples." "Nope, you have to go in half an hour." So, we took off and we just barely got back to Naples. It was really touch and go, it was scary.

Mark: I bet it was.

Dean: And I remember that when we did get on the ground the crew chief, the first thing he did was climb out on the wing and put a dip stick down there to see how much gas there was and he couldn't find any.

Mark: So, I suppose that you were gliding, the last little part there?

Dean: Well, yeah, I was able to taxi all the way in but that was about it. And one of the interesting things is, along this line, is we had very poor navigation aides at that time. I remember it was getting dark and I could see the Isle of Capri and I could see Mount Caucasus and I knew where the field is but you can't see those lights because we used what we called blitz lights. You had to be lined up on the runway in order to see them. If you were off to the side or on the backside, you couldn't see any lights. And I guessed

and it just happened to hit it just right and if we hadn't, I doubt that we would have gotten in.

Mark: But you did.

Dean: Boy we did!

Mark: And you're here to talk to me.

Dean: Yeah, right. But I wish I had known the name of that diplomat. I keep thinking his name was Burn but it couldn't have been because he was pretty heavy in the White House at that time.

Mark: But you think he was a notable person?

Dean: Yeah, he was and I can imagine how he felt having to come back again with his wife and baby and then under those dangerous conditions.

Mark: Yeah, interesting.

Dean: But I just happened to think of that thing.

Mark: Well, I thank you for taking the hour and a half. I appreciate it.

Dean: Yeah, you have a telephone bill there!

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Yeah, well, that is okay. I don't do this all that often and I am getting some good stories so it is worth it.

Dean: I don't know that I have been able to give you anything or not but if I have, I hope so. Are you writing a book?

Mark: Well, what we are doing is just compiling--

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]