

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
MICHAEL DEAN
U.S. Army, Korean War
1995

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Dean, Michael, (1931-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (30 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (30 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Michael Dean, a Madison, Wis. native, discusses his experience during the Korean War as a heavy equipment operator building the airstrip at K-55, and his memories of the Korean War. Dean comments on his induction into the military, basic training at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri) and touches upon racial tension there. He mentions United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) work, and impressions of the multinational troops in Korea. Dean comments on the construction of the K-55 airstrip near Osan, recreation at the base, and reading the "Stars and Stripes" newspaper. He mentions discussions of the Cold War and communism. Dean recounts his return to the United States including negative reactions to veterans, duty as a rifle instructor at Breckinridge (Kentucky), the GI Bill, and finding post-war employment. He refers to psychological effects of the war, and conversations with other veterans about these effects. Also mentioned is participation in Veterans Day activities at the state capitol in Madison (Wisconsin), and involvement in the AMVETS.

Biographical Sketch

Dean (b. July 27, 1931) was conscripted into the Army and served with the 839th Co. B during the Korean War. After the war he returned to Madison, Wis. and opened his own business.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

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

Interview Transcript

Mark: We'll just let her rip. Okay. Today's date is May 23, 1995. This is Mark Van Eells, Archivist, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Michael Dean of Madison, a veteran of the Korean War. Good morning. Thanks for coming in.

Dean: Thank you. It's nice to be here.

Mark: On this drizzly, miserable morning.

Dean: And I've got something in my nose, Mark. I don't usually talk this, quite so nasal.

Mark: I see. I suppose we should start off by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing up to World War II.

Dean: Well, I was born in Madison, raised in Madison. Before World War II I was just a kid living at home. During World War II if I could keep going--

Mark: Sure, oh, absolutely.

Dean: During World War II my father was drafted in the Navy and he was in the Pacific. And, of course, being a young man, I followed where he was, or tried to. And read everything I could about what was going on in the war. That's basically it.

Mark: And you had other relatives in World War II as well.

Dean: Yes. As I say, all the male members of my family -- all of them went to the Pacific. None of them were in Europe where most of our troops basically were. They were all in the Pacific.

Mark: Just coincidence I suppose.

Dean: Uh hum.

Mark: Do you recall the Depression and--

Dean: Yes, I remember.

Mark: I'm interested in the impact perhaps the Depression had and World War II had on you and your family--shaping your views.

Interview Transcript (continued)

- Dean: Well, my father was a physician and during this time he would treat people and they didn't have insurance and very little money because of the Depression. And we were, Madison or Dane County was agrarian county at that time so I remember many times his patients would come to our door at night and give us cheese, bacon, breads and everything. That's how they would pay their respect and also what they owed because there was no way that they could pay the money.
- Mark: And this isn't Dean Care by some chance is it?
- Dean: Yes.
- Mark: Really?
- Dean: Yes, yes, yes. It's a little bit bigger now, Mark.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Dean: He was--
- Mark: But this is the "Dean" of "Dean Care?"
- Dean: Yes. My grandfather was the original Joe Dean who started the Dean Clinic. So, as far as that goes, we always could eat because the people who he treated would honestly bring us food. And he'd be very grateful and that would be the end of the bill.
- Mark: No actually, not to interject my own experiences, but my grandfather was a dentist during this period and we had the same experience.
- Dean: In Madison?
- Mark: No, in Manitowoc County. A lot of chickens. We had a lot of chickens.
- Dean: Yeah, we had chickens. Geese, a lot of hams. We were well fed. But that was my, you know, that's the mostly the Depression but then I had, my mother's side of the family were railroad people and they lived a lot differently than most people. As my mother said when I was growing up we were very poor but we didn't know it. I thought that was a cute way of expressing it.
- Mark: And what about World War II? You mentioned before I turned the tape on, as a ten-year-old boy that--

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Yeah, Pearl Harbor was a very frightening experience for our family and myself. And then heard about the Bataan Death March and rape of Nanking and so forth. These things affected my attitudes tremendously as a very young man, young boy.

Mark: So, you grew older and went through high school. And you were eventually conscripted in 1951.

Dean: That's right.

Mark: So, the Korean War had been going on by that time?

Dean: Yes.

Mark: Do you remember when the war broke out?

Dean: On the 25th of June 1950.

Mark: You must have been about 17 or something in there?

Dean: I was probably 18. Yes, I was 18. I turned 19 that July, a month after it started. I got my first notice of draft--Mr. Harry Truman sent me a letter starting out "Greetings"--you've all seen it and heard of it. I was in the University of Wisconsin at the time and they allowed me to finish up that one semester. I was in the spring semester. And then after that I was ordered to Milwaukee in September.

Mark: There was no student deferment at this time?

Dean: There were, yes. You could get, if you were in ROTC, R-O-T-C. I was not in ROTC and because of that I was quite vulnerable to the draft. Also, Madison--it's interesting--Madison being a university town, so many of the young men at that time, draft age, were in the university and they had the ROTC draft which panicked a lot of people who then joined the Air Force and the Navy for four years because they didn't want nothing to do with what Korea looked to them.

Mark: The ground combat.

Dean: Yeah. And I took my chances and saying well, I'll take the two years and hope that it comes out.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: I'm sorry. [INTERCOM INTERRUPTION] When the war broke out, do you remember the event and do you remember what you were thinking and did you think, geez, this might have an impact on my life. Or did that occur to you?

Dean: It didn't occur to me that summer too strongly because--and then, I don't know when it was. We did really well in September in the Korean War when MacArthur went around the North Korean troops at Inchon. We thought, at that time I thought the thing was going to wrap up having no idea that November, December that year our Army was almost decimated by the entrance of the Chinese. At that time I became very aware that I was probably going to get involved.

Mark: I see. And when the actually greeting came in the mail you weren't terribly surprised.

Dean: No, I wasn't surprised. No, there were very few left who were draft age because--all of my buddies were in the Air Force or the Navy.

Mark: I see. So, if you would describe your induction into the military. You mentioned you went to Milwaukee for the physical. Perhaps you could just walk me through the steps of the physical exam and off to basic training.

Dean: First we went into, got our physical in January and I was classified 1A. That was in Milwaukee. They give you a pretty good physical. After that you just sort of wait for your induction orders. That's how I assumed it was going to happen and April seemed logical to me, or May, and they did let me finish the semester which most people said if you are drafted, they'll let you finish that semester.

Mark: Now as, in this physical, was there a psychological test that you remember?

Dean: No, no.

Mark: I've been reading about these sorts of things. In World War I they had all the shell shock problems and then in World War II they tried to screen these sorts of things out, unsuccessfully. I was just wondering--

Dean: No, not to my recollection, Mark. Nothing. Once you were in the, actually inducted, they gave you a test. An aptitude, more or less, test, to see where you might fit in better into this Army. And that was about a three or four hour test at Fort Sheridan after I was inducted. And then they give you sort of an IQ out of that. Then they have rafts of things that you may want to go into. But this was sort of funny because it seems like anybody who had any

Interview Transcript (continued)

experience whether it's driving a bulldozer or in a kitchen, they would be put in something completely irrelevant from what their experiences were. We used to laugh at that. Maybe I just had two or three people it happened to and assumed that everywhere was mis-categorized.

Mark: So, it was at Fort Sheridan then?

Dean: Fort Sheridan.

Mark: You were actually in the military. Is that where you got the uniform and the haircut?

Dean: Uniform, haircut, yeah. I wish I had brought my picture of my haircut. I still have that, Mark. Fantastic. I look like I'm a basketball player with no hair. We stayed at Fort Sheridan to get all this stuff--aptitude tests--and then I was sent to Fort Leonard Wood via troop train. That was an experience and a half.

Mark: Why is that?

Dean: Well, you're all crowded together, you all look miserable, you're all homesick; they all know they're going someplace where they don't want to go. It's sort of--the reality sunk in on that troop train to Fort Leonard Wood. We got to Leonard Wood that night, very late, about 11:30, 12:00. It was raining; it smelled horrible there because they had these coal-burning stoves. That would make you sick. At Fort Leonard Wood I was put through basic infantry training and then into engineer school.

Mark: Now this basic military training lasted about how long?

Dean: Eight week of infantry. Eight weeks of heavy equipment operation.

Mark: I see. And what did the training entail? Did you have much weapons training?

Dean: Oh, sure.

Mark: A lot of classroom, military courtesy, that type of thing?

Dean: All three, all three. But mostly I would say we were out working in the field. By working in the field I mean rifle--I was being trained, obviously, to be a rifleman at that level. Everybody, I guess in eight weeks course was trained to be a rifleman. They did give you some machine-gun training, throwing hand grenades. No mortars. I think that's a different area that I probably would

Interview Transcript (continued)

have gotten into after eight weeks without going to the heavy equipment school.

Mark: Now, I remember basic training and there were a lot of four-letter words and that sort of thing.

Dean: Oh, the language--

Mark: A lot of screaming and yelling. Was that your experience as well?

Dean: No. I was treated, I thought, with quite a bit of respect. The people, who were in charge of my battalion wherever it was that we were trained at, were pretty competent cadre. I became very close to one of them who was a college graduate at Clemson. He was a very fine man. No. Number one, if you don't screw off, do your job, they treated me very well. A lot of complaints about the food but that's normal. Anybody goes anywhere they'll complain about the food.

Mark: The food and the weather.

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: Now, what about the different kinds of people that were training there? Were there a lot of people that you knew from your induction at Fort Sheridan? Did they come from all over the country to train there? I'm interested in how people all got along together.

Dean: Well, the 5th Army Headquarters is in the Chicago area, which is Fort Sheridan. The 5th Army takes most of the mid-west. Most of these men that I was being trained with were from the mid-west. A lot of Detroit people. A good group of people from the farm countries of Dakotas, Minnesota. We had some easterners. They were definitely different than the mid-western boy. They had a different attitude, very cocky, flamboyant, very loud. They were, sometimes you might call them the troublemakers. They didn't seem to fit in like the farm community that I was raised in.

Mark: Now, you say troublemakers. Was there any sort of serious tension? Or just sort of goofing around?

Dean: No, they were smart enough--they were very wily but they were the bitches. Nothing was good, everything was bad. This is not Boy Scouts; this is not going to church group. This is an area where you're learning to survive. And the best way you can do it is, I think, is learn from the people who've been

Interview Transcript (continued)

there. Well, that wasn't good enough for some of these easterners. They had better ways of doing things. Do you see what I mean?

Mark: I married an easterner. I know.

Dean: Did you? I'm being very general now.

Mark: No, I understand.

Dean: The easterners who were in our battalion were definitely very visible folk. That's a nice way of saying it.

Mark: By this time the military was supposed to have been desegregated.

Dean: Yes, it was.

Mark: Did you train with some Blacks?

Dean: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

Mark: Was that--

Dean: We had probably, I would say 20 percent of our company--we trained as a company, in a battalion and, of course, platoons--but I'd say 20 percent of our company was Black.

Mark: Was it a source of contention, trouble, or anything?

Dean: No. Well, we had one--yes, we had one almost riot in our barracks when a young man from North Dakota who had honestly never seen a Black person--at this time they were called Colored--and this man, without knowing, just called him Black and about seven of them got their bayonets out and were going for him. And I was between him and these boys and I sort of said, "He doesn't know what he's saying. Listen to him." and they backed off. Yeah, they were, as a group, they could be very tough. They wouldn't take anything. If you know what I mean?

Mark: Yeah, defensive.

Dean: Yes. They would challenge you if you called them any bad names. At that time Black was bad; now it's acceptable.

Mark: Yeah. Did they, too, come from mid-western regions?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: No, they were mostly eastern and also Detroit, some Chicago.

Mark: I see.

Dean: I found them to be very cooperative troops. I mean they were, I thought, good soldiers. One of our, our Master Sergeant was a Korean War veteran and his name was Gatewood--I don't know his first name--but he was the most impressive man I'd ever met up until that part of my life.

Mark: So, when it came to the construction part, engineering part of your training, did you go to that school with the same people you went through basic training with?

Dean: No. We, let's say that they would take, of a company of 200 men approximately, probably 15 went from our company and then we met with other students from other companies of the battalions would be trained at the time.

Mark: The people in the engineering training, were they different than the people you'd trained with in basic training?

Dean: No. If there was, I didn't see any.

Mark: I'm wondering if they're perhaps--you had some college already--

Dean: Yes.

Mark: --and I'm wondering if some of the people you trained with in the engineering school had college as well. Not to your recollection?

Dean: No. As a matter of fact if we get into it later on in the interview I could mention something that happened on my way back from Korea, which might answer this question. Do you want me to interject that now?

Mark: Sure, why not.

Dean: Well, when I was being rotated back from Korea the lieutenant who was in charge of our company asked me to take this packet and in the packet there were ten records of these ten soldiers who were being rotated out of our base here. And I was put in charge of these ten people. Well, I was a PFC and there were either corporals and sergeants in this group and I asked the lieutenant, "Hey, wait a minute. These guys out rank me. Why am I in

Interview Transcript (continued)

charge?” And the lieutenant said, “Because we think you’re the most qualified to handle this.” I said, “Well, that’s wonderful. I’ve never handled anything like this in my life.” Well, he told the rest of the men Private First Class Dean is in charge, you do whatever he says, he’s speaking for me, and if you do not obey him it’s just like disobeying me. But I thought that was very funny. Well, in Japan when we were waiting to get on the troop ship I had some time--this packet--I started looking through the packet. Of the ten men in that packet, five of them had IQs of 80 or less. The other five were maybe around 100. So to answer your question, if there were a lot of--I didn’t find the heavy equipment school full of intellects if that’s your question.

Mark: I was just wondering.

Dean: It’s a good question ‘cause I didn’t think about it until bring these packets back. Because when I was there I found them to be very nice men and very hardworking, mostly farm kids.

Mark: That’s interesting actually.

Dean: Well, they had, so many of the farm kids had experience with tractors and heavy equipment that naturally they funneled those into that ‘cause they caught on extremely fast. They were really good. I watched them a lot and learned from them.

Mark: So, in your training then, your technical training I suppose--was it called that then?

Dean: That’s a good word for it.

Mark: That’s what they call it now. That’s what we called it in the Air Force anyway.

Dean: Yeah, I would think it’s kind of technical. You’re operating these huge machines and you have to know what you’re doing.

Mark: And so that’s what you were doing? Big earthmovers or what sort of big equipment were you trained to use?

Dean: Well, bulldozers--we actually trained on D-7s, D-8s, scrapers. We didn’t do any, I can’t think of the name of the machine now. What they were obviously doing, and we didn’t know that until we got over there, we were going to move a lot of earth because we were going to build the biggest air base in the Pacific and we had to put in railroads and we had to put in bridges, we had to

Interview Transcript (continued)

put in fill, then we put concrete down. This type of training was, at Fort Leonard Wood, was basically to do that.

Mark: And this training lasted--

Dean: Eight weeks.

Mark: --eight weeks. And so what are the steps then between finishing your training and going to Korea?

Dean: Well, they sent us all home on leave until the rotation starts coming back from Korea and then we would come in and fill their places. I assumed that's, 'cause they gave us 20 days leave, and then we were ordered to go to San Francisco and boarded a troopship at that time. So I had 20 days at home between my training and overseas.

Mark: And so you went overseas with people you trained with.

Dean: Some of them. I knew probably ten people, you know, closely. On a troopship you've got about 3,500 men on a troopship.

Mark: So, as you're going over there how long did you expect to stay?

Dean: One year.

Mark: Is that what it was?

Dean: This is what they told us and this is what they did. We were there for one year and all the men on this troopship knew that. Now, infantry was different. If you joined the Army, then it's a three-year hitch and 18 months would be overseas. Whether it's Korea, or Germany, or--we're building air bases that time in Morocco, in Algeria, too--in Spain--and if you were a draftee it's one year. If you enlisted it's 18 months. Overseas.

Mark: I see. That's a little different from the Vietnam one-year period.

Dean: Wasn't Vietnam one year?

Mark: Yeah. For everybody. Draftee, non-draftee.

Dean: Non-draftee? Oh, I didn't know that. I see.

Mark: That's interesting.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: They changed the policy then.

Mark: So, what was your voyage like overseas?

Dean: Dreadful. Just dreadful. One experience, Mark, I've got to tell you this. You're in this hull of this ship and its leaving San Francisco on a beautiful day --you can't believe the climate out there, it's just gorgeous. Blue sky, blue ocean, Golden Gate Bridge, everything was great. When you get outside of San Francisco and the ground underneath, the sea, what do you call it--the bottom of the ocean is very rough. And there was a lot of heavy wind as we left. And we're down, I don't know, 20-50 feet down below in this thing and there's bunks--eight, sixteen--one guy is about a foot off the ground, then the next one, the next one--layered six up in the air. I don't know how many people in a room this big. There might have been 400 of us. And a lot of them were seasick. I was the second bunk up, which was a nice place; you just crawl right in. I didn't feel very well but I didn't eat 'cause I didn't want to bluh. But the guys who did eat they were splashing vomit all night long. You just, I covered myself up. And they were very sick. That was the most miserable group of people I've ever seen in my life.

Mark: I'm sure.

Dean: It was bad.

Mark: It's very common, actually. I hear the story all the time but it's always interesting.

Dean: Yeah, we're sick. Can you imagine vomiting from six feet up; what it does down below? Well, anyway, the next day it had passed. We were still pretty ill, then by the third day, gee it was just gorgeous. We were going to Hawaii to pick up some more troops and get some water.

Mark: And did everyone sort of get their sea legs so to speak?

Dean: Yeah, after that it was fine. We read books, some guys had cards, we sat around the deck. I read Mickey Spillane. I remember that, "I, The Jury." That was his first book. Do you ever read him?

Mark: I'm familiar with the genre but I haven't actually read him.

Dean: Yeah, he's fun, fun boy.

Mark: And so the trip lasted how long?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Seventeen days.

Mark: That's kind of a long time to be on a ship.

Dean: Yeah, it is.

Mark: Where'd you land when you finally got to Korea? You went to Japan first.

Dean: Yeah, Tokyo. Went to Tokyo then took a train from Tokyo down to Kyushu, down the southern part of the island. There's an Air Force base called Fukioko. I'm not pronouncing it right but that's where we, then went from there and landing in Korea the next day.

Mark: And where in Korea?

Dean: They called it Suwon, S-U-W-O-N.

Mark: I'm not sure where that is.

Dean: It's about 20 miles south of Seoul. And I did go through Hiroshima on this troop train. I was very interested in what I saw there 'cause the city had been built up. You'd never know--or the part I could see--you never knew that it was destroyed six years before.

Mark: Was that pretty much the case with the rest of Japan that you had seen?

Dean: Yes, absolutely. I saw no evidence of war. Then when I got to Korea, of course it changed like night and day 'cause it was all around us then.

Mark: Well, there was a war going on at the time.

Dean: You bet. Strange tanks lying here and there. Things burnt out and so forth.

Mark: So, when you landed in Korea, what were your first impressions?

Dean: It was Saturday night, the day before Easter. I think it was the 12th of April 1952. And, again, it was at night. There were no facilities for us. There must have been 12 or 15 of us. We just sort of slept on the floor under desks and so forth like at an old school house, I believe it was. The next day we were shipped to our unit.

Mark: Which was at Osan?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Yes. Well, no. First we went, we stayed at Suwon. The next day I was pulled out of this group by some lieutenant. He offered me a job to take care of the educational, you know, it's a world education system. I can't remember, it's a long, about six letters long. Something about education. It's like you go to school, what you call it--

Mark: It was a U.N. thing?

Dean: Yeah, yeah. UNESCO, I think it was UNESCO. United Nations--Yes. The lieutenant wanted me to be his assistant to help in this area, which I said, okay, I'll do that. And I stayed there for five days. After five days sitting on my rump doing nothing I said, "Lieutenant, I'm out of here. I want to go back--I was trained to do bulldozer--I want a bulldozer." He thought I was nuts but I got to Osan within five days after the lieutenant offered me this position.

Mark: Just briefly, with your work with, I'm interested in the U.N. and how it operated and what your dealings with it were. All these different nationalities coming together.

Dean: Well, we were pretty isolated; Mark, where we were and we didn't see any of that. But I did go to Seoul one day and we did bump into some U.N. troops, the Turks were the ones that I was most impressed with. They had a battalion I believe, maybe a regiment; it was some, less than 1,000 or maybe a little over 1,000 men. I was most impressed with them. They were very upbeat, smiling group, very aggressive in many ways and I knew from my readings that the Chinese did not like to be in front of the Turks.

Mark: Because they were--

Dean: They were awfully aggressive, yes. Not only that but they loved going at night, cross the lines and killing as many as they could and bring back some captives for information. They were very effective at it. Where they trained, I have no idea how they got this way, but they were really something.

Mark: That's interesting.

Dean: But outside of that I really didn't have any contact with any other troops. Oh, wait, just before I rotated four P-51s came in with South African pilots. And they were just like the movies. I mean they had their scarves on, their blue scarves, their beautiful helmets, dressed to the nines. They just came into our air base. It just opened up. And they were fantastic. They were cocky little devils, too. Smiling, laughing, all of them had mustaches, their hair was perfect. They think they're going to go on television or something like that.

Interview Transcript (continued)

But they were a wonderful group of guys. Very young--25, 23. I never met them; I just watched them from a distance. I wanted to meet them. They were really characters. And they could speak English. The Turks couldn't speak English.

Mark: I lost my train of thought there. So, you finally got to Osan. I know there's still an air base there but I'm not exactly sure where it is.

Dean: It's called K-55. Again, that's about 10 miles south of Suwon. I imagine if you look at a map it's probably about 40 miles south of Suwon. It's on the map. Osan. And our air base--we built probably about 2 miles from the city of Osan which was basically destroyed because fighting had just gone through there.

Mark: And so when you got--I'm sorry, you were--

Dean: I was just saying, the air base is called K-55. It is still functional and it's the largest air base in the Pacific except possibly there's one the size of that in Okinawa. I don't know the actual statistics. I was told this was the largest air base in the Pacific.

Mark: Yeah, it might well be. And so, when you got there, what were your duties and what did you do. I mean, describe if there was such a thing, a typical day for Michael Dean in Korea.

Dean: Well, we had three battalions in this area. Mine was the 839th. I was in company B and I operated a piece of heavy equipment, which would move huge amounts of dirt. We had rubber-tired vehicles. It wasn't a caterpillar like we were trained on. These are called tradozers. It's a new machine. They had tires at least 7, 8 feet tall. Four of them. Had a diesel engine and all the power from the diesel would go into electricity and electricity would run the machine. Behind us we had these big things called a scraper and we put them into the ground and they would fill up. You see them all around here moving dirt. Ours were not as efficient or as big as the ones they have now but we moved a hell of a lot of dirt. That's what we did.

Mark: You were building the airstrip.

Dean: Yes. In a rice field that was drained. Huge, huge rice field. And what we did we just went in there and started filling it with dirt. It took months. And we'd get up and 6:00 -- no, no -- we'd get up at 5:00 in the morning. We'd be at the field with our, and I'd take over the machine and my buddy then would go back and sleep. It would be 6:00 in the morning and at 6:00 at night, he'd get

Interview Transcript (continued)

on my bulldozer and I'd go home and sleep. We did that seven days a week. Every 14 days we would trade. I'd go on night duty; he'd go on day duty. So we were operating these vehicles 24 hours a day to fill this rice paddy with dirt.

Mark: And in the one year you were there, how much progress was made?

Dean: The base was completed. I took off from the base. I left from our own base. When I got there it was nothing except a--we hadn't even started to fill it yet. In fact, I think this was what all these men that were trained at Leonard Wood--they were in different battalions so I lost contact with them--but I'm quite sure this is what, why they were training so many of us because it was a huge project.

Mark: Yeah, it sounds like it. Did you get much free time there at all?

Dean: No. Well, yeah--

Mark: Did you get off base? Did you get to go to Japan for a week or something?

Dean: I did go to Japan in January I believe it was, the end of January. That was a nice experience. Yes, there were villages built up around, old farm villages, built around here where the Koreans would, we'd hire 12 and 15 year old boys--I think they were older than that, I really do but they said they were--and they would be our house boys. We lived in a tent and they would sweep the tent and do chores for us because we got paid, I got paid \$90 some a month and I'd send most of it home and then we'd give them a dollar. They'd do anything in the world for a month; they'd do anything for you. And they were nice kids; got along well with them. They didn't sleep with us. They'd all go home at night but the next morning they'd be right there.

Mark: Was that the extent of your contact with the Koreans?

Dean: Yeah. Well, one time I was in charge of a group of Koreans to dig a ditch. It was a water-type situation for, I think so that the Koreans could live on the amount of farmland that was still arable. I did that for about a week. That was very boring. I just watched them shovel dirt back and forth.

Mark: Did you get to sample any of the Korean dishes for example?

Dean: Kimche was a big, big thing and--

[END SIDE A AND END OF TAPED TRANSCRIPT]

Interview Transcript (continued)

- Mark: There hasn't been one person I have talked to who went to Korea who hasn't described that so take your turn here.
- Dean: Yeah. Well, _____ smelled. That's all I can say. It was all around you. You could not escape it. 'Cause that's their method of agriculture and that's their method of putting nitrogen back into the soil and that's what they did. They'd come and clean out our outhouses and so forth like that.
- Mark: And use it in the fields.
- Dean: Yes. We got a case of dysentery, too, about July I think it was, or June. It started getting pretty hot then. The whole company, maybe the battalion, came down with dysentery. That was a bad situation. Everybody had it and we didn't have the facilities to take care of everybody. Basically, you finished and had to wait in line again. You ever heard of that one? That's a new one. Well, that's a true one. You get done, you go right back in line.
- Mark: Why was that? Because you were in a remote area?
- Dean: Well, in a remote area and obviously something got into our food. Now, where the Koreans probably did it because they'd work for us and they'd eat with us. I mean, they could eat--after we were done--they'd come eat and it probably came from one of the, I would think, from one of the Koreans who had some kind of a bacteria and it went through us like shit through a goose. Something like that.
- Mark: 'Cause there was an outbreak of amojajic fever which is a rare thing which is now linked to this Ebola virus. That's why I recall this offhand. You know, it was an undeveloped country at the time and disease environments, I'm not surprised to hear that, although I had never heard that--
- Dean: We, obviously, were very isolated. But it was very serious 'cause I some big shots with big things on their shoulders, doctors and so forth, coming to look at the facilities. It went through--about 4 days, 5 days it was over and never occurred again.
- Mark: What did you do on the post or the base or whatever you called it -- a post I suppose--it was the Army--what did you do for fun? Did you play golf, play cards and--
- Dean: Well, when you worked 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, you don't have a lot of time. There were card games on payday. We'd get paid in Korean script and

Interview Transcript (continued)

there'd be a card game right afterwards. One of the tents would be the place where they'd put down a blanket and all the guys got there. I imagined everybody had one; it wasn't just B Company. I'm quite sure that C Company and A company had them. I'd watch 'cause it was great entertainment watching these guys throw dice. And one guy was in charge and he was a rather large chap and he was a tech. sergeant, I think that's an E7, and he had a 45 in his belt and he controlled the game. No one fooled with that guy. It was run very well. There was no arguments and people got cleaned out they'd go home. And there would be some drinking because people would go on R & R they'd bring back cases of booze and then sell them for \$10 a bottle. They'd buy them for \$2, sell them for \$10. So there'd be the booze would come out when the cards came out. And it was hysterical to watch this. I was on the periphery, Mark. I never--

Mark: I'm not a gambler myself.

Dean: Why they'd chew me up and spit me out in about five minutes. And you knew that.

Mark: Those guys are pros.

Dean: Oh, absolutely. So I just watched that. It was entertainment. Sometimes you'd get together with your buddies--they did have beer there. We were allotted two cans of beer a day. And two cans of beer on an empty stomach all day long; that's all I needed. I was very talkative. That was about it. There were moves later on. I'm sorry. I'm trying to think of the entertainment. The movie theater was erected in November? And so, by that time, and by November, we were off the 12-day shift, too--12 hour a day shift. We were on an 8-hour. That gave us more time. So I did go to see two movies, three movies maybe.

Mark: Current ones?

Dean: The one I liked the best was "High Noon." It just won the Academy Award. The only thing was that the audio went out on the damn thing and I never knew what the plot was. Until I got home and I went and saw it and I loved it. But I remember "High Noon." There were a couple of comedies but I can't remember them.

Mark: How was morale?

Dean: Terrific, terrific. I thought so. I mean, everybody was upbeat. The bitching, of course, the Army is always bitching. The food was good, the cooks tried

Interview Transcript (continued)

their ass just to get things well and get it done properly, I thought. All your, we didn't feel like we were in the Army. You know, we didn't have any role calls. We looked like hell, we were dirty. I mean, when you work in fields like we were doing, you couldn't keep clean. And the officers didn't give a damn. We were doing our work. They were very proud of us and we accomplished something well within the time limits of what the Pentagon wanted.

Mark: 'Cause by this time the war had been kind of stalemated and sort of dropped from the headlines.

Dean: Yes, it was about 100 miles north of us. Yeah.

Mark: Some of the Vietnam veterans complain that they were stuck out in the fields and the public didn't care about it and were disliked or whatever the case may be. Apparently it wasn't a problem. You had your job and did it.

Dean: Yeah, that's right. We read the "Stars and Stripes" and we saw that there were some people questioning the sanity of the war. I mean, what the hell, MacArthur got fired. But that wasn't why he was fired. He was fired because he wanted to attack the Chinese. Yeah, it was bad. There was a lot of heavy fighting, crazy fighting. I mean, almost masochistic and macho like "I've got this hill. Come up and take it from me." So we'd send two companies up and take it and we'd lose 30 percent of our troops doing that. And then the Chinese would come back the next day and take it back from us. And there was nothing, there was no reason for it because at that time there was a lot of negotiations of ending the war. But we had to save face. So if they kicked us off a hill, uh, we have to go back and take that hill because if we didn't the people in Geneva, the North Koreans and Chinese talking to our people, would say "hey." They didn't want to fight anymore, they're done. So we had to go up and sacrifice a company of men to show that we still have spirit. Now we didn't feel that nor did I understand that at this time where I was. I didn't understand that until I read about it when I got back home. So our morale, I thought, was wonderful.

Mark: Now, this of course is part of the--I meant to ask this earlier; actually, that's the role of communism and anti-communism. In the Cold War this is perhaps the coldest part of the Cold War.

Dean: Yeah, it really was.

Mark: Was communism, was this something you discussed?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Yes.

Mark: What made you serve? I'm interested in the role of that in sort of morale and the reason for the war.

Dean: Yeah, we knew who our enemy was and we didn't necessarily think that the Chinese, you know, we didn't know if they were constricted or if they were volunteers. "Stars and Stripes" made me think that they were volunteers but I found out afterward that's not true either. No, there's no question in my mind in 1952 that there was a real threat in the world of this type of social system that I didn't think was as good as what I was being raised in sort of a free enterprise system. I felt that, yes.

Mark: Do you think that was common among people? People care?

Dean: I have no idea.

Mark: Or care for others. I'm just wondering.

Dean: I can't. Yeah, no. We did talk about Stalin and so forth like that and I knew enough about Stalin at that age to, I mean, he attacked Finland as an example in 1940 for no reason at all and he looked like a fool because the Fins beat the hell out of him. I knew about that. They also attacked Poland when the Poles were fighting; all their men were over fighting the Germans, in walked Stalin again. Trotsky was axed in Mexico City. And all these things I recall. I knew who the enemy was but I didn't consider the young 20-year-old Chinese soldier my enemy. The system is what I thought was wrong.

Mark: I see. Okay. So, you spent a year there? You left from the air base you built?

Dean: You bet. I'm very proud of that.

Mark: If you'd describe your voyage home, the sort of steps--I imagine this half way around the world--

Dean: Went back to Tokyo and got on a troopship. This time there was only 1,200 of us on this. A bigger troopship, too. And officers and their wives were on one floor and, of course, we were down in the hatches and so forth. I remember coming over I thought I'm not going to do that again, sitting down in the hole. So I went and looked up the chaplain and said, "Chaplain, do we have a library on this ship? And he said, "Yes." Said, "Don't you need a librarian, you know, 'cause I'd volunteer to be your librarian." "Well," he said, "that's wonderful." So I spent my time in the library checking out books

Interview Transcript (continued)

to the officers and their wives. Which two days coming out of Tokyo we hit a storm. This is a storm now, not just rough seas. This is a storm. I was the only guy in the library for about two days because they were all sick. Then they started coming back in again; they were very pale and I asked one girl, I said, "Boy, you look different than you looked a couple of days ago." and she said, "Yeah, I lost five pounds." But anyway, I had a nice experience on the way home.

Mark: This also took about 17 days or so?

Dean: No, we did not go to Hawaii this time 'cause we went to Hawaii for water and to pick up a battalion of infantry. This time the ship was equipped with water, distillation processing, and we didn't have any problems so you could go over much quicker.

Mark: And where did you land? In San Francisco?

Dean: You bet. The most beautiful site in the world going underneath that bridge. Nothing has ever been the same. That's the most beautiful site I've ever seen.

Mark: Now, when you got back did you have some time left in your military service?

Dean: Yes.

Mark: What did you do?

Dean: Well, then they gave me the leave that I had accumulated by contract or whatever you call it. Went home and had a delightful experience there, seeing all my friends there and so forth.

Mark: And how did they react to you?

Dean: Most of them were very proud of me. A couple of guys made some remarks -- how stupid can you be to get involved in that? I still remember who they are and I, they're gone now, they're not around me. I don't know, one of them lives in the Dakotas. I thought that was illuminating. It hurt. But I just considered the source and didn't let it bother me.

Mark: These were young guys your age?

Dean: My age.

Mark: You went to school with?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Dean: Yeah, uh hum.

Mark: So, you had to go back to military service for a couple of months or something?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: And where did you go? And what did you do?

Dean: Breckinridge, Kentucky. I was a rifle instructor.

Mark: This lasted how long?

Dean: Well, I was supposed to end in September but because of the economics of the war they tried to get rid of us as fast as they could which was very, very acceptable.

Mark: Sort of an early discharge?

Dean: Yes. We'd done our duty; now get the hell out of here.

Mark: And that wasn't a problem for you?

Dean: I didn't fight it. No, I didn't fight it. No, I said, "That's the nicest thing you've ever done."

Mark: So, you got back.

Dean: Eisenhower was in charge then. He knew how to handle it. He said, "Get rid of these guys. We don't need them anymore. They've done their job."

Mark: So, you're free and clear, discharged, done your service. What do you want to do to get your life back on track? What are your priorities?

Dean: You mean after I was out?

Mark: Yeah.

Dean: I went back to the university.

Mark: Did you use the GI Bill?

Dean: Absolutely.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Were you aware of the fact that you had these benefits coming to you?

Dean: Yes.

Mark: Did someone in the Army tell you they were?

Dean: I knew about this in Korea. And how I knew, I don't remember. Once again, was it in "Stars and Stripes" or did my parents tell me? I don't know. But it was very clear to me that when I got back I would be able to get through school without any kind of parental help.

Mark: And was that true?

Dean: Yes. Between summer jobs--I had a very good job in summertime on road construction because of my background in the military. And with that, plus the GI Bill, I had no problems at all.

Mark: Now, I've talked to World War II vets and they describe the campus as being flooded with veterans.

Dean: Yes.

Mark: I would imagine Korea might have been a little bit different.

Dean: Absolutely.

Mark: Did you feel isolated? Where there groups of veterans on campus?

Dean: No. I never paid attention to any of them. One way or the other. I knew that there were veterans there but I'd say probably 16,000, I think there were 16,000, 17,000 people when I came back -- at the university. Maybe 1,000. Where after World War II I'd say 50 percent of the students were veterans.

Mark: I'd say at least.

Dean: You know more now than I do.

Mark: I haven't looked at the statistics but what I can gather that's my personal guess.

Dean: I would think so. I was in high school in Madison. I saw the swelling of the ranks and so forth and they were veterans. You talked to the people, you know what they are.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: But that was much different than your experience.

Dean: Uh hum.

Mark: Did you have any desire to talk with other veterans or did you just want to get on with your life and do your thing?

Dean: I had some friends who were overseas with me, from Madison. We got drafted together. One guy was in a lot of my classes at the university, was an old high school friend of mine. Marvelous guy and we were very close. He was in tanks in the 25th infantry division and he had two tanks blown out from under him. And both times he was the only person who got out. Otherwise he lost two crews. And we had conversations about that and he had a lot of trouble. I had some good talks with him about that.

Mark: Well, this brings up a question I'm going to ask anyway and I'll try to skip ahead here. What sort of psychological or personal adjustments did you have to make if any to getting back into civilian life?

Dean: Well, Mark, when you're taken as a 19 or 20 year old kid and said "Okay, now here's a rifle, here's a machine-gun and I'm going to teach you how to kill." and your whole focus is how to survive and how to use this weapon the best you can and how to obey orders and get the damn thing done and still live. Then all of a sudden the government says, "Thank you." now you're over here. You still have some hard times with that. You think about the people I saw mangled by these machinery that we used. Because of long hours.

Mark: Accidents.

Dean: Yeah, horrible accidents. You think about that. You think about the heat and the cold and all the stuff you went through. And you're so happy to get back. And your experiences were so wonderful and you look in hindsight that I just felt that I was the luckiest guy in the world. I didn't have any resentment.

Mark: Did you feel that at the time or this after reflecting?

Dean: No, this is right at the time. Oh, there were moments where you wonder about, as I say, you wonder about the whole thing. We didn't really win the war. The North, South Koreans lost 2 million people, the North Koreans didn't get beat up as bad. We have a lot of soldiers who have been injured and disabled. And you can't help but think that 'cause you were involved but that last very, that's almost self-serving. It doesn't do any good. But the main thing is you look and see what you've got, how they lived over there, and how

Interview Transcript (continued)

you live here. Or opening the packet and finding out that 5 of your friends have IQs less than 80--geez, at least I can read. I mean, see what I mean? The whole thing sort of pulls together when you say, no I was just proud and tickled to death. I never had a real problem. But then I forgot it. The Gulf War brought the whole thing back. Vietnam didn't do a thing. The Gulf War got me.

Mark: That's interesting actually. Why do you suppose that was?

Dean: I have no idea. I called another guy, the buddy that I told you about, the tank guy. I called him. We had a little conversation about the whole thing. He said, "Yeah, Mike, I go through it still sometimes." and it does bring it back because he was a tank guy and, of course, our tanks were very effective in that war. He said he had some problems, too. But they're good, they're good problems now.

Mark: Yeah, that's interesting. So, to get back to where I was. We were talking about the GI Bill and benefit programs, generally. As you got on in life did you use other sort of veterans' benefits? For example, a home loan or any of that sort of thing? I was going to ask you, did you go to graduate school?

Dean: No. I got my degree and went into the business world here in Madison. I think I got a loan, my mortgage on our first house, I think the government backed it somehow. I don't think it lowered the rate but they had, it was a GI loan.

Mark: Was that federal or state?

Dean: It was federal I believe. And I had a friend who was in the banking business and I said, "I want to build a house. Would you give me a mortgage?" and we talked about the GI and he put the whole thing together and I think it did help me.

Mark: I'm trying to think of some of the other programs that there were. Did you have any problems finding work?

Dean: When I got out of the university?

Mark: Yeah. You said you went into business?

Dean: Yeah.

Mark: You started your own business?

Interview Transcript (continued)

- Dean: I went into an insurance agency here in Madison and I stayed there for seven years and realized that I had personality conflicts with the owners and so I started my own.
- Mark: I see. But your military service didn't hinder you in searching for work or any of that sort of thing?
- Dean: It helped. I helped me grow up. I think I was probably one of the most naive, young men in the Army.
- Mark: And by the time you got out you were a little wiser, you think?
- Dean: Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah, you can't help with having experiences like that not grow.
- Mark: I've got one last area that I want to cover and that involves veteran's organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. Did you ever join a group like the Legion, VFW or anything like that?
- Dean: I was an AMVET for a year or so. Then I don't know why I did it or why I got out of it.
- Mark: Was this right after you got out of the war? Or some years later?
- Dean: It must have been right after I got discharged. I think maybe I was solicited by some people and they were going to help GI, help discharged veterans to get more benefits or something like that. I don't know what it was. And I signed up and it was \$5 I think to sign up. I don't think I was there for more than a year and I said I can't see it. I guess I'm not a joiner.
- Mark: A lot of guys aren't. I'm not myself. It's just I'm curious. What about reunions and that sort of thing. Did you ever attend any formal reunions?
- Dean: No, but I do go -- and I really enjoy this, Mark -- I go to the, if I'm in town, if I didn't have any, and I usually try to make my schedule around this -- but on November 11 I go up to the Capitol and participate in that Veterans Day thing. I've done that and I really get a kick out of that.
- Mark: What drives you to do that?
- Dean: A sense of history? I just like it. I've done it about 10 times since I've been discharged which was a long time ago so I guess, probably a lot of other people do different things but that's one I like.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Well, those are all the standard questions that I have. Is there anything that you'd like to add? Something I might have skipped over?

Dean: Well, I can't think of it. No, I think I've said all I have to.

Mark: Well, I thank you for stopping in.

Dean: You bet.

Mark: It was very, very productive.