

# Capt. Thomas Melville Dunn

**Dec. 11, 1913—Apr. 25, 2000**

**106th Infantry Division**

**424th Regiment**

**3rd Battalion**

**Headquarters Company**

**The information that follows is from conversations that I had with my father during the last five or ten years of his life. As thousands of others have said, “I wish I had taken better notes!”**

**In the few instances where dad made unkind remarks about someone, I struggled trying to decide if I should edit the text or remove the person’s name. I finally decided to leave everything as it was related to me. If someone is offended or feels any of this is inaccurate, I will apologize.**

**If anyone knew my dad, I’d really like to meet him. If you would like a copy of these notes, please let me know and I’ll be happy to send you a copy.**

**Thank you,**

**Wayne G. Dunn  
620 Coachman’s Way  
Parkton, Maryland 21120**

**Conversations With Dad**

## ***Battle of the Bulge:***

**Dad had just turned 31 on 11 Dec 1944 — five days before the Battle started.**

**424th had high-ground with good view for 300 yards. 28th Infantry was to the right. When the Germans came they swept around the hill, pushing everyone back. Lack of supplies and ammunition - they were told by Division Headquarters to “hold your position’. Finally around 11:00 PM, and with the Germans between themselves and their destination, they were told to “get out if you can” and they started to retreat to the Our River, which was behind them. They**

**collected all the remaining men, and had about four people for each compass. They planned on “taking a 113-degree azimuth” to a point between the two bridges on the river (they figured the German’s held the bridges). They also removed the ammunition from their guns to avoid gunfire that would give away their position as they tried to sneak through the enemy lines. They left several soldiers behind to keep firing their weapons up and down the line to make the Germans think they were still there. They told those men to wait about thirty minutes and then run as fast as they could to catch up. At one point they were crossing a large field (about 16 acres) and suddenly realized they had been seen by Germans who were on the edge of the field with artillery. The Germans lowered the aim of their artillery and started shooting at the men. At first everyone dove for cover to avoid the shrapnel, but they quickly found the snow was only several inches deep and on top of a frozen layer of snow beneath it. Dad remembers getting a bloody face from trying to dive into the snow and hitting the ice. He also claims that is why his fingers are so short -- he wore them down trying to claw a foxhole in the frozen ground. Realizing they were badly outnumbered, and the Germans would soon send a patrol after them, they decided to take their chances and raced for the cover of the woods on the other side of the field.**

**They had already discussed that they would have to wade across the river, because it was certain the Germans controlled the two nearest bridges. When they reached the river, they sent the tallest men to search for the shallowest crossing point. Since dad is not one of the tallest people, the water was up to his chin. In addition to the water being extremely cold, the men had to watch for large chunks of ice floating downstream. They had also told the men they were trying to reach to keep firing their artillery on a regular basis so they would have a position to home in on.**

**Although I can’t remember whether it was during the initial battle or later, but dad mentioned another story that was interesting. He said they had sent out two patrols to probe behind the German line, but they had not returned. When they sent the 3rd patrol and they didn’t return, they told them to break radio silence, and report their condition. The patrol reported they were trapped, in the loop of the river, with one man shot in the leg and another in the arm. Capt.?? McCullough, who was in charge of the artillery, overheard what was**

**happening and told them to have the patrol face towards the artillery unit, then fired one shot, which landed about 100 yards behind the patrol. When the patrol reported where the shot had landed, McCullough told the men to start walking out, and the artillery laid down a moving circle of fire around the patrol as they made their way back.**

**Finally they made it back to their own troops, but were quickly told to go defend “Brock?, Belgium” They fought there for a while, and then were sent to \_\_\_\_\_? The Germans were pushing so hard they had to retreat again. They headed down a road that led to the river, then reached a crossroad and quickly started running. It wasn't long before the Germans guessed what had happened and they started firing artillery after them. The Germans didn't realize how much of a head start they had, so their shells kept falling short.**

**Dad said they met a Colonel of a tank group and they were told to head to \_\_\_\_\_ about 18 miles away, where tanks were trapped in the town. Arrived at town late at night and when they got there, German artillery started firing and dad dove down on the ground. An officer was killed when he tried to hide behind a wall about 15 feet away. He said there was a ‘crazy’ boy dressed as a German — an officer shot him.**

**The next morning they heard shots from a nearby field and looked out to see a big Italian boy (Laporter?) chasing a German around a haystack. They kept running in circles for a long time, but the boy couldn't catch up to the German. A hall-track decided to shoot the German the next time he appeared, but the boy unexpectedly circled back, and was shot in the arm with a 50-cal. bullet.**

**As all of the tanks started racing out of town, they were leaving the troops behind. They had the bazooka man aim at the tank to stop it, and six men climbed onto the top. They raced for the river, where the bridge was guarded by the ~‘~ ~ Airborne, waving them across.**

**V.**

**It was very cold, and the army had only issued field jackets to the troops -- not nearly warm enough. One day, as they were retreating, they came across a trail of blood in the snow. They finally caught up with someone who had taken their boots off to try and thaw out their feet, then couldn't get their boots back on. It was either retreat**

**or be captured, so the soldier walked in his bare feet in the snow and ice. He said he couldn't feel his feet anyway. The soldier probably had to have his feet amputated.**

**Dad started out with the 28th Infantry Division. One day they asked for volunteers to drive trucks to carry other troops back to Pennsylvania, of course, everyone volunteered to ride rather than walk. Anyway, they called each man in and asked about their qualifications. Since dad had experience driving large trucks while working for the highway department, he was selected as a driver. After driving the other troops to Pennsylvania, they asked to keep dad as a driver for a longer period. His commanding officer let him stay. Later he traveled to North Carolina and finally Louisiana, still driving trucks. At some point his old outfit came into the same camp as he was in, and his Captain said he still wanted him to come back. Then one day he found both officers talking outside a tent, and he approached them to talk about whom he would report to. When his former Captain asked him what he would rather do, he told him any soldier would have to be crazy to walk when he had the chance to ride. Finally, he was transferred to the new unit.**

**The army decided to create an entirely new Division — the 106th — that would require a large number of new officers. After a period of time, dad was approached by a Lieutenant and told they would like for him to go to OCS (Officer Candidate School). Dad basically ignored the subject, and continued to drive trucks. Several weeks later the Captain approached him and said he would like for him to go to OCS -- he was too smart to be driving, and would be of better service to become an officer. Dad told him he was pleased for the consideration, however he liked doing what he was doing. At this point the Captain told him it was not his choice — it was the army's — and he was going to OCS whether he liked it or not. He also told dad he would make every day of his life miserable if he decided not to go. Dad was sent to Ft. Benning, Georgia for his officer training. Since all officers were commissioned, dad was first discharged from the Army before becoming a Lieutenant. (This helps explain the paperwork we found in his old army trunk.)**

**Dad also talked about the questions he was asked when he was before the Officer Review board. The Officers asked him 'Which side of a horse or mule do you dismount from?' Dad said he thought**

**about the question for a moment, then responded ‘the off [near?] side’. When asked to explain, he said that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ had a team of mules that he used for plowing and he would help him out on occasion. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ had explained what everything had meant and dad had remembered. The officers said he was the only person that didn’t say ‘the left side’.**

**Dad mentioned the new division was trained near Spartanburg, South Carolina, but also went into the mountains of Tennessee during the winter months, and then into Illinois. They originally thought they were going to the Pacific, but later decided to go to Europe, so they headed to Tennessee in the winter to train. Since dad had experience working with the phone company, he was given further training in communications and then was an instructor for new troops. He would teach the men how to use spikes and belts to climb trees to string the communications line. He also told his men that if they were careful, they could climb the tree without their safety belt. This would be quicker, and since you never knew where the Germans had their snipers, a few seconds may save their life. One day the safety officers came by and caught the men training without the safety belts, and ordered dad to stop teaching them such dangerous methods. After they left, several men approached dad and asked him what they should do. Dad said he could not tell them to climb without the belts, but he sure wouldn’t say a word if they decided to do it on their own.**

**One day they had a training review with the generals, and all of the training officers (about five hundred men). The generals kept talking about how horrible the training was going, and how they needed to quickly improve. They said there was only one bright spot, and that was in the communications training. They asked Capt. to stand and be recognized, but he stood up and said he had been so busy with review boards, court-martials, etc., that he didn’t have time to spend doing training, and that he had turned it over to Lt. Dunn. When the generals asked dad to stand and be recognized he said it was one of his most embarrassing moments to be singled out in front of so many people.**

**I believe dad said that while he was 1”~ Lt. and Co. Exec., the Company Commander was Capt. Riggsby. Dad worked until 10:00 one**

**night signing passes for the men. Next night at the barracks men asked dad to sign passes, but dad said Capt. Rigsby was on duty. They said he was at the club drinking, so dad went to the club and confronted him.**

**One time they were marching along the road, with Capt. Rigsby in the lead. A Colonel called dad and said they were too slow and holding everyone up. Dad got the men to double-time, then Rigsby got mad — dad said to complain to the Colonel. Later the Colonel and the other officers disappeared and the men kept marching — dad was in front leading the brigade. Maj. General's jeep pulled up and asked who was in charge — dad said he was in front and in charge. The General said troops were coming back down this road and they needed to clear the path, and asked dad how he planned to do that. Dad got the five companies off the road and told them to stay ready. By then it was dark. A runner came and got Rigsby and said the Colonel wanted to see him. Later he sent for dad and said he wanted dad to take over the company. Dad said he had been with them since the beginning and had trained most of them, but thought that since they were going to be in combat the next day The'Colonel said he didn't care what dad thought.**

**Dad also laughed about the experiences with the five Catholics from Pennsylvania he was in the barracks with. When he first got there, they gathered around him and said how tough “us five Yankees are going to make it on you poor southern boy”. Dad said he looked at them, then started laughing. When they asked what was so funny, he said, “Now, if it had of been six of you, I may have been a little worried, but since it is only five of you, I don't think this little southern boy will have any problem whipping all of you.” They all got a good laugh out of it, and became good friends. His newfound friends would stay up all night playing poker, and about fifteen minutes before Mass, they would ask him to keep an eye on things. They would rush out, leaving cards and money on the table and, as soon as they were back, they would pick up where they left off.**

**Dad also talked about how lucky he was in being selected to join the new Division, where they would spend the time properly training the men. Most of the other people went through basic training and then were hurried off to be used as replacements for the many people being killed or wounded during the war.**

**Dad said he didn't have a lot of respect for the Colonel that ran his outfit, because he didn't always show good sense, and he didn't treat his men with respect. His promotion to First Lieutenant came while he was training some of his men on an old road in the country. He had sent his men to the top of a hill and told them to go take a nap or play cards, and that if anyone came by, he would cover for them. Soon a jeep came down the road with a General in it, and asked what they were doing. Dad said his men were up in the hills practicing defense of a Command Post. The General said they had been keeping an eye on him following his good work with training his men, and were pleased to promote him. Later in the war, while in Germany, dad was walking along the road when a jeep with a General approached, and dad saluted. The jeep stopped and the General asked if he was Lt. Dunn. When he said yes, the General asked him to come into the office, before his Colonel. Dad entered first and called the room to attention, and the General asked the Colonel just why dad had never been put in for a promotion, even though all of his performance reviews were rated as 9's and 10's by other company commanders he had worked with. The Colonel started apologizing and said he would make it a priority, and would do the paperwork that same day. The General said that would not be necessary, and walked over and pinned Captains bars on his coat. (I believe this was in 1945.)**

**Dad also mentioned Capt. Counts, who was a friend of his. During the fighting in Germany, they kept sending soldiers across an open field, but everyone was getting shot. The Colonel told Capt. Counts to take his men and try again, but the Capt. told him he was crazy, it would be suicide, but he would obey. Later, dad said they brought a stretcher back carrying Capt. Counts, and he went out to meet them. Dad could see he was wounded pretty bad and said he would accompany him back into the place they had set up as a hospital. Capt. Counts asked dad to look after his men for him, and as they held each other's hand, dad told him that he would, even though he already knew all of his men had been killed trying to cross the field. As they entered the room, Capt. Counts died.**

**Alter the war, dad stayed in the reserves until the Korean War**

**started. Then he was called up to report for active duty because they needed officers. When he went to Richmond, the recruiting Sergeant asked him if he wouldn't be excited to go to Korea. Dad told him "I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for the experiences I had in W.W.II. Furthermore, I wouldn't take ten thousand dollars to go to Korea." That was when money was worth something. The Sergeant told him to have a seat, and he would be back in a minute. After about ten minutes the Sergeant returned, and said, "I just looked at your military records. It shows you were in the Battle of The Bulge, and faced some very fierce fighting -- you were one of the lucky ones. I have decided we will not need you, and I have moved your records so you will not be called for this war. Dad asked how they were going to get the officers they needed, and the Sergeant replied, "We only needed two officers, and we called four to report for duty. You were the first one here, so now we will simply take two of the three remaining people." When dad got home he quickly got out of the reserves.**

**Dad talked about events that occurred after victory in Europe. He was sent from ~? in Germany, back to \_\_\_\_? in France (about sixty miles outside Paris). The Army was planning on sending some of the troops to the Pacific to continue the fighting there, but something happened to everyone's records -- they were lost. While they were deciding what to do, the men were supposed to stay around their camp. One day dad was in the barracks reading and a Major came in and asked where everyone was. When he was told everyone was in Pans, the Major started screaming and shouting about court-martialing everyone.**

**On another day, a new Major came in with the "11-7?" manual and started reading it to all of the troops. After a while he became irritated that no one was paying any attention to him. A Captain with scars all over his face, and a veteran of many battles, stood up and told the Major to shut up. "If people were to follow your orders from that book, half of them would get killed." The Major threatened to court-martial the Captain, but the Captain reminded him of all of the records being lost, and that he would be wasting his time because the war in Europe was over.**

**Shortly afterwards, dad was transferred to another location -- I think it was a hotel. When he got there, he found there was no room**

available on the first floor, so he went up to the second floor. After a short while, someone came into the hotel shouting "Dunn, Dunn, where are you?"

Dad was surprised as he had only recently arrived and didn't think anyone would know he was there. Anyway, the man told dad he had a phone call. When he answered the phone, someone on the other end said, "Do you know who this is?" Dad said "The voice is familiar, but I've met thousands of people in the last few years". Dad learned it was Major \_\_\_\_\_? someone he had gone through training with in Louisiana / Georgia (truck driving). The Major asked dad what he was planning on doing, since all of the records were lost. Dad said he was told to remain where he was until they sorted everything out. The Major said, "My jeep is on the way, and should be there about now. Gather all of your stuff and come on over to my command." When he got there, dad was given three options: (1) Go to the Philippines to continue fighting, (2) Go to work onboard ships ferrying troops back to the States, or (3) work on the railroad transferring people from that camp to Paris. Dad selected the railroad job. His duty was to manage the transportation of troops by loading them into cars, traveling to Paris, and then returning.

The French would provide whatever railroad cars they had -- sometimes coach cars, sometimes freight cars. Dad would determine the capacity of the cars - say thirty people could fit in a coach car, and would mark on the outside of the car how many people from a unit was in each car. He would always put units in adjoining cars.

The train was electric powered, and would do about 100 miles an hour. The trips were very fast.

We still have the plaster 'Golden Lion's Head' that was the emblem for the 106th.. On the back there are at least 10 or 12 signatures, but only five or six can be seen well enough to note. Possibly a large magnifying glass would help show the others. Here's my interpretation of the list:

**Charles F. Girand, Lt. Col. Inf., Comdg 3rd BN**

**Leslie C. S[t--]uble, 1st Lt. ml.**

**Berwick, Capt. (BB) (S-3)**

**Lt.? Dale R. Carver, A4R Platoon**

**James ~ninck, Capt. Co. "N"?**

**Capt. Ronald \_\_\_\_\_? 424th**

**From dad's discharge papers:**

**Army Serial #: 0 1-295-847**

**Honorable Discharge on 1 Apr 1953**

**Capt. Infantry, USAR (Reserves)**

**Commanding Officer of HQ Co. in 3rd Battalion of the 424th Infantry Regiment.**

**Served through four campaigns in the European Theater (Northern France, Rhineland,**

**Ardennes, Central Europe)**

**9 Oct 1942 to 5 Jan 1946**

**Also served in Co. A, 40th Battalion, Spartanburg, SC, Camp Croft.**

**Dad suffered a heart attack in April of 1998, when, at the age of 84, he was working on pipes under someone's house. He misled everyone for four months — until we finally discovered what had happened — but by then his heart was functioning at only about 50%. He even managed to get back into the woods that fall to turkey hunt, and resumed his daily ritual of meeting the gang for breakfast. Actually, knowing some of his cronies, I believe they all met to tell tall tales, but since there was eating involved, they decided to call it breakfast.**

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