

**Transcript of Oral History Interview of Leslie S. Dunn, Jr.**

Interviewed by Kathy Bradford on April 18, 2005

© Brigham City Museum & Library

Acc # 05.19.1 / MS 285

---

Kathy Bradford: Today is Monday, April 18 2005, and I'm speaking with Les Dunn at his home in Brigham City. First, Les, I'd like to ask you where and when you were born and a little bit about your family.

Les Dunn: I was born on January 28, 1926 in Logan, Utah at the Budge Hospital. My parents were Leslie S. Dunn, Sr. and Annie Mitton Dunn.

KB: So you must have been the first son.

LD: I was the first son. I had an older sister, but I was named after my dad. People used to call me Leslie, and they would call Dad Les. I looked forward to the day I could be "Les."

KB: Did you have other siblings?

LD: Yes, I had five sisters – all of them very musical. In fact, they've put out a CD of their singing.

KB: Well, you're musical too, so it must have been a musical family.

LD: Yes, my Grandfather Mitton was one of the early church songwriters, and as I remember at one time he had about eight songs in the church songbook. His name was Samuel B. Mitton, and he was a contemporary of Evan Stevens. They were close friends and were at each other's homes a great deal. Evan would travel with Grandpa, and when his choir would go different places, Grandpa would travel with Evan. Evan wrote a song about two of my aunts.

I always wanted a brother, but never got one.

KB: What kind of work did your father do?

LD: My dad's family were all farmers to begin with. Then when Dad had his family, he started a feed store and grain dealership over in Cache Valley. They would clean and treat seed grain for planting in the fall and handled all of the egg business for Southern Cache County. He had a trucking line and a service station as well. By the time I was 14 years of age, I was driving the truck. I worked very hard, and I was very strong as a young boy.

I went to the Woodruff School in Logan, Logan Junior High and then Logan High School.

KB: Were you in high school when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

LD: Yes, I was in high school. I'd come home from church, and it was on the news. There was a lot of excitement. I remember a lot about that period of time – the scrap metal drives that were

held in the neighborhood. Scrap metal was piled in the middle of the streets. Everybody would give all of their scrap metal. Also at that period of time Second Street had just been constructed, and they were hiring young men from all the high schools in Northern Utah. These young men would go down to Second Street to load boxcars with war materiel.

KB: Is that the same place that they call DDO?

LD: Yes, Defense Depot Ogden is what it was originally called. We would get on buses or trains at the train depots and go down on Friday night and work all night and all day Saturday and sometimes work until noon on Sunday. Then Sunday about noon we would go home and then back to school Monday morning. It was the first real money that many of us ever had. I bought bonds every paycheck. It was really neat! I met a lot of guys from Brigham City at that time. Ration stamps were needed to buy anything.

KB: And you have roots here, right?

LD: Oh yes. My ancestors on my dad's side were some of the original settlers here in Brigham City. Simeon Dunn and Samuel Smith, my great grandfathers, were founding fathers. The family were farmers as I mentioned, except Samuel Smith, and he was the Judge.

KB: He did a lot of things. I know he was a storekeeper for one thing.

LD: Yes, he was quite a character I guess.

KB: Was your father the first generation to leave Brigham and go to Logan?

LD: No, my grandfather Charles Oscar was one of the middle sons of Simeon Dunn who settled here in 1852. In those days of the early settlements, one son was allowed to stay in the community, and the other sons were sent out to help settle other areas. My grandfather was sent over to College Ward, and he was the first bishop of College Ward. My dad grew up there. Grandpa was asked to take a second wife, and after a lot of soul searching, he and Grandma Dunn agreed to do it. So I grew up in a polygamous family, and I'm sure polygamy today is a lot different now than it was then. In those days, it was the most wonderful thing you can imagine – all the cousins and aunts and uncles who treated you so well. You just felt like a big family where everybody loved everybody. When I see the things that are happening in polygamy today, it makes me feel bad.

As I grew up, I worked in the feed store with my dad, and by the time I was 11, I was lifting 100- to 120-pound bags. By the time I was 13, I was driving the pickup truck and the big GMC truck. By the time I was 14, I was taking trips down to Devil's Slide and down to Nephi all alone driving the truck. I would load 15 ton of cement by hand and 15 ton of plaster by hand and drive back to Logan, go the lumberyards, and unload it by hand. Then I went back to the feed store and worked the rest of the day.

KB: You didn't have much play time as a boy growing up.

LD: No, but I think everybody during that period of time grew up very quickly. I remember when I was finally getting jobs. I had worked for my dad for a dollar a week. Of course, that was just a little bit of spending money. When I got jobs with other people, I would give my paycheck to my mother. Then if I wanted to go on a date, I would ask her for a dollar or 50 cents or 75 cents to go on my date. It made you feel like you were contributing to the family, and I think you grew up very quickly because of these responsibilities that you felt.

KB: What year in high school were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

LD: I was a sophomore. I knew they wouldn't take me in the military as a sophomore, but I took a very heavy load in school – all of the math, science, and English classes. I had finished every requirement by the time I was halfway through my senior year. I was hoping they would take me midyear, but they wouldn't do that because of my going into the pilot training program. You had to have a high school diploma before they would let you fly a plane. Today you've got to have a college diploma to fly one.

I was in the Reserve, and we went to a few Reserve meetings in Logan. I was in the Reserve from August of 1943 until I graduated from high school the first part of the next June.

My dad had a set of boxing gloves at the feed store because as the farmers came in, physical activities were important. People did elbow wrestling in there, and they had the boxing gloves. I learned how to box by boxing adults at the feed store. When I was a junior in high school, I was invited to go down to Salt Lake and take part in the AAU Tournament for the Golden Gloves. I won the Intermountain States Boxing Championship at that time.

I went out for football and track as a sophomore. I pitched softball in the summertime. I enjoyed the physical activity, and I enjoyed music. My granddad was such a great musician and taught me music as a young boy. He was my first teacher. Then the old music teacher at Brigham Young College in Logan was Henry Otte. During the Depression, the government hired men like him, retired musicians, to teach music to young people. So he taught me trumpet, and I played in the youth symphony orchestra starting when I was about 10 years old. I remember playing the bugle for all the scout things in Logan as a young boy. I have been able to do it ever since.

KB: It sounds like you did it all.

LD: Well, I was very active in school affairs – band, orchestra, school plays, studentbody officer. I loved school. I loved all my classmates. In fact, I'm a lot the same way now. I like people. I really do. I've been really lucky to have ended up here in Brigham City where I've had so many opportunities. People have been wonderful to give us chances to do things.

KB: I feel the same way about Brigham, but let's get back to the time you went into the military.

LD: I went in the Army Air Force and was inducted at Fort Douglas where we underwent a whole battery of other tests besides the academic tests we had taken to get in. It covered a little bit of everything. It was psychological. They wanted you to be able to hold your composure

when you were being attacked verbally. Some of the questions they asked me were about my feelings toward my mother, and did I have certain feelings for my mother. I remember being very angry at them. I controlled myself, but I told them I did not appreciate that kind of talk. They just kind of laughed at me and then went on with other questions.

After we were inducted the first part of June 1944, we were sent from Fort Douglas to Amarillo, Texas to basic training. While there I did really well. I qualified well in everything. From my athletics in high school I was in really good shape. I was All-State in football, and I had won all the music competitions that I had entered. I got to be pretty good on the trumpet.

KB: Did you do anything with the trumpet in the military?

LD: I took my horn with me, and I organized dance bands on every base I was on, and we would play on Saturday nights for the guys.

KB: Did they have dances?

LD: Oh yes, there were WACs on bases, and the girls from town would come in. That was kind of fun. A lot of the guys took their instruments with them. When I got lonesome sometimes, I would find an empty barracks or an empty tent and I would go in and sit in the dark and play and play. It took the homesickness away, and that was where I learned to play without music. Of course, in the combo I play with now we don't use music. Somebody starts a tune, and we just join in.

KB: Where did you go after Amarillo?

LD: Well, at Amarillo we had more tests. They were a lot more stringent. The physical demands on you were hard. We had 20-mile hikes, and we would be required to run for 5 miles. They really got us in good shape. Weaponry was part of what you learned and first aid. They gave us what they called psycho-motor tests. That means mental and physical. Some of them were combined. For instance, one of the tests was kind of silly, but you had a board with different shaped pegs. There was another board over to the side of it with the same different shapes, and you had to pick out these different shaped pegs and take them over and put them in the other board. This was for agility. You had to be very quick at this.

Another one was hard for me. They had a disc like a record that would go around. In the first part of that test they had a little wand that they would give you. It had a bend on the end, and a metal disc about the size of a nickel was on the record that was going around. You would take that wand with your right hand, and you had to follow it all the way around without losing contact to that metal disc. Then they would speed it up, and you'd go faster and faster. Then they'd go the other direction, and you'd have to do it with your left hand. They wanted to test your dexterity and also your mental gymnastics. The hardest part was that you had a little wheel with a handle on it, and you tried to wheel it around. You would take the wand away from you and bring it close to you by turning different directions. Then they had another one that you'd turn, and the way you turned it would take the wand parallel back and forth in front of you. Then they would turn the disc on and you would turn these handles to change direction. I could do it

when it was going slow, but when it went fast, I made a lot of mistakes because it would come off. Then you'd have to put it back on.

Another one was vision, and I had studied physiology in high school, so I knew how the eyes worked. I knew about the fovea centralis and all that. They had to see if you qualified to be a fighter pilot and qualified to be a night fighter. They would take you into a room that was completely dark. On the wall projected in front of you would be a ring of light, and there would be a little break in the ring of light. You had a switch in front of you, so that the break in the ring of light would be in a different position all the time. Then you would take this little wand and move it to the position that the break was in. Well, if you look right at something at night, you can't see it. The fovea centralis is the center of your vision, but you've got your rods and cones. One of them is for night vision, and one is for day vision. If you look right at something at night, you can't see anything, so you have to look to the side. I knew this from my physiology study in high school. So I'd look to the side, and I got 100%. This guy told me they'd never had anybody do that before. He said, "You cheated. How did you do that?"

I said, "Test me again."

So they tested me again, and I got 100%. I guess I was cheating because I knew what you had to do. They wanted to know how I knew that, so I told them. I explained the physiology of the eye and how you can't see something at night if you look right at it. You have to look to the side. That qualified me as a fighter pilot for night flying.

There were a lot more tests. I can't remember all of them, but that's a sampling of what they were like.

After we took all of these tests, we were classified. To be a radio operator, you had to recognize rhythms and dots and dashes and to repeat what you heard. Some people were good at that, but they failed on a lot of dexterity things, so they were sent into radio.

Some were real good physically or could understand machinery – because that was part of the test, too – gears and all that kind of stuff. If they were good at that but couldn't do these other things, they were sent to aircraft mechanics school.

The ones that could do all of it, that did everything well, were sent on to pilot training. I made that, and we were sent to Merced, California. Merced was in the Sac-Joaquin Valley. While at Merced, we were put through a pre-flight program. We learned aircraft recognition. They would flash the outline of an aircraft on the wall, and you had to identify the country it came from, the name of the aircraft, whether it was a fighter or a bomber. If it was a bomber, you had to identify whether it was a light bomber, heavy bomber, pursuit ship, or night fighter. They would flash that on, and you had to immediately tell what it was. We got so we could just snap it back just like that. You were preparing to defend your life, and so you learned and you learned fast. Not only did we have to do that with aircraft, we had to do it with naval vessels and learn the profiles and what countries the ships were from. You got so you were real good at it.

Then they put us in link trainers. Before the link trainers, they put us in a little control box. You weren't blacked out, and you could see a chart. You had your stick like for your airplane, and you had a light that would flash somewhere on this square chart in front of you with little lights all over it. They'd turn on lights in different places, and you had to move that stick to the proper position as they flashed the light up there. Sometimes it went a long ways and sometimes just a little ways, but you learned a lot about controlling an airplane. You learned about all of the instrumentation of the aircraft. You learned about planning and navigation. We learned about weather. How to determine what weather was and how it was going to be and to read weather maps. Do you know what an isobar and an isotherm are?

KB: I see that in the TV weather, and I never know what they're talking about.

LD: Okay, isobars are the barometer readings, and the isotherms are the temperature readings. So on weather maps you can plot the movement of weather. They take the isobars, and they draw lines with the same isobar reading and draw a little circle with that reading – or whatever the shape is. With the isotherms they do the same thing. Now you know what the air pressure is moving across the country – the high pressure and low pressure, the high temperature and low temperature. We learned all about that.

We learned to recognize cloud formations, every type of cloud. I still remember them whether it's cumulus, cirrus, stratus, cirro-stratus or cumulo-nimbus. That's the thunderhead. We learned to recognize a cold front as it's coming towards you. A cold front is like a line across the sky. In a warm front you have the fluffy clouds, and you don't have a distinct line.

Then we were taken out on the flight line and learned all the operational procedures there. We learned all of the parts and system in the aircraft. These were airplanes out on the flight line. The two types of planes that we had there were the BT13 (Beginning Trainer) and the AT6 (Advanced Trainer). We learned all about those.

KB: Did you ever fly these planes in the air?

LD: No, our experiences with them were static, on the ground. We learned all about the aircraft, weather, map reading, and all of the systems like the aelerons and the trimtabs. Then they put us in the link trainer where you had the controls, the elevator, the altitude, the bank indicators, the fuel indicators, RPM dials. That all became second nature to you after you learn how to use it. It's just like flying an airplane. Every pilot, when they go into a new plane they haven't flown before, goes into a link trainer that is designed for that particular aircraft. They give you problems to solve, and they put you into a dive. Of course, you've had this instruction before, but you have to learn how to come out of that dive. They put you into a spin, and how do you get out of that spin? They tell you to do a loop, and then do a half turn, and then you do a half turn going the opposite direction. They give you all of these problems in the link trainer, and you have to solve them. You're watching your instruments even when you're in the open and doing all these things that you're supposed to do.

Then they take you on night problems, and then they make it black. Everything is done by instruments, and you learn to get your speed up before you try to take off and to watch your

instruments for straight and level. You watch your bank indicator for the turns. You've got your artificial horizon that you're looking at, and you watch your fuel all the time. You have your lever to pull up your landing gear.

KB: But doesn't it come automatically after all that training so you don't have to think individually about each thing?

LD: Yes, after a while it's automatic. As you go to climb, you're watching your air speed and the rate of climb. If it's too steep, you stall out. Your speed will tell you if you're getting ready to stall out. All of this you have learned, and there was a lot of class work, especially in mathematics. I'd taken every math class in high school, so I felt I was pretty good at it. I don't know if you've ever seen these books on mathematical tables. They help you solve a lot of mathematical problems. We had to learn how to construct all of those tables, but it's done by formula. It isn't difficult, but that was before computers. They would tell you to construct a logarithm table for such and such, so in longhand, you'd figure out the numbers that go into the different log values. That was fascinating with everybody working hard and learning everything so quickly. There was competition, too.

You wanted to be the best or at least one of the best. We were moving along really good and so excited! Then word came down from the War Department that all pilot classes were being stopped where they were.

KB: Was it because the war was nearing an end?

LD: Well, this was in 1944. It was terrible for us, but they said they had all the pilots they needed for the foreseeable future. Everyone had the option of staying right where they were and they would be called a permanent party on the line trainee. That simply meant that your pilot training would stop. You would go on the line, and you would service aircraft. You would take engines apart. They had their regular mechanics, and they would assign you to work with certain mechanics, which was fine. I enjoyed that.

Then word came down that you could choose if there was another branch of the Air Force that you wanted to go into you could, but your pilot class was frozen for now. At that time within about a three-week period, letters came from home telling me of all my friends that were being killed. Six of my very best friends were killed in about a two-week period. I had been a leader in school. I was captain of the football team. Here I was safe, and my friends were being killed, and I just couldn't stand it. It was terrible. I went to see my Commanding Officer. I said, "What can I do? I just can't sit here while my friends are being killed. I've got to avenge them. I just can't sit here."

He said, "If you really want to eliminate yourself, there are options. Any branch of the service you want, you can go into."

I had had parachute training; I'd had infantry basic training. So I said, "I'll sign up for Infantry Paratroops."

He had the application, so I filled it out and sent it in. About two weeks later it came back from the War Department, and it said that anyone who was qualified to be a pilot could not leave the flying branch of the service. So I said, "What can I do then?"

He said, "You can go into aerial gunnery. You can go into radio, or you can go into aircraft mechanics. You've qualified for all of those. You can go into those right now."

I said, "What would get me into the fighting quickest?"

He said, "Well, the quickest and the most dangerous is aerial gunnery."

So I said, "I'll take it."

I signed up for aerial gunnery school. They sent me to Kingman, Arizona to aerial gunnery school. I went down there, and I did really well. I was real high in all of the areas, in everything on the ground – the ground school, learning to fire. It was really a kick. To teach you how to fire from an aircraft at another aircraft, they had an interesting way of doing it. First of all we were firing 50-caliber machine guns, and they are big. The shell is as big around as your thumb. Initially to learn to fire a 50-caliber gun, you didn't just hold it. It was on a mount, and the kick was something. The guns would have two handles, and you had to push the fire button. It was on a tripod, and you would just learn to hold your arms in a certain way so that it didn't just shake the daylights out of you. You would fire at targets until you were good. We had at the back of the gun a ring sight, and it had concentric circles on the inside and a piece of metal across the concentric circles. On the end you had like a finger with a brass dot on the end of it. You learned to fire by using the ring sight and the dot. For instance, when an airplane is going past you in that direction, if you shoot right at it, the bullet will go behind it because they are traveling so fast. So you wouldn't fire right at it. You would adjust your gun with your ring sight so it's at a certain angle ahead of this airplane that's going that way. Instead of shooting right at it, you've got to move the muzzle of the gun in front of the plane. Based on the speed that you're traveling and the speed that aircraft is going, you can judge that real quickly. You put that dot on one of the rings that you figure will compensate for the speed. Then you fire. We did this first of all in something like a video game. You had a make-believe gun and make-believe planes going, and you would learn to adjust that very quickly. I got to be real good at that.

Then your plane is going this way, and the other plane is going that way, so now if you shoot right at it, you're going to go behind it on that side. So now you've got to put the muzzle this way, but not too much because you're traveling that way, and you're giving momentum to the bullet going that direction. The fighter goes twice as fast as the bomber, and so you have to compensate about half, and you need to judge that. You get real good at that.

One of our instructors said, "Remember in combat, if they're firing at you, your life is worth three seconds. You've got to get them within three seconds, or they'll get you."

You know, that's motivation! We did this in these games, but we were firing this 50-caliber machinegun in the firing range to get the feel of it. Then we started firing shotguns. The kick of a shotgun is similar to a 50-caliber -- not quite as much, but similar. We were stationary, and we



were shooting skeet, and we would do that for hours. I had never shot at skeet before, but I had shot at birds – pheasants and that sort of thing, so I had an idea. They put us on the bed of a truck and drove the truck around in a circle. You didn't know where these clay pigeons would come from, but you had your shotgun mounted on a tripod with the ring sights. You were now learning from a moving platform to fire at a moving target. You got so you could nail those things every time. It was always practice, practice, practice.

After we got so we were really good at that, they took us up in planes to get us used to it. They taught us all about the different firing stations in an aircraft. The B 24 and the B 17 had the same firing stations. They had the waist gunners on each side. They had a ball turret underneath. They had the tail and the chin, all these firing positions. You learned how to operate these different positions. The waist gunners hold a 50-caliber machinegun on a mount, and it was just like we were practicing on the range. You're using the ring sight. Airplanes are coming.

The tail gunner would go back and get set in the tail, and you had a gun that you fired the same way the waist gunners did. You had a ring sight, and you learned how to fire from that position. You went up to the upper local, which is a turret up on top and you learned how to do that. You had controls, and you had two guns there. On the chin turret, you had two guns and a turret operation there with a gun sight in it. The lower ball turret was probably the most accurate gun on the plane (at least that's what they told us). You were solid; you were down in good position. You had two 50-caliber machineguns to either side of you, and you had a gun sight that was amazing. You'd get in, crank the guns so they were pointed straight down, open the hatch, and step in on the seat. You'd sit down on the seat, put your parachute under your seat, put your feet in some pedals that controlled the turret and gun positions. You learned that gun sight, and as you looked in the gun sight, you could see a line. You had vertical lines that you could move in and out by moving your foot, and then you had parallel lines that you could move up and down with the other foot. As an aircraft would pass your view through the gun sight, the gun sight compensates for the speed of the aircraft, for the wind velocity, and the velocity of the plane that you're going to be firing at. The gun sight is adapted to all of that. It was amazing! So you would talk: "Somebody coming under it at six o'clock low. Pick 'em up, ball."

They're talking to you like this, and you see the plane coming. You frame it with your feet, and you track it with your paddles. As soon as you've got it framed, you're tracking, and you're firing – three-second bursts. If you do all of that and you've framed it properly, your framing and moving in the turret compensate for your speed, that aircraft speed, and the wind velocity. It's all compensated for, and so you've got a pretty accurate firing. Anyhow, I got really good at the ball. I really did. It was exciting. You know, you had a lot of things to do. My gosh, it was really something!

Before we ever went up in the air, we had to learn the 50-caliber machinegun. We had to learn that inside and out. We'd take them apart and put them together, and then we'd do it again with winter flying gloves on. They were kind of heavy gloves. Then you had to learn to do that blindfolded because if you had to replace one of your guns while you were in the air, you probably didn't have any light in the waist of the aircraft and you've got to know how to do it. You've got to be able to identify the piece and where it goes by feel through winter flying gloves. Boy, you did it! That was the ball turret.

The first time I was ever airsick, we were out in advanced combat training. We were up flying just below the cloudbank, and there was wind and a little thunderhead above us. I was in the ball, and I was just having fun. No planes were coming in so we were just having fun. The guys in the upper local were doing the same. We were just playing. I was spinning that turret, and then I'd pull it back and spin it the other way. I was just having a ball! All of a sudden I got sick. They had told us, "If you get sick, you go to the bomb bay and you unload there. Don't you do it in the aircraft."

So I pushed the sticks forward, unlatched the door, and popped out of there. From the waist, you had the radio room, the bomb bay, and the pilot's quarters. I ran to the radio room. I was going through the radio room, and I yelled, "I'm sick!"

The radioman pushed open the door for the bomb bay as I was running, and I just made it to the bomb bay in time. In the bomb bay, the bombs were loaded to the side one after the other along the whole fuselage – two or three rows of them. There had a little catwalk going through the bomb bay, and then cables were stretched to the side of that out a little further. You were to hang onto those cables as you went through the bomb bay, so that's where I was sick. Then when you get on the ground, you've got to clean it up. So I did that.

KB: Was that the only time you got sick?

LD: It was the only time I got sick, but it was my fault. The guys were laughing and said, "What did you do? You've never been sick before."

I told them I was just playing games, and they said, "That's stupid."

Anyhow, I got so I could really track them. I was fine with the other positions, too, but the ball turret was what I really got good at, and so that became my position.

KB: How long did that training last?

LD: Oh, we were there I guess about five months. You were there a long time because it was very critical. Then orders came that we were to report to some field on the East Coast to go to Europe, so that was great.

Marion and I had dated in high school, and I'd fallen in love with her.

KB: Was she from Logan, too?

LD: Yes, her dad was sent to San Luis Obispo to guard the coast a year before Pearl Harbor, so she spent her junior year at San Luis Obispo High School. Then war broke out, and her dad was sent to the Hawaiian Islands for staging to go into the Pacific. Their mother Bessie brought the kids back to Logan. She didn't know if Ruel was going to make it out alive or not so she had to find a way to support the kids. She had been a teacher as a young woman, so she went back to college in Logan. She standardized her teaching degree. Marion went to Logan High, and I was

there. I had been going with a girl. I wasn't serious about her, but I really liked her. She used to accompany me when I played. Then I met Marion! I tell you, I was lost! I never dated another girl. I wrote to her all through this training. We had a delay en route to the East Coast, and we got married.

When I got here, orders came that instead of going to Europe I was to report to Williams Field, Arizona to await shipment to the Pacific. I didn't care. I went to Williams Field, and as time went on, we waited and we waited. They didn't ship us out, so in order to keep the guys busy, they started a football team on the base. They did this all over the training commands in Europe because the war in Europe was winding down. They organized football teams over there, so I went out for football. Our team won the Southwestern States Service Championship.

KB: What position did you play?

LD: Well, it was kind of funny. The first coach we had ran what was known as a Notre Dame box. It was the offense that Notre Dame used. It's similar to a single wing except you don't have a wingback outside the end. He's in behind the tackle, and you have a blocking back, a fullback, and a tailback. I was the fastest guy on the team. I was really fast. I was a hundred-yard dash man in high school. So they had me at blocking back on that single wing because I was a good blocker, and I was fast. I could outrun any of our backs, but when Norm Jacob came, he went to T formation. Then the blocking back becomes the quarterback, so he first put me at this guard spot, but I was so fast that I got around the end and into the holes way ahead of the backs. The backs were way behind me, and I was blowing through there. So he moved me over here to this tackle spot, and then swinging around like this the timing was about right. Now the backs weren't so far behind me; they were just right.

KB: How long did you do that?

LD: Oh, we finished the war playing football. They were neat guys. There were pro players, college players. The guy that was first string for Oklahoma played on our team. We had a heck of a lot of fun with it.

KB: Was Marion with you during this time?

LD: Marion came down and stayed with me during this football period, while we were waiting to be sent into combat. We were waiting and waiting, and it was terrible. I'd talk with CO's, and they'd say, "You just relax. You're in the pipeline. You'll be going over when they invade Japan. Don't worry about it."

We had this mass of guys ready to be in on the invasion of Japan. I was part of that.

KB: And you were still there when the bombs were dropped in August of 1945?

LD: Yes.

KB: So you were just left. Do you have regrets about that?

LD: Oh, I weep about it still. I really do. It was the hardest thing – so hard! I wanted to go. I'd been a leader in school, and the kids looked to me and depended on me. Maybe that's conceit, but I didn't look at it as conceit because I wanted to help them and take care of them. I've had the same feelings about my sisters.

We didn't know we weren't going. We were just waiting, anticipating going. You're doing this. When they dropped those atomic bombs, we knew we wouldn't go, and it was just a terrible letdown. My enlistment was for the duration of the war and six months. Six months after the war ended, I was discharged. During the six months I was in the casualty detachment. Anything they could think of for you, you did. We had boxing matches on Saturday night. I boxed on Saturday nights. But it was such a terrible disappointment. I feel so inferior to the guys that went overseas.

KB: Why is that? You know that you were as well qualified.

LD: I know, but they got in the fight. At least they were there. We were ready to fight. We were trained.

KB: You have been very involved since then in doing the flag ceremonies and things like that.

LD: I guess that's my way of making up for what I couldn't do during the war.

KB: Where were you when you finally got discharged?

LD: I was still at Williams Field, Arizona, just out of Mesa. Then I came back to Logan and went to school on the GI Bill, graduated in three years, and became a coach at Lava Hot Springs. We had two kids going to school, and we got up to Lava where I was the head football, basketball and track coach and taught science. Then halfway through the year the Superintendent came to the school and told us, "You'll all need to know this. Next year we are consolidating five high schools into one." That was Lava, Downy, Inkom, Aramo, and McCammon.

KB: Wow, that's a lot of people out of jobs.

LD: Well, there were some out of jobs, and they told us that first-year coaches would be assistant coaches. I'll be darned if I was going to be an assistant coach, so I went back to Utah State and got a Master's degree. I coached freshman football and the college swimming team and was a graduate assistant in the department. Then when I got my Master's degree, the only job I could find in Utah was down in Parowan. There was no place to live in Parowan except a dugout basement with dirt walls. They had given me a contract and I took Marion down to look it over. We went down, but I wasn't going to take my family to a dirt dugout, so I just handed the contract back to them and said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

I came back and went to California where I got a job at a school called Fort Bragg. It was way up on the north coast 160 miles north of San Francisco. We were right on the ocean with the

redwood forest behind us, beaches, a fishing village on one side, a fish ladder on the other side and a lumber company in the middle of town. I was in heaven! We were there about two weeks, and the Mayor came and said, "Our Recreation Director left town. Will you take over the program? I understand you have training in recreation."

I said, "Yes, I have a Master's degree in it."

They hired me as Recreation Director. I ran a recreation center. We built a program that was just so neat, and I was football, swimming, and track coach. In the three years I was there, we lost one league game.

There was a college in Auburn that contacted us and said, "We've heard about your success in Fort Bragg. We would like you to come over and be our head line coach. Our head coach is leaving at the end of the year. If you like it here and things work out, you'll be head coach next year."

Well, you know, for a young coach, that's pretty heavy stuff. I went and talked to my superintendent and told him about it. He said, "Les, there's something fishy about that. I think it would be a mistake to go."

I said, "But the College President was the one who talked to me. He wouldn't lie to me."

He said, "I don't care if it was the President of the United States. There's something fishy about that."

I didn't listen to him, and I went over to the college and sure enough I was head line coach and swimming coach for the college, and that was neat. I was having fun, and we were having a good season. Halfway through the season, the head coach said, "Les, I can't wait until next year. This is the best year I've ever had, and we've got everybody back. Next year's team is going to be the best team I've ever had."

So he wasn't leaving! That Sunday afternoon I went to see the College President and confronted him about it. He said, "Well, I guess I wasn't completely honest with you. We like Paul, and we thought once you got here, it's such a neat town that you would stay no matter what."

I said, "Oh, President, how could I ever believe anything else you say? I left a wonderful situation over in Fort Bragg. We loved it there. I'll finish the year out here because I've signed a contract, but after that I won't be back."

I took a job just out of San Francisco in the Bay area and was there for five years. I was football and track coach there. Then one of my very good athletes, a high school American Quarterback was proselyted by Utah State to come up, and I was contacted by Utah State. The athletic director there called and said, "Les, we have an opening for the freshman football job. We understand you might be willing to come up here."

So we came back and interviewed and they offered me the job. I said, "Well, I've got to go back to California and get released from my contract."

He said, "Okay get released, and call me when you get that taken care of."

Marion and I went back, and we were only two weeks away from the start of football, and the superintendent said, "No way. I can't release you. How can I find a decent coach?"

I said, "Suppose I just walk out on my contract?"

He said, "You do that, and I will blackball you with every superintendent and every school that I can find, and you'll never find another job."

That scared me. I had five kids, so I had to call Utah State and said, "I'm sorry. He wouldn't release me. If anything comes up in the future, let me know."

I finished that year down there and lo and behold, in about January, Box Elder School Superintendent Walt Talbot called and said, "Les, I understand you might want to come back to Utah."

I said, "What have you got in mind?"

He said, "Well, Earl Ferguson is retiring, and we're looking for a head coach to take his place at Box Elder High School. We'd like to have you come and interview for the job."

So I came back to the interview and got the job, which I really enjoyed. After I had been here a year and a half, I was asked to coach the city age-group programs during the summers. Mayor Willis Hansen later asked me to be Recreation Director for Brigham City. We built a first-class recreation program, which was named Outstanding Program in the Nation with a population under 20,000.

During my 11 years as head coach at Box Elder High School, our football team won 7 regional championships and our track team won 7 division championships. After my coaching years at Box Elder, I worked in the Box Elder School District Office for 16 more years.

These have been good years, and Brigham City has been a wonderful place to live and raise my family.

KB: Thank you, Les, for talking with me and giving me all of this good information.