

Interview with Frank J. Dunnigan, 25 September 1986.

Allen: This is Thursday, 25 September 1986, and I am in Fort Lee, New Jersey, talking with Frank J. Dunnigan. member of the class of 1934, I believe,

Dunnigan: That is correct.

Allen: At the Junior College. How did you happen to go to the Junior College?

Dunnigan: Well, my recollection is that I had a scholarship and I believe that the scholarship was to the Junior College at Bridgeport, I am not absolutely positive of that. But anyway, it was about my only choice, where I could live at home, and go to school.

Allen: How did you commute to the Junior College?

Dunnigan: By automobile, there were four of us, for the greater part of the time. But, we rode in a Ford Coupe with a rumble seat, all driving from Westport, and as I recall, my place was always in the rumble seat, there were two girls and two boys, the two boys were in the rumble seat, and December, January and February, that was quite an experience.

Allen: It was. I remember rumble seats. Do you remember the name of the Foundation that provided the scholarship?

Dunnigan: I recall it was an Emily Fuller scholarship. Emily Fuller was the wife of Robert Fuller, who was a noted educator. I believe he wrote a chemistry textbook, Fuller and Donnelly, I think it was, And he was also on the Board of Education in Westport. And he set up the scholarship, or at least it was set up, in memory of his wife. I am not sure of who exactly did set it up.

Allen: Does the name Gerhartdt Rast in your high school, ring a bell?

Dunnigan: No, although it seems to me that I have heard the name.

Allen: I believe he was the principal of the high school at that time and helped to pick you for the scholarship.

Dunnigan: My recollection is that the principal was Douglas Young, but, and I thought that Rast came later, but, I could be wrong on that.

Allen: The only reason that I mention that was that Rast eventually came to and retired from the University of Bridgeport in the Department of Education. And he remembered you and said that he had helped to pick you for the scholarship.

Dunnigan: Well, that is possible.

Allen: Gerry is retired and lives in Southbury, Heritage Village. Alright, in the fall of 1932, you first came to the Junior College, and one of the things that I have had some difficulty in pinning down, is the assembly program. And they came up with a seating plan for assemblies at this time, in an effort to take attendance for assemblies. Do you remember anything about the assemblies?

Dunnigan: I recall, I have a vague recollection of attending assemblies. I don't recall seating assignments.

Allen: OK. Another thing that came out at this time was Mr. Cortright's Curriculum for Social Intelligence. Do you recall that curriculum?

Dunnigan: I don't, no.

Allen: OK. It didn't work out very well. It was an attempt to copy, in part, some of the Columbia program in the social sciences and the physical sciences as a basic core. And even then the students were pretty much professionally oriented, although the program itself, in a Junior College, was primarily a liberal arts program, designed to prepare for transfer to other colleges.

Dunnigan: In that connection, however, I had my mind set on being a Civil Engineer. And I must say that my program was heavily slanted toward pre-engineering. And I remember taking Chemistry, Physics and Calculus, all in my first year. Which was quite a load.

Allen: Do you recall your instructors at that time?

Dunnigan: yes. I was thinking about that last night in bed. Clarence Ropp was my Chemistry professor, Willard Ballou was my Physics and Calculus professor. I had Dean Scurr as my English Professor and Dean Wallace was my History Professor.

Allen: OK, can you tell us a little bit about some of these people?

Dunnigan: Well, Dr. Ropp was a very serious instructor, liked to spring surprise tests, when you least expected them of course, a very capable professor, no question, and Willard Ballou was a very colorful character, quite elderly, he bragged about having

taught math every hour in the twenty four hours of the day, having taught Navy men who came off watch, and so forth and so on. Rather dry wit, also a very capable instructor. He seemed very gruff, intimidating at first, but once you got to know him, you really began to like him.

Allen: He didn't like to give tests, did he?

Dunnigan: Not particularly, no. Dean Scurr was a very mild mannered, very pleasant person. She really got me interested in writing. I took an English Composition course when I went there. Enjoyed it very much, and did very well in it. I've always enjoyed writing since. Dean Wallace was the, sort of a hard bitten professor, very serious, very demanding, and you certainly paid strict attention in his class at all times, never knew when you were going to be called upon, and unless you had read the assignment and prepared yourself, you were in trouble. Who does that leave now? That was the four of them for the five subjects, and then of course, there was Coach White as we called him. Who taught, I've forgotten the name of the course now, whether it was physiology or -

Allen: Health Education.

Dunnigan: Health Education, I guess that is what it was called. He was a very casual person, of course, and enjoyed shooting the breeze with the students, I think, more than instructing.

Allen: Ballou lived right near campus, didn't he?

Dunnigan: Yes, I believe so.

Allen: And I have a story that even though he lived near campus, he, just walking through the gate would get him there, he would drive his car around the block to the campus every day.

Dunnigan: Yeah, yeah. A very slow moving person.

Allen: Now, he had a daughter who eventually married Dr. Goulding. Did you remember Dr. Goulding?

Dunnigan: Yes, I did know him. I didn't have him for any subjects that I can recall.

Allen: Some of your classmates at this time are people who are still around the University in one way or another, George Puglisi, do you remember him?

Dunnigan: I remember the name. I have a slight visualization of him, I wouldn't be sure that it was correct, or not.

Allen: OK. Stuart Mayper?

Dunnigan: No, I don't recall Stuart.

Allen: Stuart just retired from our Chemistry faculty last year, and he was there for one year, I believe, and then went on to another school, eventually came back to the University as a teacher. There was also in that first year, a beard contest. The infamous beard contest, do you remember that?

Dunnigan: Yes, I do recall that, yeah.

Allen: I have more people who claimed to have come in second or third on that, which is at variance with the record.

Dunnigan: I don't think I was in contention.

Allen: Alright in 1934, you were on the track team.

Dunnigan: Spring of '34.

Allen: And you got your letter on the track team. Do you remember anything about that team?

Dunnigan: Very little, I am sure the meets took place at Seaside Park, and I am sure my event was the high jump.

Allen: And the discus.

Dunnigan: And the discus?

Allen: As a matter of fact, in a meet with Staples, you took a first in the high jump and a first in the discus.

Dunnigan: I am absolutely amazed on the discus.

Allen: However, in the meet with Stratford High School, you were not listed as one of the people who placed.

Dunnigan: Yes, that's very possible.

Allen: And I was wondering if perhaps you had missed that meet for some reason or other?

Dunnigan: I can not recall.

Allen: OK. Now one of the professors that you had was Prof. Herren.

Dunnigan: Yes, Professor Herren, What did he teach?

Allen: I thought it was math.

Dunnigan: Well, it's possible in my second year. I had analytic geometry, descriptive geometry, although I thought I had Ballou both years. I remember the name, but I don't particularly recall him.

Allen: Well, the reason that I know this is that in the class will, you are quoted as leaving your ability to argue with Prof. Herren to someone. And I was wondering what you were arguing about? You don't remember?

Dunnigan: No I don't. I don't know.

Allen: You also, in the spring of '34, were voted as having done the most for your class. What did you do to win that honor?

Dunnigan: I really don't know, other than being president of the class both years. Aside from that, I can't think of anything especially that I did. Although if I had the reputation for arguing or being able to argue, I had some discussions with the professors or Dr. Cortright, I don't know.

Allen: How well did you know Mr. Cortright?

Dunnigan: Not particularly well. I think he knew my name when we met, and of course, I heard him speak many times at assemblies, and so forth. But I can't say that I knew him much better than the average student. Possibly a little better, since I was president of the class, I suppose I had some meetings with him.

Allen: Did you have anything to do with student government?

Dunnigan: I don't, well, the vague recollection is that, yes, in my position as president of the class, but aside from that I don't have a specific recollections.

Allen: You don't know know what you were primarily concerned with in Student Government?

Dunnigan: No, no.

Allen: Alright, I have an interesting little thing in the Class Prophecy, which may ring a bell. In the Clas Prophecy, it says, "Dunnigan has left Mary and run off with that little blonde flirt, Doris Gustafson." Does any of that ring a bell?

Dunnigan: The name would be Mary Pastor, I have often wondered whatever happend to her. And what was Gustafson's first name?

Allen: Doris.

Dunnigan: Doris. I remember the name, Doris Gustafson, but I

can not really picture her. I used to date Mary Pastor, I don't ever recall dating Doris Gustafson.

Allen: Well Class Prophecies usually are on the ridiculous side - with a lot of opposites.

Dunnigan: I see, yes, Well, I was fairly tall, and as I recall she was very short.

Allen: An evidently she was a flirt and -. How would you typify yourself? Were you sort of staid and proper?

Dunnigan: Pretty much so, yes.

Allen: This would fit. Alright, one thing that I have a little difficulty in tying down, during this period, is the student's social life. What they did after classes, and what the general atmosphere was like on campus.

Dunnigan: It was pretty serious and business like. We all lived at home and therefore once classes were over, you headed for home. With the four of us, if one had to stay later, the others would be in the library doing home work and so forth until we were ready to depart. But there was very, very little social life, that I can recall. Aside from one or two dances a year, I just can't recall any social activity. I think there might have been a little bit more among some of the Bridgeport residents, the Warren Harding group and the Central High group. But only because they were friends and they would have had the same social contact anyhow. ~~It was not university sponsored. So I don't~~ recall much social life at all, really.

Allen: What is your most vivid impression of the Junior College when you were there?

Dunnigan: Most vivid impression? I guess it would be the serious study program. I mentioned before that I took both chemistry and physics as well as calculus in the first year. Normally you take Chemistry in one year and physics in another, because it is four hours of lab work, but because of the restrictions of the staff and program, they offered physics every other year only, it happened that this was the year that I had to take Chemistry as well. So with 8 hours of lab work, a week, and the preparation for lab work, and the other class work, there was precious little time for any Social Activities. I worked pretty hard every night and every weekend and, on homework.

Allen: You must have done rather well, because you were elected to Phi Theta Kappa, and graduated Magna Cum Laude.

Dunnigan: Yes, my grades were good. I remember, I think it was Dr. Ballou who said, work like hell in your first year at college

and establish your reputation; then you find that you can take it a lot easier from there on out.

Allen: You know what I used to tell my freshmen the same thing?

Dunnigan: Is that right? Well, I think it is quite true. But having done that the first year, I think that you establish a habit too, and you continue.

Allen: Now you went on to New York University School of Commerce. You graduated in '34, but you didn't graduate from NYU til '40-.

Dunnigan. That is correct. Between, in my summer vacation, let's see, it would have been 1933, I had a summer job with the New York Edison Company, which is now Con Edison, today. I went back to that job in the summer of '34 after I graduated from the University of Bridgeport, and I stayed on. I think after about a year there, and let me say that I wound up in the accounting department.

Allen: Yes, this is quite a change from Civil Engineering.

Dunnigan: Yes, well, in 1932, '33, and '34, you were extremely lucky to be able to find any kind of a job, and as I said, I wound up in the Accounting Department and I found many, many of New York Edison's engineers in the accounting department, running adding machines all day long. And this was simply because they were doing no construction work, and, because of the depression, and so forth. So after about a year there, I decided that I would start taking some evening courses at New York University. And I took my first course in a course in Utility Accounting and, I have forgotten what the other subject was. I really didn't have any specific plans about getting a degree at that point. My principle objective was to take a few courses that might help me in my work at New York Edison, hopefully to move ahead.

But I found the job was quite boring, no stimulous at all, and no matter what you did, didn't make any difference as far as promotions were concerned. In fact, I was promoted to a substantially more important job, and after six months in that I asked tentatively about a possible salary increase, and I was told that that was out of the question, if I was unhappy I would hbe transferred back into my former job. No question the job was more important, and the person who had it before, was paid more than twice as much as I was making, but that's the way that the situation was.

Allen: Do you recall what you were making at that time?

Dunnigan: \$25.00 a week. The reason I recall, was because my monthly commutation from Westport was \$24.92.

Allen: Which left you a lot to eat on.

Dunnigan: Well that was for a month whereas this was weekly. But still in all, I had subway fare, and I had my transportation at the other end, from the railroad station, home. So after the first year, I found it stimulating to take the courses and I wanted to continue and I decided that I would work toward a degree, but since I was working, and commuting to Westport, which meant getting home at, catching the 10 o'clock train if I was lucky, getting home at midnight, and taking the 7:13 train back in the morning. I limited my studies to two nights a week at New York University.

And along the line, three years later, I changed jobs and went with Prentice-Hall. And I worked considerable overtime there. So that, again I was pretty much limited to two nights a week, so that's why it stretched out over the period that it did..

Allen: And just about the time you graduated, you went into the army?

Dunnigan: Yes, I graduated in 1940, as I recall, and in 1940 I had moved to the New York Post, I don't know if that shows in my resume. I wanted some tax experience, I thought that I might go into tax accounting at that time, and I got a job as an assistant to the tax manager of The New York Post, in 1940 and I was there about 10 months, and I decided that I would like to get my year's service over with and not have it interrupt my career at a later date. So I went into the service, I had about 10 months in there, two months to go and Pearl Harbor came along, so I knew I was in for the duration, so I applied for Officer Candidate School, and wound up with five years in the service.

Allen: What branch were you?

Dunnigan: I went into the Coast Artillery which, but then was assigned to the Anti-Aircraft part of Coast Artillery. A good part of Coast Artillery was converted, and the Officer Candidate School that I went to, although I applied for the Coast Artillery School in Fort Monroe, which was a permanent post, and I had visited there and it was just beautiful. I wound up in the Anti-Aircraft in Officer candidate School in (?) North Carolina. Which was out in the swamps. Far from any appearance of Fort Monroe.

Allen: Do you recall what unit you were assigned to?

Dunnigan: I started out in the 9th Coast Artillery in Boston Harbor, which was a regular Army unit. And it was there that I applied for Officer Candidate School, and I had to wait a while to get in, because once Pearl Harbor came along, everybody decided he wanted to go to Officer Candidate School. And I don't

know that there was any particular unit in Officer Candidate School. Following completion of that I was selected to be an instructor at the camp, and (?) I accepted. Following, about a year and a half, I was assigned to a unit which was the 541st AAA, and was the second unit, I think, to be assigned the new 120 mm Anti-Aircraft guns. The first one was up in Camp Edwards.

Allen: Did you go overseas?

Dunnigan: I did not go overseas, never went overseas in the entire 5 years. I had sailing orders three times, twice I came home and said goodbye to all my family and friends, the third time they told me I could go home once more before taking off, I said, "No, I've said goodbye twice, and I can't go through that embarrassment the third time". Went through the training program at Camp Davis and then went to Fort Bragg for staging, just prior to going overseas. First time the orders were cancelled, and we had to repeat the last five weeks of the training program. And that happened a second time. And the third time they broke up the Battalion, and they selected one company. which was ours, to go to Aberdeen Proving Ground, to test a brand new 36 inch mortar. There were only 4 of these guns ever built, and they were to be used against the West Wall in Germany. The projectile was supposed to be able to break up 12 feet of reinforced concrete and that is why I wound up at Aberdeen Proving Ground, working on that.

While, the first time we fired a projectile, they had a new plastic explosive which was 10 times as powerful as TNT, the projectile, which was 36 inches in diameter, exploded in the tube of the gun. Fortunately we were all behind bomb shelters, because it scattered pieces of steel the size of this table a quarter of a mile around the area. So they changed the explosive, and continued working on this, and eventually it was going to be made mobile and used against the Japanese caves in the South Pacific, and so forth. Well, we were still working on it at Aberdeen Proving Ground when the war ended.

Allen: I asked several questions on that because there is a similarity to my experience. A quick summary. I took my basic in field artillery at Bragg on the 155 howitzers, and then eventually ended up Camp Shanks, where I came in as a replacement in and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, 20 mm unit. And went overseas as an assistant machine gunner to an illiterate. And eventually was commissioned overseas in the infantry. And I stayed in the Reserves afterwards. I assume you did not.

Dunnigan: I stayed in the Reserves a short period as I recall. But a very short period.

Allen: Then you came back to Prentice-Hall where you eventually became President and Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the

Board, and Chairman of the Board and Chairman of the Executive Committee. And you retired from that.

Dunnigan: Yes.

Allen: How did you get back into a relationship with the University of Bridgeport?

Dunnigan: John Cox was responsible for that. John called me at one point, wanted to have lunch with me, and we did, and he wanted to get me involved with the Alumni of the University of Bridgeport, and this is really the first contact I had had from the University since I had left. Nobody ever contacted me and it just never occurred to me that I could walk in there and say, "Is there anything that I can do?" I was busy with my career and that was it.

Allen: Do you recall approximately when that was?

Dunnigan: I don't recall exactly. I would guess that it was four or five years before I went on the Board.

Allen: And then you received an honorary degree in '76 and then right after that came on the Board.

Dunnigan: Yes.

Allen: Good. What has been your most rewarding association with either the Junior College or the University of Bridgeport?

Dunnigan: Well as far as the University is concerned, I would say that one of my most rewarding experiences was my association with Dr. Miles, knowing him and working with him. I think he is a very capable person, I think he has done a hell of a job for the University, and I think he is very inspiring.

As far as the Junior College is concerned, the most rewarding, I guess it was the solid background I got in my education which enabled me to go on from there at New York University. Because it was almost entirely all serious business, there was, you can't say that I can recall any great camaraderie, because we didn't have time for that. And living at home, we of course, we didn't have the opportunity. My social life was, in those days, was more around friends of mine in Westport than it was around the University, or the Junior College.

Allen: OK, I think this will conclude the formal part of the taping, Frank. I will turn this off.

END OF TAPE.