

National Museum of the Pacific War

*Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas*

*Interview with Gene F. Dauer
United States Marine Corps*

Interview with Gene F. Dauer

This is Scott Atkinson. Today is February 18, 2005. I'm here in Fredericksburg, Texas interviewing Gene Dauer. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies achieves for the National Museum Of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Atkinson: Ok. To get us started, first, we would like to get a little background from you as to, for example, when and where you were born?

Mr. Dauer: I was born in East Saint Louis, Illinois, October 13, 1925.

Mr. Atkinson: And our parents were?

Mr. Dauer: Joseph and Hazel Dauer.

Mr. Atkinson: Where did you grow up?

Mr. Dauer: I spent my first fifteen years in East Saint Louis, Illinois.

Mr. Atkinson: Ok. And you went through the school system there?

Mr. Dauer: Yes. Through the Junior High, Rapp (?) Junior high School. At the time I got out of Junior High School, my parents had separated and my mother and, the man who became my step father.....well, actually he, I'm getting way out of line here. My stepfather, of course, was a graduate, chemical engineer who had worked for Monsanto for several years. Then, during the depression, Monsanto packed up and moved to Biloxi, Mississippi and he was out of a job. He had separated from his wife and my mother was working as a cocktail waitress out at Curtis Steinberg airport in Southeast Saint Louis.

Mr. Atkinson: As you were growing up were you active in sports?

Mr. Dauer: I tried out a lot. I wasn't very successful. (laughs) The closest I came to organized sports was at the Junior High School level and in the one and only game I started with my parents, mother and step-father present, on the opening kickoff, I was a defensive end and I put my head down to stop the runner and he got me on the top of the helmet

with his knee and I was history, unconscious. That was the end of my football career. (laughs) I did play, and had subsequent success in basketball, at the Junior High level.

Mr. Atkinson: But, you enjoyed sports?

Mr. Dauer: Oh, I enjoyed sports. I just wasn't very good at it. Believe it or not, as a youngster, I was a kind of a ninety-seven pound weakling. I was always trying to put weight on. Now, I'm trying to get it off. (laughs) Anyhow, my step-brothers had come out to California, or went out to California, his brother had gotten him a job in a foundry, Western Holly (?) Stove Company. He was quite an engineer. He was very good at instrumentation and things like that, so he got work at the foundry. So then he sent for my mother and my younger brother. That was trip and half to.

We drove out with the husband of a friend of an aunt and uncle that were in Los Angeles area. He went back to Detroit to pick up a brand new Plymouth business coup. I never will forget that thing. He was driving it back from the Detroit area, and to keep cost down. My mother shared the cost for gasoline and.....

Mr. Atkinson: What year was that?

Mr. Dauer: 1941. I graduated in February of 41. I was a semester behind in school for help and other reasons, so we packed up and moved the Los Angeles area.

Mr. Atkinson: Do you recall Pearl Harbor and the attack.....?

Mr. Dauer: Oh yes. Very much.

Mr. Atkinson: What sort of memory do you have of that?

Mr. Dauer: Of course, I didn't know anything about Pearl Harbor. It was a shock and I had the usual patriotic, you know, I just turned fifteen, the previous October. I was too young. I had to be, I think, sixteen years and nine months. Something like that. Anyhow, as soon as I was old enough, I kept trying to enlist, first in the Navy. My hearing was so bad that I couldn't pass the hearing test. I was crushed, because, you know, I wanted to part of the operation. I took all kind of vitamins and....I

think the hearing was caused by high temperatures in East Saint Louis as they burned a lot of soft coal at that time. Every winter I wound up with Bronchitis and ear infections. I can remember the doctor saying, "Well, if it doesn't break in a day or two, we are going to have to go in an lance it." I said, "Don't fool around and get the infection." Anyhow, finally, when I turned eighteen, of course I had to sign up for the draft, I went down to the draft board and someone yelled, "Hey, you." and I answered, and that was the hearing test. (laughs) An old one-legged gunnery sergeant from the Marine Corps was sitting there and he talked me into the Marine Corps. I hadn't even considered the Marines before that.

Mr. Atkinson: Do you recall anything of what he said that caused you to be interested in the Marines?

Mr. Dauer: Oh yeah. He gave me the history of all the things they had done in the passed. He also said that by being what they called a selective service volunteer, after I got in boot camp they started calling us handcuffed volunteers. He says in the regulars you get promotions a lot faster for the regulars than they are for the draftees and the reservists.

Mr. Atkinson: Did you find that to be true?

Mr. Dauer: Well, I was a private for the better part of two and a half years (laughs) before I made PFC. Not entirely. Because I was a regular Marine, typical Marine, I was in trouble as much as I was.....

Mr. Atkinson: Where did you enlist?

Mr. Dauer: In Los Angeles.

Mr. Atkinson: In Los Angeles. You recall the date you enlisted?

Mr. Dauer: January 4. That's the date I reported for duty. I enlisted just before Christmas. Let's see, I was eighteen in October and I think I got my draft call the following month. I think it was November and they let me stay at home through the holidays and I reported for duty January 4, 1944.

Mr. Atkinson: Where did you go then?

Mr. Dauer: Marine Recruit depot in San Diego.

Mr. Atkinson: And that is where you had your basic training?

Mr. Dauer: I had boot camp in....at that time,.....well the recruit people still were where you get your basic. The rifle range was at a place called Camp Matthews, which is now part of the campus of University of California at San Diego. They took over all that property. The rifle range today is up at Camp Pendleton.

Mr. Atkinson: Where did you go after boot camp?

Mr. Dauer: Camp Pendleton. And joined the Fifth Marine, Fifth Medical Battalion. I started out in B Company and trained with them....the first three companies, Able, Baker and Charlie, were assigned to the three infantry regiments in the Division 26th, 27th and 28th. B Company was assigned to the 27th. All my training being with that combat unit, I never got to put it to use because I went, on the summer of '44 I took leave at the training at Camp Pendleton and went back to East Saint Louis to visit with my father. We were out in the piney woods and didn't get the telegram to report back to duty. So that was my first big trouble. I was late getting back to San Diego, back to Pendleton. Baker Company had already shipped out, they were gone by the time I got back. So, I got assigned to D Company, which was still in Camp Pendleton. I was with D company when we (started the tour) (?)

Mr. Atkinson: Tape fades out.....

Mr. Dauer: Basically.....well, everyone in the Marine Corps is, first off, a rifleman. I did take some field signal courses. But, it was primarily semaphores. (unintelligible) I picked up the telephone stuff just out of necessity. If it needed repair, they said, "You know anything about the D91 (?) switchboard?" I said, "No, but I can learn. That's how I got....."

Mr. Atkinson: (unintelligible)

Mr. Dauer: (unintelligible) they were going overseas.

Mr. Dauer: It was part of the eighteenth. They were going overseas.

Mr. Atkinson: They were ready to pretty much go?

Mr. Dauer: Right.

Mr. Atkinson: OK. Where did you go?

Mr. Dauer: First, we went to Hawaii, the big Island. The second division was set up (unintelligible).... We landed at Hilo and we went up to a little village in the mountains called Camp Walla (?). D Company was assigned to an Army (?) hospital in Camp Walla (?) And I used that (unintelligible)....

Mr. Atkinson: And they needed somebody to do that.

Mr. Dauer: Right. And they said, "If you're willing to learn, we're willing to teach you." There wasn't any formal schooling, or anything like that, it was just, here's the switchboard, here's how it is supposed to work, now make it work.

Mr. Atkinson: From that point on were you pretty much (unintelligible).

Mr. Dauer: Well, no. My MOS, Military Occupational Specialist, was ambulance driver. They came out with something to do (?). I didn't have an ambulance to drive so that's where they were giving me separate (?) duty.

Mr. Atkinson: Tell me about the Marine Corps.

Mr. Dauer: They're resourceful. They use what they've got when they've got it.

Mr. Atkinson: How long did you all stay in Hawaii?

Mr. Dauer: We got there in October of 1944. I just turned nineteen. Then we shipped out, I think, the middle of January. The flotilla, or whatever you want to call it, was gathered at Eniwetok (unintelligible). Getting there, they were scattered all over. You couldn't see a lot of other

ships. From there we went up to Saipan. We didn't go ashore, but, they assembled again and then from Saipan we went to Iwo.

Mr. Atkinson: You were probably anxious to get to shore?

Mr. Dauer: Yeah. I know I was very anxious to get to shore because the Kamikaze were just starting and I wanted to get off of that ship. I wanted to be on dry land.

Mr. Atkinson: Do you recall what ship you were on?

Mr. Dauer: I remember the ship was *Hilo*. That was the (unintelligible)...Merchant Marine ship. A ship operated by the Merchant Marine but they had Coast Guard gunnery crews aboard and they were transporting Marines to Hawaii. I can't remember what the name of the ship was that went to Remo (?)

Mr. Atkinson: When you arrived at Remo (?).....(unintelligible).

Mr. Dauer: (unintelligible).....Like I say, I just wanted to get off that ship. I didn't actually land until D plus four, the day they raised the flag at Surabachi.

Mr. Atkinson: You saw the flag raising?

Mr. Dauer: No. I didn't see the actual raising. We were still on the ship. But, they made the announcement over the intercom and everybody rushed to the rail to look. There was Old Glory. Then later that afternoon, my outfit went ashore. I heaved a big sigh of relief.

Mr. Atkinson: What part of the island did you get ashore on?

Mr. Dauer: Just below (unintelligible) number one. Below the rock cliffs (?). I don't remember the colors of the beach. Being late in the day, the (unintelligible) said, "OK. Get our stuff together and we're going to bivouac here." We were right next to the Thirteenth Marines (?). I don't know what battery, but there were 105 MM howitzers. We planned to dig in there and we would dig a hole and the sand would just run back in. You couldn't get a hole. So we went out and gathered the cardboard casings (?) that the artillery ammunition was in. You filled that with the sand, and lined the hole with it, and you had a hole.

That night I'll never forget. I've never been so scared in my life. Artillery, back and forth. The Thirteenth would fire out and the Japs would fire back.

Mr. Atkinson: Did most of the fire from the Japanese come off of Surabachi?

Mr. Dauer: No. It was coming from up here. No. At that time, they had, pretty well, well; they didn't have all of Surabachi secured. But, they had them, pretty well, pinned down. There was still a lot of enemy there. Every time one of us would stick their head out, or an artillery piece, they would go after them. That was the 28th Marines.

Mr. Atkinson: That first night that you were there were men being hit where you were?

Mr. Dauer: Not in the immediate area. There was artillery. The incoming was all going too far. It was going over where we were and passed where the artillery was firing. They didn't have very good forward observers.

Mr. Atkinson: The Japanese were not able to home in on where your artillery pieces were located.

Mr. Dauer: No.

Mr. Atkinson: Otherwise they would have been hit. I would imagine.

Mr. Dauer: Yeah. Because they had wonderful observation. It was nighttime and all they were going on was the muzzle flash.

Mr. Atkinson: So, what happened next?

Mr. Dauer: Well, the other thing I remember, being that close to the airfield, during the previous day, well all during the bombardment and Ariel attack, they wrecked a lot of airplanes on the airfield. The Japanese would just push them over the edge. This was all raised. The airfield was higher than the surrounding ground.

Mr. Atkinson: There were Japanese planes on the airfield?

- Mr. Dauer:** They had all kinds of wrecked planes around the airfield. At night, they would filter in and lay in wait until daylight and then start sniping. So you didn't dare get up and start moving around first thing in the morning until they got all the snipers cleared away. I don't know who was doing the clearing away, but I was sure glad that they got somebody to.....In the whole time I was there, the only enemy, either Japanese, or Korean, they had a lot of Korean workers there, that were injured and in the Division hospital. I never saw an active Japanese come out and point a rifle at me and shoot.
- Mr. Atkinson:** So you were, basically, in support of the hospital, the field hospital that was there?
- Mr. Dauer:** Yeah. It was called the Division hospital and it was operated by the Fifth Medical Battalion, primarily, Headquarters and Supply Company and D and E Companies.
- Mr. Atkinson:** You saw a lot of casualties then?
- Mr. Dauer:** Oh yeah. I did eventually get to drive an ambulance. They lost so many ambulance drivers that I got reassigned and I was with the 26th Marines.
- Mr. Atkinson:** When you were driving the ambulance did you ever encounter any fire, or have problems?
- Mr. Dauer:** Not anyone you could see. I mean you couldn't stop and shot back at anybody. We took a lot of fire. The Japanese strategy, if you want to call it that, was they didn't shoot to kill. They shot people to wound them and tie up more people, corpsman and.....so we had.....of course they did kill a lot of people. I get so mad nowadays when the news starts talking about, "Well, they lost another ten people here." Ten people in a day isn't.....
- Mr. Atkinson:** Not compared to what happened here.
- Mr. Dauer:** Right. How many tens of thousands did we leave there?

- Mr. Atkinson:** I know there were 6,800 that got killed here in twenty-seven days. Tell me a little more about, you know, the day-to-day type of things that were going on.
- Mr. Dauer:** Well, there again, the Marine Corps, whatever they needed most, is what you did for the day. If you had to haul bodies from the operating room to the wards and what not, to a morgue, that's what you did. If you had to get them lined up for a burial detail, that's what you did. If you had to work on the switchboard, lay steel wire for a telephone and stuff. Because the tanks and amphibious tractors would get tangled up in that wire and just....we had a lot of wire replacement. We never had poles to climb to put that stuff up on.
- Mr. Atkinson:** What did the hospital communicate with, radio, or telephone?
- Mr. Dauer:** Well ashore, it was primarily telephone because it was secure. Radio they could intercept. Equipped (?) with the Navajos, they couldn't figure out what they were saying.
- Mr. Atkinson:** You had Navajo talkers on Iwo Jima?
- Mr. Dauer:** Yeah. Fantastic people.
- Mr. Atkinson:** First time I've heard that. I knew they had had them, I just didn't know.....
- Mr. Dauer:** Yeah. We definitely had them at Iwo. I didn't know any of them personally. The officers were continually praising them for being able to communicate and not had them intercepted.
- Mr. Atkinson:** How long were you there at that one position?
- Mr. Dauer:** Well I was there until the end of the operation. That was twenty-seven days? I was there for four.... three of them. The first four days.
- Mr. Atkinson:** OK. Then your unit completely moved out? Went back down to the beach?
- Mr. Dauer:** Yeah. We left on a landing ship tank. That's an awesome sight to, when they come up on the beach. (laughs). We went as far as Guam

and transferred to another AKA. We got back to Pearl Harbor the day that President Roosevelt died. Some time in April, I think. Of '45

Mr. Atkinson: How long did you stay in Pearl after that?

Mr. Dauer: We were only in Pearl for.....the day we landed and we stayed over that night and the following day we went on another LST back to the big Island. Now, it wasn't an LST either, it was a LSI, landing ship infantry.

Mr. Atkinson: What did you do back on the big Island?

Mr. Dauer: First, we were just, kind of, licking our wounds and reorganizing and getting ready for Olympia, which was the occupation of Japan. Not the occupation, but the assault. And then, of course, Truman dropped the A bombs and that was the end of that, thank God.

Mr. Atkinson: And you were on Hawaii when that happened?

Mr. Dauer: When that happened. I was still on Hawaii, well, the following year, April 1st; I will never forget that, when the tsunamis hit Hilo, we had scheduled a work party. By this time the division had gone on....they went to.....Nagasaki? They went to occupy Japan because I was transferred to another outfit called the 17th Service and Supply Battalion, which we were just dumping surplus stuff out in barges and dump it in the ocean. We had a work party that day, April Fool's Day, and the Sergeant in charge of the detail looked out and said, "What is this?" and the bay had just emptied. Fish flopping on the bottom and the Hawaiians were running out to get the fish. He said, "Everybody in the six-by." And we headed for the hills. Saved our lives.

Mr. Atkinson: So you were in Hilo when that hit?

Mr. Dauer: We were in Hilo when that hit.

Mr. Atkinson: Wow!

Mr. Dauer: Somewhere I've got, maybe, a hundred and fifty black and white photographs I took when with an old combat, wooden, combat

graphics, three and a quarter by four and a quarter, combat camera. I took all kinds of pictures around Hilo and the surrounding area.

Mr. Atkinson: Those pictures would be valuable to historians these days, I think.

Mr. Dauer: I hope they are still viable. They're stored somewhere at my oldest daughter's house. She even more disorganized than I am. (laughs)

Mr. Atkinson: So that was quite a major event there in Hilo.

Mr. Dauer: Yeah. I can thank the Marine Corps for a lot of unique experiences. (laughs loudly).

Mr. Atkinson: That's not one you really expected, I guess?

Mr.. Dauer: No. But, quite obviously the good Lord had been looking after me.

Mr. Atkinson: The fact that that one fellow knew to get out of there was really important. Any kind of humorous events occurred while you out in the Pacific?

Mr. Dauer: I don't know how humorous it is. The only time I ever got seasick was when we were sitting in the lagoon at Eniwetok, we just finished the Friday morning Navy breakfast of baked beans and cornbread and I came topside and hit that sunlight, or the sunlight hit me, and I, just barley, got to the rail in time. I fed fish for...I mean it was like a millpond. There wasn't a ripple on the water anywhere, but I was sure sick.

The only other thing, semi-tragic, rather than humorous is when we were on duty there at the division hospital. One night one of the fellows, we always slept in pairs; we never stayed alone during the night. One of the guys left the hole and didn't get his buddy completely awake just to let him know he was going out and when he came back in, his buddy thought it was a Jap sneaking in on him and pot-shoted him. Got a gut shot, but it didn't touch any vital organs. It went in and out and he survived the gunshot. You never know.

Mr. Atkinson: Did you get mail while you were there?

- Mr. Dauer:** No. I sent out, the days of the old V (?) mail, where you wrote and, of course, the sensors, by the time they got through with it, my mother had trouble deciphering it, but she still remembered my comment about trying to dig in a sugar can. I described it as like trying to dig a hole in a can full of sugar. That's still around somewhere. I think my oldest daughter has it.
- Mr. Atkinson:** Did you have any friends, or buddies that you palled around with, stayed with, or.....
- Mr. Dauer:** Not really. Changing organizations, at a critical time like that, I didn't....the ones I trained with went off without me, so to speak, and I didn't get real close to the people in D Company. Well, you get awfully close at the time, in combat. I never looked anyone up afterwards.
- Mr. Atkinson:** What was your relationship with the officers?
- Mr. Dauer:** Well. The officers in the medical battalion were, primarily, hospital corps officers, or M.D.s, all Navy doctors. The Marines weren't every fond of them. They were not the kind of officers that instilled a lot of confidence because they operated in a totally different sphere than....we had one quartermaster, a captain; I remember his name, Peter Bender. He was a quartermaster with the battalion. He was one crackerjack officer. He kept the Marines from going over the hill. (laughs)
- Mr. Atkinson:** He was, pretty much, like our C.O.?
- Mr. Dauer:** No. The company commanders were Navy doctors. Boy, Captains mast was something else. They just had very little use for enlisted Marines, especially one that didn't behave.
- Mr. Atkinson:** Was that prevalent?
- Mr. Dauer:** It was in the Fifth Medical Battalion. I don't know about now. Since getting out and.....I've met any number of hospital corpsmen, not ones I served with, but they are all princes. I mean, in my eyes, they can't do any wrong. That was a, you can't say, thankless job because they were very dedicated people. They wouldn't be in that if they hadn't been.

Mr. Atkinson: OK. What would you say was your most difficult thing you ran into to?

Mr. Dauer: Just seeing the carnage.

Mr. Atkinson: Hard to deal with that?

Mr. Dauer: It was such a waste of young lives.

Mr. Atkinson: When were you finally able to leave Hawaii and come home?

Mr. Dauer: October of '46. I was in the Pacific for two years. I went over in October and came back in October two years later.

Mr. Atkinson: Where did you come back to?

Mr. Dauer: Actually to the Port of Los Angeles. Sort of a discharge center where you processed.....this time they made me a clerk typist and all I was doing was....well I was doing the clerk typist work even before I left the Division. There again, they were so short of people who could type that I wound up, it's kinda like, a company clerk job, muster roll and.....

Mr. Atkinson: Where did you learn to type?

Mr. Dauer: In High School.

Mr. Atkinson: So you landed back in the Port of L.A. Did they immediately muster you out?

Mr. Dauer: Oh no. I was in the regular Corps and I was supposed to serve a full four years, which would have taken me to January of '48. Then in December they offered me, they said, "Were going to give all the SSDs (?) the opportunity to get out early, if they want to get out. But, if you'll re-enlist for another full four years beyond your original four, you will immediately become a corporal." So I, by this time, I was engaged, and went to my wife-to-be and I said, "Hey I got a chance to make corporal if I re-up." She said, "You re-up and the engagement is off." (laughs)

So, I didn't re-enlist. She's gone now. God rest her soul.

- Mr. Atkinson:** What did.....you actually separate from the service then on your four-year mark, or did you get.....
- Mr. Dauer:** On the three-year mark. Well, actually it was January 24th. I remember that date. January 24th of 1947. So I did just three years. I still remember my serial number.
- Mr. Atkinson:** And that was?
- Mr. Dauer:** My serial number? 876886. I've got an old fatigue cap that I wrote it in so I've always got a reminder. Somewhere my dog tags are at my oldest daughter's house to.
- Mr. Atkinson:** Well anything else that you would like to put into the interview?
- Mr. Dauer:** I don't know what it would be. I'm just so grateful I managed to survive and the experience will be with me for a lifetime.
- Mr. Atkinson:** It's quite an experience to be able to have behind you and be able to remember it. OK, very good. We appreciate your coming in and taking the time to give us this interview.
- Mr. Dauer:** I really appreciate the opportunity to do it.
- Mr. Atkinson:** It will go into the achieves of the museum and it'll be permanently a part of the achieves. It will be available for other historians to research and to review and so every interview is valuable in some way, shape or form.
- Mr. Dauer:** Like I said, I've been to the museum before. In fact, I'm kind of a low-key sponsor. But I was real proud to have served under Admiral Nimitz. He was commander of the fleet at the time.
- Mr. Atkinson:** We think an awful lot of him here in the Hill Country.
- Mr. Dauer:** Can't imagine why. (laughs)
- Mr. Atkinson:** All right, Gene. I appreciate very much thank you for your service to the country. This completes our interview.

Mr. Dauer: Appreciate you taking the time.

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