

**Daniel Burnham
Veteran**

**Interviewed by Senator Patty Ritchie's Office
Oswego County Legislative Office Building
11 November 2003**

Interviewer: **INT**

Daniel Burnham: **DB**

There was also someone else present during the interview. This was probably Mrs. Burnham. **MB**

INT: Was there one event in particular that you know really made you want to join the service?

DB: I knew that I was going to be called in. You know we all were called in my age, guys my age. You know they called us back. It was great. I never regretted anything.

INT: Now, you said you were a member of the Marine Corp. So I'm assuming you did your ...

DB: I was a hospital corpsman. So you see, they had to have a pharmacist mate to go with the servicemen. So I was sort of their little doctor or probably nurse.

INT: So now where did you go for your training?

DB: Where I went for training? Now let's see where did I go? Norfolk, Norfolk? I can't remember where I went.

MB: "You went to Norfolk, Virginia."

DB: Yeah, I went there too.

INT: So what was the whole training experience like? You are getting prepared to you know ...

DB: You had to stop and do just like they are were doing. Whether you were a corpsman or what. You just do what everyone else does. So you see the Marine Corp. doesn't have any nurses or doctors you know. So they have to depend on corpsmen, hospital corpsmen to take them for medical help. So it was great though. It was a great bunch of guys. And I had a couple of guys my age and my height. I should say my low. It was great. It was a great experience.

INT: Do you get to stay in contact with any of your friends that you had met during your time in the service?

DB: You know I ran into one one day. I was up in Watertown. I don't know where he came from. He was from Massachusetts to begin with but I ran right into him and he is the only one I've ever seen since I got out of the service.

INT: Oh wow! So I'm sure that must have been a treat to be able to.....

DB: It was nice. It was really good.

INT: Did you guys do a little reminiscing?

DB: We were just walking and all of a sudden we run into each other and we can't figure out where we came from.

INT: And then it hit you.

DB: I enjoyed it.

INT: So once you had wrapped up your training down in Virginia, what happened next? I mean did you go overseas or did you go someplace else?

DB: No, I just stayed here because I was in the Reserves.

INT: Okay.

DB: So I waited till they needed somebody and then if they needed me they called me.

INT: And when did you get the call?

DB: Well, I got called almost immediately. And I was with them about three or four years.

MB: We went to California, Danny. Remember we went over to the West Coast.

INT: So when you got out of your training, you went over to California for a few years right and then did you go overseas after that?

DB: Then I came back home and then they called me.

INT: Now when you got the call to go, were you a little bit nervous, were you scared, were you excited or was it just...

DB: No because I was used to it you know I had been in it for so long about 3 or 4 years. So I sorta expected a thing like this and they called me and I ran into some buddies of mine – got to be buddies of mine. You know about my height so we were like young boys getting into something that we never knew about.

INT: So you knew that you were going to get the call, you just didn't know exactly when. So you were prepared though.

DB: Oh yeah, I was prepared for it.

INT: So when you got the call where did you end up going?

DB: We went, let me see, Camp Pendleton. Yeah Camp Pendleton.

INT: Now did you go overseas at all during World War II?

DB: Yeah.

INT: Where did you go?

DB: Went over to ,,,, Yeah I went overseas. I just ... only as a Pharmacist Mate.

MB: "You went to the Marshall Islands over to Samoa"

INT: How was that experience?

DB: America Samoa? Well, it was nice though. I got to see guys my age and we had been doing the same thing all the time and we never knew it because they were there and I was here. It was a good experience.

MB: "Tell him about getting off the LST's where they had the barb wire for you guys." He can't remember"

INT: It's okay.

DB: Who's that?

MB: "When you landed over in the Marshall Islands over in Samoa and the Japs had all the barbed wire and the guys that jumped off the LST's got caught and they got shot. But he was so small that he got in between the barbed wire."

INT: I guess not being tall was a good thing.

MB: And he got ashore.

DB: When I jumped out of the boat, I jumped right into a a ... puddle like a little kid thing that came from a bomb you know. I jumped into this hole I dropped right down you know and this kid right behind me picked me up and said "Danny you better go with us and not down there." The corpsmen are all by themselves really. One thing the Navy, is the corpsmen are on your own You do what you can do and basically what you are taught up do to. They don't know. I wasn't a doctor or anything like that but they treated you like were. You were just one of them.

INT: Now how long did you spend over in Samoa?

DB: Samoa? "How long was I there?"

MB: "He was overseas 4 years."

INT: So you were over there 4 years in total. Now did you spend that total 4 years in Samoa or did you leave there and go someplace else?

DB: Different places.

INT: Okay, so where did you go?

DB: All the places were in the Pacific. So, it was alright. When the time came they got you out. It's just like everything else, when they don't need you anymore, you just leave.

INT: What do you remember most about your time overseas during World War II? I mean is there one memory that sticks out or one story that sticks out?

DB: No, I know, it really doesn't because you never think about, you know, it just comes when it comes you are ready for it because you always knew it was going to come at one time or another. But, it was a good experience. You know, I don't regret anything. But I was little, see. I was small I'm only 5'4" and I probably weighed at the time, I probably weighed about oh maybe 140 pounds or something like that. That's about all.

INT: Now, if you had to go back and do it again, would you do it?

DB: Oh yeah. I think it taught me a lot really. The guys taught me how to get along with some people and boy did they watch you a lot. Boy I tell you, you never went anyplace by yourself. There was always somebody went with you. And boy, they wouldn't let anybody do anything ... to interfere. You know, they would say "Hey....we'll take care of it."

MB: "Tell them about how you got your medals."

INT: Yeah, cause you got some medals behind you here don't you.

DB: I got all those, yeah those are mine.

MB: "Tell them how you got your star."

INT: Yeah, if you could that would be terrific if you could tell the story about how you got some of your medals that would be wonderful.

DB: I really don't know how you do it. They just. You know, it's like everything else and all of a sudden they see you and pick you and you get all the attention and they never get it.

MB: “Tell them how you rescued the guy, that’s how you got your medal.”

INT: You rescued somebody, I would love to hear that story.

MB: “The guy, you were going to shore and the guy couldn’t make it. You went over and pulled him out of danger.”

DB: Oh, I don’t know. That was

MB: “Tell the gentlemen here how”

INT: What lead up to you rescuing that individual?

DB: You see, as a corpsmen, you are not really assigned to any particular thing. You are on your own. So when you see something, you do it and always, with us, and I think that this is true I seen a guy do everything that I’ve done and never even got a look. But because being a corpsmen, I got the look and I got the credit for all the stuff. It really wasn’t mine. I had friends of mine that got short ended really.

MB: “Danny tell them about how you rescued the man. Your fellow corpsmen.”

INT: So your corpsmen was in danger and so you rescued him.

MB: “I don’t know if it was a corpsmen but it a member of the Marines.”

DB: No, it must have been somebody, I don’t remember.

MB: “Remember he was stranded and you were small so you crawled over and pulled him out of the danger of the Japs that were up in the trees. Remember when you landed there were all the Japs in the trees and everything shooting at you.”

DB: But I don’t know what you are talking about. I don’t know.

INT: But you rescued your friend from enemy fire though and that’s how you got one of your medals.

DB: Oh yeah. Well, they give them to you when something happens and you do something. But you know somebody else can do the same thing and they would never know it. You know what I mean. I had good friends of mine, they weren’t corpsmen, but they were good friends in the service and they did the same thing I did

INT: Now when you saw your friend in danger did you think twice about going in and trying to save him or was it just I gotta go in there and I gotta save him. It was just It was almost automatic. Cause it was something you knew you had to do and you just did it. You didn’t have anybody tell you. You had already been through that thing and you did the training. So, Corpsmen are really all by themselves.

MB: “Tell them how you tagged the soldiers, how you tagged the dead men when you picked them up. You called the stretchers. You went ahead and found the men. I don’t know what you mean.

INT: Can you talk a little about what you did, you know whether it was calling for stretchers for wounded soldiers when you were overseas as a corpsmen.

DB: Yeah, I was a corpsmen. What I did I was a corpsmen. We just went along with them, you were basically their little doctor to begin with. So you went along with them you knew what you were supposed to do and they knew what you were supposed to do so between you and them and me, you know, we got things done that we had to get done.

INT: So you were taking care of a lot of wounded soldiers then when you were overseas.

DB: No not really. The Marines, they didn't have that many marines got hurt. They really took care of themselves.

MB: Danny tell them how you tagged the men so that they could be brought in. Tell them how you tagged the men that were laying down and were hurt. He put tags on their toes.

INT: So that they could be brought back home?

DB: You see, if somebody got hurt, what you do is you tagged them, you put a thing on them. Some other corpsmen when they came over to pick them up they knew exactly what was wrong with them and what you did. That all we were told. We weren't told to do anything special. Just do that thing and then go on and take care of the other people.

MB: Tell them what you had to do though. You had to do what to, the dying men, the injured. You had to give them what? He had to give them morphine. You gave them a shot.

DB: No we didn't give them morphine. No we couldn't do that. They wouldn't let you do that you know. As a corpsmen you went there and you just did things to take care of the immediate. All you did basically was bandage wounds and things were they got really hurt. I'll tell you who always took care of the corpsmen...

MB: "Tell about getting shot."

INT: Oh you were shot?

DB: Oh I got shot at yeah.

INT: What was, where did you get shot? What led up to that happening?

DB: You know, as a corpsmen, you always had a satchel on the side like this and in that thing you had battle dressings and all that stuff. A Jap shot at me and it went right into the inside part and just missed me by about that much. And the bullet landed there and tore open 8 or 9 of those battle dressings of mine.

INT: Wow so that was a close call so to speak.

DB: Yeah it came about like that, it was about that close.

INT: So just inches from hitting you. Wow. Now where did that happen?

DB: Well, you just automatically do it.

INT: Where did it happen though? Where were you when you were almost shot?

DB: We were doing certain things and they were up in the towers like. So what they did was when they got ahold of something, the Marines got ahold of something. They would take and they would have the guys with the big guns take it down there and take the guy out and take him right off the picture. It was amazing how they were. It was a good experience for me really, here I was from a little, small town, Camden not very big. I hadn't been very far really away from home and all of a sudden I find myself at 17/18 years old going to all these places that I didn't even know existed.

INT: Yes.

DB: But the thing is as a corpsmen with the Marines or anybody I don't care if the Marines or.. but in my case had to be with the Marines and the corpsmen are top dog.

They just watch you like you like a hawk. It's amazing how close at times it gets. I enjoyed it really. You know, if I had to do it again, I would do it.

INT: Wouldn't think twice?

DB: No it would bother, I wouldn't give it another thought. Someone said to me one time "Hey, what do you do?" I said I just do what I'm told. I said I know what I have to do and I do it. I said, there is no lieutenant or anybody that really gets on your back. He knows what you are supposed to do and you know what he's supposed to do.

INT: So you were certainly a dedicated member of the Marines and very brave for rescuing your friend when he was under enemy fire.

DB: I might just as well have been a Marine when I was a corpsmen. That was the difference.

MB: "And they never carried a gun."

DB: Oh yeah, we carried a gun.

MB: Oh did you, I thought you didn't carried a gun.

DB: No, no, we had, we carried, never fired a gun. Not once did I ever fire a gun. If they ever asked me I would never know how to do it.

INT: So when you were finally able to come back home, when the war was over, what was it like coming home from, you know, the chaos of, you know, a war to back home and starting the rest of your life now. What was that experience like?

DB: When I came back, all of a sudden all of the stuff that I was used to doing is gone. You are on your own. Now, you're making your own decisions. You're doing your own thing and only the things that you want to do. You're not having anybody on your back all the time. I always liked that. I never regret having that experience.

INT: So when you got back home what did you do after that? Did you, you know, continue your career in the service or did you?

DB: No when I got back home it was over with that's all. I was right back home where I normally would have been and that was it and I fell right into my life.

INT: So what did you do professionally? Did you stay in the service or did you pursue a different career?

DB: No, let's see, I taught in school you know.

INT: What did you teach?

DB: I taught Social Studies in school for a number of years. So I was always with the kids. Always in that position where I enjoyed it.

INT: So I'm sure that whenever World War II popped up in the history book, I'm sure you were a pretty good authority on it.

DB: Oh yeah, they would ask me and I would say well I'm a little bit familiar with that. They would say oh you are? And I would say I've gone through this thing before.

INT: Being a teacher of Social Studies and having to teach World War II what was that like? Being able to not only teach it from the history books but also teaching it from the perspective that you were over there. What was that like?

DB: I would get the kids and they would ask me. So I would get the kids I would say to them whatever you want to know just ask me and if I have the answer for you I will tell

what it is. I said but there are a lot of things that I couldn't do anyway, you know, I couldn't give you an answer for. But see, I taught school here and it was a good experience.

MB: "He had two brothers and he met one of his brothers on a ship new Okinawa where you were didn't you Dan? Bob he was on a ship over there in the Pacific."

DB: Yeah he was right next door, right next to me. When he got over there he was in this ship and I was in this one.

INT: Oh wow!

DB: But I didn't get to see him though. You know, cause I didn't know it but he was that close.

INT: Now, one of your pictures, on your wall here, it's got a picture of the American Flag being raised.

DB: Oh there.

INT: Can you talk a little bit about that experience and could be because you were saying earlier that you were over there.

DB: I know we got. We got our fight with the Japanese. We don't need your flag up there

MB: "Tell him about your Lieutenant, the Lieutenant wanted the flag."

DB: Yeah

MB: "Remember they took the small flag down and put the big flag up and the Lt says. No, I'll take that and put it in my pocket."

INT: Somebody said no you won't you'll leave it up there where it belongs.

DB: But being a corpsmen is you know another thing being in the service. You know, it's not exactly the same thing for everybody. When you are a corpsmen, especially a corpsmen like I was, a Pharmacists Mate you could do a lot a things and they let you do them. A lot of things you had to do you made up your mind they didn't make it up for you. You knew what you had to do and had to be done and you did it and then when it was over that was it.

INT: If you had to leave one lasting message about World War II. What would it be?

DB: I really don't know. See, everything went by so fast for you, you know, so quick, so many times, that a good many times you didn't know really what you were doing. That was okay with me because I was 18 years old, you know, I wasn't very old, but I was 18 years old and I was small like a kid just being with like a brother, you know. It was a great experience for me, I think. I think being in the service and being a Pharmacist Mate and all that stuff was a great experience for me.