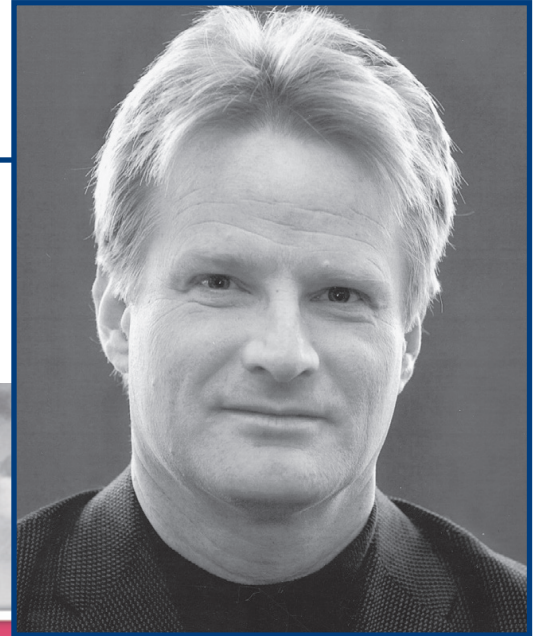


An Interview

with

Terry Frei



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Wisconsin Historical Society Press What were some of the most surprising things you learned from researching and writing *Third Down and a War to Go*?

I don't know if it was surprising, but the one thing that struck me was the universality of the college experience. Sure, a lot of things have changed in 62 years, but a lot hasn't.



WHS Press For this text, there were obvious personal motivations. In what other ways was *Third Down* different than previous projects? Similar?

My previous book, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming*, involved a similar mix of sports, history, politics, and narrative journalism. I didn't have such a direct personal connection to that topic, but I developed one. In the case

of *Third Down*, it was there from the start and was a primary motivational factor, and it offset the fact that many of the principals were deceased when I began the project. The Vietnam War—the subject of much dissent in the nation—was one of the major issues in HHNC. The difference here was that World War II was universally considered a just war that we had to fight.



WHS Press Explain your motivations for writing about the 1942 Badgers.

My father, Jerry, died in 2001. He coached Hall of Fame players and ended up with a handful of Super Bowl rings, but he had a picture of the 1942 Badgers on his den wall when he died and still sounded like an awestruck teenager when talking about the older stars on that team. My dad also flew 67 missions in a P-38 fighter plane after he entered the service following his sophomore season, then returned to play again in 1946

and '47. And for all the fuss made over the returning veterans in the accounts of the time, you'd have thought they'd been off mowing lawns for three years. Even over the years, his military service was rarely mentioned in any material about him. I knew that others on that team had served and even had died in action. I wanted to find out what it was like to play that season in that final-thing atmosphere and also discover what the others did during and after the war. In short, I wanted to know about the men in the picture on the wall.





WHS Press Compare and contrast college football in the 1940s with the present state of the sport.

On the field, the game was just so different. One platoon and limited substitution. No facemasks and limited padding. Less

sophisticated offenses. Fewer coaches. Certainly less showboating and selfish concerns. No official scholarships, though some players were sponsored. But so many things were similar to the game of today, including fan attitudes, second-guessing, and pressure to win.



WHS Press You published *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming* with Simon & Schuster. What made you go with a small regional publisher (with a small budget) this time around?

I was very attracted by the idea that the hardback version of this story, which was so personal for me, would be published in a timely manner and overseen by people with an affinity and a passion for the subject matter.



WHS Press What final message would you like readers to take away from *Third Down*?

The value of sports as a character-building and bonding experience. Corny, but true.

Also, that young men and women in the 1940s who answered the call to serve their country really aren't that much different than the young men and women of today.

