

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS F. MOUNTNEY, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Louis F. Mountney, Jr. on December 3, 2004, in Haddonfield, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Brendan Finley: Brendan Finley ...

Daniel Leary: Daniel Leary.

SI: Mr. Mountney, thank you very much for having us here today and also to Mrs. Mountney for her hospitality.

BF: Could you tell us a little bit about your family, how they came to the area and what they were like?

LM: My father ... was from Philadelphia; my mother was from Allentown, Pennsylvania. They met because they worked with the Lehigh Valley Transit Company and that started everything going. Basically, my father was a civil engineer. He did not graduate but he went to Penn State and Muhlenberg College. He worked as a civil engineer. Civil engineers at that time, in many cases, worked on a job. When the job was over, the pay stopped. So that you saved money while you were working to carry over till you got the next job, which is not the best way of doing it but that's the way the system worked. We lived in Allentown and we lived in Collingswood for a while, then back to Allentown and then moved back to Collingswood and the first two years of school, I don't know how many schools I was in, three or four. ... A couple [of schools] in Allentown, I was in two or three in Philadelphia, and in Philadelphia when they decided that they didn't like people writing with their left hand they came around with a ruler and smacked your hand if you were writing with your left hand and I became right handed. Which could mean your brain is a little unbalanced. [laughter] So we lived in Collingswood. We eventually rented an apartment. We lived there with my great aunt for a while then we moved into an apartment in Collingswood, on Lakeview Drive, across from the railroad station. Being a rail fan, why, that was the greatest place you could be, and we lived there, I don't know how many years, I was out of high school when they moved. In fact, I was married when I moved. Through high school, and after the high school in '43, I was drafted. The Depression didn't seem to affect me too much because we always seemed to have enough food on the table. I remember my father used to walk from Collingswood to Philadelphia looking for a job during the Depression, but, actually, I never felt that we suffered like some people did. We had a roof over our head and enough to eat, which was more than a lot of people in the Depression had. After high school, as I said, I got drafted and next two-and-a-half years was not mine.

BF: What did you see around Collingswood during the Great Depression? Did you ever see the bread lines or things like that?

LM: I never recall seeing that. We lived in a suburb ... which didn't seem to have a problem like that. I don't recall any of that. I was pretty young at the time, and, of course, the older you get the less you remember that far back. [laughter] As far as I can determine, it was a tough time, and I guess it was a lot tougher time for my parents than for me because ... they seemed to, more or less, I guess, shield me from some of this.

DL: You were interested in the railroad. What were some of your interests as an adolescent?

LM: Yes, I was interested in trains and trolleys because ... my father worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad for a while and he used to take me places on passes. I remember we went to Coney Island one time and coming from Allentown, why, up there everyone is speaking Pennsylvania Dutch, you go to Coney Island, they're all speaking Yiddish. I had asked my father, naively, "Why are they all speaking Pennsylvania Dutch?" and he said that wasn't the case. [laughter] He had taken me different places and ... it was interesting when he had a good job, boy, moved me up pretty well. We never owned a car ... and we never owned a telephone. So if you wanted to make a phone call you went up to the paper store on Collings Avenue, in Collingswood, and we used the phone up there. At that time, I was pretty young, I wasn't interested in girls and they weren't interested in me quite honestly. [laughter]

BF: A lot of the people we've interviewed said that because of the monetary situation during the Depression they couldn't afford to date. What did you do for entertainment? Did you play sports or did you have a hobby?

LM: Well, we played baseball over in Knights Park in Collingswood. We also fished over there, occasionally. I liked fishing and as to what we did, I did not do what a lot of kids did at that time, go to the movies on Saturday afternoon ...

BF: You were saying you didn't go to the movies.

LM: No. I didn't go to the movies. Maybe a couple of times, but I don't recall, it was not a weekly affair like it was with many kids and I think the price of the movie was ten cents, maybe twenty-five, something like that.

BF: It has changed quite a bit.

LM: Yes, it has changed quite a bit. [laughter]

DL: Was Collingswood a rural community?

LM: No.

DL: Was it more suburban?

LM: No. Haddonfield was a rural community. That was the end of the line. If you went below Haddonfield, you're in the boondocks and Haddonfield bordered on the boondocks. [laughter] But they were ... during high school, of course, during football season, why, Camden was Collingswood's biggest competitor ... rival and Haddonfield was number two, because in those days it used to be very interesting. On nights before the ballgames, the State Police would come to town to help the regular police and there'd be egg throwing in both places, Camden and Collingswood and Haddonfield, and, of course, if you won the games, you didn't go to school the next Monday, which they don't do anymore. I never went up to town on Friday night; it's safer to stay home. [laughter] It was quite a rivalry and, of course, in those days, games like that,

in most games, we didn't have television, or anything else, and the crowds were very large and, now, you're lucky if you get the parents out to the ballgames.

BF: What were your favorite studies in school?

LM: Recess. [laughter]

BF: While in school, did you know what you wanted to do for a career yet?

LM: Not really. I ... know on my yearbook I put down I wanted to work with the railroad, which I eventually did. But ... at this point in time, I can't recall a desire to do one thing or the other.

DL: I noticed that you have a lot of Boy Scouting memorabilia around. Were you involved with the Scouts as a young man?

LM: I was in the scouts for about four years and, unfortunately, I didn't do anything great in that. Basically, that's one of the reasons I got into scouting later on, when I was an adult, I tried to bring about a change of attitude, or something. We had a drum and bugle corps. I played the cymbals, which you don't need too much education for that one. ...The troop I was in was big on parades so we used to go to different places for that. I was not what someone would call a student. I went to school, got the necessary minimum requirements and got out. [laughter] After the war, of course, I took advantage of the GI Bill to go to the College of South Jersey, which eventually turned into Rutgers and I was in Rutgers maybe a half a year, or something.

DL: In the 1930s and the Great Depression era, do you remember any of the New Deal programs in your town?

LM: Oh, yes. In fact, my father worked on some of them. In Collingswood they built the football stadium with the New Deal, WPA or PWA. However ... WPA was lower level; PWA was a sort of a higher level, as far as work went. Of course Cooper River in Collingswood, well, the whole thing was completely restructured from what it used to be. It used to have a bridge across of Browning Road and you had no bridge at Cuthbert Boulevard and the river was not as wide because I remember swimming in it. I remember the woods back in Westmont where we used to go back and, well, barbeque, not barbeque, have a fire and roast a piece of meat and maybe baked a potato. But that changed considerably ... apparently for the better, but working on the Coaple River was a big job because they had to dig out a lot of dirt to make it as wide as it is today and all the way up into Westmont. Well, they're the main things I sort of remember that they did.

DL: Do you remember specifically which New Deal projects your father worked on?

LM: Not really. I thought he worked possibly on ... some waterworks, I'm not sure.

DL: How did you and your family feel about Franklin Roosevelt?

LM: Well, we were all Republicans. I'm still a Republican, even though I haven't voted Republican for years. It's just, you get into something and you stay in it, you don't agree with it but you don't get out of it. [laughter] And it's how you vote anyway that counts. He didn't like Roosevelt and, of course, being a young son, I didn't like Roosevelt either. I guess it goes along with the territory. I won't change my mind about that but that's the way it was then. Another thing we used to do when I was a kid was hang out at the railroad crossing across the street from our house ... They had gates there and we had a black watchman. Collingswood was strictly white. You wouldn't find a black person within ten feet of the Collingswood line. He was probably the only black person that anybody ever had contact with, but, he was a terrific guy. He was a woman's man, he liked girls, and all the kids who went to high school by going over the crossing and I think nearly everybody knew him and that was, I'd say, probably the only way they ever got to know about a black person. ... He wasn't the normal black person that you find today. We used to go to ballgames with him over in Philadelphia and ... there were other watchmen there, too. One of them knew my grandfather. The crossing was a place to go and sit and it was a lot of fun because if a train came, we all hid behind the shanty so in that way those supervisors at the end of train wouldn't see all these kids hanging around and get him in trouble and at nighttime, he'd go over to put the gates down while I put the lights on. If you like railroads, why, that was great.

DL: You said you went to Rutgers after the war.

LM: Yes.

DL: You were in high school for the first two years, or so, of our involvement in the war. Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

LM: Where was I? I was sitting in a friend's car listening to the Eagle's game, playing New York, when the news came across.

DL: How did you react to the news?

LM: I don't remember. ... I'm not sure what kind of impression, it was sort of ... so sudden and I wasn't following the news that closely, to know that somebody screwed up royally, and, I guess, we just took it, waiting for the next news broadcast.

DL: At that point, do you remember if you had any sense that this was going to change your life?

LM: Not really, no, because you either figured it would be over in a year, or so, and it wasn't going to affect, to my knowledge at that time, it wasn't going to affect me, little did I know.

SI: Did you know about what was happening in Europe at all?

LM: Oh, yeah, I knew what was happening in Europe. But, I didn't monitor it ... Now, you can monitor twenty-four hours a day ... Stuff that I hear now on TV, especially on C-Span, which has some very interesting stuff which I just recently listened to, which was unbelievable, and I

guess that's the problem we have today; news is twenty-four hours and you get your fill of it and you get so much of it that your head isn't going to comprehend everything that's coming across. It's just impossible for anybody to do. ... It's interesting to look at, you can turn it off if you get tired of it, which is ... a big help that way, but there is some very interesting stuff on there that you should be listening to.

SI: After Pearl Harbor was attacked, do you remember seeing the older guys in town going to enlist, or maybe soon after that being drafted?

LM: Well, I know some of them, yeah, well, the whole high school class was drafted. In fact, I have to say when I got left back to 7th grade, I figure that's the smartest thing I ever did was repeating the 7th grade, because when I got into the service, a lot of people I know were sitting in the middle of everything and I went in and got my training, I was in the Army Air Force, and I was overseas less than a year. I flew over, in one week, to get where I was going in India and I have friends who took a month or two to get over there.

DL: That's a long boat ride.

LM: Long, tedious boat ride. [laughter] I was lucky because I did fly to a couple of other places and the only time I had a real troop ship was when we went from India out to Tinian in the Marianas. But coming home on an LST, I don't know if you've ever seen an LST. You stand on one end and you can watch it go like this at the other end. They are flat-bottomed boats. Then we had the battleship *Maryland* to come home on from Hawaii. I was lucky in the fact that I never heard a gunfire, I never heard a bomb dropped, never saw anybody shooting anybody. Because of where I was, I ended up with three battle stars which gave me 15 points toward going home. But, if you're in the right location you get them whether you saw anything or not. It was interesting in that respect, and I did get to see Cairo. I had a pass there and a pass in Australia and a pass in Calcutta, which I always equated to Camden, New Jersey. I'm not sure if they thought about Camden that way, not much to equate anymore ...

SI: In the two years or so between Pearl Harbor and when you went in the service, can you tell us a little bit about how the home front changed?

LM: My wife tells me, I don't remember anything then, "Don't you know we had rationing? Don't you know that we had all this stuff?" I say, "yes, I know it." You know, I knew we had stamps; you didn't eat as much as you did before and you could only buy certain pieces of clothing, and things like that. I never felt that I was without anything. Apparently she did. I don't know. She keeps telling me all about the things I'm supposed to remember. [laughter]

SI: Do you remember gas rationing?

LM: Without a car I could care less. [laughter]

SI: Were activities like high school football games being cancelled because of the war?

LM: I don't recall any. Schedules were always maintained that they published, and we always played Atlantic City, Bridgetown, and Vineland, they'd be the farthest away from Collingswood. I don't recall that we had any curtailment to my knowledge.

SI: Did you see the movement of any troops during the war? You seemed to have kept a close eye on the railroad, did that change at all during the war?

LM: No, because I wouldn't see any trains in Collingswood. If you lived in Haddonfield, you'd see the trains because everything comes across from Philadelphia through Haddonfield, and down here in Collingswood, all you get are trains going into Camden, so there wouldn't be any troop trains through Collingswood unless they diverted them for some reason. ... Atlantic City was the main spot for training. Of course, if you were at Fort Dix and lived around Moorestown or Merchantville, you saw a lot of troop trains, but in Collingswood, I don't recall ever seeing a troop train.

SI: Was there anything like a USO in Collingswood or anything like that?

LM: Not that I know of.

BF: Could you tell us a little bit about your basic training? What was that like?

LM: I became expert at KP. [laughter] We weren't sure if we were down there training for what but KP was one of the rigors of basic training. Up at ... three or four in the morning and finished around eight or nine at night, and you did this two or three times a week. Basic training was basically you had calisthenics, also some hiking. We had some time in the classroom for different things. You didn't get any passes. My basic training was in Biloxi, Mississippi at Kessler Field. We went down there in July and got off the train, I said, "Boy, I know why they moved so slow down here." It was hot and I think they gave us a couple of weeks to acclimate ourselves to the climate because it was something. It gets hot up here, but it's unbelievable down there.

BF: How did the southern part of the country compare to the north during that time? Did you experience anything different coming from up here?

LM: Yes, you had segregation. The bathrooms were segregated, and waiting rooms were segregated. I guess, you sat in the back of the bus, but other than that I wasn't out in the mainstream of the South, I was in an army camp ... and, basically, the people you were with were ones that you were familiar with, and, occasionally, you got others from different parts of the country in there and that would be the only time that you'd really feel that you had something different than what they had. Other than that, why, I can't say that there was.

SI: You were drafted into the Army. Did you have a choice between going in the regular army or the Army Air Corps?

LM: No. Somebody up there liked me, that's all I want to say, and kept an eye on me all the way through for which I am ever grateful.

SI: Could you talk a little bit about that process of actually reporting for the draft and the physicals and then going down to Biloxi? What was that like?

LM: Well, we left from Collingswood. We had our physicals in Camden. We went up to Fort Dix in a bus and, I guess, we were there about two weeks. Well, the first or second night that we were there, we all got food poisoning, so we ended up in the hospital. They were taking them out there like flies ... which meant everything was pushed back. I'm glad I got sick because I was quite satisfied where I was sent. [laughter] ... I got down to Kessler Field, Mississippi and stayed there for, I don't remember the date. You don't have a sheet of paper do you? [Editor's Note: referring to the pre-interview survey] ... I was in Fort Dix for five days, it seems like it was longer than that but, I guess, it wasn't. ... I left Kessler Field on September 1st, and went to Missouri. We were assigned to the Air Corps attached to the Signal Corps and we got Signal Corps training. The only thing I didn't like about that was the idea of having to climb a telephone pole. Fortunately, somewhere along the line, I got sick and ended up never having to climb a telephone pole. [laughter] It wasn't so bad going up, I guess, it was the coming down that bothered most people. After that, ... I came home with a fourteen-day furlough on April 22nd, then we went to Deridder, Louisiana and we were attached to a signal company and then they sent us up to Barksdale Field in Shreveport, which was considered to be "the country club of the Air Force." It was quite lavish and if you were stationed there, you got the best of everything, and after we spent time there, we had thirty days there and went back to Deridder, Louisiana which is south of Shreveport. In October, we left Deridder for ...the overseas replacement depot in Greensboro. Left Greensboro for Fort Totten on Staten Island, December 21st, got there on the 22nd. That afternoon, or that day, I got a pass to come home for just the day; I had to be back by midnight. ... I came down by train and used a taxi to get across to Collingswood and back over to Philadelphia 30th Street Station again. I don't think I made it back in time but everything was all right. The next day we hopped on an airplane at La Guardia and flew to Bermuda for the night and then departed Bermuda, stopped in the Azores, before we went Casablanca. We departed Casablanca after two days there because you always had to wait for transportation. If the plane wouldn't go any place, you didn't go. So then we went to Tripoli, and we got into Cairo. I had a pass in Cairo. During that time I also saw the Taj Mahal from the air when we went over Agra [India]. Then we got to spend a night in Abadam [Iran], which is, I guess, Iraq or Iran right now, on the southern coast of, or southern part of the country, and when we got to Karachi, India, which is now ... Pakistan. I pulled guard duty New Year's Eve, that's one week after I left the United States, so it's a heck of a lot faster doing it that way than going by boat.

SI: Before you left for India, did you have any idea you would be going there?

LM: They didn't tell you anything. You knew you weren't going to the North Pole because you didn't have better clothes, but you can speculate where you might be going. We got over there to Kharagpur and we flew into there and then we had to take a truck for sixty miles up to a place called (Khulna?), which was going to the 28th Air Service Group, which is part of the 58th Wing of the 40th Bomb Command in the 20th Air Force. These were all B-29s and we departed Calcutta on a two-day-pass in March on a great train ride. It's different, and then coming back we rode 3rd class. The toilet was a hole in the floor, [laughter] and they had bunks along the top

where you slept. Half of the guys that were in the train, or in the car there, had a few too many and needed to sleep a lot of it off. There were some mosquitoes around, which were bothering me, I couldn't sleep, and I took out the aerosol bomb, and started to spray to kill the mosquitoes. Well, unbeknownst to me, the biggest cockroaches in the world came out of the woodwork, knowing these guys are sleeping there and the cockroaches are about this far from their foreheads and they woke and they saw these things; I wasn't one of the favorite people in the car that night. [laughter] It was different. So we eventually left Calcutta, in May, and we went to Fremantle, which is the seaport for Perth, Australia and from there, we went to Tinian in the Marianas, which was one of the B-29 bases. Guam had some and Saipan had some and we were lucky, we watched baseball games at different times while we were there because the American and National League players were there, I don't know if they were inducted or what, but they came and they played baseball.

SI: Who did you see?

LM: I remember seeing Enos Slaughter. I forget who else. I have newspapers, sporting news of the different games that were over there and the people I saw play. But Enos Slaughter, I saw. He was always a very active ballplayer. When he came in from the outfield, he ran. I knew that he did that in the majors, only I saw him doing it out here, you know, the guy really is dedicated. [laughter] I saw a few of those games. Other than playing one or two softball games in Louisiana, it's about all the baseball we got. So, November 18th, we departed Guam for Hawaii on LST 1102, which was the flagship of the group, the flotilla group, and we had Thanksgiving Day dinner on the LST with all the trimmings. We arrived at Hawaii and I got a pass to Honolulu; and was on the beach of Waikiki. We departed Hawaii on the battleship *Maryland* and arrived in Seattle, Washington and went to Fort Laughton. I had a 3 day pass in Seattle and we departed Seattle by train for Fort Dix. I got home on pass on December 26th. You consider that I went overseas December 24th, not a bad deal, and I got out of the service January 6th and went home.

SI: We want to go back and ask questions about your experience in the military. Can you tell us a little bit more about what the signal corps training at Camp Crowder entails and what they were training you for?

LM: Yes, I was trained as a cryptographer. Don't ask me to do any of the cryptography work on the newspapers. Eventually, I went to a message center clerk. Actually, when I got over to India, the first thing they told me was that I was "average". I came for a thousand miles and was told, "Oh we don't need you." [laughter] So they put me in another MO and that's where I stayed.

SI: What was the other MO?

LM: Message center clerk, which is what I had studied, too, when I was in Camp Crowder.

SI: With the cryptography training, what did that entail? Were you learning the codes or were you just copying things out and passing them on?

SI: Please continue.

LM: There, we used a machine. It was called a cryptography machine. But actually, I didn't do what you'd call real cryptography. Where I was they didn't seem to be using that or I wasn't aware that they were using it. The machine did all the work it, told you what the message was.

SI: Was it one of the machines where you typed in plain language and it comes out in code?

LM: To tell the truth, I don't remember, you see what an impression that made on me?
[laughter]

SI: When you were in this training do you know if you had to go through any kind of security clearance?

LM: You had to be, yes, I had to be cleared.

SI: Was it to the point where they interviewed members of your family?

LM: I have no idea. All I know is they probably asked me some questions and from there, I guess, normal security, well, cryptography, of course, was pretty secretive stuff and, I guess, it was fairly high security.

SI: You described this whirlwind tour from Fort Totten to India. What was that like being from Collingswood and in the New Jersey-Philadelphia area, to all of a sudden being shipped out all over the world? How did you adapt to that?

LM: Well, it was very interesting, the idea of going over. We went over on a C-54, when we were flying over the ocean, which was four engines and the rest of the time I was on a C-47, which was unfortunate. The officers all sat in the front where it was warm and the enlisted men sat in the back where it was cold. ... I had flown before because I had gone over to Central Airport in Camden here and flown with, I even forget who I flew with, he had a tri-motor plane and he used to take people up for a dollar and fly them around. So I had walked over to Central Airport and that was my first flight, and, of course, this was a different kind of flight, much more modern plane, of course, and it was interesting. You don't got much scenery to look at, but, you get there faster.

SI: You mentioned that you got a pass in Cairo. Did you know anything about these places that you were visiting? Had you read *National Geographic* or something like that?

LM: Well, I knew what Cairo was; I knew that they had pyramids, and so forth. The fellow I was with, and I decided we'd go to one of the markets, which is in the back alley or someplace. Anyway, we bought some stuff back there. We didn't go to the pyramids. Actually, I saw the pyramids when we flew over them. Other than that, why, I wouldn't want to live there.

SI: You were traveling with all Signal Corps replacements?

LM: No, we were all Air Corps people.

SI: Can you tell us about India and your impressions of the country?

LM: Oh, India, what can I say, India makes Camden look good. That was the poorest place I have ever seen. Kids are begging on the streets continuously. The first night I was in camp they had a fire in one of the little villages nearby and I went over to that and saw the huts and places they lived in, what they called houses. They had thatched roofs and there was no plumbing or things like that. The cities were terrible. We saw one place a Jain Temple, which the religious group had, but there was a wall around the whole place. Inside was the wealthiest place you'd ever want to see. It would make anything over here look shabby. Everything was made of gold and silver, it was unbelievable. On the other side of the wall was the poorest place you'd ever want to see. Kids half dressed, begging, people laying around, of course, the cows that ran freely over there. It was unbelievable. That was ... one of the things that impressed me about it. India is either very, very wealthy or very, very, very poor. I don't think it has changed too much today. They have more people than they had then. There are more educated people over there than they had then. As far as the main population goes, I don't think really it has changed too much. ... It's not someplace, I would want to be around.

BF: Was there any type of interaction between locals and the American forces or Allied forces?

LM: I didn't see any, there probably was, but I didn't see it. The only thing of interaction was, well, get the heck out of here. [laughter]

SI: Did locals work on the base?

LM: Yes. Well we all shared one bearer. He'd get paid so much. We have so many guys, like three or four soldiers, and he'd make the beds in the morning, just like your wife does. Also, anything you needed you'd ask him to get for you. It was nice that way, he kept the place clean and you didn't have to pay him too much.

BF: Did you have any interaction with the British in India?

LM: No. We had six, I guess it was, who apparently did some guard work around the camp. I saw them marching there one time. This used to be a British camp and Americans took it over. It wasn't that bad. It was comfortable, as long as you kept your mosquito netting down.

SI: Was it very hot where you were? What was the climate like, or the environment?

LM: Well, it was warm. Fortunately, we were not there during ... what they called the rainy period.

SI: Monsoon season?

LM: Monsoon season, yeah, we got out just before that. I don't think I would have liked that, everything had to have been nothing but mud. But it was warm, eventually you get used to it. I mean, I wouldn't get used to it now but I got used to it then, so it wasn't bad in that respect. Besides, our mess hall was right across from our barracks and Indians took care of the mess and they bring in the chickens in the morning, cut their heads off, and you have them for lunch.

SI: What was an average day like for you at the base in India?

LM: I really forget what I did. I know I had certain duties. We didn't have to do KP, that was one nice thing. I worked with the, in Signal Corps stuff, I guess, it was with the cryptography message center and so forth. Sometimes there were other details to do but they weren't that bad.

DL: Do you feel like your training prepared you for the duties that you had while you were over in India?

LM: That I was training for over here?

DL: Yes, do you think the training over here prepared you?

LM: No, because, well, to a certain extent. See, in the army there's one thing you have to consider, no matter what you trained for, that may not be what you do. In other words, in this case it stayed fairly close but that's about all.

SI: The B-29s that were stationed at the base were flying over the hump to China.

LM: They were out bombing, too, bombing down Singapore and different places held by Japanese. They flew the hump. B-29s were a dangerous plane. Of course, being twenty-years-old in that area, I wanted to fly, I wanted to see what it's like flying a B-29. So one day I went out and I got permission to do some practice take offs and landings and I thought it was great, until I came home and started reading about the B-29s. I thought, "What a jerk you were. It was the most dangerous plane in the world," they cracked up on take offs and landings "and you're out there just having a good time?" [laughter] Of course, we lost an awful lot of planes on the take off and landings.

DL: Did you see a lot of these accidents at the base?

LM: You could see the smoke at the end of the runway.

SI: I hear stories about flights coming back from these long missions and limping in, do you remember seeing these?

LM: Well, off hand I can't say. It wasn't that close to the runway itself. Now we used to watch them come in and just as far as you could see, they had their landing lights on, just like a parade of cars at rush hour is what it looked like. ... It was quite obvious some of them were shot up and sometimes you'd see the results from a fire, or something like that, but it was a very dangerous airplane.

BF: Being an enlisted man, what was your relationship with the officers like?

LM: Oh, generally it was all right. I don't recall any specific instances where I had any problems with officers. You tried to eliminate those and stay as far away ... as possible from them, if anything might happen or it could happen. So, of course, that's one thing in the service you learn to do, don't volunteer and ... keep your nose clean. You make them happy doing it that way, that's fine.

SI: It seems just from the story about the plane ride that there was a clear difference between the lives of officers and enlisted men.

LM: Your life was different in as far as the weather went. I was freezing one night in a plane and I went up front I forget what I went up front to do in the plane and I thought, "No wonder these guys aren't freezing, it's nice and warm up here." [laughter] But don't try to stay there.

SI: In May of 1945 you made your trip to the Marianas. What was it like being on the ship?

LM: Well, that was the first troop ship I'd been on and it wasn't that bad, really. We didn't know where we were going but we ended up in Fremantle, Australia, which was great. ... They weren't going to give anybody passes and then they decided they would, so I recall we took a train in from Fremantle into Perth. I remember the first thing as we came in the yards of Perth, somehow the train emptied out rapidly, the warehouses were over here and the main station was over here and it was unbelievable. [laughter] I was interested in one thing, getting a drink of milk. I hadn't milk for so long I was really after that. I guess, I got a milkshake and I walked around Perth and found the railroad station and got to see what things were like, which interested me more than anything else. You don't get there everyday so I figured I'd take advantage of it.

SI: I heard these towns where a lot of GIs and other servicemen went on leave could be pretty rowdy.

LM: Oh, yeah.

SI: It sounds like they had the potential in Perth.

LM: I didn't drink so I didn't get in contact with that element, and interestingly enough, when we were in Tinian and a sergeant, said, "I'm going to get you drunk before you leave camp here," I said, "No, you're not I don't drink." Well, one night they had a bottle in the barracks, strangely enough it was Philadelphia whiskey which is kind of odd when you consider it, and started drinking some of that. Oh, I remember lying on the bed and that's all I remember. I remember I was sick, but I never saw the floor, and when I woke up the floor was dry and clean. I thought that was pretty nice. [laughter] After that I swore I'd never take a drink in my life and I had a headache like anything the next day ... I'd have given anything for a glass of milk about that time. ... You used to trade off if you didn't like beer and you trade off with a coke, or if you didn't like cigarettes you trade off for something that you wanted, so that worked pretty well. He got me, I'll have to admit, never again.

SI: On the ship going to the Marianas and Australia, did you travel in a convoy, or were there any submarine alerts or anything like that?

LM: I don't remember. I don't think we were in a convoy. We went up past the Admiralty Islands and some other places that had once been very active as far as the Japanese army, in fact, probably there were still some Japanese there then, because I know on Guam, ... one or two Japanese stayed there until sometime in the '50s or '60s. No, it was an uneventful trip actually.

SI: When you arrived in Tinian, did you set up the same operations? Did you do the same job as you had in India?

LM: Yes.

DL: That was so close to where the nuclear bomb went off. Did you have any experiences and special experiences with that or did you know anything about it?

LM: No, I did not know anything about it. The only time I ... might have seen it, the group who did it, was because I was in the hospital which was over on the north field which is where they were stationed, and I may have seen the group. I had no idea what they were. Nobody knew what they were, except ... they didn't have to do what all the rest of them had to do. No, I didn't like the idea being on the same island with an atomic bomb, really, after I thought about it for a while. [laughter] But by that time it had been dropped, and, of course, they put another one in after that and claimed it wouldn't have gone off because it wasn't armed. It was sort of historical in the fact that I was in the same island as the atomic bomb, and I wouldn't care to get any closer than that.

DL: Was there any type of reaction once it was dropped among that people that were there?

LM: I don't recall because ... nobody knew enough as to what it was to have much of a reaction right at that time. I mean, it's not like, when you're in the service, it's not like turning on C-Span to find out what's going on, You may not find out for a week or two what really happened or the nitty-gritty of the whole thing ... so much of your impressions are rather vague. You could probably hear what they say in Japan about it but you wouldn't hear too much on your own.

SI: Did you listen to like Tokyo Rose and others?

LM: I have heard it, but I think I had a radio with me, I'm not sure. I don't know. It's too far back to remember some of this stuff.

SI: Did you correspond with anybody during the war?

LM: Well, I asked my family for films, which were hard to get. Of course, I did take pictures while I was over there. I don't know that I asked for a bunch of money, I don't think I asked for money. But it irritates me that I didn't make more of a story about what I was doing, or what was going on. Of course, some of it might have been crossed out when it got to the censors but

there were some other things, I think, I probably could have written instead of asking for something all the time, but that was the nature of the beast.

SI: In both these places, in India and Tinian, was it more like a nine to five job, or were you constantly on call?

LM: Well, I guess when you're in the army you're constantly on call, regardless. I don't recall working at night very much. ... I don't even remember pulling guard duty over there, maybe I did but I just don't remember.

SI: On Tinian, were you warned not to wander off out of the secure areas?

LM: Well, you didn't get much chance to wander off. ... I drove around Tinian one time with somebody, looked over the town and they had made swimming pool. They have a lot of coral over there so you had to be real careful if you were swimming. ... Don't get caught in the corals or you will be a very unhappy soldier. They fixed swimming areas up for people, for the soldiers. Naturally, the officers got the best part. It seems to me they had a big platform, or something that you could go on to stay out of the way of the coral, but you had to be very careful of it. I think they tried to allow you to swim where there wasn't much coral. Swimming was one thing you could do ... I don't recall much else, other than watching baseball or something like that.

SI: Did you get to see any USO shows or anything overseas?

LM: Yeah, I saw Lily Pons and Andre Costellanos. That's one of the things I remember. I don't remember any of the others. There must have been, but I just don't remember.

SI: Outside of the baseball and USO shows, there wasn't much entertainment?

LM: Oh, yeah, you had movies. We'd go to movies, that was nearly every night I think. Other than that why, no, it was rather a drab existence which wasn't bad because nobody was shooting at you.

SI: Do you remember when you heard that the Japanese had surrendered?

LM: I don't remember what I was doing. I don't know how much of an impression it made at the time. When they signed the peace treaty, I had a chance to fly a B-29 over the peace treaty signing. Unfortunately, with my luck, we didn't get there. I looked out of the window and somebody was standing out on the wing with a hose, hosing gasoline past my window, I don't know what had broken on it, or if something had broken off of it. So we turned around and came back to Tinian. We flew around there for about four hours 'til we used up all the fuel. That was kind of disgusting because I had a chance to see something historic and I didn't see it.

SI: So how did you feel coming home?

LM: I guess I felt pretty good, considering I was overseas less than a year, and I was very happy with the situation. I got to see some things I would never have seen or never would see. No, as I said before, I was very lucky. Who ever was watching out for me has done an excellent job.

SI: On any of your travels around the Pacific, did they give you those ceremonies for crossing the equator?

LM: No, fortunately not. I crossed it twice.

SI: Did anyone give you a pitch to join the reserves?

LM: I'm quite sure they did but I figured I was smarter than they were. I did not join the reserve; I joined nothing when I got out. I said, "I am out, period, that's it, the end," and my friends who joined the reserves were fighting in Korea. They kept on going, they're still going. No. Reserves, I'm not a reserve person in that respect. [laughter]

SI: So what were your first steps back into civilian life?

LM: I guess my parents figured I was back home to bug them. They had this thing called a 52/20 and I took advantage of that for a while. I got tired of that, and then I had a couple of small part-time jobs. Some of us at times ... we weren't doing anything. We ended up fixing clocks and putting them together or something I think for a couple of weeks. I worked for Wyeth Pharmaceuticals for a while and then I answered an ad in the paper for the Reading Company and stayed there for thirty-three years. So that took care of that up till my retirement, what was that, twenty years ago, twenty-two years ago, got a good deal out of that. Other than a few things ... the physical problems I have, why, I have no complaints about my life.

DL: What was Rutgers like when you went back after the war?

LM: Well, you have to remember that Rutgers in Camden was the College of South Jersey. I got in there, I guess, mainly because the mayor of Collingswood lived across the street from me and he was president of the college. In fact, I think he helped found it and I went there for a couple of years and Rutgers took over. You know, there's not much difference. You went to the same old buildings. It's not like it is today. You wouldn't even know it was the same place. We had classes in churches, we had classes in a building down next to RCA, and we had classes in the law school building, which was also part of the library there for us on Penn Street. ... Most of the guys that were in there were ex-GIs. Some of them went on, to finish up; I dropped out after I got married. I went for a while when I got married and I couldn't handle marriage and school, too, or it couldn't handle me, I don't know which one. That was my college education, which is about ... two years.

DL: What were you studying?

LM: Business.

BF: When you made use of the GI Bill, did you have any different views on education?

LM: First, I had to go to Brown Prep in Philadelphia to get the necessary subjects I didn't take in high school. My views of education aren't any different. You had to have certain things if you were going to get certain places and I had to get those. So when I finished, the only bad part was I used up some of my GI Bill at Brown Prep, which was unfortunate, but it turned out it didn't make much difference, I guess.

SI: Would you like to tell us how you met your wife?

LM: How'd I meet my wife? Well, we blame the railroad for everything around here. [laughter] She'd ride the train, and one day she drove to the Collingswood station and I thought, "Oh, she has a car, must have plenty of money because girls didn't have cars for their own; without a lot of money." So I intensified my efforts and I got a date with her and it was about that time I found out that it was the family car and it was not hers and they were not wealthy. Well, it was too late to do much about it then, so, she continued riding the train, as did I, and then we got married. We had three children, all turned out very well, no complaints about them. Never gave us very much trouble. I always used the threat of a belt, which I agree with using on the ones that don't behave themselves properly, not that it's thought of today as a good way, but then I'm not that liberal. One of them went to school, got a degree in North Carolina. That was the only mistake, going down south and stayed. My younger son Daniel became an Eagle Scout. My oldest son was a ... Star Scout, and Joyce was in Scouts, and Helen was in Scouts, and I was in Scouts. Of course, when you're in Scouts the way I was, it did away with a lot of putting kids to bed at night and changing diapers, or things like that.

SI: Your oldest son was in the Navy for a while?

LM: Yes, he was in the Navy.

SI: Did you have any feelings one way or the other about your children serving in the military?

LM: Not at the time he was in, because there was no war. He can't even get in the American Legion because you can only get in that if there's a war going on. Craig played baseball when he was overseas, because he played high school baseball and he played over in Italy and Spain and I forget wherever they went. He was able to play, so he had a fairly good time.

SI: Do you guys have any other questions? Is there anything else you'd like to say for the record? Or anything that we forgot to ask about?

LM: Oh, I have some funny stories, what I thought was funny. I was taking care of the barracks out in Camp Crowder during the winter, you had to keep the fire going and provide heat in the barracks. I didn't know a thing about keeping the fire going in here. At home, my ... father went down, we had coal, he shoveled it in, and that was very seldom because we lived in an apartment so I didn't know a hill of beans about it and whatever I did, I did it wrong. ... When the bugle sounded that morning and I got up and it was cold and my name was mud and they wondered who the person was taking care of it. [laughter] By the time I had two or three other people trying to help to get the fire going and you don't get a fire going as easy unless you throw

gas on it and I think they frowned upon that and so it was cold. I know, because if you worked at night, you slept during the day, and some guys came through, clean the barracks, "Who is that?" "It's the guy that took care of the heater last night." I didn't say anything, that I was awake, so they didn't bother me. They were very unhappy, which I can understand. [laughter] One thing the army didn't teach me was how to take care of a furnace. [laughter]

SI: Well, if there's nothing else, thank you very much for having us and talking with us.

LM: Thank you.

SI: We really enjoyed it.

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Reviewed by Mark Eiseman 2/8/05

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 2/15/05

Reviewed by Louis Mountney 3/5/05