

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Question: What, now I'm trying to remember, now you were, you were um...

Answer: A member of the National Guard, in the State of Washington, and at the 161st infantry, which was the only infantry unit here. We had artillery units, and coast artillery, and medical units and one thing or another, but the 161st was the only infantry unit from the State of Washington, ah Washington State Guard.

Question: And so you had prior to the war, signed up?

Answer: I had, when I was going to high school, I was at Rogers High School in Spokane, Washington. And a lot of us, 16-years-old, went to join the National Guard. And that's all we needed, we didn't need any evidence ah, that we really were 18, all we needed to do was say we were 18 and we were in. And it was a buck a week and in those days a buck a week was pretty good money. Ah, so like I say, I was talking before about this young fella, I think he was 15, and ah, even though I didn't get out when we were inducted, I still wasn't 18 years old. He was only 17 and he decided to get out, and later, of course he joined the Air Force and became a fighter pilot. Well he went back to high school, finished his senior year and went ahead and got his commission.

Question: So when you started out, the buck a week you were thinking hey, this is great way to make a buck a week. The war wasn't going on yet, or was it?

Answer: Right. Well the war in Europe was going on. And I, very, very honestly, I figured some time or another, we were gonna be called in. There wasn't too much doubt in my mind that ah, when this war in Europe was escalating to a point we couldn't possibly stay out of it. So yeah, I was pretty much prepared to go in regular Army, though I was hoping, when we were inducted we were inducted for a year they said. They said one year and I thought well if that's the case in one year I can go back to high school and I was playing full back on the first string at the time, and ah, I thought well next year I'll come back, I'll take over my full back position and I'll be that much bigger and that much older and I'll play that much better. And then unfortunately I didn't get back until 1945 and by that time I was ineligible to go back to high school and play football anymore.

Question: Hah. So it took some of your older childhood away from you a little bit.

Answer: Well, I guess it took all of it away. Because my, when I came home here I'd never been to a prom, I'd never driven a car, ah there was just a lot of things that high school kids do and teenagers do that ah, I never had an opportunity to do. I was sent with responsibility almost from the time I got in. Particularly after we were inducted, I was a squad leader and I had eight men that I was responsible for. And even though I was ah, only 18, age 17, 18 years old, I felt that responsibility and ah, so yes I missed all of being a teenager. With all the thing teenagers do, I was in the Army and I had my responsibility and that was it.

Question: Hah. So you, I mean, forced you to grow up real quickly.

Answer: I think so. Yeah, in those days the Army used to be run a little differently than it is today. Ah, and for instance I had a squad leader, his name was Fink. And squad leader Fink was on my ear continually until I just had a belly full of it and I hauled off and I belted him right in the mouth. And I thought, oh boy now I've done it because that's a court martial offense for assaulting a non-commissioned officer. So I carried on and waiting for the other shoe to fall and finally soon it did. They said report to the company commander, so his name was Harrison, real nice fellow. And I went into Harrison and I said Linden reporting as ordered sir and he said I understand you don't get along with your squad leader. And I said no sir I

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

certainly don't. And he said do you think you can run that squad better than he does? And being a cocky little kid that I was I said, I know damn well I can run it better than he does. And he said well you're gonna have a chance to find out, you take over the first squad, I'm taking Fink and putting him down in the supply room. And, which was a great surprise to me, I had been promoted for punching my squad leader in the mouth. But that's how you kept a lot of your discipline in those days and there wasn't an awful lot said about it. Good Lord, today if you hit a man why you'd be up for a court martial. You just wouldn't dare lay a hand on somebody like that. But ah, in those days, like I say, that was the rule that ah, if you could physically take care of yourself, you were more apt to be the leader.

Question: Hah. So you're 17, 18 years old, you're now squad leader.

Answer: I'm a squad leader.

Question: Now how does that play out?

Answer: Well it, I had taken a great deal of pride being a squad leader. And I used to have my uniforms tailored to me. And consequently when the draft started I was the only man from my company picked to be a drill instructor at the North Fort Lewis, when they'd just finished the North Fort Lewis, the new draftees were all put in North Fort, and I was like I say, one of the only men in my company that was sent over to train these draftees and it was mostly because of the pride I took in being a soldier. And neat and trim and ah, learning all I could do about, or all I could about being a soldier. And though I, funny story about that I'll tell this, the ah people that were drafted, they draft 'em up to 35 years old, well you can imagine when you were 18 years old what a 35 year old looked like. He looked like an old man. And I was training these old men and one guy it was, I could just imagine the frustration he was under, he had been a high school teacher and a football coach in California

Answer: And being a single guy, they picked him up and I imagine Pop Durland, he's 35 we'd have to call him Pop, and so Pop Durland was drafted and he was sent up and he was looking me straight in the eye, 18 year old kid that he'd been, had on the football field kicking around, and the shoe was on the other foot. It was me giving the orders and Pop Durland having to abide by them. And ah, I'm sure it didn't go over too big with Pop Durland.

Question: So how, were, so you had a whole variety, you had Pop who was 30 something years old, you had some kids roughly your age that you were, the drill instructor to and all that...

Answer: Right.

Question: Was the service an equalizer for the most part? That people said to heck with age.

Answer: Well it was an equalizer in so much that ah, it more or less leveled off at an education level. If these kids, or these men that we got, were out of universities they seemed to have a little clique of their own. Ah they didn't mingle too much with us grade schoolers and high schoolers but if you were from Southern Cal or Washington State or something like that they had their own little fraternity in the Army. Ah, over the years, like I say it lasted for four years, almost five, and over the years we did start to get closer and understand each other a little better, but initially I recall that ah, most of the college people they ah, pretty much hung out together and that was it.

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Question: So there was a whole different form of segregation happening within the ranks, huh.

Answer: Oh yeah. We had ah, it was funny in our company when the training was all over, all this initial training of draftees was over, our company wound up with 28 Japanese. And they put them in our unit just to keep 'em together. I mean rather than to scatter all, scatter 'em all through the regiment we had the 28 Japanese. Well of course when we finally got the call to go overseas they weren't about to send 28 Japanese overseas with us because we were heading for the Pacific and that's where all the trouble was. Now most of these guys ran in the, wound up in the 442nd, that was a Japanese regiment that fought in Italy and established a tremendous record for themselves. But ah, initially they were trained by us, or at least a portion of 'em were trained here at Fort Lewis and then cut out and ah, made the nucleus of the 442nd.

Question: So was Fort Lewis, was that considered your boot camp then?

Answer: This was boot camp for, for draftees.

Question: For the people coming in.

Answer: When we first joined there was no such thing as a boot camp. We just learned from following the guy ahead of you. I mean we used to call 'em rear rank Willie and if you were a recruit that's where you always were, in the rear rank. And ah, just kind of keep up with the guy in front of you (laughs), until you got ah, got the formation down, and got the... but we were given the, a little individual in the corner of the armory on right face, left face and about face. But when it came to marching, ah rear rank Willie always wound up behind the corporal and you just followed the corporal around.

Question: So by the time that you started being a drill instructor was there a clear boot camp then at North Fort or was it still pretty...

Answer: They specialized. I was in a machine gun training company. And course we were responsible from the marching aspect of it to the deployment and operation of a machine gun. Now other outfits were rifle ah, infantry, or ah you know, just straight leg infantry, rifle carrying guys. And, of course they were given the same marching instructions and one thing or another but they were, you might say, experts at their weapon. They went through the M1 Rifle, they went through the BAR and they went through the light machine gun which the line companies had. And what we had were the heavy machine guns, we had the 50 calibers and the 30 caliber water cooled, and that's what we specialized in. And consequently these people were sent to machine gun companies as to where the rifle men were sent to rifle companies when they were finally finished their six weeks -- it was a six week training course.

Question: Wow six weeks, hm not very long really.

Answer: No not too long but ah, once they got with the company we were almost another, oh, six months before we were given the order to ship out. Actually we were given the order to ship out, not to Hawaii where we ah, finally landed, but we were heading for the Philippine Islands. Now this is just before the war, probably December the 1st of 1941, and we were in San Francisco and we were on Angel Island. Now we were getting ready to move the eighth we were supposed to board ship and head for the Philippines, and two of our regiments had preceded us. Ah, the 162 and the 163 and actually the 148, three regiments had preceded us and they were on the, on the ocean, they were on their way to the Philippines and we were

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

the last regiment to have, to leave San Francisco and we were on Angel Island getting ready to go when the war started. So the three preceding regiments they put into Australi

Answer: And we were a little late leaving so the best we could do, rather than to risk running into the Japanese Navy out there somewhere, we made a fast run to Hawaii, and reinforced the Garrison in Hawaii.

Question: And that would be after Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Answer: That was after. Pearl Harbor was still smoking when we got there. I know we could see the smoke, the black smoke still coming up from Pearl. Ah, the oil's still burning, and ah when we came in. We didn't land in Pearl Harbor we landed at the Aloha tower right down town in Honolulu. We put in and then they, some of the units were put on trains, little cane trains, and they were driven up to ah, little puffer bellies ah, run 'em up to Schofield Barracks and dump them off. And I was fortunate. I got in the truck and ah, we didn't know where we were going, but I came into Fort Shafter, and that's almost downtown Honolulu. And then I was given the job after we got to Fort Shafter, to police the Honolulu area and enforce martial law. And so we had a Jeep with five or four guys in the Jeep and ah, they, martial law amounted to this, at sun down every resident in the city was on their own property. They weren't allowed to walk down the sidewalks or in the streets or anything else. And they weren't allowed to leave their property until sun up. And ah, so that was what we were looking for, anybody walking down the streets or out of their own little are

Answer: I was told later, I've been down there, in fact I lived there for ten years after the war, and ah, I talked to a lot of the people and they use to say how they'd hear the Jeeps would come and they'd be out playing in the street or what ever and they'd all run behind the hedge and let the Jeep go by, they said because, Jeep was, no cars on the highway, you could hear that Jeep coming a mile away. And so we weren't really enforcing an awful lot of anything when it came right down to it but I'd have some of the old-timers tell me that when they were kids they'd hear the Jeep and run for a hedge and get behind it.

Question: Now the picture you have of you on the beach there's all the barbed wire behind you.

Answer: Um hm.

Question: What was the theory behind the barbed wire? Who are we keeping where?

Answer: Well we had guns ah, which are not in the picture, but we had the 27th infantry, which was one of our sister regiments, they were deployed right on Waikiki Beach. They had machine guns and, and fox holes and everything behind that barbed wire in the event that the Japanese would attempt to make a landing there, ah, all along the beach was manned 24 hours a day. But ah, machine guns were in place and the rifle men were in place and ah, that was pretty good duty if you could be right on Waikiki (laughs). In other words there was a lot of the island that was pretty desolate and they were there too.

Question: Oh yeah, that's right, it was a little different Hawaii at that time and...

Answer: Yeah there was a lot of beach to defend and people were scattered all around the island on various beaches -- some nice like Waikiki and some so desolate that you ah, wouldn't ever want to return.

Question: When you left, so you left out of San Francisco area, you got on a ship right?

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Right.

Question: Pearl Harbor had happened, correct?

Answer: Right.

Question: You're what 18, 19, 20 now.

Answer: Oh I'm 19 I suppose.

Question: Oh getting to be an old man now.

Answer: Oh yeah, I'm an old timer.

Question: What was going through your head? I mean did you realize what, what you were going into?

Answer: I think I did. Ah, and it was an adventure to me. I think it helped being young. It was an exciting adventure. And but I noticed that as the people were older they were a little more concerned about the thing, I mean, they weren't looking forward to this at all. If they could've jumped off the ship and swam back they would've. And initially we didn't know where we were going. I mean nobody said you're going to Hawaii. We got on the ship and we were leaving San Francisco and until we got out to sea we were not told exactly where we were going to go.

Question: But you'd already heard the news of Pearl Harbor though.

Answer: Oh we knew Pearl Harbor. Ah as a matter of fact, nobody seemed to know, and I talked to a lot of civilians ah, that were in the same boat, when somebody said Pearl Harbor, nobody seemed to know where Pearl Harbor was. I mean they knew Hawaii but that isn't what they were saying on the radio. They said Pearl Harbor has been bombed. And so the question is, where is Pearl Harbor? (laughs) Because nobody had ever heard of it. It wasn't the thing you saw in the paper every day.

Question: So when, if they said you were going to Hawaii, did you know you were going to Pearl Harbor or did you think, hey, we're going to Hawaii?

Answer: Well, by the same token, when they said you're going to Hawaii most people didn't realize there was five islands out there. And going to Hawaii there's the big island of Hawaii, there's Oahu, there's Molokai, there's ah, Maui, there's Lanai, we could've gone to any of 'em, but we just assumed if we were going to Hawaii we were going to Honolulu because that was the only Hawaii we knew.

Question: That's right yeah, at that time that was, hah.

Answer: And yeah. Most people didn't realize when they went to Hawaii they went to Honolulu and that was Hawaii. Instead of, actually the big island is Hawaii. And the other ones are named accordingly.

Question: Yeah.

Question: So you knew you were headed to war though?

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Oh yeah we knew we were, we weren't going to get out of it now, we were on our way.

Question: But for you it was, you weren't thinking, I'm going to go over and might get killed.

Answer: No that thought never entered my mind through the whole war. I thought I was gonna get hit and as many times on patrol, I used to lean forward because I've seen guys get hit and they get knocked on their back and I thought, I don't want to get knocked on my back. If I get hit I want to be leaning forward far enough, you know, that I can get on my face and continue the fight. But ah, I never got hit which was very fortunate and ah, like I say another thing about this. When people start to talk about getting hit and how their family will grieve and one thing or another, that was a, that was a bad omen. And very likely they would get hit. I think probably the chances of them getting hit, it was like a, a something they seem to know was going to happen to them. And they would begin to talk about it. I know one night for instance I was with a guy named Peru and we were all, you know, light talk about one thing or another and Peru started this talk about his wife would miss him and he didn't know what his wife would do if he got killed. And he kept talking about this, and we got to looking at each other 'cause we'd heard it before. And we broke up our little conversation and started to get dark, we got in our fox holes, we got into a fire fight. Who got killed? Peru. He was the only one. We got a couple of guys hit but Peru was dead. And yet here just, you might say, an hour before he was just prepping, ah prepping, what am I trying to say ah?

Question: The preparation, preparing himself.

Answer: Yeah, yeah. He was preparing himself for the inevitable.

Question: So how did you, um, was war always fear to you? Now it sounds like it wasn't to you, that ah, 'cause I couldn't imagine being in a war for, 'cause you were there for how long? You were there...

Answer: Well we were there from the beginning to the end.

Question: Yeah so you spent a number of years and I can't see going 365 days a year being scared. Could you get to average life, I mean was it like, I go to a job every day, you went to a job, but it was...?

Answer: I just, like I say, having the responsibility of running a squad and then later running a platoon ah, I just had so much to think about, about getting this guy here and getting furious at this other fellow because he wasn't doing what I told him to do. And my time was taken up just in getting rations to them, getting guys to the medics, ah, it seemed like I was always busy. And so, I tell you, one of the greatest compliments I think I was ever paid, we had a reunion here and it pretty much sums up my attitude I guess. We had a reunion a couple of years ago and a guy from Iowa came up and he hadn't seen me in some 40 almost 50 years. And he didn't recognize me at first and I got to laughing and finally he said "My God I remember you," he said "you're the guy that was laughing and joking and singing all the time," and he said, "when I'm so damned scared," he said, "I didn't know what I was doing," and he said "I remember you," he says "you're the guy." And so which was a great compliment that I was the guy that he remembered laughing and joking all the time. So I guess that was my attitude.

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Hah, wow. That's ah, you know I think that, you know, everybody does it differently, but I think that's a good way to do it, I mean 'cause you're in the situation.

Answer: Well I've always said you can either laugh or cry. I laughed a lot. I could've cried.

Question: Yeah.

Question: Now you were in some pretty ah, let me see I'm looking to see where you were, ok, a little one that many of us had heard about, Guadalcanal.

Answer: Guadalcanal. Yeah Guadalcanal was one of the first operations in the Pacific and the Marines had been there for almost four months before we landed. And they were pretty much at a stalemate. They had Henderson Field which was about a three mile stretch on the beach and about a mile inland. And in the four months they'd been there, that was it. They, they were on the Matanikou River was bordering them on the north and that's where we took over their lines. And we came in, ah, our units relieved the units on the, on the river and ah, they pulled back and went to New Zealand. And so we took over but, that, when ah, I might tell you a little story about that. When we first took over the lines the Marines didn't have any outposts to speak of. They weren't way out there in the Japanese areas looking to see what was gonna happen next. So there was a guy named Captain Wade and I had taken some special training in Hawaii and ah, Wade was the instructor, and so he got most of us together. There was a oh a guy named Roy Hamilton and Mickey Trade who was a fighter out of Chicago and ah, oh gosh I can't think of everybody's name at the time, but there was about eight of us and he called us together and he said we're going into the Jap lines and we're gonna look around and find out just what their disposition is and we're gonna come back and report. Well that's a little naive, I mean to, but at the time we had never been in a fight, you know, in a war before, us young people, so we thought ok let's go in and take a look at 'em (laughs). So we did. We went into the Jap lines but getting back out was another thing. And we stayed, oh yeah and the guy said all you want to take is a D ration bar, they were a chocolate bar that resisted heat, they wouldn't melt. And that was all we were gonna have to eat while we walked in and looked at the Japanese and found out how they were set up. So in we went and three days later (laughs) we finally fought our way out of the thing. But I know that one time we started up a hill and we got in a hell of a fire fight with the guys. And how we never, how we managed and we didn't manage well -- nobody was hurt seriously -- and ah, then the first time I ever heard "mushi, mushi" ah, that's how Japanese answer their phone. We over ran this hill and there was a phone lying there and I picked up the thing and I said hello, hello on the phone and I hear this mushi, mushi, mushi, mushi. So the guy at the other line course didn't know what had happened to his buddies on this hill that we'd just over run the hill but ah, I always remember mushi, mushi (laughs). But we, we got out of there and got back to our own lines and, thank God. Ah I remember wading up a stream one time on this same patrol. Wading up a stream and the water is so crystal clear, it's just beautiful, and so I'm slapping the water up in my face, drinking it, oh it tasted so good. And we went around the corner and there was a half a dozen bodies lying in the water (laughs). So we didn't drink out of the stream anymore (laughs). I didn't get too sick, but some of the guys did. I mean, I wasn't the only one doing it. Everybody thought oh, this crystal clear water, how lovely and were drinking it and some of the guys, oh they got pretty sick by the time we'd got out it had hit 'em, and course they had diarrhea and, and ah all sorts of stomach problems.

Question: Wow. Boy what a fun vacation.

Answer: Yeah.

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Question: What did the history books left out about Guadalcanal? I mean, what, what don't we know about the...?

Answer: Mostly that the Marines took the whole damn thing. That's what the history books will tell you. I've got reams of material on Guadalcanal and it's seldom that they ever mentioned that the Army was ever there. This was an all Marine operation and like I say, what they had was three miles long and one mile deep. And when we started attacking, we attacked and went 18 miles up to Point Esperance which is the northern tip of Guadalcanal, and we had to fight our way all the way up there. And incidentally, they ah again, they tell about how many casualties like a few hundred casualties, and I remember walking those 18 miles and I don't think there wasn't a time that I couldn't look left or right or straight ahead and see a Jap, a dead Jap laying somewhere, behind a tree, in the road, or where ever. And so, again I think we were short changed on how many casualties we inflicted on the Japanese as we chased 'em up, up to the end of the island.

Question: What's it like, 'cause you're in the heat of battle at that point right? I mean you're firing they're firing...

Answer: Off and on, oh yeah.

Question: What's that like for a 19-, 20-year-old kid, anybody I guess?

Answer: Well you're just looking for a target. Ah, I ah, it's been so long that ah, you're more interested in seeing him, I mean that was my idea

Answer: The bullets were flying and ah, sure I was scared, if I'd tried to talk I probably wouldn't have made it, my heart was up in my throat. But my big concern was, where is he, where is that guy, and so I can return that fire. And that was my big concern, not so much burrowing under the earth, but trying to find out where the fire was coming from so I could return the fire. It was, that was my, now I'm not saying that I was the bravest fellow in the world, ah because a lot of people like myself, and then there were a few that were burrowing down in the ground to get out of there. And it's amazing, statistics were taken one time, they took a survey on how many people went through these combat situations and never fired their rifle. And that's incredible and I know it to be true. And the only explanation they have, if I start shooting, they'll see me and they'll shoot me. Which wasn't too logical but it was their logic that I don't want to start shooting because I might draw attention to myself and I'll get shot.

Question: Was it, um, was it chaos or was it very, did you feel you were in a very controlled situation?

Answer: It was very ah, much under control, I thought. I never saw anything get to the point of being panic. It was, if we saw we weren't gonna, ah win the battle, then it was all right pull back, pull back, pull back. And one at a time guys would pull back, get in another position, fire a few shots to cover the next guy pulling back, but it was very controlled. I always, ah maybe there was situations, and I'm sure there were situations that became chaotic, but any fire fight I was in was pretty, pretty much under control.

Question: Hmm.

Question: So communication was ah, was good? I mean you could, you knew where everybody was and...

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Oh yeah we knew everybody and that helped. I mean when you said Johnson get out of here, he didn't have to be told twice (laughs), he'd get up and get out.

Question: It was interesting when ah, Mr. Sherman and I were talking, and he talked about he knew his brother was somewhere and he found out his brother was there, and there was also this very normal, just like if I knew a buddy of mine was up in Seattle I could track him down, I could get there. Was that common? I mean did you know where other troupes were and things like that? Or were you pretty much...

Answer: No. No I ran into guys accidentally. I didn't know where anybody was. I remember, ah there was a fellow with the Air Force there at Henderson Field. And I just bumped into him and I'd gone to high school with him and he was one of the mechanics, ah on Henderson Field, I think he was with Pappy Boyington or one of the guys on the field 'cause. That was another thing on Guadalcanal. We got bombed and bombed and bombed, night after night after night. Ah, I read an article by Laughton, Laughton Collins, Laughton, I think it's, Laughton C. Collins, he was commander ah, commander in chief of ah, the United States Army after the war. But he was our division commander at the time of Guadalcanal, Laughton Collins. And he wrote an article, he said, when he went to Europe he didn't worry about bombing and he refers to it, when I was in Guadalcanal he said, there wasn't a night we didn't get bombed once or twice a night. And ah, it got to be a ho-hum kind of thing really, you wouldn't think that at first. Course I was, I was frightened at first. But ah, the sirens would go off and they'd say the bombers are coming in and you just felt like saying, oh drop dead. You know you just got tired of hearing it because, like Laughton Collins said, once or twice a night, almost every night we were there. They would come down from Bougainville and New Georgia and ah, there were several islands up ah, above, they had air bases and well within range so they'd wait 'til night time when, because our fighters were too much for them during the day and they'd come down and bomb us every night. They knew where Henderson Field was and they knew the general proximity in there. And, but it got to be a ho-hum sort of thing.

Question: Now you, besides Guadalcanal, you were at um...

Answer: New Georgia was the next one.

Question: Ok.

Answer: And New Georgia was an air base that the Japanese had and I just referred to it, it was very close. And an outfit, I think they were maybe, well I won't even, I won't even guess, venture to guess but it was an Army outfit who had gone into New Georgia to take ah, um, the airport there at Mund

Answer: And they had never been in combat before and oh were they equipped. They had camo, that was the first time we ever seen camouflage uniforms, they had these boots, kind of tennis shoes, camouflage tennis shoes that they had on, oh they were equipped for the best. And the Japanese just made mincemeat out of 'em. They over ran their supply, they over ran their medics, they bayoneted everybody in the medical are

Answer: And so they just called us up at a minutes notice and they said pack up your gear we're heading for New Georgia

Answer: And we went up on destroyers. They didn't, anything that would float, that could get us to New Georgia, they used. And I wound up on a, on a USS Shaw, Shaw was sunk later, I understand, it was a, ah destroyer. And boy we went flying through the slot heading

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

for New Georgia, as fast as we could get there, because these guys were in dire need of help. Like I say they'd, turned out to be the Japanese Quarter Master Corp. They'd, we furnished them everything -- from rations to trucks. So we came in there and stabilized the situation and I've never seen a bunch of guys more scared in my life. Their eyes, they looked, everybody had owl eyes, they were just terrified. And they had good right, reason to be, you know, 'cause they had taken a tremendous beating. These Japanese just came down there in swarms and just ran right over the top of 'em.

Question: Hah.

Question: And you also went to um, and I'm going to pronounce it wrong, ah Leyte Luzon Leyte L-E-Y-T-E.

Answer: Oh Leyte.

Question: Was that it? Leyte Luzon?

Answer: Ah let's see here. Oh Leyte, yeah Leyte on Luzon.

Question: Ok and...

Answer: Luzon is the big island in the Philippines. And Leyte is Leyte Lingayen Gulf and it's a big harbor in there. And we landed ah, up there the ninth of January I remember. And I was never so happy to get off a landing craft in my life. The Kamikaze's were just taking their pick out there -- we had ah, we must have had 200 ships out there in that harbor, all descriptions -- and we'd hear these things roaring and just full blast, down they'd come and they were Kamikaze's with bombs on them and they'd hit these ships and a burst of fire and smoke would start. And I'd thinking, hurry up get that landing craft alongside this ship, I want to get off of here. And ah, which I was grateful, like I say, first time I ever got over a landing net and down under a landing craft and was heading for shore and was grateful. Because they, I don't know how many they sunk in there, but ah, they had their Pickens. That harbor was, like I say, full of about 200 ships and it was hard to miss. And they just flew in and we'd hear 'em roar and they'd come down, just absolutely straight down. They'd hit tankers, they'd hit troop ships, they'd hit ah, anything they wanted.

Question: So what was your, when you got called in there, what was your, what did they call you in to do? What was, what was happening?

Answer: Well, that was the start of a five and a half month continuous combat. Once we landed in the Lingayen Gulf on Luzon we started fighting. The first town we got to, they was, we were not opposed at the landing. We just walked to shore and there wasn't anybody around. They had all run back to a little place called Benilonan, or generally in the line of Benilonan. And we finally got to Benilonan, we had been fighting in jungles up until that time, now these were little towns and one thing or another you know. So we marched into town, pretty much spread out, but on either side of the road. And they got some fire at the head of the column so they stopped the column and we all just sat down and was resting our heels. And all of a sudden these Japanese had hidden their tanks in the buildings, and we hadn't sent out reconnaissance to the flanks to look in the buildings. And the front of the buildings came down and here come the tank and the infantry. They caught us flat-footed. They just came in from both sides and our guys, being seasoned troops and that was the only thing that did it, we laid down with our bazookas and our rifles and one thing or another and we returned fire. We knocked out 13 tanks and I don't know how many infantry we put away. And we weren't unscathed, we, we lost too many men but far less than what they lost. And I often thought,

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

now when this officer went back to make his after action report how did he ever explain that they had us dead to right on both flanks with tanks and infantry, they moved in on us and lost. I said, because that's exactly what happened. We just blew 'em away. They come charging in there, everybody took their position, like you were saying before chaos, there wasn't chaos, these, our troops are well trained, they found themselves a good firing position and returned fire and that's all it took. Just hold your ground and return fire.

Question: Can, 50 years ago, can you remember what was going on in your head? I mean, what are you thinking about when this is going on? I mean is it like, I mean when I play capture the flag that's a thrill and the guy's hiding and there's a little rush, but these are big tanks and people firing things.

Answer: Oh yeah. Yeah. Well now that scared me. When I saw those tanks coming, that scared the bejeezus out of me. As a matter of fact, I got underneath my truck, we were an anti tank unit, and we had a three quarter ton truck with a gun behind, and we hadn't unlimbered the gun, the gun was still sitting back there when the tanks hit or we could've returned fire if we'd had a gun set up. But unfortunately we were in column and we were marching and the trucks were kind of following us. I dove underneath my truck and I saw this tank coming and all I'd ever been told, fire between the slits. So I just clip after clip after clip I'm firing as close as I can tell where the slits were that they were looking through and watching me. And all of a sudden I feel this pain on my back and I thought, good God I've been hit in the back, and I reached back on my back to find out where the blood was and I pulled my hand back and it's black grease. This tank had shot my, right through my grill and split the block on my engine right over the top of my head, and by gosh I can't, I never saw, I didn't hear it, I didn't see it, ah I didn't even know about it until when the block split the oil ran out of the engine down on my back. So I rolled out from under that truck and found myself another firing position.

Question: What um, what do you think that the, what do you think the major message would be to leave with the generations to come, probably some of the generations that aren't even here yet. I mean the ones that are here don't have full knowledge, I don't even know if they have knowledge of World War II, but the generations to come. What, what's the message that this whole event leaves 'em you think, or that you would want to leave them?

Answer: Oh gosh ah. Just be loyal to this country. It's, there's so many factions now that will denounce our government, and denounce the military for instance. They, and it can't be that way. We've got to be, you might say, one for all and all for one. We can't have these flip ideas about let's not discipline our children, ah and let's not impose mandatory military service, ah, it just doesn't work that way. If we're gonna be free then we've gotta be involved in the thing. And being involved in it is taking your tour of duty in the Navy, in the Air Force, in the Army and ah, then in future years if we need your services, you're pre-trained, there won't be all this ah, frustration of getting people in like we did, as I saw it. Ah, starting a draft and trying to build an Army of millions of men when you only had a nucleus of a few thousand. So ah, now I, it's, it it sounds kind of funny about patriotism and one thing or another but it's a fact. You've gotta love this country.

Question: That's ah, Keith talked about the uniqueness and he said he didn't know if it was because of the depression or what it was but World War II was 100% focus uniting...

Answer: He's right.

Question: That everybody was in at the same place.

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Right.

Question: Hm. You know, and I'm going to bounce around a little bit here for, common day life while you were in the service, let me pick a day, Christmas.

Answer: Ah, don't remember too many Christmases. I was in New Zealand one Christmas, and the people down there just bent over backwards being nice to us and making our Christmas ah... Why, I guess the Christmas I remember, I landed in Hawaii Christmas Eve when we came over. And now I remember that one because I was the first one in the chapel (laughs). We landed there, got up to Fort Shafter and they said there'll be Christmas services up at the chapel and ah, I was the first one, the first one there (laughs).

Question: Was something like that, did that bring, you know and I keep using the word a normalness, but what we think of, free life. Did that keep you in touch with free life? Did it make it harder? Did it, what, did it make you homesick?

Answer: No I, I guess I was you might say fortunate or unfortunate in so much that I didn't really have a family. I had been raised in boarding houses and orphanages and ah, my dad was a city fireman and my mother had died when I was, when I was born. So dad didn't want to have me adopted out, he wanted to keep me so he kept me in boarding houses and some, like I say sometimes I ended up in an orphanage because between boarding houses. And ah, so I didn't have any real firm grip on holidays ah, I've had holidays in, with ah, people I lived with, the Radimakers, the Costigans, the Skullys the Pfeiffer, the Bensons, ah as Christmas came around I was with them during Christmas but not with my family, so I didn't worry too much about the Christmas thing.

Question: So you didn't face a homesickness then?

Answer: No, no. And I felt so sorry for the guys that did I mean 'cause really it was almost pathetic. And I think the worst thing, we had a guy named Franky Cortez and I think the worst thing that could ever happen, happened to him. His family would send him pictures monthly of his bedroom, and the front room, and the kitchen, and mom and dad and he just, and every time he received these pictures it'd break the kid up. And ah, they thought they were doing him a favor to show him his own little room at home and his own little kitchen with his momma making a pie or whatever, and God that was torture. I know he'd show 'em to us and break out in tears. He'd say this is my mom. Boy that was tough.

Question: What did you look forward to? I mean there had to be...

Answer: We used to have a saying (laughs) when we were over there. "Golden Gate in '48" we made it by '45. I wanted to get home and have a home, ah you know. Again, I never had a home and that was the biggest thing to me. Come home and buy a house I could call my own. I was very fortunate, I got a lovely wife, we've been married for was it, 52 years now. And she was pretty much in the same condition I was. She had lived in boarding houses and orphanages and so we had that much in common. So we made a pretty good go of it. That was my big goal was come home, get a decent job, and ah, buy a home and live happily ever after you might say.

Question: Wow.

Answer: Which I have.

Question: Hah.

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: You know you were talking about chaos and one thing I wanted to get back to, when these tanks were hitting us and all, there was a fellow named Jack Wing. Jack Wing later became supervisor of schools down in Payette, Idaho when he came back home. And Jack's on one side of the street because the column when we got hit he's over there and I'm over here. And in the middle of all the shooting and one thing or another, I hear this guy start yelling "Hey Linden, Linden," and I look across the street and he's standing up and said, I said "What do you want?" and he said "I'm hit!" Well what am I supposed to do about it? And I the only think I could tell him, I says "Well lay down or you'll get hit again!" (laughs) And so he did, he laid down. But he was hit bad, he got hit through the stomach and he wore a colostomy for years and years but ah, I got him shipped out, it was the first Jeep that came in I put him on the Jeep, and we hadn't seen him years and years and then he came back to one of our reunions. But ah, one heck of a guy.

Question: Is there, that brings me right to the next one, is there, did you find a special bond with the guys? That...

Answer: Oh yeah.

Question: Is that, I mean, how were, is that the most unique experience you've ever had, in that way of the bond that formed because of the situation?

Answer: Yeah. I think most of us in the service are, you know, now it gets emotional.

Question: I mean, if I touch on questions that you don't want to answer, feel free not to go down those but...

Answer: Tough for me to talk. Bout old buddies.

Question: It's a very, very special, it sounds like you found a family with ah, guys that you served with. And you still keep in touch with them.

Answer: Yeah, every Christmas, as many as there are left, I send 'em Christmas letters and, news about the other individuals I've heard from. If I hear from a guy in California I'll put his thinking and his thoughts and his words into my message. I've heard from Gene Belk in California and Gene's wife is fine and his kids are doing this and ah, his health is good and I hear from Roy that, in Reno, and Roy does this and, so I spread the news around in, in every Christmas for all the letters I've sent to all the guys, yeah. I'm sort of, I've been a sort of self-appointed historian for the, for my unit too.

Question: Oh wow. That's good. Somebody, that's important, I mean I think it's important that somebody does document and keep track of and...

Answer: Well it just amazes me that more guys haven't really been involved. You know, like some guys it's like pulling teeth to get them to write a buddy. And I send that message out every year too. I'll say write a buddy, I said, I've sent out the addresses and the names of all the guys I've got a hold of and everybody gets a copy of it. And I said, they like to hear from you, I said, as much as you like to hear from them. And that ought to be enough you know because you hear from one of these guys and ah, it's pretty nice.

Question: Is it a bittersweet I mean...

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Well it is particularly in these later years it's getting to be. 'Cause I hear from a guy and he sounds so upbeat and one thing or another and the next thing I know I get an obituary from his wife. And that makes it tough.

Question: I just, all the people I've talked to, the uniqueness, the, I don't know I would assume for a lot of them is it was an experience that they've never, ever experienced anything like it again in their life. That it was, it was that powerful, I mean you depended, they depended on you for their life, you depended on them for your life and that's something I've never had to face, you know.

Answer: Well I've been, again I've been flattered to have guys say that, on these reunions I get with, they said if we go back to war, we want you for our leader.

Question: Wow, hm.

Answer: So that sounds, it sounds good to me.

Question: High honor, respect and, which is more important than rank, respect is, is much more. No matter what your rank was in relation to them the fact that they respected you, and age and everything like that.

Answer: You know, I don't know how many people feel that way about it, but even fighting can be funny. There's a lot of things that seem gruesome to the average person but for guys that are fighting, it can be absolutely hysterical. Ah, I remember we had a guy named Baycock one time. And Baycock, I don't know, are you familiar with the mortars and all and bazookas?

Question: A little bit, yeah.

Answer: Well you load the bazooka and this number two man loads it, wires it up, and gets it ready to go and then the gunner is ready. Now the loader he's standing here. Well this tank was traveling down the road and this bazooka man kept following the tank until pretty soon he was pointing right at the loader, the rear end is. He pulls it, blows this guys helmet off, the back blast of it, burns all his hair, and his face, and his eyebrows, and knocks him backwards and he starts screaming "I'm hit, I'm hit, I'm hit!" (laughs) He thought somebody dropped a bomb on his lap. Well something like that now, that was funny. It wasn't funny to him but to everybody else who had seen exactly what had happened, that was, that was a goofy thing. Like we had Chaplain's assistants, I think his name was Fox, and he drove the Chaplain up behind the line, and the Chaplain went up to talk to the guys. And he stayed by the Jeep, and this Jap snuck up and didn't have a weapon and at the last second, he turns around and sees this Japanese guy coming and grabs for his throat. And inadvertently, when he grabbed for his throat he stuck his thumb right in the guy's mouth. And he's got his right hand on his throat but he's got his left hand with his thumb in his mouth. And this Japanese is chewing like crazy on this thumb see. (laughs) And he's biting on it and this guy starts hollering help, help, help and pretty soon a couple of riflemen come, said what's a matter and he said shoot 'em, shoot 'em and he has 'em out there. And they said well drop him and we'll shoot him. And so the guy drops him, he's dead already, this guy had been holding him for five minutes by the neck (laughs). He strangled him to death.

Question: Is that the fear gets going and...

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Yeah, and he just held on and hollered shoot him, shoot him (laughs). And fist help, it took time for the people to come down and find out what he was hollering help about. Again it wasn't very funny to the Japanese guy but (laughs)...

Question: It's all a matter of prospective.

Answer: Yeah right.

Question: And that's, and that's a lot of what we've been trying to find out is that there was, and that's why I kept asking about fear, how you deal with it, that there is that average, everyday life that, that something is funny. I mean like you said that number two guy that got blown over, he didn't think that was that funny. Probably looking back he probably, now, hopefully...

Answer: He stayed with us, you know.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: I'll tell you another one was kind of fun, we had this guy Al Engel, ah, he's one of the guys in the picture with the three of us. And Al thought he was the meanest, roughest, toughest little guy in the world. So captured a couple of Japanese one day, and he's really being nasty, he's hitting this guy and telling him, come on move, and he'd kick him and tell him move, move. And they started across a creek and apparently the Jap knew where all the stones were and he just walking like crazy. And Al missed one and he fell in the creek with his rifle and the whole thing and the Jap turned around and gave him his hand and helped him back up again. Well it took the hate right out of his, right out of his mind. From then on he stopped kicking him and stopped hitting him. And oh, he was going to be so tough yeah, the Japanese said here, help you up.

Question: Some of my dad's favorite stories, he was in the Navy but he was at tail end and all his programs kept getting washed out and washed out and washed out, but he said the one was is if you wanted cold beer you would take and put your beer can in a sock and you'd go out the airplane and you could put it in the airplane fuel and then you'd take and whip it around as that airplane fuel ah, evaporated it off it would cool that beer down. So in the other words I guess I'm flying and they could take big garbage cans up with 'em and they could make ice cream while they were up flying around up there.

Answer: Yeah, get up 30,000 feet and (laughs)...

Question: So there is, I mean there is, there's life and there's humor in war besides all the tragedy and terrible things that happened out there.

Answer: Right. Well another episode was, I've got a picture at home I remember and somebody took it, it could've been the same guy. There was, on Guadalcanal, we weren't too good at policing the are

Answer: When we'd shoot 'em we just left 'em lay. Ah, later they got regular details to put 'em in trenches and cover 'em up, we just could care less about whether where they went, they could stay where they fell as far as we were concerned. One guy fell in the road. And the trucks had come up and down and up and down the road and pretty soon this guy begins to look like a gingerbread man. He starts spreading out. And there was, he had to be a brand new second lieutenant, he flagged a truck down and I had a position just on the side and I could see this guy down there and he, this Jap, or this lieutenant flags the truck down and he

Robert Linden

Tape 1 of 1

said you got a pioneer kit in your truck with a shovel and a pick and one thing or another. And he said yes sir, we do. And he said well get this guy off the road and bury him. And the truck driver said sir, we don't bury 'em we just shoot 'em (laughs). And put the truck in gear and down the road and left the lieutenant standing there with his mouth open. You know, what happened? (laughs)

Question: What, when um, after the war, do you live with an animosity towards any country or anything like that? Or was war a war or what is that?

Answer: Well I, I personally had animosity against Japan. Ah, even today. I wouldn't buy a Japanese car. It's just lingered with me, I know it's foolish but that's the way I feel. That ah, I buy American, and I support American, and I see no reason that I should. I mean...

Question: But do you feel that towards the people, a person, a country, all of the above?

Answer: I think that, I don't think the government's have changed that much. Ah, it's always been my idea that if you want to really get helped out get in a fight with the United States. Boy we'll rebuild you, we'll give ya, we'll loan you money, ah and I think a lot of 'em have used that. And no strings attached -- I don't understand that part of it at all. We give 'em a couple of billion dollars but we don't tell them how to spend it. Now I don't understand that part. In Japan, good Lord, look at the industrial revolution they had there because of us. And they have no respect for us even today. I mean, they'd just as soon give us the finger in anything.

Question: You know, it's interesting, and they don't have a, they don't have a, and that's the end of my tape so...