

Lester Meis Oral History Interview

LESTER MEIS: But I have to talk about my CIA experience and my IDF experience.

PETER RIESZ: Today is January the 12th, the year 2001.

(laughs) We're at the office of Lester Meis in Victoria, Texas. This is Peter Riesz, interviewing for the Military Order of the World Wars, about 9:15 in the morning.

Morning, Les; how are you doing today?

LM: Doing fine, Pete.

PR: We're going to talk a little bit today about your military experience. What we'd like to document as accurately as we can is times and places, and units you were in or assigned to. Any stories or interesting anecdotes you might have, good or bad, hopefully good, but anything you want to add about your experience in the military, we'll be glad to hear. First of all, what's your complete name?

LM: Lester Arnold Meis.

PR: When and where were you born?

LM: New York City, October 11, 1925.

PR: Right in New York City?

LM: 126th and Lexington Avenue, the Doctors Hospital, which is no longer there, I guess. I don't know. I haven't seen it

in 50 years, so it wouldn't make any difference to me. But now I guess it's Harlem.

PR: What was your educational experience? Where'd you go to elementary school?

LM: Elementary school, Los Angeles. Secondary school, Los Angeles. High school, Los Angeles.

PR: What high school and when did you graduate?

LM: Fairfax High School. January of '42, something like that.

PR: You went in the service in January of '43.

LM: All right, then it was June of '41 that I graduated high school, because I immediately went to UCLA and had a year and a half of UCLA before I went into service.

PR: How did it come about that you went into the service?

LM: I had two choices: become a Dogface, Army, or enlist in the Navy as a volunteer. I could not see myself trudging around in mud and crap. So I went into the Navy.

PR: How did you know that? You registered for the draft and your number was about to come up or predicted to come up?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Did someone give you warning you were about to go?

LM: One of the members of the Draft Board of that area who knew my mother and so forth.

PR: What was your move then?

LM: I volunteered for the Navy.

PR: Right there in L.A.?

LM: Right there in L.A.

PR: What was your experience there? Did you have a test or something? Or did you qualify right away?

LM: I had a test. NGCT or something. Naval deal. I remember this distinctly: it had 90 points, and I made 90 points, which meant that I could read and write.

PR: (laughs) You were fully qualified. You had a physical there?

LM: Yeah.

PR: What day was that? Do you recall what that date was?

LM: No, but it was one day before my 18th birthday, or maybe a couple weeks before my 18th birthday.

PR: So that'd be September or October.

LM: Right.

PR: Did they call you right into duty then? Swear you right in and ship you off?

LM: I think it was 36 hours. (laughs)

PR: Go home and get your toothbrush, and report in?

LM: Report in. We took a train from Los Angeles to San Diego and was toted on a bus to San Diego Naval Training Station, arriving there just in time for breakfast, which was a drastic surprise to me. Shit on the shingle.

PR: I thought that was an Army exclusive.

LM: If it was anything bad, the Navy had it.

PR: And you went right into boot camp then in the San Diego Navy Training Station.

LM: Yeah. After about six weeks of boot camp, I guess all the records and crap caught up with me. And they immediately transferred me to Hospital Corps.

PR: Was your boot camp completed?

LM: No, that one wasn't.

PR: What was the boot camp experience like?

LM: Pain in the ass, as far as I was concerned.

PR: Taught you how to march and salute, wear a uniform, make your bed?

LM: Yeah, the whole routine, which was new for me and not very rewarding an experience.

PR: This is getting almost to '43 now. Was there a lot of activity there, lot of troops being trained?

LM: Lot of boot companies being trained, yes.

PR: Were you divided into different companies with a Drill Sergeant that harassed you?

LM: Yes. There was not a Marine Drill Sergeant but a Naval Chief Petty Officer. I guess they must've dredged him up from Timbuktu or something. I think his IQ was probably 70.

PR: He was in charge of whipping you into shape. What do you mean your paperwork caught up and then you went to the Medics?

LM: I have no idea. They must've decided that I had a year and a half of college and I could --

PR: On the basis of that experience and your initial experience, they tried to fit you into a square hole.

LM: I'm surprised they didn't fit me into a truck driver or something like that.

PR: (laughs) When they decreed you to be a Medic, what happened then?

LM: There was a Medical Service Training facility at San Diego. All they did was transfer me to that for the Corpsman Training, which I think was 10 weeks.

PR: Was there a big class there?

LM: A class of about 25.

PR: This is separate from the Navy Training Station.

LM: It was in the Naval Training Center.

PR: Subsection of that. Did you know you were in the Marines then?

LM: No.

PR: You were just training to be a Naval Corpsman.

LM: Yeah.

PR: You remember your serial number?

LM: 5655861.

PR: That's the one you got and kept all the way through.

LM: Right.

PR: What was the training to be a Corpsman experience like?

LM: Very minimal shock/traumatic training.

PR: (overlapping dialog; inaudible)

LM: Not even that. "Here's somebody dying. Take care of them." About like medical school.

PR: (laughs) It just takes not quite as long. (laughs) How to put splints on and stop bleeding?

LM: Yeah. General Field Hospital. But I kept thinking to myself the Navy does very little of this; most of it's on the ship. Finally it struck a chord that I'm being trained as something else. Right at the end of the thing, they had a big listing on the bulletin board. "So-and-so will be going to this, that, so forth." There I was, Medical Field Service School, Camp Pendleton, California.

PR: That's after the 10-week Navy Corpsman training. Did they teach you how to start IVs and stuff like that?

LM: No.

PR: This was all really just basic.

LM: Basic bullshit.

PR: Advanced First Aid, I guess you could call it.

LM: That's probably what it was.

PR: After the 10 weeks, if you had aptitude and qualified, then they'd move you onto the --

LM: Aptitude? Qualified? (laughs)

PR: What did they call the other school?

LM: Medical Field Service School.

PR: Where was that located?

LM: Camp Pendleton, 177,000 acres of nothing. Oceanside, California, 25 miles north of San Diego.

PR: Was that a big, huge dome base at that time, like it is now?

LM: The 4th Marine Division was in training there. The 2nd Marine Division was in training there. God knows what else. There's 177,000 acres. They had a tent camp here and a tent camp there.

PR: What was your Medical Field Training School experience like? How long did that last?

LM: That was approximately 10 weeks. Then I was assigned to Training Staff.

PR: At the end of that time?

LM: Yeah.

PR: What was that training like? More treating people? Field situations?

LM: Actually, my end was Field Sanitation. Here's a fly; put it on Block A and hit with Block B.

PR: Identify it?

LM: No. We had the beginnings of usage of DDT. How to dig slit trenches, how to dig disposal.

PR: So you were a specialist right from the start.

LM: Yeah.

PR: They sent you to the school, and instead of treating wounded guys directly you'd --

LM: It was all based on, essentially, malaria control. They did have some decent training, considering that most of the Officers didn't know from shit anyway.

PR: Who were you trained by? Other Corpsmen or some Officers?

LM: Physicians attached to the Marines.

PR: Did you have some bookwork attached with that? Something about how to identify the things you were coming across?

LM: Some very minor manuals.

PR: Did you get into actual treatment of wounded people at all during that time?

LM: No.

PR: That was not a part of your subsection that you were in.

LM: You were expected to know that.

PR: Where did you live? Were you in barracks during that time?

LM: Barracks.

PR: So it was a developed enough camp.

LM: The Medical Field Service School barracks.

PR: I suppose you marched to class and did all that business.

LM: No marching.

PR: You got to be kidding? Casual.

LM: Just worked your ass off. That's about all.

PR: Dawn-to-dark training?

LM: Ten to twelve hours a day.

PR: Did you have any field stuff?

LM: Lots of field stuff.

PR: In a practical sense, though, to do with sanitation.

LM: Yeah.

PR: Did you have to go out on maneuvers, like other training?

LM: Only with respect of going from the Medical Field Service School to the area of maneuvers to see whether they had built their latrines properly. It was a very interesting deal. You were a military plumber.

PR: You were more an inspector at that time.

LM: Correct. As a part of it, we inspected the food facilities, too.

PR: But you weren't attached to a specific unit. This was still the training phase.

LM: Correct.

PR: No nighttime stuff or Mickey Mouse stuff at night.

LM: Played a little poker.

PR: Pretty good meals? Food adequate?

LM: Food was adequate. Certainly not a gourmet menu.

PR: Was there a lot of physical conditioning? Calisthenics?

LM: Just in Naval boot camp; that's about all.

PR: What did you do at the end of the Medical Field Service School training? What time would you guess we're getting toward by this time? It says you went overseas in February '44. Getting onto the end of '43 or early part of '44?

LM: Yeah. Of course, there were campaigns going on in the South Pacific. We had a choice: stay at the Medical Field Service School and die on the vine because it was boring on a ship, or go into the pool where they would assign you to wherever. They assigned me to the 4th Medical Battalion of the 4th Marine Division. At that time, it was in the rear base at Maui. Had just come back from, if I remember correctly, the Marshalls and Kwajalein, and were refitting and re-rigging and so forth.

PR: So the 4th Division had left the San Diego area and been involved in a battle while you were doing your training.

LM: Yes.

PR: At the end of the training, you were assigned to the 4th Medical Battalion of the --

LM: Fourth Marine Division.

PR: How was that Medical Battalion organized?

LM: Four companies, as far as I know. One company or maybe two companies strictly Field Hospital, and then a specialist company. I don't know about the other company; I never ran onto them or never thought to.

PR: Were you in a company that was just all sanitation?

LM: Sanitation and general whatever. Whatever they needed you for, that was you. Everything from dental on down.

PR: You could be called on anything, but you were trained for the sanitation end of it. Anything else was just a body to do a job, and not really trained for it. Did they ship you right over to Maui to join up with the --

LM: Zoom.

PR: Flew you over?

LM: No, no.

PR: Got you on a ship?

LM: Oh, it was a wonderful ship.

PR: You remember what it was? Name of it?

LM: It was the [*Palau Lau?*], which was a Netherlands East Indies Merchant Marine. It was an el-stinko from the word go.

PR: Where did you sail from?

LM: From San Francisco.

PR: You go off to camp in San Francisco?

LM: No. We went, if I remember correctly, directly from Pendleton to embarkation in San Francisco. And I don't really know whether we went from an Army area or a Navy area or what. Most of it was at night, anyway. I didn't know nothing.

PR: Was there a huge mob of you going at the same time?

LM: If I remember correctly, there were two ships.

PR: Two ships that went at the same time. So some people from Pendleton; people coming from all over the --

LM: Yeah. I'm sure there were drafts from other areas.

PR: What was your rank at this time?

LM: I think I was Pharmacist's Mate Third or something like that. I was really a Field marshal, but nobody believed me.

PR: (laughs) They didn't find that out till later on. Was that what all the Navy Corps persons were called, Pharmacist's Mate?

LM: Yes. Now it's Hospitalmen. They've changed it. It was Hospital Corps then. Now it's Medical Service Corps.

PR: This ship, *Palau Lau*, was that run by the Merchant Marine or by the Dutch still?

LM: Dutch crew. East Indies crew.

PR: Just with our troops packed on there like sardines.

LM: Yeah.

PR: You sailed out from San Francisco.

LM: Under the Golden Gate Bridge, past the Farallon Islands. I remember that very distinctly.

PR: Good birding islands. They're famous now.

LM: And right to Pearl Harbor.

PR: Was that an easy trip across, other than the crowded conditions, the poor sanitation, the smell and stink?

LM: Smell. Food was wonderful. (laughs)

PR: No big storms or anything like that?

LM: No.

PR: Were you in a convoy, zigzagging?

LM: To tell you the truth, I don't even remember.

PR: What happened when you got to Pearl?

LM: Unloaded and embarked for Maui. I think it was a one-day deal.

PR: To get across to Maui?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Do you know what that timeframe is? This is in February of '44.

LM: Yeah.

PR: Okay.

LM: I guess. Shit, I don't know.

PR: I don't put that in any description of the ship. (laughs)
You catch up with the 4th Marine Division. Where were they
in Maui?

LM: They were on the side of the volcano Haleakala. It was
mostly a tent camp. It stretched all the way up -- not way
up -- along the side.

PR: On all that volcanic soil?

LM: Yeah. About four years ago, Geneva and I went to a
conference in Honolulu. And I said, "You know what? I
want to go over to Maui and look at some things that I used
to remember." So we go over for a couple days and had a
car. Wandered in these areas and couldn't find the
goddamned area until we got to top of one of the roads.
There was a service station and a convenience store. I
went in and I said, "Could you give me directions to the
old camp areas of the 4th Marine Division?" This guy
looked at me and says, "Were you with the 4th?" I said,
"Yes, sir." He said, "My dad was with the 4th. I could
show you where the damn thing is." We were about six miles
from there. He showed on a map. He says, "Take this road
right here. Go right down, and you'll find that there's a
very large playground for children right there, plus a
monument to the 4th Marine Division," which was sort of
pictures encased in plastic of the various battle areas,

plus a middle picture of the tent camp itself. I didn't take a picture of that; I should've. It was very interesting. Looking up this area, there was not a thing there. Cattle grazing, exactly the same way it was when they found it. There was a pineapple field on the right.

PR: Didn't become a permanent camp or anything like that.

LM: No, no. It was owned by somebody.

PR: Strictly a training camp.

LM: And there was a pineapple field on the right that we used to borrow pineapples from. I learned one thing: you don't ever eat a pineapple right from the bush. Got to let it sit for three or four days. Otherwise the citric acid just kills you. Citric acid, you take a bite of it and it just burns your mouth. But after three or four days, it's sweet as could be.

PR: (laughs) You found that out in a hurry. How did you fit in with the Medical Battalion there? You were in training at that time?

(break in audio)

PR: So you fit right into the Medical Battalion, then?

LM: I actually, if I remember correctly, helped set up a dental clinic. Of course, I wasn't a dental tech or anything like that. Didn't know shit about that, but did that. Then

started checking sanitation facilities throughout the division.

PR: The 4ths Marines had been off in battle. Then they'd come back.

LM: This was their main base throughout the war.

PR: And they were back getting replacements for their wounded and healing some wounds.

LM: They had, if I remember correctly, 1,000 casualties or something like that. It wasn't really bad.

PR: They really didn't get tore up completely.

LM: No, but Saipan and Tinian tore their ass up good.

PR: How long did that last, once you signed in with the 4th Division? How long were you there? When did you leave?

LM: Probably two weeks before the Saipan and Tinian campaign.

PR: June 15th was Saipan.

LM: Then we were at sea the 1st of June, or probably a little before that.

PR: Did you know something was coming up?

LM: Yeah, we knew something was coming up. "Get aboard this goddamned ship." (laughter)

PR: Did you have any idea where you were going, though?

LM: No.

PR: It was all top-thing until you got out in the ocean. Did you go back to Pearl Harbor to ship out, or did they ship you right from Maui?

LM: Right from Wailuku, which is a port on Maui.

PR: What sort of ships were you in for that?

LM: If I remember correctly, that was an Army troop transport taken over by the Marine Corps. They sort of set them aside from all Army stuff, because if they were next to an Army base half the equipment would be stolen. You've never seen anything like that. They had a list of what they needed. And I saw jeeps, four-by-four trucks, you name it, just... And within an hour, there were Marine Corps numbers, paint, the whole bit.

PR: (laughter) "We got a lateral transfer."

LM: On Saipan, the goddamned Admirals are always fed very well. But I saw a reefer that was full of wonderful New Zealand mutton exchanged for a reefer full of wonderful steaks.

PR: And the Marines won that one; the Army lost. (laughs)

LM: They lost everything. No matter what it was, the Army lost everything. (laughter) Saipan was a disaster for the Army. That's when the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions were on the end of the deal, or across the island or some damned thing. And the 27th Army Division was in the middle. They sat on their ass, and the Japanese came around. That's when old

General Smith relieved General Smith of his command.

Essentially kicked all the Army Officers off the island.

PR: Wasn't a good experience. When you went in the Navy, you had the Navy whites and the blues uniforms. When you were assigned to the uniforms, what sort of uniforms did you have with the Marines?

LM: Green uniforms.

PR: The khaki?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Was there sort of a work uniform and a dress uniform?

LM: Yeah. You wore greens, whatever it was.

PR: Khaki and the blue Marine uniform?

LM: You have a Navy insignia. And that was the difference.

PR: The Navy supplies all the medical care for the Marines.

LM: Correct.

PR: So you had the Navy patch on but a Marine uniform.

LM: Right. And my nine stars.

PR: Did they ever train you in rifles, pistols, anything like that?

LM: I think I got two days' training. Medical personnel never carried. I had a .45 in my sea bag and a carbine in my sea bag, because they gave you those and you just put them away somewhere.

PR: The Army had those Red Cross arm bands. Did the Marines wear anything like that, or no distinctive insignia of any kind?

LM: No, because the Japanese loved to kill them.

PR: Yeah, it's a good target. The Army guys got rid of them in a hurry. So you ship out. Did the whole 4th Marine Division go on ships? Was it a huge convoy?

LM: I don't really recall. There were a lot of ships. The 4th was a Reinforced Marine Division of about 22,000. That was 4th Artillery Battalion, 4th this battalion, 4th... The breakdown was pretty damn good in that book.

PR: Can I borrow that?

LM: Absolutely. You'll find me in there. I'm way in back saying, "Go ahead, fellas." (laughter)

PR: What's your recollection of how long it took or where you went to when you sailed out from Hawaii?

LM: I think it was two or three weeks.

PR: Saipan was your destination?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Did you know that?

LM: I think at the same time Guam was being hit.

PR: Did you have any idea where Saipan was?

LM: Yeah, it's over there.

PR: Did they clue you in on where you're going? Where the ship's headed? (laughter) Were you zigzagging with destroyer escorts for protection?

LM: I don't even remember. I don't even give a shit. I was playing chess most of the time with a couple of the Medical Officers. We had these little portable chess sets, just passing the time of day.

PR: Did you have any Corpsman responsibilities in the Dispensary or anything like that? Inspecting the ship's sanitation?

LM: Ship's company took care of that.

PR: Did you go straight into Saipan or was there a stop somewhere?

LM: No, we went straight to Saipan.

PR: You were on the lead invasion in Saipan?

LM: All hell was breaking loose. I assume I was somewhere there. I don't think we were the first group that went in, because there was so much smoke, crap, and so forth in front of us.

PR: A lot of firing noise and activity. There were other waves of ships going in?

LM: Yeah.

PR: How would they get from the ship into the shore?

LM: Landing craft.

PR: These LCVP things or Higgins boat type things? Amphibious boats?

LM: Mm-hmm.

PR: Eventually your detachment/company, whatever, got up, climbed down the nets and all those things, got into the boat, headed for shore?

LM: Yeah.

PR: What's your experience as you got to shore?

LM: Lots of noise. As far as I could see, nobody was shooting at us there. I didn't really see any initial action until we got to the sugar refinery. And then there were a bunch of snipers. I watched --

PR: Do you think this was on the first day in the invasion of Saipan you went in?

LM: Yeah, everybody was in the first day.

PR: The whole 4th.

LM: Except the ancillary forces coming in afterwards.

PR: So the whole 4th Division was landed on that day. The 2nd Division, did you say, was --

LM: They were two or three miles up. And the 27th Army Division was also landing at the same time.

PR: So you just kept advancing with your 4th Division?

LM: Yeah.

PR: When did you get to do things there? What was your experience as you advanced?

LM: Field Hospital with some. Actually, I was sort of a left hand, because I didn't have too much of anything to do other than fill in and help out.

PR: So just common sense things to help out, moving patients back and forth, or supplies they needed, things like that?

LM: Yeah, go to the beach and pick up shit.

PR: You certainly weren't doing your sanitation thing.

LM: No.

PR: Was there a lot of wounded? Was it a fairly efficient treating of the wounded?

LM: There were a lot of wounded, but they moved out in a pretty fast manner. In fact, we had three hospital ships right offshore. I guess those that had to be taken care of were taken care of in the Field Hospital. And those who made it to the Field Hospital were transported to the Hospital Ship.

PR: So when they brought them back, if they were still alive they would get emergency treatment and sorting. And if necessary, they'd be evacuated out to the Hospital Ships, where they'd do the definitive stuff.

LM: Right.

PR: How about the dead? Registration area? Would they try to bury them there? Were they evacuated?

LM: No, I just saw a lot of bodies in body bags. But I don't know. I don't think anybody was buried during the campaign.

PR: What was the course of the action there on Saipan?

LM: I think Saipan was about 10 days to 12 days. The first six or seven days was the real mess, and then cleanup after that.

PR: Did you keep moving up behind the troops, or did you stay back more with the Field Hospital?

LM: I was sort of half and half. Not all the time as a direct Corpsman, although I did do a little of that. I left a yellow streak all the way up.

PR: (laughs) That's only natural. Sometimes a brown streak, maybe.

LM: When somebody tells me they were this and they were that, I just thought to myself -- I was scared shitless. Anybody tell you that they enjoyed combat and they weren't frightened, they were either a psychiatric case or something else.

PR: It's my understanding the 4th Marine Division did real good, advanced up. Got to a point where the battle was

almost over, and the Japs were pretty well contained. Is this hilly countryside, Saipan?

LM: Yes.

PR: Up and down? Hills, valleys? All sorts of traps?

LM: Lots of caves. I don't know which day it was, but I don't think Tinian was hit at the same time. It Tinian was hit a couple days afterwards, because it's just a little shit island. Frankly, unless I read it and remember things, I don't remember all this crap.

PR: I just like your impression; the things you remember about what it was like at that time.

LM: Noisy.

PR: Were the Japs bombing artillery back at you? Shooting back at you all the time?

LM: Only for the first day. Then they were knocked out.

PR: Was there any air support by the Japanese?

LM: No.

PR: You didn't have to worry about air raids.

LM: No. That was Guadalcanal that had all that.

PR: From then on you just kept advancing up. It's my understanding you'd gotten almost to the end, and then the 27th Army Division was called in to relieve you. They almost lost the battle.

LM: I don't know the exact circumstances, but the 27th fucked up good.

PR: Their first experience; didn't know how to fight. (off-topic; dialogue not transcribed)

LM: Saipan and Tinian, if I remember correctly, 4th Medical Battalion had about 25-percent casualty.

PR: You had a lot of Corpsmen up on the frontlines doing the initial patching, and then evacuation back.

LM: To the Field Hospital.

PR: What happened after the 10 days. Now the main thrust of the battle was over.

LM: Then we went to Tinian.

PR: Right away?

LM: Yeah. But Tinian was just about secured at that time.

PR: So you left Saipan, the whole 4th Division?

LM: Not all of them. I'm sure they looked at me and said, "He doesn't have anything to do. Send him over there."

PR: Was there a little transport that took you over?

LM: Landing craft.

PR: What did you do over there? Mess around? Inspect latrines?

LM: One of the Marine (inaudible) Companies had a casualty. They were looking for a Corpsmen. A guy had been nipped by a Jap sniper. He was about dead. The Lieutenant said,

"Why don't you stick with us for a while? We're looking for some special things." I said, "As far as I know, nobody knows I'm here, alive or dead. I'm here." Their objective was going into Garapan, a little town, and blowing the Yokohama Specie Bank.

PR: (laughs) Are you serious?

LM: Yes, that is the Lieutenant's prime deal, which they did. "Go this way, fellas. Go ahead." Blew the shit out of it. Guard the door, and they found an extensive amount of Japanese currency, of English pounds, of American currency. And the best thing in the world: something like 25 cases of Black and White Scotch. Belonged to the Japanese Admiral. That's where he kept his --

PR: In the bank vault?

LM: And the thing that I remember most about that is that everybody had 100-yen notes. You'd light your cigars with them. The thing that astonished all of us at a later date is that the Japanese never demonetized their money. (laughs) It was all good money.

PR: They kept the same currency? Isn't that amazing. If you'd only known, you would have duffel bags stuffed with the stuff. (laughs) "Ship another bag back."

LM: But the (inaudible) Company, we had about 14 guys. They just had wads of this stuff. (laughter)

PR: Had the town been taken already?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Where'd you advance to after that?

LM: I just went back to the main --

PR: Back to the main Medical Company. Still on Tinian?

LM: Yeah. (laughter) The Chief Warrant Officer said, "Where the hell have you been?" I said, "I've been up with the Marine (inaudible) Company." He said, "Oh, good deal. Good deal." (laughter)

PR: Was that just a couple days? No extended time?

LM: No extended time.

PR: What did you do after the Tinian action? Was Tinian pretty much secured by that time?

LM: Yeah, back to Maui.

PR: The whole 4th Division?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Same camp? Same place? Same song?

LM: Same camp, same place, same song. By that time I got a real nasty bronchitis. I went into the Dispensary. This Lieutenant Commander looks at me and says, "You've got a hell of a case of asthma." I said, "I do?" "Yeah, we're going to ship you over to Aiea Heights, Pearl Harbor, Fleet Hospital. Load up all your stuff. You're going over there."

(break in audio)

PR: They shipped you over to a hospital on Pearl for treatment.

LM: Yeah. But there was no treatment. You just were on a ward. They would look at you. Finally, bronchitis was getting over. I must've caught another cold or some damn thing because I went back to the same hacking. I'll never forget this: Lieutenant Commander Johnny Blue, who was an obstetrician and was sucked into the service, he looked at me and says, "You can't stay in the service. You've got asthma." And I said, "I have?" "Yeah, we're going to ship you back to Oakland and probably discharge you." "They will?" (laughter)

PR: Oh, Jesus. Did they really?

LM: Yeah.

PR: This was December of '44?

LM: Yeah, I believe.

PR: September '44 you went to Pearl.

LM: Around December is when I was cashiered out of the service.
(laughs)

PR: Then you went back to Long Beach.

LM: I was discharged in Long Beach.

PR: Medical discharge for asthma?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Is your asthma all cleared up? Your bronchitis is all cleared up by now?

LM: They gave me a 10-percent pension. I think three years later or four years later the VA called me in for an examination. This doctor looks at me and he says, "What the hell are you doing here?" I said, "What am I doing here? Here's the form."

(break in audio)

LM: The VA doctor says, "What the hell are you doing here?" I said, "Here's the sheet calling me in for a physical." He went over me with a fine tooth comb. He said, "Well, we'll run some blood tests. But as far as I can see, there's not a damn thing wrong with you." (laughter) That was it. But in the meantime, that 10-percent pension allowed me to get on Public Law 15, I think it was. Whatever the hell it was. Not the regular GI Bill, but the extended GI Bill. So I got three degrees out of the government.

PR: What did that qualify you for?

LM: Additional funds.

PR: Because of the disability?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Did you ever have any more trouble with this, quote unquote, asthma?

LM: I had probably psychosomatic when I went back to Georgia with my wife. (laughter) Every time I go up there, I get wheezing.

PR: They must've heard something in your chest to tag you with something.

LM: I'm sure they did.

PR: You're probably allergic to the sugar cane. Bagassosis, don't they call it? The sugar cane --

LM: I'm allergic to my relatives.

PR: (laughs) So it didn't take them very long to medically discharge you.

LM: Uh-uh.

PR: How long after they discharged you till they reexamined you again?

LM: Four years.

PR: Four years later they finally -- for reevaluation of your disability. And they didn't find a disability. (laughter) Did you have any Reserve obligations at all, or were you completely tied up?

LM: I was gone. I told them that I'd be happy to come back into service, as I told you before, as a Nine Star Admiral, and work my way down.

PR: (laughs)

LM: But that would interfere with my early Defense Force deal.
I'm a Brigadier General, retired.

PR: You can't be on both sides. (laughs)

LM: Oh, yes, you can, if neither side knows. (laughter)

PR: Any experiences you had along the way that were unusual or curious?

LM: The whole thing was curious, as far as I was concerned.
Just seeing the total screw-up, I often wondered how we won the war. Then I figured out that the Germans and Japanese were a little more screwed up than we were.

PR: We screwed up less. Did you get any idea during the Saipan and Tinian if there was any order to the battle, or was it just sort of chaos and confusion?

LM: Pretty much chaos and confusion the first day. But after that, it was pretty much orderly advance.

PR: Supplies would always come in whenever you needed them?

LM: Yeah. The whole megillah.

PR: Enough to throw away? (laughs)

LM: Yeah, and did. It was interesting. I always figured that if anybody could go through essentially three boot camps, like I did, anybody in the world could do that.

PR: You were highly trained in sanitation. (laughter) Did you ever use that training at all in your time on either islands?

LM: On Maui.

PR: That was the only time you had occasion to use it.

LM: Because neither Saipan or Tinian were going to be bases for any Marines whatsoever, because then the Air Force came in and took over everything.

PR: Tinian became the big base for B-29s, didn't it?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Is that where the atomic Enola Gay took off from? Wasn't that from Tinian?

LM: That was from Tinian.

PR: That was a real important island.

LM: The island was one long runway, as far as I could see.

PR: Tinian?

LM: Yeah.

PR: Saipan was more hilly. Why do you suppose they took Saipan first? Did it sort of overlook Tinian?

LM: They probably thought there was 18 zillion Japanese. There were a lot of Japanese. And they did have artillery in the caves that they could fire out.

PR: Did you hear any of the fanaticism of the Japanese? Stories about that?

LM: Stories, yeah, but I --

PR: Didn't witness anything firsthand. Was Spanish where all the civilians were jumping off of cliffs when they finally got to the end of it?

LM: Uh-huh.

PR: You didn't see any of that part of it?

LM: I saw the results. Did not see any of the...

PR: They were fanatical. Okay, well, this has been an interesting talk. It's a little after 10:00.

LM: Does this give me a Reserve status?

PR: Might get you in a jail.

LM: Field marshal (overlapping dialog; inaudible)?

PR: I'm going to turn this over to your friends at the IRS.

(laughter)

END OF AUDIO FILE