

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Willard E. LaCounte

Billings, Montana

June 9, 2016

Battery A

118th AAA Battalion

9th Air Force

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is June 9, 2016. I am interviewing Mr. Willard E. LaCounte by telephone. His phone number is 406-652-3178. His address is 3309 Harlou Drive, Billings, Montana, 59102. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Well Bud, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. LaCounte:

Well thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is okay with you.

Mr. LaCounte:

Okay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

"Agreement Read"

Is that okay with you?

Mr. LaCounte:

Sure, sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road we try to get in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or a daughter or someone we could contact, if we needed to, to reach you?

Mr. LaCounte:

I have a son and a daughter both.

Mr. Misenhimer

Either one, whichever is convenient.

Mr. LaCounte:

Well the daughter probably. She lives in Washington, DC.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's her name?

Mr. LaCounte:

Cynitha. C-y-n-i-t-h-a LaCounte. Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number for her?

Mr. LaCounte:

I've got it here someplace. It's 406-790-0329.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me read that back to you. Do you have an address for her?

Mr. LaCounte:

I've got it here someplace. Ok, her address is 4852 Eisenhower Avenue, Apt. 140, Alexandria, Virginia. And the zip code is 22304.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hopefully we'll never need that, but you never know.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birthdate?

Mr. LaCounte:

May 25. I was born in 1923.

Mr. Misenhimer:

'23 okay. And where were you born?

Mr. LaCounte:

In Froid, Montana, F-r-o-i-d.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. LaCounte:

I had eight brothers and sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. LaCounte:

Two of my brothers and one of my sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are any of them still living?

Mr. LaCounte:

Not a one, no I'm the only one alive.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If they were I'd like to interview them. Now what were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. LaCounte:

My mother's name was Theresa and my father's name was Ernest.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, I'm a Chippewa Indian first of all. And when during the depression the government picked up a lot of Indian kids and sent them to Indian schools. And I was one that they picked up and sent to Indian schools. So I went through the depression from one school to the other, I started when I was in the first grade.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you live at home or you stayed there at the schools?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no, God no, I was four hundred miles from home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But how did your parents make it through, do you know?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, I lost two brothers with malnutrition during the depression. And my mother and father separated in, I don't remember when it was, '33 I think, '32 or '33. So my mother lived, supported the family mostly on the relief program after Roosevelt enacted that, that program.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did you all live on the Indian reservation?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are you 100% Indian?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, 50%. We were married 67 years when my wife died, but she died six years ago now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh I'm sorry to hear that. Now what year did you finish high school?

Mr. LaCounte:

I didn't finish high school. I finished 11th grade in 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now December 7, '41 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yep, yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you hear it and where were you?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I was in Bainville going to school I guess at that time. And later on then I went to Dutch Harbor, Alaska and went to work on a submarine refueling station.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And that was in the service?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, I was a civilian.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how did you hear about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I have no idea, on the radio I guess. Well I had a brother that was taken in the National Guard in September of '41. So he was out in Fort Lewis, Washington when the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. And too I just really don't know how I heard it. But I guess it was such common knowledge.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard it how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I, at the time I didn't think it would because I was also in the National Guard but they gave me a discharge because I was too young to go overseas. Yeah I was. They allowed some of us younger kids in there because they had quotas they tried to fill. And to fill the quotas there were three or four sixteen year olds in the National Guard at the Bainville unit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then when did you go into the service?

Mr. LaCounte:

I went in in September of '43.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, I was drafted.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you go in at?

Mr. LaCounte:

I went in, well from home they sent me to Butte and then from Butte to Camp Haan in California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you went into the Army, is that correct?

Mr. LaCounte:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any choice of the branch?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well at Camp Haan in California and then we done a lot of our practice shooting and stuff in California on the desert at Victorville.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about your basic training, what all did you do during basic?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well getting familiar with the 90 mm guns and 50 caliber machine guns. And at the time I was a jeep driver. And when we went overseas I was a jeep driver but then we lost a few people and then they reshuffled the schedule and I was no longer a jeep driver for ..., yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But now did you have basic training where you shot the rifle and learned marching and all that

sort of thing?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh yeah, oh yes, sure. Yeah we had rifles, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then when did you get into anti-aircraft artillery?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh right at basic training, right away. Yeah, we were assigned to a 90 mm unit as soon as we got to California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So it was in September or October of '43, early in there somewhere?

Mr. LaCounte:

Right, right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well tell me about that training, what all did you do in that training?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well mostly, mostly you know, "hut, two-three" (*laughter*). No, we had a lot of shooting, target practice out in the desert. They'd pull, they'd have some kind of electric planes pulling targets and we'd shoot at those targets. We shot at them both with the 90s and with the 50 caliber.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what was the range on the 90?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh God I don't remember what that was, I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's pretty high though.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah it was high.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah it's up in the twenty-thousand feet as I recall.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah I'm sure, yeah. I don't remember what, oh yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else happen while you were in that training, anything you recall?

Mr. LaCounte:

No nothing, nothing really. While I was in training my wife come out there and got a job at the Quartermaster Corps rebuilding Army clothes, shirts and pants and stuff. She sat at a sewing machine rebuilding clothes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you get married, what date?

Mr. LaCounte:

The 15th of October in 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's before you went into the service?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yes, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you say you were a jeep driver, how did you get to be a jeep driver?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well that was my assignment when we first got to Camp Haan. They assigned us to whatever job we were going to be and they stuck me in a jeep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any special training for that?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, uh-uh, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had a driver's license I assume before you went in?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh yes, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what all did you do as a jeep driver?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well mostly hauling Lieutenants and Majors and that around, wherever they wanted to go then I'd have to take them. So I was kind of a chauffeur.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then when did you go overseas?

Mr. LaCounte:

Went overseas, we got to Glasgow, Scotland on Christmas Eve of '43.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In Scotland?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how did you go over?

Mr. LaCounte:

On the *Queen Mary*.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip over?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh it only took five days you know. But it was pretty rough and I survived alright but we sure had a lot of people sick on there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that North Atlantic can be awful rough that time of year.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, yeah, yeah it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you threatened by German submarines or anything on your way over?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no, not a thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did the ship zig-zag on the way over?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

As I recall the *Queen Mary* was fast enough they didn't use escorts.

Mr. LaCounte:

No, well I think on our trip over there was between fourteen and fifteen thousand troops on that ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, it could hold a lot of people.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, it was a big son of a gun.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got to Scotland then what did you do?

Mr. LaCounte:

They sent us to a town by the name of Henley in England, and that's right in the center of the industrial area of England. And we set up our guns and every night we were firing at German planes coming over, bombing. They all was over at night you know and every single night we were, we were up most of the night firing at bombers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what was your job at that point?

Mr. LaCounte:

I was a jeep driver you know because when the invasion come along they didn't have very many planes left any more.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But when you were there shooting at these airplanes, what was your job, what did you do?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well depending on where I was at the time of the raid. If I was close by I was handling ammunition on the gun. There were seven of us I think on the gun, a fuse cutter and then the gunner and the loader and then four guys handling ammunition. And I handled ammunition mostly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did y'all shoot down any planes?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, you know that's hard to tell. Undoubtedly hit some, but if you don't get a direct hit and blow it out of the sky you never know you hit them you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what unit were you in at that point?

Mr. LaCounte:

I was in the Battery A of 118th Anti-Aircraft Battalion.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And they're 90 mm.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yep, 90 mm.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many guns in a battery?

Mr. LaCounte:

Four.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Four.

Mr. LaCounte:

Four 90s.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah four 90s and there's three batteries in a battalion, right?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, four. Four batteries, A, B, C, D.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So those sixteen guns firing at any one time or close to that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Right, right, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything particular happen while you were there in England?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, not, no. And we never had any bombing around us really. But the planes of course were mostly going over London and they had a path kind of over where we were, so we done a lot of shooting.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about the rockets, the V1s, and V2s?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well after, we were in Holland quite awhile after the invasion, and our guns were set up to shoot at the buzz bombs and that's what we done for oh five or six weeks I guess, till the war ended.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now there in England though you didn't see them there when you were there?

Mr. LaCounte:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Again I think they were concentrating on London.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, yep, yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How far were you from London?

Mr. LaCounte:

About thirty miles.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, that's fairly close then.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How were the English people?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh they're lovely, yeah real good. Yes, lovely people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get a chance to go to the pubs?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh you better believe. That was daytime, oh yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now if you were up during the night firing did you get to sleep in during the day then or what?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, but I've been back over there about oh at least eight or ten times since the war was over.

Yeah and I'm planning on going over one more time if I can, if my health holds up. I want to go over for the..., you see every ten years they have a real large ceremony on the beach, on the

landing site. And I've been to every one of those except to one. Now on the 75th year they're going to have another one, which would probably, could be the last one. I'm going to try to get to that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you say you've been overseas, have you been to England or to France, or to both?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, I fly. Did you ask me how I go over?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, no, when you go over were you talking about going to England or about going to France?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, going to France, but I just about always go to England first. And then they kind of follow the route, like South Hampton and there's where we shipped out of. And that's kind of where the trips usually begin. And then they go across the English Channel on a ferry and then bus us around from there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you travel with one of these travel companies?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well yeah with a travel group, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now tell me about going across the channel, when did you leave to cross the channel and how did you go across?

Mr. LaCounte:

Went across on an LST. We were loaded on an LST and we got off on the afternoon of the 7th of June.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, June 7, '44.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which was two days ago.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip across?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well we sat out in that English Channel for four days on that, on that LST. And it was foggy and rainy just about all those four days. And then on the morning of the invasion it was real foggy, you couldn't see anything. When it finally cleared, in the English Channel all you could see was ships. I don't care what direction you looked it was ships, LSDs, LSTs, LS-everything. Landing craft, everything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what time of day did you land?

Mr. LaCounte:

About 3:00 in the afternoon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Three p.m., okay.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There was still a lot of fighting going on there at that time, right?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well and we were scheduled to land on the first day. But there was such chaos on the beach that they held us back till the second day when they got things cleared away a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were there a lot of artillery fire and shooting at you and things like that when you landed?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh yeah, oh yes, yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. LaCounte:

Well that's why they held us back because the artillery fire had blown up so much stuff and then there's lots of bodies laying about you know. So if we had come on shore we'd have probably had to run over some of them, or there'd be vehicles in the way or blew up tanks or blew up everything you know. And so that's why they held us back till the second day. And then they had little D6 caterpillars and pushed stuff away and kind of made a trail across the beach and then up on top. And we were supposed to set up on the beach, but by the time we got there the second day we could already get on top. So we just motored right on through and got on top and set our guns up on top.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what beach did you land on?

Mr. LaCounte:

On Omaha.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what kind of prime mover did you have to pull your guns around?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh they called them prime movers. And they were three and a half-ton truck. But after we were there just a couple of months we got a track driven vehicle. And then they're built by Ford and all I ever knew they called them ..., you know they called everything M1 or M2 or something. Well they called that thing an M1. And it had a sixty mile speed on the gauge but it was on a rubber track.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But when you went onto Omaha Beach you used a truck there then, right?

Mr. LaCounte:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it a special type of truck?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no. Well I guess it was special, yeah. I guess, yeah, well they were a heavy truck and they were real short wheel-based and alls they were ever used for was pulling the guns, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how about your ammunition, how did you get your ammunition?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well that came in on trucks, but we had a big supply with us. The trucks had compartments for ammunition, so we carried quite a bunch with us. But then as soon as we got over there and got established it was delivered with trucks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

As I recall that 90 mm shell is all one piece, right?

Mr. LaCounte:

Right, right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how long is it?

Mr. LaCounte:

They are 39 inches long, they weighed 39 pounds.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you got on the beach did you do much firing at planes?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, there was only two planes came over that beach while we were in that position. And then as soon as they gained ground they moved us, they kept moving us all the time. And if they

captured a railhead or a landing strip or a factory or something they'd move us in position to protect whatever they had captured. And they moved us off the beach and sent us to a ..., God I don't remember the names of the towns anymore. But they sent us to some railhead anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now were you shot at by German infantrymen?

Mr. LaCounte:

No. Well when we landed on the beach yeah, sure there was fire all around us, all over. Yeah. We didn't lose any personnel but we did lose a couple of trucks going on the beach. They had personnel carriers, two and a half-ton trucks, and we lost a couple of those. But we didn't lose any personnel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now once you got up and then you started moving forward as they took more ground, is that right?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, yup.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any particular battles you recall?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yes, in northern France up around ..., oh I can't think the name of those towns right now. But, God I can't even think of the name of them right now. But anyway, four years ago I was issued the Medal of Honor from the French government for my activity up in ..., I don't remember the towns, but. But four years ago I got the Medal of Honor from the French government.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh, one of the towns was Metz, Metz yeah. But there's three towns up there that I was in, I can't remember them now, but yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now which Army were you attached to?

Mr. LaCounte:

We were attached to the 9th Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

9th Air Corps, okay.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You weren't with one of the Armies, I mean like 3rd Army or 4th Army anything like that?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, uh-uh. It was the 9th Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, I really don't know anything in particular. From the Metz area you know the Germans had, well they had ran out of airplanes really and so that's when they got up to Holland they sent us to Maastricht, Holland right away. And we set up there for, oh I don't remember it was quite a while, shooting at those buzz bombs. Were the V1 and V2 rockets. You could tell, you couldn't tell if you hit them, but they would change course. I don't think anybody ever hit one, but the concussion would change the course so that they would no longer land in London. And now that was the purpose is to try and change their course.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now it took a while to break out of the beaches there to start moving across France. I think about a month or so wasn't it?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Maybe a little longer, I'm not sure now.

Mr. LaCounte:

And then when the war, well just before the war was over they sent me to Marseille, France and there was, oh twenty some of us. And we refurbished an old French military base and as they overran the prison camps in Germany they shipped all those prisoners to us. And we, well issued them clothes and gave them baths and gave them something to eat, and oh everything. Went through medical lines and then we'd notify their country and their country in turn would get a hold of some of their own units you know. And we had them about normally between seven and ten days. And then like India would have, we had a bunch of Indian people, and they'd send a truck then and pick up their soldiers and on their way. But we had them about a week or ten days. Oh they done everything, they deloused them and sent them through medical facilities and through dental facilities and just everything you know. Every one of them was in need of something.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And these were all non-Americans or non-British, non-French, right?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, we didn't get any Americans or British. We got, oh some Australians, some New Zealanders, some Indians, and some Italians. Of course the Italians were kind of an ally of the Germans you know. But it was at the end, there was some of them in prisons too. And we got quite a few Polish, quite a few Polish were shipped to us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now these were people who'd been in POW camps or had they been in the concentration camps?

Mr. LaCounte:

Concentration camps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Concentration camps, okay.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were in pretty bad shape.

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh God, some of them were terrible. Some of them had to have help to walk, they were so skinny and weak you know. Yeah. And then from that, when the war was over and there were no more prisoners coming they sent me and twelve, well twelve of us to a town, Beaune was the name of it, Beaune, France. And we set up what they call a Transit Mess Hall. And as soon as the war was over they start shipping soldiers from Germany and Belgium, all over. And they were taking them over to the Pacific. Well they came through to our station at Beaune and we'd get a phone call from Dijon, France and they'd say we've got 650 troops will be at our station in one hour. And we'd have either breakfast, dinner, or lunch for them whatever the time of the day happened to be. And so we had one hour to prepare meals for well up to 600 troops. And we fed about, between five and six thousand troops a day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Wow, that's busy, yes.

Mr. LaCounte:

We had a bunch of German prisoners doing the work you know. And then we had some Polish military as guards to guard those Germans. And the Germans didn't hardly dare do anything, those Polish would shoot them (*laughter*). They didn't get along very well you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right. How did you happen to get assigned to that from anti-aircraft?

Mr. LaCounte:

I have no idea, they just..... I had a barrack in the military camp, when that became empty I got shipping orders to bring my stuff to headquarters and I headed down there with my duffel bag. They put us in the back of a truck and away we went. Now why they picked me I don't know.

But it was a pretty good assignment. Then they sent another fellow and I later from that station to Switzerland to arrange R & R trips. And our job was to check for the availability of hotel rooms and restaurants. And we'd go like to Berne and different places in Switzerland and get a count on the hotels and the names. And then get a count on restaurants and how available they were. And then we'd turn that all in so that they start issuing R & R trips right away. That was a king's assignment there, I liked that. I'd go through that again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Who was going on these R & R trips?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, all the soldiers. Any soldier that applied for it you know and then they'd pick oh maybe eight or ten from this outfit and ten from another outfit. But they had a steady stream of them once they got started, circling in and out of Switzerland.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And about what month would that have been, when was that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, it was ..., we made the survey in October and November and the trips started, before we got back they was already sending troops into Switzerland. It was in November of '45 before they really started. I got home Christmas Eve of 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well yeah, in Japan August 14, '45 is when Japan surrendered.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Germany surrendered May 8th of '45.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, well then I was there about six months after the war ended.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, yeah, they were still getting them out, processing. Did they ever talk about sending you to the Pacific?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, I don't think so. We built up points for the length of time we'd been there. If we were married, it was so many points. If we had kids, so many points. If we had ailing parents, so many points. Well I had been over there two and a half years then or just about. And then I was married and I had a son, so I extra points for that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, my most frightening time was in that harbor of course before I was in the military. But during the military thing, getting on that dumb beach would be the most frightening. Our unit was rather safe because we were always behind the lines, protecting something that the people on the line had already captured. So our unit was ..., I was in one of the better outfits I think, as far as safety is concerned.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were never wounded?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no, no. We lost, I think now four troops out of our unit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how did you lose those, what happened?

Mr. LaCounte:

Machine guns, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Germans machined gun them?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, yeah. In those hedgerows, see when we landed we got in to those damn hedgerows there,

yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well they were fine. I didn't get along with one, most of them were fine you know. But one of them, you know you always have somebody when they get authority they take advantage of that and we had one that took advantage of his authority.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What rank did he have?

Mr. LaCounte:

A 2nd Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, they're the worst.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah (*laughter*), yeah you're right. Yeah they want to lord it over you, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April the 12th of '45 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, I'm sure. We get that, well is it Stars and Stripes?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, and of course it was full of, it was in that Stars and Stripes. Well then when he died the news just flashed right away you know, we knew that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that what reaction did people have?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I don't really remember except I kind of had an admiration for him because of the programs he had set up when I was a little kid. When he enacted that relief program and then he had the CCCs and different programs, I thought it was the best thing ever happen to this country.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no, no I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You know who she was?

Mr. LaCounte:

No. I heard that woman in Japan, I forget what her....

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tokyo Rose?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah. I heard that a few times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you, how did you hear that?

Mr. LaCounte:

I don't know, it come over the radio. I think it was re-runs that they put on the radio. Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May the 8th of '45 when Germany surrendered did you have a celebration then?

Mr. LaCounte:

We didn't have a celebration, no. Because we had our camp full of the recovery people, you know from those prison camps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were tied up in camp down there then.

Mr. LaCounte:

So there wasn't much for us to celebrate looking at the spoils of Hitler's doings you know. Of course everybody was happier then but there wasn't much of a celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now then August 14th when Japan surrendered did you have a celebration then?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no we didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you hear about it?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh yeah, heard about that right away too. Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about when they dropped the atomic bomb, did you hear about that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what did you think when you heard that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I thought more power to them, drop some more (*laughter*). Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well it was good. It was always pretty good I think. For the simple reason that, well we never did get bombed but we were strafed one time by one plane. But we never got bombed and we were never, we were within maybe 18 or 20 kilometers of the front line a lot of times. But we never had any shooting at us while we were in our positions, you know. We got shot at a couple when we were moving from one place to the other, but never when we were in position.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I've got a parade bayonet here, a German. And I don't even know where the hell I got it, but I've got one. I don't remember getting it. I've got another souvenir here from England. I was in a pub one time and the pub, about seven foot off of the floor had a railing going clear around the pub that stuck out about four inches. And there was, oh everything in there was brass and they had brass vases and figurines and stuff. And as I was leaving the pub when they closed up, right above the door was a vase. And I reached up and took that vase and took it with me and I still have it here. If I go back in three years or go back for the 75th, I think I'm going to take it with me and see if I can find that pub. It was in Henley and I'm sure I can find the thing. But if I do I'm going to take that thing back. Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I didn't get any medals except this one I got from the French government. But I got all those ribbons, a ribbon for each six months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

A Legion of Honor I think they call that.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah. And then we got some kind of a ..., well I got two medals also from the French government besides that Medal of Honor. I got one issued to me at one of the ceremonies on the beach for my participation in the invasion. And then I don't know what, really what the other one is for. It was something in the mail.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You probably got the EAME, you got what they call the EAME, Eastern African Middle East ribbon. Did you get a Good Conduct?

Mr. LaCounte:

(Laughter) Me? No. Well I guess I have a Good Conduct, that's a ribbon. Yeah I got that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. LaCounte:

I did have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was that?

Mr. LaCounte:

When we were in Holland only. That's the only time we ever had time to go to a Red Cross.

And they, I forget now, I think they charged us fifty cents for a cup of coffee and fifty cents for a doughnut.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That didn't sit too well with people.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah. And then I heard stories about people that had tried to go home for deaths in the family through the Red Cross. And what I heard they didn't come out very good on that, so. But I didn't have any affiliation with them at all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh yes, yeah. Yeah, I was on the second flight out of Billings here.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long ago was that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh, two years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh it was nice, but I'd been there before, different times?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, beings my daughter lives there I had been there. And then my wife and I took a trip one time and we drove over there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your career in civilian life?

Mr. LaCounte:

I'm a cattle rancher and cattle feeder.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How big a ranch do you have there?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh at one time I had right at 16,000 acres. But when I decided to retire, I've been retired for 26 years. When I retired I sold off enough to pay down everything I owed and I bought a house here where we're living. And I paid cash for everything and I didn't owe any and I had enough land left to live on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You've done quite a bit traveling then?

Mr. LaCounte:

We've done a lot of traveling. My wife and I traveled to 84 foreign countries.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh my goodness.

(Ending of side 1 of tape.)

(Beginning of side 2 of tape.)

Mr. LaCounte:

Well I was gonna say, if my wife ever caught me looking at a globe or at a map she'd go to start packing her clothes *(laughter)*. Yeah, she loved to travel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's your favorite foreign country you've been to?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well, I think New Zealand would be my choice.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is that right?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah I think so.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you like about New Zealand?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well the temperatures are beautiful and the people are so friendly and just, just nice. And the weather is just perfect, just absolutely perfect.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you there?

Mr. LaCounte:

One month.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year was that?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh heaven's I don't know, but it would have been maybe about '81 or '82 or someplace in the

early '80s.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been to Australia?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh yeah, yeah. Yep, I liked Australia too, but not as well as we did New Zealand. Well I had picked up a magazine here, I think it was our 63rd anniversary. And it had an article in there about the *Queen Mary II* making the maiden voyage from South Hampton to New York. I called my travel agent here and told her to get us on that ship. So she went to work and got reservations and she forged my wife's name on a couple of papers and one thing another, because I didn't want her to know anything about it. But then we went over, flew to England and London and then we took the, what do they call it under the...?

Mr. Misenhimer:

The underground?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, under the English Channel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yeah, under the Channel okay, right.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, I forget what they call that. So we took that over to Paris and we spent a couple of days in Paris and then we had to take that back because we couldn't get a flight back. We got to South Hampton and got on the *Queen Mary II* and sailed that maiden voyage back to the United States to New York. But from the day I heard of that *Queen Mary II* I wanted to come back on it because I had gone over there on the *Queen Mary*.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the *Queen Mary II*?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh God that's a beautiful ship, I'll tell you. And then when we got on there, of course this travel

agent had kind of built things up a little bit and they took us to our state's room and they had oh a huge bouquet of flowers in there and a bottle of champagne with glasses and the champagne was in ice. And they had a bottle of Black Velvet sitting on the counter with some glasses and oh we were treated royally.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well Bud, that's all the questions I have, have you thought of anything else about your time in the service?

Mr. LaCounte:

I don't think so, no. I don't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, when you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well not really, I was always kind of, I was a carpenter when I first started my working years. And I got a job right away and of course I had my wife and my son to take care of, so. Yeah, no I didn't really have any problem. We had a school, the government paid us I forget \$100 or something to go to school. And we had vocational stuff, carpentry and welding and stuff like that, you know. We had a teacher, in fact he came from Billings and he was up in that little town of Bainville and that was his sole job was to teach the veterans welding and stuff that maybe we could use you know. I went to that for about a year and a half. But I was a carpenter. I don't think ..., I got a fishing pole right away and I spent my leisure time fishing of course.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. LaCounte:

I've never been to one. When I first got home for years I'd get notices of reunions and they were always on the East Coast because most of our outfit was from the east, East America. And I never had money and I didn't have time to go out there. So I didn't have money enough to go to any of them, so I never did get to one. I would have loved to have gone, but I didn't make it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you kept up with anybody you were in the service with?

Mr. LaCounte:

No, no I haven't. No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. LaCounte:

No. Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. LaCounte:

Oh boy. Now you know I had that question asked me different times how many stripes did you get. I don't know if they mean all at once, how many did I have all at once or how many I got. Because I got three stripes, one at a time. But each time I got them they took them away from me. *(Laughter)* So it's kind of a hard question to answer. But when I got out I still had one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

One stripe, okay.

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah. I wasn't an ideal or a perfect soldier by any means.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Why did they take your stripes away from you?

Mr. LaCounte:

Well one of them I was assigned, this was in England, I was assigned a job. They called me to transport a 1st Lieutenant out of headquarters in the evening. So I got my jeep and I went to headquarters and picked him up. And we went to London and he had the road all mapped out and everything and so we parked and he disappeared, he said he'd be back. I don't remember how he worded it. But anyway while I was parked there MPs come along and my name was on

the jeep. So the MPs come along and question me. And I told them that I delivered a 1st Lieutenant to this address and one thing another. But my jeep had no business being there. But I wouldn't tell them, I didn't tell them the name of the officer. And because I didn't tell them then I got in big trouble and they took the jeep away from me. So and they also took my stripe away from me, that was the first one they took away. Another one, they later assigned me to a two and a half-ton truck cause they needed a driver for one. And they formed what they called the Red Ball Express, they had trouble keeping gas up to the tanks because everything was advancing a little faster than they had anticipated. So they formed this Red Ball Express to haul gas from the beach on up to the front lines where it was needed. And they called for trucks from different units. And they called for one truck from my unit and my unit picked my truck to go on the Red Ball Express. Well I was out on pass and so I missed the assignment. So when I finally got in I'd had a couple of bottles of wine or something and they took my truck away from me and my stripe also. But before I got out then they gave me back another stripe. So I really had three stripes, one at a time, three different times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well anything else you've thought of from your time in the service?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah, you know I enjoyed part of it and part of it of course was misery. But you know it was part of life and I wouldn't trade my experience for anything on this earth.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were overseas could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. LaCounte:

Yeah we did. Yeah it was ..., well now I had a son born the same day I landed on the beach. And it was probably two weeks before I had word that I had a son you know. But from that time on the mail was really pretty good. Pretty good, I had no complaints. And I think my wife wrote to me every single day I was gone. Yep. Sometimes I'd get three or four letters in one mail call you know, but that was because we had moved. But no, I didn't complain about that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's all the questions I have unless you've thought of anything else.

Mr. LaCounte:

No I haven't think of ..., no not a thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well again thank you for your time today and thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. LaCounte:

Okay, thank you, thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay.

(End of Interview)

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