Fritjof “Fritz” Lokensgard was born on 20 November 1911 in the small farming community of Hanley Falls, Yellow Medicine County, Minnesota. The youngest of eleven children of Norwegian immigrant parents (his father, a Lutheran minister, was born 1853 in Norway), he attended local schools, graduating from Hanley Falls High School in 1929.

Fritz graduated from St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, in 1933, and then decided on a career in the ministry; he moved to St. Paul for Luther Seminary, completed this program, and was ordained a minister in 1937. Between 1937 and 1942, he got married (wife Maxine), started a family (three children), and served congregations in Belfield and Hettinger, two small communities in western North Dakota.

With the US entry into World War II, at age thirty-one, Fritz decided to join the US Navy as a chaplain. After chaplain school, he served at Great Lakes Naval Training Center (Mar – Dec ‘43); and at a naval aircraft depot at Ponam, in the Admiralty Islands (Jan ‘44 – Aug ‘45). Fritz spent the remainder of his active duty, until September 1946, at a Coast Guard facility in New York City. He remained in the Reserves after discharge.

Again a civilian, Fritz was re-united with his family, and served churches in Humboldt, Iowa (1946-53) and Glendive, Montana (1953-57) before returning to chaplain duties at the Veterans Administration hospitals in Fargo, North Dakota (1957-65) and Minneapolis (1965-79). In retirement he moved to Bloomington, Minnesota, where this interview took place.

Reverend Lokensgard shares his wide-ranging memories of sometimes challenging work as a military chaplain during wartime.
Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is the 9th of May 2003, and this is an interview for the Oral History Project of the World War II Years. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I am speaking with Reverend Fritjof “Fritz” Lokensgard at his apartment here in Bloomington, Minnesota. First, on the record, Mr. Lokensgard, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

F: Glad to have you.

T: We’ve talked for a few minutes, and I’ve learned the following. You were born in the small western Minnesota town of Hanley Falls the 20th of November 1911 and you were the youngest of eleven children. Your parents, both immigrants to this country from Norway, and I’ll have to say on the record, you have set the record for the parent who was born the furthest back. Your dad was born in 1853 in Norway and apparently he was remarried you say. So your mom was a second wife. You attended schools locally in Hanley Falls. Graduated Hanley Falls High School 1929. I think you said it was a whopping total of eleven students in your class, one of whom was a girl. One year at Texas A and I College, and then the final three years St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, class of 1933.

F: Correct.

T: Followed that with Luther Seminary in St. Paul, 1933 to 1937. At this point I want to ask, what is it that led you to the ministry as a profession?

F: I think a lot of the influence that affected me was from my father, more by indirection. As I recall he never once told me you must be a minister but his influence, his way of living and teaching made a great impression on me.

T: Now your father was a minister as well.

F: He was a pastor for fifty years. All in western Minnesota. He attended Concordia Seminary in St. Louis for a while. Then he went to Madison, Wisconsin, to a seminary. But he was ordained in 1881. He had a parish in Granite Falls, Minnesota, where quite occasionally because of a vacancy in another church he would preach at services in German, Norwegian and English.

T: So your father spoke all three of those languages.
F: Very fluently. It was something I'm sorry I was not so adept at.

T: The Norwegian I understand—where did the German come from?

F: Well, because German was a strong theological basis for the Lutheran Church, and they read Luther’s writings in the original German. Today you can get Luther’s writings in English, but at that time they were still either in German or Norwegian. And of course he had seven years of Latin and several years of Greek and Hebrew, so he was fluent in both of those too. I think another influence was a dentist in Northfield, Minnesota. One day I was in his office. I had my mouth full of cotton and he said, “Fritz, why don’t you go to the seminary?” I couldn’t say a word. Then of course, too, I had the experience of a year in Texas where I attended another church. Then I came back home and went to St. Olaf and the influence of men like President Bough, and some of my teachers, like my English professor, Dr. Spone, they were great influences on me to go to the seminary. In fact both of those men wrote letters of recommendation for me to go to the seminary, and then seven years later they wrote letters of recommendation for me to get into the Navy chaplaincy.

(1, A, 84)

T: How was it that you selected Luther Seminary here in St. Paul?

F: Because that was the only seminary of our church at that time. We belonged to what was called the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America which goes way back to the early seventies, 1870s. The seminary in St. Paul was the only seminary that our church had.

T: So it was the natural choice then for you.

F: Right. Right. And I knew a lot of my classmates were there. In fact at that time more than fifty percent of the students were St. Olaf grads and I knew most of them. So there was sort of a fellowship idea there too.

T: What kind of memories do you have of your four years at Luther Seminary in St. Paul?

F: Some of the professors were tremendous teachers, scholars. I think of our church history professor, Dr. Westbring, who really opened the Book of Acts to us as a history book. I still remember the three fixed dates in history that he pointed out to us from the Book of Acts that relate to secular history. And Dr. Gullickson, the president, was a kind, understanding man. When I went off in the summer of 1934 to take charge of the church in South Dakota, Dreadfield, he gave me several books to take. We were down in the archives and he picked out a lot of commentaries. I was only a junior, a first year student. He was much concerned and he was very helpful.
At that time, and all during seminary, we were assigned to a specific church in the Twin Cities area so we had, along with our studies at the seminary, we had a chance to get into the practical workings of the church: teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, having an active part of the Young Peoples’ Society and really getting an idea what ministry was. And then, of course, my internship was a great year. My class was the first one that took part in the internship because they decided that that was a worthwhile addition to the seminary curriculum. So they divided my class and half of us went on and finished. The next year the rest of us went out on internship. We were scattered around. There were only eight of us. We called ourselves the V-8, which was a popular car at that time. I had a great year in Grand Forks with Pastor Fred Schmidt, whose father had been one of my father’s teachers at Madison, Wisconsin Seminary.

T: So you had sort of a known quantity for you.

F: I didn’t know that when I got there, but I discovered that. And interesting enough, one cold winter night I took a sleigh-ride party with a bunch of young people from the university. We had what they call the University Lutheran Club. We had a couple sleighs and it was cold. I borrowed Pastor Schmidt’s heavy leather jacket and when we were on the sleigh-ride, I felt in the pocket and pulled out a plug of tobacco and I put it back in the pocket again. The next day I thanked him for letting me use his jacket and I said, “You know what I found in the pocket? A plug of tobacco.” “You didn’t throw it away!” “Oh, no.” “I’m saving that for next fall’s hunting season,” he said. He was looking ahead.

The important part of my work there was with the young people. We had a group of university students. Later one of those students became president of the First Bank here in Minneapolis. Through the years another one became a doctor. I met him thirty years later at the Veterans Hospital in Fargo.

T: Just by chance.

F: Just by chance. He was stationed there and I didn’t know he was there. The internship did a lot to make me realize that this is where I belong. This is what I should be doing.

T: So it really cemented your decision.

F: Right.

(1, A, 161)

T: You spent several years after seminary in Belfield and Hettinger, North Dakota. Small, rural parishes. And you were at the second of those, Hettinger, North Dakota, when the United States became involved in World War II.

F: Correct. And I remember December 7, 1941.
T: That was my question. I was going to ask you, if you recall what you were doing when you first heard that news.

F: I just got back from our morning service in town, in Hettinger, and was getting ready to go to a service at a country church at two o'clock.

T: So you managed both of those.

F: Yes. In fact, I had one twenty miles north and one twenty miles south, in addition to the one in town. And we had the radio on. As my wife and I walked into the door we turned on the radio, and that's the thing we heard. Pearl Harbor. We were both in shock. Our reaction was very confused. I went out to my country church, and everybody there was sort of subdued. They had heard the news, so we talked about it. We knew that this was going to make a difference in the lives of all of us.

T: Do you remember talking about that at church that day?

F: Yes.

T: How did those conversations go?

F: In the next few months, every young man my age—I still considered myself a young man at that time, at thirty-one—every man in his twenties was gone.

Then I went to a church convention early in June in Minneapolis. One of the speakers was a chaplain from Great Lakes. Chaplain Spike Hanson who directed the Blue Jackets Choir at Great Lakes. He gave a sermon that really made up my mind for me.

T: For going to the chaplain service, you mean?

F: Right.

T: Had you been thinking about it before then?

F: Well, yes. Yes, indeed. I'd sort of been inclined toward the Navy for some years. In fact, my senior year in high school I took the examination for Annapolis, and went up to Montevideo [Minnesota]. I spent three days there, six hours a day, taking exams. And they were tough. The trouble was, coming from a small high school, I didn't have enough math. I just had algebra and geometry; I didn't have the other stuff. So I was appointed as first alternate. All summer long I thought, well now if something bad happens to the principal, I'll be going to Annapolis. But he remained healthy.

T: Luckily no guilt to hang on your shoulders there.
F: That’s right! *(both laugh)*

T: So the Navy was something that you had in your mind even before you went to the seminary.

F: Yes.

T: Talk about the sermon you heard from Reverend Hanson and how that impacted you.

*(1, A, 207)*

F: I remember his approach was this: He said I joined the Navy in order to preach to the sailors but things have happened differently. They preach to me. And he told about the influence those young men had on him. And his life, his spiritual life, his whole being. He’d been a pastor in North Dakota and during the ‘30s he became active in a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. Did you ever hear of that?

T: Yes.

F: And then the war started. In fact he joined the Navy before Pearl Harbor. So he was on active duty. And he did a tremendous job at Great Lakes. I didn’t know at the time, but a year later when I came on duty at Great Lakes I was closely associated with him. The next day I went down to the recruiting office in Minneapolis.

T: So really it impacted you so much that you made the move.

F: That’s right.

T: Now you were married at this time.

F: Right. I was married in 1938. I had three children by this time.

T: Tell me about the conversation with your wife.

F: That wasn’t easy. And it wasn’t easy for either of us. But she came to realize that, as I did, that this was something that had to be done. And some of the people in my church in North Dakota, they encouraged me to go. They had their sons in the service. At that time there were very few women in the service. Their encouragement, and the way things were going...

T: What arguments did you make to your wife? You say, this was something that had to be done. How did you explain it to her?
F: As I recall, it wasn’t easy for either of us. But we talked about it all and talked about the alternative. Here I was at the right age, in good health. I had a responsibility. And then something interesting happened.

T: What kind of responsibility? How would you describe that responsibility that you felt?

F: Toward the young men in the service, as well as to my church. Because the church was encouraging us at the time to volunteer.

The day after this, after I had heard this sermon, my wife and family were visiting her parents in Chatfield, Minnesota, and she had our car down there. There was no bus or anything, so I hitchhiked. You could do that in those days. And a young fellow picked me up, and we were driving down on the way to Rochester. We talked about the war. He said, “I’ll be going in next week. I’ve been drafted. I’m 1-A.” He said, “What are you?” And I had to think for a minute. I hesitated. Then he said, “Are you a 4-F?” I said, “No, I’m not a 4-F.” That’s not physically able. “What are you then?” So I stuttered and stammered. Finally… “I’m 4-D.” He said, “4-D? What’s that?” (pauses briefly) I said, “Deferred.” As a minister I’d be deferred unless they absolutely needed me. So I felt about as high as an ant at that time.

T: Was there a sense of guilt or shame, almost, in having to tell this guy you were deferred?

F: I think so. There was some of that, sure. But then when I had my physical down there at the Recruiting Office in Minneapolis… it was kind of interesting...

T: To tie up first of all. Did your wife try to talk you out of this?

F: No. No, she didn’t. No. We talked it over with her parents too. My mother encouraged me to go. My older brother had been in World War I.

T: You were the youngest. That’s right.

F: I was the youngest. And I had three of my brothers who were in World War II beside me. Either as instructors or... and another one was in the USO. So we kind of all got into it. But anyway, I had my physical. The doctor asked me if I had any allergies. I said yes. I said, I can’t eat potatoes. He said “You can’t eat potatoes?” I said no. I think that came because at the seminary for years all we had was starch. During the Depression. A lot of potatoes and Post Toasties. I developed allergy to potatoes. So he called another doctor. “If he can’t eat spuds, you can eat something else,” he said. So they didn’t worry about that.

T: Were they anxious to have you? Did they need chaplains?

F: Oh, yes, they really did, definitely. We had a church organization called the Bureau of Service to Military Personnel that was encouraging us to go in.
T: So there was a need.

F: Yes.

T: By the way, what did you wife do? Did she follow you from one location to the next stateside, or did she stay in with her folks?

F: That was very difficult in wartime, and more so in the Navy than in the Army or Air Force. There the families have more chance of being with their husbands. She lived... first she came to Chatfield--her parents' home.

T: Where is that, by the way?

F: That's right near Rochester. South of Rochester. In fact, they spent a few months in North Dakota when I was at chaplain school at Norfolk, Virginia. We had three months indoctrination. Chaplain School. It was a tremendous experience.

T: So she was first in Chatfield with her folks?

F: Yes.

T: You were gone for a number of years though.

F: Oh, yes. Then they moved to Minneapolis and rented a house in Minneapolis. Then when I came back from the Pacific, I had about a year in New York. And then the war was over and I found a place to rent, they lived in New York with us.

T: Okay.

F: The kids went to school in Brooklyn, and in a short time they developed a real accent. Brooklyn accent. You wouldn't believe it.

T: Did your wife work during the war?

F: No. She had her hands full with our three children. Now in Chicago, when I was at Great Lakes, there too, we were fortunate enough to find a place to rent near Dusley Lake, and I would drive into work every morning.

T: She was able to be down there with you too.

F: We spent the summer and the fall months at Rattlesgill. Most of my furniture and my books we stored in Minneapolis during the war.
T: Now when you were at Port Hueneme, California, and then in the Pacific, your wife was back in Minnesota?

F: That’s right. That’s when they moved here and we rented a house here in south Minneapolis. At Port Hueneme is north of Los Angeles. It’s a great shipping point for the Seabees and the various groups.

T: A Navy gunnery school is there too or something?

F: Oh, yes. It’s a big place. Port Magill is there. It’s right near Oxnard, California.

T: Now once you decided to join the chaplain service, the first step was chaplain school. Is that what it was called?

F: Yes. The chaplain school was a great experience. We spent a lot of time studying Navy history, Navy traditions, and of course, the big book was the Navy regulations. The big book about that thick.

T: You had to learn about the Navy, didn’t you?

F: Oh, yes. In order to be able to function as a chaplain we had… we were dealing with men all the time and we had to know the regulations, the rules, and learn different ways of talking. For example, COG or BCG. Do you know what they mean?

T: I don’t know the Navy lingo, no.

F: COG is conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. Having a BCG is a bad conduct discharge. Another one is AWOL. Everybody knows what that is—absent without leave.

T: So you had to learn all these acronyms.

F: Sure.

T: This chaplain school was only men who were also going to be Navy chaplains?

F: Yes. There were eighty-five of us. The first two weeks we slept in a barracks. Eighty-five guys. Every night you can imagine the variety of snores (laughs). I was on an upper bunk, and the fellow below me had a snore you wouldn’t believe. One night I got up and I had my flashlight and I shined it on him. Pretty soon three other men joined me. We all stood just marveling at him. He was sleeping and snoring. But then he woke up with all the light on him, and he wasn’t very happy about that.

T: Talk about the men. Age group, background. What kind of people are we talking about?
F: Some of the men I met there, in my class there, were men from all different backgrounds. One of my good friends was a Jewish chaplain. Another one was a Presbyterian chaplain.

T: So they weren’t all necessarily Lutherans in this group, certainly.

F: Everybody. We had a lot of Episcopal chaplains, and Catholic chaplains. We lined up, and we had drills. We had a petty officer who would drill us. And the fellow ahead of me, his name was Kaye. Big, husky Catholic chaplain. He never did know how to march. So when we were drilling they’d say to the rear march or double to the rear march. I’d wind up holding him most of the time because he was slow on the turning around.

T: So there was physical training involved here too?

F: Oh, yes. We had physical training. We had tests. Strength tests. We had swimming tests. One of our men who just got in two months before he would have been ineligible. Fifty years old was the maximum.

(T1, A, 350)

T: So you could get in for chaplain service, up to age fifty.

F: Yes. We lined up on the edge of the swimming pool one day and the old chief said, “Okay, when I say dive in, you dive in.” So he gave the command. This fellow couldn’t swim a stroke; the old chief had to fish him out. He had a big long hook and he said, “Pardon me, sir. You couldn’t swim. Why did you dive in like that?” He said, “You gave me the order.” (laughs). It was a little tough on the old chief drilling us, because we were not too efficient, and it was frustrating once in a while.

T: The age group, the age spectrum, it seems to be all over the place.

F: It was from twenty-five to fifty.

T: We’re talking not middle age guys, but close to it sometimes.

F: Right. Some of the men had been in the parish for twenty years or more. This one older man had a son in the Army, another one in the Coast Guard. So he joined the Navy. His two sons were chaplains. They were line officers, and he was a chaplain. We had chapel every day. They had a separate service for the Catholics, and another for the Protestants. My official title was Protestant Chaplain. I was supposed to serve all the Protestants. And of course, as time went on I served Catholics too, because I was the only chaplain on the island. Questions were asked. People were concerned if we would be restricted in what we could do or say. We were told and we were encouraged and practically ordered, do what you always have done. If you’re a Lutheran, conduct the service the way a Lutheran would at
home. Wear your vestments at the service. Once in a while there would be a conflict, but they could be ironed out. But we were told, you be what you always have been. And the Navy didn’t tell us what to say or how to say it. They were terrific in their support. Everything we needed we got. For the good of the men.

T: Now this chaplain course, did you go right from there to your first station at Great Lakes?

F: Yes. It was in late March ‘43. I was at the hospital. We had about nine hundred patients at the hospital.

T: Dealing with what kind of patients?

F: Most of these men, some of them, were patients who had come back from the war. Had been wounded. Others were from boot camp where there are always a lot of minor diseases.

T: So these are physical injuries. Broken legs, or appendicitis, or whatever.

F: And a lot of them had had surgery, like a hernia for example. And that of course they would be incapacitated for a while.

T: Sure.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 384

F: The age group there was the same as in the chaplain service. But a bit younger. There were boys sixteen years old even, and all the way up to men in their fifties as patients. This is getting a little bit ahead, but in the South Pacific we discovered that one of our sailors was fourteen years old.

T: Fourteen?

F: Right. He was a big kid, and he wanted to get in the service. Finally we got letters from home telling us about this, and he didn’t want to go.

T: They made him leave though.

F: Oh, yes. He had to go home. We found other boys that didn’t know how to write.

T: Talk first about your duty at Great Lakes. What exactly were you doing?

F: We had quite a varied program. We had some lectures for the... They had a hospital corps school there too. Training men to be corpsmen. Which was very active. The main duty was to conduct services, and Bible classes, and visit every patient, every new patient that came in. There were two Protestant chaplains, and
one Catholic chaplain. And the three of us were kept pretty busy with nine hundred men. So we took turns being on night call. Sometimes I spent the entire night with a patient who was really having problems.

T: When you say problems, physical problems?

F: Yes. I found out too that my main usefulness as a chaplain came not from the big services where there were maybe several hundred men, but where there was one on one. I got to speak to individuals.

T: Did you have a lot of opportunity to do that?

F: Oh, yes. And of course our office was always open. We were busy all the time. People came into our office with their problems.

(1, B, 452)

T: What kind of things would people come to you with when you were out there?

F: A lot of the times they were fellows who had gotten in bad with... Some of my best customers were from the brig. They hadn’t done anything so legally terrible, but they had done something.

T: Was there a brig there too, at Great Lakes?

F: Oh, yes. They had a brig. There was one chaplain who was assigned to the brig completely. That was his full job.

T: A lot of people in there then.

F: Oh, yes. Because we had at one time about thirty thousand men in training there at Great Lakes.

T: That was a big facility.

F: I remember a fellow came to my office. He said, “I just got orders that I have to report and leave right away. My wife is supposed to come in on the train tonight at nine thirty and I won’t be there.” So I said, “Describe her and tell me her name.” I went to Chicago and met the train. She saw this stranger in uniform and so I figured, this is the girl. I had to tell her the news that her husband was gone. He was on his way to Greenland I think it was. No way of contacting him. He had no way of contacting her, because she was already on the train. So we had a cup of coffee and I waited until another train went the other direction and she went back home again. So some of our work was very mundane. And some of it was very inspirational.

T: Talk about a case where your work was inspirational.
F: There was a young boy in the South Pacific who had picked up some infection. Had trouble healing. And of course in the jungle that happened sometimes. He was in the hospital.

(brief pause in tape)

F: Tony Maranello was a young sailor, young Italian boy. Grew up in New York City. He had quite a bad case of fungus infection.

T: Now these infections were not uncommon in the Pacific.

F: No. I stopped to see him in the Sick Bay. We had a small Sick Bay on the island. I got well acquainted with him. One day one of the doctors saw Tony reading a little book. So he said, “Tony, what are you reading?” He said, “The New Testament.” And he said, “Oh. Let’s see it.” So he handed to him. A few days later the doctor stopped in my office. I had an office in the library and he said he’d been attending my chapel service. He said, “You know, I got acquainted with little Tony over in Sick Bay and he showed me his New Testament and that’s the first time I ever saw one.” He said, “I went to school and university and I went to medical school. You’re up in a Christian country. I never held a Bible in my hand before.” The long story was that he asked if he could be instructed for baptism. So every noon hour for several weeks we’d get together, talk about the Bible, about faith. I gave him a copy of the catechism and I suggested he do the same I did: memorize it. The day came when he was baptized at our chapel. I said “Doc, how about some evening?” “No. I want to be baptized at the service.” So he was. And it not only made an impression on me, but it made an impression on the men, that this officer, at his age, requesting baptism.

T: Right.

F: Then a very interesting thing happened across the bay from Ponam, where we were.

T: This was in the Admiralty Islands?

F: Admiralty Islands. We were on an island called Ponam.

T: Let me hold that thought for a minute. Before we forget about Great Lakes, one thing that I wanted to ask you, with your wife and kids there, how was the situation, how was your family life in Chicago? With work and with a new apartment or a new house to rent. How did that work out?

F: We took part in a few of the activities up at Great Lakes as we could, but what we had to do was we were lucky to get babysitters at the lake where we were living. At Lake Dusley. And one of the neighboring girls was available so my wife was able to
go with me to many of the social activities that were taking place at Great Lakes. Like the Blue Jackets Choir. And we had some terrific concerts there. Kate Smith. Heifitz.

T: Being a large facility attracted large name acts, I guess.

F: Oh, yes. Tremendous programs. And on every Thursday night we broadcast on National Broadcasting Company. The master of ceremonies was a big tall guy whose name has slipped me at the moment. But he became quite active in broadcasting later on. And of course the great banjo player whose music I didn't appreciate too much. Eddie Peabody. Ever hear of him?

T: No. So, to sum up, there were activities there. Now when you think of your own, trying to manage a household, how much were you impacted by rationing or shortages, these kind of things?

F: Really they didn't affect us so much because there was a great commissary at Great Lakes where everything was available.

T: Things that might not have been available on the civilian economy.

F: That's right. One thing we noticed for the first time was something called Dromedary Cake Mix. You could buy a box of cake mix and it was all set to go. The commissary at Great Lakes was terrific. So we had no problem. Before that, in North Dakota, we already had stamps.

T: This was before you went in, in December '42.

F: Right.

T: So you noticed a difference between your civilian life in North Dakota after the war started, and then in Chicago where you were stationed. I hear you saying, you were really not bothered by shortages or rationing of certain things.

F: That's right.

(1, B, 568)

T: When you think of your duties as a chaplain there—you got there in March of '43 and stayed until when at Great Lakes?

F: Just before Christmas that year, 1943. Then I got orders to the South Pacific.

T: You ministered to people in the hospital, people for a variety of medical ailments. Did you also deal with anybody who were what we might call psychological cases? People who were in there because they were having mental strain or stress.
F: We did have a ward at the hospital, called the Psycho Ward. Quite often I would go down there. Men would ask to see the chaplains. So we would always go and see them. Some of the men didn’t want to see us, but for those who did we were available. So I had some quite lengthy talks there.

I remember the first time I went the sailor in charge of the security there let me in, at the end of this ward, and the door clicked behind me. Here I was alone in this room with a sailor, who was lying on a bed. There was just the mattress on the floor. I had no idea what I was in for. I couldn’t get out of there either.

T: Did you know why he was there?

F: No.

T: But he had asked to speak to you.

F: Yes. The main thing I did was listen. Listen to him. I don’t think anybody had done that for a long time. And he appreciated that.

T: What was his story?

F: That escapes me now. I just don’t remember what his story was.

T: But you interacted with people, and these people must have had a variety of different backgrounds or reasons why they were there.

F: I think one thing I learned in the Navy that I should have known before, was to listen. I also learned to have more patience with people, not to be too judgmental right away. Just jumping at conclusions.

T: So this is a way how this experience changed you for the long term.

F: Sure.

T: When you think back to your ministering with people in psychiatric wards, what kind of people do you remember, and what kind of stories were they telling you about why they were there?

F: It's difficult to be really specific.

This is not related to that, but one day at Great Lakes five young men came in the office. They came to my office. They were very unhappy. They were being discharged. They had all admitted being homosexual, and now they were really mad because they thought they would get a medical discharge. Instead of that they were getting undesirable discharge. That’s quite a difference. It meant they couldn’t wear the uniform. It meant that they got no benefits, ever. But at this point they couldn’t say, we made this up.
T: Because they had admitted it.

F: But some of them had made it up, in the belief they could get a medical discharge.

T: Why did they come to you?

F: Because they thought I could intercede for them. I said, “You’ve told your story. Are you going to change it? Who will believe you this time?” Now that didn’t happen all the time. I mean, that’s the only incident of that I remember. But it did happen.

T: What happened to those young men?

F: They were put on the train and went home, and that was it. They couldn’t get into the service any more.

T: And that’s called an undesirable discharge?

F: Yes. Oh, there was another thing.

T: Was homosexuality something that you encountered every so often?

F: It is very, very unusual. Overseas I never encountered it once. This was the only time. It was something entirely new.

T: In a sense, they just walked in your office and give you this story. How did you find yourself reacting?

F: The thought in my mind was that somebody had told them this was a good way to get out of the service. I couldn’t pin them down and say, now were you telling a lie or weren’t you telling a lie? You’ve come this far. There’s nothing now you can do about it. They were done for.

That reminds me of another incident that happened. A young boy came in the office. He was very shaken.

T: This is Great Lakes still.

F: Yes. Because this was just a few days before he graduated from the hospital corps school. He had the night watch that night and about three o’clock in the morning he fell asleep. An officer came along and found him sleeping. He probably was sleeping for three or four minutes. He was put on report immediately. When you’re on watch you don’t sleep. And he was called before the commanding officer. He was not allowed to graduate with his class. He had been there for the full term of learning to be a hospital corpsman and I went and talked to the CO of the corps school. He said “What are you going to do? If a man can’t be trusted to stay awake
when he’s on watch what will happen when he’s overseas or in a combat situation? We just can’t take a chance.” So he was sent back. So instead of being a pharmacist third class he went back to being a seaman second class. He just had to go to sea as an ordinary seaman.

T: People come to you with a wide variety of issues or problems it sounds like.

F: In New York, in Brooklyn, at the Armed Guard Center after the Manhattan Beach was decommissioned I was transferred to the Armed Guard Center for temporary active duty there. One morning two women came in the office. On a Monday morning. The one was older than the other. She was her older sister, I believe. They told me this story. This girl had been at a dance somewhere in New York Friday night, and she and a sailor spent the night at a hotel room Friday night. Monday morning she came to my office. She knew where he was stationed. She gave me his name. I called him in and I talked to him separately. He didn’t deny it. He said, “I had too much to drink. Imagine waking up the next morning and seeing her.” The girl said she was pregnant and she wanted to get a certain amount of money out of the sailor. I had a doctor friend in Brooklyn. So I telephoned right away and told him the story. And he said, “I don’t question the fact that this happened or that the girl is pregnant.” She knew all about it. She said she’d had the rabbit test [or “Friedman test” which was an early test for pregnancy using rabbits as live test animals] for pregnancy. “But,” he said, “that young fellow is not the one responsible. In three days that rabbit test would prove nothing. So he’s innocent.” So you can imagine what happened. I called these two women into the office and told them the story and they left. And then I called the boy in and told him. He was just a pretty lucky guy.

(1, B, 675)

T: So you did have a variety of issues from A to Z, didn’t you?

F: Oh, yes. One day a guy came in my office and he showed me a picture of a girl and said this San Diego girl has five Navy husbands. I said, “Five husbands!” And he said, “I’m one of them.” She had married these guys to get their allotments.

T: She was pulling in five allotment checks?

F: Because they had all different names. And she was getting five allotment checks from five different guys. So he was wondering what to do.

T: Because he was one of the five?

F: He was one of the five.

T: So what did you tell him?
F: I went to the legal officer and told him the story. I said, “What can you do?” He said, “He doesn’t have to do anything. He’s not married. That was not legal. He was never filed.” They could get her on bigamy, but this guy he said, you don’t need to bother about getting a divorce. But he said to me, “Chaplain, are you running a divorce mill?” Because [there had been] several incidents.

T: Of this multiple marriage stuff?

F: Not necessarily that, but other guys would get a Dear John letter saying, sorry but I decided to go with so and so. So I think I had about three or four cases of those.

T: Of the Dear Johns?

F: That was in Pearl Harbor, in 1945, after I returned from the Admiralty Islands. When we came back from overseas.

T: What was your responsibility in that situation, when somebody gets a Dear John letter? What did they want you to do?

F: Many times I’d read the letter and I’d say, you’re a lucky guy. You wouldn’t want anything more. You’re just lucky you found this out now. But there were crazy situations, some of them.

T: The end of ’43 you got orders for the South Pacific. This is going to change your family situation, it looks like, because your wife can’t follow you there. How did you and your wife take the news that you were going to the Pacific?

F: It came as a shock because it so happened, we were at Great Lakes. Her parents had come down for Thanksgiving. This came so suddenly. It said, “Report without delay.” That meant within four days. So I had to get things straightened up.

T: You had to tie up your household business, everything.

F: We were able to rent that house until the next spring. We were fortunate.

T: You yourself had to depart within four days?

F: I had to leave, yes. Get all my stuff.

T: What kind of discussions did you and your wife have when this news came?

F: It happened so suddenly. You couldn’t get an airplane in those days. So I had to go by train to Los Angeles. It happened so fast I really didn’t have much time to think about it.

(1, B, 715)
T: Would you say you were excited to be leaving, upset to be leaving your family behind, what kind of emotions did you have then?

F: Rather mixed emotions. I knew it would happen someday, that I would be going overseas. But as I was, we had come to realize after being in the Navy this long that this was what we were supposed to be doing. And my wife felt that way too.

T: So would you say she was supportive of what you were doing?

F: Oh, yes. We had met some wonderful friends at Great Lakes. There was a Baptist minister and his wife from Alabama. They were tops. And we were neighbors. And we had many good friends. The same thing happened when they left Great Lakes and came to Minneapolis. There was a group here of chaplains’ wives. At least fifteen of them from our church.

T: Like a support group really.

F: They would get together with the head of the Bureau of Service of Military Personnel, Dr. Elwood Saker, at Augsburg Publishing house, and they would get together at least once a month and share their concerns. Everything. Then they rented a house in south Minneapolis and everything went fine. But of course, there was no word then for seven weeks. They didn’t hear a word from me.

T: For the record, when did you arrive back from the Pacific?

F: In early September ‘45.

T: You had V-J Day in Honolulu, right.

F: I had a ten day leave. Then I reported to Manhattan Beach.

T: So you were gone for almost two years.

F: Two years practically.

T: You were briefly in Port Hueneme.

F: Just waiting for our ship. During that time I got a lot of equipment from different organizations. We picked up a player piano with about a hundred rolls of music you could put on it. And I got a flatbed truck and had about six sailors helping me. We went down to Los Angeles. There’s an organization called the Chaplain Service Corps. They had a piano. I said great! They said, do you want it? I said sure. A great big upright piano. We had that on a flatbed truck.

And as we drove through the streets of Los Angeles two of the sailors were sitting down at the piano playing, acting like they were playing. And we’d get to an
intersection and stop for a stop light and the music would stop and the guys would stand up and wave their hats to the pedestrians, who were applauding our music. Then while they were bowing the music would start up, so they would sit down fast and start playing again.

T: Because it's a player piano.

F: Yes. You wouldn’t believe the equipment I got.

T: This is all stuff that you thought you would be able to use in the South Pacific.

F: Yes. A lot of athletic gear: baseballs, footballs, basketballs. Several radios and phonographs. One of the ladies said, “Do you have any magazines?” I said we had a lot of magazines. “Well, I mean new subscriptions.” I said no. “Write down what you’d like to have.” I wrote down every magazine I could think of, Reader's Digest, National Geographic, New Yorker and Atlantic Monthly.

T: These would be sent overseas to you.

F: Overseas. And I said, you better get four copies of each. So the day came along about two months after we landed. I think I got eleven mail sacks full of magazines. Brand new magazines.

T: The stuff you're collecting to go over there suggests that your job was going to be a lot more than just ministering to people.

F: Right. Actually I was welfare officer and librarian officer, as well as chaplain.

T: Welfare officer and librarian officer. Now what did that mean? What all would you be responsible for?

F: We had a library. We collected a lot of books. That they shipped out from the Chaplain Service Corps in L.A [Los Angeles, California]. We had maybe five hundred books in the library. Mostly fiction, and technical books. Then I had a yeoman, he was the librarian. He ran the library. I just sort of told him what to do. Then we had a recreation hut with a pool table...

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: Hang on a second. This is all in the interest of kind of chronological order. So you shipped out from California. You went to the Admiralty Islands. Is that right?

F: Yes. We first sighted land after twenty-one days. We stopped at New Hebrides, at Espirito Santo. That’s the first time we saw land. And when we came ashore we got mail. Now how they knew where we were going to be I don't know. We didn't know
where we were going. But the mail was there. And I got the mail that had accumulated during those twenty-one days that we’d been at sea.

T: Now how far from New Hebrides to the Admiralty Islands?

F: We left New Hebrides and went up to the Russell Islands and then to Guadalcanal, and stayed there a few days. And then our ship continued without escort. Went up between New Guinea and the other islands there. We could see lights on either shore. Japs on both sides of us. So we went up around... circled up around and came into the Admiralties which are north of New Guinea.

T: Okay.

F: And they’re west of Rabaul, west of New Britain. The main island in the Admiralty group is Manus. That’s where they had the staging point for the attack on Leyte in the fall of ’44.

T: Did you stay on Manus Island most of the time you were there?

F: Actually we were on a small island right next to Manus, called Ponam.

T: Was that a permanent facility that you were going to be at?

F: No. There was, when we landed there, there was a native village, very nice little village, and about maybe 150 wild pigs running around the island. It became a naval air station. We supplied new airplanes for the carriers that came in. They would leave the Marshall Islands, Kwajalein, and go and bomb Guam and Saipan, and then it was too far to fly back. They didn’t have enough fuel. So they would come down to our place and then go back. Sometimes the carriers would come close enough. We’d fly our planes out to replace the ones that had been shot down.

T: How many men were stationed on this island? I’m wondering how many people you actually interacted with.

F: Actually it was quite a small group. We had a Seabee group and an ACORN group, minus an ACORN. ACORN meaning aircraft operation, repair, and maintenance. We had probably four hundred men.

T: And how many chaplains were there?

F: Just one. I used to fly to the next island and trade places with a Catholic chaplain on Sunday morning.

T: At Manus or a smaller island?

F: Another small island.
T: So you had a chance to interact with a number of people.

F: Oh, yes.

T: Describe your duties, that is, the kind of the things that you found yourself doing while you were there.

F: Lots of times it was writing letters to people inquiring about their men.

T: Family members would write to you?

F: Right. And the Red Cross was very active during the war, doing a great job of keeping people informed about different things. One day I got a letter from Washington, a telegram, saying investigate so and so. This particular sailor had written to his wife and told her that he had been wounded, and he was hoping to be discharged soon. She contacted the Red Cross, and they contacted our outfit and I got the message. So I went to check the boy and found out he was working the motor pool. When I talked to him he was under a truck doing something. He was whistling away, having a great time. So we passed the time of day a while. He had never been wounded at all. He had made up the story. But he was very unhappy, wondering why the Red Cross wasn’t doing their job. I didn’t tell him my side of the story, I figured let him wonder here. The guys would try things.

One day I got a telegram, a death message, to report to one of our young boys who worked in the dining room. A young black boy from Alabama. The message was that his father had died. I visited him, and we had a long talk. Six weeks later I got another telegram. His mother had died. So I had to go and tell him again. And he said, there was no reason he should go home again; there was nobody there. Things like that were pretty tough.

T: What do you tell a young man like that?

F: I just, I discovered that he was a Christian and he had some faith. I tried to show him that I was in need of as much help as he was, and that we were all in this together. He really had made quite an impression on me, this young boy.

T: In what way?

F: The fact that here he was a long ways away from home. I never could completely realize just what he was going through. Just had an inkling.

T: Now you mentioned him being black. Did you have blacks at your facility there?

F: Actually at that time in the Navy, all of the cooks and waiters in the officers department were blacks. But the cooks for the white boys were white. For the
enlisted men. Which is quite interesting, because some of the white boys just wouldn’t want black boys serving them. But for the officers, we had a top notch black chief in charge of the cooks. Just a terrific guy. But at that time the Navy had not really allowed any blacks.

T: It was segregated.

F: That’s right. It began that way. Up until that time, the only job a black boy could get was as a cook.

T: Did you have blacks at your services as well?

F: Oh, yes.

T: How did you observe blacks and whites getting along on Ponam Island, where you were stationed?

F: There were no problems at all. They just seemed to go their own way.

T: Keep to themselves?

F: Yes.

T: You mentioned the messages. You had regular services. How did you decide what were appropriate messages for services? What did you tell people?

(2, A, 145)

F: Every day during the noon hour, during the afternoon, we had an hour for reading mail. Censoring mail. I wasn’t supposed to do that for privacy reasons. But the guys wrote so many letters some of the officers said, come on Padre, you’ve got to help us here. So I did. I got so I could censor mail and not know what I was reading. Just saw stuff I shouldn’t see.

But one day something caught my eye. It said, “Yesterday I went to the chaplain’ service. Our chaplain reminds me of Brother Wilson, the Free Methodist minister at home.” The reason why that struck me was that the day before, after the service, a young pilot as he walked out shook hands and thanked me for the service and said, that is the typical Episcopal service. So without realizing what I was doing I was able to minister to different categories.

As to the services, I used the Lutheran text for the church year. I figured that there’s no better way to put the faith across than follow the church year. Advent, Christmas, Lent and so forth. And on the island I had Catholic boys come to communion. I used the regular service I’d always used. I’d have several hymns and prayers and some of the old collects of the church year, and usually I had a sermon about fifteen minutes long. I had an organist who was terrific. He had [been] a music major in California. He was an enlisted man, and oh could [he] play the organ.
We had an old organ we found in a deserted mission, and we had to put a microphone in it. So the services were very interesting.

T: This is enlisted and officers as well at the same services?

F: Oh, yes. They tell a story at one of the chapels there, some officer roped off an area for the officers. Reserved. The skipper came in and took that rope and threw it out the window. So they were mixed together.

T: How well attended were your services?

F: Quite well attended, because the personnel officer, who was a young man from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, was my tent mate. And Sunday morning he would go and wake all the guys up. “Get to church, you bums!” So they were pretty good in coming to church (laughs).

T: A little arm twisting, but they showed up.

F: Right. A couple times when I flew down to the next island coming back there would be fog. You couldn’t see the island even. And we’d have to circle around. Finally, one day we were late getting back. The guys were all coming out of church. I wondered what had happened. The doctor had taken over and had the whole service. Preached a sermon and everything else. That doctor was from Minneapolis, here. He was very active in one of the Baptist churches in Minneapolis. A Dr. Widen. I found as a rule, the officers were very cooperative.

T: As far as getting themselves there and getting their men there.

F: Yes. It was entirely voluntary, of course.

T: People didn’t have to come?

F: Right. That was different from Great Lakes, from Navy boot camp. It wasn’t compulsory, but they found it much more pleasant than doing KP duty on Sunday morning.

T: So it was a chance to relax.

F: Yes.

T: When you dealt with people there, you ministered to people or you dealt with people on a one on one basis, what kind of problems did people bring to you out in the Pacific?

(2, A, 206)
F: Mostly different types. Worrying about their families. Or maybe somebody being ill at home. One of the least problems was finances; that never was a problem.

T: So often men worried about people at home.

F: That’s right.

T: Was it worrying about girlfriends, or parents, or who in particular?

F: All sorts of family affairs or in-laws or others. Some of the letters that the boys let me read were unbelievable.

T: Letters coming from home?

F: Letters coming from home. And of course I wrote a few letters, to different people. I just suggested to them, don’t tell your son in the service all your troubles. Keep them to yourself. He’s got enough to worry about.

T: So people would write and tell the men things they then had to deal with.

F: Yes. They’d write and tell them about how sick they’d been, or they were losing their job, or somebody had been mean to them, done this and that. Things that they could have kept to themselves. They didn’t have to bother servicemen.

T: Things these men could do nothing about anyway.

F: Sure. Certainly.

T: Did people come to you who were facing stress or mental strain from being in the Pacific?

F: You mean during the time I was out there?

T: Yes.

F: No. I think the main concern was, let’s get this over with and get home again. I did have a lot of civilian people coming in when I was in New York after the war. Dealing with problems.

T: This is when you were stationed at Manhattan Beach?

F: At Manhattan Beach.

T: Was this combat stress or these kind of things? Mental strain?
F: No. I think of one particular incident in Manhattan. A young Jewish girl who was sitting out in the office when I was going to leave. It was quite late at night. She was sitting there and she was crying. So I stopped and talked to her and tried to help her. To make a long story short, she was pregnant and the fellow had apparently just abandoned her and her mother wasn’t speaking to her. She was the sole support for her mother and her sister. She had a good job. To make things more complicated, she’d already had an abortion. Unknown to her mother.

T: Had she come to you because the young man was a Navy guy?

F: Right.

T: That’s why she’s here to see you.

F: I dealt with that for about four months. Over a period of time. Anyway, first I called her mother and said, your daughter needs you. You have to talk to her. They weren’t talking to each other. She changed her name. All of her friends thought she was married, but she was not. So I found out where the serviceman was. He was in the Coast Guard. That’s where I was serving at the time, in the Coast Guard. Found out he had been transferred to Greenland. So I wrote a letter to the chaplain there and told him this story. I got a letter back from him saying he talked to the young boy, who denied everything. There was nothing he could do about it. Forget it. So I called the District Chaplain in New York, a four striper. Rabbi Goldman. Boy, he went to town! We got this thing settled around. So the boy was forced to pay support for the girl.

T: He did admit it finally.

F: Yes.

(2, A, 267)

T: When you were in the Pacific, Reverend Lokensgard, did you deal with people in hospitals at all?

F: No. There was a hospital at the main base. We had just a Sick Bay on our island. The main base would be Manus.

T: They probably had their own chaplains.

F: Yes, they had their own chaplains. But I went down to see one of our men there because he was being transferred back to Pearl. The day before he was to leave a friend of his took him up in a plane and they were scouting around. They went up pretty high and went into a dive. The next thing he knew he woke up. He was lying half in the ocean and on the beach. The airplane had crashed. They never found the airplane and the pilot. His life jacket, the seatbelt broke. He went right through the
canopy of the airplane and was knocked out cold. His parachute opened. He never remembered opening it. But he woke up on the beach. This happened the day before he was leaving. I stopped in to see him. He was a pretty sober guy, but he was pretty thankful too, that he was living. So we were not actively in combat. But after our Manus was declared to be secure, we captured about four hundred Japs. After it was secured. So it was still kind of a touchy business.

T: Sounds like it. You mentioned writing letters to family members saying, essentially, watch what you tell people. Were you ever responsible to write letters to people telling them that their son had been wounded or had been killed?

F: Yes. That was tough. Of course that even happened when I was stationed at Great Lakes. There were boys dying in the hospital.

T: You had to write those letters too?

F: Yes.

T: How do you approach that task?

F: The only approach is direct. You can’t hesitate or beat around the bush. You have to come right out.

T: They were also getting a telegram or some other notice, so what was the purpose of your letter as the chaplain?

F: There were times when I would write the letter after they’d already known about it. After they’d been notified officially. This happened even long after the war. When I was still in the Reserve. Once in a while I was requested to go and visit so and so in a neighboring city or something. Just to give encouragement, offer support, anything that might be done to ease it.

T: These letters—can you recall an instance when you had to write one of those letters and recall what you said?

(2, A, 304)

F: That would be very difficult. I couldn’t remember now.

T: When you composed those letters, what did you find was the most difficult part of composing a letter like that?

F: It would depend on if you knew that they already knew about it. If you knew that they had been officially notified, it made a difference.

T: I bet it would. Otherwise your letter might be the first one they get.
F: That’s right. I remember one night in New York, on New Year’s Eve I went up and had to report the death of a young boy in a Jeep accident down in Puerto Rico. That was tough because he changed his name. His name in the Navy was James Carlin. Actually I found out when I got to his home, the apartment where his parents lived, way up on 181st Street, his name was Jacob Caplan. See the difference?

T: Yes. So you did this one in person. You didn’t write a letter; you went to see the folks.

F: I went to see them personally, because I got the phone call from the District Coast Guard. Here I was a Protestant chaplain, and the parents weren’t there right away. They were at a theater. They did not know. But the elevator boy said, “Is something wrong?” I said no. I said, “The parents of James Caplan [Carlin?], do they live here?” “No,” he said. “Oh, you mean Jake Caplan.” I said yes. “Well, they’ll be here soon.” So I waited.

As they came off the elevator his mother looked at me and thought at first it was her son, because he was a young officer. Then they went up to their room. I gave them time to get their coats off. It was New Year’s Eve. So I went up to the elevator and rang the bell and I said, “I’m sorry to interrupt. I saw you down in the lobby but I thought I would give you a few minutes.” She said, “Come in.” So she said, “Is it about Jim?” I said, “Yes.” So they both sat down and I just told them that I had had a telegram, saying that he had been killed in an accident. He was their only child, their only son. To the Jewish people, a son is mighty important. So I read some Old Testament scriptures, a couple of the Psalms. They were in no hurry for me to leave. They wanted to talk. The war was over, but death was not taking a holiday.

T: That’s a good point. We kind of assume that once V-J Day came it was all over. Two things I want to touch on before we have to conclude today, and one of those is V-J Day. You were in Pearl Harbor, or in Hawaii, at that time.

F: Yes. I had gone downtown on an errand of some kind. Our ship was tied up in Pearl Harbor. The news just hit at that time. The streets were loaded, packed with people celebrating (chuckles). And I was glad to get home, back to the ship.

T: What kind of things were going on downtown? Talk about that. What do you remember?

F: I mean people were singing and shouting and dancing around hugging everybody. It was really bedlam.

T: Was it chaotic or destructive in any way?
F: Oh, no. It was chaos. And of course the streets in Honolulu are not very wide either. It was quite an experience. I got back to the ship that afternoon. This is the USS Blue Ridge. And I went to my office.

A young officer came in. He was not an officer; he was a chief. But he’d had problems at home and in fact, on the ship the announcement came that the war was over officially. When he came in the office I said, “Sit down.” He said, that’s the first time anybody in the Navy ever asked me to sit down. Anyway he talked about his wife was having problems, and he wanted to get home. And he said, this is going to make a difference. And I said, it sure is. Because we heard the official announcement.

T: Yes. Had you been expecting it or was this a real shock?

F: No. It was rumored for a few days. Uncertainty. So we didn’t know when it would be. So when it did come it was a real… like the [Minnesota Wild playoff] hockey game last night. You’re never quite sure until it’s over.

T: In the interest of time I have to jump to the last question. And that is, when you think about your war experience and that you were away from your wife and family for almost two years; you were in the service almost four. What do you think is the most important way that the war changed your life, Mr. Lokensgard?

F: It made me more appreciative of home and family and country. I never regretted having gone in service. Even though there were times when there was some ambivalence. I was wishing I were home now. But during those days in the jungle and being with all these young people I realized, why should I be sheltered when they were giving everything. So it wasn’t entirely a guilt feeling. It was feeling of responsibility—this is something I must do. But when I came home in September or late August of ’45 the two older kids ran to me but the younger one, he didn’t know who I was. That kind of hit you, you know. Then you figured, well maybe he could take a chance too if the older ones… so he came to let me hold him. He was only a year old when I went.

T: So he didn’t remember you at all.

F: He was born in ’41. So he was just about a year and a half when I left.

T: So you think that you changed as a person as well through this experience.

F: I think it made me a little more patient and a little more understanding of differences. And made me not quite so judgmental.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.
T: When you got back—now tell me when you need to go, and we’ll stop for today—when you got back to see your family, you’d been gone for almost two years. What was that like?

F: It was too good to be true. The oldest boy, he was five. Yes, that’s right. He saluted me.

T: You were in uniform, right?

F: Yes. The younger one was still deciding, who is this guy? Even though there were pictures. I realized that our country is worth defending. It’s worth standing up for. I had a lot more respect for some of the high officials I met. Found out they were real men.

T: When you meet them as real people, you mean?

F: Yes. And they made a lot of sacrifices. Many of them. You wonder just how we could be so fortunate to be here, and not over in Russia or Iraq or someplace else.

T: I know you’re pressed for time today, Reverend Lokensgard, so at this point we’ll conclude for today. Let me thank you very much for your time.

F: You’re welcome.

END OF PART ONE
BEGIN PART TWO – 28 May 2003

Tape 3, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is the 28th of May 2003 and this is our second interview with Reverend Fritjof Lokensgard. Thanks once again for taking time to speak with me.

F: It’s good to be here.

T: You talked about a few things we’d like to discuss here, and let’s see how some of these develop. One of the first duty stations you had was at Great Lakes north of Chicago there and you had some brief encounters with people in the psychological ward there. I wonder if you recall any interactions with people who were confined in that particular ward of the hospital?

F: Actually, my work at the hospital was involved with the patients in the hospital, the students, and their hospital corpsman school...

T: Which was also there.

F: Yes. And then with the personnel, both the enlisted and the officer personnel who had duty stations. So it was quite a large assignment. There were just two Protestant chaplains there and one Catholic.

T: Three chaplains for the whole...

F: Right. And we had about nine hundred patients in the hospital. We would go through the wards every day and quite often a man would stop us, otherwise they’d greet us and glad to see us.

T: Let me interject. When someone stopped you, could they literally just say, hey chaplain, could you come over here for a second?

F: Sure. Or they’d say, are you busy, Padre? Can I talk to you? Sure. I met some very interesting, the first man I talked to actually had just come back. He had been wounded in the South Pacific. He was an old chief and he told me about his experience, how they were in a night battle. Before the battle began he said that he prayed for every man on the ship that they would be spared. He said during a battle they took several torpedoes but it hit nothing vital in the ship’s mechanism and when morning came they were still afloat. There were a few injuries. Not a man was killed. He remembered, too, that he better be thankful for what had happened. But he gave me a real talk and I thought this man, if he’s typical of the men in the Navy, this is really going to be an experience.
T: It sounds like he called you over in a sense sort of to talk out what he had gone through.

(3, A, 61)

F: Yes.

T: Did you find that was the case other times as well? That men really wanted just to sort of get something out?

F: Many times. Many times they would thank you, and you'd say, I haven't been able to do much, to help you at all. Many times I had the feeling, I haven't helped this fellow, but many times he would say, thanks a lot for your help. There were many different types of problems. Some were financial. Some were spiritual.

T: When men would come to you with home finance as a problem...

F: Sure. Sure. In fact we had a chaplain's fund, an unofficial fund. If a fellow really needed help and came we'd just give him maybe ten dollars or something to help him along. One time in New York, a young black sailor came into the office. He wanted to talk to me. Fine. What's your problem? He said, I need ninety dollars.

T: A lot of money in those days.

F: That's a lot of money. He said, I really need it. I said what do you need it for? There's a prizefight down on Madison Square Garden tomorrow I want to go to. I said that doesn't quite qualify.

T: He had a lot of nerve coming in and asking a chaplain for boxing ticket money.

F: We had a fund that was provided sometimes by our civilian group. They'd just send you some money and say use this to help somebody.

T: This is outside of normal channels though, isn’t it?

F: Right. We did have welfare fund at Great Lakes. Many of the fellows were able to get help. They needed help and they could get loans from the Navy Relief Society, the Navy Welfare Society, and every base had a welfare fund that really helped, especially the enlisted men who needed some emergency help.

T: That was up to you to make the call on whether this was a valid need or not?

F: Right. That's right. So we would make a recommendation then. The Red Cross was very helpful in this matter too. There were a few civilians who worked overseas who fit into the military because they had sort of a semi-military organization.
T: They were in uniform and they had a structure.

F: Yes.

T: So as you walked through wards at Great Lakes, or even when you were over in the Admiralty Islands, people might just call you aside for a little one on one conversation.

F: Yes.

T: And that could happen numerous times a day?

F: Sure. We were on duty there all day, and then usually one of us would have the night calls. We’d alternate those. That happened too when I was back at Great Lakes after the war. On just active duty for training which I continued.

T: How did you as a Norwegian Lutheran, ELCA--the Norwegian Church that you were part of is now part of the ELCA...

F: Yes.

T: You worked together with chaplains, you’ve already alluded to it, who were of different Protestant denominations, but also with Catholics and, I take it, even with the Jewish faith sometimes?

F: Right.

T: How would you characterize the relations between chaplains of different faiths?

F: It was a fine relation. There was a chaplain at Great Lakes... (coughing)

(3, A, 130)

F: The senior chaplain at Great Lakes was a Catholic at that time, and I remember I went into his office one day and I greeted him and said “Good morning, Father.” And he said, “Don’t call me Father. Call me chaplain.” That was news to me. He insisted that we should not call him Father. Most of the Catholic men called him Father, but the chaplains weren’t bothered by rank quite so much. Some of the staff officers enjoyed being called by their rank but the chaplains, you never went up to a chaplain and said commander so-and-so. You would say chaplain. Of course after we were recognized we were called “Padre”.

T: A term of affection?
F: Right. Another incident I remember. We were on Ponam Island. I was the only chaplain. The next island there was a Catholic chaplain but no Protestant. So on Sundays we would change places. I’d fly down to his place and when I was there he’d be up at my place. Our job was to get a pilot to take us down there. Then I remember one day we were a little late getting there and because the chapel was full of sailors the Catholic chaplain started the service. My service. I walked in and he was up at the altar and he handed me the hymnbook and said, “Carry on.” So I went on.

T: Did you wear vestments when you had services?

F: Yes. We were encouraged to, if you wore vestments in civilian life, wear vestments now. I planned not to take vestments because that would be something else to carry. But this particular group in Los Angeles called the Chaplain Service Corps—interestingly enough the chairman was a Mormon lady—I called her by telephone and told her who I was and she said, “Oh, stop in at our office.” And she said, “Do you have a robe to wear at church services?” I said, “No. I’m not taking one.” “Oh, you have to have a robe,” she said.

T: She encourages you to take one.

F: Yes.

T: And then supplied it to you?

F: Right. She said, “How tall are you? What do you weigh?” So I told her. A week later in the mail I got a package of a clerical gown that I wore.

T: No kidding. Now were these gowns denomination specific or was it kind of one style for all chaplains?

F: You mean the robes?

T: Yes.

F: These were sort of Oxford gown things. But the Catholic chaplains all wore their regular traditional gowns, different. I wore just this one single black gown because it was simple. I didn’t have the surplice and the cassock that I had in my civilian life. But I always wore it. I didn’t wear a clerical collar of course, because with your uniform you couldn’t wear that.

T: It doesn’t fit together, or you just don’t do that?

F: You just don’t do that. You could wear a clerical collar with your vestments if you wanted to.
T: But you wouldn't mix the two.

F: No.

T: I see.

F: We had very fine relations. I think I mentioned this doctor in Minneapolis who more than once took over the service if I were delayed. There were not very many Jewish chaplains in the service because... for example, the Jewish chaplain, if he were alone on a ship really couldn't of great help to the men.

T: How about the sailors of the Jewish faith? There must have been some.

F: Oh, yes. Usually they had a layman. Now we had a young Jewish officer in our outfit and he would get the men together. Once in a while I would join them because they had to have at least seven men at a service.

T: Why is that?

(3, A, 193)

F: If you have six men you can't have a service. That was a Jewish rule.

T: I see. So you had to have a certain number of people.

F: Right. So sometimes he would come out and say, we need you. So I would go to his service. I was wearing my hat, you know. You have to wear your hat.

T: I didn't know that about the number. That's interesting.

F: Sure.

T: You mentioned in your writings and also in our interview last time that men came to you with a wide range of personal problems. Dear John letters. Finances at home. What other kind of things did men pull you aside to talk about or come to your office for?

F: Many times it would be worry about finances. They would be worrying about the health of somebody at home. Sometimes they would get a letter from the mother. At one point I had the feeling that the worst enemies of the young fellows in the Navy was a mother back home. The ones who were not supportive, who were complaining or telling terrible things that were happening at home.

T: Things they could do nothing about.
F: Right. I did write a few letters to mothers when a fellow would come with a letter that was just so far out that it was ridiculous and try to just tell them that they’re not helping things at all by writing about these matters.

T: Could men come to you with legitimate problems in letters and ask... Did people come to you and ask, can you help me get home on this?

F: Oh, yes. That happened once in a while. When we were stateside, if there was some legitimate reason we would get the man home. Like in Great Lakes and in New York.

T: So you had to authority to approve something like that?

F: We had the authority to recommend. To recommend for approval. We didn’t have the authority to approve, but we had authority to talk to the Red Cross or to the Exec. Usually the executive officer was the man who was directly above the chaplain. Not the commanding officer...

T: So that would be your next step in the chain of command.

F: So most of the problems were concerned with getting home. Sometimes I would ask the fellow what can you do when you get home? Well, he wasn’t sure.

T: Did you ever have the impression that someone was coming to you with a bogus story or a trumped up story just trying to get back home?

F: Oh, yes. I think I mentioned one about a guy from Washington saying check on so and so. This came from Washington out to Ponam.

T: To Ponam. That’s a long way.

F: Said check on him. Report to so and so. Report his condition. So I checked on him, and he had written to his wife telling her that he had been wounded and he was not doing well. He’s hoping to be able to come soon. So he said, please go and talk to the Red Cross in Hickory, or wherever it was, in North Carolina. So she did. And the Red Cross followed through on it. Then I had to report this guy is in excellent health, he has not been wounded.

T: He was bluffing.

F: Sure. Another fellow...you know, we used to censor the mail and I got so that I could read stuff and not pay attention to what I was reading, but still spot the stuff that shouldn’t be there. One fellow was writing about, yesterday it was real hot. I mean in more ways than one. And he was giving the impression that we had been in a fierce engagement that day. He just made it up.
By and large the men overseas, I had fewer problems with them than I did when we were here. In the States we had more problems with the men. One reason was that, I think, here they had their families either to contend with or to interfere, and over there, there was nothing that could be done about that and here you were. You made the best of it.

(3, A, 252)

T: That's interesting. Because they're so far away that those problems or temptations are also far away.

F: Sure.

T: Now I was also curious too, as someone who was a little bit older, shall we say; you were thirty years old in 1941. Did these young men sometimes see you as a father figure?

F: Yes. I'm sure. I'm sure of that. In fact one of the--this was a little native boy who was living in the old mission, across the bay on Manus Island. He'd been there when the Japanese had come in. They killed the German missionaries because they were white. The little boy stayed and took care of the Japanese general. Then they'd chase him out and there were a couple young American soldiers just stationed there temporarily. We heard there was an organ there, so we got permission from the Australian--called the ANGAU, Australian-New Guinea Administrative Unit, which covered that part of Papua New Guinea at that time. It's independent now. We went to this mission, and there was an old, old organ, a reed organ that you pump.

T: A reed organ.

F: Yes. And inside [it said] it was made in Brattleboro, Vermont. Usually when an organ is tuned, the organist writes the date in there. The date in this was 1892. The last time it had been tuned.

T: Fifty years ago, plus.

F: Before that. Yes. So we took that organ back and took it all apart, the Seabees did, and replaced all of the bellows completely, put a microphone in it and it sounded terrific.

T: The Seabees could fix a lot of stuff, couldn't they?

F: Yes. Anyway, this little boy, David, wanted to come home with me to the States.

T: How old was he?
F: He was twelve years old. And he had no relatives. I had to explain to him that it just wouldn’t work. But many of the younger sailors, and we had many that were just barely... they were seventeen, eighteen...

T: You were at least ten years older if not more.

F: Right. I think that was an advantage, because you did have more of a relationship. They looked upon you as a sort of father figure. Some of the young guys.

T: Although you wore a uniform, you weren’t an authority figure.

F: That’s right. And overseas we didn’t wear our blues, or our whites, or our khakis. You wore fatigues most of the time. Even the officers didn’t even bother wearing their insignia, all of them.

T: So you couldn’t differentiate.

F: Yes. I think I was commenting too that we had a lot of black sailors, and they were all stewards or cooks. In the Navy at that time they served as stewards. In charge of them was a fine black boy. He was a chief steward. College grad, but he couldn’t get a commission at that time because he was black.

T: The Navy was segregated still during World War II, that’s right.

F: So the black steward’s mates, most of them in the Navy found themselves working in the officers’ mess. We had the galley where the sailors ate. They were all served by steward’s mates, who were white. But the stewards who served us were all black. Which is quite interesting.

T: Yes. Could blacks attend your services?

F: Oh, yes. They were there. We had a couple who had beautiful voices. Good singers. During the training at Norfolk, the chaplain school, each of us spent two weeks at a different installation. I went to the Portsmouth Navy Yard. One day a young black boy came in and asked for a Bible book so I gave him the New Testament and the next day he brought six other guys back with him. They all wanted the Bible books. They were very much interested in that.

(3, A, 310)

T: So you would say that these young men, when they came to you with concerns, did you feel like they were talking to you as a friend? Were you a person they felt they could trust because you were older or because you were a chaplain or why?

F: I think so. A lot of them thought that we could do anything. Anything they wanted, we could do.
T: Just go tell the chaplain, right?

F: Yes. Still, that wasn’t possible. Some of them would come and make up stories, and you’d listen to them and you could detect it.

T: Did you get pretty good at that? After a while when you heard them, deciding who was pulling your leg or trying to?

F: Sure. I had a yeoman in New York. Prince of a guy. He had a degree in music. He played the organ. Did all the secretary work. He insisted that I have a Lenten service, all during the Lenten season. He happened to be Catholic. Gene Terry. There was a Navy League, a women’s league in Brooklyn, who gave us a hundred dollars a month just to use as we wanted to. Usually when the guy came in he’d say, let me handle this. He said, “You’re an easy mark.”

T: He had you sized up, didn’t he?

F: Right. So what he would do, if a fellow wanted ten dollars he’d say, have you got a watch? Give me your watch. Pretty soon we had a collection of watches and fountain pens, and many times the fellows would come back to get them. Other times not. They just figured the ten dollars was worth more than my fountain pen.

T: These guys wanted a pawn shop in a sense. That’s one way to protect your investment. You arrived at Ponam Island in 1944, right?

F: Yes. 1944.

T: Was that island secure or not?

F: No. We delayed several days at Guadalcanal on purpose in order to give them a chance to secure the island. But then we got orders to proceed and we went up west of Rabaul, between New Guinea and some islands. We could see fires on either side. We went through at night, in the blackout. The Japanese had fires on either side. We went up and around. Came in from the north. We stayed on board ship for several days. Then we finally went ashore at our island. Ponam was at the very west end of Manus Island. Manus was shaped like a hand, like this (holds out hand, fingers extended), and Manus means hand. Reaching from here, a reef just a few feet below the surface of the water, it reached for twenty miles.

T: Across the north end there.

F: Yes. Then when we were getting ready for the attack on Leyte in October of ’44, there were a thousand ships in the harbor at one time. Battleships and cruisers and carriers. Just unbelievable. And Manus was the staging point for the attack on the
Philippines. It all went through that. I have a copy of *Time* Magazine, the small edition, that I kept, and it said: “Manus, Gibraltar of the Pacific.”

T: So for the time you were there it was quite an important staging area.

F: Oh, yes. But the people here knew more about Manus than we did.

T: Why is that?

F: Because it was written up in *Time* Magazine. We couldn't even tell the people we were at Manus. We didn't know where we were.

T: You had to read about yourself in the magazine.

F: Correct (*both laugh*).

T: The Japanese were either still on the island or nearby when you arrived. Did you have any encounters with Japanese?

F: Three of our fellows got a little motor boat launch. Crossed over to Manus and were exploring there and they were in the jungle. All of a sudden they heard a noise, and here was a Japanese soldier. Quickly they went over and shot him and he was wounded. Then they wondered why did we do this? Of course they were shooting in self-defense. But they brought him back to the island and he died. We buried him there on the island. There was no identification. We wondered who he was. Maybe he was a Christian. Maybe he was... who knows? He might have been the son of some important person.

T: He died anonymously.

F: Yes. Down at Manus, at the main base at Longau sometimes there would be a Japanese standing in the chow line because he'd be dressed like the natives were and you really couldn't tell them apart. They were all dark.

T: He would show up in the line?

F: Trying to get food. So I think they captured several hundred after it was secured and they sent them all to a prison over... I think in Rabaul.

T: So did you ever fear for yourself? Was there ever action close enough where you had to be concerned?

F: No. We had target practice using our Colt revolvers at Port Hueneme California before we left. The captain said, you better do it. I'm not going to be responsible for you. So we had target practice.
T: Did you carry a weapon then?

F: Oh, yes. I did until we got settled over there.

T: Was that unsettling in a way to have to carry a sidearm for you as a chaplain?

F: We were supposed to be noncombatants. But he said, if you're in the foxhole and a Jap jumps in, I'm not going to worry about you. You gotta handle that situation. When we had target practice, the top scorer at practice was a dentist from Minneapolis. He wasn't even a line officer. And I was second (chuckles).

T: The dentist and a chaplain were the best shots. I'm not sure if that's good or bad! (both laugh)

F: That's right. And then we practiced taking our revolvers apart in the dark or blindfolded. Cleaning them. Putting them back together again...

**End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.**

T: When you think about your time on Manus—you were there on Ponam for close to a year all said and told...

F: Actually it was a year and a half, really.

T: So the Pacific war was nearly over when you left there, wasn’t it?

F: Our office was decommissioned in, I think in May ’45 and most of the men were transferred to the Philippines. I waited for orders. I finally got orders to the USS Blue Ridge which was in the Philippines. But then our ship needed some minor repairs so we went to Pearl.

T: Did you go by ship or by flight? You picked up the Blue Ridge at Pearl Harbor?

F: Yes. Actually I flew from our island to the Marshalls and then to Pearl.

T: So you got a flight back.

F: Yes. You know where Johnson Island is?

T: I do. Refueling place.

F: Yes. It’s just a little island west, maybe five hundred miles west of Hawaii and the landing strip... when we landed there... we were way out at sea before... I thought we were going to hit the waves--the wheels were down as soon as we got to the edge of the island. We almost went off the other end.
T: So it was a short strip.

F: It was a short strip. After the rest of my gang was all gone I had temporary duty at the Lornagau, which was the main base, submarine base, at Manus Island. Temporary while I waited for my orders to come.

T: How long did you wait there?

F: I was there about three months.

(3, B, 420)

T: So you were dealing with different type of mariners now?

F: The men there were attached to the submarine base and the interesting thing there, one night in May...

T: Longau is the name of it?

F: I was asleep in the barracks. There were four other guys in this outfit called a CASU. It’s a small service unit. All of a sudden we heard this terrific explosion. Practically knocked us all out of our beds. And here a lone Japanese plane had dropped a bomb on a ship in the harbor. The war was practically over but they were... this was a lone plane that came from Rabaul, I think it was.

T: Bombing the submarine facility.

F: Yes. That’s what they were trying to do. Do something to the sub... Up until that time we hadn’t even bothered having blackouts except once in a while. For example, one night when the Army show was there... this was the Army--they had an outdoor theater... There were probably four thousand men there watching this show. All of a sudden sirens went off. No lights. No cigarettes. We sat in darkness for quite a while because there was an alert.

T: There might be a plane in the area.

F: Yes. They were concerned about it. Now before this bomb went off we heard this airplane. We were in bed. We were talking. We had our cots lined up. It didn’t sound right. It sounded like an old coffee grinder. The airplane. Then kaboom! It went off. As far as I know, there were not casualties but they did quite a bit of damage to an oil barge. Another thing happened. One day I was on the way to get the mail which was one of my jobs and get the movies, new movies.

T: So you were doing more than the spiritual side of taking care of men. You were taking care of movies, libraries...
F: Of course I had a yeoman actually working the library, but I was the librarian and the welfare officer and recreation officer.

T: You wore a lot of hats.

F: Right. Because of the fact I was recreation officer, I picked up all this gear. A lot of it from the Joe Brown Company. Joe E. Brown the great--he was a comedian at that time. He had a wide mouth. Joe Brown. He donated all kinds of athletic gear to the service.

T: You were saying about picking up the mail one day...

F: Yes. We went to the submarine... We had a net at the far end of the harbor. We were outside of that. But that net was so constructed that no ships could get into the harbor unless they'd come and get tangled up in that net. But we had an opening for our little speedboat. We were going along and all of sudden we saw this terrific cloud and explosion and a ship called the Half Moon, which was an ammunition ship, was completely wiped out. They didn't know what had happened, but there had been some unidentified aircraft just ahead of this. Several men standing on ships maybe two hundred yards away were killed.

T: How close were you to all this?

F: We were about maybe, I suppose, a thousand yards from this so we saw all this. There were only two men on that crew that came out alive. Two men on that ship.

T: Amazing even they did, when you describe it.

F: Yes. And I talked to one of the boys and he was really shaken up. He was in the brig at Manus. The other boy was one who had gone to pick up the mail. And those two were the only ones left. It was really a disaster.

T: One fellow was in the brig, and he survived?

F: He was in the brig ashore. They had a brig on the ship, but usually that was very uncomfortable. He was ashore. So that was one time when being a bad boy turned out to be good. He couldn't believe it.

T: Recall that conversation with him. How do you talk to someone like that?

F: I just asked him some questions. He was really so shaken up, but I asked if he realized how fortunate he was. He realized that but he couldn't image all his shipmates being killed.

T: Anybody on board that ship was dead.
F: Yes.

(3, B, 515)

T: You’ve described a lot of different jobs. Welfare officer, confidant, chaplain who held services, who dealt individually in spiritual or just everyday situations with men.

F: Sure.

T: And you were at Great Lakes. You were at Ponam and you were at this submarine base. What, for you, if you think back about things, what was the most challenging aspect of your duties as a chaplain--because they were far-reaching.

F: At different times they probably seemed more challenging than at other times. I think in many ways it was easier being a chaplain overseas than back home.

T: Why was that?

F: Because we had more contact with the families of the men here. And families, they caused problems. Many times if the families had let the men alone they’d get along better.

T: I’m wondering if this has anything to do with the age of these sailors? You mentioned eighteen, nineteen years old. They’re scarcely out of high school. You’ve got parents who are concerned and maybe meddling—is there a difference between those two?

F: Sure. I think probably... I don’t know if a lot of the reason... They actually weren’t adults yet, but they grew up in a hurry.

T: What was the most satisfying aspect of your work as a military chaplain?

F: I felt that I was doing my duty to these men as individuals, and also to my church. They were concerned, and the church was very supportive of our chaplains. I felt too that I was making some contribution for the good of our country. Patriotism was a very important thing. I never regretted having gone in, although there were times when I wished I were a lot closer to home.

T: Sure. You mentioned it was something the men had to deal with, being far away. You know, for you too, I guess when you were living at Great Lakes you had your family close by. Suddenly, and you mentioned last time you had a rather sudden set of orders that said go now...

F: Sure.
T: How often did you write home when you were overseas? To your wife.

F: On the way out we were twenty-one days without mail. But I wrote about every other day. So when we got our first mail I had a whole big stack of letters. And it’s amazing, the mail service we got. Very good service. Then this Chaplain Service Corps that had provided us with so many things, they sent me a big box full of mixed nuts, salted nuts and fruitcakes. We got them the day before Christmas, 1944. And I had them put them in the library, these cans of fresh nuts and fruitcake. The skipper came along and he couldn’t believe it. He said, “You timed that right!”

I mentioned the player piano earlier. That finally landed in our island, but it took a long time to get there. But we had different pallets full of gear and stuff. I was down when they were unloading this barge onto the dock and it had been raining. The piano was in a big piano case of course. They tipped it over and all kinds of water came running out. Colored water from the piano. Just soaked. Because it had been rained on at Guadalcanal or someplace. We thought, it’s done for. My yeoman with the help of the Seabees dried it all out, took it apart. So we had this piano. It was really great.

T: Keeping people occupied and with activities was an important thing that you did. Let me finish up on the question. I almost forgot now about your own writing home when you were overseas. Were you a person who wrote to your wife regularly?

F: Yes. I did.

T: How did you decide what to tell her and what not to tell her?

F: I never told her if I wasn’t feeling well or things weren’t going well.

T: The same kind of letters you talked about men getting that you had to deal with. So you didn’t do the same thing to your wife.

F: That’s right. And she was very good about that too. Because if I allowed myself to start thinking about the kids, or wonder what happened if they got hurt or were sick... you just couldn’t take it. So you had to sort of build up a barrier there about not allowing yourself to think too much about what’s going on at home. But I wrote about the conditions, about the different people and about the friends I made there. My roommate, my tent mate was a young man from North Carolina. A prince of a guy. He was our personnel officer. He was the one who every Sunday morning would wake up the other officers and say, “Get to church.” There were some real fine men. And you know, I think three years after the war, I was walking down Fifth Avenue in New York. I went to Times Square and I met an old chief that I hadn’t seen since over on Ponam and he recognized me. Then, when I was stationed in Brooklyn and I was looking up somebody, I caught up to a young sailor, a young officer, who was pushing a baby buggy and his wife was there, and he’d been on our island. That was really something.
T: That was just by chance.

F: Sure. Just by chance. I used to say, if you sat long enough in Times Square you'll see a lot of people you know.

T: Enough people go by, right?

F: Right.

(3, B, 618)

T: When you mention Ponam, a small island, was it at all frustrating for you at being on what might be considered an out of the way post?

F: There was so much activity, because we were constantly providing new airplanes for the carriers. They would come in within a distance and we'd fly new airplanes off to them. Sometimes when they'd come back from a run, maybe half of the airplanes were shot up. Others, when they landed on the carrier, sometimes they'd run out of fuel. Other times there would be no compression. This was before the day of jets. All prop planes. In that case they would just push it over the side — there was nothing to do to repair it. That is more expensive. So we kept building or getting new airplanes.

T: And funneling them to the aircraft. So in a sense, you're describing some place that was not necessarily an outpost. It was a very busy island for the time you were there.

F: Oh yes. Sure. We had this main base and the soldiers had a camp at Los Negros Island. Then there was a submarine base and Peleliu Island had an installation. All these islands all had different units. It was a staging point.

T: Then as the battle went forward to the Philippines, and the Philippines were secured, the Philippines was a staging area for other...

F: That’s right. So a lot of our men went up to the Philippines in February, March and April of ’45.

T: Are you surprised you didn’t go up there as well?

F: I was waiting for my ship, but I was hoping I would go there. In fact I had ten sea chests full of stuff. Good books, two radios, several phonographs.

T: The tools of your trade as the recreation officer.
F: Right. The ship was at Subic Bay. So I shipped all those things up there. Then I waited for my orders. I was told I was going to go there. You don’t go anywhere unless you get orders.

T: That’s right.

F: I got a good red-hot letter from the district chaplain saying, where are you? I wrote right back and said, I’m waiting for my orders; they got lost on somebody’s desk somewhere. I stayed and I was busy, because the chaplain who I followed had gone for R and R in Australia. He was supposed to come back and it was my turn to go to Australia because I, supposedly, was qualified. He missed his ship coming back. They had no aircraft. He went to Brisbane and was having a great time in Brisbane while I was doing his job.

T: That’s one of the reasons you stayed up there in the Admiralty Islands so long.

F: Yes. Then finally I got my orders and I decided I’m not going to do what some chaplains had done. They’d spend weeks trying to find their outfit somewhere in the Pacific. They didn’t know where they were. So I found out that the ship was on the way to Pearl.

T: You knew you were going to the USS Blue Ridge.

F: Yes.

T: Which is what kind of a ship by the way?

F: It was a communications ship for the Seventh Fleet. They called it MacArthur’s Navy. It had all kinds of communications. Unbelievable.

T: So you were going to be the ship’s chaplain.

F: Yes. I had a good friend at Subic Bay. He’d been at Great Lakes and he was looking forward to seeing me up in Subic Bay in the Philippines.

T: You never got there.

F: I never got there. But all my sea chests did.

T: Was your personal equipment in there too? Your personal stuff?

F: Some of my own uniforms. I got everything I needed for the work, so somebody got it and used it. But I had some things there that were really treasures. Some of the favorite books.

T: You really thought you were headed there.
F: Oh, sure. There was some delay because somebody just didn’t send the orders to me as they should have. So that was a real disappointment to me.

T: At this point, we’ve covered those themes that I wanted to hopefully engage in conversation with and I think we’ve been pretty successful at those, and at this point I’ll thank you and conclude, feeling that I know even more about your experiences as a chaplain. I really feel that your job was much more complex than I realized at first. You were dealing with men in groups and as individuals, but also in things non-spiritual in content. You in a sense were a person for conversation, a person to take problems to, a person to bum money—for a boxing match if it came to that, and lots of other things in between. Valuable work and I thank you for sharing with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW