

**Interviewee: Larry Strand**

**Interviewer: Thomas Saylor**

**Location: kitchen table of the Strand home, Minnetonka, MN**

**Date of interview: 18 February 2002**

**Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, August 2002**

**Edited by: Thomas Saylor, September 2002**

Larry Strand was born on 17 November 1924 in St. Paul. During the early- to mid-1930s, at the height of the Depression, his family moved to a succession of farms outside the Twin Cities; in 1940 they moved to Minneapolis, where Larry attended Central High School and worked at a local gas station. In mid-1942 Larry moved with his father to Montana, where they found employment as carpenters.

In December 1942 Larry volunteered for the US Marine Corps. After Basic Training in San Diego he was shipped to New Zealand, where he joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division as a replacement. Months of additional training followed, during which time Larry became a scout-sniper.

In late November 1943 Larry participated in the invasion of Tarawa Atoll, in the Gilbert Islands, for the US one of the war's costliest actions. While in Hawaii in early 1944 for rest and refit, Larry developed chronic eczema and spent the next six months in various hospitals; when the condition failed to improve he was shipped back to the US and, in December 1944, discharged.

Following military service Larry worked until 1960 for Minneapolis Moline, and then in industrial engineering for Remington Rand (later UNISYS) until retiring in 1986.

Larry Strand's private life demonstrated a deep concern for others; for many years he volunteered his time and energy with the elderly and shut-in. For this he was recognized by Methodist Hospital, St. Louis Park, Minnesota, with their "Earl Dresser Award" for volunteer service; in addition, Larry was named by the Volunteers of America as an "International Volunteer of the Year" for 2001. He was also active in his church, Aldersgate United Methodist of St. Louis Park.

Larry talks openly about dealing after the war with combat related stress, sometimes referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Larry Strand lived in Minnetonka, Minnesota, with his wife Doris (Shea) Strand, until his death in November 2002.

**Interview key:**

**T = Thomas Saylor**

**L = Larry Strand**

**[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation**

**(\*\*\*) = words or phrase unclear**

**NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity**

**Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.**

T: Today is the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2002, and this is the interview with Mr. Larry Strand. First, Larry, on the record, I'd like to thank you very much for taking time out of your day to sit and have a conversation with me. Thank you very much.

L: You're welcome.

T: Are you a native of the Twin Cities, Larry?

L: Yes, I am. I was born in St. Paul in 1924 and moved from there during the Depression onto a farm. I was about seven or eight years old. It turned out that this farm that we farmed on shares, we had three horses and seventeen cows, and pigs, and chickens. I had a horse that I could ride all over the country. Seven to eight years old. I just had a ball.

T: Now, your dad wasn't a farmer by trade. Was this much of an adjustment for him?

L: He came from a farm. His dad was a farmer in North Dakota and, of course, he helped his dad. His dad even gave him a plot of land that he could raise some stuff on himself. So he had a little bit of knowledge and he was gutsy. He would just do it.

T: Now the farms, and I think you mentioned before we went on the tape, that your dad had a couple of farms in the 30s there. And those were mostly local, weren't they?

L: They were all in Brooklyn Center. We didn't have a town called Brooklyn Park at that time. It was Brooklyn Center and Crystal, which was not too far from Brooklyn Center.

T: Those places have sure changed since your folks had farms there in the 30s.

L: It's all homes. The farmers that we knew sold out to big developers. Those farmers moved up north to get away from the homes. It's all built up now.

T: So the land that your folks farmed has been covered up by...

L: By homes. We had 160 acres and we had all these animals. A little side note: We got this farm, I think, because the other farmer had been making moonshine and shipping it to Chicago.

T: This was Prohibition, wasn't it?

L: Yes. *(laughs)* He was shipping it to Chicago, so when we took over the farm in 1932, we found all these crockery jars busted up and the stills were all busted up. There were two stills on the farm.

T: What happened to that guy, do you know?

L: I have no idea. I know that they didn't like it that we moved in on that farm, so they tried to burn the house down. It got so bad that my Dad carried a gun. The neighbor came down and carried a gun. They walked around the farmyard at night.

T: Who was trying to burn the place down?

L: As a child I figured it was the moonshiners, or not the moonshiners, but the gangsters from Chicago because they came by with these great big cars. Back in those days they had twin taillights and that was something else. That meant it was a Packard. So we knew it was someone with a lot of money. But that went away. It all went away. But it was one part of my life where I grew up during the Depression and Prohibition.

T: Your dad moved then to the farm in Crystal, and then in the late 30s to another farm, right?

L: Yes. In the late 30s we moved to a private home which was located on a farm. I raised popcorn and a few things there on my own. Then that house burned down and then we eventually moved to Minneapolis.

T: Is that where you attended high school, in Minneapolis?

**(1, A, 80)**

L: I attended high school in Robbinsdale. Then in the tenth grade, in 1940, I think it was, we moved to Minneapolis and I attended Central High School where we had a home there on 38<sup>th</sup> and Chicago.

T: Did you finish high school in Minneapolis?

L: No, I didn't. I didn't finish. I wanted to go into the Marine Corps and I was having a tough time in school. I don't know why I was having a tough time but it was all new kids and even though I was a big boy, it wasn't any fun anymore. I was thinking about the Marine Corps so much, I suppose, that I didn't finish high school. When

they came out with the GED, I signed up for that. I used that for my job interviews and so forth. But then I went to school. I did a lot of school work at the university, too, to help me with the job that I had. It was only job-related stuff.

T: That was a different era, when school and education meant different things on the job than certainly today. So, in December of 1941, when the United States becomes involved in the war, you were not attending school but you were working in Minneapolis. Is that right?

L: Yes. I was working at a local Standard Oil station. After taking care of a car at the gas pumps, I went into the office and heard on the radio that the Japanese had bombed us.

T: Did you frequently listen to the radio at work?

L: Well, we always had music on, yes. It was always a background. It wasn't so much listening, it was just having a little bit of something in the background. And I was usually working by myself.

T: Was that the case on this Sunday? Were you by yourself?

L: Yes.

T: When you heard this news on Sunday afternoon or evening there, did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

L: That's interesting. I knew where Hawaii was—Pearl Harbor, probably not. *(laughs)* Everybody couldn't believe this, that the Japanese had started a war. It was unbelievable.

T: What was your reaction when you were hearing that news on the radio?

L: I don't know. I guess I can't describe it. At that time I was seventeen. I guess I didn't have much of a reaction except that I was disgusted with the Japanese. I can say that much.

T: You were living with your folks at this time. Is that right?

L: Yes.

T: When you got home, did you talk about this with your folks?

L: I don't remember that. I think I kept it to myself.

T: How soon after this did you...

L: I'm sure I did, but not extensively.

T: Were your folks themselves pretty much aware of the situation after Pearl Harbor, or was politics not really a subject at your house?

L: Oh, definitely. My dad took this job in Montana. When I signed up, when I was eighteen years old, he was about forty. He tried to sign up. He wanted to go in, too, but he had had some health problems and they wouldn't let him go in.

T: So your dad tried to enlist as well?

L: Yes.

T: Soon after this, I think, you, with your dad anyway, moved to Montana and you followed. Is that right?

**(1, A, 149)**

L: Yes. I followed to teach myself to be a carpenter. I had all my tools and I went out there and we built homes on a stationary coal camp. In fact, it was called Colestrip, Montana. We built some homes out there, and we built a school house and a roundhouse. I became a regular carpenter, because the only carpenters they had out there at that time pretty much were Indians that hadn't had a lot of experience. I didn't have a lot of experience either, so I fit right in. *(laughs)*

T: This was summer of 1942. Is that right?

L: Yes. This was the fall of 1942.

T: By this time had you pretty much made up your mind that when you turned eighteen you were going to join the service?

L: Oh, definitely. When I didn't go back to school, that was my excuse for not going back to school. I was going to go into the Marine Corps.

T: Let me ask you, why the Marine Corps and not the Army or the Navy?

L: The Marine Corps, to me, seemed to be the more elite. I suppose they bragged about themselves so much that they sounded good. I can't say much more about that, except that I thought they were really special.

T: When did you enlist actually?

L: I enlisted December 12, 1942.

T: How soon after that were you actually off to Basic Training?

L: I enlisted December 12<sup>th</sup>. But back up just a little bit. I went to Billings, Montana, and enlisted and then they called me when I was to be sworn in, and that would be December 12<sup>th</sup>, technically. We were transported from Billings, Montana to Butte, Montana, where we were technically sworn in, put on a troop train and went down to San Diego where I was put into the recruit depot there. I remember this was in December, and it was cold. I used to wear long underwear when I was working as a carpenter, and I still had that on when I got to San Diego and I took my clothes off because they told us to, you know. And I'm the only guy standing there with long underwear on and I really felt like a farmer, I tell you, if a farmer is bad. I don't know. *(laughs)*

**(1, A, 188)**

T: Were most of the other guys from different parts of the country?

L: I suppose, yes. It just happened that in that bunch I was the only one with long underwear on. I didn't need them any more down in San Diego.

T: Your mom, how did she react when you said you had joined the Marine Corps?

L: I don't think there was a lot of reaction by either one of my parents. They accepted that. While I was in the Marine Corps, my mother gave blood just as often as she could. She got up to the gallon stuff. She joined the Semper Fidelis Club, made up of mostly women in Minneapolis, and she'd go to that and visit about their children. She got into it.

My dad took a big job up in Alaska as a superintendent, so he was helping the war effort. He built eighteen army camps, and a 160 mile road, too. He was in charge of that. Going from Haines, Alaska, up to, I think, Haines Junction, about 160 miles. They had eighteen army camps, so he did his part for the service.

T: Do you think your folks got more involved in war service because one of their kids was serving?

L: I don't know. I just can't answer that. But I used to write back and forth to my folks with the V-mail, which was real light paper. We used to correspond. There wasn't much I could say, because the military wouldn't let us say a whole lot.

T: I want to get back to San Diego here. That was a new part of the country for you?

L: Oh, yes. I hadn't been out of Minnesota hardly. This was a big experience. Really a big experience for me. San Diego was located right next to the water, very close to the water. You could walk down to it if you want to walk through all that sand. It was a big deal. I met all the other recruits down there and we assembled into a platoon. I think there must have been fifty or sixty of us and we started our training. The training was to get our bodies back in shape, because a lot of us were out of

shape and they wanted us in the same shape. We did a lot running and exercising with our rifle and things like that.

T: Were most of the guys the same age as you?

L: Yes. I would say they were, in my platoon. When I went overseas I found some older people, which I became friends with.

T: Was this the first time away from home for most of these guys?

L: I would say so. Yes, I would say so. It was for me.

**(1, A, 232)**

T: How was it, being away from home?

L: I wasn't lonesome because, I think, we were so busy. I really didn't get lonesome. The only time I got lonesome was... this was after two years being in the Marine Corps. I got liberty from the hospital and I went by myself to a movie. It was the first time I was out. It was *White Christmas*. And I sat down in the movie and I watched for about twenty minutes, and I got so lonesome I couldn't stay anymore. I had to get out because it brought back all my family memories. I couldn't stand it. I don't know if I ever have seen that show. I know I couldn't watch it because I got so lonesome. But that was the only time that I really got lonesome.

T: They kept people busy, didn't they?

L: Yes. We were either exercising or we were learning how to tear down our gun, our rifle. Our rifle. The reason I repeat that is because I called it a gun in front of the sergeant, and he had told us just the day before, "Don't ever call this a gun! This is a rifle!" So I went up to him and I said, "Sergeant, I don't have a tool for my gun." He said, "What did you say?" I said, "I don't have a tool for my gun." I had to sleep with that thing that night. *(laughs)* That's a memory. I won't forget that.

T: You only make that mistake once, right?

L: Yes.

T: Was Basic Training too difficult for some guys?

**(1, A, 255)**

L: I can't say that. I think we all got along about the same. I believe that is because the drill instructors trained us about the same and we all grew up the same, so to speak. We all became more muscular and so forth. I can't say that anybody had

trouble. Maybe the first time we ran you might find somebody that was way back, but before the eight weeks were over we were all pretty much the same.

T: Did anyone wash out of your platoon while you were in Basic Training?

L: No.

T: While you were in Basic Training, was it made clear to you as an individual or as a platoon just what you were getting ready for?

L: Yes. I would say yes, because we had a lot of training in how to shoot properly and we spent two weeks on the rifle ranges. Shooting, shooting, shooting, shooting. I became an expert rifleman. I was so proud of that. But then, I told you earlier, when I got overseas they made me a scout and sniper because I had a good record in how to shoot. At that time I wasn't too proud of it. *(laughs)* I thought I'd just as well be with the regular guys.

T: Because you would be operating differently, I suspect?

L: Yes.

T: Was it clear to you who the enemy was by this time?

L: Oh, yes, yes. Definitely. More so when we got on ship and we headed out. Leaving the land, the United States of America, and going someplace else. It was clear that we were off to do something special. And I think that's when it hit home for me, is when we got on board ship and we were off for something else.

T: When did you find out that you were going to the Pacific and not to Europe?  
Pretty soon, pretty early?

L: I think we knew that right off. I don't know. They weren't sending any Marines at that time to Europe because they had two wars going. They kept the Marines for jungle warfare. I think that is true. Now they sent a few Marines to Europe, but I don't know how many. I know they had a few.

**(1, A, 280)**

T: So it was possible to think already of the enemy as the Japanese?

L: Oh, yes. The damn Japs. That's what we...

T: Were there images of the Japanese that were present to you as a recruit or as a person in training?

L: No. Not that I can think of.

T: When you thought to yourself about the Japanese whether it was in training or when you were shipping out, what images came to mind?

L: *(five second pause)* I don't know. I thought of them as being absolutely a no good people that would harm us or harm anybody the way they did and want to go to war with us. I hated them. I did. I think, probably, that's what the Marines wanted us to do. But you asked a few questions about that and I can't say, other than it was instilled in my mind—whether it was done by myself or not I'm not sure—but I got that the Japanese were no good. They were bad. In fact, I heard, I didn't see, of Japanese prisoners being taken that never got back to the base. The Marines just killed them. I don't know about that. I didn't see it but I heard enough about that, that they weren't very nice people. We were probably worse when I think about it. We weren't that great either. But, of course, we didn't start the war.

T: Did this, your opinion and your perception of the Japanese, did this change during the invasion or after, or did it stay pretty much the same?

L: All I can remember as far as the Japanese go is, I can still think about the dive bombing and giving up their own lives just to get rid of a ship, so you didn't know where they were going to come from. When we were on our troop ship before we started our landing, we were attacked by Japanese aircraft and the guns on our transport were shooting back. That was how the war started for me. The real time war is when we hadn't even left yet and the Japanese were trying to shoot our ship and we were shooting back at them. All this noise going on and, as a young person, I probably turned nineteen that year, during the invasion. The war started at that point for me.

T: You took a troop ship from San Diego to the Gilbert Islands? Or did you make a stop along the way?

L: No, we left on a troop ship in April 1943, and that troop ship took us down to Wellington, New Zealand, where we were to be replacements for the fellows who were lost on Guadalcanal. On the way down we stopped at Samoa and Australia. Then eventually down to New Zealand. We were there in May. We didn't get there for thirty days. It took thirty days for the troop ship to go back and zigzag back and forth. It took us a long time to get there. We got there in May 1943 and were there until early November of that same year.

T: That's five or six months you spent in New Zealand.

L: Yes.

T: Training or?

L: First of all, the casualties from Guadalcanal. They were gone, of course, and we replaced them. We went in for training for five months. Our specialty in the beginning was mortars. I was on the 81mm mortar platoon for some time until I learned how to do that. Then we learned how to shoot, if we had to, 37mm, which was a small cannon. It's about that big. (*motions with hands*) We learned how to shoot them. Shortly then I was reassigned to become a scout and sniper.

So I left Company C, where I was getting this other training, and went into scout and sniping and I was attached to a different company, a weapons company. We didn't really do much with them except that scout and sniping was a different technique of training. We trained then when I got into scout and sniping. We learned how to travel at night with a compass and get to where we wanted to go by compass. One of the other things we did was an enormous amount of shooting.

T: With a different kind of weapon now?

L: It was a .30 caliber, but it was a 03 Springfield Stargauge. Stargauge meaning it was the first three rifles coming off the factory line. It was excellent. It had a pistol grip on it compared to the other 03s in service at that time. An excellent rifle. We would shoot, and people don't believe this, but we shot at a target a thousand yards away, and the bull's-eye was about eighteen inches in diameter.

**(1, A, 369)**

T: From a thousand yards away?

L: That's three thousand feet. That's three-fifths of a mile. We would hit the bull's-eye once in a while. (*laughs*) You'd be surprised because just your heartbeat would change the rifle movement just a little bit from that far away.

T: It makes a big difference, doesn't it?

L: Big difference. Just move a little bit and that thing is far away. We would shoot and shoot and shoot. From all positions, prone, and sitting and so forth.

T: Did you know when you were in New Zealand –

**End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.**

T: – where you were ultimately going to go, as far as the invasion?

L: No. After we trained, one day they just said we were going to board ship. And we thought we were just going to practice training, so we didn't know. On board ship we went from New Zealand to New Hebrides and we had a practice landing. Then when we got back on board ship again we got the announcement that we were going to make a landing at the Gilbert Islands. They wouldn't tell us anything before that so we wouldn't be able to tell anybody else.

T: Had there been scuttlebutt among the guys about where you were going?

L: We didn't know. I never heard of the Gilbert Islands until they told us that. It was a secret. We didn't know. A complete secret.

T: When the guys learned that there was finally going to be a real invasion, did people change, once they realized that the real thing was close at hand?

L: I think they got more somber and wondering what was going to take place because we had no idea. You know, you can't practice war really until you've got the enemy out there. Then it's a different situation.

T: How much time elapsed from when you heard you were going to make the landing to when you actually made it?

L: About three days.

T: It was really no time at all.

L: Nothing at all. We didn't know where we were going. We didn't know what was going on.

T: Really? You didn't even know the actual destination?

L: Oh, no. We had no idea.

T: How did things progress here? Did the troop ship drop anchor and then transfer to smaller boats to make the landing?

L: I didn't make the initial landing. I think I told you a little bit about that already. I think it was because we were set up as a scout and sniper with all this fancy camouflage stuff. There were three platoons and none of us made the landing. They kept us back until the third day, then they let us go in, onto Betio itself [Tarawa is an atoll, with a number of islands; Betio is one of the largest, and was the main Japanese defensive position]. They dropped us in the Higgins boats and then took us over to another larger ship and dropped the scout and snipers off and left us there ready to go on if we have to. So we were there until the third day. Late that third day they brought us in.

I remember the first thing I saw when I got off the Higgins boat was a guy, and this plays in my memory forever. The guy had been sitting down on the beach for some reason, sitting on a stone or something. And his whole body was blown away from here up. (*motions to waist*) And to see a stomach starting to bloat from the heat... This is the first real thing that I had seen that really got to me.

T: American or Japanese, this fellow?

L: He was American. Back on ship before we left, we left late, they were bringing casualties on the ship and they were dropping them off overboard in their body bags. There was a flag draped over the body bag, so this was a burial at sea. There were a number of these.

T: Into the water?

L: Yes. Rather than keep them there.

T: A lot of the guys were making the landing in Higgins boats?

L: Yes, in Higgins boats.

T: And you were on a larger ship, in a sense, watching them depart.

L: We didn't leave our ship. The scout and snipers stayed on the main ship where a lot of them went off and made their landing. What I understand happened, and it's in the history books, that the Higgins boats, and the Navy driving the Higgins boats, hit some coral and dropped the guys off in twenty feet of water. They had all their gear on, all their bags, and backpack and extra gear, and of course, they couldn't swim with all that heavy stuff. A few of them drowned. I don't know how many. Then they started taking all that stuff off and leaving it on the ship or in the Higgins boat. Then they made the landing. I stood guard on that night, standing guard over our platoon who was sleeping. We dug holes, foxholes, to sleep in, to be down a little ways in case of bombs or anything.

T: The island was not secure by this time?

L: That was very close to secure. But it wasn't, because the Japanese were still bombing us. They were bombing the other end of the island. The island was only a half-mile wide and about a mile long. It was just an airstrip. All we were getting for all that work was that airstrip. You could see the big battleships on the other side of the island when you looked across the island. It was flat. That made a good airstrip, too.

T: When you were on the ship and the landing was started, how did you handle the waiting until you would be sent to the island?

L: I was nervous as heck and that was when I discovered I had eighty boils on me. I went to the corpsman and showed him and he said, "Sorry." (*laughs*) He wasn't going to put me in sick bay. That wasn't why I went to see him. I just wanted some help with the pain of those damn things.

T: Did they itch or were they sore?

L: No, they hurt. They were boils. They would raise up, just like that (*extends hand and raises it slightly, to indicate swelling*). And if you puncture it, then you let all that pus out and it wouldn't hurt any more. And that's what happened—my gun belt and stuff just punctured all those boils, and I don't even remember them anymore. Once they had been punctured, the pain was basically gone, and I was able to keep going.

T: You felt a sense of nervousness?

L: Oh, yes. I'm sure. But you know, I've always been ashamed of being nervous, but I can't help it. That's the way I was. When I think back before we made the landing, before I left ship, here's some guys playing poker down there and just having a heck of a time. (*laughs*)

T: No nerves at all apparently.

L: I don't know. (*laughs*) I never asked them. But I wasn't interested in playing poker at that time.

T: Were there other guys who were showing their nervousness in other ways?

L: No, I don't know. I can't say that. I think I lived inside myself for a while there and didn't discuss it with anybody.

**(1, B, 150)**

T: Kind of thinking things over or?

L: It was the unknown. We didn't know where we were going to go, how we were going to do it, or when, and we had no idea what we were up against. Of course, none of the Marines did. You didn't know. There were pillboxes all over the island and all over near the beach, and the Japanese were in these pillboxes. The Marines took care of most of them with flamethrowers. I remember, just before we were going to go to another island to sleep that night, this would be the fourth day it would be probably, I was walking around with my buddy and I saw... Well, I wanted a souvenir, so I cut this pocket open. Here it was a Marine with a package of Camels in his pocket. Cigarettes. I said, "Enough of this." I didn't cut any more pockets open.

T: When you were there and you knew it was a Marine, what were you looking for?

L: Just anything that was Japanese, I guess, to take as a souvenir from Tarawa.

T: Was souvenir hunting a pretty common thing?

L: I can't say it was common on this island. It was so small and it was taken care of so quick. I can't say there was a lot of it, but I'm sure it was if there were hundreds

of Japanese laying out there, probably, yes, that they would pick up some swords and a few things. But I didn't see anything like that when I was there.

T: After you landed, Larry, did your nervousness go away or change?

L: No, it went away.

T: So, actually being on the island was the best thing for that?

L: Yes, I got along just fine on the island, just fine. When I was standing guard, all by myself, between eleven and two or something like that, the worst time of the day, I got along just fine. Very, very dark. You wondered even at that time whether a Jap was going to sneak up and put a knife in your back. I'm exaggerating maybe, but not really. Because you didn't know what or who was left out there. The earlier Marines had really secured the place quite well, so there wasn't any reason to think that way, but there's always a straggler Jap out there.

Please understand, I don't feel that way today, but that's just the way it was then.

T: How many days were you on the island?

L: We were on the island for three days, the Marines. How long was I on the island? Several hours, I guess. We slept there that night. The next day they took us to another island that didn't have any bombing on it or anything.

T: Were there Japanese on that island as well?

L: No. It was just a small island. It had several palm trees on it and our platoon slept on the ground.

T: Did your nervousness come back after you had left Tarawa?

L: Yes. I never thought about it anymore. I think everybody was nervous. I would think they would be. But I never thought about it anymore. Never thought about it and still, when I was on the Hawaiian Islands and we were located on the Big Island of Hawaii, on the northwest corner, fifty miles from Hilo, on R and R, and I got along just fine. But that's when my skin trouble started. I had no reason to think about it as being nerve-wracking or anything.

T: After the Gilbert Islands, what was your next destination?

L: What happened to my platoon was that they eventually went to Saipan, but when I got the skin trouble on the inside of my arm, the corpsmen didn't know what to do with it so they sent me to an army hospital in Hilo hoping they could clear it up rather quickly, so I could get back on duty. My seabag and everything was back at the base north of Hilo. I was in the Army hospital there for thirty days and they put

the wrong ointment on me. I think it was the wrong ointment, because it poisoned me somehow. It got so bad they finally put me in a private room and they didn't know what to do with me. It just wouldn't stop.

T: Was it painful?

L: Itchy. It wasn't painful, it just itched.

T: Itchy is almost worse than painful sometimes.

L: Yes, because at night I would scratch it and I would scratch everything right off. Heavy pieces of skin right off down to the watery skin.

T: They weren't able to tell you?

L: They called it chronic eczema. They did everything they could for me for thirty days and then, there was a military government rule that Navy couldn't use an Army hospital for over thirty days. So they picked several of us up by airplane and took us to Oahu, to the Naval hospital. There they did more things to help me. They had me in sitz baths to soften up the abrasions on my skin a little bit. In thirty days they put me on a hospital ship. That took five days to get back home. Then I was in the Oakland Naval hospital for two nights. Then they put me on a hospital train. To give you an idea of the seriousness of this, I had to be right in bed with a nurse taking care of me. Not specifically assigned to me, I don't mean that. But the damn stuff was really a mess!

T: And it spread, you said earlier, down your arms.

L: Yes. Down my arms. I didn't have it on my back because I couldn't reach back there and scratch. I had it all over.

T: What was going through your mind as this dragged on month after month?

L: I still had the patience to believe that they were going to fix it because it started getting better up in the northern climate. When I got out of the warm climate and got up in the state of Washington, then it just started gradually healing, and I did more bathing. It gradually went away where it got to the point I could go on a limited liberty. They had to wrap my arms up with gauze, and then I'd draw a bit of liberty. But eventually [in December 1944] I got discharged.

T: Did you feel a sense of frustration that you couldn't get back to what you were trained to do?

L: I can't say that I did. I took each day by itself and became friends with the sick guys in adjacent beds. We were in that hospital together, suffering together. I don't

mean that I was suffering; I don't mean that. But a hell of a lot of guys were. I just took one day at a time. That's the way I looked at it.

T: When you thought back at that point, as you think of the Tarawa experience, how did your personal actual experience there differ from what had played through your mind ahead of time for the way you thought it was going to be?

L: I expected to make the landing like everybody else and it didn't happen. I was very grateful for that. It meant that I got out of it alive. Anybody that got out of it alive was grateful. I was more than grateful though—I didn't have to go into it like some of the other ones.

T: Was there a sense for you of relief? Was that tinged with guilt, perhaps?

L: I've had more guilt about it since, I think, than I had at the time. Where I hear about my buddies. I've got a real good buddy at church that had thirty-seven bombing missions. He was a bombardier. To think that every time he did that he suffered like I did just once.

T: As far as having the stress?

L: The stress of doing that. He had thirty-seven stresses like that. When I think about me, I think that, boy, I really think a lot of that guy. The one time, if I can add an aside, the 37<sup>th</sup> time he decided to go on a different plane because of something. The plane that he should have been on went down. He was able to make it through on the other plane.

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T: How did he internalize that?

L: He talks about it now. He shakes like this. (*shakes hand gently*) He's got the shakes and it's got to be from, well, I think it's from the war. That was over in Germany.

T: Let me move to another subject here. When you were in the Marine Corps, Larry, did you come into contact with people of other ethnic groups, Filipinos, or blacks? And if so, what kind of relations between groups did you observe?

L: I had a personal experience with a black in the hospital and we became very good friends. I didn't know a whole lot about blacks, but I thought they could take a joke like anybody else. I went in and washed my face. This was in the hospital, and he was going to go in to wash his face. I said, "Why bother? You won't know the difference." God, he went and got his knife! A six-inch knife! And he came after me! I said, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to offend you. I was just making a joke."

The best thing that happened to me. I've never forgotten that one. I've been really nice to blacks. That was a good experience for me as a young man.

T: Young man from a northern state?

L: A northern state. From Minnesota. At that time we didn't have a lot of blacks, but we had quite a few in south Minneapolis. But I hadn't been associated with very many of them. I learned my lesson there for the rest of my life.

T: Was he in the Marine Corps as well?

L: No. He was in the Navy hospital, so he was probably a sailor. We didn't have very many blacks in the Marines that I remember. The Navy had blacks, but I don't remember a lot of them in the Marines.

T: What about women in uniform? Did you come into official contact with any women in uniform during your time in the military?

L: I didn't. No, I didn't come into official contact. I just saw them when we were on liberty. Other than Army nurses.

T: What can you say about them?

L: They were wonderful. They really took care of me. Comparing the Army nurses to the Navy nurses, the Army was hands down three times better. They were so compassionate. In the Navy, you had a head nurse and then corpsmen. The corpsmen were the deliverers of the medicine and whatever had to be done to your body. I liked the Army better.

T: How long were you in the Army hospital?

L: I was in an Army hospital for a month.

T: Was it difficult for you as a young man to be in a situation where you had a strange woman putting on bandages in a more personal way like that?

L: They were very careful that they didn't... they kept you covered up. They were very careful about that.

T: There was no level of discomfort?

L: No, not for me.

T: Let me ask a different question here. During your time in the Marine Corps, did you have anybody, another guy, an officer or enlisted man, who made a real impact on you in a positive sense?

L: I think my sergeant that I had in New Zealand. He was a good friend to all of us. Nothing particular, though, except one time. He was teasing me in front of the whole platoon. I said, "You go to hell, too." He said "What did you say?" "I said you can go to hell." He didn't say a thing except I had to stand guard that weekend. I never said that again! *(laughs)*

T: Was he someone that you looked up to because of the example that he set?

L: He was just a really pure guy, down to earth, and I like that kind of people.

T: Did you have a number of friends among the enlisted guys that you hung out with regularly?

L: I played a lot of poker so I had those friends. We're talking now about going back sixty years probably. I have pictures of a friend that I had in the Army hospital before I was put in a special room. I was walking around yet. I had a real good friend there. Then I had an older friend in the Hawaiian Islands who we'd go on liberties together. There were several of us. Buddies, you know. I don't write to them now. I was in the hospital for seven months and I lost my seabag and any addresses or anything so...

T: You never got your seabag back.

L: Eventually they sent personal stuff back in a box. They mailed it to me after I was home for several months. After the war.

T: How would you describe the guys that you preferred to hang out with in the Marine Corps? Personality wise, I mean.

L: Low key.

T: People who would just enjoy quieter things?

L: I mean, for example, taking charge. I like to hang around with the guys that are low key from that standpoint.

T: What was your sergeant's name, do you remember?

L: I don't remember.

T: Speaking of people, how did you stay in touch with family and loved ones back home when you were away from home?

L: I'd do a lot of writing.

T: Were you a regular letter writer?

L: I suppose. I don't know if I wrote as often as other people, I can't say. I was pretty good at it. I would write my mother quite often. My future wife wrote me a letter and then I wrote to her more often probably. It was hard for me to write because so much stuff would be cut out. It would be censored. I had really a hard time writing because I didn't know what to write about. You can't write about the land, where you are, or what you saw. The censors spoiled it for you.

T: You couldn't tell people where you were, obviously.

L: No.

T: So all that time when you were in New Zealand you couldn't say you were in New Zealand.

L: No, that's the trouble. Or even when I was north of Hilo in the Hawaiian Islands. I got a letter from my mother and she said, "Hello, Hilo." The mothers found out somehow. *(laughs)*

T: So some guys were finding codes for this information. How important was it to you to get mail from home?

L: It was important. It was so important. My last name starts with an "s", and I was always called out last, and oh, I couldn't wait. That probably, if I was crestfallen, I think it was not getting a letter.

T: Really? It was that important to you.

L: Yes. I mean if there's anything you can think of about –

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

T: Again about getting letters from back home.

L: Yes, it was probably one of the most important things that you could have was to have mail call. All of us would rush to the sergeant if he was giving the mail out, and you're waiting for your name to be called. Oh, man, waiting for your name to be called. It wouldn't be called that often. I didn't get a letter from home every day. Probably once a week. I never measured it. I sent a lot of V-mails. They were light and the military recommended it.

T: Were guys to encouraged, then, to stay in touch, to write back home? Or was it more that the military made available the means to do it if you wanted to?

L: I don't remember them saying to write home.

T: They made it easy if you wanted to do so though?

L: Yes, oh yes. No problem.

T: When you were in New Zealand, was there a mail call pretty much every day?

L: I don't remember. I don't think so. No, it was once a week, maybe, or something like that. I don't remember.

T: Did you get news, newspapers, this kind of thing when you were over there, particularly in New Zealand?

L: We had no news from home, from that standpoint.

T: Get *Stars and Stripes* [official US Army paper] or anything like that, or *Leatherneck* [official USMC paper]?

L: No. *Leatherneck*. We'd get *Leatherneck* magazine once in a while. I don't remember much publicity from that standpoint.

T: Was it even on a mundane level, was it possible to follow the baseball standings or get football scores from home or that kind of stuff from the States, or not really?

L: I'm sure there was but I wasn't interested in sports. Coming off the farm I just never got into that.

T: Did you make lasting contacts during your time in the service, Larry?

L: No, I didn't. No. You mean as far as writing to somebody?

T: Why do you think that is?

L: I didn't have any addresses. I think if I would have had it early on it would have been all right. My buddy, Errol Fox, he had several buddies that he corresponded with and he visited with. They would come up to his home and he'd go down to their home. I missed that. I wish I would have had that myself.

T: Is it because of losing your stuff and addresses?

L: That's the big thing; I lost all that. If I hadn't gotten sick I'm sure that we would have started gathering a lot of that stuff.

T: Because the unit you were with went on to Saipan, you said, right?

L: Afterwards, yes. I imagine we would have gathered all those addresses, each other's, and I didn't have any of them.

T: Is that something that bothered you over the years?

L: Yes, I miss that. I miss that because I'm jealous of Errol. *(laughs)* He had the addresses. He had the contacts and they were best of buddies.

T: Let me shift now. In December of 1944, the Marine Corps finally decided to discharge you. Now your enlistment obviously wasn't up...

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L: No. I was a reserve. So, it would have been the end of the war if I had stayed.

T: How did you feel when you learned that before the end of the war and before the end of your service that you were to be discharged? How did that news hit you?

L: The doctor called me in and he went over my paperwork and he said, "How would you like to go home?" I said, "I'd love it!" So I went home. But still I felt a little bit *(pauses three seconds)* what do I want to say? My buddies were landing on Saipan and they were probably going to go on to Iwo Jima, I don't know. I wasn't sure. I thought about that a lot that. You know, "Why me? How come I was given this break?"

T: Did you see it as a break then?

L: Yes. When I said, "Yes, I'd like to go home," I thought this is a break, this is a gift.

T: Did your medical treatment continue even after December of 1944?

L: I was given a ten percent disability for this skin problem, and that meant I got a little check every month. Ten percent being about the lowest probably. After about four years they called me into the Vets Hospital and examined me and it was looking good, so I didn't have that any more.

T: Did you have to have any kind of medical treatment after you left the Marine Corps? Or did they just hope it would go away?

L: I may have had some private with my own doctor but I wasn't about to go back to the service. I just didn't trust them to do what's right.

T: Because, as you mentioned, you thought that the first stuff that they put on was part of the problem anyway.

L: Not in the beginning, but when I was poisoned I said that's a (\*\*\*). But they didn't use that any more on me.

T: How long was it after you were discharged that the problem really began to clear up for you?

L: When I was discharged and I took this job with Minneapolis Moline, I started stuttering, and to this day I don't know why. But I stuttered for a couple of years and, in the beginning, I couldn't even go up to a drugstore and ask for a package of gum. I couldn't get it out. I would just struggle, struggle, struggle and they would finally understand me. And at that time one of the people at Minneapolis Moline wanted to get me some disability because of that, but I never did. That wasn't why I was stuttering. I certainly wasn't stuttering on purpose, just to get some kind of disability. But he thought I deserved it, because he thought it was war related. And I think it was. It was war related in that I was coming from one environment to another environment, and I couldn't handle it. I handled it, but something up here (*points to head*) said something else, in my head.

T: Your stuttering hadn't started while you were in all the hospitals?

L: No, I was just fine.

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T: When you got back to Minneapolis?

L: When I got back to Minneapolis and after I worked at Minneapolis Moline, I don't know how long it was. A few weeks or less. But I started having a hard time talking. And I never doctored for it.

T: And it did subside after some time, didn't it?

L: It subsided after I volunteered to do some work at that church. Somebody invited me to be vice president of the men's club, or maybe it was president; I don't know what it was. I was really afraid of getting up in front of anybody and talking, especially because of my stuttering. I said, "I'm going to do it! I'm going to do it!" And that cleared me up. And it helped me in my job, too, because I was able to get promotions. I think it was just saying, I've got to take care of this myself. I got tough with myself, that's all.

T: You think that's what did it?

L: I think in my mind that I was going to go out and be a vice president of a club and I had minimum talking to do at that time and then later I became president. I think those jobs helped me recover, if that's what you want to call it.

T: How long a time period are we talking here before it really cleared up?

L: I'm not sure. A couple years maybe. At least two years.

T: Larry, when you were back in the States, how was it to see your family and your loved ones again?

L: It was great. It was really great. My future wife came over to my folks' house with her dad and mom who I knew real well, and we had a little celebration. I was proud to be coming home as a Marine. To be able to drive a car again. I was really grateful.

T: What was the very first thing you did when you were discharged?

L: Do you mean when I came home? Well, they gave me a train ticket to go from Seattle, Washington, to Minneapolis, so I got on the train and headed home. Now you'll recall, this was in December. We were going across the northern United States. The train must have been an old boxcar or something, because it was so cold that we would put our legs up between... People we didn't even know would put our legs up between them to keep our legs warm. *(laughs)*

T: It was that cold on the train?

L: Yes. And they would put their legs here, and I would put my legs there and somebody else would put their legs here. It wasn't that we would have frozen if we didn't do that, but that's how we made it more comfortable. That's how cold it was.

T: What was the hardest thing for you readjusting to being a civilian again?

L: I don't know. *(three second pause)* I don't know. I can't think of what that would be. I suppose visiting with strangers. I had trouble with talking. I guess I think about that as being the biggest handicap I had, of all the things I really didn't like.

T: What about the easiest? What did you find the easiest thing to get used to?

L: Being with my parents and having a girlfriend right away as soon as I got home. I think that made life a lot easier and a lot nicer.

T: You were a civilian again when President Roosevelt died in April of 1945. How did you and those around you, your family and friends, react when you heard the news that the president had died?

L: I think we were all really sad because, back then, if you put yourself back in that time, I think most all of us thought he was one of the greatest people alive, as far as being president. He'd done a lot for the economy and he stood up to the Japanese and helped the Second World War in Germany. I looked up to him. I thought he was pretty great, and I still do. I think he did a good job.

T: What do you remember about the day the war ended against Germany, V-E Day [8 May 1945], when you were also here stateside?

L: You know, I don't remember a whole lot about it because I was already home and I was starting to get my feet planted pretty well, and it just came and went for me. That's probably not a very good explanation, but I had been let go before so...

T: It sort of suggests that you were really getting on with your life already.

L: Yes. I was caught up in my life.

T: Did the ending of the war against Japan, V-J Day in August of 1945, make more of an impact with you or about the same?

L: Yes, because that's the one I was really involved with. And then I knew my buddies would be coming home.

T: How did those in your workplace or your family respond to that news?

L: Where I was working at that time was a lot of older people. I don't remember a whole lot about it. It's so many years ago. I'm sorry. Just that we were all happy. I know my folks were, because it probably meant more jobs for my dad in construction work. He was thrilled about it.

T: You didn't have any brothers serving in the service at this time?

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L: No. My brother was eight years younger, so he never got into the Second World War.

T: Was he in Korea?

L: No. He went into the weekend stuff. The Reserves, with the Navy. He never went in regular.

T: At the time, Larry, did you feel the US government was correct to use atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to help end the war with Japan?

L: At the time, yes, because I figured, and it's been talked about since then too, that the war just would have kept on going and people on both sides would be killed. I thought it was a good thing. The war ended right now. I thought it was okay. However, on second thought, it's too bad, I think, that we've become a nuclear age because it seems to have given us more problems now with countries throughout the world that are also involved in nuclear stuff. I think because of that bomb it just,

I think it made a mess out of the world, our future. I can't see that somebody's not going to use that nuclear device like we did on Japan, and use it on somebody else. I can see that happening. I think it's terrible that we invented it. However, at the time, we stopped the war. At the time, I thought, "Yes, good deal."

T: To conclude, let me ask you, at the time, as a young man of eighteen-nineteen-twenty years old, what did the war mean for you personally?

L: It was an education. It's an education that I wouldn't give up, now that it's happened. To be able to travel a little bit with buddies in the Marines, and to see different parts of the world. I didn't see a lot, but a little bit. To have that experience, to have some experience of war. I'm proud of that. I'm glad I had that. I'm glad it happened. I mean, I'm not glad the war happened, but I'm glad I was part of it. I'm proud that I was a Marine and I'm proud to be a United States citizen.

T: In what ways do you think the war experience changed your life?

L: I think it got me into a different vocation than I would have had otherwise. I wouldn't have gone into office work. I only went into office work because of my skin problems. I would have gone into carpentry, I'm sure of that.

T: And you were already headed down that road, weren't you?

L: Yes. I was headed down that road anyway. However, I'm glad it worked out the way it did because then I got into the electronics field. Things exploded when I went in, as far as the invention of the transistor, and those things changed everything. I became part of Unisys, Remington Rand, when that transistor was coming into its own, and we started making computers and using the transistor. That's why I was hired to work for that company, because they were making new printed circuitry using these transistors. A whole new ballgame.

T: It sounds like you were one of those who got in on the ground floor of a new technology.

L: Yes, I did.

T: Anything you'd like to add at the conclusion of the interview that we didn't touch on or that you think is important?

L: No. I don't think so. *(three second pause)* One of the things I was thinking about the other day was the camaraderie we have with other World War II veterans. I don't care if they're in the Navy or the Marine Corps or Army. Just to know that they helped protect our country back sixty years ago. And I'm still alive to talk to them about it, visit with them about it. Visit with them about their things. I like being part of that even though we're real old. I've got a buddy that's close to death right now. He told me about his life in the service. I won't go into it except to say that he

had nightmares every night for thirty-seven years. His experiences were that bad. Not that that's something to be proud of, to know that, but I...

T: But he can talk to you. You mentioned the sense of camaraderie, that because you share that there's a level of comfort for him to talk about it.

L: Yes. And he went into depth. He even wrote it to me on e-mail, a lot of what he went through. He was going to write more but he just got sicker and sicker and sicker, and now he's really bad. That kind of stuff, you know. I enjoy hearing other people's experiences, and being part of that. We're like family.

T: Camaraderie might be the best way to explain that?

L: Yes.

T: There's a sense of belonging regardless of theater or service branch. You had a larger experience.

L: But I don't have a whole lot to add to that.

T: At that point I want to thank you very much for your time. I enjoyed this very much.

L: You're very welcome.

**END OF INTERVIEW**