

Wisconsin Veterans Museum

Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

LEONARD AUGUSTIN

Corporal Draftsman, Ground Forces, US Air Force, World War II

2003

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**Augustin, Leonard**, (1922- ). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette; analog 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 micro cassette.

**Abstract:**

Leonard Augustin served in World War II as a Corporal draftsman and as a statistical clerk for the US Air Force in the China-Burma-India Theater between 1943 and 1945. Born in 1922 in Port Washington, Wisconsin, Augustin attended Port High School and then worked at the Modern Equipment Company as a draftsman until he enlisted in the Air Force in 1943. After enlisting, Augustin mentions traveling to Chicago to receive his uniform and then moving on to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi for six months. He then was transferred to an air base in Florida for about a year where he made layout drawings of the air field for incoming pilots. Augustin discusses the reasons behind why he wasn't deployed overseas to the war front and his desire to travel during his service. As one of five brothers, he was only allowed to deploy overseas once one of the three brothers already deployed returned home to the United States. Augustin's eldest brother returned home from Africa and Leonard was deployed to India in 1945, where he helped to destroy old planes for the Indian government. While there, Augustin describes discovering that he could type and his duties as the statistical clerk. During his time in India, he traveled to Calcutta and the Taj Mahal. When the war ended, he returned home and began working for the Modern Equipment Company again and he also attended MSOE [Milwaukee School of Engineering]. Augustin spent forty five years working for Modern Equipment. During the interview, the narrator also touches upon the letter writing and shipping of goods cycle his family, including his other deployed brothers, engaged in during the war to communicate.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Leonard Augustin, born in 1922 at Elm Grove in Port Washington, Wisconsin, graduated from Port High School and went on to work as a draftsman for the Modern Equipment Company until enlisting in the US Air Force in 1943. After enlistment, Augustin went to Chicago to receive his uniforms and then progressed to Keesler Air Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. From Biloxi, he went on to work at an Air Base in Florida for a year, where he drew air field layouts for pilots new to the air base. After a year of service in Florida, Augustin was finally deployed to India to help dispose of old air craft for the Indian government. While in India, his ability to type became apparent, and he became a statistical clerk. When the war ended and he returned home to Port Washington, Augustin worked for Modern Equipment and attended MSOE [Milwaukee School of Engineering]. After working for Modern Equipment for forty-five years, Augustin retired.

Interviewed by Mark Jaeger, 2003.  
Transcribed by Kylee Sekosky, 2014.  
Edited and Abstracted by Kylee Sekosky, 2014.

## **Interview Transcript:**

Jaeger: I'm talking to Leonard Augustin of Port Washington. Ah, Leonard can you tell me a little bit about your background? How you grew up and your family life?

Augustin: Family life was, well, like anybody back in the 1920s.

Jaeger: How old are you?

Augustin: How old am I? Now I'm eighty –fuck it—gonna be eighty-one in a little while.

Jaeger: Okay. Where did you grow up?

Augustin: I was born at Elm Grove and grew up in, uh, I said, Port Washington.

Jaeger: Oh, okay.

Augustin: Went to school here and graduated from the, what's called "Port High," and I went into service in 1943.

Jaeger: What branch?

Augustin: Air Force.

Jaeger: Okay.

Augustin: Ground.

Jaeger: What was your specialty?

Augustin: Well, I was a, what's called a draftsman at a local company here of what's called "Modern Equipment." Well, when I went in, we went down to Chicago, where we were given our uniforms and so on and so forth and from there I went to basic training down in Keesler Air Force Base down in Biloxi, Mississippi. I was there for about six months and then was transferred over to an air base in Florida. And I was there for about a year. And then—

Jaeger: What were you doing at that time? Were you still doing drafting through the Air Force?

Augustin: Drafting, yeah.

Jaeger: Okay. It woulda been forty-five at that time, 1945?

Augustin: Uh—forty four, I think, last part of August or somethin' like that of forty four—or forty five, yeah, that's better.

Jaeger: Okay. What kind of things were you drafting?

Augustin: Pardon?

Jaeger: What were you drafting? What were you making drawings of?

Augustin: Oh, things that they wanted at the base, like a layout of the base for the new pilots coming in so that they would know where everything is.

Jaeger: Oh, okay, so the mapping, that sort of thing?

Augustin: Yeah.

Jaeger: Okay.

Augustin: Sort of a map of the place, and while I was there, I came up for a shipment overseas I think three or four times, and I was scrubbed. I was scrubbed, because there was five of us in service and three of 'em were overseas, one in Africa and two wound up in the Battle of the Bulge. Well, finally my oldest brother, the one that was in Africa and subsequently went into Italy, he came home. So, I was shipped overseas to India.

Jaeger: So, you had three other brothers who were all in the service at the same time? Is that right?

Augustin: I had four brothers.

Jaeger: Okay and they were all—

Augustin: Three overseas, one stateside, and myself.

Jaeger: Okay and they didn't want entire families to be overseas? Is that the idea?

Augustin: They only let three out of a family serve. Remember the book about the, what's it called, Sullivans?

Jaeger: Oh, yeah! Yeah!

Augustin: And that Navy ship?

Jaeger: Right!

Augustin: It was five of 'em that got lost—

Jaeger: Oh, that's right!

Augustin: And that's because they all went down.

Jaeger: Or that movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, where the whole family was in battle at the same time? Yeah.

Augustin: So, therefore, that's why I was scrubbed.

Jaeger: So when your brother was returned stateside, then you were shipped to India? Is that—?

Augustin: Yeah.

Jaeger: Okay. And what did you do in India?

Augustin: India—when I first got there, we were demolishing the old planes for the—I don't know, for the government there, and I was on that for a while, and then I suddenly found out I knew how to type, so I got moved into headquarters.

Jaeger: [Laughs] and what rank were you at this time?

Augustin: Pardon?

Jaeger: What rank were you at that time?

Augustin: A corporal.

Jaeger: Okay.

Augustin: And uh—

Jaeger: What did you do in headquarters?

Augustin: In headquarters, I was a statistical clerk in the office there.

Jaeger: Okay.

Augustin: Which was a collection point for reports that had to go out.

Jaeger: Were you disappointed that you had those kinds of assignments? Were you kinda itching to go to battle, or were you happy to be out of harm's way [laughs]?

Augustin: It really didn't matter in that way. When I was [coughs], when I was stateside, I just wanted to get someplace where the living conditions and so forth, if possible, would be an extreme opposite of what I was accustomed to, which I found out there.

[Both laugh]

Jaeger: I would say. So you wanted to experience a different kind of life than you had in Port Washington [laughs]?

Augustin: Yeah, so that you'd have, you know, in which case something to talk about, something to see.

Jaeger: Well, yeah!

Augustin: You see this stuff in the—in that magazine, *National Geographic*.

Jaeger: Mm-hm.

Augustin: And I seen some of the things.

Jaeger: And did that assignment in India meet that requirement [laughs]?

Augustin: Oh yeah, I got around a little bit in India there. Well, we were stationed about a hundred miles north-west of Calcutta, and so I got down into Calcutta a couple times, and also took a flight up to the Taj Mahal.

Jaeger: Oh really? What did you think of that?

Augustin: Something different. [Both laugh] I got a couple pictures, but I didn't get those either.

Jaeger: Were you impressed? Or were you disappointed?

Augustin: Impressed, because you know India basically is poor—

Jaeger: Uh-huh.

Augustin: —so where the financial effort toward it or just plain physical effort came from, you're surprised. I know when I first got over in India I meet some people or some GIs that were in parts of China [??] with the B29s, and they said when they started up the bulldozers the Chinese workers that were there hit the dirt [both laugh]. They was wondering what in the world was coming off—

Jaeger: So they weren't used to that kind of heavy equipment thing?

Augustin: Not a CAT [probably Caterpillar machinery] that's so darn big.

Jaeger: How long were you in India?

Augustin: I was in India approximately nine months, as far as I know.

Jaeger: Was there fighting going on in India at the time or was this more of an occupation area or—

Augustin: This was a field where they started their, what's called, bomb runs across the hump—

Jaeger: Oh, okay. So were they like a staging area? Is that right?

Augustin: Sorta, yeah, and it was really a small field you know compared to say MacDill [Air Force base] in Florida or something like that.

Jaeger: And then from India where did you go?

Augustin: Home.



Jaeger: Oh you were done then? [Laughs] You had served your overseas stint, and—

Augustin: Yeah, and—

Jaeger: You were out of service then?

Augustin: Yeah.

Jaeger: Okay, and did you leave as a corporal then? Was that your final commission?

Augustin: Yeah. I could have been more perhaps. I just didn't.

Jaeger: Was there a reason that you wanted to get out? That you had served your purpose?

Augustin: No, I really wasn't interested in the military as a full time thing.

Jaeger: What did you do when you came home then? Did you go back to work for Modern Equipment?

Augustin: Yeah. Went back, finished up and after I was there for quite a while then I went back to school for a while, to MSOE [Milwaukee School of Engineering] and finished up at Modern after forty-five years of work there, [laughs] which is unheard of now.

Jaeger: No kidding! Not anymore they wouldn't do that [laughs].

Augustin: In fact, if you are someplace ten years, it's overdue.

Jaeger: You're right! Now you mentioned you had four brothers who were in the service at the same time. What branches were they in?

Augustin: Uh, my oldest brother was in Africa. I don't know what his occupation was there.

Jaeger: Well, was he with the Air Force or the Army or—?

Augustin: Yeah, the Air Force but he served—

Jaeger: Oh, 'cause it was the same thing right, at that time, the Army Air Corps?

Augustin: Yeah, and uh, the other two were—one was in the 3rd Armored [3rd Armored Division] and the other one was in the—

Jaeger: That was in the Army, right?

Augustin: Yeah—was in the, what's called, Field Artillery, and the one stateside, well, he got in after I did, for quite a while. So, he was in basic training with the Marines at Camp Lejeune [North Carolina], and he finished out his stint too because the war ended. So, he was in there, I don't know for how long, and then all of us were home again.

Jaeger: What were your parents like while you and your brothers were fighting? What were their feelings during the war?

Augustin: Well, they were very concerned because of the three of 'em in the actually fighting in the—well, North Africa and the one brother in the 3rd Armored and the Field Artillery. They got in on the Battle of the Bulge—

Jaeger: Yeah!

Augustin: So—

Jaeger: Yeah, there was good reason to be concerned [laughs].

Augustin: —especially when you hear of one of your brothers going in to town, and it seemed like the 88s [German 88mm artillery guns] were following them.

Jaeger: Oh yeah, yeah! Were any of them wounded or killed?

Augustin: No, all of us came home, not even wounded as far as I know, unless they just had a nick or something, but otherwise—

Jaeger: Well that's a miraculous record, wasn't it?

Augustin: We were very lucky. I think somebody was looking after us.

Jaeger: What did you get out of your time in the military? What did you learn about yourself or about life?

Augustin: I knew I wanted to stay in the field I was in, which was drafting and engineering, but otherwise, what I got out of service is an—an assignment overseas where I could see things different than back home here.

Jaeger: Was there a sense of patriotism too? Like you owed it to your country somehow?

Augustin: No, I really didn't think of that. I just wanted to get in 'cause everybody else was basically, and—[long pause] I did think though that Hitler shoulda been stopped sooner.

Jaeger: Was there any pressure from your brothers to follow their lead?

Augustin: To join the service? No.

Jaeger: Really?

Augustin: No, because I volunteered about a year before they actually called me up, but I don't know what the deal was at that time, why it was that long, but from the time I volunteered until they called me up was about a year.

Jaeger: I bet somebody picked the process that—

Augustin: Possibly that.

Jaeger: So when you left, was the war over, or winding down at least, right?

Augustin: When I left?

Jaeger: When you left the service, yeah.

Augustin: Oh when I left the service, yeah, it was basically over, because on the boat after we got out of New York City going across, Hitler gave up, so Germany surrendered. That was in August, I think. We went out and went across—through the Suez Canal and up into India there. So I was overseas when the Japanese gave up, also.

Jaeger: And what was your feeling or the sentiment around you when VJ-Day [Victory over Japan Day] came?

Augustin: It was good. [Jaeger laughs] We were glad 'cause at least all the friends you were with at that time were interested also in getting home, back to our normal way of life again.

Jaeger: So did you ever have to fire a weapon in battle? I'm sure you did in training but—

Augustin: No, not in any battle.

Jaeger: Uh-huh, and are you just as happy you didn't have to?

Augustin: I guess so. Although, at the time I was down at Florida, if I wouldn't have had three brothers overseas, I would have been over there, I would say, sometime in forty-four. So—

Jaeger: Just wasn't meant to be I guess, right?

Augustin: I guess not [both laugh].

Jaeger: And that's hard to complain about, isn't it?

Augustin: Yeah, that's right.

Jaeger: Do you look back now and think about those times? How America might be—have been different then then now?

Augustin: Not necessarily. I'm too busy with other things [laughs].

Jaeger: So you're not overly—you don't watch the developments in Iraq very closely, or anything?

Augustin: Oh, yeah, I follow them.

Jaeger: You do.

Augustin: Yeah.

Jaeger: So you're kind of a military buff then? You're interested in that?

Augustin: Sort of.

Jaeger: 'Cause I love Military history. Do you like war movies and books and things like that? Most veterans are, I think so [laughs]. What is you—do you have a philosophy about war? What are your feelings about war?

Augustin: If you put it in the book, Uncle ["Uncle Sam"] might start calling [both laugh].

Jaeger: You'd rather not be quoted then is that it?

Augustin: Yeah, somebody might take offense.

Jaeger: Yeah, well and that's not the nature of this book to be controversial, so, yeah, yeah.

Augustin: If the wrong people get it—

Jaeger: Yeah, yeah, of course. The right people will be reading those books. I don't think—[both laugh].

Augustin: There are a lot of people that I mean—I don't put no politics.

Jaeger: Okay, sure, sure. When you think back to that time, was it exciting? Was it scary? Was it just part of growing up?

Augustin: It was a little exciting. You learned a few things, initially, especially in basic. You know, when they said, "Sit," they meant right now, not when you got around to it. So, on those deals, I used to just pull my feet up and [smack] right down. So, you'd be down in about one or two seconds.

Jaeger: So you were very good at sitting [laughs].

Augustin: Well, I was in good physical shape at that time.

Jaeger: Can you go over the names of your brothers? Let's go from oldest to youngest.

Augustin: Oldest was Joseph, then Fred, and then Norbert, and the other one that was in service was the younger one, Ruepen.

Jaeger: R-U-E-P-E-N?

Augustin: Yeah.

Jaeger: And where did you fit in that group?

Augustin: In—after Norbert.

Jaeger: Okay, so you were the fourth oldest or second youngest.

Augustin: Well yeah, there was eight of ‘em in our—

Jaeger: Oh, there were girls too?

Augustin: —Yeah.

Jaeger: Oh, okay. How did the sisters all feel about the boys being—

Augustin: Oh, I think they had somethin’ to talk about, and they got letters from us of course, and so, the people back home had a running thing of our experiences and so on.

Jaeger: Were you good at writing letters to your family back home?

Augustin: In the service, I was.

Jaeger: Yeah [laughs]. Well that’s when it counts. When they’re afraid [both laugh].

Augustin: Oh yeah, well in service you wrote, I would say, an average of at least two letters a week back home. So it wasn’t necessarily to the same person all the time.

Jaeger: ‘Cause they would all share them anyway, right?

Augustin: And of course, then letters to your brothers, wherever they were.

Jaeger: Oh, you could have things forwarded to them wherever they were?

Augustin: Yeah, A.P.O.’s.

Jaeger: Oh, okay.

Augustin: Army Post Office.

Jaeger: Did you write to them too? Did everyone try to keep track of each other?

Augustin: Oh, sure, and being in the States, I could send them stuff that they couldn't get over there.

Jaeger: Oh, right. Well you were a very valued brother; I'm sure [laughs], like the quartermaster.

Augustin: They got a box of cigars. I got three of 'em, one for each brother that was overseas, so that sorta stuff—

Jaeger: Well, yeah! What were your mom's and dad's names?

Augustin: George and Anna.

Jaeger: And were they both alive during the war?

Augustin: Sure. Yeah, he died when he was seventy-one, and she died at ninety-one. So, I think I got her genes.

Jaeger: [laughs] Yeah, I think so. Well, if you had to choose those sound like a better one to pick. Is there anything else that you want to talk about that you can remember from those days?

Augustin: No—what do you mean? Like for instance?

Jaeger: Well, like any of your war recollections or coming home? What life was like when you came back home? Were you treated like a hero when you came back home?

Augustin: No, because there was so many of 'em coming home, everybody wanted to get there and—but there wasn't that, which there should have been for the uh, Vietnams [veterans], since they had the big ticker parade for the initial people coming home from Europe, and they should of had it for that too.

Jaeger: Yeah, yeah. People were probably just tired of war by that time right? "I'll get back to life."

Augustin: Yeah, well you see so much crap in the paper, you know, some good and some bad. It's like right now with the stock.

Jaeger: Yeah, right.

Augustin: The stock market. Chief execs want a hundred and eighteen million as back pay, etcetera, and the little guys workin' for maybe a hundred dollars a week.

Jaeger: Yeah, now where's the equity there right? [Laughs] Or the justice? Yeah, you're right. I think that's the thing that we like to have these glorified, romantic images in our mind of how great it was to fight, but a lot of times war was just drudgery, just like going to the factory and coming back to life afterwards.

Augustin: Well, basically the majority of 'em had it better than—well, not the majority. The majority that were in the war, did all of the heavy fighting in the mud and so forth like over in Europe. Otherwise, I mean, I don't know anything about Africa. My brother was there, but he didn't say much.

Jaeger: So you didn't come back and compare stories so much?

Augustin: No, because they, the ones that were in the fighting, really don't talk about it.

Jaeger: Mm-hm.

Augustin: Why not? I think, well, first of all, people back home don't know what it's like to be in service, and they have no idea.

Jaeger: And maybe they wanted just to put it behind them too, right?

Augustin: Oh, that could be.

Jaeger: I think, I think you've given me plenty [laughs].

Augustin: Pardon?

Jaeger: [Laughs] I think you've given me plenty. Um—Yeah, I think so—very good. Thank you for your time. I'm not sure when the book is coming out. I think she said she had like, a hundred and twenty interviews.

Augustin: You want to turn that off?

Jaeger: Oh, sure. That's a good idea.



**[End of Interview]**