

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Dr. EUGENE E. ECKSTAM
USN Surgeon, European and Pacific Theaters, World War II
1994

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Eckstam, Eugene E., (1918-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (162 min.), analog, 1 7/8ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (162 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono

ABSTRACT

Eckstam, a Madison, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service as a Senior Medical Officer aboard Landing Ship Tank (LST) 507 during Operation Tiger, service on LST 391 during the Invasion of Normandy, and action in the Pacific theater. Eckstam speaks of his Military medical training, examining new recruits at Great Lakes Naval Training Station (Illinois), and participation in a seasickness treatment study. Eckstam relates his experiences during Operation Tiger including his actions once LST 507 was torpedoed and sunk, use of his life belt, and 3-hour wait to be rescued. He also comments on the secret nature of Operation Tiger, warnings to keep it silent, and his later research attempting to discover exactly what happened. Eckstam refers to D-Day and the reactions of officers aboard LST 391 communicating with those on Utah Beach, and his treatment of casualties on D-Day+5. He speaks to the difficulties encountered by medical staff such as lack of penicillin, inability to sterilize equipment and obtain supplies, care of captured Germans and Japanese, disposal of morphine, and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. Eckstam tells of his return to the United States on leave and feelings that people in the United States did not appreciate or sacrifice enough toward the war effort. He mentions being stationed at Panay (Philippines), Army and Navy relations, the black market, the invasion of Mindanao (Philippines), prostitution, the use of the native population for laundry and cleaning services, and the practice of taking "emergency wives." Also touched upon are the mental problems faced by the Army and Navy while stationed at isolated island bases and the reaction of his base to the Japanese surrender. Eckstam relates several antidotal stories of service in the Pacific, information about his return to Madison, use of the GI Bill, difficulty adjusting to civilian life, and nightmares about his World War II service. He touches upon experience with the American Legion and withdrawal from it because it lacked interaction with other officers, his return to Europe for the fiftieth anniversary of Operation Tiger and organizing reunions for its survivors.

Biographical Sketch

Eckstam (b. December 16, 1918) volunteered for active duty with the Navy in 1942. He served as a Medical Service Officer, achieved the rank of Lieutenant, and was discharged from service in 1946.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1997.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Today's date is the 10th of October 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview with Dr. Eugene E. Eckstam, Medical Corps, US Naval Reserve in World War II.

Mark: Good morning, Dr. Eckstam. How are you today?

Eckstam: Good.

Mark: Perhaps you could start off by telling me where you were born and where you were raised and a little bit about your upbringing.

Eckstam: I was born in Memphis, TN in December of 1918 and after I was a month old, Dad came up to Olson and Verhusen on the square as a tailor, cutter and designer, so I was raised in Madison. Went to Madison public schools, West High, the University of Wisconsin premed and Medical School.

Mark: When did you finish your medical?

Eckstam: I got my MD in March of 1943 in the "Speed Up Program" during the war.

Mark: What made you decide to go into the field of medicine?

Eckstam: I originally wanted to go into the field of dentistry because I had a developmental abnormality--underdevelopment of the center portion of the face. So I saw a dentist and he brought out the upper jaw and retreated the lower jaw so I have a fairly normal face as a result and I wanted to help other people. But then I got in Comparative Anatomy and I found out the entire body was much more interesting than the head and neck, so here I am.

Mark: What is your specialty?

Eckstam: General Surgery. Chest, vascular, abdominal, you name it I did it.

Mark: At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor you were in Medical School already. Do you remember hearing the news about Pearl Harbor and what you thought and felt at the time?

Eckstam: Very well. I was studying for Medical School and I was taking a break on a Sunday afternoon and I went down to watch Dad work on some clothes that he was making for a customer and the news came on the radio. So that threw out the studying for the rest of the afternoon. But I remember that day very clearly.

- Mark: Did you think holy cow I'm going to end up in the war? Did you see any implications for yourself personally?
- Eckstam: Well, I knew that I had to go into service. I was totally healthy otherwise. They were demanding a lot of doctors to go into the service so within a week I requested application papers for the Navy, because I wanted a nice bed and food.
- Mark: Why the Navy? There were plenty of services to choose from.
- Eckstam: Living conditions, and all of the water. I was raised on the lakes in Madison and I knew how to run a boat before I could run a wagon.
- Mark: It's my understanding that the Navy was viewed as a little bit more elite than the Army was. Is that?
- Eckstam: I just wanted to be around the water and a nice bunk and nice food.
- Mark: At the time of Pearl Harbor how far were you into your medical training? First year med second year--what I'm eventually getting at is how did the war effect your degree program?
- Eckstam: I was between the sophomore and junior years of Medical School and the senior year was sped up to be a nine month year rather than a full year and then internship was sped up to nine months instead of a full year. So, I completed internship six months early and then went into service.
- Mark: I'm interested in how the war changed life on campus here. Did you notice more uniforms around campus?
- Eckstam: Oh, there were a lot of--there had always been fellows in the ROTC, the Army ROTC and a few in the Navy ROTC, not too many. There was a gradual increase in the number of all kinds of uniforms on campus during this period of time. Every year there were more.
- Mark: So you finished your degree and went right into the Navy.
- Eckstam: Yes. I signed up for my commission right after Pearl Harbor and I got it in March of 1942 and therefore my number was lower than a lot of other medical officers going into service later on when the draft pulled them in when they realized that there was no other alternative. So, I didn't know it at the time but I wound up being Senior Medical Officer wherever I went. So I was

constantly displacing other officers that had been in charge of things and here this new punk comes in takes their jeep away and their privileges.

Mark: In terms of military history there is the stereotypical infantry man who goes to boot camp, gets his head shaved and gets yelled at and kicked in the rear end a couple of times. I can't imagine that was the case for a medical doctor. Perhaps you can describe your entry to military service, what sort of training you had, what sort of preparation you had for military life. Trace the steps of how you processed into the military.

Eckstam: As soon as I got my commission, I was requested to study the manual of the Medical Department and I had to write examinations on that. That continued until I went into service and then continued after service until I fully completed it. So I read the entire manual of the Medical Department. That was about the only training before I reported for active duty. There wasn't any drills or boot camps or anything like that.

Mark: Where did you learn basic military courtesy, all the saluting and

Eckstam: That was partly in the Medical Manual and something tells me I started studying Navy regulations. I'm not sure whether I started that beforehand, as a probationary officer in school or whether I started it later, but I read the entire manual of Navy Regulations and answered quizzes on that. I think I had to do that also and I think that's where I learned protocol. That defines some of my actions during the disaster when the ship was sinking.

Mark: So your first duty station was at Great Lakes?

Eckstam: Great Lakes, IL.

Mark: Your duties were composed of...?

Eckstam: I reported in January of 1944 and I followed all the other brand new doctors reporting for duty and wound up mistakenly at the hospital. I didn't realize that there was a separate Naval Base side by side. The next morning I reported over there and they promised me all my papers would be transferred, all were except the insurance so I had no life insurance when we got sunk. Our duty at Mainside was examining new recruits. 1600 or 1700 a day.

Mark: You did that for how long?

Eckstam: One week. Then we were detached and sent to Lido Beach, Long Island.

- Mark: I'm interested in the processing of the new recruits. In that one week that you did that, how would you characterize the physical and mental health of the Navy recruits.
- Eckstam: I think they were basically very excellent. We never saw a complete recruit; it was like an automobile assembly line. Recruits would come in on the main floor, take all their clothes off and put them in a box and attach a shipping label home and then they'd carry a little bag with their personal belongings in that little ditty bag and parade around totally nude through this long chain of doctors and each one would do one thing; one would do a right ear, another would do a left ear, another would do the heart, another would do the lungs, another hernia, another hemorrhoids, another range of motion, and then there was a psychiatrist who answered a few questions and we bounced around every day and the kids were all scared coming through the line--they didn't know what was going to happen. They were just terrified, but they were all pretty healthy.
- Mark: Were there many who were disqualified for service in the Navy? Did it happen a lot?
- Eckstam: I don't know what happened at the end of the line. All we did was one part. I did 1600 right ears one day. I don't know what happened to them. I don't know what the left ear looked like.
- Mark: So, after only a week you were told you were going overseas, right? You went to Long Island first.
- Eckstam: Lido Beach, Long Island. There was a delay in reporting because they were forming medical units in Long Island to be on amphibious craft, on LSTs and they would pair up two doctors and 40-hospital corpsmen at Lido Beach. This was called a Foxy 29 unit for duty on amphibious warfare overseas. When these units were formed periodically they would leave and get on an LST and go across the ocean. Our training there was basically what we learned on internship, how to treat first aide wounds in the emergency room and we were told to pack them open and never to close them to avoid contamination. We did quite a bit on chemical warfare, how to treat chemical warfare injuries and wounds. We had to go into a building in which tear gas was released, take our mask off, open our eyes at the instructor before he'd let us out. So that was hard on some people, but we got a good taste of chemical warfare, what we had to do for it during the short time that we were there.
- Mark: So, was this your first real experience with what sort of battlefield wounds you would be treating?

Eckstam: There were lacerations of all sizes including big ones, sucking chest wounds and belly wounds. We were just basically to clean them out and pack them and bandage them up. That's about all you could do anyway. Then ship them back.

Mark: So you spent how long at Lido Beach?

Eckstam: I shipped out about March 4, so I was there only about five weeks.

Mark: I'm interested in this trip to Halifax, the seasickness.

Eckstam: The ship went to Boston and then somebody from one of the universities there came on board and set up a double-blind study to study seasick pills and they were given to almost everybody on board the ship and we didn't know what they were and the 40 corpsmen and the two doctors had to keep track of all the symptoms of all these guys. They kept parading through. There were eight hours so we could keep track of how good they were. By the time we got to Halifax a day and a half later, the sea was fairly calm so it wasn't really a very good test. We turned it in and then we later got the results of that study.

Mark: What was the result of that study?

Eckstam: It turned out the sugar pill worked the best in a mild sea. It turned out that scopolamine, which is now in the form of an ear patch, was very close to the sugar pill, which may be why it is so popular and it does work. Then Dramamine came in a very, very poor third. The reason for that probably is because the medicine itself makes you feel woozy, and you can confuse that with seasickness. Scopolamine would probably be the better drug.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe your voyage across the ocean. As a medical doctor for example, what sort of quarters did you have and that sort of thing.

Eckstam: Officers were in the officers' country of course, and I was assigned an upper bunk that had a regular innerspring mattress. A very nice sleeping quarters. A very tiny room about 8 feet square. The living quarters were very adequate. The officers' mess room, which was a combination of eating, lounging and first aide station was in that general area also. The food was very good on the ship, the same as the enlisted personnel ate. It was all very good.

Mark: Your trip took how long over?

Eckstam: I think it took about 3 weeks over approximately. The 80-ship convoy was going only about 7-8 knots.

Mark: Did you worry about the wolf pack submarine?

Eckstam: Yes. Instead of doing nothing on the way over--it was totally boring, I volunteered and so did a lot of the corpsmen to do security duty onboard ship. Security duty meant being on four hours and off four hours and making total rounds of the ship every hour. Every single compartment that you could walk through and some that you almost couldn't to make sure that everything was secure, nothing was loose and rolling around and one night there were some supplies on the top deck that were rolling around so we had to break out a detail and secure them again. But on the nicer nights we'd stand on the railing and just look at the sea and the bright phosphorus glittering in the water from all the ships and wondering why we appeared so bright. I could just see submarines everywhere and their periscopes. Your mind can do fantastic things to you. I thought, why this is so stupid, here there's a couple of hundred guys on the ship and if a torpedo hits it what are we doing--nothing. It's so stupid to be going off to war like this. That remained my thought.

Mark: Where did you land, was it Liverpool?

Eckstam: No, the first spot was near Glasgow, Scotland up in Rosneath and we picked up four small boats, those are those little boats that hang up on the davits, they look like life boats but they will carry 30 fully loaded troops into the beach or one jeep. They can also evacuate casualties from shore as well. That was our first taste of what he called limey ale and it was warm and it wasn't very good but we tasted it. The American beer that they had was all sold out in about ten minutes so they didn't have much.

Then we went down to Milford Haven and got rid of our trucks, we had carried over about 22 large trucks and I remember sitting in a pub there with some of the coal miners that were in that area there. One guy was saying that he took a bath every night when he got home and his misses would put a big wooden tub in the middle of the kitchen and fill it with boiling water and then enough cold water to be right. He just sat right in the middle of the kitchen taking his daily bath when he got out of the coal mine--my how primitive. We were right back 600 years ago. That was without walking down Milford Haven and all these streets that we had to pinch ourselves to make sure we weren't in a historical movie.

Mark: Did you get to see many of the British people and the British countryside and as an American what were your impressions?

Eckstam: We, as an officer of course, you're off duty all the time. I had no duties at this time, there were no casualties coming in so, medical officers, we just got off the ship the first time and just saw the sights all day whenever we could. We talked to quite a few people. The people in the remote areas were very, very nice. They were glad to see us. In the more populated areas, especially in southern England, they were so overrun with the GIs that I'm not so sure that we were welcome anymore. Too many of us were there. In Milford Haven

where we tied up for a while waiting for a spot at the oil docks across the Channel at Pembroke, we went ashore and heard some music in the distance. As we got closer we were looking forward to some good English music and it turned out to be Deep In The Heart of Texas, which was sort of a jolt.

Mark: Was it played by Americans?

Eckstam: No, in a British house someplace. They had the radio going listening to American music. This was unreal. Then we left some oil at Pembroke docks and while we were pumping out oil, a couple of us went and explored Pembroke Castle, which was Henry XII's castle where Henry VIII was born. That was an interesting thing.

Mark: That was in Wales, right?

Eckstam: Yeah. We revisited that 5 years ago, the 45th anniversary. We took pictures again. Didn't have any pictures from before because they all went down with the ship, but I remembered what it looked like and it was the same castle that I'd seen before.

Mark: So in the days leading up to the invasion where were you stationed and what sort of preparations were you making? Did you know that the big invasion was--

Eckstam: We were on the ship all the time. That was our assignment. Being in the Navy, your base was the ship. We knew from training in Lido Beach, Long Island, we learned all about the LST; its function of how troops and equipment would go into an invasion zone by using small boats and large boats of variable sizes and then our function was to take care of the casualties as they were brought out to the LST or as they were loaded if the LST happened to be on the beach and then take care of them until they got back to England and turn them over to the hospitals there. That was part of Lido Beach so we had absolutely no duties all the time that we were in southern England and there was no training onboard ship at all for anything except the general quarters drills. We were assigned shortly before our practice invasion of Exercise Tiger to a chemical warfare training session again, along with other war wounds this was much more intense than we had at Lido Beach and it was a solid week. Officers and corpsmen attended together. That was at a little town called Fowey. The barracks were at the top of a hill. We were staying in old apartments halfway down the hill with a cold fire and sleeping on cots and freezing every night. I won't forget that and I can see that room because I had to get up every hour and put more wood on the fire. We went back this year and I think I saw the apartment that we stayed in although I'm not really sure.

Mark: I suppose we're up to Exercise Tiger now. Was that the first amphibious practice that you were involved in? Was this the first practice run?

Eckstam: Yes. We had just seen films on actual invasions, just black and whites of course at that time. We weren't told much about anything. There's a big to-do about the life belts that we were wearing. The regular Navy wore the kapok jackets but all the Army and the Medical Department were issued these inflatable belts around your waist and they overlapped and snapped shut. The only thing we were told was to unsnap them and then squeeze the two handles to open the carbon dioxide cartridges and inflate the belt. We were not told, as far as I can recall to put it under our armpits before we blew it up and that later on caused a lot of mortalities because soldiers with their backpacks on were top-heavy. There wasn't any room for that kind of a life belt around their chest anyway with the pack on and so they had to wear their belt around their waist. So, they were upside down in the water, which accounted for an awful lot of casualties then. We had no training on board ship for abandoning ship or anything else like this. Most of the other officers had only been in the Navy a few months longer than we had.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe the goals of Operation Tiger. What were you told you were doing when you were heading out?

Eckstam: We loaded at Brixham. We knew that we were to come in the morning after the initial invasion. We loaded on the 25th of April and we just rested at anchor for a while and as we set sail, the orders were opened and then being an officer, I was privy to some of the information that the enlisted personnel were not and I knew that we were going on a practice invasion and I knew that the 27th would be the day that the beaches were being hit and that we would hit them the following morning and that our role was to take onboard simulated casualties. As we sailed we also had heard that on the 27th the invasion had already started by the time we sailed (the practice invasion). We had already heard that in a previous exercise, I don't know whether that was that morning or weeks before that there had been casualties on the beach because the destroyers and battleships did not stop firing when the small boats hit the beach with boatloads of troops and that there were 100 or 200 troops killed on the beach. That question is still open. I'm still researching that. It could have been on March 10 during Exercise Fox. During Exercise Tiger I have letters on both sides of the fence. Some say they saw some casualties, I can't find anybody who said they saw a lot of them during Tiger on the beach.

Mark: So you were set sail--

Eckstam: We were set sail in Lyme Bay, which is the little hollowed out part of England between Cherbourg and the Isle of Wight, there's a little hollow area there and we were sailing around in Lyme Bay. We joined five ships that came out of Plymouth. Some ships came from Plymouth and they went around that little hook of an island where Star Point was and Slapton Sands was at the south point. That's pretty close to lands end. It's only about another hour out there

by car and then we sailed from Brixham which is just north of that area and we were circling clockwise and around Lyme Bay. We were actually 35 miles away from the beach but we were only 10-12 miles away from the island of Portland, which is right near Weymouth when the E-boats caught up with us. Along the way we'd heard, in addition that there had been beach casualties that one of our destroyer escorts that had an accident and did not join us, so we knew as we sailed that we had only one small fishing trawler essentially as an escort, which didn't make us feel very good. What can you do when you're on a wartime rehearsal? You go and hope for the best.

Mark: So, what happened next?

Eckstam: Well, we hit the sack in the evening and we had general quarters about 1:30 in the morning and we'd had general quarters four or five times a day anyway because of the air raids and we thought oh, just another drill. Submarine alerts were another cause for general quarters and we reported to our station, mine was in the wardroom of the top and nothing was happening. I heard gunfire and I remember saying that somebody better watch out what they're doing or somebody's going to get hurt. What a remark--in hindsight! Then I started to go topside like a crazy fool - I wanted to see what was going on. If I had succeeded in getting out the starboard side of the ship on the deck, I'd have probably blown in the water by the force of the torpedo raising up the ship. We got hit around 2:03 and as it was I was just raised up inside and fell down on my knees. I probably would have fallen overboard had I been on the deck to watch what was going on.

Mark: When the torpedo hit what did you think had happened? Did you have any idea it was--

Eckstam: My first thought was some kind of explosion, like maybe we hit a mine or something. I really didn't know and I don't think it was until quite a few minutes after that that we heard it was a torpedo hit us and that they'd seen a lot of small boats running around so it could have been a German fast boat or a German E-boat, enemy boat. We didn't know for sure until the next day what hit us.

Mark: After the initial explosion what did you do at that point?

Eckstam: I knew that there happened to be a battle lantern and I thought, as the senior medical officer on board I ought to know where all the supplies and lights were to take care of things.

Mark: I was in the Air Force. I'm not familiar with a battle lantern. Perhaps you could tell me what that is.

Eckstam: A battle lantern is a battery-operated lantern and they're about 8 inches square with about a 6-volt battery pack, but double that size. These are stationed throughout the ship in case they lost central power then they'd take these battery operated lanterns off the wall and use them to light your way around the ship. I knew where all the lanterns were from the security detail that I'd done crossing the Atlantic and so I knew there was a lantern right by my right hand and so I turned it on and then everybody else got their lanterns going in the area. I went into the ward room to wait for casualties and they were just minor little things, scratches and stuff, nothing major so I went down below deck just to see if there was anybody hurt down there. I don't know if I'd do that again because if you are on a sinking ship why would you want to go down? Well, I went through all the compartments that people are normally in, I went as far forward on the sides as I could and the sleeping compartments and there weren't any people there dead or alive that I could see and then I opened the door into the tank deck, the hatch, and there was a raging inferno there. The force of the fire just about knocked me back on my heels, so I could hear the guys screaming and hollering in there. [Eckstam is overcome by emotions; interview pauses]

Mark: So you somehow abandoned the ship or what happened next?

Eckstam: Well, after I closed the door to the tank deck to preserve watertight integrity, I think that probably comes from my study of Navy regulations that you had to do that, then I went topside and there was absolutely nothing to do. We just stood around on the port side of the stern of the ship watching that blazing inferno just a few feet away with the trucks blowing up and gasoline in boats going off, 40 millimeter shells, everything exploding, that's the best 4th of July celebration I've ever seen and every other 4th of July celebration is just nothing. They are just a bunch of ladyfingers, crackers or fakes compared to this fireworks demonstration. The ship got so hot that even through our heavy thick military shoes that it was just like walking on bare tar in the hot summertime. You had to leave the ship it was untenable and about the same time the order to abandon ship came. I didn't want to jump in the water so I inflated my life belt, forgot to undo the snaps so I had a hard time breathing and it about squeezed me in two. Then I opened the snaps and climbed down the cargo net and eased into the water which I later found was 44 degrees, very cold, and that was about 2:30 a.m. - 2:35 a.m. I was sitting high and dry. The sea was reasonably calm, almost a flat sea for the ocean. Well, this was in the bay, but this was a large bay. Then the darn life preserver kept sneaking up or I settled down into it causing a bare midriff and I got a very cold midriff as it was exposed. So I had a frightened struggle and pulled my clothes down to the life belt as it came up around my armpits and I got my shirt tucked into my pants again and got my middle warm, that probably saved me because by being totally warm and wearing my wool socks and shoes and being fully dressed for combat in the North Atlantic, I probably had a thermal suit on and I think the guys who lived were probably fully dressed. There were some who

took their shoes off and jackets off and they were going to swim someplace. I don't know where in the world they were going to swim at 2:30 in the morning, you couldn't see anything and I don't think those guys are alive.

Mark: So far as you know, were you alone? Were you conscious of others around you?

Eckstam: Yeah, there were other guys climbing down the net. We could hear guys jumping and hitting the water. I didn't see too many people because it was pretty dark. The moon was sort of behind clouds and I felt something tugging on me and I thought some sailor was hanging on to me. I was swimming hard to begin with to get away from the ship and the suction in case it would sink, because I heard that you would be pulled down with the ship in case it went down quickly. Something started pulling on me and I started hollering, "Get away" and the other doctor on the ship was just off to the side a little ways, I couldn't see him. He said, "Gene, what's the matter?" I said, "Somebody is trying to pull me down--oh, it's my life jacket or I mean my gas mask". He said, "Throw the darn thing away". I said, "I can't, we gotta turn it in".

Mark: I assume that wasn't meant to be humorous

Eckstam: No, it wasn't. But it sure as heck is now! The stupid things that you say in time of disaster. It's just funny.

Mark: So you were adrift how long until--was it daylight before you were rescued?

Eckstam: Well, I thought I heard some voices and then I could see a life raft so I swam up to it. There were about five bodies deep around the life raft, I think they are about 6'x8' maybe and they were about five deep all around. One by one the outer guys would lose consciousness and I'd try to hang on to one and the other guy would lose consciousness and I drifted away with them and I didn't want that so I dropped them. There weren't any lines or ropes to hang onto them so I would swim up to the life raft again and the same thing kept on happening until I finally was able to reach through a couple of fellows and twist a hand around the rope that ran around the life raft. I didn't want to drift away like the other guys had. Then I blacked out and I don't remember much. I remember hearing motors and I remember being terrified that the damn Germans were probably coming back and are going to strafe us because they had a reputation of machine gunning survivors of the water, that scared me more than anything else. I was more terrified at that time than I was with the whole sinking process. I remember having one knee on the ramp of a small boat that picked a lot of people up. Then I remember being halfway up the ladder of the rescue ship and I don't know how I got there. Obviously, I wasn't out totally. I was sort of semiconscious during this time, but there is a blank couple of hours.

Mark: Was it still dark? Did the rescue come fairly quickly so far as you can tell?

Eckstam: I've been working on when I got taken out of the water. I have the logs of the ships, I've talked with the small boat operators of LSE 515, the only American ship to turn around and rescue survivors and that's because Captain John Doyle disobeyed orders of Commander Ben Skahill. The enlisted men all say they had a heck of an argument, which they could hear outside the Captains quarters. The Captain said, "I'm going back" and so he did. The Captain, I've talked with him, he's dead now but he said "No, we agreed to it", but Doyle is such a kind person that I don't think that he would admit that he disobeyed orders and did this. Apparently, he'd been rescued in the Mediterranean after being sunk so he was going to turn back and save us like he had been saved. I wouldn't be here otherwise.

Mark: So,

Eckstam: Time was about roughly 5:00 a.m. to 5:30 a.m. because it was just beginning to get a little light and some LCMs were sailing from Torquay and they arrived at our scene about that time and picked up a couple of dead and the small boat launching and take-up and so forth. All this puts it between 5:30 to 6:00 a.m. So it was at least 3 to 3.5 hours in the water.

Mark: What happened after you got onto the ship?

Eckstam: Went sound asleep in the bunk and never realized there was so much coffee and booze on board a Navy ship. There wasn't supposed to be any booze. But sailors were coming around giving everybody a shot of whiskey out of the bottle and coffee galore and then they asked me if I could help take care of some of the injured which I did. I got up and helped the other doctor cause I just had sore knees and no other injuries, fortunately. I just helped them until we got into port.

Mark: What happened after you got into port?

Eckstam: Got rid of everybody and then we walked off and I remember walking across an open square and going into a red building and there we stripped and took showers and were issued Army fatigue uniforms. We put our insignia on those and walked out the other end into waiting trucks. The Red Cross gave us the uniforms.

Mark: Was there some sort of debriefing afterwards?

Eckstam: No, I have an order that I didn't know I had until a couple of years ago. It was right out of Shapely Court, which was Eisenhower's headquarters, and it was titled as a memorandum and it said "You will not talk with men that are not in your unit about this episode until authorized to do so." So, I think that when

the announcement finally came, August 8th I think it was, as far as I'm concerned that was the time for releasing, but I had totally forgotten that I had received that order. I had enough sense that I wouldn't talk about it anyway--jeopardize the war effort.

- Mark: So, what did you understand had happened? In retrospect, you searched this and found out what happened.
- Eckstam: The rest of that day, the officers were taken--we all went to an Army hospital incidentally, the Sherborn, and Dr. Green, an Army physician examined us and he subsequently wrote something which was published in American Heritage magazine in March of '45 and his work is the basis of the initial publicity on this 20/20 program which was on the 40th anniversary. So, it's his material that was published by 20/20. Then I met Dr. Green in the last several years, I've known him for ten years now, he's in Chicago. We went to Plymouth and there were a bunch of officers there and we talked about the whole thing. The officers had to solve the problem as to what went on. I sat in on all the conversations so that day and the next day I pretty well knew that there were a bunch of E-boats that were out there. How many I didn't know until later and I knew that two ships had been hit with heavy loss of life and I knew that a third one had been hit and got to port, but two sunk. The further details I didn't know until I started doing research on it.
- Mark: There were over seven hundred killed, more than that infantry unit had at Utah beach. I was doing a little bit of research
- Eckstam: Utah lost around two hundred on the day of the invasion, D-Day, and we lost 639. There are other figures but I can't support those.
- Mark: What happened to you after this?
- Eckstam: We were survivors in Plymouth wandering around the town of Plymouth, which was almost completely leveled. There were hardly any recognizable government buildings at all. Just rubble. The V-bombs and all these other things kept coming over in German air raids, we kept on hitting the slit trenches all night every night and we wandered around and constantly got picked up by the Air Patrol and by the Military Police for being officers out of uniform. We weren't supposed to be there with fatigues with officers insignia on and finally the Army Commander in the area gave us a piece of paper to carry which allowed us to not be arrested every day or a couple of times a day. We visited all the pubs and toured around the area and really enjoyed life while we were there trying to recover our noise consciousness. One of the things that we did which sounds rather cruel but I think it helped, the Quonset huts were in a compound that had a lot of stones that were about an inch to two inches in diameter. The guys would come back from a hike or something like this they would throw a handful of stones on top of this tin roof Quonset

hut and the guys inside would jump and dive under the table, but that was shock therapy and by the end of three or four weeks, we weren't scared of noise anymore, so I think that helped desensitize us.

Mark: So when the actual D-Day invasion came were you still in England at the time?

Eckstam: Yeah. We were about a week ahead of time. We were reassigned to LST 391. The first one was 507. There were 20 corpsman on that and one doctor. We had part of 5th Ranger headquarters on board which we had loaded at Falmouth.

Mark: So you still participated in the D-Day activities then.

Eckstam: Right. Also, they were scheduled for Omaha, Point Du Hoc, where they had trouble, and again, we were supposed to land H+24 hours the next morning just like the practice invasion.

Mark: Is that what happened?

Eckstam: We couldn't get rid of them because the Rangers couldn't get inland. They had marked that position as everybody knows from the publicity of D-Day and they didn't establish a satisfactory beach head for--oh, the colonels--to go in because we had nothing but colonels and Lt. Colonels on board. There was a map in the wardroom and it was just like watching the war today on television. They had just a chart there and all the troop movements were charted on a minute-by-minute basis, 24 hours a day.

Mark: Did you get to observe much of this?

Eckstam: Oh yeah, I was standing right in the wardroom watching the chart all the time.

Mark: Because Omaha was a tough beach. Do you have any comments on the scuttlebutt; I guess that's a Navy term, among the officers as invasion was going on and as it was not going exactly as they had planned.

Eckstam: No. They knew exactly where all the units were on shore from radio communications, when things weren't going well at all, you knew well in advance and they would be pushed back. They were very discouraged about this whole thing and they didn't think it was safe to leave the ship until D+5. Five full days after the start of the invasion. They were supposed to leave at D+1. So they were four days behind schedule in leaving the ship and they weren't very happy with this, because they were anxious to get off and get going. When they finally did get off--well in the meantime, we just paraded up and down off the coast about four or five miles. **[END SIDE A, TAPE 1]** We could see the beach but we didn't want to get close because a lot of shells

were coming out from shore and occasionally we would drop anchor and you'd see a shell half-way between you and the beach and if the next one got a little closer we weighed anchor and got the heck out of there because as soon as we sailed the shell hit just where we had been so had we stayed there we'd have got blown up so we kept on dodging shells from shore for five days, day and night and general quarters almost constantly. I slept through two air raids and I don't even remember any of that, and the bell was one foot from my head. Don't remember it at all. So, when we finally got rid of those fellows they brought out one of those rhino ferry. A rhino ferry is a huge pontoon barge with two huge (750-1000 horse) outboard engines on the rear of it. The entire LST (which can hold 22 trucks or 22 tanks) I think we had 22 trucks on board this time and all the jeeps and smaller trucks that were on the tank deck plus the full Army complement of people on this one barge and then they peddled four or five miles into shore and unloaded. Which left us empty.

Mark: That was D+5. After that were there casualties to be treated?

Eckstam: Then we had orders to go over to Utah Beach. We went over to Utah Beach and we anchored only about 1/2 to 3/4 of a mile off shore and ducks were bringing casualties out from an Army dispensary to various LSTs. The LST had the bow doors open and the ramp was in the water and the duck could just roll up the ramp and right into the LST and unload their 12 litter cases and return to shore. I got permission from the Captain to go to shore for one of these trips to see what the Army dispensary was like. I was highly impressed with the efficiency of the Army Medical Corps. All the casualties were in neat rows, they were all as clean as they could be in battle dress, all the dressings were clean, and all the shots for pain and antibiotics were totally up to date. I was totally impressed. Unfortunately the duck went back to the same LST again. So we took care of the casualties, 24 hours around the clock until we got back to England about two days later.

Mark: As a doctor and medical officer, what were the most frequent kind of casualties that you experienced, for example, arms and legs, head and body wounds and was your military training prepare you adequately for your first real combat experience?

Eckstam: You asked what kind of wounds, yes all that you mentioned. There wasn't any part of the body missed. We had 125 casualties including 19 German prisoners and the wounds were all over the place. I think abdominal wounds were probably--a preponderance of them. Why I don't know. With 125 casualties they represent the full spectrum of injuries. The minor ones we were able to leave as is, but the more serious ones that were bleeding through, we had to change the dressings and the other doctor and I realized that one of our corpsman had experience dressing wounds. It turns out years later that he'd been a surgeons assistant for a couple of years before he was in the Navy, so he knew more about changing dressings than the doctors, fresh out of

internship, did. So we assigned him the task of doing all the dressings. So two corpsmen would carry a litter up to the end of the tank deck and put it on a table and Delbert Powell would change the dressings. I met Delbert in Florida a couple of years ago. He's a minister now. The other doctor and I gave the penicillin shots and we only had about half a dozen syringes and needles, which is sort of stupid for an invasion, I don't know how you can sterilize anything, so what we did was to load the 20 cc syringe with penicillin and we had to use one 2" needle and we'd give each soldier 1cc and we'd treat 20 soldiers in a row. If first guy had hepatitis the next 19 probably got it too. They'd boil the syringe and the needle and use it again. The corpsman would bring it to us so Dr. Engartner and I were just going up and down the isles giving penicillin. The corpsmen would be giving the morphine syrettes after being a morphine titrate and they would give those and if the damages were too extensive on some of the guys, they'd give the morphine right through their clothes, an arm or a leg or whatever part of their body they could reach and they figure that its better to calm them down and then we could fix them later on.

Mark: Were there psychological casualties? Did you notice?

Eckstam: We didn't have any violent ones. I think probably the violent ones were handled in another way. We didn't have anybody that was far out, but a lot of them were just scared to death. The Germans we kept on the top deck so they'd be separate from the U.S. casualties.

Mark: What was the logic behind that?

Eckstam: Didn't want them to mix 'cause they didn't know who was going to kill who. So they separated them by the skipper's order. They got taken care of in the same rotation that our guys did. We took care of our guys first and then we gave them their shots and took care of their morphine needs and so forth, and then we'd start back on the GIs again. There was a strict rotation. They got no less care than ours did, but they got it last, not first.

Mark: Did the LST go back to England then?

Eckstam: We went back to England. We had a minor bow door collision when a British ship crossed our bow. It turns out that we were at fault from reading the logs, but at the time the Americans said the British caused the accident, but reading the log it was the American ship that was in the wrong. So they had to go into dry-dock. An LST is no good without bow doors and ramps so the Medical Department was detached almost immediately and I was sent to Scotland with a bunch of other Army officers to await transportation home.

Mark: To the U.S.?

Eckstam: Yes. They said, "You are going to go to the Pacific". We knew that. We were going to stay stateside for a little while and then go to the Pacific. We were told that.

Mark: When did you find that out, in Scotland?

Eckstam: In England. When we got orders to go to Scotland, it was the order that we're going home and then out to the Pacific. I didn't know if it was a joke or not 'cause the war was going on out there.

Mark: What was your reaction to that?

Eckstam: Oh, great!

Mark: Facetiously?

Eckstam: It was facetious. That's all I needed after being sunk--more war. I didn't want any more part of it, I'd been sunk and I went through D-day--that's enough. But, that wasn't enough.

Mark: So you went back to the States then in the summer of 1944?

Eckstam: It was sort of interesting. We were just wasting time in Scotland so one day a couple of us decided we'd go to Glasgow, so we took the bus from the Navy base over to Glasgow and from Rozney, across the Bay. We stayed there overnight and we went to see a movie and the short between the movie was Life at Great Lakes, IL. The last thing we wanted to see. In Milford Haven we heard Deep in the Heart of Texas, now is Glasgow, Scotland we're learning all about Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

Mark: Can't get away, huh?

Eckstam: Then on the way back we decided to get off the bus and go up Loch Lomond. So we took a trip up Loch Lomond and teased some Scottish girls and when the teasing got too heavy, they turned on the Scottish brogue and we were lost.

Mark: They got us but good!

Eckstam: So we got back just in time, the guys were packing up to go home--to take a train ride to go down and catch a ship near Bristol. We barely made it--we almost lost our trip home by this stupid side trip that we took. But it was fun. We got a ride home on the Albemarle. Seaplane tender. Boy! That's a luxury ship.

Mark: So when you came back to the states where did you land?

Eckstam: We landed in Boston and then flew to Chicago and then went back up to Madison where we had a month survivor leave. I don't remember what I did, I think I just stayed home. I got used to civilian living again.

Mark: What was Madison like during the holiday?

Eckstam: Well, the only thing then and after the war both, I thought these people at home don't know what is really going on. There is zero appreciation for the war effort and what the GIs are going through and the British are going through in trying to save the United States. The people at home didn't appreciate the war effort at all. They were going out to parties and having a good time. Of course we had a good time over there too, but these people were having a super good time. We didn't have a good time at all compared to the stateside people. That bothered me for a long time.

Mark: Did you notice the rationing that was going on the home front? What did you think of that?

Eckstam: Well we were glad to do that to help the war effort--there was no problem with that. Absolutely none. We took our meat stamps and gas stamps and lived within them.

Mark: Did you think they were sacrificing enough on the home front? As a front line person coming back home--

Eckstam: No, they weren't sacrificing enough. They weren't being exposed to any danger whatsoever and had no appreciation. I think they could have tightened up a lot of the stamps, gas. People were still traveling too much and not donating enough to the war effort.

Mark: So after you left Madison you left for California.

Eckstam: I was assigned to a Seabee base dispensary out there in Fort Phoneme and that was a 300 bed Navy dispensary.

Mark: I'm not sure where that is.

Eckstam: Port Phoneme is north of Los Angeles and south of Santa Barbara, about half-way between. It is right on the coast and the Seabees were [Pause in recording here] shipping out regularly to do construction work in the Pacific. The 300 bed hospital there was taking care of a lot of very sick personnel and we had some guys in there with fevers and diseases that we didn't have the answers for. Some of these kids hadn't even been overseas yet. They were just sick people who were congregated in this area so it was an excellent medical experience for the months that I was there.

Mark: When did you get to the Pacific?

Eckstam: That was the only good medical experience I had in my whole military experience. That was excellent training. Then after being there about five months, in about February or March we were shipped up to San Francisco and were based at San Bruno. There is Trafran racetrack in there. We went down there primarily for weapons training. I figure why do doctors and corpsmen need to have weapons training? When we reported they were forming small medical units, one doctor and three corpsmen and we would be assigned to Port Director outfits. Port Directors are 200-men outfits that would be in charge of a port and direct shipping in and out of that port, so they needed just a small Naval first aide station is what it amounted to because there was always an Army field house, an Army dispensary within a mile or two of us, so we didn't need any more than that. But, they trained all of us, the doctors and the corpsmen with weapons and I learned how to fire the 45, the carbine and the Thompson submachine gun and the BAR rifle and Springfield rifle and how to field strip all of those and detail strip the carbine and 45 and I just about became an expert with the 45 when we were shipped out. I could have been if I'd have had another week maybe. We were issued 45s and the corpsmen were issued carbines and we carried those on the ship going out.

Mark: Wouldn't that be against the Geneva Convention?

Eckstam: But the Japs used the Red Cross as a target. They didn't recognize the Geneva Convention so when we were fighting the Japs we didn't expect them to recognize it so we had to be prepared in case they attacked our medical unit.

Mark: So then you shipped out in March of 1945?

Eckstam: Yeah, we left March 1, 1945 and we went out on a freighter. It didn't arrive somewhere out in the Philippines until April 9th and that was 40 days and 40 nights I think it was. We had a layover in the Eneiwetok group when guys from sickbay were fishing and they caught a huge barracuda and they must have used about five pounds of butter to fry that baby. Barracuda steaks, that's one of the best fish I ever had. Since we were the medical crew there we got the spoils of the corpsmen fishing. That was wonderful. Then we had a layover a week in the Palau group of islands, which isn't too far from the Philippines because a submarine scared us. The Palau group wasn't secure yet. We could see our bombers from aircraft carriers coming into this island that was only about 5 miles away and bombing the Japs on the beach and the old sailors on the Mormack which is a merchant marine ship passed stories around that the natives on this island over here like to sneak up to the anchor chain and come down in the crew's quarters and slit everybody's neck at night. I don't think too many of us slept too well although we knew it was a bogus story--we weren't quite sure.

Mark: I'm interested in your impressions of the South Pacific when you initially got there. You had been in Europe and then you went to the Pacific and that is rare in one veteran.

Eckstam: Rare? A whole bunch of us went out.

Mark: You're the first one I've spoken to that has been in both theaters.

Eckstam: We did stop in Pearl Harbor on the way out and of course that's paradise. We got downtown to Honolulu and went to Waikiki beach. There was an Army recreation retreat center right on Waikiki beach in a hotel--I can't remember the name of it. It was still there when we visited about 15 years ago. We went swimming at Waikiki beach and it was paradise compared to going the other way--until we got into the Philippines, the combat area. That was jungle again, everything that the Army does and here I was wanting a nice soft bed and good food! I was in an Army settlement.

Mark: So you landed at Samara?

Eckstam: We landed at Samara in the Leyte Gulf area.

Mark: Was that secured at that time?

Eckstam: The coastal part was secured. The mountains weren't secure and Leyte had been secured for at least 6-8 months by that time and there were fantastic numbers of military units in that Leyte Gulf area.

Mark: Mostly Army.

Eckstam: Yeah.

Mark: Perhaps you could discuss some of the Army-Navy relationships. There's a lot sometimes made of service rivalry and all that sort of thing. In your military experience generally, did you find that to be a problem? Was it all tongue-in-cheek kind of thing?

Eckstam: Well, when the Army was on board for the practice invasion and also Exercise Tiger, and also for the invasion of Normandy, the soldiers were very obviously envious of the status of the Navy and their quarters and everything else--so called "soft life" as it were. I felt sorry for the Army guys, the officers were all right I had no problem getting along with those guys. Out in the Pacific, didn't have too much contact with the Army people except when we had to beg and borrow medical supplies from them. When we got to Samara, the medical unit was detached as an emergency--there was a launch to come out and pick us up and they waited until we threw out all of our gear and our sea bags and left the ship. It was an immediate detachment and we went to shore

and were told that we were going on an invasion in a week, so where's the medical supplies--we had none. They were on that freighter out in the harbor. I was the senior medical officer and the only medical officer gets some supplies for the invasion. Commander Gehring ordered me to do that. Commander Gehring, incidentally, was a classmate of the Admiral Will Halsey. He wasn't an admiral, he was a commander. He had a problem that's why he never made admiral. The problem was very evident on the day that a change of command occurred on our base and he had a farewell for the skipper and he came up the steps to the Quonset hut and fell flat on his face, dead drunk. That was the problem. But anyway, he told me to get supplies and I talked to my three corpsmen, fortunately one had been in service for 10 years and he was experienced, Tommy Thompson, and he said "Well, Doc, let's go beg, borrow and steal". So we got on a small boat ferries that were all over the Leyte Gulf area and we visited every supply depot and every Army dispensary and hospital that we could and while I was talking to the officer, Tommy was talking to the Chief Petty Officer asking for supplies, the other two corpsmen would be going down the aisles with the corpsman of the officer and loading boxes and stuffing their pockets and their field jackets full of medical supplies and as we left there, the guy was still saying "No, I'm sorry, we can't issue anything. We're not authorized to do that. Here we were lugging out boxes to the small boat and taking it back. He saw what we had but he could honestly say, "No, I didn't authorize it."

Mark: Sounds like a MASH episode.

Eckstam: I believe MASH is a documentary of what went on in the Pacific. I thoroughly believe every episode happened, somewhere, sometime. I've seen most of the episodes. It is unbelievable. So we wound up with two sea chests full of medical supplies including morphine and penicillin and the works. We had so much morphine left over that when we finally closed one of our bases, we filled a 5 lb barrel with about an inch and a half of morphine. We emptied all the morphine in the barrel so the black market wouldn't get it and then we dumped it in the ocean.

Mark: That brings up an interesting point. Did you see a lot of that?

Eckstam: Flourishing wildly out there.

Mark: In the Pacific.

Eckstam: In hindsight it probably was in England but I was young enough that I didn't recognize it. Young enough in terms of service time. I got real wise by the time I got out. The black market was wild.

Mark: What sort of things were--

Eckstam: You name it. Anything any GI brought out he would sell for a fantastic profit and anything that the natives could sell us they did. They had a fantastic price and we figured we wound up even.

Mark: Like booze and cigarettes, medical supplies?

Eckstam: Anything, you name it--it was marketed.

Mark: Was it fairly open?

Eckstam: Oh yeah. Everybody knew but nobody acknowledged it.

Mark: So, if you got caught--

Eckstam: You saw nothing. If I get questioned officially, "No, I'm just telling a story."

Mark: And nobody--

Eckstam: Nobody knows it. Some of the episodes that I saw the guys are dead now, so there would be no way to corroborate it. I could be making up a fish tale a mile long and nobody would know whether it's true or it's false.

Mark: Was there any violence associated with it?

Eckstam: Not the black market. But we were afraid of that.

Mark: Cause you know, organized crime--

Eckstam: Oh, this wasn't organized. This was each guy on his own. The only organization were that some of the Filipinos buying things, groups of Filipinos would seek out American supplies. Now they might have been organized but the Americans certainly weren't.

Mark: That brings up another thing I'd like to touch on, the Filipinos. Did you have much contact with the Filipinos?

Eckstam: Yeah, a fair amount. First of all I want to mention that this freighter did have our ambulance and my jeep on the top deck, so we got one ambulance and one jeep officially but the medical supplies were down deep in the hold of that ship and under lumber so there is no way we could have gotten our medical supplies out because the invasion was moved up two weeks and we were supposed to go into the west side of Mindanao and we never did see those medical supplies. I don't know where they went. We used our begged and borrowed and stolen supplies and had more than we needed. After we invaded Mindanao, the southernmost island and going southwest is the Peninsula of Zamboanga. That had been already secured. On April 17th we invaded the

west side of the main body of Mindanao in the [unintelligible place name] area as a Victor 5 operation. Boy the bombardment started at 5:00 a.m. and I was just scared to death.

Mark: You were offshore on the ship?

Eckstam: Coming in on an LST and just terrified. The Japs thought we were going to come in the other side of the island. The deception worked great and the Japs ran 35 miles that first day. The Army had a heck of a time trying to keep up with them. As a matter of fact the Navy LST was docked and the Army general was screaming like mad. He wanted to get his trucks and equipment off on the next LST waiting out there in line. What was the Navy doing--we were unloading cases of beer. On the day of the invasion in the afternoon. Shells start flying at 5:00 a.m. and by 3:0-4:00 p.m. we were unloading beer.

Mark: I take it the casualties were light.

Eckstam: No casualties at all.

Mark: So what happened after this invasion of Mindanao? Where were you stationed and what were you doing?

Eckstam: We were right there on the beach and then the Port Director was directing traffic from the LST and then as soon as they got ashore they were directing traffic from the shore station. Everybody was intense on the ground and they pit latrines and they got purified water. They had these big sand filters, puofilters they call them and then the Seabees that were attached to it, construction people built huge 5,000 gallon holding tanks out of wood which they brought over in kits. There were two of them, 10,000 gallons of water. That was on top of the hill and then they ran pipelines by gravity down the hill to the mess hall which was just a big tent to begin with and then later on they got a platform under the tent like a Quonset hut and sick bay was just three tents on the grass. That's all we ever had out there. We had one tent for combination office and sick call, and two tents with five cots each in case we had any patients. We had one or two I guess.

Mark: What kind of patients were they?

Eckstam: Backaches, minor sprains and bruises and stuff. Stuff that happens in civilian life.

Mark: I was wondering if there were any exotic diseases or tropical--malaria--

Eckstam: No, we worried about malaria and we had a malaria control officer with us and when we first got there we were supposed to use mosquito netting all of the time. My first night in Samara, on land, I almost wound up in psych ward.

I'm over 6' tall, the cots were 6' long and the canvas cots come with mosquito bars which are just as wide as the cot and just as long as the cot and I couldn't lie straight because the mosquitoes would be biting my head or my feet, I couldn't roll on my side or they'd be biting my knees or my butt or my arms and by morning I had malaria, I had dengue fever, I had every tropical disease you could possibly imagine and I was a basket case. By the time sunlight came up I was alive and well and that ended all those fears, but that first night was unreal, in a strange land with all those weird tropical things that you don't know anything about and once that first night was over, no problems after that. But on the island of Mindanao, I went around and took a long piece of grass and the guys would not have their mosquito netting down because it was hot and I'd tickle their feet with the grass. They'd wake up and yell and holler and throw words, "Oh get away, we thought the Japs were coming." A couple of guys grabbed their rifles. I thought well, what if that were a mosquito with dengue fever or malaria, so we had good enforcement after the first few nights. The natives were there. They came around, they wanted to make money. They washed clothes for not only the officers but the enlisted people and they helped tidy up, we used them as servants and we'd give them a coin here or there, not much, probably \$1 or .50 for the whole wash load. They'd wash every day for .50 and so they took care of everybody out there. This is what we did all the time we were in the Philippines no matter where we were. We never had really good quarters, because this was designed to be temporary, but the Filipinos were friendly and no problems. We were pumping our water supply out of a creek that came down the hill and the malaria control officer learned that there were Moros. They were at the top of the hill and these are the people that don't like anybody. They don't like the Filipinos, the Japs, the Americans and we were more scared of them than we were the Japs. Part of their ritual is to dump all of their excrement in the stream, which is real good because as the stream bubbles down the hill it purifies itself. It's an excellent principle--that's probably why they live so long. But, we were pumping water out of that stream to drink and to cook with and so the malaria control officer had culture kits and everything else like this and we cultured the water and used gram stains and all these other things to try to find bugs in the water and there were zero. Nothing grew. So the water supply was totally safe in spite of its source. The major problem on Mindanao was mental. Since the invasion was two weeks ahead of time, we didn't have our supplies, we didn't have our mail either and people need mail from home in order to avoid the blues. It was very obvious after a week or ten days went by that the morale, not only of the Navy base, but the Army guys too, was deteriorating. There was fights and everything else breaking out in the Navy itself, in the Army and between Army and Navy--fist fights. Lots of arguing, bitching and moaning and groaning around. Tommy, the old experienced Navy guy recognized this as what it was before I did. He said, "Doc, we gotta do something. The Army Special Services has a bunch of musical instruments, why don't we put on a variety show? And, why don't we build a baseball diamond?" I asked him where he was going to get all that stuff. He said the Army has it. They even

had a baby piano. This is only a week after an invasion. A piano!! A full set of band instruments. Well, now I know why they need it. So, it took a little bit of GI alcohol. I said, "Tommy, I don't know what you're talking about, I don't know how much we got" and he says, "You don't want to know." So, I don't know what he did, but by the next morning bulldozers were leveling out a field for a baseball diamond and we had horseshoe pits and a badminton court. We had all the supplies to go with it and planning was going on between the Army and the Navy guys, just the planning effort helped everybody. In about two days we had a Bob Hope type variety show, just Army and Navy guys. They did the most stupid kinds of entertainment, you wouldn't even listen to them at home it was lousy, rank amateur, but for four hours in drizzling rain, they put on a hell of a show. Instantly the gloom went away. Everyone was happy. Then it was another week before the mail started coming.

Mark: I've heard some vets use the term "rock happy." Are you familiar with that term?

Eckstam: No. What is it?

Mark: If they were on an isolated island somewhere, there would be nothing to do and people would start doing strange things, walk around without their clothes on, etc. It sounds like the same basic problem that you had.

Eckstam: Yeah, it was an emotional mental problem, the Army and Navy both had it. There were no provisions for it--boosting morale by either Army or Navy sources. It took an enlisted man from the Navy, a sharp one, to figure out the problem and cure it.

Mark: How long were you at this temporary base at Mindanao?

Eckstam: Just a couple of months and then we moved up to Panay in July. Ilo had been a city of 100,000 before the war and one of the garden cities but it was pretty well destroyed by the Japs, there wasn't much left. But we were right on the ocean with a Navy base.

Mark: This was when?

Eckstam: The last half of 1945.

Mark: When the Japanese finally surrendered, where were you?

Eckstam: There.

Mark: Do you recall hearing the news? Your reaction to it?

Eckstam: Oh, yeah. The base just erupted like a volcano. Work stopped and they broke out the beer and everybody got drunk. Everybody, the skipper on down. There was just no action that day. I think it was afternoon when the word came in. Fortunately, because nightfall wasn't too far away but it was one big party right on the base. No alcohol in Navy quarters of course. Ha! Ha! But that was a happy day! We took a deep breath and from there on we weren't really worried. I think that changed the morale of the whole situation.

Mark: When did you finally come back to the States?

Eckstam: May of 1946.

Mark: That's kind of a long time between the Japanese surrender and your actually coming back.

Eckstam: Yeah, it was.

Mark: Did you spend all of that time in the Philippines?

Eckstam: Yeah. On Panay we were supposed to be staging for Japan, we knew that, but I don't know what we were doing to stage, because we were just the Port Director outfit. I want to talk more about some MASH episodes that occurred. First of all Mindanao after Commander Gehring left, we had a young athletic guy come in that brought his body building equipment with him and he was more interested in his physique and women than he was in running the Navy and he had had a Filipino gal as his live-in wife in his tent over there. So, the parts you see in MASH where the officers had locals living with them is certainly true. It happened. On Panay, we were again based in tents, but they thought sick bay ought to be combined in one Quonset hut so they put us up in a big Quonset hut and the back part was ten cots. I guess this was really standard in semi-permanent areas and we had no water supply. We had to haul buckets in and so forth and the guy said it was sort of hard to bathe patients, which we didn't have any but in case we would, thought it was going to be hard. We did have one little Filipino boy come in coughing, incidentally. We thought he had pneumonia and he was the son of a Filipino Navy veteran and had been there all during the occupation and he was trying to get back in active duty again, but he was having a hard time, strangely and he wanted us to use penicillin and the kid was so darn sick that I agreed to even though we weren't supposed to and before we could give him the penicillin, he coughed up a huge ascaris worm about 5-6 inches long and it cured his pneumonia. It was the ascaris plugging up his bronchial. The guys thought we ought to have running water and so again, Tommy Thompson being the resourceful guy he was, found ways and means of having the Seabees rig up some running water to the sick bay and we had a sick in the dispensary that would run cold water (or whatever the temperature of the pipes was--in the morning it was cold, after the sun came out it was hot). The

Captain's inspection was once a week and the so-called head was just a disposable pot, I don't remember just what we had in there for a head, but we had a little room that was designated as a head or a dressing room and my corpsmen were very resourceful and eventually found a water heater that was not used at the railroad station and the 1st Lt. didn't want to have anything to do with this piece of equipment that wasn't assigned to him. It was supposed to be on that island. So, we appropriated that and then they found parts of a toilet and they found parts of a wash bowl and the Seabees had plumbing supplies and so gradually, over a couple of weeks time, we developed a full-fledged head with this water heater we had a shower with hot and cold running water, we had a flush toilet which carried the sewage right down to the beach and over the sea wall. The toilets there were just benches build out over the sea wall and you just sat on them and if the wind was coming from that way, you got a nice salt water cleansing of your bottom, or if you were standing up you got spray up on your face all the time. The Captain's quarters were also over the sea wall, so he had the same thing at a little distance and the first time that that room was opened, he went in there and couldn't believe it. He turned all the water on, the shower, flushed the toilet and got the hot water running in the sink and washed his hands, dried them on the towels that were there and looked around and said, "Eckstam, report to me immediately after Captain's inspection". So I went over there and when I saw him go into his tent, he says, "Where did you get that head?" I said, "We found it, Sir". Standard answer. He says, "Well, I understand. What I want to know is how soon you can have a flush toilet in my quarters?" I said, "Tomorrow, Sir". It was.

Mark: This was before or after the surrender?

Eckstam: Before the surrender. This is more MASH.

Mark: So, on Mindanao and on Panay, what would be your daily routine? You said there were no patients.

Eckstam: Mindanao was jungle. There is not a damn thing to do. Nothing. It got dark; you didn't want to be out in the jungle with those Moros around. You'd get your head cut off. You stay at home, played a little cards, and went to bed with the sun and got up with the sun. Panay was a little bit different story. There were some lights in the city, dim ones because of blackouts but you could see to get around and in officer's country, they had a gambling hall with a crap table, so we'd go downtown and play craps in the evenings.

Mark: Was there much fraternization between the officers and enlisted in this situation?

Eckstam: With my corpsmen, yes. With the rest of the base, no. Three of us officers had a tent together and we got to be very close friends. We followed each other after the war; the other two guys have passed on. We stayed together

with the other officers but, we just went to town, took tours in the country and when the surrender was announced we just got in the medical jeep, my jeep, and we got permission to leave the base for that day and we went up in the hills and talked our way past the Army, we knew the Army Commander I guess 'cause we had to see him about something for sick bay so I knew who he was, so I said "Colonel So and So gave us permission to come". He said that we shouldn't be there and where were our papers. We didn't need any. Just tell the guard and we went right through. We were lying through our teeth, but we drove right on through and we just stood at the edge of the perimeter watching the Japs come in. There were submachine guns, this was an armed camp and the Japs came in just as proud as they could be, their uniforms were tattered and patched but they were clean, they were neat, everyone was erect, and full discipline. **[END SIDE B, TAPE 1]** The officers all laid their Samurai swords on the table in front of the American officers. The enlisted people all threw their guns on a pile in the middle of it and just lined up as neat as a pin. I talked with one of the Japanese doctors in the prisoner camp afterwards and he didn't want to be in the war, he was drafted just like most of us were. Most of the soldiers were drafted and they didn't want to be in the war. They were happy to see the end come. The Japs felt the same way we did. No different.

Mark: In your particular case there wasn't much bitterness then.

Eckstam: The Japs were glad it was over. They were glad to be in our care. They were scared that we might do something to them, like the Germans were scared that we might do something to them on our ship, which didn't happen. As a result of our firmness but not picking on them, they shaped around and were smiling after a while and appreciated the care that they were given. They wouldn't have given us that care. We knew that, but that's beside the point.

Mark: I just have one more question about camp life. As a medical doctor, you've talked about MASH several times, was it difficult to enforce military discipline on an officer such as yourself and was there much military discipline and courtesy in the camp with the enlisted men and that sort of thing?

Eckstam: There was absolutely no problem with discipline. There was the usual kind of guy who would be absent without leave and a few little minor stealing episodes and so forth, but you find those episodes at home. It was the same kind of picture you get in civilian life as you get in the military, but there was no problem with discipline. The officers controlled the men. There was no question about that.

Mark: Was there a lot of spit and polish and uniform parts, all that kind of thing? I ask because in MASH they go around in their bathrobes and that kind of thing.

Eckstam: Yes to the first question and no to the second question. We didn't do that. You dressed every morning and the Filipinos that did our laundry were great, efficient. On Mindanao they just used the stream, they beat the clothes with a stick in the stream, to clean them just like you see in the old movies and they came out spic and span. I don't know how they did it--I don't know how they ironed them. I think that maybe when they were wet they ironed them with their hands in the sun on a flat rock or something, but they were all wearable, they were neat with creases in them and they were very militarily acceptable. This was true on Panay the same way. Just amazing.

Mark: I get the impression morale was pretty high.

Eckstam: Morale was no problem from there on in. Just being alone in the jungle is terrible. Being around other people in civilization is great.

Mark: So after the surrender did you spend months still in the Philippines?

Eckstam: Yeah. When we disbanded our base, we had trouble with two men in closing up. That's when we had to get rid of all of our morphine. We did have a couple of patients on penicillin for gonorrhea. We had a couple of syphilis patients also and I don't remember what we did for them, but one officer and one enlisted man had a chronic urethritis which didn't clear and they came crying on my shoulder. They had had what they called emergency wives, just like this one commander did. They went out and lived in these little grass shacks with their emergency wife and the father would solicit this because he wanted money. So the GI would pay him enough money, whatever they wanted it was cheap for the GI, \$5 a week I think. Then you could live with any one of the daughters that you wanted to pick--teenagers and live in the hut and she would do all your cooking for you and take care of anything that you wanted.

Mark: Was that fairly common?

Eckstam: Yeah. Two officers that I know, one of them lived in an old refinery house on Panay. He lived in the house and she did the cooking and the cleaning and they slept together and all that sort of stuff. Then they wondered how they were going to explain their chronic drip to their wives when they got home. I said, "Well, you heard my lecture on VD when you came here and you should know. My only recommendation is that you turn into the first stateside hospital and refuse to leave until you're cured. I don't know what they are going to do for you."

Mark: What was the military policy on that? I can't imagine that the military was tolerant of that.

Eckstam: Well, I don't remember anybody getting fined or court marshaled because of venereal disease. You are not supposed to get it, but they did, and that was the main disease that we treated of course. At Manila it was even worse.

Mark: This fee for an emergency wife, was this something that an enlisted man could afford as well?

Eckstam: Oh, sure, easy. It was cheap; you couldn't afford not to have one. Of course, most of them didn't bother with the formalities of emergency wives, they just visited the gals downtown all the time. The prostitute ring was just flourishing. There was one other medical episode in Panay that was very interesting. One of the Filipino doctors came to the base and wanted to see me. He couldn't get on the base so I had to go to the gate to see him. He had a patient with pneumonia that was desperately ill and he wanted to know if I could get some penicillin so I decided to go see this patient. He was using what is called scarification and cupping. The guy did have a pneumonia on one side, a low bar pneumonia, couldn't hear any breath sounds on half of the chest. They had taken a hot wire and put scars about every inch all on that one side of the chest. It was neat scars in rows and that was supposed to produce irritation inside and heal the pneumonia. By cupping they take a glass and heat it over a candle and they put this glass of warm air on the skin and as it cools it sucks up the skin and produces a huge welt. That's supposed to produce irritation. This guy had both kinds of injuries and I felt so sorry for him that I gave him penicillin. Legally, I can't do that but I just took some and did it. That was a traumatic awakening. The hospital out there was just nothing. I've seen hospitals like this in the Caribbean since that time and they are just big empty rooms with screens on the side and steel cots to sleep on. It was primitive then and the Caribbean islands have the same hospital today. You want to get sick in the Caribbean?

Mark: No thanks. I don't want to get sick in Madison much less the Caribbean.

Eckstam: We got to Manila on New Years Eve and went to the officers club and had a heck of a New Years Eve party. That was my first taste of the big city after being out on the islands for almost a year and a half.

Mark: What was your--That was a ravaged city after the war.

Eckstam: Yeah. It was all flat. There wasn't anything standing taller than two stories. All the government buildings were totally destroyed. You couldn't recognize them. No bridges across the River. They are all pontoon bridges. I've seen pictures since and I don't recognize anything. We had a ten-bed dispensary there too. It was still a G10 outfit, but more people and the Navy people, with everybody going home would have to go through Army hospitals, the sicker ones and my job with two bars on my shoulder was to talk to the captains in the Army, a full lieutenant in the Navy and straighten out Navy records in

Army hospitals. All I did all day long was to drive around in my jeep, which I displaced from the guy who was there before me, 'cause I was senior to him, and drove around to the Army hospitals all day long around Manila. There were about five of them I think. I just did paperwork--as a doctor. Totally administrative. In the nighttime I was rooming on the second floor of the officers barracks, the bottom half was covered with plywood, the top half was screen and the bottom foot was screen, all open and the Officer's Club was right across the street and the Mess Hall was right beside it. We couldn't wait to get home at 5:00 p.m., take a shower, put a new uniform on and go to the Club. This other guy had a Ph.D. in Education and he was a professor and I had a doctorate and we went over there and by golly we found that our alcohol intake was going up precipitously and we started bitching at one another. After a very short time, we'd eat and go to the movie and see a double feature until it got 'one' when we sobered off a little bit. Then we both realized that it was so easy to become an alcoholic and realized that we were on the road and decided to quit for a week and it was hard, with glasses tinkling across the street. We went back after ten days and committed ourselves to one drink before supper and one drink after the show and we did that for the next four months.

Mark: I was going to ask was this more of a problem after the war had ended? Or, was alcohol a problem also during the war?

Eckstam: There was alcohol all during the war, everywhere. As I said on our rescue ship, every enlisted guy had a bottle of booze in his sea bag and I wasn't going to go over to the Philippines without booze. I took a whole case of cheap booze over with me, which I didn't have to use 'cause the Navy had plenty of supply on hand. There was booze everywhere. More than you could drink and it was available to everybody.

Mark: As a medical doctor, was there a lot of alcoholism and how did

Eckstam: Yeah. It's easy to see why people who are in the military on a permanent basis become alcoholics. There is nothing to do on many stations after 5:00 p.m. You have no responsibilities; especially in wartime we all had the philosophy of live today because tomorrow you're going to get killed. So you drink and have a good time.

Mark: This didn't seem to change much after the surrender.

Eckstam: Even more drinking because you're celebrating and happy. A drunk will always look for an excuse. I'm not an alcoholic, maybe on weekends. Never during the week. I don't care for it. I don't have to have anything. In that situation a lot of people succumb and become chronic alcoholics, you bet they do.

Mark: Was there a policy toward alcoholism in the Navy?

Eckstam: In writing there is officially, but everybody drinks and we knew a lot of the senior officers were chronic alcoholics. They were covering it pretty good.

Mark: Was there any treatment available?

Eckstam: I don't think there was any treatment at all that I was aware of. But then we were in combat zones you know--that's different. Manila was good duty. We went downtown, we'd go to some local city movies, drive around, tour. We got along with the Army in Manila because I was dealing with them all the time and I had no problems except when some guy had to show off his bars and be Mr. Important for a while or something like this, but you get around those idiots. We went up to Foxenham Falls one day. We took an Army command car and we had to stop about every ten miles, open the trunk and get out another beer. We went up there and they had hot and cold ponds up there off the Ponze River in the central part of Luzon and we had some Filipinos paddle us upstream in a wooden canoe to the Ponzenham Falls where we went swimming for a while and then we came down shooting the rapids in a wooden dugout canoe. Now that's a thrill! klunk, klunk, klunk!

Mark: I see you survived it though.

Eckstam: Oh, it was fun!

Mark: Between the Japanese surrender and the time you went home, I can't imagine you weren't thinking "When am I going to get the hell out of here".

Eckstam: Points were accumulating on a regular basis. They had the point system and every month you got another couple of points and you knew that you had to have x number of points to come home so you knew exactly the month when your points would be up. So, I knew I was going to come home in April or May, one or the other, depending on how the points worked out.

Mark: If I recall correctly, there were some places where some GI unrest about getting discharged. Some GIs were very anxious to get out of the service to the point where they staged protests or that sort of thing. If I'm not mistaken one of them was in Manila.

Eckstam: Don't remember anything about that.

Mark: There were isolated instances, but some cases where the GIs

Eckstam: I happened to think of one other MASH-like episode that relates to some of this emergency wife bit. That is very fascinating. One of the officers had gotten a Filipino girl pregnant and he shouldn't have--this was the wrong

family and I guess this wasn't a formal arrangement, he just seduced her or something, raped her maybe. The family was waiting outside the gate for this guy to come out. They would have kidnapped him and shot him if he had left the base. So, he was a prisoner and he went through the same kind of emotional experiences of being isolated like they were at Mindanao without mail and stuff. He did have a very severe case of acne on his back and on his face. It is really the most severe case I've ever seen. He had big pustules that were bleeding and everything else on his face and his back. We were giving him all sorts of medication. That was totally independent of this other thing, but we used this as a tool to get him off the base. Again, my resourceful Tommy Thompson came up with the idea. He said, "Doc, why don't we evacuate this guy to a hospital in Manila, maybe they can cure his acne and it will probably save his life, from the Filipino family." So I authorized an emergency air evacuation for acute acne. So we loaded this guy in the ambulance and kept him down low and let the enlisted guys drive him out to the airport. I was in the back of the ambulance constantly so the Filipinos wouldn't see me going with him. It was just a routine run because the ambulance was going to town everyday anyway. So we got him past the family and loaded him on an airplane to Manila. Finally, after about a week the family disappeared. They realized he wasn't there anymore, but we saved that guy's life really. So, another MASH story.

Mark: If you think of any more let me know--those are always good stories.

Eckstam: Well, in Manila, I knew there was a fellow from New Glarus and my wife is from New Glarus and we knew each other, in fact we double-dated in college. Kenny Sweifel, he has passed away. His wife is, I think, still around. Kenny was in the Army motor pool as an enlisted person, of course, officers and enlisted men don't fraternize. You asked that question earlier and I said "no", but in this case we did. So Kenny drove over in a jeep one night and I told him I wanted to take him to dinner and he said he couldn't come because he was an enlisted man. Well, you wear your khakis and we'll find a way. I met him at the gate and we went down the road away and I put some of my bars on his collar so he was a medical officer. I said, "You just keep your mouth shut now, let me do all the talking, you're just visiting from the ship. There were so many guys in there no one paid any attention to us. I don't think anybody ever knew that he was there. So we had a very nice cocktail hour in the Officer's Club and then we had a nice meal at the mess and then we went to the movie and had a good time there. Afterwards we had another drink or so and then I went outside the base with him and took my insignia back and he drove home. We had a hell of a good evening. Nobody knew the difference.

Mark: I'm interested in your voyage back to the States.

Eckstam: We accumulated enough points and we sailed from Manila on the 20th of April and I guess I was detached on the 20th and the USS Teladata, our troop ship left on the 22nd of April. I don't remember anything about the voyage on the way home. We got to San Francisco, according to my notes on the 10th of May and on the next day, the 11th, I had a government transportation flight to Chicago and somehow or other, I probably took the train to Madison. My aunt lived in Chicago; I probably spent overnight with her like I usually did coming and going. My aunt's family, cousins were there.

Mark: When you got out of the service, took off your uniform, what specifically

Eckstam: Well, I left my uniform on for a while.

Mark: While in Madison?

Eckstam: Yeah. I didn't have anything to wear. I felt comfortable in a uniform. It was normal. Civilian clothes were abnormal. On internship I had applied for surgical residency and I had been accepted at the Mayo Clinic. So, within a day or two I went up to the Mayo Clinic to see about re-establishing my residency, which I thought was canceled when I went into the service. But, I found it wasn't. They're kind enough there, it's a unique organization and they said, "Well, when would you like to start?" I said, "As soon as possible". They asked if I could wait until July 1. I had a job so I was delighted. I was glad to wait; I would have waited longer if they couldn't fit us in. Their normal residency staff was 400 in training and when I was there the max was 625. So, I started residency in October 1946. I was there 4.25 years.

Mark: A lot of vets had trouble finding work when they came back. You didn't have that problem.

Eckstam: I had a lot of trouble when I got out of residency because everybody was flooding the market at that time. I looked long and hard before I found the Monroe Clinic in Monroe, Wisconsin. Their type of practice, they only had 13 doctors at the time, but they were practicing a brand of medicine similar to the Mayo Clinic. I served as an internist and managing things together and so forth and so on. It was a real true group atmosphere and I liked that so I think I talked my way into them.

Mark: I'm not familiar with medical training, medical school and those sorts of things. Residency, this is something you pay for?

Eckstam: No, I got \$42.50 a month. Residents today are paid \$25,000 as a senior resident.

Mark: What I'm getting at is they used the GI Bill and all of these other types of program

Eckstam: Since we didn't pay tuition, I couldn't apply for tuition. But I used my full benefits to acquire a medical library and I have three shelves full of medical books, which the GI Bill paid for. Of course, they are all out of date now, but at least then I needed all these books and training since I was studying for a specialty exam and all those things. I also stayed in the Naval Active Reserve, went to meetings and all that sort of stuff for a few years. I stayed active because they had a unit at the Mayo Clinic that was an active unit and it was real easy to keep up your Active Reserve Status. I went to Monroe then in October of 1950 and then it was a little harder to get to Madison for meetings, you were on call and so on and so forth. So, I switched to the inactive Reserve shortly after I got there. Sometime in 1951 I think. When I could resign and get out, I wanted to get out in 1954. But, I had about 13 years, I should have stayed another seven in the Reserve and then I'd have had a 20 pension. I might have had to go to Korea, which I didn't want to do.

Mark: There were other parts of the GI Bill too, for example, home loans and that sort of thing. Did you use any sort of home loan program to buy a house or were you able to finance it on your own?

Eckstam: Nope. Didn't use anything else, just the GI Bill of Rights for library. That's all I took.

Mark: In the years after the Vietnam War, I've become aware of some of the problems veterans face in coming back into society, employment and all sorts of things. And, also problems with battle fatigue, posttraumatic stress disorder, and some of the social dislocations that veterans experienced going through a war. When you came back did you have any problems readjusting to society?

Eckstam: Yes. The main thing, the most dramatic thing was driving in an automobile, because you're out there driving on jungle roads at 25 or 30 m.p.h. and all of a sudden you're hurling down a highway at 50 or 60 m.p.h. and that was terrifying. I just begged the drivers to slow down, I just couldn't go that fast. I think it took me a month or more before I got accustomed to going at speeds over 30 m.p.h. on the highway and the totally callused attitudes of the people, was somewhat depressing and disgusting and I felt almost like I just as soon want to get out a Tommy gun and start, not shooting anybody but causing a raucous to make them duck for cover to make them have some little idea what we went through. But that only lasted a short time. But you just got so irritated with the civilian that had no comprehension of what was going on in the war, the seriousness of it, in spite of the fact that we had a good time overseas, we were still under stress and under combat conditions and you

never knew what was going to happen and now here everything was so free and easy and that didn't sit too well.

Mark: Were there some particular incidents that you can think of that like callousness or something like that?

Eckstam: I don't remember anything right now, but there were a lot of insensitive remarks about "You guys are dramatizing it too much, it wasn't that bad." You have to be there, just like I heard on the radio coming up here, people who were hit by lightning, you had to be hit by lightning to know what it is to be hit by lightning. No appreciation of it otherwise. You have to be torpedoed and sunk to appreciate the impact of an explosion. You have to live under enemy warfare in order to appreciate what it is to duck for cover and hope that you're going to be alive five minutes from now. So you don't appreciate that unless you've been there, I don't think. I didn't appreciate it ahead of time. I do now.

Mark: Some of the veterans I've spoken to talk about having nightmares and things like that. You mentioned the term, but I couldn't tell from the context if you were talking about a specific nightmare that you had. I had one paratrooper describe how in his dream he would fall out of the airplane without a parachute.

Eckstam: I dreamt about our sinking a lot. That would wake me up with nightmares. I'd be going down with the ship; I'd be on fire and all sorts of things. The intensity of Exercise Tiger was just with me for at least five or ten years afterwards. I don't have nightmares anymore. I think about it but I don't have nightmares anymore. But I was burning up and trying to get into that tank deck and save those guys and everything. Yeah, they were terrifying nightmares. I don't think I had any stress thing--that was the only thing that I can relate to stress. I'm rather emotional, I cry when I'm happy. I cry when I'm sad. I cry at weddings and funerals, birthday parties and everything else like this, but I don't think I had any emotional impact from the service. I was this way before and I'm this way now. I didn't change. I sort of think, as a doctor, that people who have emotional impact after service were probably a little bit inadequate ahead of time and the service was a stressful thing and triggered an event for them. Some people just sailed through with no problems at all. They're stronger emotionally. Just like people are stronger physically--they don't get sick.

Mark: One last area I want to touch on and that involves veteran's organizations. Did you join any veterans groups immediately after the war or years after the war?

Eckstam: Yeah. I signed up for the American Legion immediately and I went to the meetings and I thought, "This is great, I want to meet the guys." I was getting ready to sign up with the VFW also because you can only belong to the VFW if you've been overseas and that's sort of a distinction, but the only people that were coming to the Legion meetings were insurance salesmen that wanted to sell me insurance. There weren't any other guys in there that I wanted to visit or talk with, and [END SIDE A, TAPE 2] having been an officer, most of the guys that were in the Legion were enlisted personnel and they had a totally different educational background than mine, their job status locally was totally different than mine and we just didn't have any common interests at all--just zilch, so I don't think I was a Legion member for more than about a year. I just quit going and didn't pay my dues anymore. And, I didn't see any reason for joining the VFW 'cause I thought that'd be similar. Then I got busy in medicine.

Mark: And so the reason you explored this in the first place was for

Eckstam: Camaraderie and didn't find it.

Mark: What about later on. You mentioned going back to England several times. Were these unit reunions or--

Eckstam: No. The first time we visited England was in 1982 and we went with another couple and it was primarily for a medical meeting in Sweden on gastrointestinal diseases in Stockholm and I have relatives in Sweden. But we visited England first and our daughter happened to be in England studying at that time, taking some post-graduate courses at Oxford and so we toured England with her for a while and then we went to Sweden and the other folks flew home and I stayed with my cousins and we stopped in England again, later on, but this time we just toured by ourselves and we just drove around and went to some of the military areas. But I wasn't quite sure where I was because I hadn't started Exercise Tiger research at that time. Then we went back for the 45th anniversary, but by that time, 20/20 had come out with the story of Exercise Tiger and one of the officers of the ship, Tom Clark, called me up and it's a good thing he called when I was in my office and not with a patient because he came up the next day and a couple of months later we were invited to the LST 515, our rescue ship reunion in Chicago in September 1944. Then Floyd Hicks of that ship suggested I try to find other members of the LST 507, my ship since I was interested in reunions. There were only about 8 or 10 of us from my ship there. But that got me started in Exercise Tiger and I got started in reunions and I have spent a lot of time and a lot of money. It's a time consuming hobby in retirement. It's a good thing it came along the same year that I retired. I quit the operating room in 1985, 35 years

in surgery. I worked in the office part-time for a year, but I was able to pick up this Exercise Tiger bit and learn computers to put all this dope on a database and so I know a lot about Exercise Tiger and why it happened and so forth and so on.

Mark: I'm interested in what makes you search after 50 years. I'm sure its not just because you retired and you needed something to do. There's got to be something more compelling than that.

Eckstam: Well, first of all I wanted to find out the corpsmen that I was with. I had the list when I came home and then I cleaned house about 20 years ago and thought I'd never use these lists. But then, all of a sudden, I believe it was nostalgia--I don't know what that is. But you want to know everything about the past. Why do genealogy people want to know about genealogy--same reason I suppose? I don't know the answer, but I had a desire to learn everything I could. It's a research project like I was trained to do in medicine. I visited a lot of archives and I have a lot of information, a lot of data, I know about everything that there is to know about Exercise Tiger, just relating to our sinking episode, not the whole operation and I know that the communications were not correct, they gave us the wrong radio frequency. We knew ahead of time we didn't have an escort and we found out later that there was inadequate planning at the highest levels for an emergency. It was improper training of life values, which didn't affect me but caused a lot of casualties. So I don't know. It's become interesting and I want to get people together. I plan reunions. We've had them every year with the national LST Association and there are about 10,000 members in that. Landing ship tanks, large floating targets and it's fun meeting people. But for the 50th reunion now, I'm sort of post-climactic and I don't think I'm going to have any for the 8 ships that were in our convoy before that were attacked, I'm just going to center around our own ship. Our reunions have centered on the 8 ships that were in the convoy that was attacked.

Mark: Where do you hold your reunions?

Eckstam: Wherever the LST Association is. It's been in Norfolk, it's been in St. Louis, it's been in New Orleans and Washington and Pittsburgh and San Francisco.

Mark: You told me that you were in Europe just this summer for the 50th anniversary?

Eckstam: Yes. We went there in April.

Mark: Perhaps you can tell me about your trip a little bit.

Eckstam: One of my corpsmen, Ken Block was a travel agent in New York. He had arranged the 45th anniversary trip and he arranged this one, but unfortunately, he had a cancer of the colon and died before the trip came off. It almost didn't go because he was unable to function properly, so I sort of helped to keep the group together and it wasn't well done at all, but we got there. We flew over and there were twelve of us and two Army guys that came along and were interested and we toured Brookwood Cemetery where all the dead were buried immediately. I found that out. There were no mass graves. They were all taken to Brookwood outside of London, 262 of them in individual graves. I know the diggers; I have corresponded with the truckers that helped haul the bodies up there. We had a brief memorial service at Brookwood Cemetery. Then we went to Deep cut and the British Normandy veterans held a service there. They dedicated a stained glass window in that church to all the veterans of Normandy, injured or not so we're included in that, so we had to see that. They gave us a plaque in remembrance of our visit there and we sent them one in return. A big picture of us. Then we visited Bristol, why I don't know, because I guess, one of the LST British enlistee guys was there. Then we turned to the Harrier Base which were these hover crafts. On the way down to Plymouth, England, where we were based for a while, we were on the ship, but we were based in Plymouth Harbor and then we took a side trip over to Falmouth which was another harbor that a lot of us were in at the time. I had something to do with these details of the trip because the tour guide in England just had a general tour outline and it wouldn't have been of interest to the veterans at all. So, we did see the spots that were of interest to us that no other tourist would be interested in. Then we attended memorial services on April 28 on Slapton Sands where we were supposed to have landed in Exercise Tiger. There is a tank monument there raised by an Englishman, Ken Small to the memory of the dead. He wrote a book, *Forgotten Dead*. There is a stone monument on the beach there that was dedicated by Beverly Byron; our US Representative from Delaware in 1987 and that was the first US recognition of this tragedy. There is a monument on the beach over there that was erected ten years after Tiger, but it was to the citizens that evacuated the area for their sacrifices of their farms and their homes that were bombed and shelled and everything else--loss of cattle and income. But '87 was the first American recognition and the Saturday before the Thursday that we were there, they had a big celebration on Slapton Sands and our Ambassador to England was there, Admiral Crowell. He was Joint Chief of Staff and he dedicated another monument that's on the sea wall at [unintelligible place name], Slapton Sands and that is to all the members of all the exercises that took part in Tiger and all the guys and they had Army Generals and Admirals there so this was the first full-fledged American recognition of Tiger in 50 years. After that we went to a memorial service at Slapton church. This tiny church and after that we went out to sea in fishing boats to drop a wreath. It

was so foggy that we couldn't get out to the site so we just had a ceremony a mile offshore in the fog. We were bombarded by the press over there. We were on BBC and Sky TV and independent TV and NBC and ABC were over there and CNN. We were on American and British TV, the twelve of us.

Mark: How'd you feel about that? Did you feel you got recognition or did you feel intruded upon?

Eckstam: The first day it was sort of fun being a so-called celebrity but then it got to be a nuisance and a pain in the neck after that because of the constant bugging and constant questions for days on end. The same questions over and over. We got used to having cameras poked in our faces all the time and it isn't fun after a while. But, we were all sort of happy that we were getting publicity because we knew that we would be finding additional people that were in Exercise Tiger and we have, probably about a dozen people who had relatives or friends in Exercise Tiger and we have been able to tell them what happened there. Their loved ones or their friends at that time, which is satisfying. After that ceremony we went over to France and visited the beaches, Omaha and Utah and we visited the cemetery in Belgium, American cemetery, 'cause one of our survivors had a brother in the Army who was buried there and learned about the Battle of the Bulge, that's where he died and we went to the American cemetery at Omaha Beach, then back to London. That was a twelve-day trip. Then I stayed on another week in the English public record office to do more research.

Mark: Was this trip a kind of catharsis for you? Is this something you get overly emotional?

Eckstam: I don't think so because I've been so deeply involved with Exercise Tiger and went through the 45th, I just wanted to learn more information. I struck up a correspondence with about 50-60 Brits and I must have seen about half of those people in person and asked them more detailed questions than they could write in their letters and I went back down to Portland, where all the bodies and where all the live guys were taken in Portland Harbor and I visited with a great number of people there and so I got a lot of information of what went on. So I have a lot of contacts with not only American witnesses to the event, but British witnesses as well.

Mark: That pretty much covers all of my questions, is there anything else you want to add?

Eckstam: No, I think we've got it pretty well done.

Mark: I appreciate your coming in.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]