

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ALBERT A. GIESE
Engineman, LSM-18, Pacific Theater, WWII
1996

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Giese, Albert A., (1915-). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (96 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (96 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Giese, a Nekoosa, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service with the Navy aboard LSM 18, and his veteran activities with the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Giese describes basic training at Great Lakes (Illinois), diesel training at the University of Illinois, and amphibious training at Little Creek (Virginia). He talks about landing at Leyte Bay where his LSM supplied tanks, ammunition, gasoline, and troop transport. Giese relates his non-combat role as head diesel mechanic and his combat role as damage control. He relates information on the landing at Corregidor, life aboard ship, lack of supplies, and reaction to VJ-Day. Giese details his homecoming, including the reaction of his son whom he had only met once, and return to his pre-war work. He talks about his involvement with the Veterans of Foreign Wars including founding a post at Nekoosa, reasons for choosing the VFW rather than the American Legion, and aiding veterans. He also comments on organizing LSM reunions.

Biographical Sketch

Giese (b. May 15, 1915) was drafted into service in 1943 and served with the Navy aboard LSM 18 in the Pacific Theater during World War II. He was honorably discharged from service and returned to Nekoosa, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

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

Interview Transcript

- Mark: Today's date is February 19, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Albert A. Giese of Nekoosa, Wisconsin, a veteran of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific Theatre of World War II. Thank you for coming down this afternoon.
- Giese: Thank you.
- Mark: I suppose we should start at the top as they say and have you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- Giese: I was born in the Town of Saratoga. That would be in the center of Wisconsin.
- Mark: Is that Juneau County?
- Giese: Wood County. I grew up in Nekoosa, Wisconsin and attended high school in Nekoosa. After graduation from high school I went to work for Nekoosa Paper Company. I got married in 1938 and had two children. I was drafted on October 25, 1943. Spent boot at Navy Training Station at Great Lakes, Illinois and attended diesel school at University of Illinois. I was transferred down to Little Creek, Virginia. Joined LSM-18 commissioned at Houston, Texas and I signed on there as a fireman first class and worked up to, the time I spent in service, in charge of the engine room when I retired, or was discharged. Left the ship in November 1945 at Saipan and was discharged at Great Lakes on January 3, 1946. During that time I earned 42 ½ points. The American Asiatic Pacific, two stars, and Philippines Liberation, two stars. This is just a brief description about it put in there. Our ship, the LSM-18, took part in seven assault landings and made more than a hundred trips to supply advanced areas in the Philippines and Borneo. Also made two trips to Japan from Manila. The ship claimed four Jap planes destroyed and was decommissioned 3-26-46 in San Pedro, California. And then I retired from the paper mill July 1, 1977 as head diesel mechanic on locomotives and cranes.
- Mark: I suppose we need to go back and cover a couple of things. For example, the attack on Pearl Harbor. This is one of these events in history that people remember where they were and what they were doing. It's like Kennedy being shot or something like that. I would imagine that you recall December 7, 1941.
- Giese: On December 7, 1941 I was working at my job in the paper mill. I was, I guess, just as surprised as anyone else. That is about all I recall of that.
- Mark: It was a couple of years before you actually got drafted.
- Giese: Right.

- Mark: As you had mentioned you were already married and had two children. Many people being drafted at the time were eighteen-year-old kids. You were a little farther along in life and a little more established in life. I am curious to know your reaction to being drafted. Did you expect it? How did it affect your family?
- Giese: I misstated that a little bit. The son was born before I went into service and the daughter was born afterward. I was granted two three-month deferments because of the son. When I reported to the draft board and the lady that was in charge of the draft board, I asked her when do I expect to be called. She said, "Why?" I said because we are expecting. The lady said, "That is not going to keep you out of service." I said I didn't expect it to. I was just wondering on how to handle my affairs. Well, the son was born under difficulties. He and his mother spent almost a month in the hospital before they came home and that's how I got the two three-month deferments. And then when they were better, I went into service.
- Mark: Yeah. Did you expect to get drafted? If you were eighteen, a lot of the guys that I've spoken with, they were pretty fatalistic about it. But again you were fairly well established in your work at this time?
- Giese: Correct. I didn't expect to be drafted. In fact, on the ship I was treated almost like a father to these eighteen-year-olds.
- Mark: Now, let me do the math here. I'm not very good at math. That's why I went into history. If you were born in 1915, you were drafted, you were about twenty-six by this time?
- Giese: Twenty-eight.
- Mark: Twenty-eight, yeah. So you were thirty when you got discharged.
- Giese: Right.
- Mark: I suppose you were kind of a father-like figure to some of these youngsters.
- Giese: To these youngsters on there, yes.
- Mark: Well, this theme will come up from time to time. These things go on. Um, so 1943 you got drafted and you went off to your induction in basic training. As we mentioned before the tape started rolling, I went into the service myself and got inducted forty years after you did and I've got certain memories of the induction process and so if you would, describe the steps you took in getting into the service. I assume you had to take a physical somewhere and go off to Great Lakes and then to basic training. Just walk me through the steps of how you actually enter the service.

- Giese: The basic physical was in Wisconsin Rapids before being sent down to Great Lakes Naval Training Station.
- Mark: Now, at this physical I would imagine by this time already you'd noticed that you were a little older than some of the others being inducted into the service.
- Giese: Oh, yes, yeah. Of course that time there was quite a few others my age and even some older that were being inducted.
- Mark: Then you went off to, was it Great Lakes you said?
- Giese: Great Lakes.
- Mark: And what transpired there?
- Giese: You had your basic boot training there, getting a little bit used to what the Navy was like, what you should expect of the Navy.
- Mark: This is the screaming drill sergeant and that sort of thing?
- Giese: Right.
- Mark: Was that your experience? I find veterans, sometimes they had fairly amiable drill instructors and sometimes they had mean guys who gave them a hard time. What was your experience in terms of the discipline? Being someone older and more established, how well did you adapt to military discipline lifestyle?
- Giese: I don't think the older ones had much of a problem. I noticed that there were younger ones in with us but they had more of a problem than the older ones did. I think they were screamed at more than we were. That was my memory of it.
- Mark: Was it tough do you think?
- Giese: Oh, yes, it was tough.
- Mark: Now, basic training is also a time when people from different parts of the country all sort of come together and sort of become soldiers or sailors. If you would describe some of the other people in your basic training unit and how they all got along. Or was there much diversity in terms of regions and that sort of thing?
- Giese: Well, yeah, there was. One thing I remember, one of the fellows I got acquainted with that gives a little idea of his age, at that time they took him over to the dental park and pulled all his teeth out and fitted him with false teeth. So, that's how far down the line were about them. But we had, at the Lakes, we had people from, well, I would say mostly central United States.

- Mark: Yeah. Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois and that sort of thing? Some would claim that the Navy was President Roosevelt's favorite and it had a little more of an elite status than say the Army or something like that. So in proportion of draftees versus volunteers, and did you notice anything in basic training as to how many were volunteering and how many were draftees and the quality of the sailors?
- Giese: The biggest percent were draftees. And biggest percent at that time went in as USNRs and they weren't looked at too well as far as the regular Navy was concerned.
- Mark: They were the temporary troopers so to speak.
- Giese: Right.
- Mark: Your basic training lasted how long?
- Giese: Well, let's see.
- Mark: Approximately. Perhaps it seemed like forever.
- Giese: It was only six weeks, I think it was.
- Mark: And then you went where again?
- Giese: It was, at the end of basic training they sort of interviewed you to find out what niche you fit into and evidently my mechanical ability must have showed up. They sent me to diesel school at the University of Illinois. They had a diesel-training bay underneath the bleachers on the football field.
- Mark: How did that go? What sort of training did you get?
- Giese: The basics in diesel; your cooling systems, your general principles of diesel and that's about it.
- Mark: A lot of classroom-type training.
- Giese: A lot of classroom. They pushed you through there in a hurry because they needed people to fill in for these LSMs that they were building.
- Mark: Now by this time, did you know what type of ship you were going to be on?
- Giese: No. When we were shipped out of school then they knew because we were going down to Little Creek, Little Creek, and that was an amphibious space so we knew we were going into the amphibs. At that time we thought we were going into LSTs, but when we got

down there we found out that we were going to LSMs and they weren't built yet. They were just building. In fact, our training was on an LST.

Mark: Now, Little Creek is where again?

Giese: Virginia.

Mark: Virginia. Now this is where you actually meet the ship eventually.

Giese: No. We were, after amphibious training at Little Creek we were shipped to Texas, Galveston, Texas, where the ship was just going down the ways and that's where we meet the ship.

Mark: And you departed for overseas from Texas.

Giese: Galveston, Texas.

Mark: You got to travel around a little bit in the country as you are doing your training and these sorts of things. Did you get off the base much?

Giese: Very little. We were mostly, in fact at Little Creek we didn't get out at all.

Mark: So the weekend pass, shore leave I guess is what it is in the Navy, was pretty rare I take it.

Giese: Pretty rare.

Mark: So, in terms of ways the war and the war effort was affecting the home front, you didn't get off post very much, you didn't really get a change to observe the way the country was being affected by like rationing and these sorts of things?

Giese: No. The only time that we were given time off was between boot training and Little Creek, Virginia. We did have a, I think it was a, ten-day leave to go home. Went from there to Little Creek and that was it.

Mark: So you met your ship in Texas then?

Giese: Right.

Mark: And took off overseas.

Giese: Yeah.

- Mark: Why don't you describe getting the ship ready—I would assume there is a shakedown cruise or something like that that you had to do. What is involved in preparing a ship for combat?
- Giese: Getting the supplies that you were allowed. That was another thing that we found out afterwards, that we were expendable, was because we were very fortunate in having an engineering officer that had a little experience. We used to go out nights stealing supplies from the engine room, pipes and things like that because we would go to the supply office and the first thing they would look at is our ship—you're not allowed that. So that's why I say we were expendable. We would take the ship out and so many hours at full speed and try everything out there—on the guns and all that. We did that twice and then we were shipped overseas.
- Mark: As you're doing the shakedown cruise, I mean, there were German U-boats on the Atlantic off the Gulf of Mexico. Was that a concern of yours at all?
- Giese: No. All our shakedowns was right out of Galveston. No worry there at all. In fact, from Galveston we shipped out over to the Panama Canal and across.
- Mark: So why don't you describe your trip overseas. You left from Texas, through the Panama Canal, you mentioned. Was it difficult getting your sea legs for example? I mean, Wisconsin, with the exception of the eastern part of the state is not known for nautical heritage necessarily. Did you have trouble adjusting to the boat? Did others on the ship have those sorts of problems? And then if you would just describe where you went to? You went from Texas, through the Panama Canal, to where?
- Giese: As far as getting your sea legs, it didn't take too long. I think by the time we were through with our shakedown cruises the majority of the sailors on there were either sailors or they were sick boys. The ones that were the sick boys, that continued on throughout the whole time we were on the ship.
- Mark: They never got used to it?
- Giese: They would get out to sea, they would be sick, they'd get over it and then they were all right until they came back into a port or something and then that would go over and over and over again. But we went through the Canal. And from there our first stop was Bora Bora. I think all of us would get up on deck in the morning and look out and wondered if they knew where they were going, you know, not being old-time sailors, just first time out. But from Bora Bora they never told you where you were going or what was going to happen. From there we headed to New Guinea. When we got there and we saw all the ships we knew then that something big was coming up. That's where the convoy was formed for the initial invasion of the Philippines.
- Mark: So you went right overseas, sort of queued up and went right into the fighting.

Giese: Right into battle. The initial landing was in Leyte Bay. That's where the troops landed. Our first load of landing was five General Sherman tanks, their ammunition and their gasoline supply. The first landing, the tanks were designated to get to the airport so that they'd have someplace to land their planes. They left their ammunition and gasoline aboard and the following day we had to unload that and if you wanted to see sailors work to get rid of that stuff and get back out to sea because the front was right in there. We unloaded that gasoline and ammunition and got back out.

Mark: So, in terms of your first actual invasions and stuff, I image it took place in the early morning. I'm interested in setting the scene before the invasion and then your place in it. I mean, you were first wave, second wave, and what it was you saw, how heavy was the combat and was your ship damaged at all? Sort of walk me through your role in that invasion.

Giese: In the first invasion we were very fortunate there was no damage whatsoever. Of course your larger ships shelled the beach first, soften it up for our invasion. So we hit, unload and pulled off and got back out to sea again, out in the bay. I was just telling this friend of mine, my nephew's son, on the way down that we just did our job. We were scared, but we were trained well enough to do what we had to do and we did it. And when I think back on it now I wonder how we did it but we did.

Mark: Um, so, that beach that you dropped the materials off on, was it pretty combat-scarred? How had the invasion progressed there? Were there Japanese in the jungle? Or had they been pushed back by this time?

Giese: They had been pushed back here. Palm trees and that were all blown up. Our Army and our Navy ships did a good job in clearing the beach out before we made a landing.

Mark: I would image you had to go in more than just once. You had to go back and get other supplies and bring it in and continue this re-supplying.

Giese: That was one of our jobs, was to go back up to the bigger ships and take in supplies and that.

Mark: So, with this particular operation in the Philippines, how long did it last? How long were you shuttling supplies back and forth? Couple days, couple weeks?

Giese: For that first one we were in there, oh, for a couple of months. We worked going around and dropping off supplies and infantry and that. We made several runs. I think that's—remember I said in here about all these hundred side runs. Those were all in on that deal, you know.

Mark: Yeah. So, this was the first of seven?

Giese: In this one, yes.

- Mark: Yeah. I suppose it would be hard to distinguish each particular one but are there any one of these seven missions in particular stands out? One or two or three that were particularly harrying or particularly momentous, or just for whatever reason that they stick out?
- Giese: One does. Our boys were pinned down on Leyte Island, on a place they called Ormuck. We were to go around at night and drop off some supplies and ammunition and pull off and retreat back. We hit the beach and some how or the other—to describe it—I'll probably get these things turned around but to describe it, when you hit the beach you had to be prepared that you could pull off again. So, you had an anchor that you could drop. You called it your stern anchor. You'd drop that before you hit the beach. And during the time we were unloading and waiting for nightfall the tide went out and when the convoy got ready to go we couldn't get off the beach. About six Jap planes came over. You see, there's another thing, when you were in a convoy, the Jap planes picked on the big ships. But if you were by yourself, then they picked on you. So they started to pick on us. Well, the tide finally came in and we got off. The Jap planes came over and they sank one of our ships and we were given the command to hit the beach and abandon ship, which we did. We hit the beach, abandoned. There again where our training came in—this was the place, this is the second round, but this is the place where we had to abandon the ship, went in and dug holes, fox holes, and if you want to see sailors dig—but we thought we were done for. The front line, we could hear the shooting, the fighting. But that night at midnight, the Army came around and gave orders that we should return to our individual ships, which we did and we pulled out.
- Mark: So this photograph here is of the abandoned ship?
- Giese: No. This photograph here, about six weeks later, we made a return trip with supplies. The beach was, everything was secured at that time, but it was the same beach. I think that was the scariest one because that's the day, this is a 40 MM gun tub up here. One of our boys was killed there with shrapnel from a Jap bomb dropping by. And one of, LSM-19 was it? I don't want to be held down on that number. One of them was sunk there. But that I think, of all of them, was the scariest one of the bunch.
- Mark: But there were other situations where you were being shot at a number of times. You mentioned for example that your ship had taken down four planes.
- Giese: Right.
- Mark: There were other incidences?
- Giese: There were other incidents where we were attacked. In fact, the first trip back from Ormuck Leyte we were pinned down in one spot and another ship was sunk there. That's where one of the Jap planes we were credited for, we got. I just wished so many

times afterwards, but like I said you were so busy doing your job that you just didn't think about it.

Mark: Yeah. Now, in terms of your job, during these invasions, let's get specific about where you were and what your role was and what you were doing.

Giese: My first job was damage control. That was anything that would happen, you were supposed to take care of that. But then after that, then I was down in the engine room running the engines. In fact I had charge of the engines.

Mark: Is it more of a comfort or is it more frightening to be deep inside the ship during an attack?

Giese: I think it's more frightening. In fact, we had one young fellow that was on the phones in the engine room and when he was on the phones he could hear everything that went on in the com and that and when they would say a plane coming in at such-and-such an angle he would disappear down this end of the engine room. Then pretty soon he was up there but we couldn't have that down there. But he couldn't stand it there so it was a little bit of a, I don't know just how'd you put it but some people couldn't take it.

Mark: Yeah. It was mentally taxing I suppose.

Giese: If you put him up on the con as a watch, wonderful, but down in the engine room he was no good.

Mark: Everyone has their talents, I guess.

Giese: Right.

Mark: So, of the seven initial landings you made, how many involved actual fire on your ship? The first one you described didn't sound like you were in too much threatening danger. Some of the other ones sound like they were extremely harrowing. How often were you in life-threatening danger during these invasions?

Giese: I think you were in life threatening, in almost all of them but some were worse than others. The landing up at Corregidor in Bataan, that was a bad one there. But like you said the big landings where we had destroyers and that involved we faired out fairly well because the planes wouldn't pick on us. They wanted the big ships.

Mark: So, there were seven invasions and then you had some time when you weren't in combat. What was going on on your ship between the invasions? What sorts of things happened? I suppose you had to get—

Giese: We were, some of the time after some of the islands were secured there, your battleships would come in and, of course, there were no docks or anything for them to

land at. And supply ships—so, then we would have to run over to the supply ships, pick up supplies, bring them over to the battlewagons. That's the way they were supplied. We spent a lot of time doing that. We spent a lot of time on shuttling the Army personnel around, taking them from this spot to that spot and dropping them off and landing them back. Most of that was done, we would leave at dusk and try to get back in the harbor before dawn.

Mark: Did you get any shore leave during this period?

Giese: Very little.

Mark: Still?

Giese: When an island would be secured they would take one section from the ship and take them ashore and get them a couple cases of beer and have a little party but very, very little.

Mark: But, you know, shore leave in Manila or that sort of thing, you didn't get that sort of thing?

Giese: No.

Mark: Because you know one of the stereotypical images of the South Pacific, of course, with Micheners's novel and the play, the native girls and all those sorts of things, this was not your particular experience?

Giese: No.

Mark: Pretty business-filled I take it.

Giese: We were busy all the while we were there. Even after the war was over, the two trips to Japan. We got off the ship, got on the dock. That's about as far as they would allow you to go. **[END SIDE A, TAPE 1]**

Mark: I want to come to that but before we talk about the end of the war I want to discuss what we were discussing before the tape was on. The difference between the LST and the LSM—what specifically is the difference?

Giese: The LST is about a hundred feet longer. Their tank deck as they were called was enclosed. They're quite a bit wider, but they're flat bottomed just like the LSM was. But they weren't able to get up on the beaches like the LSM. The LSM, most of the time when we pulled up on the beach it was just like this picture. We dropped our, opened our bow doors, dropped our ramp and it was—

Mark: Troops or tanks coming out?

- Giese: Everything could go right out. Once in awhile when you had run into a shallow beach, they had little water to go in but most of the time it was like that. But they were more maneuverable. There's pretty good descriptions in the one book there, the difference between the LSMs and the LSTs, why they were developed.
- Mark: Did you run across LSTs in the Pacific? And was it, I would imagine, or perhaps it's my imagination, that there might be sort of a rivalry between the two? Which ship is better? Any of that sort of thing?
- Giese: Not really. We didn't have that opportunity. We run into quite a few LSTs. Well, there just wasn't any chance for any rivalry.
- Mark: Yeah. One of the more notorious things about World War II, or any war for that matter, sometimes is inter-service rivalries as well. And you had contact with Army guys—you were ferrying them into the beaches and that sort of thing. Any sort of kidding around about Army grunts and Navy squids and this sort of thing?
- Giese: Oh, yes. The Army personnel, when we shuttled them around, they thought we had it pretty nice. We had warm grub.
- Mark: Well, were they right?
- Giese: Well, yeah, but it was war. It wasn't always the best of everything. Their big gripe was, hey, you guys got a warm sack to crawl into every night and look where we have to sleep. But we got along real well.
- Mark: It was mostly just a joking around kind of rivalry.
- Giese: Right.
- Mark: 'Cause I know like between MacArthur and Nimitz it wasn't always friendly necessarily. That wasn't, things were pretty amiable among you guys.
- Giese: See we were, our ship was—when you mention MacArthur—we were just three or four ships down when MacArthur returned.
- Mark: Oh, is that right? Oh, I didn't know this.
- Giese: Yeah, we watched him walk ashore.
- Mark: So, what really happened? It's one of these mythical events. There's debate as to who came ashore first, when did he come ashore? I can only ask you your own personal recollections, of course, but what did you see?

- Giese: You probably know that Douglas, General MacArthur, was a very good PR man. When they landed him first he was on dry land. His photographers and all that backed off into the water so that when he came ashore he was wading in the water to make it look good which I don't guess there's nothing wrong with that.
- Mark: Well, why not? If Schwartzkoff can be on TV with Barbara Walters—so we're getting near the end of the war. Did you have any—
- Giese: There you go.
- Mark: Okay.
- Giese: One thing I would like to get in here before we get to the end of the war. On those ships we were supposed to take on water from the water ship. We had a still on there that, when it was clean, we could turn out about 2700 or 2800 gallons of water, fresh water in twenty-four hours. And then, of course, we called it dirty. They would fill it up with lime and all that. So that would gradually go down to about 1100. When it got down to 900 gallons of water in twenty-four hours they would kick out on you. So all the while I was on there we never took on water. We made all our own water so when you had 45 to 50 men, 2800 gallons of water isn't very much. Many, many a times salt-water showers. You have to be out to know what a salt-water shower is. What we would do, we would get them up to the shower room and the engine room, the water king as we called the guy, would have to watch them. Get in, get wet, step out, soap up, keep the line going. After you soaked up, drop in and rinse off. There was a lot of fights there.
- Mark: Fights about what?
- Giese: About getting a freshwater shower and not leaving them in there long enough to get all the soap off. A lot of that stuff went on. We were what would you call it? We weren't meant to be, we were supposed to get more stuff from the supply ships. But we didn't. We were—
- Mark: They never quite made it your way for one reason or another.
- Giese: No, we were all on our own. One of the things, too, that I keep forgetting—when we left the States we had four twenties and a single twenty, twin twenty up there but in Bora Bora they found out that that's not enough guns so we had a single forty-millimeter mounted on the bow. When the ships came out after we were out there they came out with a twin out there. This will probably be all mixed up. I mean, you know, that could have been in order there but after fifty years—
- Mark: After thirty. Actually, that brought up some other questions I was going to ask. In terms of staying occupied on the ship, when you weren't on duty, you see the movies, there's the drinking and the gambling, and this sort of thing. The writing letters home.

When you weren't actually on duty what did you do to keep yourselves occupied? How did all these young guys adapt to being cooped up on this ship? You mentioned that scuffles might break out occasionally in the shower room. I would imagine that being cooped on the ship caused other tensions as well.

Giese: Yeah, you had your tension built up. You were kept busy enough washing your own clothes and writing a few letters. The biggest entertainment was when we got paid which wasn't very, very often, and that was gambling. Other than that, movies, we didn't know what a movie was. We evidently were never around a ship that had the equipment to show movies. Once in awhile after some of the islands were secured then we'd go on the beach to a movie but other than that we were just, just kept busy. I think you probably know, the Navy knew it too, we made a little brew ourselves.

Mark: I wasn't going to ask that sort of thing specifically, but boys will be boys. You were able to do that on your ship?

Giese: Well, we found out that your fruit, your peaches and pears and all that stuff came in those huge cans, see. Okay, they'd dump them in the big kettles and after the chow line was all through, why, where'd the juice go? Overboard. But we found out that they told the cook, hey, save that. Us fellows in the engine room, we had the opportunity. So, we put it down in the spare parts room and sneak a little sugar and a little yeast. It never really got matured. It was drank up before—

Mark: So, this is you and a couple of buddies who had your own little still there? Was that the only one on the ship that you knew of?

Giese: It was the only one.

Mark: That you know of. In your unit I suppose.

Giese: There wasn't room otherwise.

Mark: I suppose. If you had gotten caught with that what do you think the ramifications might have been? Would you have gotten into trouble?

Giese: I don't think so. Our engineering officer knew we had it and that's all the further it went.

Mark: I see.

Giese: I think as long as no one abused the privileges, they didn't bother us.

Mark: Well, if something else from the war period, we can come back to it. But in terms of the war ending, do you recall when the war in Europe ended? Or were you so busy that it didn't make much of a difference?

- Giese: No, it didn't make much of an effect on us out there. What mainly affect was when they dropped the atomic bomb and told us the war was over. That's when it hit home.
- Mark: And do you recall that specific moment, when you first heard of the bombs? So you recall your reaction, and those around you?
- Giese: Well, I think the only thing I can remember was it's, hey, I'm going to have my points pretty soon and I'll be able to go home.
- Mark: Uh hum. Was it an air of celebrating and jubilating?
- Giese: Oh, yeah, yes.
- Mark: And then, of course, the official surrender followed a week or so later.
- Giese: Right. And that's when us older ones, I know especially myself, I had my points. They came up with this point system. You were in so many battles, and so long, were married, and all this. That's where they decide how many points you had. I had my points when we were in Manila and I wanted to get off the ship and they said, no, I couldn't get off so we made a trip to Japan. When I got to Japan I wanted to get off. No, I had to come back to Manila again. They made another trip to Japan and all this while I'm getting, want to go home. I've got a wife and a son at home, see. Finally at Saipan, I raised enough Cain that I got off there. That's where I got my experience. There was two CVEs and some other ships in the bay at Saipan and, I thought, well, I'm going to have a fast trip home. What do I get? An LST from Saipan to Pearl Harbor.
- Mark: Not the fastest ship in the Navy, I take it. So you went from Pearl Harbor, eventually you came back to the U.S. Describe your getting out of the service. That's a whole out processing, sort of. Just like you're inducted in, there's a whole process of getting out of service. Walk me through your discharge.
- Giese: We got off of the LST at San Francisco and was just there a couple of days. Shipped to, back to, the Great Lakes and just a week's time there and was discharged, shipped home.
- Mark: From the Great Lakes and you took a train home?
- Giese: Took a train home from the Great Lakes.
- Mark: And this is the point where a lot of war stories often end. But I have a couple of questions about some of the post-war experiences and veteran's organizations and that sort of thing. You first got home, what were your priorities to get your life back on track?

- Giese: Well, of course, the first thing was my wife and the youngster.
- Mark: Was that a difficult adjustment? You had been gone for quite awhile.
- Giese: It was for the little one. His mother had worked real hard put pictures and that stuff, but when I walked in the house he took one look at me and went and hid and he'd peek out. I just thought to myself, okay, I'm going to ignore him, which I did. It wasn't long and he was out there. But after that the big thing was getting a job.
- Mark: Some veterans did have problems finding work. There were a lot of guys coming back at once. Of the veterans I've interviewed, I get a wide range of responses. Your own personal experience was that getting back to your job was a problem.
- Giese: We were very fortunate with the paper company. I think a lot of the companies were like that but we had 90 days to get back to our old jobs.
- Mark: Now, there was the Selective Service Act which was supposed to guarantee that, if at all possible, that you got your job back.
- Giese: You got your job back or one that was equivalent.
- Mark: Did you?
- Giese: No. I went back into the shipping department and I wasn't too happy with that job 'cause I wasn't too happy with the wages and I asked them what they could give me and they, oh, your old job. That's about all the satisfactory they could give me. I just didn't know what to do. But I stopped one day and asked a fellow on what we called the switch crew, where they handled the cars. They had their own steam engines at one time and they were just switching over to diesel engines. And they said they were, all that stuff looking for a diesel mechanic. I said, boy, you've got one. I'm ready for it. So that's where I switched from the shipping department to the diesel department. In fact, I started out and built it up from nothing to, when I retired we had three diesel locomotives, we had four diesel cranes, plus a bunch of end-loaders and that was all diesel equipment that we were maintaining.
- Mark: This was the same company that you worked for before?
- Giese: The same paper company.
- Mark: Which one was it, just out of curiosity?
- Giese: Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company at that time.
- Mark: It's changed now?

- Giese: Oh, yes. It changed to Great Northern-Nekoosa and now it's Georgia Pacific.
- Mark: I lose track. I've got an uncle that works in a paper mill up in Rhinelander.
- Giese: Up in Rhinelander?
- Mark: The name changes and I just forget. That's how they go sometimes.
- Giese: Well, see, Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company was one of the old companies that started in 1908, 9, 10, I think somewhere around there. It was one of the first paper companies on the Wisconsin River. If you're familiar with the Wisconsin River, it's worked pretty hard from our mill at Nekoosa, on up the line. There's Wisconsin Rapids, Barron, Stevens Point, let's see, Rhinelander gets in there somewhere.
- Mark: Rhinelander is pretty far north.
- Giese: Yeah.
- Mark: But it's the same basic thing, yeah. So, you were fortunate to find work fairly soon after the war. Something to your training and satisfaction.
- Giese: Well, in fact the Navy, I always said the Navy, in one way, was the best thing that happened to me. I got into a field that I liked.
- Mark: Yeah. At your work place were there other veterans coming back to work? And among those you worked with, were there a lot of other veterans?
- Giese: Yes, there was. They either got into the old job or got a better job. The veterans were treated real good there. The Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company was, like most of those, were family affairs. And that was the Alexander family and they treated their veterans real good.
- Mark: Any specific ways you can think of? I mean, some companies I know have sort of a veterans club and that sort of thing. Were there organized activities or did they just sort of look out for the veterans and help them when they could?
- Giese: No, there was no clubs or anything. They just looked out for their veterans.
- Mark: Was it a unionized place?
- Giese: At that time, no.
- Mark: I was wondering if the unions had any sort of a—
- Giese: Afterwards it was unionized. See at that time it was like a big family.

- Mark: Yeah. So, you found work. But there are other problems coming back to civilian life that others, some veterans have experienced. In terms of the GI Bill, you were able to find work so you didn't need the educational parts. There were other parts of the GI Bill, the employment insurance you didn't have to use. Housing loans and that sort of thing?
- Giese: No, no, I managed all alone. I didn't have to get into any of those.
- Mark: In terms of medical conditions, did you have any medical problems that you needed VA attention for in the first few years after the war?
- Giese: Not the first few years, no.
- Mark: As you got later on in life.
- Giese: As I got later on in life, yes.
- Mark: But nothing that is war related?
- Giese: No, nothing war related. I get down to the Veterans Hospital here in Madison about maybe three times a year but it's not war related.
- Mark: Now, veteran's organizations. I happen to know for a fact that you are a member of some but let's sort of trace your history in the veterans' organizations. When you first came back in late '45, did you join any of the major veterans' groups, like the Legion or VFW?
- Giese: I joined the VFW. We, in fact, we organized the first post in Nekoosa.
- Mark: Oh, is that right? You and some other World War II veterans?
- Giese: Yeah. There was enough of the World War II veterans in the area. There was a post up at Wisconsin Rapids but we wanted our own post in Nekoosa. I was one of the charter members of the VFW in the Nekoosa area.
- Mark: Now, how did you get started? I mean, it was just some guys you worked with or some—
- Giese: Just a group of people got to talking about it, got a meeting, then we contacted the Rapids post and found out how you went about organizing, get a charter down there.
- Mark: Were they cooperative or did they say—
- Giese: Oh, no, they were cooperative.

- Mark: Oh, I was wondering if they'd say, geez, why don't you just join them or something. They were interested in starting up other posts and that sort of thing. It wasn't a problem. They helped you out.
- Giese: Oh, yeah, no problem at all.
- Mark: Now I assume you eventually attracted World War I veterans and World War II veterans and later even Korean War veterans.
- Giese: A few, but it's dying down now.
- Mark: Mostly World War II guys.
- Giese: Yeah. And Vietnam. Of course, now Vietnam has their own post in Rapids so they kind of stick with that. We have a couple of Vietnams, several Korean but we're starting to die out.
- Mark: Why VFW in particular? Was there any specific reason or it just happened to be those active in your area?
- Giese: I think the reason was because we were all, except for a few of us, were all in the same age. The American Legion at that time was all World War I vets. I guess we just didn't want to, some of us belonged to the Legion along with the VFW.
- Mark: Oh, yeah, a lot do. Do you by some chance?
- Giese: At one time, yeah, but we wanted our own functions. I guess that was it.
- Mark: So, getting the VFW post off the ground, how did you go about recruiting? What sort of meetings and organizational activities and that sort of thing did you have? How did your approach take off? I mean, obviously you were able to establish it, to keep it going. Was it difficult? Did you have difficulty finding members and that sort of thing?
- Giese: No, not at all. In fact, we grew fast enough that we built our own building and that went on for, oh, better than, around 30 years. And then as they start dying off then your good workers started dropping off. We finally had to give up the post, the building. We still have the post there but we meet in the, the city gave us a room to meet in. We're not as active as we used to be.
- Mark: Yeah. In the first few years after the war, specifically but even generally, what were the main reasons for organizing 'cause, as I'm sure you're well aware, veterans' organizations mean different things to different veterans. There are services in helping getting benefits, there is the social activities, there are political activities. In the case of

the post that you organized, what were the main functions of it? Why were people joining it?

Giese: One of the things was to help out the veteran not quite as fortunate as we were. The other one was for get together. We'd have our fisheries and Christmas parties. We've always helped out the veterans not as fortunate as we are. Like now, once a year with the auxiliary, we have a group come over from Tomah for a day for a picnic. Even back then we had military funerals. Back then we did try the whole thing, the guards and all that stuff, but finally that died out. We still have a group for military funerals but we just furnish the firing squad and let the church take care of the religious part and we just take care of the military part of it.

Mark: Now, the LST veterans, I know you're also involved with them. How did that all start and when did that all start?

Giese: Well, let's see, not the LST, the LSM.

Mark: Oh, I'm sorry. I should really be careful. The LSM veterans, when it come time, in terms of reunions of the ship's crew and that sort of thing, did that start soon after the war? Or was that as you go over a little later on in years?

Giese: No. We started as an individual ship about ten years ago. In fact, that's the first reunion we had and we weren't too familiar with the national organization at the time. But then after we had our first or second reunion then the national came in and like I said, we've had one reunion with them.

Mark: Now, when it came time to your own personal participation, how did you start to get involved? Did someone get a mailing list and start tracking guys down?

Giese: That's just about what it was. The fellow that was in the engine room with me started it. We got together and we started hunting up the members. Now we have, finally got a full list of the crew and their addresses and we contacted as many as we could but after fifty years there's a few missing. We have at least, oh, between fifteen and twenty show up every year.

Mark: What motivates you to go to these reunions and to organize them?

Giese: I think the comrade part of it. I recall the first reunion we had. We met, a fellow came up to me, with myself and a couple of others, they'd say, "Hi, Al. How are you?" and I'd look at them and I'd say, "I'm sorry but I don't remember your name." "Yeah, you do too." They'd mention it and, well, sure enough all at once their features started to come back. But, see, they were 18, 19 and I was 28 so I didn't change, I guess, as much as they did. But we just have such a good time when we get together now. We had them come from the East, from the West, from the South. It's just unbelievable.

- Mark: So, what's a typical get-together? I mean, I assume most of you guys are married. Do you bring along your wives and that sort of thing?
- Giese: You bring your wives and we meet, we try to arrange it some place where the majority haven't been. Like we've been out, last year we went to the Black Hills, we went out to Yellowstone, we've been down South. I had them up in Wisconsin to the Dells one year and it's not formal. We arrange some side trips for them and have a few meetings, have our meals together, just a general bull session I guess you'd call it.
- Mark: Now, this is your particular ship that you're talking about.
- Giese: Right.
- Mark: And you've been to, did you say one national—
- Giese: One national at Vegas two years ago.
- Mark: How was that different, other than size?
- Giese: The size part is and then, sure, you have your card you and a fellow would come up, "Well, you're off LSM-18. Where did you guys go?" and all that, you know. But you don't have the closeness that you do with your own ship. I enjoyed it. We had 500, it was a little over 500 men. It was close to 1200 with the women.
- Mark: Pretty impressive showing actually.
- Giese: That's quite a, but with a group like that you don't have the closeness.
- Mark: Right, right. Well, I think you pretty much exhausted all the questions I had. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you want to go back to? Or anything you think we've missed or skipped over?
- Giese: No, not really. I think, oh, there's many, many stories that could be told, I guess. **[END SIDE B, TAPE 1]** I wish I would have kept track of some of those things a lot closer. Some of the people did. Like in this little magazine we've got here, every now and then somebody writes an incident that happened to them. No, I think we've covered it pretty well.
- Mark: Well, thanks for coming down today.
- Giese: Well, I enjoyed it.
- Mark: So did I.

Giese: My nephew there, I don't know if you know that he brought his dad's World War I uniform.

Mark: I didn't know specifically what he was bringing.

Giese: And then he brought his World War II uniform and some pictures.

Mark: Yeah, I saw the pictures of the ship.

Giese: Yeah, and a gas mask from World War I.

Mark: I'll be curious to see them. Well, thanks again for coming in.

END OF TRANSCRIPT