

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
EDWARD H. LAINBERGER
Prison Clerk, Army, post-World War II and Korean War.

1996

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Lainberger, Edward H., (1928-2001). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Edward H. Lainberger, a Montello, Wisconsin native, discusses his experiences in the Army, including duty as a clerk at Sugamo Prison in Japan after World War II and with the 8th Army during the Korean War. Lainberger speaks of being drafted in April of 1945, basic and artillery training at Fort Bliss (Texas), and assignment to Sugamo Prison in Japan. He talks about duty as a pass clerk, working with visiting families of war criminals, and his awareness of the war crime trials. He comments on meeting Tokyo Rose and Hideki Tōjō, and he portrays the general demeanor of the prisoners. Lainberger describes a typical duty day, recreational activities, visiting Mount Fuji on leave, and seeing limited reconstruction of the country. After the start of the Korean War, he discusses being reassigned to a transportation section at headquarters of the 8th Army Headquarters in Yokohama. He tells of arranging to see his brother, who came through Yokohama with the Army. Lainberger touches on having enough points to be sent home in 1951, participating in Operation Longhorn in Texas with a military police outfit, and working as a security guard at Fort Custer (Michigan) until his discharge. He addresses his civilian career at Oscar Mayer and membership in the VFW and American Legion. Lainberger relates going to China in 1949 to receive a transfer of 250 prisoners from Lord Ward Jail (Shanghai), and he portrays the behavior of the Chinese prisoners.

Biographical Sketch:

Lainberger (1928-2001) served in the Army from 1945 to 1952, including duty at Sugamo Prison from 1946 to 1950. He was raised on a farm between Montello and Pardeeville (Wisconsin). After the Korean War, Lainberger married, worked thirty-two years at Oscar Mayer, and eventually settled in Arlington (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996

Transcribed by Karen M. Emery and WDVA staff, ca. 1998

Checked and corrected by Calvin John Pike, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Transcribed Interview:

Mark: Okay, today's date is April the 30, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Edward Lainberger of Arlington, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Second World War. Good morning and thanks for coming in.

Ed: Thank you.

Mark: A snowy day in late April, if you can believe that.

Ed: I go by the nickname of "Mr. Ed" if you want.

Mark: Mr. Ed?

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: We'll try to be a little more respectful here, I think. Let's, I suppose, start at the top as they say and why don't 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.

Ed: Well, I actually didn't go in until '46.

Mark: Oh, I understand.

Ed: I was too young. I was born half-way between Montello and Pardeeville.

Mark: On a farm?

Ed: On a farm. We lived in a log cabin for four years and I did most of the farm work when I got big enough. In '44 I went to work in Arlington, Del Monte plant.

Mark: Now, by 1944 you were 18 years old or something?

Ed: No, I was 16 then.

Mark: Sixteen.

Ed: And then I worked one pack there and then I worked for some farmers again. Then in December of '45 I went to work for Oscar Mayer's, and the first of March they drafted me. I went down, had to go to Fort Sheridan for a physical.

Mark: So you went into the Army?

Ed: Army, yeah.

Mark: The Army wanted you.

Ed: Yeah, they said, "Come." [laughs]

Mark: I'd like to stop here for a second and go back for a couple of things before your military career started. When Pearl Harbor was bombed you must have been what, thirteen or so, huh?

Ed: Yeah, something like that.

Mark: Do you recall hearing that news? And as a young person, do you recall that it might have any implication for the rest of your life? Or did you just not think in those terms?

Ed: No. But I can remember when the events were in. I can remember that good because there was noise all over the joint. [laughs]

Mark: So you went to Fort Sheridan, then, to enter the Army.

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: In March of '45.

Ed: April.

Mark: April of '45. And that's just as the war in Europe was ending.

Ed: No, the war in Europe had ended and Japan had surrendered already but they were still drafting.

Mark: Yeah.

Ed: I don't know why but they were.

Mark: So, why don't you just walk me through your entry into the Service. I joined the Service about 40 years after you did. Now, I remember some things about going in very distinctly and very clearly. So just walk me through the steps. You went from Madison, I would imagine—

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: Down to Fort Sheridan or somewhere?

Ed: We went to Milwaukee and then we went to Fort Sheridan. And then they stripped you and physical, shots, and interviews. Then they come around and if people wanted to enlist, and five days after I was in, I enlisted for three years.

Mark: So you were given a choice, either to be drafted for two years or enlist for three?

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: Why did you decide to enlist for three?

Ed: I don't know. [laughs] I tried, I guess. And then I went to Fort Bliss, Texas for--

Mark: For some basic training.

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: And what sort of training did you do there?

Ed: Artillery training.

Mark: So you knew by the time you went to Fort Bliss that you were going to be in the artillery?

Ed: Yeah. Yeah, and we were there, basic training for two months, and then we got delayed en route and got, I think, it was a fifteen day furlough, or ten days, I don't know. Come home and I had to report back to Seattle, Washington, in late July. I was put on a boat and went to Japan. Repple-dep [replacement depot] in Japan.

Mark: I want to go back to basic training for a couple of things. In basic training people from all different parts of the country come together; a lot of different regions and ethnic groups and that sort of thing. Was that your experience? And how did the people from the different parts of the country, different sort of backgrounds all get along together?

Ed: Well, when I was in we got along good together. We had, I guess, people from all the States. We took M-1 and I guess it was four guns on a turret, I can't remember, and then we took them on the four wheel bier. I guess you'd call it a cannon or something, but it was up on wheels, and then you had to take ahold of the thing and set it down on the ground. Then you could shoot, see. And we went out for training on that. We went out in the New Mexico desert someplace and fired it. And then they had a guy with an airplane with a flag on the back. We were supposed to shoot at that. And then at night we used tracer bullets. And the M-1, we went out, fired the M-1, you know, qualification for that.

Mark: Now, as one goes into the military service, they have to subject themselves to military discipline; a lot of "yes, sir" "no, sir", wear your uniform correctly,

those sorts of things. And some people don't always adapt very well to that sort of environment. How did you adapt to it?

Ed: I didn't seem to have any trouble. I guess you know you had to do it and you did it, see. [laughs]

Mark: Okay. So you went to Seattle to go overseas. How did you get to Japan? Did you fly or did you take a boat?

Ed: Boat.

Mark: How long was that trip and won't you describe it for me?

Ed: The second day out, I was seasick.

Mark: I suspect you weren't alone either.

Ed: No. And it took us about eleven days. It wasn't on that trip, but [when] we got in Japan, we had to go to the repple. Then you had KP. I was only in there about two, three days and they come up, my name was for Sugamo Prison and I thought what the hell am I getting into now? I got there and they put us in bunks, you know, and you were kind of jittery, you know, because they were [unintelligible] and there was a guy that was in the barracks, the same barracks they put me in, he was due to go home in two weeks, and he had a job in prison records. He says, "You want a good job while you're here? I'll get it for you," he says. What the heck would I do in that thing because where we lived it was, oh, about eight miles to any town so I never got to go to high school because there was no buses or anything. I didn't say any more. Two days afterwards they called me into the orderly room, go up to prison records. [laughs] So I started in there as a pass clerk. We took care of the visitors, interrogations, and stuff like that when they come in.

Mark: So the visitors would be who?

Ed: The Japanese families.

Mark: Families of people who were on trial?

Ed: Yeah, yeah, families of the war criminals. See, we always called it--now I can't even think what we called it, but anyway, Sugamo Prison was way overshadowed by the Nuremberg Trials. There was some news releases but it wasn't very much. But I was in there from August of '46 to July of '50. About a-year-and-a-half after I was there, all these people were going home and our chief clerk who got sick, until I left there in July of '50. So everything that had to do with prisoners come across my desk or I had to make decisions what to do.

Mark: What were some of the biggest problems you faced, or challenges you faced in that job? Or was it pretty routine?

Ed: After I got used to it, it was routine, but it was kind of hard at first, you know, because the biggest share of the people that knew all about it were going home, see, and this was a whole new bunch coming in. But I finally worked my way and I could take care of it.

Mark: Did you keep track of the trials that were going on?

Ed: We didn't keep real good track of them because there was so many trials going on, see. The major war criminals was twenty-eight that started and I haven't found out what happened to that twenty-eight. But our twenty-seven were--two of them died, and twenty-five of them was sentenced. But we had trials going on all the time. This was in Tokyo where these International Tribunals, Far East was then. And there was eleven judges there from like Britain, Australia, China, Russia, and Philippines; wherever the war crimes were committed, you know. These were all there. And then the minor ones went to Yokohama. There was a bunch of them sentenced. And then we had--I was in charge of interrogating them when they come in; make sure we got all the records, their finger prints, their photos.

Mark: You mean the prisoners or the family members?

Ed: Prisoners.

Mark: The prisoners.

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: Are there any of the prisoners that stick out in your mind; any of them that made a particular impression?

Ed: Tokyo Rose.

Mark: Yeah, you met Tokyo Rose?

Ed: Yah. When they brought her back to the States for trial, I escorted her down to the prison gate and turned her over to the people that were bringing her back.

Mark: Now, as a young private in the Army, I don't suppose you asked her [laughs]--what did you talk about with Tokyo Rose?

Ed: Oh, not too much. Just, because I only seen her--our office is on the second floor and we had to walk down the stairway, out to the gate, turn her over, see. But I have a signature of her that she signed for me. And then Tojo, I seen him two or three times. And I did go back in the prisons--I didn't have much

to do with the cellblocks at all because we get the orders and the people back there took care of them, see. But I did go back there a few times to check on little things, you know, that didn't seem right to me, so I went back there to make sure that they were right.

Mark: Did you get a sense of how these prisoners were holding up? Did they seem anxious and nervous? Did they seem calm and content with themselves? I suppose they were different depending on the person.

Ed: Yeah, but the most of them, they didn't seem to be too excited or anything.

Mark: Because I know Tojo eventually killed himself. Did you see any signs of that?

Ed: No, he didn't kill himself.

Mark: Oh, he didn't? I must be mistaken on that.

Ed: What happened, when they first started picking up war criminals they took him to Omori Island. It was a dingy, jungle of a thing. And what I've heard--this Sugamo Prison, it was a real barn building at that time and there was factories all around. And when I got there you could look out the front window and count twenty-eight smoke stacks where there was buildings, but they were all like wooden and stuff. They dropped these incendiary bombs, it burned them up. And what I heard, they had ordered not to hit the prison because they intended on using it. One small building, the roof burned off, but the rest of it was intact. But they took him to Omori Prison where they first held him, then they took over this one. But the story goes that Tojo knew they were going to pick him up, so he had a doctor come in and draw a circle where his heart was so he knew where to shoot, see, and they come to pick him up and they heard a shot, and so they had medics and everything there, and they got him out and he survived. He was hung at the end.

Mark: I see. I guess that's true, actually. What about the family members, did they seem distressed at all?

Ed: Well, some of them a little bit. See, like they could only have so many visitors at once or otherwise, you know--if we had 100 visitors coming in there every day, it'd be so confusing. And there was also people coming in to interrogate these people; getting names of new ones. But, yeah, they sent an artillery battery to the prison to clean it up and get it ready. In the early '46, I think it was, Tojo was one of the first honored guests to be there. [laughs] They started bringing them in at that time. Then they finally made it a military police outfit. It was Headquarters, Sugamo Prison. Before that, they had these artillery batteries. They come up from, like the Philippines and all over, and they guarded. Then, this was when they appointed a colonel as commandant, but then they renamed it Sugamo Prison.

Mark: So your job was basically 9 to 5; five days a week-type of thing?

Ed: 8 to 5, I think it was.

Mark: And on regular weekdays?

Ed: Yeah, on regular weekdays, but we had what they called CQ. [Charge of Quarters mid-level or junior NCO who is responsible for the company's barracks during off-duty hours]

Mark: Well, the Army always tries to keep as busy as possible.

Ed: No, in case something would come up or be somebody in the office that they could get a hold of somebody, see. They could get a hold of the officer, the guard, and it would be up to him what to do. And they slept in--they had a cot that they'd bring out and sleep in the records section overnight. I think, I can't remember what we had on the weekend, but I know during the week there was guys that stayed up because that one night we had an earthquake. I didn't even feel it, but they had chandeliers hanging about that far from the ceiling and he said they were almost touching the sidewalk; back and forth.

Mark: But you had some free time though?

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: You went to work and the evenings were pretty much yours.

Ed: Yup, yup.

Mark: What did you do to occupy yourself?

Ed: Oh, went down to the club and had a few drinks. And we had a theater there. They built us a theater. I operated that for about eighteen months. And then they put in a bowling alley. They were awful good to us because I don't know why. We had the first bowling alley in Japan. After awhile, then, all the big shots from Tokyo, they come out and you couldn't even get to bowl. [laughs]

Mark: Isn't that always the way it works?

Ed: Yup.

Mark: Did you have much contact with the Japanese civilians? I mean, you were there a little later. I don't know what the fraternization rules were supposed to be.

Ed: There was some that had quite a bit. They even married. Well, I never—

Mark: Some GIs did?

- Ed: Yeah. I never got into it too much.
- Mark: Were you told not to fraternize with the Japanese too much?
- Ed: No, but you had lectures on VD and all this kinds of stuff like they do all over.
- Mark: Did you get to travel around much?
- Ed: Oh, yeah. When I had leave I went to--we were going up, me and another guy, were going up Mt. Fuji with a group one day.
- Mark: Was this like a USO tour or something?
- Ed: Yeah, USO. And then they had hotels where you could go to stay. We were going up on Mt. Fuji and the sun was shining real bright. We got about half way up there and it was snowing so much you couldn't even see the road so we never got to the top. I went to two or three of the shrines. I went to the pearl farm; seen the emperor's white horse. I had sixty days leave coming when I come home because I didn't take it all.
- Mark: Now, you spent three years in Japan was it?
- Ed: Six, five.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Ed: See, I re-enlisted.
- Mark: Oh, you did?
- Ed: And come home on sixty-day furlough; went back to the prison.
- Mark: So you went back to Japan, I mean, during the Korean War period as well.
- Ed: Yeah.
- Mark: See, I was going to ask you how Japan had changed in the time you were there. I mean, it had been devastated during the war and rebuilt into the modern industrial nation it is today. I was wondering if, from your point of view, you could see how the reconstruction of Japan was going and how things had changed when you were there.
- Ed: The main part of town did, but out in the country, it was still shacks. There was a train station, oh, probably from here to the Capitol and back. Well, it was just a mud-puddle road to get there and there was shacks on both sides of it. But now the prison is completely gone, or just the stone where it was. They built a kite center out there. It's the highest building in Japan. It's sixty-five stories high.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Ed: Yeah. Some people have been back there and I've seen pictures and you won't even know the place now.

Mark: So when the Korean War broke out, how did things change for you? Or did they at all?

Ed: Yes, they did. In July of '50, they come out with orders, they were going to take so many men from the prison and form a prisoner of war processing team and send us to Korea. And we got down to the depot and they broke the outfit up, busted it all up. And it was four, five, ten of us that had administrative MOS's; they were like 502, 055, something like that, and they held us back and they sent the rest of them over as replacements so they never got to the prison. I was one that was held back because I had the [End of Tape 1, Side A] office MOS. And I was assigned to 8th Army Headquarters, Rear, in Yokohama. And I was put in a transportation section; vessel control. All of the vessels that come over from the States went to our office. Cargo, men, and all the--anything that come over. And when the war first came, they would load all food supplies on one, all ammunition on another, and ordnance on another, and they had to bring them into Yokohama and break them all down because they didn't want the food all going to one place, see, and that's what we took care of. The passenger list of men coming over, we didn't have too much to do with. We could tell who was coming over. In fact, my brother was in the National—in the Reserves; Navy Reserves and he got, the war was over so he got out of it, and they drafted him into the Army. My sister wrote me. They weren't very good [at] writing letters to me. I didn't get too many letters while I was in. But anyway, she wrote and said that he was coming overseas. I says, "As soon as you find out, you tell me where he's going; whether he's going to Seattle or San Francisco." The biggest share of them come out of San Francisco. And finally she wrote and said he was coming out of Seattle. And, so, we got the thing, so I kept looking through them and finally found the date when he was coming. And we worked fairly good with the second major port, see, because we were actually in control and we told them what to do. I went down there and I got a hold of a guy and says, "My brother's on that ship. I'd like to get on and see him." I figured I'd have a bigger wall to get in there but he said, "Sure, go right up there." They took me up, and took me up to the captain's thing, and I told him what I wanted, and he says, "He should be right down there." [laughs] I went down and tapped him on the shoulder. [laughs] He turned around; he didn't know what to think. He got stationed in Yokohama, too, for awhile, and so we got to see each other four or five times because he come over and I was just about ready to come home, see.

Mark: Small world, sometimes.

Ed: Yeah.

Mark: I would imagine after the Korean War started that this fairly cushy, 9 to 5-type of job ended and you had to work a lot more hours. Would that be true?

Ed: It was after I got to Yokohama.

Mark: Yeah.

Ed: We worked seven days a week.

Mark: Yeah, that's what I would have thought.

Ed: Yeah. But after, see, the biggest share of the war crimes were over, the main ones were all hung, and it was starting to die down there, see. It was actually closed in '52. They give them a choice. They could either govern themselves or have somebody govern them and they chose to govern themselves so the Japanese police started coming in, taking over all the whole thing. But while I was in Yokohama we were working seven days a week.

Mark: So you left Japan, '52 was it?

Ed: '51.

Mark: Now, there was a point system during the Korean War to get guys home, but in your case, I suspect your enlistment just happened to be up.

Ed: No.

Mark: You had points?

Ed: You had to have 48 points, or like that, to be rotated. And see, they told us-- MacArthur was still in command when I took leave, and they said that broke your service overseas. Well, Truman ousted MacArthur and a guy by the name of Ridgeway took over and he says, "No, that all counts as one." So I had 60 points so they had to send me home.

Mark: And was your service obligation up yet or did you have to go somewhere else for awhile?

Ed: No, I was sent back to Fort McCoy and then I was there. They couldn't find no place to put me. I must have been there three months and they had me sending out W-2 forms. They finally transferred me to Fort Custer, Michigan, to a military police outfit. It was a reserve outfit or something from Washington, D.C. I got there one afternoon. The next morning I was on my way to Texas for Operation Longhorn.

Mark: What was that?

- Ed: It's like, they have enemy and they have good guys, and then they battle, you know.
- Mark: Oh, it's just a training operation.
- Ed: Yeah. And during that time they liberated Lampasas, Texas. That was down at Fort Hood. And I was one of the guys that went out--there was a lieutenant and I was a sergeant and 100 guys. We went out there as a military government team, see. We tried the mayor, the chief of police. You know, just like a war. Then I got back there and they deactivated and sent them home. Then they sent me. I was in the security guard at Fort Custer until I got out.
- Mark: And once you got out, what did you do after that?
- Ed: I goofed off a whole year. Got married. And then in '53, I went back to work at Oscar Mayer's.
- Mark: I see. Was there any sort of unemployment insurance or anything for you once you got out?
- Ed: No.
- Mark: I know right after World War II there was a part of the GI Bill that gave guys some money to get back on their feet before they started working again. You didn't get any sort of unemployment insurance?
- Ed: No.
- Mark: How'd you pay your bills if I might ask?
- Ed: [Laughs] I worked for a farmer. Then my wife is from Chaseburg. Do you know where that is?
- Mark: No.
- Ed: It's between--you go out of La Crosse and then you go back up in the hills. And I went up there and helped her dad until we got married. And then, oh, it's not much work up there so I come back down here and I went back to work for Oscar Mayer's for thirty-two years.
- Mark: Did you ever join any groups like the Legion or anything after you got out?
- Ed: I've been a member of the Legion for almost forty years and I'm also a life member in the VFW.
- Mark: And why did you join these groups? I mean, was it because of their political activism or because it was just a place to hang out with other vets? People

join for various reasons. I was just wondering why you chose those groups in particular.

Ed: Well, I guess it was the thing to do. And we have meetings, you know, get out for a night; social.

Mark: But you're not like a post commander or the treasurer?

Ed: No.

Mark: You don't hold any offices and that sort of thing.

Ed: While I was in Yokohama I joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars there and I was adjutant there until I come home.

Mark: And you still go to the Legion hall?

Ed: I don't go to the Legion--

Mark: Fish fry on Friday night or something like that?

Ed: I don't go to Legion halls too much, but the VFW.

Mark: Those are pretty much all the questions I have. You worked through my little routine there. Is there anything you'd like to add, or think we've skipped over, or anything?

Ed: Not too much, I guess.

Mark: All right. Well, if you think of something, let me know. Otherwise, thanks for coming in. We got you out of here in under an hour.

Ed: Yep.

Mark: Good job. Okay, we're back for a second. Mr. Lainberger's going to tell me about his trip to China real quick here.

Ed: On the 23rd of January, '49, We left Yokohama on the J & W Weeks with the Japanese crew. It was during the time that the revolution was going on in China. The Communists had taken over and Chiang Kai-shek was the leader then and he wanted to get rid of these prisoners before the Communists came. It took us five days on that old tugboat to get to Shanghai and we went into Shanghai where the prisoners were held in Lord Ward Jail in Shanghai. There was about 250 of them. Some of them, they had to carry on stretchers and some, biggest share of them, walked on. But I was chosen to go there because I knew all about the records, and everything, so we could check and see if we got everything we needed. During that time, it was Chinese New Years and when we come in--the guards for the prisoners were from the 1st Cavalry--and

there was a bird colonel in charge of them, and there was banging, and popping, and shooting so he got his machine guns and everything up on deck, you know, ready to start fighting. When the tugboat captain come aboard, he says, "Get that God damn stuff off of here if you don't want to get in trouble." But we landed there in the afternoon and we loaded the next day and we left.

Mark: How many did you pick up?

Ed: About 250.

Mark: That's a lot.

Ed: And they said, the prisoners said they had a lot different trials than they were having here. They'd march them in, read the charges against them, sentence them; you're done. It only took about five minutes, I guess, to go through it. [laughs] But we had a good trip, but it was slow getting there. Then it was later that year, I don't remember just what day it was, they—there was quite a few Chinese in Japan and they were something else them guys.

Mark: Why is that?

Ed: Well, they'd murder, swipe, whatever, they didn't care. And they were holding them at the 8th Army Stockade where they kept Americans and they wanted to get rid of them. I was, again, to go and check the records, see. We got around fifty or sixty of them. We got them back at Sugamo, well, they had to be all processed, see. And they get released and some of them didn't even get home and they were arrested again. But they had files, you know, where they committed murder and they had pictures. You could see the whole bloody mess and everything. I guess they were really--they seemed to be—

Mark: Tough times.

Ed: Yeah. I just thought I'd throw that in.

Mark: Well, I'm glad you did. That's quite interesting.

[End of Interview]