Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

LAWRENCE E. LANDGRAF

Medical Technician, Navy, World War II.

1995

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Landgraf, Lawrence E., (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1995.
User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).
Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Lawrence Landgraf, a Hayward, Wisconsin native, talks about his service on the *USS Relief*, a medical ship, during World War II. Landgraf highlights first hearing that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and recalls having a strong desire to join the service. After graduating high school and working for a few months, Landgraf decided to enlist instead of being drafted. He talks about traveling to Duluth in 1942 to enlist in the Navy, having a recruiting officer sign off as Landgraf's guardian since he was still seventeen, and being shipped off immediately, and he touches upon how his parents felt about his joining the service. Sent to Farragut Naval Training Station (Idaho), he details boot camp, duty as a life guard, saving a man from drowning, and being delayed from graduating due to contracting the mumps. He also states that he did not have a close connection with his fellow trainees due to his prolonged illness. Landgraf mentions volunteering for Officer Training School so he could work in aviation, but instead being assigned with his entire class to the Hospital Corps because of that unit's need for men. Landgraf touches on medical school, an internship at Bremerton Naval Hospital (Washington), reporting to Treasure Island (California), travelling to New Caledonia (Pacific) aboard the *USS Wharton,* and getting seasick. After being assigned to the *USS Relief* (AH-1), he touches on being first assigned to the kitchen and his efforts to work his way up to orderly and, eventually, to pharmacist mate 2nd class in the operating room. He recalls his first patients being casualties from Tarawa and Enewetak. Landgraf elaborates about the working conditions of the ship and interacting with women nurses. Landgraf outlines his duties on the ship, elaborating on types of injuries he saw, how they would treat wounded soldiers, and comforting those who were fatally injured. He outlines typical procedure during battles and mentions that the worst campaign he participated in was Okinawa, stating that, up until then, the Japanese had generally left hospital ships alone. During Okinawa, Landgraf recalls being strafed by Japanese planes, witnessing kamikaze attacks, and seeing bodies in the water of Japanese civilians who had committed suicide. He describes going through a typhoon and having liberty on the islands, in New Zealand, and at home in Wisconsin. He states that everyone was relieved to hear that the war ended without having to invade the Japanese home islands, especially after witnessing the high casualty rates from the small island campaigns. He describes taking aboard some former Japanese prisoners of war and the terrible shape they were in. After being discharged, Landgraf talks about using the GI Bill to enroll in the University of Wisconsin-Madison and graduating with a degree in journalism. He describes crowded conditions on campus, the serious demeanor of veteran students, and difficulty

finding housing. Landgraf reflects on having post-traumatic stress syndrome symptoms and regrets not having a homecoming celebration. He states that he never really got into veterans organizations mainly because of his dislike of the petty rules of order involved in them, and Landgraf contrasts the treatment of Vietnam veterans and World War II veterans.

Biographical Sketch:

Landgraf (b.1925) enlisted in the Navy after graduating high school in 1942 and served aboard the *USS Relief* in the Pacific theater. After the war, Landgraf enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and hoped to enter the medical field. After switching his major to journalism, he graduated in 1949 and had a career as a salesman with Madison Newspapers. Landgraf and his wife settled in Middleton (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.
Transcribed by Joanna D. Glen, WDVA Staff, 1997.
Transcript edited by Channing Welch, 2008.
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Abstract written by Andrew Baraniak and Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

Mark: Today's date is April 11, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Lawrence E. Landgraf, of Madison, a veteran of the Second World War. Good morning and thanks for coming in.

Landgraf: Good morning.

Mark: I'd like to start the interviews by having 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.

Landgraf: OK. I was born January 3, 1925 in Hayward, Wisconsin. I lived about ten miles out of Hayward and my folks had a small resort. I think at that particular time I was a senior or had graduated from high school. I skipped a grade so I graduated kind of young and so I believe this was on a weekend, I don't recall exactly when December 7, 1941 was, but I remember my mother calling us and the radio said Pearl Harbor's been bombed. That was a shock to us because I think we were aware of what was happening over in the European theater and knew that probably I'd eventually be drafted and that sort of thing. So, it was a shock and we stayed by the radio and I can still remember to this day, President Roosevelt's day of infamy speech and that sort of thing. I was anxious to get in the service. I was underage at that particular time.

Mark: This is interesting to me. You were anxious to get into the service. For what reason? Was it patriotism?

Landgraf: Well, there was an enemy that attacked us without warning in a cowardly way and I think I wanted to get even. At that young age, I think looking back at it now, you have the feeling of immortality, or if you did get hit and were killed, I mean you'd rather have that happen than something happen to your parents and so there was that feeling I think of loyalty and then as my friends and associates who were all older than I was, were drafted or enlisted I wanted to join them, be with them too at that particular time.

Mark: This desire to get into the service, was this common among like people in your high school class, people your age?

Landgraf: Of everybody that I knew, I don't recall anybody saying they did not want to go. As a matter of fact, I think there was - you wanted to go because you could have your choice of the services if you enlisted rather than wait and be drafted. So, of all the people I knew, I mean they were quite anxious to go.

Mark: Did you finish high school before you enlisted?

Landgraf: I finished high school. I must have finished it a year earlier and I had two semesters of the University of Wisconsin Extension courses that were held up right at the Hayward High School and so I actually was a freshman, a legitimate freshmen could go into my sophomore year at that particular time.

Mark: This extension, was this a war time thing or was this something they had been doing before? I've never come across this.

Landgraf: I don't think it was a – I don't know if it was a war time or not but here's a little community of 1,000 people that had regular professors, I think it was kind of a circuit that they had. They may have had this in Rice Lake and some other areas too. The Spanish professor would have a class in Hayward one day and maybe a couple of hours later he'd another place else. But, the basic freshman courses were offered there, you know, language, English literature, math and so on.

Mark: So you enlisted then in '42 right after graduation.

Landgraf: I enlisted, actually, the summer of – I graduated high school in, must have been in '42. I went to work in our small resort, we had a lot of people from Rockford, Illinois and some of them were working in defense plants and so I was still 17 years old, so too early to go in the service. So I worked in Rockford for a while and came back to Hayward, and right after Christmas I took a bus up to Duluth, and I was going to enlist. I wanted to check with the various services and I don't know if I got any further than the Navy Recruiting Office. And I was nearing my 18th birthday, and I guess the way it worked then if, once you were 18, then you had to go – you went through the draft board and it was a roll of the dice and they would select the service. Well, I wanted to go into the Navy, I didn't want to go in the Army. Had a brother who already was in the Army and we were competitive and wanted to be in different services. I'm sure. So I went to the Recruiting Office and right there they said, "Well, we'd like to enlist you," but you needed a guardian to sign my papers. Well, my dad was back in Hayward so at the time a judge appointed one of the recruiting officers to be my guardian so he could sign me into the Navy. At that particular time I thought that, well, I'd enlist and they'd send me back home and maybe 30 days later they'd call me up and send me off to Great Lakes. This was what they had done with all my buddies. Well, it didn't happen. They put me on a train or bus or train, I think it was a train that night, sent me down to Minneapolis. I was on my way out to a place called Farragut, Idaho. I'd never heard of Farragut, Idaho. Or I-- Couer d'Alene, Idaho, I guess it was Camp Farragut was there. So there I had to call my folks saying, "Well, I'm sorry. I'm not coming home." We never even had a chance to say good-bye. "I'm going tomorrow morning. The train leaves for Couer d'Alene, Idaho."

Mark: What did your parents think of this?

Landgraf: I don't know. I think - my dad is kind of a stoic person. My mother was – I think she was really saddened and felt very bad about it. I think she cried on the telephone, I can't remember very much. That's about it I guess. I didn't even have a change of clothes or anything else, but they gave me a toothbrush and stuff like that so. They put me on a train and it was a long trip out I know to Coeur d'Alene, which I can't even remember where it was on the map at that particular time. But apparently it was a brand new base to complement Great Lakes and so it was brand new, but anyway the town was – little town – station where the buses waiting for us. This was in the middle of the night it seemed, and it was called Athol, A-t-h-o-l. As you can imagine there was a lot of play on that particular word. From that town, but they took us on buses and they dropped us off at Farragut. I think we spent the night there. The next morning of course we went through all the things like your shots and your haircuts and your clothing. They toss you your clothing and then assign you to various companies.

Mark: Is this the haircut then? Does this happen at this point?

Landgraf: Within a couple of days all that happened together, I'm not sure which is which but I recall they kind of threw the clothes at you and some guys the hats went over their ears, it was kind of – probably – I look back at it now and you'd say it didn't seem very organized, well organized at that particular time. But they did the job, I think. I ended up with - they gave me my pomade back, Vitalis or whatever it is, of course I had no hair to slick down with when I got through. Everybody was the same way. So you didn't even need a comb. They gave you a little sack to put all your belongings in, which were not very much.

Mark: I was in the Air Force and I remember the drill sergeant and all that kind of thing. Was there much of this kind of screaming and yelling, basic training yet?

Landgraf: I don't recall being that bad. We were assigned to barracks and companies and we had our drills, which I kind of enjoyed. I enjoyed the feeling when you're with a company and you're off doing the marches and synchronization and the boots at the same time hitting down. I kind of liked that. I know they did, initially, a kind of physical aptitude test, when you first came in before you started all the calisthenics and everything that they did and then they did it later on when you graduated from boot camp to see what kind of improvement you had. But, anyway, I didn't mind it. I kind of liked perfection

I kind of respected the orderliness they wanted things to be in the barracks, you know, that the beds had to made just so for Captain's inspection, things like that. I don't recall any mean "Sgt. Bilko's" or anything like that we had, although they were there and they could embarrass the heck out of you. For example, if you do some drills with your guns and then be ease, you'd take a break and some guys would inadvertently lay their rifles down with bolt side down which is a "no-no." Of course then everybody waited for that poor guy to step back to pick up his gun, which by the way, we never had real guns to practice with. They were imitation.

Mark: I was going to ask--

Landgraf: --Gerands--

Mark: --what equipment and that sort of thing…

Landgraf: Never had a chance to fire a shot and I enjoyed hunting and that sort of thing, so I was kind of looking forward to target range practice and things like that.

Mark: So what did your training consist of? Was it marching in formations and classrooms and that sort of thing?

Landgraf: Ah, training we had school classes on Navy procedures to learn the signal code, you know the terminology, how you go forward on the starboard side and you go back to the stern on the aft side and you didn't call a bulkhead a wall, I mean there was a deck, there was a wall, everything had a different name and you had to fit into that whole thing. Then they had of course had the rifle drills and then had work detail and then we had of course a large swimming pool. Everybody had to learn how to swim at least a minimum distance and jump off the high diving board which to some people who had never been in water before, was real, real scary.

Mark: I'm sure.

Landgraf: That was no problem for me in that sort of thing.

Mark: This training lasted how long? Six weeks? Eight weeks?

Landgraf: I would guess it would be in the neighborhood of six weeks or so. For me it lasted a little bit longer. I was assigned to - there was a certain period of your training where you had either Mess Hall – you had some kind of special duties. Because of my past experience in swimming, I was made a life guard. About that same time, while I was a life guard, I got sicker than heck and I reported to Sick Bay and I think they thought, I don't know who examined me, a corpsman examined me, whatever. I think they thought I was trying to get out of work detail.

Mark: Malingering.

Landgraf: Malingering.

Mark: So they sent me back and I was really having chills and I remember we were on life guard duty on that time and there was one guy up in the tower and another guy on ground level and I would have been the third person. I was – I think I went back to - I was sick, went back to throw up or something like that. I came back. I heard the whistle blowing from the guy up above and the guy that was on ground level panicked and they were pointing to one end of the pool. I couldn't see what was down there so I dove down and there was a body laying at the deep end of the pool. Well, I pulled him up and brought him over to the side and they helped me get him out of the pool. We resuscitated the guy. We finished that and they came and they picked – him, ambulance group picked him up and I passed out. I woke up in the hospital and I had the mumps, it turned out to be, had an advanced case of the mumps, so I was in there for a couple of weeks. When I came out, I missed my company, they had gone on so I started out back in with another company which--

Mark: From the beginning, or did you came in the middle of their cycle?

Landgraf: Well, I kind of came in the middle, as I remember, but it was really tough for me because all the friends that I had made, you know, 18 years old, first time away from home, the friends I had made had moved on, so I was with a group now who pretty well had made their own friends and that seems to be kind of what happened. People kind of made their own friends and although nobody was ever rude to you, it's just the fact that you needed somebody to talk to and that sort of thing. Anyway, I graduated from the camp and then there came a time then you got your choice of what branch of the Navy did you want to go into. I had always enjoyed the idea of being a pilot. So I knew the best route to that, since there was an Officer's Candidate School, would be to sign up for aviation gunner's mate, aviation ordinance man, aviation machinist. Well, my whole class got Hospital Corps. At that particular time, the Hospital Corps was pretty well decimated because they were, the Hospital Corps worked with the Marines. They went ashore with the Marines in activity to support them. They sported a big white cross on their helmets and the Japanese were picking them off like birdseed.

Mark: Big target, yeah.

Landgraf: Big targets. So they took our whole class and made them go into Hospital Corps.

Mark: I was going to ask if you had to take any sort of psychological testing or aptitude testing to get in that sort of thing, but it sounds much more arbitrary than that.

Landgraf: I don't recall any of that. I'm sure there was some aptitude tests that they had, but why then would they take the whole company? I had gone up to the Captain of the Camp to ask to please consider this because I had gotten the Captain's Mast earlier and what that was is they honored me for saving that guy's life and so they put this in my record, which I think I sent to you. I thought well maybe I've got enough chips so that they'll listen to me and they'll grant me that. They said, "We're sorry, you have to go in the Medical Corps." They had a school right there basic medical school, right at Coeur d'Alene, and so I thought, well, I better make the best of it. I found out that if you had certain grade level, you could get more liberty, and Spokane was a liberty town that we had nearby, and sandstone or something I can't recall, but I studied pretty hard and I advanced and did fairly well. And then I was sent to do kind of my internship at Bremerton Naval Hospital just outside of Seattle. I stayed there for awhile I guess to really get some practice in dealing with people and how to draw blood and all those kind of things that you do in working with cadavers and the whole thing. Then I got my orders to report to Treasure Island in San Francisco. There must have been a group of about 35 of us and I had to be responsible for all 35 guys. But, you know there was never a problem, never ___(??) "We're missing five guys." You came from all parts of the company, you melded all together. But anyway, went to, stationed at Treasure Island and there was kind of a waiting period, you kept checking a bulletin board to see your name come up and your assignment. Finally, my name popped up and I guess it must have been maybe a couple of weeks at the most. This is where I wish I could have recalled all that. I was to report at a certain pier number to board the *USS Wharton*, which is a transport ship.

Mark: W-h-a-r-t-o-n?

Landgraf: T-o-n. Right. As I recall. This was the first trip out in the South Pacific. Now I didn't know where the destination was, I mean

Mark: Just got on the ship and--

Landgraf: You got on the ship, and you went. I think we people just kind of, you went wherever they told you. We had a mixture of Army, Navy, Marines all on board the ship and most of them were for the first time. I remember getting terribly seasick the first day or so. I thought I could get a medical disability just from the fact that I can never get used to the this, the shipping.

Mark: But you did, eventually.

Landgraf: But I did eventually ---

Mark: Let's skip ahead into the story a little bit. You did eventually --- you must have –

Landgraf: I did eventually, but every time we'd go into a harbor and stay there for a few days, I'd have to kind of go through the whole ritual again to kind of get used to it, but once you were out there after awhile there was no problem.

Mark: I suspect you weren't alone in having to get your sea legs.

Landgraf: Lots of people were hanging over the side, right, yeah. Anyway, we ended up, were disgorged I guess you could say, after what seemed like a long trip to a place called Nouméa, New Caledonia. Which, like I say my geography was not that good. I knew it was out in the South Pacific someplace. There again, this was a place where you waited to get your further orders. But I do recall on the way back someone had said that we had been torpedoed, that they had sighted a trail of torpedoes and one had hit the side of the hull, but turned out to be a dud. This was the scuttlebutt that I had heard, whether that is true or not, I don't really know. But anyway, we went to New Caledonia and finally there I got my orders to report to the *USS Relief* which was standing out in the harbor so I was one person to come on board the *USS Relief* and she was a beautiful ship, all white and so on. They came in the Captain's gig to pick me up and here I am, the newest person on this whole ship.

Mark: You're 18 by now?

Landgraf: I'm 18 now, just 18 and maybe three months or something like that, and a quarter. Hospital Corpsman would be second class which is about as low as you can go at rating. So they put me on the scullery, in the kitchen, cleaning dishes and things like that. That was not where I wanted to go. They had a practice from time to time, the fleet - you'd have an exam for if you wanted to advance in rating. You were competing – there were so many openings and you were competing with the whole fleet in the South Pacific at that particular time. Well, I studied pretty hard and I got my rating to Hospital Corpsman, I think, 2nd Class, whatever it was, with two stripes. Then I went to work in a ward. There I started working with patients.

Mark: At this time what sort of patients did you have? Were they combat casualties, malaria camp casualties, guys breaking legs?

Landgraf: Shortly after I got on board, when I went on board ship we really didn't have any patients at that particular time. We were on our way to I think Tarawa and whether we were there to kind of clean up, we came into Tarawa at sort of the end of the invasion. I do remember going ashore. I can't recall us taking too many casualties at that particular time. What I was doing ashore I don't remember, but I had a chance to go on shore, whether it was to support a Marine group or what I don't know. I remember seeing parts of bodies, parts of gas masks, leggings, feet with shoes on them. There wasn't a whole tree on the island.

Mark: So this was kind of your baptism of fire, so to speak.

Landgraf: Baptism of fire, yeah. There were tanks all hung up on the reefs, I mean it was a real carnage of war and that sort of thing. Shortly after that, well, I must--because we must not have had any patients, but we start going into other actions and activities, and I think it might have been Enewetak and some of the coral atolls out there and we start getting patients. I worked with them in a ward and ---

Mark: You were just a standard medical technician?

Landgraf: Orderly, at that particular time.

Mark: What sort of things would you do for the patients?

Landgraf: We would give them IVs, we'd check the blood pressure, we would check the temperature, we would empty bed pans, we would help give them baths, we'd make their beds, we'd do back rubs, we'd bandage their wounds, we would administer medicines and things like that, and did everything that a nurse would do. We had nine or ten nurses on board ship.

Mark: Were they men or women?

Landgraf: They were women. All women. They were all officers and they were kept separated from the enlisted men. They ate with the officers.

Mark: Did this sort of separation thing work?

Landgraf: I don't recall any shipboard romances from that standpoint. I think probably if there were it would probably be between the officers and not really the enlisted men. There was still a social status, you know, to that.

Mark: Back in those days, the working woman wasn't as prevalent as it is today.

Landgraf: That's right.

Mark: As young guys did you have any qualms about taking orders from women? Were they just another officer or trained technician or was there any sort of problem with respect to--?

Landgraf: There were nurses who you respected because of their ability. As a matter of fact, I think the head nurse was a nurse who escaped Corregidor with MacArthur and she was our head nurse on the thing, so you respected her because she had been through quite a bit and that sort of thing. I don't recall any animosity towards the nurses. In fact, they were more like friends. They'd be helpful in working with you. I don't recall for how long I stayed in the ward but I remember some situations where I'd be with somebody and they were dying and I remember one Marine, nice guy, he was shot right in the hip and he had gangrene and there wasn't anything you could do at that particular point except administer morphine to kind of make it easier for him. I kind of held his hand and talked with him about his family and things like that. But you get used to death. You get to the point where you can see some people were just mildly injured were complainers and others who had, I can remember a guy standing with his foot off in the shower, taking a shower and you'd never hear a complaint from somebody like that.

Mark: He was an amputee.

Landgraf: He was an amputee, right. But he got up and got himself into the shower by himself and that sort of thing.

Mark: I was going to ask, what were some of the more difficult patients for you to deal with in terms of work, in terms of emotional strain, that sort of thing? You've already been commenting on this, but I'd like to go a little further perhaps.

Landgraf: I can't remember as much about that as I can later on the next stage of my life. We worked with these people, try to keep them alive until we got back to another base where we discharged them like where they could go to a regular hospital. It was sort of a maintenance situation as much as we could to maintain and improve their health and quality… Later on I advanced to become an operating room technician. I took another exam and got promoted to Pharmacist Mate 3rd Class and then got the Hospital Corps rating, where then I actually worked right with the surgeons.

Mark: You got this promotion when during the war? As best as you can ---

Landgraf: The best that I would suppose within maybe at least within a year of boarding the ship I would say. Probably a pretty fast promotion. At first I thought I wouldn't like it because of the sight of blood and all that sort of thing, but I really got to not to enjoy it but feel good about what was happening to the point that if we had time, I'd go down to the wards and look up these people and check with them, see how they were doing and that sort of thing. I started out working as an instrument nurse, and there your job was to anticipate the tools that the surgeons would need. And they'd be working, they'd just hold out their hand and you had to snap that clamp, scalpel, or hemostat or whatever it was in his hand. You'd have to anticipate. The teamwork part really felt good. We had some doctors who, I remember one doctor who would get irritated if you gave him the wrong instrument. He'd throw it on the deck and that sort of thing. But, most of them were easy to work with, and as you got to know, but we did everything. I mean you operated on persons to set a wrist for a fractured wrist or somebody fell against a hatch cover or something like that and you went all the way to somebody who had shrapnel throughout their intestines and you had to do a wide open laparotomy and repair the intestines hand over hand. Sulfa was the drug of choice, antiseptic at that time, to amputations to working with the skull, drilling the holes and the trephines and taking out a section of the skull and things like that. That really never bothered me and I was just as interested in watching that. Prior to that in boot camp, the first time I saw blood being drawn, I passed out. So, I mean how you can change. There were even times in the battles when we would go in to an invasion, we would be on duty almost 24 hours a day around the clock.

Mark: I was going to ask --- try and frame this a little more. Say the Saipan operation. By Saipan you were in the operating room I take it.

Landgraf: Right, right.

Mark: As the invasion starts, where are you? How far back are you? Are you fairly close? A couple of islands back or something? And what goes on in a hospital ship as an invasion gets underway?

Landgraf: Generally speaking, we could be on deck, we could watch the battleships and cruisers shell the landing area. My station was in the operating room so whenever there was a "Man your battle stations" I would be in the operating room. There were no portholes so you couldn't really see what was going on. When we would sail in as close as we could get, depending upon the depth of the harbor, because they'd bring out the wounded in little landing craft, ducks, amphibious craft, whatever.

Mark: So you were right up there then?

Landgraf: As close ---

Mark: I mean you're within shelling distance --- gunpoint ---

Landgraf: Right. You could see the explosions, you could see the flames, you could hear the noise, but in our operating room, you didn't pay attention to that. They just kept coming and coming.

Mark: About how long after the invasion started did you start getting the casualties? An hour? Two hours? Much longer?

Landgraf: Oh, I'd say probably pretty shortly within that time. Then some go to like an emergency room, some would be sent to the operating room. See I think the code of the Navy was that your job is to keep as many men at as many guns as possible, which sometimes meant you had to try and get somebody to repair them and send them back to action as fast as you can, even sometimes over and above those who were more critically wounded. Tough decision to have to make. I didn't have to make that decision. That was made when they were brought on board right from the landing area. We would work continuously and then finally we'd get a couple of hours off and you were so hyped up you couldn't sleep. That was kind of a scary time, but you didn't hardly take time. I remember going down to eat, mess -- a break and my uniform would be bloodstained and covered and so on, and I can't remember how this worked but in our operating room we had two tables so they could have two teams of surgeons working at the same time, and there were even times where the surgeon would step back and ask me to finish up the operation. I would do the suturing, coming back up through the peritoneum and through the muscle tissue and the skin and so on. They didn't leave, they observed me and that sort of thing, but they had confidence that I knew what I was doing and that sort of thing. Then once we got loaded up and there was usually another hospital ship that would come in the area, I think the *Comfort*, the *USS Comfort* was in the neighborhood. We could see each other passing. Then we'd go back to a rear base, often times it was Hawaii and take our wounded back and at that time, then we could do further things beyond the life-saving. We could do more reconstructive surgery and things like that.

Mark: And this did occur on your ship?

Landgraf: Yes.

Mark: On some of the longer voyages back.

Landgraf: Right, yeah.

Mark: Would be able to comment perhaps on what were some of the more common kinds of injuries in a combat situation? It's kind of a vague question I understand, but in terms of broken limbs vs. head wounds, vs. shock or-- What takes the biggest toll on the soldier, and sailor and Marine from your perspective in the operating room?

Landgraf: These were soldiers, these were Marines, we got the whole mix coming on board the ship. I would say shrapnel, probably shrapnel damage was the most common. Fractures, I don't recall doing too much setting. Fractures, shells, bullet wounds. Another one of which was really bad was flame burns which was an awful hard thing to treat. In fact, we didn't do too much. They would go to a ward and it was a question of trying to keep the wounds covered, and we would try to do some surgical skin grafts and that sort of thing, but fire did a lot of damage, I think maybe to people who were in tanks and got hit by artillery shells or mortars. But mostly I think it was shrapnel that I recall. I can't recall too many like bayonet wounds and that sort of thing, but, machine gun wounds. Proportionately, I just wouldn't have any idea. I don't remember because ---

Mark: That's interesting enough. Was there one campaign, was there one battle that was particularly bad from your point of view?

Landgraf: I think the worst one was Okinawa. There was still a code of war up until that particular time. See, after we would, at nightfall, according to the Geneva Rules of war, whatever, we would sail back out of the harbor with our lights on and they were pointed down at the sides and so we were a perfect target for a bomber or a submarine. But at Okinawa, when we went out, let's see I'm not sure if this is on our way in, but we were bombed and strafed by three Zero's and from that point on we stayed in the harbor, we turned our lights out and I think the worst thing, in addition to all the wounded, it seemed quiet initially but then it really heated up, were the kamikaze attacks at night and, of course, my battle station was in the operating room. I had a helmet on and my life jacket, that's all you could protect yourself with but you could hear, the ship would be shaking, you could hear the airplanes going overhead and then after the all clear, those who were outside could see fires all over. They could see it in the whole harbor, but we stayed in the harbor, the other ships would make smoke screens. They could go around make smoke screens. I think that was the scariest time that we had during an actual invasion. We were at Saipan and we were at Tinian and I have a sea bag at home where I wrote all the different places we were at. I should have brought that with me but it's kind of beat up. I think Okinawa was the real worst one. One of the things that I can remember going in there before the action started, one of the times we came across all these bodies that were floating. There was one high cliff and children, women, old men and we learned later that they had, because of the invasion they were told that Americans would bayonet and kill every woman and child and so they just jumped off the cliff and drowned.

The scariest situation thought I think was we ran into a typhoon, hurricane typhoon. Fortunately, we were empty at that time, but I believe we were coming from Leyte somewhere from the Philippines and we got in the eye of the storm with some other ships. It lasted it seemed like forever but, and some of the ships went down in there. And I can recall a tremendous list that we took and the pounding the ship took and I really respect the Commander because this was an old ship and we were afraid that, boy, this was going to break in two, but he brought us out of it. In fact, I brought some pictures of the ship. I don't know if you need any of that information or not. That was probably the scariest.

Mark: Did you get liberty in the Pacific at all? I mean I assume you didn't spend all four years on the boat.

Landgraf: Oh, yes. No, we did. They'd take us. We'd have a time, and we'd go ashore. We'd go to the islands. I remember one group of coral atolls that we were anchored in and basically what liberty consisted of at that there was cold beer, as cold as they could get it, and maybe you'd play volleyball games, softball games and things like that. There wasn't much activity. We went to Auckland, New Zealand one time and our ship was in dry dock there for a while. We all took turns going over the side to scrape the barnacles off. We had liberty at Auckland so we had a chance to meet some of the people in New Zealand and eat some of their food, steak and eggs, "stike" and eggs as it were, and that was interesting. Of course, we had liberty from time – we'd have, a short liberty, we'd go back to the islands, drop patients off at Pearl Harbor. Then we could have liberty, down town at Honolulu. Basically, those were the islands themselves and we did go back, our ship had to be retrofitted back in the States, it was in dry dock for a while at Oakland or Alameda Naval Yard and we got liberty to come home at that particular time.

Mark: So you got a break there, for awhile.

Landgraf: That's right. Two times I got a chance to go home.

Mark: And did you come back to Wisconsin?

Landgraf: After the war was over?

Mark: No, I mean during this break.

Landgraf: I did come back to Wisconsin. I did come back to Hayward. Came back in time for deer hunting season I think. The thing that I remember that made it miserable though was that the trains were full. I recall coming back to Wisconsin, I think we had to take a train up to Seattle and then take another train cross-country. I think I was way on into Montana before I had a chance to sit down. They were cold and dirty and full and that sort of thing. But I think I had a couple weeks opportunity to get home at that time. Then I came back and the ship was ready and we sailed out and probably then we went to Okinawa. Whatever. After, and I said this to many people, that we were getting ready to stage for the invasion of Japan. That was next. I should mention too that I think I can remember seeing the B-29s coming in for a landing at Okinawa and some of them almost making it and crashing just what appears to be a quarter to a half mile short of the island. Others would come limping in and smoke and stuff like that so I can see why they - of course being involved down below deck so to speak in the operating room you weren't aware of why this island was taken and what was the purpose of this. It didn't seem like some of those islands, you thought, "Why don't we just bypass those islands?" because there are so many people killed for just a small piece of real estate. But if you didn't knock out the airfields, like there was one place - you could call them Charlie from Truk, whatever the case may be. There must have been a Japanese air base there called Truk and they'd just make their nuisance raids which would keep you awake at night. You'd have to go to your battle stations and run and hid, so to speak. But there were interesting things that happened. I recall out there and all of a sudden it would be just stop forward progress and shortly a submarine would emerge right next to us, and we transported a person who had an appendicitis off of the sub and we'd perform the appendectomy on the ship and kept the person with us. The sub went back below. Anyway, we were relieved to hear about the A-bomb being dropped on--

Mark: Okay, that was the next area.

Landgraf: Was that your next area? Okay, you steer me if you --

Mark: Well, I'm just wondering, do you recall when the war in Europe ended, first of all?

Landgraf: Yeah. I remember, I can't tell you the date, we remembered the war in Europe ending because I think there was a feeling of, "Now we can get some help here." I believe there was a general feeling that a lot of people that most of America's efforts were devoted towards the European theater and that we could have used more of this, and that if we had them over there in the South Pacific. We felt that now we're gonna to have some relief, we're gonna have some more attention, more air support, whatever.

Mark: And was there some impact? Or did V-J Day come so quickly that it really didn't make much of a difference?

Landgraf: I don't recall it making an awful lot of impact. I think some of the older people that had been out at sea longer and had families at home got an earlier discharges or relief and that sort of thing. But I know we were all happy to have the war end over there and I think we were thinking, now we can concentrate on this one.

Mark: Can you recall when you heard of the first A-bomb? Or the second A-bomb for that matter?

Landgraf: Well, there we didn't know too much about it but the report came through the loud speaker that the Americans dropped an atomic bomb on - I don't know if it was Nagasaki or Hiroshima, which was worst. We didn't even know what an atomic bomb was. There was no newspaper on board ship so it was kind of like what you heard over the intercom or scuttlebutt. Those who worked on the bridge I'm sure or in the radio room, where access - were privy to all that kind of information, but I think some of the officers went out of their way to try to keep us posted of what was going on. But, when we heard the second one was dropped and that the Japanese then asked for armistice, we were really relieved because, you know, just based on the experiences that we saw on those small islands, what a terrible toll it would have taken on both sides by the time to go through the whole mainland. We were scheduled as a matter of fact, I don't know whether we landed or took liberty on one of the southern islands of Japan but we were then called after the peace was declared, we were called to go up to Muckton, Manchuria. I don't know if I could find Muckton on the map now, but I think it was what is now South Korea. There was a rail line that came down from Northern Manchuria where a lot of POWs were kept, including some of those who were captured on Corregidor. So we waited there. We took on quite a few people who came, "One-Man-Army Wermuth," and oh I've forgotten some of the names, but they were brought on board ship as former prisoners of the Japanese.

Mark: What kind of shape were they in?

Landgraf: Terrible shape. They were emaciated, some could hardly walk, thin, lost a lot of friends. General Stillwell or something, name kind of rigs a bell as--

Mark: He was one of your patients?

Landgraf: One of the patients I think, yeah. Anyway, they were in pretty bad shape. I don't recall whether we took them back to the islands, I'm not sure how far we took them. But then we were called back to go up into the China Sea, which was kind of dangerous because we had mined the China Sea pretty heavily, and we had two destroyer escorts that would peel off from time to time and machine gun floating mines that they had. And at night we'd worry about that because where I slept was below deck, wondering what if something happened during the night. We somehow anchored outside of the Wang Ho River and I boarded a smaller ship, like a landing craft, you know a larger landing craft that would hold tanks and things and went up the Wang Ho River to a town called Tientsin. Had liberty there and we stayed there for a week or so and why we were there I don't really know. I know there were a lot of White Russians that emigrated from Russia after the Czar was defeated by the

Communists, but we stayed there a week or two. Had liberty there in China, and then came back to the States in November or December of ‘45.

Mark: When did you get your discharge then from service?

Landgraf: I think officially, it would have been like in February, 1946.

Mark: You had enough points. I haven’t interviewed too many Navy guys. You had the same point system as the Army?

Landgraf: It was called a hitch. I was in the regular Navy vs. being in the Reserves. A hitch was usually for four years and basically I had served my four years. I guess it started from the time I was 18 --- whatever it was. Whether I had signed up for a 2 or 3 year hitch, mathematics doesn’t work out as a four year hitch, but my hitch had ended. They wanted me to reenlist in the Reserves. I remember that process was going on.

Mark: What did you tell ‘em?

Landgraf: I didn’t think I wanted to. A good friend of mine who is a great guy, name is William Klem, he’s a Cherokee Indian and we were buddies. He had just **[End of Tape 1, Side A, Ca. 45 min.]** reenlisted and that’s -then they dropped the A-bomb and stuff and so he had another four years to go at that particular point. I was getting lonesome for the four seasons, I missed the winters and the springs and the falls and I missed home and that sort of thing. I’d had enough.

Mark: And you came home.

Landgraf: And I came home, right.

Mark: As you are back sitting in your parents’ living room or whatever, what were your priorities in getting back into civilian life? You were 22, 21 by this time?

Landgraf: 20, 21, right.

Mark: So what did you want to do in the next few years?

Landgraf: I didn’t know what I wanted to do, initially. Jobs were scarce. Remember this was the summer of ‘46, jobs were scarce up there in Hayward. I had one year of University Extension. I kind of got to like medicine a bit, but I met, I think this was still like in March, February, I met a fellow who was going to the University and he said, “Why don’t you take the GI Bill and go to the University?” I thought, “Gee, that really sounds like a good thing.” So I came down here and finished and got my B.A. degree here.

Mark: The thought of going to school and using the GI Bill hadn't occurred to you prior to that?

Landgraf: It may have but I think, really nobody in my family had gone to higher education and my brother who was discharged before me from the Army, he was, I think he was going to a school, a vocational school to learn to become a sheet metal worker. We had a technical school right in Hayward. So that didn't appeal to me too much and so I didn't get much of a chance to think about what I wanted to do.

Mark: But you were aware that you had this GI Bill.

Landgraf: Right. Right.

Mark: You could do it if you wanted to.

Landgraf: Right.

Mark: I'm interested in how knowledgeable you were as to what sort of options you had as to your benefits.

Landgraf: I can't recall going through any out counseling or things like that when I got discharged. You know it was kind of like, "Here's your paper." "My God, I'm free. I don't have to salute anybody if I don't want to," whatever the case may be. Free to come and go.

Mark: But you knew about this sort of thing.

Landgraf: But I knew about the GI Bill, right, right. But I wasn't sure what all the particulars I think until I came down here and I talked to an advisor who kind of explained what the amounts were and ---

Mark: From the campus here?

Landgraf: I think on the campus here, right, right.

Mark: What was it like going to school on campus? There were a lot of vets on campus.

Landgraf: At that time, I tell you it was jam packed. What I remember were long book lines, standing in line to get your books. What I remember were Quonset huts on the campus where the Library Mall is now. We had classes in some of those.

Mark: There's still a couple there actually. If you know where they are you can find them.

Landgraf: Well, there were some seemed like near the corner of Breese Terrace and University Avenue. There were some for quite a while. I remember we – I stayed at Bashford House at Tripp Commons and I'd never eaten so well. Carson Gulley was the chef at that particular time and I got to know some real nice guys we still stay in touch with. Fortunately, these guys came to school to study and so there wasn't any playing around from that standpoint, we always, we had our --

Mark: I was going to ask how serious you were and the other vets were as far as their studies were concerned.

Landgraf: Very serious. A lot of them were married or engaged. We felt like we had three or four years to make up that we were behind. Didn't pay any attention to the fraternities, sororities that sort of thing. I had met my wife-to-be so I wasn't interested in dating or things like that. The thing that I think changed for me was the realization of what education could do for you. I had kind of goofed around at that extension course up at Hayward. Of course, I went home every night and there was not an atmosphere of learning. I guess I had maybe a B and a few C's and a D. I ended up graduating with honors, especially when it came to a big credit course like Biology. I had known, I could - we'd get our assignment and I'd say, "I'm ready to take the lab test," because I knew I could follow the blood and I could name all the vessels, and the nerves, the bones in the body and so ---

Mark: It seems like a natural for someone like you. Do you think this is because you were 21 as opposed to 18 or do you think the military had, your military experiences, your life experiences --?

Landgraf: Part of it because I was 21 vs. 19 or 18, but part of it is the fact that I think I learned how to study and because it became a reason to study. I had regrets that I hadn't concentrated before, because I did have an opportunity to take one more exam for Officer's Candidate School to get my pilot, to become a Navy pilot, and I was doing great until I came to math. I knew I had this thing locked until I came to the math questions and that would have been something I wanted to do. I did have one regret later on and that is that I didn't go on into Medical School. One of surgeons, the Chief Surgeon on the ship had a clinic in Houston and he said, "I want you to go back to Medical School and I'll have a job for you." But, I thought, oh gosh, a long period of time and anyway I guess I didn't understand that you needed a local doctor or someone to kind of be your mentor, to get you into school because it was still kind of a closed institution and I remember Dean Middleton, Dr. Dean Middleston, whatever the Medical School, sort of laughed when he saw what my grades were and that sort of thing. So he just didn't give me any encouragement at all. He just said I couldn't do it.

Mark: So you chose Journalism instead.

Landgraf: There again, I didn't, you know-- so I'm going to college, what field am I going to go into? It seems like you know, you go down you could take this turn, you could take that turn, but I enjoyed writing, it was one of my favorite course, in English back in high school and so I knew some people, I think, friends who were going into J - School and I thought that well, that sounds pretty good so that's kind of how I ended up.

Mark: There were a lot of problems that some vets had. Did you have trouble, for example, finding a place to live on campus and then after you graduated?

Landgraf: Yes. It was after we - after my wife and I got married I stayed at Bashford House first--

Mark: You were in college when you got married?

Landgraf: Yes. I had a year or two to go and in fact, I went to summer school to kind of hurry it up. We came down here and all we could find was an apartment on Butler Street up here. Rooms were really scarce and we - no cooking facilities or anything. We had to eat at Piper's (??) cafeteria, or whatever. Then finally we found an apartment on Regent Street and there was rent control at that particular time if I remember right, and this apartment was a one bedroom apartment, the bed was a sofa you had to take down every night. We had to wash dishes in the sink. But we were happy. We got along all right. We finally found larger quarters, closer to campus, right where Memorial Union South is now. In order to get that though, we had to pay a year's rent in advance, cash. So, I had to take a small loan from the bank and that was under the table. In order to get this.

Mark: Was there any sort of government assistance for rent? --- loan for example ---

Note from transcriptionist: Tape ended and I missed some conversation.

Landgraf: It seemed to me there was a flat amount per month, if you were single so much, if you were married--

Mark: For GI Bill.

Landgraf: For under the GI Bill, right. They took care of tuition--

Mark: --these emergency kind of things like--

Landgraf: No. Nothing like that. I think there was friends and family, or your local bank up at Hayward loaned me the money to do that, you know. But then my wife got a job, and I worked part-time. That kind of helped support us a little bit, you know.

Mark: Did you have trouble finding part-time work at school?

Landgraf: I didn't take – most of the time I wasn't looking for part-time work. I was taking as many credits as I possibly could, trying to get through. I did have some work, must have been near my senior year, working in the College of Agriculture for Dean Kivlin (??). So I think when I found work I was able to – when I looked for it I was able to find some work.

Mark: Now, after you graduated did you have trouble finding a house? Did you have trouble finding work after this?

Landgraf: No, I had sent in applications for employment with a variety of companies – Denver, Colorado, St. Louis and so on, and coincidentally my wife who worked with another lady at, I think, Dane County Social Services – one day she was on the corner, they were going to pick her up and take her up to work in a snow storm and her husband said, "What's your husband doing?" "Well, he'll be out of school in a couple of weeks." "What's the major?" "Jornalisim, advertising." He said, "Well, I'm leaving Madison Newspapers. Why don't you have him stop up and see Lou Heindel, the ad director." Which I did, and they hired me there, so I had a job before I quite graduated. It was a couple weeks before graduation. So that's as far as I got. I spent the rest of my career right at that location, Madison Newspapers.

Mark: What about housing? Did you finance, I don't want to get too personal, of course, but did you finance it on your own, or did you take out – G. I. loans and that sort of thing after the war.

Landgraf: Housing, after we got married, my father-in-law gave us a down payment on a house. We bought a house out in Middleton. I think for $10,000. The price of the house was, I think you put a thousand down, and you bought the kitchen table and chairs and range and refrigerator, and we're off and running.

Mark: I suspect Middleton was kind of a city unto itself. It wasn't connected to Madison like it is now.

Landgraf: It was a little drive. This was a, the area was a project area where somebody had – elevations were all – the same floor plan, only a little different exterior, and it was a great neighborhood, people like ourselves, former vets, all young, had young kids, and so our families started coming at that time.

Mark: That's what I was going to ask. Were there a lot of people in your same situation living there?

Landgraf: Same situation, and we got to be close friends. We entertained within ourselves, playing bridge. We'd take turns monthly going over to somebody's house. We still, there are six of us, still get together regularly from way back then at that particular time. We did have in between, we found an apartment out on Jenifer Street, and we shared that with an older man. Looking back at it I think he must have had Alzheimer's or something like that or was alcoholic [Approx. 10 sec. gap in tape]… He had, was doing a lot of crying, I guess there's a name for that--

Mark: They do, colic you mean?

Landgraf: Colic--

Mark: I have, he's older than that now. That's an old picture, but --- crying out the story--

Landgraf: Yeah. Well, you know how it is. You can't--

Mark: Can't shut 'em up

Landgraf: --isn't much you can do, and the people above us didn't have any children, and I think there were times you could hear the broom handle on the floor. So we were glad to really get out and get into our own little house.

Mark: I've just got two last areas I want to cover.

Landgraf: Sure.

Mark: First involves sort of the social or psychological adjustments to society. Did you have any sort of problems getting readjusted? Some vets complain about nightmares, not being-- sacrifices not being appreciated. You know, the kind of Vietnam—stereotypically now Vietnam Veteran— Did you have any sort of experiences like that?

Landgraf: I can recall a little bit of resenting the fact there were some people who happened to be, who were able to march in parades, have somebody maybe throw some flowers or that sort of thing or being on shore when war ended or something. I kind of went in quietly, out quietly, was never in a parade. My folks were never able to meet me at the ship or friends or anybody when I came in or to say good bye or that sort of thing. I don't think I had regrets about that. I would have liked to have that. For a long period of time if I heard a loud report or a loud noise I'd do flashbacks from the standpoint I'm right back at it again, and it took me several years before, you know, that went away. And I'd have memories of people who had died and friends who I'd lost, and particular patients who had died that I got to know pretty well. You wanted so badly for them to pull through and that sort of thing. I thought about that from time to time. I'd have dreams about the invasions starting on, and I'd have nightmares about that for awhile, but--

Mark: Did this story steady, or did it eventually sort of --?

Landgraf: Oh, it didn't last, that part didn't last long. I think the part about – if a loud report or a car backfire or something like that, that took quite a few years before--

Mark: -- years.

Landgraf: Yeah, for that to go away.

Mark: The last thing I want to cover involves reunions and veterans organizations and those kinds of things. Did you ever join any sort of veterans groups, like I know on campus there were several groups, and then there's always the Legion, the VFW, and that sort of thing. Did you ever get involved in that sort of--?

Landgraf: After I got out of the service and kind of fiddled around Hayward there I did join the American Legion, but there was such an age difference I think between the entrenched, and it didn't seem to hold interest to me. I joined the VFW out in Middleton, oh a few years ago, and I'm still a member, but I used to go to meetings regularly, but you know I stopped going because they would seem like they'd get bogged down in the rules of order and some people would be argumentative and they'd seem to me like petty kind of things that didn't make much sense.

Mark: And that's not why you wanted to go, it's not why you were interested in the organizations in the first place.

Landgraf: I don't know what I, I just felt I should belong to 'em. I disagreed with some of the things. I think, for example, to support a veterans' organization, I believe that could be melded and used in existing hospitals that we have right now. Where you know, the government maybe could pay for these people and be serviced instead of having a whole new bureaucracy set aside for them.

Mark: You mean the VA hospital system ---

Landgraf: VA, particularly with it non-being a war time situation. I think they should mothball just like they do ships and stuff in case of an emergency, not sell 'em or whatever. I think I can see why the younger GIs like the vets Viet group would like to be a little bit more by themselves versus melding in with the VFW. We always-- I remember the VFW. That was a challenge, how can we get them to be part of us? Then I thought to myself well, how could I have felt part, I didn't feel a part of the American Legion when I was at that particular point.

Mark: The old World War I guys.

Landgraf: That's the World War I guys vs. World War II. I think one thing that I think about from time to time, it's no big deal, is the fact that I feel sorry for the GIs in the Vietnam war because of the fact they had to feel like they had to put on their civies when they went ashore and they were ashamed to be in the service. I really feel sorry for them.

Mark: That wasn't your situation in any way.

Landgraf: No, Uh-uh. We had our USOs, which people volunteered. We could play ping pong and things that we went to. I've never been to a reunion. I think I got the VFW magazine just so I could see where the reunions were. I never saw the *USS Relief* until finally just about a year ago. Somebody inquired so I sent some information out but I've never heard of a reunion. We were a little different animal than the typical like a cruiser or battleship or whatever because there were two parts of the ship, the boatswains mates and the steamfitters and that sort of thing. There was the medical contingent and there were the people who ran the ship. It's almost like if you had a reunion, I would have very little in common with the other guys and they would have very little in common with me. I'd love to have a reunion just of our medical group. I think they're getting pretty old right now at this particular point. I do think sometimes I feel a little bit resentful, talk about the, I see the Vietnam Wall from time to time and the wall for the people who died in World War II isn't big enough to be built – I mean it's so many more. I'll have to confess that when Clinton was elected President, the next day I was just so nauseated the fact that this - if I was in service this guy would be my leader and that sort of thing. So I, that's when I started writing my letters to the editor and so on.

Mark: Okay, I think you've exhausted my line of questions. Is there anything you'd like to add before we finish?

Landgraf: I don't think so. I think I-- I'll probably think of something tomorrow, but I think I've covered--. I talked longer and more than I thought I would.

Mark: Oh, I hope you don't get a ticket either. Well, thanks for stopping in. I really appreciate it.

Landgraf: You’re welcome.

[End of Interview]