

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

ERLING LANDSVERK

Army Transportation Corps, U.S. Army, World War II

2004

OH
1923

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1923

Landsverk, Erling., (b.1926). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Approximate length: 1 hour 9 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

Erling Landsverk discusses his service in the United States Army in the South Pacific during World War II as well as civilian life following his discharge. He mentions being drafted in 1945 at age 18 and attending basic training at Camp Robinson [Arkansas] and advanced training at Camp Maxey [Texas]. He describes his deployment to an encampment north of Manila in the Philippines in July of 1945 and his units' role there. Landsverk recalls his reaction to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan. He talks about his detached duty with the Army Transportation Corps inventorying ships to give to the Chinese government and describes interactions with the Filipinos and Japanese. Landsverk also details his work and family life following the World War II.

Biographical Sketch:

Erling Landsverk (b.1926) was drafted into the United States Army in 1945 and completed an eighteen month tour of duty in the South Pacific. He was discharged from Fort Sheridan [Illinois].

Interviewed by Ellen Healey, 2004.

Transcribed by Jeff Tiedeman, 2015.

Reviewed by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Abstract written by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Interview Transcript:

Healey: All right. Just by way of introduction, today is May 30, 2004. This is an interview with Erling Vandsverk. Is that how you pronounce it?

Landsverk: Landsverk. Yes.

Healey: Landsverk. It's L-a-n-d-s-v-e-r-k.

Landsverk: Mm-hmm.

Healey: Is that correct?

Landsverk: That's correct.

Healey: All right. Who served with the Army during World War II. And he served in the infantry, as a scout/sniper. This interview is being conducted at King, Wisconsin, at the King Veterans' Home. And the interview is myself, Ellen Healey, H-e-a-l-e-y. Okay. Do you like to be called Erling or Mr. Vandsverk or--?

Landsverk: No.

Healey: No? What would you li--?

Landsverk: Not Vandsverk. Landsverk, *l*.

Healey: Landsverk.

Landsverk: *L*.

Healey: Landsverk. Okay.

Landsverk: No, you call me Erling. That's fine.

Healey: All right. Erling, where were you born?

Landsverk: I was born in Bottineau County, North Dakota.

Healey: And where's Bokmow [sic] County?

Landsverk: It's in a central part of North Dakota, right next to the Canadian border.

Healey: Okay. And tell me a little bit about your family. Did you have a mother and a father?

Landsverk: Oh yes.

Healey: Okay.

Landsverk: My father was born and raised in Minnesota. And my mother was born and raised in Wisconsin. And they met in North Dakota.

Healey: And did you have brothers and sisters?

Landsverk: And f-- Yes. I have two--or had two brothers and two sisters.

Healey: Okay. And did you grow up in a town or a city or--

Landsverk: No--

Healey: --in the country?

Landsverk: --it was in the country.

Healey: Okay. And what'd your dad do?

Landsverk: We had a farm of sorts. But he was primarily in construction.

Healey: And where did you go to school?

Landsverk: I went to a country school, near our home, about a mile and three-quarters from our home, west of our home--and for the first eight years. And then I went to school in high school at a town in Rolette County, at a little town called Dunseith, D-u-n-s-e-i-t-h, for three years. At that time, we were approaching 1943--or were in 1943. And my dad and mother sold our home. And we went back to Wisconsin, right near where she grew up. And I had my final year of high school in Wisconsin, Rio, Wisconsin, R-i-o, Wisconsin. And after high school, a series of small jobs, things of that sort. I even spent a little time in harvest, out in North Dakota again. And soon as I turned 18, I went to the service.

Healey: Were you drafted or did y--?

Landsverk: I was drafted. But I was ready to enlist, to-- Don't know which was first. But soon as I went to the draft board, they asked me questions and I said, "I just want to get in the service." You know, and--So they did. They got me in there right away. That happened in-- Mm. I can't remember the county by name. St. Paul, Minnesota, at Fort Snelling. That's where I was inducted.

Healey: And that was in 1945?

Landsverk: In January of '45, yeah.

Healey: Okay. And since you were living in Wisconsin, why did you end up going to St. Paul?

Landsverk: Well, I had-- My sister lived there, relatives, and so on. And there was employment there, something to do--nothing more than that. That's all--the reason I was there.

Healey: Did you choose the Army or did the Army choose you?

Landsverk: The Army was one of those things where you went-- Depending on your position in the line, you were either in the Navy or the Army, that day. So I happened to be chosen for the Army.

Healey: Okay. And after St. Paul, where did they send you?

Landsverk: Well, went to Fort Sheridan, Minnes--no, not Sheridan--Fort something, Missouri, to get, I guess, all our clothing and other stuff and indoctrination and shots and haircuts and whatever. And we went from there to start basic at Camp Robinson, Arkansas. After Camp Robinson, Arkansas, basic, went home on a nine-day delaying route.

Healey: How'd you get home? On a train?

Landsverk: On a train. And went back. And was shipped down to Camp Maxey, Texas, for advance infantry training and then up to Fort Ord. And I believe it was in May, late May, we were boarding a ship for the South Pacific. But we stopped at Hawaii, at Pearl Harbor, to refuel--and then on, unescorted, and to Guam, and then went from Guam to Leyte--and Leyte was in the Philippines--and then progressed into Luzon. And we were at an encampment; well, north of Manila quite a few miles, probably 50 miles, 60 mile. I don't know. I don't know what it was exactly. Close to the Tagaytay Mountains, anyway, where we--

Healey: Was that your first time off ship, when you got to the Philippines?

Landsverk: Yeah.

Healey: Okay.

Landsverk: So when... At that time, we had surrounded Yamashita, the incorrigible general who wouldn't surrender. And we just waited him out--were ready to wait him out, actually, is what we decided to do. Because we cut off all his supply lines.

Healey: And when was this? Do you remember which month?

Landsverk: That was in late July. Seems to me it was in late July.

Healey: Of '45?

Landsverk: Yeah. And not long after that, we got word of the bomb being--had exploded in Japan, at--

Healey: What were your thoughts? And what did your fellow soldiers think about the bomb?

Landsverk: Well, it certainly was nothing more than happiness, when we heard what it did. We didn't know anything about the atomic bomb, at that time. But the news stories then carried on how bad the destruction was. And we knew pretty well what was going to happen, because they also followed up with a demand by General MacArthur that it be an unconditional surrender. The Japanese held stubborn until they dropped the second bomb--Nagasaki. And they suddenly realized that they couldn't hold out. We had--

Healey: Where you were located, did you hear about the first bomb before the second bomb was dropped?

Landsverk: I don't really remember. I think, I mean, that we didn't hear a awful lot about it till the second one. But we did know something about one bomb.

Healey: And you were on land, at the time, or on sh--?

Landsverk: Yes, yes. We were supposed to-- Well, we went in originally to be replacements for the 32nd Division. But when we got there, the 32nd had went on to Okinawa. And we were kind of messing around, picking up prisoners and getting Japanese stragglers and so on--is really what we were doing. And then we were more or less waiting word to go on up to Okinawa., where we knew we were going to attack Japan. We knew that was going to happen. Fortunately, we didn't have to do that. After the second bomb was over, we heard of the surrender and-- And I guess Yamashita finally gave up. So--

Healey: So where did you go after the Philippines?

Landsverk: Well, I was reassigned, because I got in late, as you can understand. I didn't get in there until June sometime. And so I hadn't had the points. The other guys, that had been in there for a year so, had plenty of points. They'd go home. They had 36 points, they could go home. And guys like me, that had just a few, you know [laughs]--

Healey: How did you get points? What did they--?

Landsverk: Well, that's what they-- I think they gauged it by the amount of time you spent there, amount of months, what kind of battles you were in, whether they were

firefights or whether you were doing what we were doing, which was just more or less picking up the odds and ends, leftovers--stuff.

Healey: Tell me more about your encampment in the Philippines, while you were picking up stragglers.

Landsverk: That's where it was. It was north of Manila about sixty-some miles. And it seemed like-- Tagaytay Mountains were a little further up, not too far from the Lingayen Gulf. I'm not--just-- I don't know. Because we didn't stay up in that area too long. We were only there about, oh, maybe two weeks, maybe.

Healey: Did you go on patrols or did you stay in the encampment?

Landsverk: We did, a little, to begin with. But then we just held back, because the orders came down to desist and stay in the encampment. And we were going to wait them out. We didn't want-- well, we just weren't-- And nobody s-- The company commander just said, "There's no sense in going in there and getting in a firefight. We'll just wait and see what happens." Until-- He must have had word from MacArthur or something. And so we waited. Japanese would filter into our chow lines in the morning.

Healey: Oh! Why?

Landsverk: They were starving.

Healey: Yeah. Okay.

Landsverk: And so, when one would show up, one of the guys standing-- We always had someone on duty in a chow line or close to where they hand out the food, because it had happened before. So they just get them over to a barbed wire enclosure and put them in there, and feed them--so they had something to eat. And they had a-- It was--well, it was August or--no, July, I guess. Whatever. But--

Healey: Any idea of how many Japanese were coming into the chow lines like that?

Landsverk: Oh, I don't know. Wouldn't pay much attention. They wouldn't-- Probably one or two each day, whenever they could sneak in.

Healey: Mm-hmm.

Landsverk: Yeah. So.

Healey: Well, you said when they can sneak in. They knew they were going to be captured.

Landsverk: Oh yeah.

Healey: Yeah.

Landsverk: Yeah. And they didn't resist or anything. They just came in there and wanted something to eat. So. And, of course, we weren't eating the food [laughs] that they were used to. But that was all right. They'd take whatever we'd get--I guess. So. Anyway, after rather kind of a mild--kind of encounters, nothing serious, we were sent to--detached duty. In other words, they pulled us out of the infantry. And I did. They pulled me out of it. And they pulled probably about--oh, I don't know--a platoon of us, I guess, down to--in Transportation Corps, Army Transportation Corps. And they run us through a course of--administrative course. And those of us who could type and do things like that, we were sent into an office. And then I was put in charge of inventorying Army cargo ships. And the Army had an enormous amount of ships--the tonnage was more than the Navy had, actually--cargo ships all over the Pacific. And so they'd come into the harbor. And they'd have to be in the outer harbor. And then we'd go out in a launch. I'd have a couple Filipinos running a launch, take me out there. And then I'd get on the ship and meet the skipper and then--and require him to give me the run of the ship. And I would start down in the engine room and go all the way from there up the bridge, and inventory it. For a green, ex-farm kid and just--and training was all in what I was supposed to be doing, getting to do this was quite a switch. But it worked out.

Healey: How long'd you do that?

Landsverk: Oh, I was over there about—I was overseas about 18 months.

Healey: Okay. Oh, did you stay in the Philippines all that time?

Landsverk: Yeah. That's where I was, once I got there. So--

Healey: Were you at Leyte Gulf or where?

Landsverk: Mm?

Healey: Where in the Philippines were you?

Landsverk: Oh, Leyte was just a start to the whole thing. That's way south. And then it went from Leyte up to Cebu and up to, fi-- Luzon is the big island. And that's the one we went to, at Manila. And that had already been taken. Manila had been taken when we got there. And so the action was up the line. I remember, when we got there it was dark and we could hear some of the machineguns and small arms fire and whatever going on. So that's what we walked into. But that kind of died down, after three days. We were-- It was--

Healey: When you did the inventories, were you inventorying the gear that was on the ships, on the cargo ship, or what?

Landsverk: All the property. The ships that were inventories were handpicked, apparently. Because those that I inventoried went to--Chinese general--Chiang Kai-shek. Because he was an ally of the United States in World War II. And so the ships were inventoried and then they were sent over to Chiang Kai-shek, for him.

Healey: Do you know, were the ships delivered by our servicemen or did the Chinese come and get them?

Landsverk: No. We always had people from our camp go over there. I never went. I was told I could go, if I wanted to. But I said I wasn't interested in going over there--and riding another ship back. I kept doing what I was doing. So. There was about 250 ships out in the Pacific to go through. And, [laughs] of course, I didn't get through 250 ships. I mean, you know. But-- When they were FS boats, what they called FS boat, they were inter-island ships. They were much smaller. They were about 200 feet long, 175 to 200 feet long. And they would go around the island. They were pretty good size ships. And we didn't do too much inventorying on them. Because they were pretty well turned back to the Philippines government. And we finally got our orders to go back in late July of '46. So I was there quite a while.

Healey: Let me ask you, when you weren't inventorying ships, were you sleeping in tents at night or barracks or what?

Landsverk: Well, by that time we had built some barracks out at--near Manila, at a place called the Philippine University, what used to be a university there. And it's all ruined by the bombing and everything. But we had like barracks but what they were were--well, there was--the roofs on them were covered with metal--metal roofing--and no insulation or wood or--and just metal on--and the trusses. And we had a border on the sides up about four feet and the rest was open. And the doors were open. Because it was--temperature was very high. It was probably right around--oh, average temperature was between 85 and 95, all the time--except during rainy season.

Healey: Have any typhoons?

Landsverk: Yeah.

Healey: Yeah?

Landsverk: Went through a typhoon one time--I was hanging-- [laughs] We went to a rest camp, right up in the Tagaytay Mountains that time. We went past further than where we were before. And the second day that I was there, second or third day, I was coming back from the PX and here it come. So at first, I thought I could make it back to the building that we were housed in. It was like a barracks kind of

thing. And the wind was blowing so hard, I couldn't walk. I grabbed ahold of a small tree that was right in front of me and hung onto it, until the first blast went by. It was just unbelievable how hard that wind was blowing. I could hear the tops of those buildings being ripped off. And I thought, "There goes my [Healey laughs] sleeping quarters." But it didn't take our particular building. A typhoon is a straight wind. So it kind of paused for a minute. And I made a run for that building. And I got in it. And we stayed in it, I think, a couple days. And then the typhoon was passed. So-- The US consulate was up in that area also. And General MacArthur had a home up there, beautiful home up in there, all their gardens and--beautiful--fountains--

Healey: Did you see it?

Landsverk: Yes!

Healey: Oh.

Landsverk: I walked on it. And I thought, "Boy, this guy knows how to live." [laughs] So. Anyway, we finally got our-- our stay there at Manila got to be awfully tedious and boring, in a way--know what I mean--we were all looking forward to going home. But there was so many--

Healey: Did you meet any good friends there--or make good friends?

Landsverk: I had a couple of good friends. But we kind of lost contact with each other, as time went on, after we got back.

Healey: Were the fellows that you hung out with, were they also people who did inventory or no?

Landsverk: One was. He didn't last at that. He didn't want to do it. So [laughs] I got stuck with it. I'd always take an assistant with me. And I gained the rank of sergeant. And--

Healey: Talking about rank of sergeant, you got paid regularly over there?

Landsverk: Mm. Cash.

Healey: Cash?

Landsverk: Mm-hmm.

Healey: And did you save money? Or what d--?

Landsverk: Well, it was just same as-- It was American money. But if you went to somebody's establishment, like a Filipino, you'd probably get paid in pesos and

whatever--see?--Philippine currency. But most of them stayed on American monetary system. So. There were a lot of things over there that weren't good. Manila was a terribly badly--well, almost destroyed city. So the [cell phone]--

Healey: Keep going.

Landsverk: --streets were bombed out. And buildings were tipped over and hanging just precariously to the side. And I don't know. It was a mess over there. Pasig River, it went through there--just terrible-- It was polluted so badly and-- There was a suburb--

Healey: What'd you do for drinking water?

Landsverk: The Army had drinking water out of-- They had-- They mus-- I don't know how they got it in there, exactly. I think it was shipped in. Had it in big bags, that we hung-- that's for drinking water, now. And you get your water out of that. And for showers and that, they had wells and water and-- And for showers, we just used that. I wasn't heated. It was cold showers. But you didn't mind that, because it was so hot there. And the water wasn't all that cold either. So.

Healey: So were you talking and Manila and a suburb there?

Landsverk: Well, a suburb was Quezon City. That was Q-u-e-z-o-n City. And there's where a lot of people lived that were more--how should I say?--upper middle-class and so on. And it had a lot of Spanish influence, a lot of wrought iron railings, and windows were barred, like they do in Spain, and all that stuff. And some of the buildings there were pretty intact. So-- But the Japs had taken all the good stuff out of there, and all the monies and the valuables they could probably find. And they really ruined--and did a lot of bad-- They just-- Well, they killed and raped and did everything they could possibly do to the citizens. It was just a-- And they just did everything they could do that would annihilate all of the citizens. But the Filipino people were resilient. So they kind of popped back up, after the Japanese got out of there. Of course, the Philippines were one of our colonies, at that time that they were attacked. So we had to get the Japanese out of there, of course. And we did. And so--

Healey: For the year or 18 months that you were in the Philippines, did you have much contact, on a day-to-day basis, with Filipines?

Landsverk: Yeah. I had a secretary, in this office, that I got to know pretty well. Matter of fact, we went-- She and some of her friends had a few of us over for dinner, once in a while, at their homes. It was really nice. They were just really-- They all had college degrees. And they were just nice people--you know?--very nice, nice to us. This lady I'm talking--or the young girl I'm talking about, name was Lisa Martinez [sp??]. I often wondered how things went for her after we left. I really missed her for quite a while. And it wasn't a love affair or anything like that. It

was just that we were awfully good friends and close and we liked one another a lot. So. And so, as time went on and we got closer to getting repatriated to the United States, the orders came in for the time we were going to ship out. And my immediate superior-- I don't remember his last name, he's a captain. He called me over to his desk, probably about a week before we shipped out, a couple weeks before, and he said, "Erling, I've been going through your records." He said, "Would you consider staying in, reenlisting?" "Oh," I said, "I don't know." "Well," he said, "I'll tell you what I got for you." He said, "If you do, I'm going to put you in for field commission and you'll be a second lieutenant in less than a month. And you can go from there." [laughs] I said, "Well--" When you're a youngster like me-- At that time I was about 19 years old, I guess, 19 and a half. I said, "Well, I haven't been home in quite a while." "Well," he said, "you take the commission and after a while you'll be able to go home," this "after a while" stuff, like-- [laughter] You know? So I thought for quite a while and I said, "I appreciate it," I said, "I really do. But I don't think I want to do that." He said, "I understand." He said, "Good luck." That's the way it was left. So I went home.

Healey: Okay. And when you left the Philippines, did you leave with your unit? Or were there still a lot of people in the Philippines?

Landsverk: We were scattered. We were no longer a unit. Because we were on detached duty. I did all kinds of things during that detached duty, as well as-- I even did some courier work, the old thing about putting a briefcase in your hand and a chain around you wrist and padlock to hold them together and get on a plane and take it somewhere. And they were still carrying secret--

Healey: Oh, so you did do travel.

Landsverk: I traveled there, yeah, on a plane.

Healey: You know where you went?

Landsverk: I went back to Tacloban, Leyte, one time. And I went down to Cebu. And-- In the islands. So it was kind of fun. I was-- [laughs] I was--when we got back to Tacloban-- Leyte was--we had gone through there but I didn't-- The naval battle was something else. The harbor was just plum full of ships. All you could see was the masts sticking out of the water everywhere. But I took this down to--this particular manifest that I took down, I took to an Army headquarters down there and handed it over, after they unlocked it off my wrist. Then I went back to-- I'm getting so old, I can't even remember the name of the airfield at Manila. I should be able to remember that but-- it'll come back to me, I guess.

Healey: You flew from place to place, or did you go by? Or how'd you get around, when you were--?

Landsverk: Well, when I was down there-- I only went down, delivered it and I want back the next day, on a plane again. And we'd touch down at a couple places. I remember we stopped at Cebu City on the way back. And it was hot. It was a cargo plane, no seats. You sat in it as best you could. So. And on this plane they carried some civilians, Filipino civilians, dropped them off. So. Volk [??] Field was what it was called, at Manila. So.

Healey: When you got your orders back, how did you get back to the United States?

Landsverk: Via ship, [laughs] troopship. And--

Healey: What's a tube ship?

Landsverk: A troop ship is a ship--

Healey: Oh, troopship. Okay. And where did you go--where did you land in the United States?

Landsverk: Right where we took off from. We went back in under the Golden Gate Bridge. I remember, when we shipped out, I looked back at the Golden Gate Bridge after we got out of the harbor and I thought, "I wonder if I'll ever see that again." Well, then I did see it, when we come back. We got back there in the morning, about nine o'clock, thereabouts. And we got off the ship and they had a big steak dinner waiting for us. It was nice.

Healey: Oh! Was that on a base or--?

Landsverk: No, it was-- Yeah, Oakland Army Base.

Healey: Oakland.

Landsverk: And then we went aboard--oh, gee--they put us up for the night there, in the barracks, and the next day we got on a troop train and took off for Fort Sheridan, Illinois. That's down by Chicago. And I thought [laughs] it took forever to get over there. But troop trains are troop trains. So.

Healey: Did the troop train stop quite a bit or not?

Landsverk: Quite a little. I remember going through Wyoming. This is getting into, oh, late September, early October. And I had worked up considerable amount of leave time I haven't taken. So. But when we were on the-- We went through Wyoming. And it was cold that morning. Boy. We weren't dressed. Because we'd come out of the Philippines. [laughs] All we had was khaki uniforms on and nothing warm to put on, no jackets. Oh, a field jacket, I guess we had. But we took off from there and got down again. So, anyway. Once we got to Fort Sheridan, then we got mustered out. And that took about two or three days, to get through the whole

thing. And so then I took the electric train, L or whatever you call it that goes down between Chicago and Milwaukee. Got to Milwaukee, I took the Hiawatha train to Portage--called my brother and he come and got me. And [laughs]--

Healey: Did your family know you were coming back?

Landsverk: No, they didn't know.

Healey: No?

Landsverk: And my brother was surprised as anyone. But he come up right away and got me. And he and his wife had just--well, earlier in the year, in February, they had a little boy. And he was about six months old, at that time, pretty close anyway. And Gracie was, when she got--she was just a-- She was a real nice gal. Yeah. And she said, "We're going to have a supper here. And we'll have your folks come down. I won't tell them until they get here." So. [laughter] So she did. And so Mom and Dad, my oldest brother came down for supper. And Ozzie went out--my brother went out to meet them. And my mother went in first. She come-- And it was a-- Their house was situated close to Duck Creek, down there, which is a pretty high--lot of water in it. And the house was built on top. There was no basement. And so their living quarters were on the second floor. Mother was coming up the stairs. And she got in the door. And I was sitting just a little ways from that door, at the table, having some coffee. And when she came in, I stood up and I come towards her with my arms out. And she looked at me kind of funny. And I said, "Mom, don't you know me?" And she looked at-- she was startled. She said, "Erling, it's you?" [laughter] "Well," I said, "I guess I could understand that"--you know?--after eating-- Every day I had Atabrine, it seemed like, to ward off against d-- Oh, what do you call it? Anophele-- mosquito that gives you the-- What is it? Hm. Anyway. We had to take that. And that was a yellow pill. And that, coupled with the sun, all that time-- And most of the time, I was out without a shirt on. And so my hair was almost white, from-- Because showers on board ship, you took it with saltwater. So [laughs] my hair was really blonde. And--

Healey: Well, how is--?

Landsverk: And I had lost 20-- Let's see. I weight 160 pounds when I went overseas--when I left. When I come back, I weighed 131.

Healey: What was your height? How-- [cell phone]

Landsverk: Five-eight.

Healey: Ah.

Landsverk: I even lost some of that now. So. My weight, when I went overseas, was fine, right where it should be. I wasn't a bit fat or anything. But that's why Mother didn't know me, because I had lost that much weight. Yeah. So.

Healey: And were you ill, when you were overseas? Or why did--

Landsverk: No.

Healey: --you lose weight?

Landsverk: No. No. Well-- I don't know. Because there was food. But Army food is what it is. But-- I think lost most it to begin with--when we first go there. And I never did gain it back. No, I can't remember being sick overseas.

Healey: Okay. Good.

Landsverk: Yeah.

Healey: Well-- So you got back. And after you got settled back in, what'd you do, after you got discharged from the service?

Landsverk: Well, I had it in my mind to become--I wanted to become a concert guitarist. I loved the guitar. And I had only managed to do self--practice and try to do this and that myself, self-taught sort of situation. And so then I went up to St. Paul again, where my sister was and brother. And I got a room, on Marshall Avenue-- and started looking around for a place to--how to approach this getting an education in music. And so I found a guy to teach me. And so I started in on it. He had a music store. I was doing pretty well. And I thought, "Well, I want to take this further than this." And so I said to him--I said, "I can get some instruction"--or "some help, with the GI Bill," I said, "with this." "Well, whatever." And so I checked with the veterans' service office. And they put in for some special ed type of thing. And on those-- I was working on that and I took a job as a-- First I worked in a dispatcher's office for a truck line, that was hauling forged ornaments down to Wisconsin, Iowa, all over the place. I worked there for a while. But I had also written a civil service test. And when the civil service test was finally gone over, and they called--or wrote me a letter and said I was accepted and, "Take this job," with the Veterans Administration offices, at the same place I went in. So I did that. So I worked with them for a while and was getting on towards winter, and-- I was fine. But they put me--and started in me as a clerk-typist, at that time, which I didn't mind either. But I was doing work on insurance forms for veterans, for discharged veterans. And the light was terribly bad in there. They had a light bulb hanging in a ceiling, about a sixty-watt bulb. [laughter] I said, "I'm having a little problem reading." "Oh, no," the guy had said, "You shouldn't have any trouble. Why don't you check with an optometrist or something." Well, my brother and I had the same ailment, apparently. I didn't know it at the time. He said, "There is a good ophthalmologist down in the Hamm Building," he said.

And he said, "If you want to go see him--" So I did. But I went through the examination and he told me I had macular degeneration and that I would be blind by the time I was fifty. Oh, great news. And so, after a long talk, a lot of thought-- I talked to my brother. I called my folks and talked to them about it. No, they didn't seem to have any problem like this. So, anyway--

Healey: And you were twenty at the time, in your twenties?

Landsverk: I was twenty at that time, yeah. So I went back out there and I said, "I think I'm going to have to resign." He says, "Why?" "Well," I said, "I don't think I'll be able to do this much longer, according to what the ophthalmologist said." And I said, "He advised me not go on with my music, because, he said, 'You won't be able to read it after a while.'" And I think he got a little bit-- It wouldn't have been that bad, anyway. But so, as a matter of fact, what happened is that I just decided to pack it up and go home, and I would do something else. Well, the only other alternative was to probably follow in my father's footsteps and get into masonry and that sort of thing. And so I did. I went and I worked with him for about six months. I helped them on their farm for a while, just-- there's just no income or nothing. I just helped them there and-- and my oldest brother was there on the farm, along with my mother and dad. So I helped them. They had quite a few acres to take care of. So I did their plowing and stuff like that for them and anything I could do to help. So then, when dad did a masonry job, I went along. And he had me work as a laborer, for a while. And then he'd have me do something like he was doing and teach me a little bit about it. Anyway, it wound up that I went to work the following year for a mason contractor. And I guess I made out okay doing stonework and so on. And that's where it got started. And I went to Madison and I got myself a job there--and a big stone job for the Unitarian Church in Madison--and got my-- I got some of the union t--couple of them to sponsor me to get into the union. And so I got a union stonemason's card and blocklayer's card and, eventually, a bricklayer's card. So I had the whole nine yards. And so then things were looking better. And I still wished I could play the guitar-- Of course, I kept the guitar. But it wasn't the same. And anyway--

Healey: I see you have guitars in your room here.

Landsverk: I play all the time now. I play for-- Well, I'll get to that.

Healey: Okay.

Landsverk: So, anyway. I worked down there for quite a while. Then my sister and her husband, my older sister and her husband, decided they wanted to start a drive-in. Because it was just--they're just coming into their own being in the Twin Cities. And they didn't want to go there. They wanted to come out where my folks were. And Dad had a chunk of land right on Highway 16. And he said, "You can have that, if you want it. Give you a couple acres for it and build you something." So Dad built--I helped him--built them a masonry drive-in, along with living quarters

in the back. And they opened it up. They called it the Highway Queen. That's when Dairy Queens and stuff were just starting. And they called it the Highway Queen. So, anyway. This is where they were and got going. And my-- at that time, I'd be working in Madison all the time, and worked for a contractor down there, had year-round work. And my present wife, Joanne, took a job as a carhop at the drive-in. And, of course-- And I pulled in there one evening and saw her. Why-- interest picked up. And before long--just six months later, we were married. So that was in 1950. And in '51, we were married. And so--

Healey: And your wife lives with you, here at King?

Landsverk: Yeah.

Healey: Yeah?

Landsverk: She's right next door, right over there--

Healey: Oh, right?

Landsverk: --455.

Healey: So you've been married for--?

Landsverk: Sixty-three years--

Healey: All right!

Landsverk: --going on 64 now. It was 63 last February. So, anyway. [laughs]

Healey: You were going--

Landsverk: We had four ch--

Healey: --to tell me more about your guitar playing.

Landsverk: Well, the guitar playing didn't-- Because of getting into this masonry business and so on, it developed and got-- I stayed in it. And then the union went on strike in 1952. And so they were on strike. And, of course, I had already started the house for us, on a piece of land that I bought. And so there I was, with a house half done and-- We'd just barely moved into it. We were just really un--it was pretty rough on the inside. It was shelter. And Joanne had become pregnant. So I had to take work wherever I could find it, at the time, in '52. I met a friend of mine-- He wasn't a friend at that time. I didn't know him. But I knew the family. And I had worked with him on a little job nearby, got to know him--and then kind of parted there. And I went d-- I was helping Dad. And one day this same fellow come to the jobsite and asked me if I want to help him do some masonry work.

“Oh,” I said, “sure.” Because I--[laughs] keep the income coming in. And so what happened is, started out and became partners in masonry--call-- His name is Russell Hurd. And he and I became partners and run a masonry business for about eight years. And then I thought, well, I wanted to do some more than that. Russ was a little cautious. He was very conservative and so on. We were doing well, good friends and everything. And I said, “Russ,” I said, “I’d like to try something on my own.” “Oh, you--” He didn’t really like that too well. “Well,” he said, “okay.” I said, “I’ll buy your half out, of the partnership. We’ll have somebody assess it, how much it is worth. And then I’ll buy your half out.” And I said, “We’ll go from there.” And I said, “You can come work for me.” “Well, we’ll see,” he said. So I could, he said, yeah. So. Anyway. When--I bought him out--and said, “Okay, Russ, let’s go to work.” “Well,” he said, “I kind of changed my mind. If you don’t mind, I’m going to stay [laughs] on my own,” he said. So I said, “I understand. And it’s okay.” So he stayed on his own and I went-- I started my own masonry and concrete business, and gradually worked into being a general contractor. And by, oh, 1966, -68, somewhere in there, I became a general contractor and built anything that come along, anything that I could handle, I thought. So. And I was putting up buildings and doing concrete work and doing public works, curbing, gutters, sidewalks, and things like that, veneer work, brick, and block and stone and-- So-- I employed several employees, until, oh, I guess the mideighties and something like that. And then I kind of retired--and also managed to go blind at that time.

Healey: Okay. Yeah?

Landsverk: This is one of the reasons it happened, of course. This bilateral macular degeneration that went on was--I developed retinitis pigmentosa with it. And it just took peripheral and everything out. In other words, I have no-- I could hold my hand-- I can’t see nothing, like nothing. There’s nothing here. So all I see is something blank or whatever. [laughs]

Healey: And that happened when you were about sixty?

Landsverk: No, it happened when I was just about seventy years old. But it kept going. It started when I was about fifty-five--and start--so I can--bothering at night, for driving. It didn’t really bother my work until later. When I was in my late sixties, it was really getting hard for me to do things. I’d misplace-- I could look for something and couldn’t see it. And then I was--and hunt for it. And my driving got pretty bad. So-- One day I almost run over a guy on a bicycle. And I said to my wife Joanne--I said, “I’m going to have you haul me back to the office,” I said, “because--” There we are again. I took this job, after I quit--with this guy that used to sell me—oh--modular--not modular but-- there were homes that were built--just framing of the home, go-- they were called-- Anyway. He was building these houses as residences. [knocking on the door] And he’d g-- Hello!

F1: Hello.

Healey: Hi!

F1: I brought something to drink for you, some witch's brew.

Landsverk: Oh. [F1 laughs] Thank you.

F1: You're welcome.

Healey: Well, let me ask you a couple of other questions. Now, I know you didn't fill out the form but it says you were infantry, scout/sniper. I take it you didn't-- Was that your training but--?

Landsverk: That was my training.

Healey: But you never actually were a scout-sniper.

Landsverk: Well--

Healey: Or--?

Landsverk: --no, I wasn't, actually, no. Well, they were there to-- I suppose I could have. They did ask if we wanted to volunteer to go and get the rest of them out of there. And I said, "If a whole bunch of guys wanted to go and do it, then they could go home." I wasn't really-- I had been shot at enough times already. I wasn't too anxious to go in and wind up a casualty. And nobody did anyway. They were just all--Japanese just all surrendered--they just walked right in there and took over-- Yamashita and the whole bit. So we really never had a chance. We were in--I don't know what you would call it--just-- Mm. I suppose you could say it was a firefight. But it wasn't really a firefight either. It was just your exchanging shots at one another, and from-- What we had more trouble with-- And five of the guys I went over with, on the first night we were there-- What they were doing, they were looking for some women. Can you imagine? Not the first night. But there was a lot of-- Well, it was after the bomb was dropped. So they kind of got sort of peaceable. They managed to get--five of them stepped on antipersonnel mines. That's-- They went home in a bag. It was bad enough. If you wanted to-- But I always called myself a garratrooper. That's with a g. I was too far front to shame and too far back to get shot. [laughter] We could all get shot. I remember throwing a combat boot at a Jap that tried to get in our tent. So. He took off.

Healey: Trying to get in your tent?

Landsverk: Yeah. He got in the door, all right, but-- And he was right over one of the guys next to the opening of the tent. And I didn't know what else to do. All I could do was grab my boot as fast as I could and tried running towards him. But I flung the boot at him. And I don't know if I hit him or not. I think I might have hit him in

the shoulder. We saw him-- Because when he opened the flap of the tent, I could see a little bit of lighter-- And he went out like crazy. And I went right out behind him and I was--like a damn fool. And he could have ducked around a corner between the tents and nailed me. But he didn't. He just kept running. He didn't go down a straight line, though. He knew enough to do that. But it was that kind of sort of stuff. We had to watch out for them. The guy that was sleeping there, his duffel bag was cut, right complete slick and clean, all off the top. So the guy was looking for something to eat, I guess. So when you got-- [laughs] That sort of thing, you know. But--

Healey: Well, ever since I saw your name, I was going to ask you about your name, Landsverk. What's the nationality?

Landsverk: That's Norwegian.

Healey: Norwegian. So your dad was Norwegian?

Landsverk: Mm-hmm. Mother was Norwegian, both of them. And--

Healey: Were they born in this country or--?

Landsverk: Yes, they were. And my grand-- Well, just barely. My grandfather came over here in 1888, I think, or -87, something like that.. And some of my aunts and uncles were born in Norway. But Dad was born in this country--in 1889. So.

Healey: And your first name is Erling. Were you named after someone?

Landsverk: I don't think so.

Healey: Okay. Is that a common Norwegian name?

Landsverk: Yes.

Healey: Okay.

Landsverk: My second name or my middle name is Gunder. That's named after my father. G-u-n-d-e-r. And-- Yeah. Yeah. Mm. The Norwegians got named, picked up their name from the property that they lived on.

Healey: Oh.

Landsverk: So if you moved to the Landsverk property, you became a Landsverk. [laughs] Before that, their name was Underberg. They lived at the base of a bluff. That's *under the bluff*, Underberg. That's a na-- A lot of the names are like-- Like Dahlen. People with a name like D-a-h-l-e-n, Dahlen, that's *valley*. They lived in

a valley. I don't-- [laughter] How they come about all these names. Poor recordkeeping up there.

Healey: Well, is there anything else about your military service that you would like mention, that we haven't covered?

Landsverk: Hmm.

Healey: Any particular NCO or officer that you remember one way or the other, or maybe a training sergeant?

Landsverk: Well, there was a first lieutenant, overseas, that I came to l-- we just--we'd talk and visit back and for-- when you're overseas, the bars didn't mean an awful lot. It meant you respected the rank. But we'd get talking together just like guys and-- This guy was from-- Oh, trying to think of the name of the town--right here on the coast of Lake Michigan, north of--south of Green Bay.

Healey: Manitowoc or Sheboygan?

Landsverk: I think it was Manitowoc. Pretty sure it was Manitowoc. His name was Bruechert, B-r-u-e-c-h-e-r-t. I'm trying to think. I think it was Bob Bruechert. He was a nice guy. And he went home, of course, ahead of us. He'd been there for a while. He was infantry. And I remember one of the academy--when we were going through basic. And we were doing training in bayonet practice, how to defend ourselves with bayonets and where to stab with it and how to use your rifle. And there's a lot of things you can do with a rifle that's just as deadly as a bayonet. But he said, "You know, Erling"--[laughs] I'll never forget this--"something you want to remember when you get over there," he said, "keep your cartridge belt full," he said, "And if they're near enough to stake--they're close enough to stick," he said, "they're close enough to shoot." Oh-- But, of course, never got into that situation. But-- And some of the guys--I'm sure some of them must have. But we didn't.

Healey: And were the people training you--had they already been overseas and were they--

Landsverk: Some of them were.

Healey: --combat experienced?

Landsverk: This guy was. This guy was from overseas. And he wasn't from the 32nd but he was from one of the Divisions over there. And he had finished a tour of duty. Whether he got hurt or what, I don't know. I suppose. But they were good.

Healey: And when you were in the Philippines, the 18 months or so, some of the other soldiers that you served with, did they have combat experience? Or were they all as new as you?

Landsverk: Oh, I think I was older than most of them.

Healey: Oh!

Landsverk: Because the ones that--most of the people that I went over with were left somewhere else. There was only about maybe 500 of us that went up into the northern part of Luzon. There wasn't-- The rest of them-- There was 5,000 of us went over on a troopship. But they dropped them off, here and there. So. I don't know what happened to a heck of a lot of them, never saw them again.

Healey: Mm-hmm. You mentioned you and wife were expecting. I'll end with this. Did you--? You have children?

Landsverk: Four.

Healey: And they live in the Wisconsin area or not?

Landsverk: Three sons live in Wisconsin. Our daughter lives in Savannah, Georgia. She is employed by IBM, in sales. It's not retail sales. It's sales to corporations and stuff like that. And it's all in software and programs and so on, that IBM sells to different corporations. My oldest son works for the State of Wisconsin, in facilities management. He's in an administrative position--been there for almost 30 years. My second-oldest son, who was just here little while ago, this afternoon or this morning, works for a contractor, Kraemer Brothers. And our youngest son works for a firm out of Madison, as a quality control manager. It's an administrative position too. My youngest son, my daughter, and my oldest son all have a college degree. My second-oldest son didn't want to go to college. So. But he's certainly doing well. He's qualified for virtually anything in construction. And that's what he does. So. And he's sixty years old. So. [laughs] He'll be fine.

Healey: All right. All right. Well, Erling, thank you. Appreciate talking to you today. Good to meet you, as well as your wife, a little earlier on. Thanks, very much.

Landsverk: You're welcome.

Healey: Okay.

[end of interview]