

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

WILLIAM LEIGH

Fireman Water Tender, Merchant Marine, World War II.

2000

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Leigh, William D., (1925-2009). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 45 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

William Leigh, a Spruce, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a fireman and water tender with the Merchant Marine crossing the Atlantic Ocean. Leigh talks about enlisting, boot camp at Sheepshead Bay Maritime Service Training Station (New York), and engineer school. He speaks of his duties as fireman water tender: cleaning the oil burners, maintaining water balance in the ship's boilers, and helping with naval guns when necessary. Leigh describes the night he arrived aboard his ship, the SS *Lucian B. Maxwell*, and discusses escorting a convoy to Great Britain. Landing in France two days after D-Day, he talks about transporting landing craft, seeing heavy anti-aircraft fire, and seeing bodies on the beaches. Leigh portrays transporting French troops returning from Africa. He reveals his wages and bonuses and tells of returning home on leave. Leigh touches upon reassignment to the SS *Santa Leonor*, transporting ammunition from New Jersey to Cherbourg (France) for the breakout at St. Lo, losing ships in his convoy to torpedoes a few days before V-E Day, and sailing from Marseille to the Pacific theater of operations. While in the Pacific, Leigh mentions shore leave on Mogmog Island (Ulithi Atoll) and going through a typhoon at Okinawa (Japan). He addresses his post-war trip with the Merchant Marine to South America. Upon discharge, Leigh touches on getting married and becoming a carpenter.

Biographical Sketch:

Leigh (1925-2009) served in the Merchant Marine from 1943 to 1946. After the war he became a building contractor, worked in the Madison area, and eventually settled in Cross Plains (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000

Transcribed by Kristy Gamble, 2009

Checked and Corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: Okay. Time of day [unintelligible] and the date is 9 August of the year 2000. When were you born, Bill?

Leigh: September 10, 1925.

Jim: And where was that?

Leigh: Up in the—it's actually the town of Spruce, between the little town of Lena, Wisconsin and Spruce--oh, I was born on a farm.

Jim: Born on a farm?

Leigh: My grandmother's farm, yeah.

Jim: Oh my goodness; the old-fashioned way.

Leigh: Yeah. [both laugh]

Jim: So, you grew up a farmer?

Leigh: No.

Jim: You didn't stay there long?

Leigh: No. My dad was a carpenter, and then we moved to town [unintelligible] very soon after the farm, I guess.

Jim: Okay. And you entered the Merchant Marine, when? 1943 it says here, is that correct?

Leigh: Yeah. That's correct.

Jim: How did you go about that? Did you go to Chicago or New York?

Leigh: No. On my eighteenth birthday I went down to the Doty School here in Madison.

Jim: I see.

Leigh: And I signed up for the draft. And the next day I went to Milwaukee and signed up. And went to Merchant.

Jim: What prompted you to--?

Leigh: I don't know.

Jim: Did you want to carry a gun or--?

Leigh: You know, we were all patriotic in those days. In fact, I tried to join the Marines when I was sixteen and my mother wouldn't sign for me; she wanted me to finish school.

And then they sent me home from Milwaukee. About a week or two later they sent me a letter to be down there for I think a physical, and I guess I passed the physical, and so then they put us on a train. There was about twenty of us from Upper Michigan, Northern Wisconsin, Madison. I didn't know anybody. [laughs] I think it took like twenty-nine hours on the train. We got our meals and a chair to sit in, but that was it.

Jim: Where did you go?

Leigh: Went to--we went to Staten Island before we got off the train. There was a man met us there, and he took us across the Staten Island ferry, and he took us to the subway station. Then we got off at the end of the line and took the bus to the end of the line and that was Sheepshead Bay, New York.

Jim: That's where they--?

Leigh: Yeah.

Jim: There's a Naval base there?

Leigh: Well, it was a United States Marine Training Center.

Jim: I see.

Leigh: Maritime training center.

Jim: Okay. So what kind of training did they give a landlubber like you?

Leigh: Well, the first week was just like the Army, I guess. It was work week, boot camp. They had me scrubbin' the floors. All the shoes made black marks and I had to scrub _____[?] every day to get the marks off. And some guys were workin' in the mess hall—but that lasted a week. Then you had a choice of engine training, deck training or mess training. Mess only took about a week or two. Engine training took about three months, and I went into engine training. They taught me to be a Fireman Water Tender.

Jim: That was your official designation; Fireman Water Tender?

Leigh: Yep.

Jim: Tell us what a Fireman Water Tender's responsibility is.

Leigh: Well, you stand between two big boilers and the steam--the water comes into two boilers. There's eight burners, four burners on each boiler, and every four hours you had to clean them burners. Then you had to watch two gauge glasses. All the water came in on one line and you had to balance it. You had to keep a constant watch on that, which was fine when it wasn't rough. But it was always rough in the North Atlantic. Then the water would go out of sight this way and then out of sight this way and you had to try to balance it. And you didn't dare lose that water or you had to stop the ship.

Jim: Where did the water come from?

Leigh: Well, see we made--

Jim: You didn't pump it out of the ocean?

Leigh: No, no. That was all fresh water. It was all used over and over again.

The water was changed to steam there, then it went into the engine; it's a three cylinder engine. The main cylinder was three feet in diameter, then it was exhausted into the intermediate cylinder that was seven feet in diameter, and then into the low pressure that was thirteen feet in diameter. It was all exposed; the pistons, the piston rod, connecting rods. The pistons and their connecting rods are hooked onto the shaft. The shaft was fourteen inches in diameter and that runs along the ship back to the screw.

Jim: One screw?

Leigh: Um-hmm. Then the water or the steam was exhausted out of air, condensed and then re-pumped and that's what came to me again. I had to--

Jim: But sooner or later you lose water, because in the process a lot of water is lost in the air.

Leigh: We had to make up water that we could add.

Jim: I see. You obviously had to take down water. Because it was--

Leigh: Oh yes.

Jim: Because you always lose it. Tell me this--I don't know if I was going to ask you this. Oh, how could you clean the burners if the ship was moving and you had to stay on the fire?

- Leigh: Well, you had one extra burner, and you made sure the tip was clean and then you'd go over and you'd switch off the auto click[?] and pull that burner out and put another one in, and then clean that one. Then go to the next one.
- Jim: How often did you have to do that?
- Leigh: Every shift. You worked a four hour shift. Four hours on.
- Jim: You clean them every shift?
- Leigh: Every shift.
- Jim: I can't believe it. What happened to them?
- Leigh: Well, they burn like number six oil which had to be preheated before it would even flow; it's like tar, so they got dirty easy.
- Jim: But that was a problem, if they'd plug up.
- Leigh: Oh yeah, then you're--
- Jim: Cooked, yeah. [pause] Did you have any other responsibilities or were you always down there with the--?
- Leigh: Not really, until we got over--we had a gun crew aboard ship and we had positions to back them up. We used to back up. If you were off duty you had to help if they needed help. If you had an airplane attack or something and somebody killed then you had to be there.
- Jim: Wouldn't you be busy down by the engines?
- Leigh: No. That was--you had to be at the engine room on your shift, but aside from that, then you had a station with a Navy gun.
- Jim: That wasn't four on, four off, then?
- Leigh: Four on, eight off.
- Jim: Ah, so if you had eight off you might be called upon to help out with the gun crew?
- Leigh: Yes.
- Jim: That's what I'm getting at. Did they teach you how to shoot that—what'd they put a five inch on there?

Leigh: No, we had a three inch on the tail and then the rest, I think eight 20 millimeters.

Jim: That's it?

Leigh: Yeah. I was stationed behind a 20 millimeter.

Jim: Did you have a chance to shoot that?

Leigh: No.

Jim: Never did, eh?

Leigh: No.

Jim: Oh, my. So then how long did it take to form up the crew and get your ship and all that?

Leigh: Well, what happened was, I graduated from engine school in January. A lot of the old-time sailors got home and then they all went back home for Christmas, so there wasn't an opening for us and we had to wait. We were replacements actually. So they had me paintin' windows for two months waitin' for an opening.

Jim: On base?

Leigh: Yeah.

Jim: So your first ship was what?

Leigh: Ah, the Liberty Ship, the Lucian B. Maxwell.

Jim: That was your first ship?

Leigh: Uh-huh

Jim: Where did you go?

Leigh: We went to England. You have to go in above Ireland to get into England in there because of the war.

Jim: Too dangerous to go low?

Leigh: Well, it's all mined in the southern route, and that's where the U-boats hung out up there. We traveled with about fifteen cargo ships and we always had three or five--about five Canadian corvettes or destroyer escorts.

Jim: Circled?

Leigh: Yeah, went with us. When we came in and we pulled into Swansea, Wales. I think it took us thirteen days.

Jim: From the United States?

Leigh: Yeah. That is where we unloaded.

Jim: Oh, was there cargo?

Leigh: Everything, we had airplanes lashed to the tank and a lot of--

Jim: This is late in '43, fall or--?

Leigh: This was actually in '44. I finally got a—they sent me from Sheepshead Bay to the Chelsea Hotel and then you had to stay there until they had a ship for you and then they'd send you there. You had to go down and join the union first; the National Maritime Union.

Jim: How much did that cost you?

Leigh: You know, I don't even remember. [laughs] It wasn't very much. But when you left Sheepshead Bay they paid you off, when you left Chelsea hotel they paid you off. I was only in the Chelsea Hotel for like four hours and then they said, take the subway here, take the Staten Island ferry, walk out on pier so and so, and I got there about 2:00 o'clock in the morning. Nobody hardly around.

Jim: But you found your ship?

Leigh: Yeah. And that's the loneliest place in the world, one of them piers at night. Dark and--

Jim: Yeah. For a little boy from Wisconsin, it didn't look like home at all.

Leigh: Yeah. I got aboard that ship and there was five of us rookies on there, I think two in the engine room and two in [unintelligible] and one in--and they called me the hayseed from Wisconsin. [laughs] All the other guys were old timers. Some of the worst guys you ever met in your life. They had been at sea for years.

Jim: Did they teach you all of their bad habits?

Leigh: Well--we were so scared to death we didn't know what--I couldn't even--they told me where to sleep, which forecastles to go to. I don't know who was there before, but everybody left and just trashed the place, threw everything there; you could hardly get the door open. And I was so tired by 2:00 o'clock in the morning with all this traveling, and I couldn't get clean sheets. They says, "Oh, you can't get clean sheets until morning." I just crawled in, but I don't know who slept there the night before. Next morning you could go up to the purser and get all that.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Leigh: Yeah.

Jim: So how did you adjust to being on the ocean? How long did that take before you got used to that?

Leigh: Oh, not very long. Some guys were seasick; I never was.

Jim: You never were?

Leigh: No. But then we left, we unloaded at Swansea and then they moved us to Newport, England. We laid there for quite a long time. We got there early April.

Jim: Of '44?

Leigh: Yeah. Then we knew something was goin' on. Then they sent us to Scotland.

Jim: You still hadn't loaded up?

Leigh: No, no. We were empty and we had bunks put in there for soldiers, for one thing, and then we went up to, sent us up to Scotland. On the way to Scotland we met all the warships going south. I think they sent all the merchant ships north to confuse the Germans, thinking the invasion was gonna be up there, and we met all the warships going back toward ____[?]. We stayed at Scotland overnight and turned right around and came back to Falmouth[?] and we loaded that same night. We took the complete units of Army with their equipment trucks and everything. We usually had a couple of ranking high officers and the enlisted men. We went across to--I don't know if it was Omaha or Utah beachhead. I was on both of 'em. I made six trips back and forth. We unloaded onto LCTs and LCIs.

Jim: That's what you unloaded on?

- Leigh: Yeah. Landing craft, and they took 'em in.
- Jim: You sat off the beach about how far? Five miles?
- Leigh: Oh, you could see the beach. Well, I wasn't even that far. They had taken a lot of old ships, real old ships, and sunk 'em for a breakwater.
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Leigh: Yeah. And every ship had a barrage balloon on it for low flying airplanes. I don't know if it's true or not, but I heard that they shot down three American planes the first night and two British and a German plane. That's just the story, but--
- Jim: There are a lot of stories out there.
- Leigh: Yeah.
- Jim: But you didn't have any trouble going onto the beach. This was on D-Day?
- Leigh: It was a day or so after. I think we loaded on D-Day and then we went the next night. Took us—about day two; I think it says somewhere in there.
- Jim: Right. The weather was churning up about that time.
- Leigh: Yeah, the only thing is when we got confused, they--I think there was about seven ships that went with us, one they call the *Commodore*, the leader of the seven. And on the way over we run into a bunch of ships comin' back, and then we kinda got split up. But the *Commodore* and our ship, the two stayed together. It didn't take long to unload them ships and we got out of there. But the first night anybody would think they saw an airplane in the sky and they'd start shooting, and pretty soon *every* ship was shooting. And every third bullet is a tracer, you know. And so--and I think the first seven trips I made over to the beachheads we had a barrage balloon every time and of course the shrapnel knocked 'em down. And then they quit puttin' 'em on.
- Jim: Sure. You guys couldn't miss them?
- Leigh: No. Then one of the trips we took three French troops across that had fought for four years down in Africa. There were seven ships that took them across. They hadn't been home in years, and it was kind of nice. It was a nice sunny day. We stopped and anchored out, and they'd start singing their national anthem. You'd hear it from one ship, you hear it from another. Kind of nice.
- Jim: When you were out, you used the anchors at that time, before you discharged your cargo?

- Leigh: Yeah. And they did shell us one time with these German 88's and railroad guns. Dropped 'em pretty close to us. And we moved, we'd keep a full head of steam up while you're there. Takes you [finger snap] just like that to get goin'.
- Jim: Well, that's pretty good. How long did it take to unload a ship under these conditions, generally?
- Leigh: Oh, I don't know. Not very long. Maybe two days.
- Jim: Two days?
- Leigh: Maybe a day. I don't know. I'm in the engine room; I don't see much of that, you know.
- Jim: When the ship operated, though, it was in good shape?
- Leigh: Oh yeah.
- Jim: It was brand new, was it?
- Leigh: Well, I think it was the second or third trip across.
- Jim: So after you got--you made several trips to the beachhead right after D-day?
- Leigh: Six from Falmouth and then we went to Southampton and we made five from Southampton, so it was a total of eleven trips.
- Jim: Men and equipment?
- Leigh: Men and equipment, right.
- Jim: And they all seemed to go okay?
- Leigh: Yeah. Other than the first ship you could--I think there were bodies you could see on the beach yet. I think they were only four miles in when we hit the beach the first time.
- Jim: Yeah. Okay. So after all this experience, then what?
- Leigh: Well, then I guess they sent us to Barry, Wales then we had to take on ballast; the ship was empty.
- Jim: You went back home empty?

Leigh: Yeah.

Jim: Did you go in a convoy?

Leigh: I think so. Yeah.

The only thing getting' back was it took us nineteen days to get back because they had a big hurricane in the Atlantic, and we tried to go around it. I think it was the hurricane that tore out the landing pier. Our captain who'd been at sea for fifty-one years said it was the first time he was ever in one. And half the time the screw was out of water, you know. You go along at like ninety-eight times a minute and all of a sudden [whirring noises] it would shake you right out of bed.

Jim: I know that. Yeah, we had that sound aboard the hospital ship. But after you came home, did they give you some free time?

Leigh: Yeah. Then you got--we were supposedly supposed to get two days' leave for every week at sea, up to thirty days.

Jim: Thirty days? Paid?

Leigh: No. Got no pay once you signed off the ship.

Jim: Right. You only got paid when you were aboard, isn't that right?

Leigh: Right. And you didn't get a bonus until you--they had--see I made \$110 a month. But then if you got out so far from the United States, then they'd give you a hundred percent bonus and five dollars a day.

Jim: So it would be \$220 instead of \$120?

Leigh: Yeah. And five dollars a day besides that. And when you get back--see, these ships were all either leased or operated by private shipping companies. This one was with States Marine Corporation, the second ship, Graceland. They paid you right there. They gave you an envelope. You never got any pay while you were at sea. You could draw money if you went ashore, you could draw stores from the purser like toothpaste, anything like that.

Jim: So you had a commissary aboard ship?

Leigh: Uh-huh. Purser took care of it certain hours a day.

Jim: Right. How was the food aboard your--

- Leigh: Pretty good. Pretty good. We had a Chief Steward and he was 6'4", a black man; he's the one who called me the hayseed from Wisconsin. [laughs]
- But anyway—and they paid you in an envelope and they paid you in cash. I never seen a hundred dollar bill before in my life.
- Jim: Well, the service paid in cash, too
- Leigh: Did they? I didn't know that.
- Jim: That's so everybody knew what their number was. If you wanted to get paid, you had to know that number.
- Leigh: Yeah. Well then I went home on a thirty day leave and I got here.
- Jim: Take all your winnings home and put it in the bank?
- Leigh: Well, I had sent a hundred dollars a month home in allotments, so--
- Jim: Were you single?
- Leigh: I was single.
- Jim: Sent it home to mom?
- Leigh: Yeah, and she put it in the bank. Randall State Bank out here.
- Jim: Oh, here in Madison?
- Leigh: Yeah. My folks lived in Madison, see. I moved to Madison after I graduated from high school up north. My folks moved here a year before I did. I stayed with an aunt and my cousin.
- Jim: This was after you left high school?
- Leigh: My cousin stayed with my mother, so we just switched kids. I finished my year of school up there and he stayed with her, going to the University of Wisconsin.
- Jim: Oh, that's nice. Okay. So then after your first leave home did you get back to the same ship?
- Leigh: No. You go back, you got to go to Union Hall--
- Jim: You had no idea what ship you were going to after you come?

Leigh: No. When you left the port, you never knew where you were going, either. Didn't know if you were goin' to England, or--

Jim: Oh, when you got aboard you never knew?

Leigh: Yeah. Never knew.

Jim: So it was never posted or anything like that?

Leigh: No.

Jim: Well, that was exciting in a way.

Leigh: Well, yeah. There was a lot of second guessing. We're going here or going to Italy or we're going to England.

Jim: After you're underway, wouldn't they tell you then?

Leigh: No.

Jim: You're kidding.

Leigh: Nothing was ever told until you got where you were going. It was all guesswork on the crew.

Jim: But somebody in the ship knew?

Leigh: Well, I suppose.

Jim: But it never got down to the boilers.

Leigh: It never got down to us. Not to me, anyway. [both laugh]

Jim: How big a crew did you have, roughly?

Leigh: I think it says in there forty-four men.

Jim: Did you have some Navy officers on there, too, to run the guns?

Leigh: Yeah, I think we had one Naval officer and I think there was about fifty gun crew.

Jim: Fifteen?

Leigh: Fifty.

Jim: Fifty.

Leigh: Quite a few, yeah. I may be mistaken now and then.

Jim: You said that there was only one three inch gun. I couldn't imagine--

Leigh: Well, they got all the 20 millimeters, and it takes like--

Jim: Two guys?

Leigh: The three inch gun, you know, that was--they kept the ammunition down, and you had to have guys pass it.

Jim: It's not much of a gun.

Leigh: No. [laughs]

Jim: Did the ship rattle quite a bit when they fired it? Or didn't they ever fire it?

Leigh: We never fired that one. The next ship I got on had a five inch on the back.

Jim: Yeah, that was the most used.

Leigh: Yeah, and that thing they fired.

Jim: That rattled everything didn't it?

Leigh: That—the air [whoosh] comes back at you. [laughs]

Jim: Okay, so when you got back after your first voyage, what did you get aboard then?

Leigh: Then I went to the union hall, I put my card in and you have to have seniority, and then they sent me to the Santa Leonor and it was operated by Graceland. I was also a Fireman Water Tender there. Then we--I'm confused now; I made four trips on that ship. I think one of them was to England. We may have went to the beachhead on one of them. And then we--I think it was on the third trip we came back to the United States and they sent us to New Jersey and we loaded ammunition. Way out on the pier at three or four miles out in the water, and you weren't allowed to even walk on the pier. The Marines, they had a railroad train come out there, and it was ten thousand tons of ammunition we took.

Jim: Wonderful.

Leigh: And then we took off and we went and we unloaded that at Cherbourg.

Jim: I bet you were glad to get rid of that cargo.

Leigh: Well, they give you an extra bonus, you know. Ten percent extra. Amounted to eleven dollars. [laughs]

Jim: But if you hit a torpedo that doesn't help much.

Leigh: No, no.

Jim: Because about four breaths and you'd be dead.

Leigh: Yeah, you get eleven dollars for taking that across, is what it amounted to.

Jim: Did you know that was an ammunition ship before you got on? In other words, did you have a chance at saying no?

Leigh: I said no for about a week when we were in port, and then they said you gotta sign up, either sign up or not, and so I went and signed up, and the next day we went to New Jersey, so I didn't know. They claim that ammunition was shot off within, I think it was like twenty-four or forty-eight hours after it was unloaded. It was about the time of--

I was on the beachhead one day when they bombed St. Lo and according to the newspaper, thirty-three thousand airplanes went over. I got up at seven o'clock in the morning. There was a group of airplanes everywhere you looked in the sky. And as I said, I think they said there was thirty-three, and that's when they broke through, the Battle of the Bulge.

Jim: So what was, how long did you stay in Cherbourg?

Leigh: I can't even remember. It wasn't very long.

Jim: Did you come back to the United States?

Leigh: Yeah, we come back to the United States.

Jim: Did you go home again, or did you just get another ship?

Leigh: No, I passed up all my leaves. I made four trips up until that time, and I passed up four thirty day leaves because I was on a much nicer ship, you know. It was a steam turbine ship. It traveled faster.

Jim: Which ship was this, your second ship?

Leigh: Yeah, that was--[end of tape one, side one]

Jim: How did that change your job?

Leigh: Not--it was almost the same, except instead of two hundred and forty pounds of steam pressure we carried four hundred and some pounds steam pressure superheated to eight hundred and fifty degrees. So you get a pinhole in that, you're fried. [laughs]

Jim: That's a lot of pressure.

Leigh: Yeah, and eight hundred and fifty degrees is pretty hot.

Jim: Hot enough to cook you.

Leigh: Yeah.

Jim: Okay, but you got along okay with that engine?

Leigh: Yeah. That was good.

Jim: Your ship, was it any bigger?

Leigh: No. Actually it was about the same size.

Jim: It just had a better engine.

Leigh: And it went faster.

Jim: I guess so.

Leigh: Yeah. Instead of thirteen knots I think it went seventeen or something like that.

Jim: That's pretty good. So, how many trips did you make on that ship?

Leigh: Well, I--totally, four trips during the war. That last trip we went to Antwerp, Belgium and unloaded there. And two days before that we lost two ships in our convoy, torpedoes.

Jim: Did you see that?

Leigh: No, I didn't.

Jim: Because you were down below?

Leigh: Yeah, yeah. Plus, what was I going to say, oh--I said that wrong. It wasn't two days before we got there. The war in Europe ended two days before we got to Antwerp and we had lost two ships a couple days before that.

Jim: So, what was the next move then?

Leigh: Well, I got liberty in Antwerp, so I got on that electric train, went over to Brussels, and went to see Manneken Pis. You ever see that little boy that saved the Belgians?

Jim: No.

Leigh: But then we left Belgium and we thought we were goin' home, and they sent us to the Isle of Wight, and then they sent us to Gibraltar, and then they sent us to Marseille. We laid there for twenty, thirty days, I guess.

Jim: Not carrying anything?

Leigh: No, and they finally loaded the ship up there and then they sent us to Panama. That was a pleasure trip because the water was like glass all the way and I had never seen anything where there wasn't twenty foot waves. But it took us fourteen days to get to Panama, went through the canal, no shore leave. Then we run alone for twenty-two straight days. Zigzagging, they put it on automatic pilot.

Jim: Going where?

Leigh: Well, we ended up at Eniwetok. We stayed there awhile and we went to Ulithi. Of course there's no shore leave. I got ashore one day over there on Magmag Island. The only other person I have ever found that got ashore there was Jim Stevens, a coach at Madison West. He was in the Marines. And all it was, was palm trees and beer cans. They give us each five cans of beer and a day to walk around on land.

Jim: Every day?

Leigh: No. One time. We were anchored out, of course. And from there they sent us to Okinawa. I think that's when the war ended over there. And then we had a typhoon come in.

Jim: Did you carry anything to Okinawa?

Leigh: Well, we had all this stuff on from Marseille yet.

- Jim: That was your original shipment; you didn't let it go, but then it got to Okinawa. That's a hell of a long way; you could have gone faster going the other way.
- Leigh: Yeah, I know, but I don't know why. Anyway, I got ashore in Okinawa and there was nothin' there. Main city of Naha was just bombed out. I got ashore one day because I got a letter from a friend of mine who was in the Navy and he was stationed there. Then he ended up on--after that he went back to the United States. He ended up on a hospital ship and went to Korea. He was there, I think, for seven months and then he went back to the United States, didn't stay very long. They sent him back again. Last I heard he was in Wood Hospital in Tomah and is just--
- Jim: Gone?
- Leigh: Yeah.
- Jim: From what?
- Leigh: I think maybe he just saw so much that--
- Jim: Oh. And then after you go up to Okinawa you got out of the service?
- Leigh: Ah well, what happened at Okinawa, a typhoon came and all the ships are sent out to sea. With the tide we had gone round and round and that, we couldn't get our anchors up. So we rode the typhoon out going half speed ahead with two anchors down just to stay off the reefs. But then we went back to the United States, and of course we had to go into the dry dock and get new anchors. The war was over and I was gonna go home, and there was a train strike on. So I kind of dreaded that train ride, that far. Back in them days you didn't fly.
- We got the new anchors on in Oakland and they sent us to San Francisco then, and so I signed on for one more trip. We loaded up and down the whole coast. We went to Astoria, Oregon; Tacoma, Washington; Bellingham, Washington; Vancouver, Canada; back to San Francisco, down to San Diego, Manzanero, Mexico, Columbia. Buenaventura, Columbia.
- Jim: Just taking small things?
- Leigh: Picking up and dropping things off and picking things up. In Washington we picked up four bulls that they had that they took down there for breeding. They were championship bulls. We took 'em to Peru. We went to Ecuador, Peru and I think five ports in Chili. When we loaded down in Chili; we loaded copper bars. It was only three feet high, you know, and it weighed so much that they it put down the hold.

Jim: Down with you.

Leigh: [Laughs] Well, no, we were in middle. They had three--five holds besides this. Anyway, I got back to New York City. I had hoped to be home in June that year and I got back the 24th of December.

Jim: Of '46?

Leigh: Yeah. We came back to New York.

Jim: So that was the end of your experience?

Leigh: You know, there's something I haven't shown you. My seaman's wallet. I lost the chain.

Jim: Save that until we're finished here.

Leigh: Okay.

Jim: So then that was the end of your experience?

Leigh: Then I came home and I decided to stay home—well, in the first place, I got married.

Jim: So somebody else was making decisions for you?

Leigh: Well, that, and the draft board was still after me.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Leigh: No, but they sent me a questionnaire. I suppose--

Jim: Well, we're down to '46 though. This is 1946 or '7.

Leigh: Yeah, 1946; they were still drafting then. I wrote back, or filled out the papers that I was married. I married a lady that had a son. And then I was classified as--

Jim: Not available.

Leigh: Yeah.

Jim: So what did you do?

- Leigh: I had saved two thousand dollars and I bought a building on Monroe Street. My mother had a restaurant on Monroe Street and she lost her lease.
- Jim: What was that?
- Leigh: Wingra Park Lunch. My mother had that all through World War II.
- Jim: I see.
- Leigh: And she lost the lease on it. So I bought the hardware store that was closed all during the war down on--I bought it for seven thousand dollars.
- Jim: That was on Monroe Street?
- Leigh: 1723 Monroe Street. It's next to where Klistener's[?] used to be, I don't know if you know that.
- Jim: So near Klistener's right on the corner. Yeah. I know the boys.
- Leigh: Yeah. Um-hm. Well, I knew old Sid, or old Harry and Sid. Anyway, we took the entrance out. My dad was a carpenter and he worked with [unintelligible] So we made a restaurant out of it down there. My mother moved into there and I had like two apartments upstairs. We rented one out to students, two bedrooms and one bath and I lived in the other one. And I sold it to Mr. Klistener. I got the loan from old Mr. Victor Aldridge[?]. Did you ever know him?
- Jim: No.
- Leigh: Well he and an old lady run that whole bank all by themselves.
- Jim: The Randall?
- Leigh: Um-hm. He was an old Frenchman; he had a white goatee, white mustache. But he liked me and I got the loan from him. I suppose they saw that hundred dollars coming in every month and thought well maybe I was responsible.
- Jim: Was there any pension involved in the _____ or was this strictly a cash business?
- Leigh: Yeah. And as far as insurance, I guess you had a five thousand dollar, or the Army, I think, had ten. I think we had a five thousand dollar deductible. But then I came back and I had to pay Wisconsin income tax on the money I made.
- Jim: Certainly. We all do.

- Leigh: Yeah. I worked more than a year in New York but you're still a resident of Wisconsin and they withheld taxes when they paid you. Withholding taxes, social security. That was all withheld when you got your final--
- Jim: So then you worked at your hardware business for how long?
- Leigh: No, the hardware store had been closed; I just bought the building. Then I joined the Laborers Union. My dad had gone to work for a contractor in town name of Leo Genese[?], I don't know if you ever heard of him. So I got in as a laborer. But he would hire me as an apprentice carpenter, which I wanted to do, but I wasn't a serviceman, so the union wouldn't let me become an apprentice. So I worked there as a laborer for awhile and then I saw an ad in the paper, and it was a nonunion contractor, and I worked three years for him. Then I went down and I took the test and I got into the union. My dad had been in the union since way back in the '30s. Anyway, then I worked for Leo Genese for about ten years and then I went into business for myself.
- Jim: Doing what?
- Leigh: Building houses. Everything from dog houses to an eight story building
- Jim: Well that was ambitious. Must've had a pretty good sized crew.
- Leigh: Well, what happened, I had like five men at one time, and then I got smaller and smaller. When I built the eight story building, the guy I built it for—well I actually didn't contract it, he took care of it. I had, I think, five carpenters working and two laborers, and an iron worker. I was general superintendent, that's what I did on the job, and he took care of the payroll. [pause] And I did that, and then about 1980 I had a chance to go north and remodel a lodge up in the Mars candy bar estate. It had stood empty for seven years and it was thirty-two buildings on the property and all made of logs. So I went up there and I worked, come home on weekends. And they offered me a job up there to stay full time and take care of it for awhile. Five guys from the Chicago Board of Trade bought it. I was there for five years and my wife got sick and I came back to Madison. The only thing is--
- Jim: You were a real builder.
- Leigh: I've done a lot of different kinds of crazy things really.
- Jim: Did you ever keep in contact with any of your shipmates?
- Leigh: Not really. In fact, I got a guy that was in the training school here with me that lives in Madison and I've been trying to call him, but I never get a hold of him. I didn't realize it when I went in that he was from Madison. But then he

and I used to go out and we dated two sisters. Only thing, it took us--they lived way out in Long Island; it was about four hours to get out to their house, but we usually met at Times Square, and went ice skating up on the third floor.

Jim: Oh, that's nice. You don't keep in contact with them?

Leigh: No.

Jim: I know you didn't get the GI bill, because they wouldn't let you do that. That's too bad.

Leigh: No, we didn't get anything. It was nice that they--

Jim: Now they are coming around with some benefits; that's nice.

Leigh: Yeah. But now most of the benefits are the Veteran's Hospital I can go to and-
[Tape ends abruptly]

[End of Interview]