

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WILLIAM V. LUETKE
Flight Surgeon, Navy, World War II.

1994

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Luetke, William V., (1917-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

William V. Luetke, an Ontario, Wisconsin native, discusses his experiences as a Navy flight surgeon in the Pacific theater of World War II. Luetke touches on his childhood, earning his medical degree in 1942, enlisting in the Naval Hospital Corps, and applying for a commission so he could attend aviation medical school. He explains the difference between a flight surgeon and regular doctors, emphasizing the importance of testing sight and balance. Based in San Francisco for a year, Luetke speaks of being the aviation medical examiner for the 12th Naval District and having the power to reject applicants for flight training. He comments on working with Mormons and doing flight physicals all over the western United States. He portrays wartime San Francisco, bending Navy rules about drinking alcohol, and rationing of food and gasoline. Luetke tells of getting orders for overseas shore duty, getting a butch hair cut, and saying goodbye to his family. He discusses conditions aboard the troop transport ship, stopping in Hawaii, and assignment to a transport outfit on Kwajalein, where he got the flight time he needed to qualify as a flight surgeon. Luetke talks about having a lot of free time, recreation and USO shows in the Marshall Islands, duty as wine mess officer, and trading alcohol for services and supplies. He describes tending ambulatory wounded and psychologically affected soldiers in transit between Iwo Jima and Guam. Luetke comments on seeing battle fatigue, magnesium bomb burns, and people who went "rock happy," a form of depression experienced by some people stationed on Iwo Jima. On Kwajalein, he touches on escorting female flight nurses and transporting ex-prisoner of war civilians from the Philippines. Luetke speaks of his contact with natives on Guam, an American nurse who earned extra money by prostituting herself, and cheering up depressed guys by showing them women working at the Officers Club and hospital. He recalls flying to Ie Shima and Okinawa to visit friends and witnessing the last Japanese air raid on Okinawa. Luetke describes the discipline within the Medical Corps and not getting along with one of his commanding officers. Luetke tells of his roommate's preparations for the invasion of Japan and the relief everyone felt when the atom bomb ended the war. After returning to the States, he recalls running into a buddy who'd been sent home wounded and going AWOL for three days in Los Angeles. Luetke talks about his homecoming, having a wild leave with his wife and some recently-returned veterans, and assignments in Olathe (Kansas), St. Louis (Missouri), and Columbus (Ohio). He states his duties were mostly doing tonsillectomies, flying around the county, and wasting time. Luetke explains being dissatisfied with his job, describes his efforts to resign from the Navy, and being released after writing a letter to the President. He talks about returning to Madison, his tight financial status while doing his residency in OB-GYN, and using the GI Bill for house

loans. Luetke mentions refusing to join the Naval Reserves and being an inactive member of the American Legion.

Biographical Sketch:

Luetke (b.1917) served in the Navy from 1942 to 1947. Born in Granite (Idaho), he grew up in Ontario (Wisconsin), attended college and medical school at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and settled in Madison.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994
Transcription by WDVA staff, ca. 1996
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

Mark: Today's date is 29 August, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum. I'm doing an oral history interview this morning with Dr. William V. Luetke, a Navy flight surgeon during World War II in the Pacific Theater. Good morning.

Luetke: Good morning.

Mark: Let's just start out with some basic information about yourself. You were born in 1917 in Ontario, Wisconsin?

Luetke: No, no. I was born in Granite, Idaho. I moved to Ontario when I was four and a half years old and grew up in Ontario through High School.

Mark: I'm not sure where Ontario is.

Luetke: Vernon County, way on the east end of Vernon county, just west of Hillsboro, a little country town. Kickapoo.

Mark: I pride myself on my geographical knowledge, but—Kickapoo Valley? Is that where it is?

Luetke: Yes. Karen is from the Kickapoo.

Mark: Yes, she is.

Luetke: Viroqua, that's the county seat.

Mark: And what was it like growing up there? I mean, you're old enough to remember the 1920s and the period before the Depression and then afterwards; just briefly describe.

Luetke: It was great. I was in a class with fifteen people, kind of a middle-type student all the way through. In a small high school you got to participate in everything: band, orchestra, glee club. We didn't have football. Played baseball in the fall, basketball in the winter. Class plays, dozen, fifteen real close friends that you grew up with. I was an only child, an adopted child, so all the people in Ontario were my brothers and sisters. It was a great experience.

Mark: I see. Did the Depression hit Ontario very hard?

Luetke: You bet.

- Mark: You personally, your family?
- Luetke: My dad was president of the bank and was very embarrassed about the bank holiday, and he lost a lot of money like everybody else did. Oh, I worked for a nickel an hour, fifty cents a day.
- Mark: I was gonna say, you somehow managed to finance your education all the way through the MD. That must have been pretty—
- Luetke: Two years at La Crosse. My first year at La Crosse was a total of three hundred dollars and I think the second year was a total of four hundred dollars. Then I came to the University, and back in those days my first year was eight hundred dollars, and I don't think it was ever much after that. I worked all the way through school.
- Mark: You came here to UW Madison?
- Luetke: The last two years of undergraduate.
- Mark: I see. And is that where you did all your medical training, too, here in Madison?
- Luetke: Yep.
- Mark: And when did you finally get your MD?
- Luetke: 1942.
- Mark: Right in time for the war, I guess.
- Luetke: Yeah. We were the last full four-year class and had a full year internship.
- Mark: Among those you were training with at the time for your MD—I mean, the war had started by this time and certainly it probably seemed obvious that we were going to get involved in this. Did you and your colleagues talk much about going to war? Did you discuss those sorts of things?
- Luetke: No, we knew we were gonna have a full year of internship; everybody was busy getting married. I think the whole class by graduation, most of 'em, were married, because we knew we were gonna go to war in another year. And had a full year internship, which was great, then off to service.
- Mark: Did most of your classmates go off into the service?

- Luetke: I think so. I'm almost certain that all the men went; I don't know about the women. I think Chris Wood, who was a lady doctor, I'm sure she was in service; I think she was in uniform, too. But the rest of 'em, I don't know. We only had three or four girls.
- Mark: Perhaps you could discuss your decision to enter the service. What made you decide—
- Luetke: Well, you didn't have any decision, naturally. The draft came out about, when? 19—
- Mark: Well, 1940 was the first Selective Service Act, but then there was a period when even married men were subject to the draft then after while.
- Luetke: Well, then I wasn't married yet. In 1940 when the Selective Service came out I was number one in Vernon County. [laughs] Fortunately, I was in med school, so I immediately got deferred. I was in absolutely the first draft of draftees. Another week, I'd have been reporting somewhere if I hadn't been in med school.
- Mark: So when you finished medical school, you knew you were—
- Luetke: Gone.
- Mark: —and so you decided to volunteer?
- Luetke: I volunteered. Oh, goodness. Mark Worig was a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve practice here in town and I went up to his office, reported there to get a physical exam for an Ensign Hospital Corps Probationary, something like that. So I was commissioned, not on active duty, no money, and that carried me through the internship. Ensign USN RHVP, Hospital Voluntary Probationary, something like that. I've lost those records.
- Mark: It sounds like pretty good terms to go into the service on.
- Luetke: Oh, yeah. Everybody else was going privates, what have you, seaman thirds.
- Mark: Is that why you chose the Navy ultimately? They offered you the best—
- Luetke: Oh no, I just wanted to be in the Navy. [laughs]
- Mark: It is my understanding that the Navy was often seen as more of an elite kind of—

- Luetke: Cleaner.
- Mark: Cleaner. Better duty?
- Luetke: [laughs] Yeah, I think so. I thought it was probably cleaner and more glamorous, ridin' around on a ship and what have you instead of carrying a rifle in the mud and leading the troops and living in tents, and I ended up living in a tent [laughs] and living in the mud anyway, but I only found out about the Marine Corps after I got in the Navy.
- Mark: So perhaps you could describe your real entry into the military. When did they cut your hair and give you the physical and the whole business like that?
- Luetke: Never got the haircut, Mark. I was in Galveston finishing up an internship, Galveston, Texas.
- Mark: Was it a Navy hospital or—
- Luetke: No, it was the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. The internship finished on June 30th and I was ordered to report to Corpus Christi US Naval Air Station on the 10th of July, which I did. And you flobbered[?] around, checked in, not knowing anything. You had the uniform on that I had got up in Houston and eventually got checked in and reported to the dispensary, and I was in a group of probably—I don't remember—fifteen or twenty brand new doctors, just out of internship. My wife was up in Galveston. They needed a volunteer to work in the cadet dispensary at 6 o'clock in the morning and I didn't have anything holding me back, so I volunteered for that and met a real nice guy by the name of Carroll Hungate who was a flight surgeon, and I took one look at him and wanted to be a flight surgeon. Of course, Corpus Christi was all Naval aviation.
- Mark: Um hmm.
- Luetke: And Carroll told me the only way, being brand new in the Navy, I could get in the Aviation Medical School was to apply for a regular Navy commission, which I did. I got in Aviation Medical School a couple months later.
- Mark: What was that like?
- Luetke: Well, I still hadn't had the haircut. [laughs] This was kind of an indoctrination. We got marching a couple times a week, we got pistol

training, we got gas training, and it was a real nice—it was a two month course on eye and ear, nose and throat, psychology and mainly flight physicals. I don't remember what else. Oh, sanitation.

Mark: Camp sanitation?

Luetke: Camp sanitation, kitchens, inspecting kitchens, what have ya, hygiene; that was about it. It went on for two months. Then I got ordered to Naval Officer Procurement, of all places, for a Lieutenant JG in San Francisco, and I was there for exactly a year doing flight physicals.

Mark: I was in the Air Force in a hospital and I never understood the difference between a flight surgeon and all the other surgeons or doctors, other than catering to the pilots.

Luetke: That's exactly it.

Mark: I mean, what's the difference between a flight surgeon and the rest of the crowd?

Luetke: You're especially trained on flight physical examinations, which was a little higher caliber exam than just going in the service, where you get a slap and a pat and you're in.

Mark: So you're looking for certain things? Ear, nose and throat-type things?

Luetke: Eye and balance; they were very, very picky. Eye and balance was the big killer, and it knocked out an awful lot of them, or just eye exam. And they had to pass quite a rigorous general exam. You know, a little scar on the ear drum and you're out, you weren't accepted. I had more power then than I have ever had in my life. I was the Aviation Medical Examiner for the 12th Naval District. Brand new Lieutenant JG, had been in the Navy about four months, and I was the last word on getting into flight training for anybody coming back from the Pacific and anybody in the 12th Naval District.

Mark: Which covered what?

Luetke: Oh, San Francisco, all of Northern California, Colorado; that was it. Oh, Salt Lake City, too. I got a bunch of guys from Salt Lake City. Mormons. I've never forgot the Mormons.

Mark: Why's that?

- Luetke: Well, I didn't know anything about Mormons, being from Wisconsin, and I had one of the guys working in the office was the son of the Mormon Bishop of Salt Lake City, so he was quite a character. I never forgot the Mormons.
- Mark: Just out of curiosity, a lot of medical studies will show that the lowest cancer rates are in Utah and those sorts of things. Did you notice anything in particular—
- Luetke: No, we were all twenty-five years old or younger. Or younger. These kids, they were coming back from [unintelligible] at the time, I think, and they were all twenty-year-old young men, and I was seeing college kids down at Colorado College and over at Stockton and it was pretty good duty. They flew me all over the West out there with my team doing flight physicals.
- Mark: Oh, you went to different places to do this?
- Luetke: Yeah. I was primarily home-based in San Francisco, right downtown Market Street, but had to go over to Stockton, which was then the College of the Pacific, I think, and Colorado College, and I don't remember where else. That was about it, I guess.
- Mark: So there were a lot of washouts just from the physical?
- Luetke: Ninety percent.
- Mark: Ninety percent?
- Luetke: Yeah.
- Mark: Wow.
- Luetke: See, in 19—what are we talking about? '45? No, no, no. '44, they didn't want any more pilots; they had enough pilots. But they had to keep the program open because they didn't know how long the war was going to last and still had to keep examining and interviewing and testing, but it was getting pretty obvious that another two or three years and the war was gonna be over, and of course, it was actually only a year and a half or something like that.
- Mark: Yeah. So you spent considerable time in the States during the war, in the West?
- Luetke: Except for one year.

- Mark: Could you perhaps describe wartime San Francisco, for example? It was an embarkation point, lots of soldiers and sailors.
- Luetke: Yeah, it was mainly sailors. The soldiers were up at—well, where were they? They were down, Camp Ord or Fort Ord or something like that.
- Mark: In Monterey?
- Luetke: Yeah. It was a big embarkation point for the Army. No, San Francisco was absolutely full. You couldn't have a drink until 4 o'clock in the afternoon.
- Mark: Those were Navy rules, or city rules?
- Luetke: Those were Navy rules, strictly adhered to. The officers in this NOPO, Naval Officer Procurement Office, we'd go out to lunch and they'd serve you booze in a tea cup. [laughs] And I knew some people—it was—I Magnum's store, okay, and there were some ladies in there that knew the 44th Army Hospital when they had been stationed in Pittsburgh and then gone overseas, so I went and visited the one I was advised to see, Elsie Pope, and Elsie took me around town for lunch at the darndest places. [laughs] Topless waitresses; it was wide open. I didn't see any prostitution, but it was a party town. It was a real party town.
- Mark: There was, of course, rationing going on at the time?
- Luetke: Yeah, I could get booze down at—you can always find a place to get booze. There was a racetrack about forty miles south of San Francisco called Tanforan, and for some reason, I could go down there, I think because Myron Caves of Caves Buick was down there. He was stationed down at Tanforan. I could go down there and get a case of whiskey any time I wanted to for parties for the office, is mainly what it was. Everything was rationed. No meat, no butter.
- Mark: Did you run across much black market-type activity? If you wanted a steak, could you—
- Luetke: No, uh uh. I think they had them in the restaurants. I'm living as a Lieutenant JG in San Francisco on one hundred-eighty dollars a month. Eighty was apartment rent and we lived on the other hundred, and you just didn't eat out much. You ate out at just plain old cheap restaurants if you ate out at all; didn't eat out. Didn't have any gasoline to go anywhere. I forgot what you got; three gallons a month or whatever it was. [laughs]

Mark: It sounds to me like you didn't need to, though.

Luetke: Didn't need to. I walked to work, I walked a couple miles to work and took the streetcar to work. We were all in the same boat. The office got together and partied a little bit once in a while at somebody's house or somebody's—Officer's Club or what have you. It was fun. Mark Hopkins was a famous spot. Every time somebody came through—meet you at the big old hotel right on Union Square, don't remember the name of it. Not the Palace, the Palace was downtown on Market Street, but it was funny, I've never been able to remember how everybody found you. People came through San Francisco either coming from the Pacific or going to the Pacific, they'd find you and we found them, and how we did it I haven't any idea. I don't remember what the line of communication was. You didn't make any phone calls. It took ten days for a letter to move around anywhere. We met people in San Francisco, see you—I can't remember the name of the hotel; see you at this hotel on Union Square, anyway.

Mark: So, when did you hook up with the Marines? When did you go overseas?

Luetke: All right. I was in San Francisco from November '43 to October '44, reported down at Miramar near San Diego, which is still a Naval air station—maybe it's a Marine Corps station. It's a Naval air station, reported there, and then you're talking about the haircut. I reported in on a Sunday, needed a haircut, went to the Officer's Club and a doctor, another flight surgeon, was getting his hair cut and he was getting a butch. His name was Cal Williamson, and I said, "Cal, what are you getting a haircut like that for?" I didn't know what his name was yet; I knew it the next morning. He said, "I'm goin' overseas tomorrow morning." So I got in the barber's chair and said, "My orders don't read that way, I'm just ordered for shore duty. Just give me a nice little haircut." Cost fifteen cents, something like that, maybe a quarter. The next morning I was standing right alongside Cal Williamson at 7 o'clock and I was on the same orders to shore duty overseas. I didn't know the overseas part. I went back to the Officer's Club and said, "Cut it off; I'm going too." We finally shipped out of there Wednesday.

Mark: What did you think when you finally found out you were going overseas? Were you scared, were you excited?

Luetke: No, no. No. I think it was just something you accepted. I couldn't understand the shore orders, shore duty only, and then I found out that what it meant was that I wasn't going to be on a ship, so I came out and I said, "Betty, I'm going overseas tomorrow." So we had a couple of nights, we finally shipped out on Wednesday and that was it. But you know, everybody was doing it; there was no hysteria about being sent off to war.

I think my folks knew it. I saw my folks as part of my terminal leave back in Wisconsin. Mother was crying, I was wondering, “What’s she crying about?” [laughs] She knew I was going overseas, but I didn’t.

Mark: Mother’s intuition or something like that?

Luetke: Yeah, something.

Mark: So where did you go to? You took off from San Diego?

Luetke: Well, it was an interesting ship ride. We were on a Army transport run by the Merchant Marine and leased to the Marine Corps. I haven’t any idea how many people were on there. They were all fighter plane pilots, mainly fighter pilots. Went to Hawaii, stayed there for a week at Ewa Marine Corp Air Station waiting for the ship to go up and come back and had a nice time in Hawaii. I had never been to Hawaii before. I had no money. I sent all my money back to Wisconsin and ran into Stan Nestigan, Ivan Nestigan’s brother, who I’d known at La Crosse in ship service. You know, you run into people. And from Hawaii we went to Majuro and I found out what was gonna happen to me. Cal Williamson and I had been together all this time. And you ask in there about the ship ride. The ship ride was interesting. It was a transport ship and had a big locked psych ward in it with freshwater showers; everybody else was in saltwater showers and stacked bunks. We were in the psych ward, the doctors were in the psych ward, freshwater showers. [laughs] It pays to be a doctor sometimes when the doctor runs the psych ward, and we helped him with sick call and took care of all the troops and what have you. There was probably three thousand people on that thing, I don’t know; it was a lot of enlisted personnel, a lot of officers. It was a nice ride. Went fast; fifteen knots an hour. After Honolulu and after Hawaii we went to Majuro—

Mark: I’m not sure where that is.

Luetke: It’s one of the Marshall Islands, somewhere out there. One of those dots in the Pacific. A fellow from Minneapolis was the Senior Medical Officer and he said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “I gotta get sixty hours of flight time to get my flight surgeon wings.” Cal already had his. And he says, “Fine, we’ll put you on Kwajalein in a transport outfit and Cal Williamson, you can be in a fighter outfit.” [laughs] So to VMR252 for fourteen months and that was it. We were about six, seven months on Kwajalein, six, seven months on Guam. Flew all over the Pacific. All I had to do was work a day in sick bay and then work an extra day; get changed with somebody, I could be gone for a week. Didn’t have to hang around Tarawa—Oh, I can’t remember what was around there at that time. Makin, I think it was Makin Island was on that thing, you know, Eniwetok.

- Mark: So, describe Kwajalein. The daily routine.
- Luetke: Oh, daily routine; it was terrible. Kwajalein was about—I don't know, maybe two or three miles long and four blocks wide. You could swim in the lagoon or you could fish. Mainly I was getting my sixty hours of flight time so I could qualify for being a flight surgeon.
- Mark: Where did you fly and who did you fly with?
- Luetke: Just flew around, local flights, test flights, different neighboring islands. Eniwetok was not very far away, NGB, something like that. Played a lot of volleyball, a lot of cards, drank a lot.
- Mark: I was going to ask, was there a lot of drinking?
- Luetke: Oh, yeah.
- Mark: Beer?
- Luetke: Booze. Booze and beer.
- Mark: It was something that the Navy shipped in?
- Luetke: Well—
- Mark: Well, I suppose they would have to.
- Luetke: This squadron was a little crazy. Being the Senior Medical Officer and able to count to twenty, [laughs] I was the wine mess officer, which means I was in charge of the booze. We had \$15,000 worth of whiskey—\$15,000 working through the Marine Corps Depot in San Diego and the Overseas Naval Supply Depot in San Francisco, and \$5,000 worth of booze at \$10 to \$12 a case is a lot of booze. [laughs] It's amazing what you can do with it; it was trading money. Nothing that you couldn't do. When we got to Guam we got a whole squadron area built for two cases of whiskey that we gave the Seabees. We ran out of spark plugs and bought fifteen thousand spark plugs with a case of whiskey. [laughs] Flight jackets: a bottle of booze was a flight jacket; that was easy. You know, one of those hundred dollar flight jackets.
- Mark: Sounds like Radar O'Reilly.
- Luetke: Oh, God, it was terrible.

- Mark: A few more questions about Kwajalein. What was the mission of that base? Was it a Marine fighter base?
- Luetke: This squadron had been down somewhere in the South Pacific before the war, a place called Apamama [an atoll in the Republic of Kiribati], and I never found out where it was. Abamama or Apamama. And then when Kwajalein was secured—they probably had been in Hawaii after they got out of the Pacific, then they were sent there and we were just simply a transport squadron. I don't know what we were transporting. The guys were flying all of the time. They were flying out into Guam and Saipan, Tinian, hauling Napalm and spark plugs and equipment and what have you.
- Mark: So the others on that island, they were, of course, doctors like you, the pilots, ground crews?
- Luetke: Oh, yeah, there were a bunch of people out there. There was a B-25—I think they were all Marines. There was a B-26 tow target outfit. There was one with a cannon in the nose; that might have been B-26. We had a fighter squadron.
- Mark: It sounds like a lot of people on a small island.
- Luetke: Um hmm. It was packed.
- Mark: Were there any natives?
- Luetke: No, they had been all removed somewhere, if they hadn't been killed, I don't know. There was a big Jap cemetery that was, oh about—when they buried the Japs they just bulldozed out a hole in the ground and put them in and said, "There's two hundred bodies in this one and three hundred bodies in this one" and I haven't any idea how many people were killed on Kwajalein in battle, but there was a lot of 'em.
- Mark: Yeah, okay. When did you go to Guam?
- Luetke: April 1, 1945.
- Mark: Perhaps you can describe to me going to that island. It had been secured by the Americans by that time?
- Luetke: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well it was fun because I'd been in a Marine air group, or my squadron had been in a Marine air group, and this was the first time that the squadron and I were involved in a separate living area and a separate sick bay and what have you, and all of my medical equipment had

been stored with the Marine air group on Kwajalein. All the stuff was shipped by ship and we get our area designated and I go down to look at my equipment and there was a mound, a pyramid about twenty feet high of medical equipment. They had been getting medical equipment since before the war. There was enough there to [laughs] take care of the whole damn Pacific operation. I had enough quinine to treat everybody in the Pacific. I had neurosurgical instruments, [laughs] full set of general equipment and all this and all that. Turned it all back into the Marine air group, got rid of except what I needed. This is where we used the two cases of whiskey to the Seabees to get—officers had two tops to their tents, double roofed, screens all the way around, wooden deck. The enlisted men all got the same thing except they only got one roof. Sick bay, the administrative offices, we went first class. It was nice. [laughs]

Mark: Can't complain too much.

Luetke: Can't complain. The mess hall was all screened in and inside dishwashing, none of this outside stuff. It was great.

Mark: And so your duties were—

Luetke: Immediately started flying back to Iwo Jima two and three times a week to haul back casualties.

Mark: You didn't personally?

Luetke: Yes, there were probably three of us in the Marine air group, three flight surgeons. Three or four. By this time, Cal Williamson was back in transports; he'd got out of the fighter outfit and was back in a sister transport squadron right next to us on the airstrip and flew up there two or three times a week, get a planeload of psychos mainly, occasionally a wounded bunch, bring them back.

Mark: I was going to ask about what type of casualties, what type of battle casualties you ran across. Let's start with the psychological cases first. Could you explain some of these?

Luetke: These were guys that were battle fatigued and scared to death; what you call that one medically I don't remember. It was interesting. There was a little island south of Iwo Jima called Iwo Shima[?] and these guys would come and their heads would be hangin' down and they'd shuffle aboard and I don't suppose they'd been sleeping too well or eating too well or anything else too well and they'd see this little island and we'd go over the top of Iwo Shima on the way to Guam, they'd start to giggle and laugh and smoke and the psychological problems were all behind 'em. [laughs] I

was the greatest psychotherapist in the South Pacific; we all were. I had one real interesting thing, Mark. Flew up there, got orders to fly up—I did not have a corpsman with me; maybe I did, I don't remember—anyway, to pick up an Air Force personnel guy, and he was the man who had picked up a—what were the bombs? They were dropping incendiary bombs on Tokyo—magnesium, magnesium bombs, and one got stuck in the bomb well. He pulled it out, carried it to a door and threw it out, and he was burned from arms and shoulders and face and what have ya. They got back to Iwo Jima and got him stabilized. We picked him up and got him to Guam. He'd already been given the Congressional Medal of Honor—I tried to find this; I couldn't do it. He was written up in the Saturday Evening Post, to give you an idea of how long ago, because there hasn't been any Saturday Evening Post in a long time. But he was from Atlanta, Georgia, and was given a tickertape parade when he got well enough, and I imagine the poor guy had at least fifty operations, getting his body back together. I couldn't find it, I don't know what happened to that Saturday Evening Post thing.

Mark: I'm sure it's on microfilm somewhere.

Luetke: A few wounded guys.

Mark: Yeah. Did you treat casualties?

Luetke: Mainly they were all ambulatory casualties. Anything to get 'em off the island.

Mark: Were these the casualties from the big battle that we're all familiar with?

Luetke: Iwo Jima. Yeah, at first, and then from there, April, probably starting about May or mid-May, then we started getting the rock casualties. They were rock happy. They couldn't—

Mark: I've heard that term. As a medical doctor—

Luetke: Well, if you ever saw Iwo Jima you'd understand it. It was black. First of all, it was black sand. The whole island was black sand, and it was only, I don't know, four or five miles long maybe, if that; big, cloudy, foggy, sun never shone. Bleakest, blackest place you've ever been in your life. These were all Army guys by this time and they'd put 'em on there and these guys would go nuts and they just couldn't stand it.

Mark: What were some of the symptoms of rock happiness?

Luetke: Well, just plain depression, just severe, acute depression.

- Mark: Was there a suicide problem?
- Luetke: I don't know.
- Mark: Didn't get that far?
- Luetke: I never got that much involved with—actually what happened, I spent a few nights on Iwo Jima, would fly up and stay in the sick bay and go back the next day after it was well secured and they had roads and the Japs were all neutralized, but what life on Iwo Jima was actually like, I don't know. [laughs] It was a horrible, depressing place.
- Mark: It sounds like it. Did you have any problems with rock happiness on a place like Kwajalein?
- Luetke: No. No. We had a lot of entertainment coming through. It was a midpoint in the Pacific where people stayed overnight and entertainers were coming through. It was very easy to rationalize it. My God, they were how far—two thousand miles, a thousand miles away they were shooting at each other and we're sitting here going to movies every night, eating three meals a day, nice comfortable tents, showers and what have you. There was no problem.
- Mark: Did you get the USO show to come through? Did Bob Hope come, by some chance?
- Luetke: No. Jack Dempsey was there. I was down at the air terminal one night; oh, I had a nice job. We had just started using flight nurses and there wasn't any place to put women on Kwajalein, we had to put them over in the general's compound. So my job, every—well, not every night, but when I was on duty, was to go over to the air terminal, pick up the flight nurse and take her over to the general's compound, pick her up the next morning, put her back on the plane with her entourage. We were flying people back at that time who had been the civilian captives at Santo Tomas in the Philippines and they were all civilian casualties. A guy like you would probably weigh seventy-five, eighty pounds. I never saw such gaunt people in my life, starved to death. A lot of them had died. These were the survivors. Picked those people up, took them over to the general's compound. We had a bus or a truck, truck to transport them. It would be twenty to thirty at a time.
- Mark: So Kwajalein sounds like a fairly busy place.
- Luetke: It was busy. It was busy. A lot of stuff in, a lot of stuff out.

- Mark: Was Guam much different than that?
- Luetke: Guam was a big island. Guam was probably ten miles, fifteen miles wide, fifty miles long, something. It was a big island, had a great big harbor, a lot of action going on in the harbor. We had two B-29 fields; Agana was a Navy field. There was a fighter field down on Orote Peninsula—My God, I haven't thought of that in a long time, and then there was something south of there, some more Air Force stuff or Navy stuff. A lot of flight action going on. The bomb they dropped on—where'd they drop the bomb?
- Mark: Hiroshima? You're talking about *the* bomb?
- Luetke: Hiroshima. Yeah, I think it was from Taipan or Sini—Tinian or Saipan, one of the two. That didn't come out from Guam. I'm sure we had—no, we didn't, here was only two bombs, they only had two of them. So they were on either Tinian or Saipan.
- Mark: A few more questions about Guam. As you mentioned, that it is a much bigger island, and I'm sure they couldn't evacuate all the natives.
- Luetke: You had natives.
- Mark: Did you have much contact with the natives?
- Luetke: Only—they ran the telephones. [laughs] The native girls would be on the telephones, just like—oh, you're too young for this, but back at that time you'd pick up the phone and say, "I'd like to call Orote, the fleet hospital at Orote." So they'd stick it in the switchboard and in about five minutes you'd get Orote, something like that.
- Mark: And it was American territory before the war. They spoke English?
- Luetke: Oh, yes. They were Chamorros; that's Spanish for something. But they were good looking, short, dark-skinned Spanish people. Very nice. They were all over the island. I don't know where they had been during the battle. I don't think the battle amounted to too much. There were still Japs hiding on Guam when I was there.
- Mark: You had mentioned that before we turned the tape recorder on. Did you have any run-ins with any Japanese guerrillas or anything?
- Luetke: I didn't. No, no. Ed Detchen was with the 3rd Marines. He was a year behind me in med school at Wisconsin. He'd also interned at Galveston,

so I knew Ed fairly well. Anyway, they were out on patrol, walking around the edge of the island somewhere, and Ed walked right into one and didn't know what to do, so he grabbed him and yelled. There he is, standing with this starving Japanese soldier who hadn't had anything to eat in months, I suppose, yelling his head off, [laughs] holding onto this Jap.

Mark: Who was apparently unarmed.

Luetke: Who was unarmed and just happened to walk right smack into him. He came around a corner and there he was, "bang;" he grabbed him, held on. They picked up a few. We had quite a few Jap prisoners around our sick bay and up at CINCPAC—CINCPAC was on Guam at the time—working; they were scratching in a road. They wore a yellow outfit of some sort, had "P" on the back.

Mark: But I take it there were no snipers, no American casualties, anything like that?

Luetke: No. Nobody was shootin' at anybody. They had been neutralized completely. We used to fly over a little island called Roy[?] just north of Guam and they'd shoot at us. There'd be puffs of smoke and you'd think hey what's goin' on, and the pilots would say, "They're shooting at us." [laughs] We'd be too high, they couldn't hit us.

Mark: Yeah. That island might have been bypassed or something like that.

Luetke: Yeah. Evidently they had an antiaircraft battery there and a few shells and there wasn't anything to do, so when we flew straight over them, they'd shoot a couple.

Mark: And they would eventually run out of ammunition. You brought up something else I wanted to discuss. Being in the medical field, there were nurses. Nurses tended to be women at the time. Women in the military has been a topic of discussion for years. I'm wondering, in your experience, was there tension between the men and the women?

Luetke: No.

Mark: Was it a workable situation? How would you describe the gender relationships?

Luetke: Well, there were several fleet hospitals on Guam. We had—well, they were all—I had a corpsman got hit in the head with a fire bottle. He was way down on the south down Orote.

- Mark: A fire bottle? What's that?
- Luetke: A fire extinguisher. But there were a lot of nurses, used to go to their Officer's Club. They had a—if you wanted to just look at the woman and talk to women and what have you, you could go to the Officer's Club and have a few of those fifteen cent drinks—
- Mark: If you were an officer.
- Luetke: If you were an officer, shoot the bull with the girls and you got to know 'em. I had a psychiatrist friend—when I took the Navy Boards in San Francisco I met this guy who was a psychiatrist, and he was the psychiatrist at this one fleet hospital, 114 I think was the number of it, and so I used to go over and see him. Do you want a dirty story about the nurses?
- Mark: It's on tape; it's up to you.
- Luetke: At this one place where the psychiatrist was, he said, "See that table down at the end of the room?" I said, "Yeah." He said there'd be one nurse and about five or six guests. She was charging thirty-five dollars a crack and she had a restricted clientele of about half a dozen guys per night. Thirty-five dollars.
- Mark: In American dollars?
- Luetke: In, out, in, out, in, out. [laughs] I knew her, I had somebody from the squadron was on her ward and would go over to see 'em and see if they were doing all right. She was a perfectly nice girl, she was making a little money on the side, [laughs] more than her I suppose one hundred-eighty dollars a month as an ensign, US Navy Nurse Corps.
- Mark: That was on Guam?
- Luetke: Yeah. We had a lot of women on Guam: Red Cross, the donut girls.
- Mark: The donut dollies?
- Luetke: Yup, donut dollies.
- Mark: Is that what they called them at the time, too?
- Luetke: Just donut girls. The higher ranking officers got all those. This was when flight nurses first started and we had a big compound right next to Gonya[?] Administration, Gonya Air Field, and I knew most of 'em

because I'd seen 'em on Kwajalein. I'd squired them around on Kwajalein, back and forth to the planes. Every once in a while somebody would come through that had been way out in the Pacific and would ask, "Are there any women around here? I just want to see one." I'd take them to the Officers Club, to the hospitals and let 'em look at women. [both laugh]

Mark: I suppose it's a luxury if you're rock happy.

Luetke: Oh, yeah. You know, a year—some of these guys—what did they have? We didn't—no, we had a little, I don't know what kind of a hospital it was on Kwajalein. There were fourteen doctors in it; I think Army doctors had been three years and no hope of going back. Boy, the Army took 'em out there and dropped 'em. In the Navy, in the Marine Corps, you're gonna be out in a year, year and a half and you're going home; you'd get rotated. Those poor bastards were out there for three years. [laughs] And they got shipped out, and they got shipped to Tinian or Saipan again. It was a kind of—what's the crazy thing on TV? That medical evac program?

Mark: MASH?

Luetke: MASH, yeah. It was kind of a MASH-type of unit of about fifteen guys. They had a pathologist and a bunch of surgeons and internists, and they took care of the whole island. Anybody got sick, you sent them over to that little Army hospital. Same thing on Guam; anybody got sick, you sent them to the hospital. Didn't have to do anything.

Mark: I see. So on the time you were on Guam, did you also the USO shows and the movies and the whole thing? It's a bigger island; I'm wondering if there was even more of that sort of thing there.

Luetke: I can't really tell you who; I remember some bands coming through. I've forgotten the name of the bands. See, we weren't there that long. We were there from April until November and the European thing was over in August, I think, and then we started getting people coming through. We were getting replacements from the European theater— **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**—and I got a whole bunch of new pilots from the Philippines. All my old pilots had gone home at the end of nine months, ten months. Got a whole bunch of new guys from, that—I don't know what they had been flying out of the Philippines, probably patrol bombers, I don't know. So we had to process these guys into the squadron, and by that time I was getting ready to go home.

- Mark: Yeah. The war was over by this time. I was going to ask you if you have any recollections of the bomb dropping and how you felt and how people around you reacted, what was the scene like?
- Luetke: You know, I got a real good story on that, Mark. I roomed in a tent with a captain in the Marine Corps. I'll think of his name in a minute. Anyway, in July he says, "I've got a jeep and I'm on detached duty. I get my flight pay." My other roommate's name was Jack Fagan. He says, "Don't ask me what I'm doing; I can't tell you anything. I gotta leave here at 7:00 in the morning and I'll get back at 6:00 at night." This went on and on, and seven days a week, and then they dropped the bomb. And he said, "Okay, now I can tell you what I'm doing." His job was to figure out how many men, how many machine guns, jeeps we could get in our planes per plane 'cause we're going in, wheels up, on Japan; we're gonna invade Japan. Every Marine in the Pacific was gonna be in on this. He says, "Including you, Luetke." [both laugh] And that was his job, and that's what he was doing. You hear about this. They figured that we were gonna have to combat seven divisions of Japanese. After the war was over they found out there was twenty-seven divisions of Japanese on Honshu. We'd got slaughtered like a bunch of flies in a little flyswatter; they'd just murdered us. So I always kind of liked the atom bomb. It was one of my friends. That's why I'm here today.
- Mark: Uh huh. Yeah, he's now an English professor at Princeton, Paul Fussell; I don't know if you're familiar with him. He has an essay, "Thank God for the atom bomb." And he says it saved his life. He was in Europe.
- Luetke: We had the 6th Marines and the 3rd Marines, 3rd Marine Amphibs, all right, very close to us. I knew all those guys. Where the rest of the Marine divisions were at that time, I don't know. Well, a bunch of them were up at Okinawa. But we were gonna load these guys all in airplanes and there were a bunch of transport squadrons; there was the old Gooney Birds, the R4Ds and we were flying R5Cs, the big ones, and the new R5D had just come out, the new Douglas four-engine transport. I flew back from Okinawa on one of those. We were all going in wheels up, take 'em on hand to hand. Whoo! [laughs] It would have been fun.
- Mark: Well, that didn't happen, fortunately. You said you left Guam in November of 1945?
- Luetke: I was home for Christmas, that's all I remember. No, that's right—it was November because we had two Thanksgivings, we crossed the international dateline twice, or you know, once, and we had Thanksgiving the day before and the next day we had Thanksgiving. I got home probably just at the beginning of December.

- Mark: I see. I'm interested in the post-war experiences, but let's backtrack a little bit first. In that period between the bomb dropping and November, what was the scene like on Guam *then*? The war is over, I assume people are anxious to get home.
- Luetke: Oh, after the bomb?
- Mark: Yeah. I assume people are anxious to get home—
- Luetke: Oh, yeah.
- Mark: What's going on?
- Luetke: When did they drop that bomb?
- Mark: August. Early August.
- Luetke: August. So we were there.
- Mark: It was like four months.
- Luetke: Well, I was up to Tokyo, I was down in New Guinea area at Manus Island, that was Manus, which was very close to New Guinea, somewhere down in there.
- Mark: What were you doing in these places?
- Luetke: Well, that Manus was where we got the spark plugs. [laughs] We ran out of spark plugs, flew all the way down there. Skipper said, "Come on, bring a case of whiskey. We're going down to Manus" 'cause he heard he could get spark plugs down there. That's where I got fifteen flight jackets, too. [laughs] And I'm standing there waiting for him to get done negotiating and they were hauling a whole bunch of flight jackets out, old moldy green ones. I got a hold of the enlisted man that was hauling them, I said, "What are you doing with the flight jackets?" He said, "Taking 'em down here and burning 'em." I said, "My God, if you'd throw a few off, I can take 'em back to Guam, turn 'em in and get new ones." He says, "I know, but I can't do that." I got a bottle of booze. He drove by the next time and the flight jackets were flying off of that truck like a hailstorm. [laughs] We took 'em back, I gave some to the skipper and I had—I think I had fifteen flight jackets when I came back.
- Mark: Do you still have any somewhere?

- Luetke: No, I gave them all to the family. No, life on Guam was pretty relaxed; there wasn't anything to do. We had to keep the planes flying. My squadron eventually went to Tsingtao in China. We had to get ready for that. I had a corpsman whose name—that was interesting. His name was Harold Nixon, of all things; Harold Travis Nixon.
- Mark: N-I-X-O-N?
- Luetke: Yup. He was on a flight to somewhere and that was the only plane we lost during the war, and they crashed on takeoff. He got hit in the head with a fire extinguisher, had a skull fracture, sent him home. I'm in Los Angeles a day or two after I got back, getting some stripes sewn on my blue uniform, walked out of the tailor shop and walked right into Harold Travis Nixon. We went on a four-day drunk like you wouldn't believe. [both laugh] Celebrating. Now how can you do that in Los Angeles? Walk right smack into him. It looked like he was almost standing there waiting for me to come out.
- Mark: The reason I'm pressing this is there were some instances where some of the GIs were anxious to get home and there was a bit of unrest and that sort of thing. Did you notice any of that? In the Philippines, I guess is the—
- Luetke: No, uh uh. We were all goin' home; it was just a matter of time and transportation. I finally—they put me with Cal Williamson again. Cal and I were in a transport camp for a week, ten days. Couldn't leave the camp, which we did. Kind of miserable accommodation, just a plain old Army cot and a blanket, and finally the ship came, went home with about five thousand troops on an AKA and—you know, you're waiting it out. Nothin' to do except wait. We could have flown home. Those planes had been out there for a couple of years. We both probably had a million miles of flight time by that time and the planes were getting' a little shaky, and we decided we'd rather go home with a boat, risk goin' down in the Pacific one more time.
- Mark: And so you landed in Los Angeles?
- Luetke: San Diego.
- Mark: San Diego. And what was the scene like? I mean, there was no Statue of Liberty like you see in the movies.
- Luetke: No. Okay, that was the first of January and we were not conquering heroes. We drove into—we'd already been put onto report for something. We harassed the regular crew on the ship and they told us to stay off of the

bridge and stay out of their country. Interestingly, we pulled into San Diego and we were the first ones off ship. Dr. Luetke, Dr. Williamson, and there were I don't know how many other doctors were on that thing. "You're first. Get off." [laughs] They were glad to get rid of us. Had a quart of milk, went uptown and made some phone calls, "We're home," and caught a taxicab out to Miramar and that was it.

Mark: I have a note here, you went AWOL for three days?

Luetke: Oh yeah. Cal and I went up to Los Angeles and went to a football game. Tom Rice, a friend of mine, was interning in California Lutheran so I moved in with him and we were supposed to be back Sunday night, I think it was, and we got in about Wednesday. [laughs] The guy's name was Commander Irons and Irons had ulcers. He was the senior medical officer shipping us out and welcoming us home and all that sort of stuff. He says, "You sons of bitches. [Luetke laughs] I've had the MPs looking for you for three days up in Los Angeles. I knew you were up there. You're confined to quarters for as long as you're here." Cal had a friend in the railroad situation. He was a Railroad Surgeon for everyone [?] east and west. We had a—what do ya call a compartment on a train, a compartment?

Mark: Berth—no, that's a ship.

Luetke: No, no, no. We had the whole damned compartment. And so he'd arranged for that and he said, "You're confined to quarters." Cal looked at him and said, "Commander Irons, we've got train tickets back to Chicago on Thursday," something like that. Irons said, "You're confined to quarters." He says, "All right, go ahead—I'm glad to get rid of you guys." [laughs] And it was a nice train ride compared to the train rides I'd been on before with berth stuff and what have you—five days on a train. It's a long train ride when you spend five days on one of those stinkers.

Mark: I'm interested in what possessed you to just say, "To hell with it" and go to Los Angeles. You just didn't care about military discipline anymore?

Luetke: No, no. You'd taken all the crap that you wanted to take and you weren't about to take any more. Everybody went AWOL [laughs] occasionally.

Mark: I suppose doctors can get away with it.

Luetke: Occasionally. No, I don't know what Cal was doing; I was just celebrating getting back was all. Stayed with Tom Rice and I was partying with Nixon is what I was doing. You just did it. **[pause in taping]**

I had one interesting experience at Okinawa. I got to Okinawa once. Flew up to Ie Shima, I guess was the name of the island; it was the island where Ernie Pyle had been killed. We saw the spot where he had been killed that afternoon. We got a plane stuck in the mud, had to get that jacked out. Had an air raid that night. In and out and in and out of the Transit Officer's Quarters. Flew the next day over to Okinawa, looked up Stan Nestigan; he was with the Seabee outfit. This was the guy I'd seen in Hawaii who was from Sparta, looked him up, we got in a jeep, drove south down to Naha, found Charlie Stoops with his 1st Marine Division, I guess it was. Found Charlie. Brought him back, got him cleaned up, and we partied a little bit that night and that was the night of the last Jap air raid of the war. They were shooting 'em down like flies right over—I can't what airfield was at; I can't remember. Barb's got my flight book, so I can't look this stuff up anymore. But then I had to get Charlie back in the trenches the next morning quick, and he was AWOL when he got back. His boss was mad at him. That was just the beginning of the end of Okinawa. Interesting, we had six planes up there. The Japs landed on that field in a suicide attack of some sort, jumped out of their bomber, ran to our six planes and stuck fire bombs in the cell—you know what a cell is? That's where the wheels retract—and fire bombed all of our planes, so I had to get a ride back to Guam or I'd be AWOL again. [laughs] That was when I flew back with the Navy nurse and a bunch of casualties. I saw her a year later in Kansas City, or that spring, I guess. My wife was with me and I said, "Hey Betty, I want you to meet this girl; she's the only girl I slept with overseas." I said, "You forgot, we got those guys all settled for the night and settled for the trip, sat down and you went to sleep and I went to sleep." I hadn't slept the night before at all, there had been bombing and shooting and raising hell all night long. I passed out and she passed out. She was the only girl I slept with overseas.

Mark: Was it difficult disciplining doctors? I mean everyone has seen MASH and Hawkeye never behaves and the whole business. I'm wondering, in your experience—you've seen the show too, you mentioned it. You know, MDs. Is it hard to—

Luetke: Oh, I think we were well disciplined. The Medical Corps was kind of an independent—you thought independently, you acted independently. Your commanding officer didn't have a lot of control over you because you were running your own operation; he didn't know what you were doing down in sick bay. When I was in the squadron, I had a commanding officer, but I actually worked for the senior medical officer of the group, who answered to the colonel, who ran the group. You, you're kind of working for two different bosses. You're pretty independent; I think that—the medical officers weren't "Yes, Sir or No, Sir" and were not big on saluting and uniforms weren't too crisp and what have you. You're

kind of messy when you're in service. Drink too much, raise too much hell.

Mark: Was that a problem for—I mean, if you're a commander of Marines, you want these guys to put their uniform on correctly and shine their shoes and then here's this officer with his shirt unbuttoned or something. Was there a tension between you and the rest of the—

Luetke: No, no. It was kind of interesting. When we moved to Guam, my commanding officer of the squadron was chasing nurses down in Orote and run into a truck that was loaded with pipe, he was laying pipe and ran into some. Had to send him home, got a new one by the name of Nick Sizak. Nick and I didn't get along at all. In the summer somewhere got called up to—senior medical officer called me up, Bernie something. He says, "Come up here. You got any clean clothes?" I says, "Yeah, I got clean clothes." "Put your clean clothes on and get up there. So I went up and I says, "What's up?" I had starched stuff, really pressed; I knew a guy in the laundry. Bottle of booze again. And he said, "The colonel wants to talk to you. You've been put on the report." "Put on the report; what do you mean, put on the report?" He says, "You've been put on the report." So I went up there and this colonel looks at me, leaves me sitting outside for about ten minutes, calls me in, my senior medical officer is in there, and says, "Surgeon, you got put on the report by Major Sizak. What's going on?" "What do you mean, put on the report?" And he says, "You got put on the report for using profanity in Officers Country." Well, if you ever lived with the Marines, they can't say a sentence without profanity of the four-letter variety in it. I said, "Colonel, you gotta be kidding." He said, "No." Then, finally, he starts to snicker and he says, "Well, really what I wanted to call you up here for is, what's wrong down there? What's wrong with your squadron?" I said, "Well, we got a commanding officer that nobody has any respect for: he can't fly a plane, he's got a lot of crazy ideas about what we should do and what we shouldn't do. Nobody likes him, nobody respects him." He was gone the next day. I saw him after the war. I was in the one in Chicago—Glenview, I was up to Glenview one time, visiting Cal Williamson [laughs], had breakfast with him that morning. He says, "Hey, I gotta apologize to you." Well, he gave me a bad fitness report too, bad fitness report, and I was regular Navy at that time. Bad fitness report means you're in trouble. You'll never get promoted, you'll never make Admiral, what have you. He said, "I want to apologize to you. I acted like a horse's ass on Guam." [laughs]

Mark: And what did you tell him?

Luetke: I said, "Forget it. The war's over." But it was kind of funny. He knew what happened; he knew that I had dinked him and he had lost his

command and what have you. I don't know, whatever happened to him after I don't know. He was still, I think he was a lieutenant colonel—he was a lieutenant colonel, and he was still a lieutenant colonel when I saw him in Chicago.

Mark: That was just a couple of years after the war?

Luetke: No, it was less than that. It was the next summer. It would be summer of '46. I was still in the service in '46. I finally got out in '47. It took me a year to get out of that US Navy commission.

Mark: Well I'm interested in that. If you don't mind, let's move on to post-war kinds of things.

Luetke: All right.

Mark: As we last left off, you were in a train and you arrived in Chicago, and perhaps explain the process of getting back to Ontario.

Luetke: Oh, I met Betty at Chicago—

Mark: That's your wife?

Luetke: Yeah, I met my wife in Chicago and we spent two or three days at the Palmer House and got on a train. Norwalk still had trains and I don't know how we got there; you could either go to La Crosse on the Zephyr or you could take the Northwestern into Norwalk. I imagine we went to Norwalk, and I already had orders for the Naval Air Station in Olathe, Kansas. Oh, goodness, I was home a couple of weeks, I suppose. Overseas leave or whatever they called it. Went up to Sparta, saw Stan Nestigan. He says, "Where are you going to be?" I said, "Olathe, Kansas." He was still in the Navy. He was the guy that was in a Seabee outfit. He laughed and said, "Where's Olathe, Kansas?" After I got to Olathe the first guy I ran into was Stan Nestigan. [laughs] He got shipped to Olathe, too. It was kind of a raucous couple of weeks at home. Everybody was just coming back from overseas, you're looking up old friends. My dad, I remember, looked at me one morning and I hadn't smoked when I had gone into the service and I was smoking, hung over, and he said, "God, you've really gone to hell, haven't ya?" [laughs] And I had at the time, being pretty crazy, I guess.

Mark: The problems Vietnam veterans have had readjusting to civilian life, it's been in the news media a lot, it's been the subject of a lot of study. The experience of World War II veterans often isn't. You mention a lot of partying and drinking and all these kinds of things. Did you experience

any sort of problems getting back into civilian life after you left the service?

Luetke: No, Mark. I had—where are we now? '45. I got out finally in March of '47. I was in Olathe, Kansas for a while, St. Louis on detached duty for a while, Columbus, Ohio for a while, finally about Christmastime, sent to Washington back in a Naval Officer Procurement Office, which was absolutely not doing anything. So I'm putting in time, I'm writing letters of resignation.

Mark: And no one's getting them?

Luetke: I wasn't getting anywhere. I found out how to do that, too. But I had probably thirty, forty corpsmen in Columbus. Columbus was transferred to a Naval air station and then a ferrying facility to get the big Curtis commandos out of Columbus. I was the first flight surgeon that that place had. Same thing. Had a bunch of junk, beds, wards, equipment, had a million dollars worth of equipment at the darn place, just sitting there, never been used. And I had all these corpsmen waiting to get out of the service. They had to wait till their points or what it was. Do you know Kim Scott, ear, nose and throat guy?

Mark: No.

Luetke: He was one of my corpsman. He ran a—we were getting ready for a captain's inspection and he ran a squeegee through the wall, so we put a cabinet like that up against it. Years later, over at Madison General I walk in and I says, "Who are you?" and he says, "I'm Kim Scott. I'm the new ENT guy with Jim Land" and what have you. I look at him and he looks at me and I said, "Were you ever in Columbus, Ohio?" He says, "Yeah, I am from Columbus, Ohio." And I said "You were a corpsman in the Navy?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "You're the guy that ran the squeegee through the wall." [laughs] Small world. No, I had no problem readjusting. You didn't see it after the war. Everybody was so glad to survive and be home and so I never really had anything to do with wounded people and injured people. Everybody I took care of was ambulatory and a little crazy in the head, but that was all; everybody is crazy in the head.

Mark: Um hmm. To get back to your stateside Navy duty for a while, what were your—so-called, I guess, you're chuckling. I was going to ask, what were your responsibilities? What were your duties? What were you told you were supposed to be doing?

Luetke: Well, I went to Olathe and there were three or four of us, all regular Navy 'cause all the USNRs were out, and I was doing tonsillectomies. I'd do a

couple tonsillectomies every morning, only on the days I had the duty, that was when you had to cover the night, too. The skipper immediately said, "You can do tonsillectomies if you want to, but only on the days you have duty 'cause you have to take care of them at night." And corpsmen line these crazy guys up, they'd have sore throats, they'd look at their throats and say, "You should have a tonsillectomy and Luetke will do it." And you ran sick call and you flew in the airplanes, you flew around the country looking at stuff. I went to Kansas City once a week to an x-ray conference. My old university partner, Jack Walker, was a civilian and a radiologist, go out and eat a steak, go to an x-ray conference. You just wasted time. Absolutely wasted time.

Mark: And so you finally got out then in '47, you said?

Luetke: Um hmm.

Mark: And where'd you go from there?

Luetke: Back to Madison, Wisconsin. [laughs]

Mark: Now as an MD, you didn't have the problems a lot of veterans did, and that was finding work.

Luetke: No, I had a residency. I was trying to get a residency in OB-GYN, and there was a guy by the name of John Parks in Washington, and I knew I was getting out or gonna get out and I talked to him. He had done his residency here under Dr. Harris at UW and Leo Schmelzer ran the hospital. Leo was assistant superintendent when I was a student. I knew him real well, washed his walls one time for thirty-five cents an hour. And looked up Leo, and he said, "Well, you talk to John Parks, he runs the department here." Went and talked with Parks and Parks said, "I can't do anything for you; I got residents backlogged for two or three years. But get a hold of Dr. Harris, I know he's got a spot open." I got a hold of Dr. Harris, a little finagling, and sure enough, I got the residency. And getting out of the Navy was kind of fun. I gotta throw this in here.

Mark: Yeah, I'm interested.

Luetke: Well, the moment I got back I started trying to get out of the Navy. You write a letter of resignation, and it's gotta go through my commanding officer and to the Naval District somewhere else and finally to BUPERS, Bureau of Personnel, and I could never get it past the district: refused. And this kept going on and about Christmastime of '46, I get sent to ONOP in Washington. I finally get Betty down there and find a place to live and the guy I'm relieving was a USN and I said, "How do you get out

of here, anyway?" He said, "I can't tell you." So I proceeded to get him drunk. We were both staying in the Army/Navy Officers Quarters in Washington, D.C. and we had a big party. About 3 o'clock I kept saying, "Come on, tell me how you got out of this goddamn mess anyway; I gotta get out of here before I go crazy." He said, "Well look in my file down at the office." The next morning at 8 o'clock, hangover and all, I'm down at his office looking in his file. You write a letter to the President of the United States with political background. And Joe McCarthy was Senator then and he'd been in the Marine Corps and his campaign manager was a guy name of Irvin Van Susteren from Appleton, who I'd gone to school with, a lawyer. I got a hold of Irvin, I says, "Irvin, would Joe McCarthy help me get out?" and he said, "Sure." And then I came back from overseas with the law partner of our congressman from La Crosse. I can't remember his name. So I got a hold of that guy and he said, "Sure, congressmen will help you." So I wrote this letter, took a copy up to McCarthy's office, took a copy up to the congressman's office, living in Washington, D.C., made it nice. McCarthy's secretary had been in this department in the Bureau of Personnel, said, "That's the best letter I've ever seen." Took it in about March 5th, something like that, and I was out March 17th. But I wrote a letter to the President of the United States. I've lost the letter; it was a good letter.

Mark: This might sound like a dumb question, but I'm going to ask it anyway. Why did you want to get out so badly?

Luetke: You don't do anything. You have sick call in the morning and my Navy life was gonna be from there on in in Aviation Medicine, and you conduct sick call, that's an hour or so, and you're looking at sore throats and athlete's foot, and jock strap itch, and what have ya, constipation, diarrhea. Anybody's sick, you send them to the hospital, and then you got to waste the rest of the day and do you know what 4 o'clock muster is?

Mark: No.

Luetke: Over to the Officer's Club. 4 o'clock muster. I was probably an incipient alcoholic at the time. We were doing a lot of partying, a lot of guys just out of service, friendships were easy to acquire and to the Officer's Club for dinner for a buck, buck and a half, two dollars, something like that. Take guests. There was just no future. Ran into a guy that stayed in afterwards. I did six months down at _____[?] in 1948, I guess it was, and he was a Lieutenant Commander and had his wings on, and was getting training in OB-GYN so there was a future, but you had to play a lot of politics and pull a lot of strings and know people, and I probably antagonized everybody that I'd served under by that time, so I don't think my future was especially bright in the Navy.

- Mark: About drinking a second.
- Luetke: Drink all the time.
- Mark: You said an incipient alcoholic, perhaps. Did your drinking habits change after you left the service? Did you just leave and not do it any more?
- Luetke: Well, you don't drink on a hundred dollars a month. Now I've got a wife with a baby—a pregnant wife and a baby, and we're living in Madison, and we're paying a mortgage of seventy bucks a month. We're living on what we had in the bank plus the GI Bill, which was a hundred bucks. I had about five thousand bucks saved for the residency, and when I finished the residency I was broke. I'd bought a new car, still paying on the house, what have ya. Five thousand bucks just lasted the residency, plus the GI bill. But you see, residencies didn't—a resident now gets paid fifteen thousand bucks, up to thirty thousand bucks; I got nothing the first year, twenty-five dollars a month the second year, and fifty dollars a month the third year. Big deal.
- Mark: So you came back to Madison and you did a residency?
- Luetke: Residency in OB-GYN.
- Mark: And you were able to use GI bill for that?
- Luetke: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we all did. University Hospital was full of GIs; all of us were GIs.
- Mark: The whole campus was full of GIs, as I understand it.
- Luetke: Yeah, but all the old guys that I'd gone to school with were back doing residencies.
- Mark: I see. So where did you live in Madison? I know there was the trailer complex at Camp Randall.
- Luetke: I bought a house for ten thousand bucks at 1331 Greg Street, I think was the number on it. Lived there for four or five years, went into practice with a real well-established guy in town and started to make some money finally. Bought a house out in Nakoma and lived out there for twenty-five years, bought a house out in Maple Bluff area, lived there for twenty-five years, now I'm back in an apartment, I'm back where we started.

- Mark: Did you use GI Bill benefits for your house at all? Because there was more to the GI Bill than just the educational part, or course. There were unemployment parts, which I assume you didn't have to use.
- Luetke: They guaranteed your loan, I think that was it. You got a GI loan for four percent, I think it was four percent. I remember going up to Anchor Savings and Loan; I knew Al somebody who ran Anchor Savings and Loan and talked to him. He said to come back tomorrow. I'd been down here for a while looking for a house, that's right, and Betty was up in Ontario, so Anchor Al says come back tomorrow, I came back tomorrow and he says, "We can't loan you ten thousand dollars." And I said, "Well why not?" And he said, "Well, you're a poor risk." I said, "What do you mean, I'm a poor risk? I got a GI Bill loan, I'm gonna do a residency, I'm a doctor." He said, "You are a poor risk. You aren't making any money." Walked across the street to First Wisconsin, talked to Rollie Black, walked out of there with a GI loan, it was that simple. You just have to talk to the right people. I never knew him before, either, but that's all there was to it. Incidentally, the house—there was an interesting thing on the house. I bought it for ten thousand bucks, sold it for thirteen thousand dollars to a guy that was going to do a residency. My son is in real estate here in town and a couple of years ago he sent me a multiple listing thing; this old house was on the market for sixty-five thousand dollars. [laughs] Isn't inflation wonderful, cause it was a real tacky house; it was terrible.
- Mark: I just have one last area I want to cover, and that's veterans organizations and reunions and those sorts of thing. Did you ever join any sort of veterans club? I know on campus, for example, there were all kinds of veterans clubs with all kinds of orientations; some were political, some were fraternal. Did you get involved in any of that sort of stuff at all on campus or afterwards in your later life?
- Luetke: No. We had our own veterans organization at UW Hospital. We were all vets.
- Mark: And that was enough for you?
- Luetke: That was enough. I think all of us had been up to our ears with the service. This little hometown I'm from, I'm a member of the American Legion up there just so they get fifteen bucks a year out of my money. I never was active in anything. I was very thankful that I didn't take a Reserve commission. I had a lot of pressure on me when I got discharged from Naval Hospital Bethesda; about five different interviewers said, "We want you in the Naval Reserve." I didn't want anything to do with the Naval Reserve. Then right after that was Korea, and if I'd been in the Naval Reserve, I'd have been in Korea.

Mark: That pretty much confirmed your decision. What possessed you to join the Legion?

Luetke: Oh, just a little town and American Legion in a small town is a real politically, socially, influential group of people and Art was in service, too, so he's a member of the American Legion in Ontario; never lived in Ontario, but got a lot of friends up there. Went up there one time and Jerry Downing took us over, they've got—like all small towns they've got the statuary and the list of the guys that served, and I'm in the World War II group and Artie's in the Korean-Vietnam group—Vietnam group he'd be in. So we gave them a thousand bucks and joined the Legion, paid for the plaque.

Mark: Did you ever go to any reunions at all?

Luetke: Never. I don't know whether the squadron ever had any reunions. I would have loved to have gone to 'em. When you're in service and living this close with these people, you're flying with them, you're eating with them, you're partying with them, you have your own little Officer's Club for a year, you don't think you're ever gonna lose them, but you do. There is no way you can keep track of 'em. Just like me, I'm back to Ontario, which was my home address, but I lived the rest of my life in Madison. Everybody went back home and then they disperse all over the United States. I saw Fagan and he lives in Chattanooga, still does; I've kept track of him. I saw Cliff Buckingham out in California. He'd been a helicopter pilot in Korea and he was kind of shell-shocked at the time, but he was still regular Marine Corps, but he'd had quite an experience. Again, flight transports aren't very dangerous as far as combat activity is concerned. We flew into areas that were on fire, but wasn't much danger to it, flew in, flew out, got the hell out of there. Here's Cliff going, riding these helicopters, going in picking up downed personnel, if you can imagine. You've seen some movies about these guys picking this stuff up. He was a little shocky when I saw him.

Mark: Recovered now?

Luetke: Yes. Lost track of him. Never—I'm gonna remember Bruce, Keith Bruce. That was the guy—Keith Bruce was the guy that was doing the liaison that was going to figure out how many personnel and how much weight each plane could carry; Keith Bruce. I knew it would come eventually. Never forgot him either.

Mark: Is there anything you'd like to add? Did I forget anything?

Luetke: No. The tenor that sang with Jack Benny, ever what his name was, he spent a week with us on Kwajalein and had breakfast with him every morning. The nurses were nice. [laughs] We've covered it pretty well.

Mark: Okay. Well, thanks for stopping in.

Luetke: Okay, Mark.

[End of Interview]