

Interviewer: This is Jeff Pennig interviewing Mr. Lehning on February 24, 2005. Could you tell me your name and date of birth and place?

Lehning: My name is Fred Ent Lehning. I was born in Carole Illinois June 23, 1922 that's it sir.

Interviewer: Great just a couple of things about the depression and how it affected or didn't affect your family especially when you get to the mid to late 30s that prewar period.

Lehning: Well let's see I was about 7 years old at the time in 1930 and the depression wasn't too much in my mind as a depression. My father had a drug store in Carole and I was born up stairs over the drug store and I was as a twin. My twin brother passed away in birth and somehow I made it so here I am. But anyway we had a little store it wasn't a big store it was a family store and it was neighborhood store and it was built on the in a one story building but another story was added over that building. And that was where we lived up stairs over the store the man that owned it first built the store built it to the second story so when I came to life and began to wonder about thing and I asked my father certain things about the store you know I found out that there were chains huge chains about yeah big sections and long chains and turn ups and so forth that were put in between the two stories in the up stairs. So they would tighten those up on two by fours that were exactly from the ground to the second floor ceiling the two by fours were that long in those days. And that's how they tightened that building up and I was under the impression that it was going to fall later in life and I'll explain that later and anyway I was born there and we lived there I guess about a year, year and a half or two and then we moved over to 26th and Park Avenue. And my dad bought a home over there and it was across the street from my grandmother and grandfather Ent and it was just next door to them was my mother's older sister and she was married and had a daughter. So we were all three right in a point there but my father was held up one night while we lived over there and they made the decision right quick to come back and move over the store again. So when I was about six years old five or six going on they decided to move back so I can remember riding back and unloading things for the store and I remember things when we lived on 26th Street. When we lived there I had another brother that was born but he was born dead also but he weighed 14 pounds and I understood all of that. And I remember coffin I remember the baby I can see the baby today, beautiful blonde hair and just a good looking kid. But anyway that's how that went and my dad took the baby and myself and the undertaker in the car and we went out to the cemetery and we buried the baby. So that I remember the ride out there very clearly and I remember seeing that boy it was another boy and I remember seeing him in his casket down in our living room. And that's why I have such a good vision of him anyway that was the story there then we moved back and I grew up and went to grade school which was just a block and a half away and that's where my mother went school and I went to school there and my son went to school there so we all three had a relation to that. In the meantime after the war I came back and bought a home my mother bought a home for me as I came out of the service and I had to go back to school again, I'll tell you that later. But anyway we we came back and went into the store because my father died at 44, 45 years old 43 years old and he was 45 years old he was born in 98 1898 and he died in 43. So anyway that was where I came back and took over the store after I got out of school. So anyway that's the story there.

Interviewer: Now were you out of high school you got out of high school in 1940?

Lehning: Yes

Interviewer: Would that be right? Were you aware of what was going on in Europe and what could potentially happen?

Lehning: Yes I was and I knew when I got to be 18 years old I think it was 19 or something like that I was going to be inducted or something. Or was it 21? It was when I was going to become 21 I was going to be inducted because I was in college and so they left you in college provided that you joined a service.

Interviewer: While you were still in college?

Lehning: While I was still in college. So I went to my high school which we had a good relationship we had a lot of friends. We had an 18,000 volume town it was an 18,000 town there at the time and we had good friends and we all kept in contact with each other and we still do today those of us that are still left that is. But anyway we graduated from high school then I went to college.

Interviewer: So you would have started college it was fall of 40?

Lehning: Yes

Interviewer: Where did you go to college?

Lehning: I went to North Western my first year because it was a pre-pharmacy year and I had decided to be a pharmacist. My father asked me one day when I was in high school he said well son it's getting to be about time for you to decide what you're going to do. And I said well that's interesting what do you think I'm going to do I said I've worked here all since I was nine years old. He said well yeh you have worked here since you were nine we had a soda fountain and I hopped curve and then as I grew up I worked the fountain and I did all of that over the years. And when I was in high school I said well what do you want to be and that's when I told him. I said that's all I've ever done just pour one substance caster oil from a big bottle to a small bottle I said I make a dozen of those and I make a dozen of the ammonia and a dozen of caster oil and a dozen of whatever else you wanted you know. And he said yeh I know you have you've done a good job of that so he said okay that's fine so he said when you get to high school and that's when I was getting to high school he said you take everything you can get in chemistry and biology and in physics and in health care. So I did and I went into high school and I took all of those courses each year I took one of them so when I was in high school in junior high school I met a girl and we began dating and we dated all the way through high school six years we dated. And so when we went to parties and dances and all of that just kids grew up we had a good time all of us so then we had a group that there was many in our high school class that was in service there was a lot of them and we all went into service. But when I went to school and college I went to North Western I took my first years and the funny thing about it was I got along with everything except algebra and man I had a tuff time with algebra I couldn't get it for anything. Had a boy that came over and worked with me on the side you know getting my lessons and showing me how and he worked with me all that semester well by the time that came up and I had already I had joined a fraternity and at that time or rather was getting ready to join and so they called my professor and they said Mr. Lehning is worried about his algebra

course and he says he doesn't think he's going to pass it. And he said well he said you have him come over and talk to me and I said okay so they shipped me over I went over it was a mile to class in that cold weather and everything 8:00 class. So I went over and I talked to him and I said well Professor Garobeanian, that was his name, I said here's my notebook and here I am I know what I've made on my grades and everything and I said I don't know how I'm going to get through this but I've got to get through I'm a onetime student here I'm just a student that comes in and has one year to do and that's it. Because I said I'm going to be a pharmacist and he says oh you are and I said yes he said well let me see your notebook. And I handed him my notebook and he looked through that notebook page by page and he said Mr. Lehning you've got everything that I have written on the board here you have a perfect book I said yes I do but I don't understand any of it. And he says I know that he says don't worry about it he says I'm going to give you a good grade he says you'll pass. I said fine so he did he passed me at 76 I said that's all I want so I got through the rest of it the end of the year thought the next year I took some more courses for the rest of the year and I had Bs and As in those and I went over to see him as I got out of school and I said well Professor Garobeanian I wasn't to tell you very much now much I appreciate what you did for me. He said well Mr. Lehning I want to tell you he says I hope you become a good pharmacist because as a mathematician you are a hum. And I said well thank you sir I said thank you very much and that was it and I got in pharmacy school and in the mean time my girl at home had broke up with me. I had given her a fraternity pin and I was very much in love with her at the time but she came and said no I can't do that because I'm not in school and I'm not going to be staying home all of the time your away so I said okay if that's the way it has to be that's it. So anyway that's what happened and I went back to pharmacy school and I met a girl up there of course and I knew her for about two and a half years and we became engaged and then so I said that's fine. Well the war was going on all this time and I was wondering what happening and what was going on and how long I was going to wait so when it came time for me to get my 19th birthday or something like that when I was coming up I went down to the Navy. And I said I want to join the Navy and they said very good I said when you got a B12 program and they said yeh we have and I said well I'm at the University of Illinois I'm going to school they said fine sign here. And I said wait a minute what do you mean sign here and he said well this is B12 and your going to go in the Navy and we'll call you when we want you. I said well okay that's fine and I signed the thing and three days before I was due to be drafted you know so I got in at that time he said well I said I've got flat feet he said not in the Navy we don't worry about flat feet he said you'll be alright so.

Interviewer: Now could you explain to me what the B12 program is?

Lehning: The B12 program there was a B6 a program college deal like we were if you had two years or two and half years of college a B6 you went to the Navy and you were in Air Core in a B12 you went to the Navy but you were guaranteed to go to school for another half year. And then they would send you to mid shipment school then you would become an inson that was the 90 day wonders. So I was a 90 day wonder but it took me longer than 90 days because at the time I signed up they called me July the 1st in 43 and I went in then and then I went to Perdue University so I've been to North Western Illinois and Perdue all big 10 you know. So anyway I went there and they kept me for one semester and that's all they gave me so I had three and a half years of pharmacy then they shipped me down to Norfolk.

Interviewer: So that semester you were in the Navy?

Lehning: Yeh I was in the Navy.

Interviewer: That semester was more pharmacy more of your pharmacy.

Lehning: More pharmacy that's right.

Interviewer: Interesting then you went to Norfolk?

Lehning: They taught you pharmacy but they made us drop our little lab course in x-ray because they wanted up to take manual training. So we had to take the part where we had to write everything because of navigation see they wanted us to be able to draw straight lines this that and the other know the angles. So that's how we got to that but we did we finished it and then when we got there, there was 11 of us from Illinois and there was 14 from here and 12 from there and other places and so forth. So at the end of the semester the Professor told us said gentlemen I want to tell you he said the 12 top grades go to the man from Kansas and 11 men from Illinois he said all 11 of them came up top numbers and the one man from Kansas beat them but he says all of you were there. Well we felt pretty good about that we had a good education we knew anyway I had went down there for I guess three months and we did different things we did everything we had to do.

Interviewer: You were undergoing training every day?

Lehning: Yes everyday we were at Perdue too we were in uniform at Perdue. And we were actually in the Navy and that's when my dad passed away was when I was in the Navy at that time. So anyway we were in our uniforms and we earned it we got up at 5 o'clock in the morning and we ran we ran for I don't know how long all of us now I'm just all around all around. Then we did a lot of other courses that we had to do and more athletic type thing we did that too. Then when we got through with that they said okay they called our names said get all of your gear together you're going to be shipped so we got all of our gear together and we were put on a train.

Interviewer: Did you have any idea where you were going?

Lehning: No not at the time so then well we did too we knew we were going to New York we knew we were going to New York. So that was alright with us we were down in Norfolk anyway. So were in the train and we all went to New York and on that train I think it stopped once or twice or more but they didn't have anything to feed us all we had was an apple or a cookie or something. And it was about a day or a day and a half time to get from Norfolk to New York and so when we finally got to New York I finally realized that I was in the Navy. And was and it was good cause when I hit that door with the time to eat I mean boy they took us off that train and they fed us and they fed all of us. And I mean that was the best food I had ever had so anyway we got off and then they put us in and we had a 30 day suspension period where we were just there. And we had to pass our test and all of our classes and we were able to do that. And I had a roommate that didn't make it he was taken out because he didn't make his grades. And I used to stay up at night with him with lights out and just over everything we

were supposed to have for the next day and talk with him and tell him and this that and the other and he'd give me the answers to the questions and all of that but he just couldn't make it when he got in.

Interviewer: Where in New York were you?

Lehning: I went to the University I went to Columbia University I went to Columbia University. That means I've been to Illinois North Western Illinois, Perdue, and Columbia. And I've got jackets for each one of them but anyway that was how we got there. So I was in the 15th Company the 3rd battalion the 3rd whatever we were. And so we would have to march everywhere together in uniform we had uniforms and hats with the little anchor on it not the big anchor just the little anchor it was a mid shipment indication. And we had our blue pants and we had a coat and everything that was made for us and that's what we wore everyday and a blue jacket and we had to wear those things to class. And we had a coat if it was cold and it was cold because we were there from December till April and it was cold. But anyway so I was I got in there and that was an interesting think I think there was about 12 or 15 of us in one platoon. And there was three platoons to a company and so we had to worry about our 15 men so anyway.

Interviewer: Now were all the 15 guys that you had come up from Norfolk with?

Lehning: No

Interviewer: This was a new unit?

Lehning: No they was all messed around it was all of us that were down in Norfolk but we came down there we came from Perdue from North Western and this that and the other and all the schools that they shoved us all at one time down there.

Interviewer: Okay

Lehning: So anyway but then we went into our classes now we had navigation we had gunnery we had what was the other ones? Identification, plane identification, and we had seaman ship and we had another one but anyway there was about five classes. Anyway we had to go to a class a day classes we'd go five times a day we had to go and we had to pass because when we first got there we were mid shipmen we weren't mid shipmen yet we were just dedcuties. So anyway we were all apprentice seamen so after the first week of the month they gave us our grades the ones that stayed and became mid shipmen. That's when we got our anchors on our uniforms and everything lines up and that's how we

Interviewer: What percentage of you made it?

Lehning: You know I can't tell you what percentage I only know there was about one or two in our group that didn't make it.

Interviewer: Okay

Lehning: But then I had another fellow that moved in with me and he became the commander of the entire group. But he roomed with me now that was really great because if we got a demotion or a slap on us for not doing something or doing something wrong or being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time you know one of those things I ended up where I had one demerit left and I'd have been kicked out at that point at the end of the year. Well we had a every week we had an examination we had to clean you know we cleaned everything up and got everything out and all of that done. So we cleaned our room and got our bed made and got all of our stuff just hanging just right everything in position. And we're all outside standing because the group was coming in the commander and so forth and coming in our captain commander anyway he was coming down the hall. And I looked down and my roommate says yeh to the waste basket and I said what he said look in the waste basket. I looked in there and man all of the trash was in it and I said oh no so I went in there right quick when he went in a room I ran in there got it and I put that under my shirt. And I've got it all under my shirt and I stood there at attention you know and he walked in he was everything checked everything with white gloves all around at the top you know and all of that. And he came out and he said well gentlemen you did very nice and I said boy cause that I would have been gone I really would have. So anyway that's how we got out of there and we did get to graduate and of course we marched in to eat and we marched there and we went out on the water and had a cruise and id things like that. I was very good and the nice thing about it is I have a book and I don't have it with me I didn't know I was going to do this. And I have a book and everything in the book has all of our pictures in it just our little 15 men things when we're in class when we're doing this because the man one of the boys in our group was given the job to take the pictures to put in the book. And he took us every place we were we'll that was great because there I am in the books in the pictures and so forth. But anyway that's how that all happened we were pretty close. And every Sunday we would march over to church then we'd march back. Then we'd be off Saturday at noon we'd be off until I had to be back at 11 o'clock because I couldn't identify any of the planes. My eyes just wouldn't see I just could not identify a Jap plane I couldn't tell you which one was. So anyway I got through it alright and but I never could get an overnight so anyway that's what happened. And then February the 14th came along and I got a cake in the mail from the girl I met in Chicago when I was going to school there. And I had become engaged to her too because I figured if I like a girl that was what I was going to do so I became engaged to her. But that February I got a I got there in December January and February the second month so I got a cake for Valentines Day from her and I said man that's nice. I opened that box up and I looked at that cake and in the middle there was something on top and I pulled it out and there was ring not a ring but a box a ring box little pad. And I grabbed it and I looked at it and I opened it up and there was her ring. And I said oh no I said man I'm through with women I don't want anything to do with them. So my roommate and I were doing very nicely and he said well let's go out and we'll get drunk today. Well I said okay because that was just on the weekend you know but I tried to call Ruth my girl I was in high schools with because during the time I was in Illinois not in the Navy I got a letter back form her sister and she said Ruth wants to know if you will marry her. And here I was engaged to this other girl so I said I can't right now I can't get married I'm in the Navy she knew that and I said I'm engaged to girl up here. I said what can I tell you I can't get married right now so anyway she said alright then she's going to join the Navy. I said that's fine let here join the Navy and maybe I'll run into her you know was my deal. So anyhow when I got this ring back I got on the phone and tried to get in touch with Ruth it was at Memphis in the Navy. And I tried to get here I called and called and they

said no she's not here we don't even have her listed anymore. I said well okay so I finally called my mother and I said mother how can I get in touch with Ruth? She said what do you want I said I want to talk to her she said well don't hurry about it she said she just got married last week. I said oh no so that was that and that's the reason we went out to get drunk I was man I was mad but anyway we had went out and when we went out there was 1500 midshipmen and all of us go out on Saturday and everything was just clobbered up and filled up and all of that. And we hit every bar there was between 116th Street and 110th Street that afternoon. Then we got to this one place it was a restaurant they had a dance hall and a restaurant and my roommate and I went in and I was drinking and he was drinking and all of a sudden he met up with a girl in there and I didn't look at any girls I was just sitting there having just down the drain you know. But any way in walked this little girl who she said was coming and I said I don't want anything to do with a girl I don't want a blind date I don't anything to do with them I don't want them. She said you'll like her I said no I don't want anything to do with her well in walked this little blonde and I said oh is this your friend she said yeh and I said okay so I introduced myself well she introduced me to her. And she looked at me and she says well okay so we stayed together there and it was her birthday so I bought her dinner there bought them all dinner that night and we just sat there and we talked and we danced and we danced. And she said well okay we'll have to take you home the two girls said we'll take you back so I said okay. So they took us all the way back how to get here and all of that and she got right down to the base where they were going to let us loose and put us back in the Navy again cause I wasn't in the Navy that night I was having fun. Anyway I said well how about a kiss good night and she said no I never kiss a boy on the first date I said oh I thought to myself I'll get even with you. I said okay can I call you she said yeh she gave me her number I said okay I'll call you every night at 9 o'clock and I did every night I'd call her at 9 o'clock. And that's how all of us lived at that time everybody had some connection they made a connection there and that was it. Anyway after I went through we had seven dates just seven dates on weekends seven weeks I had one night overnight so I could go out to her sisters house one night and we had a friend and had a party and dance and all of that and we had a chance to get together a little bit and be with each other and so I said well I said I don't want to say anything to you and she said well I can't say anything to you then. I said no I said all I know is that I like you very much I said I'm not going to get married I don't want to get married if I'm going overseas and I said you don't want to marry me if I'm going overseas. But I said if I get back I'll call you and I said I'll write you and you write me and she said yes I will. So anyway she took us down to the train after we had the graduation and my mother came out for the graduation by the way and met them and the nice thing about it is it's the people that you meet during this time. It's the people that you don't know your going to meet but you do meet and so mother came out and I introduced her to her mother and we had about a little three day weekend there together. And I came back home for my leave you know then I had to go back and I was assigned to the Pacific. So I had my commission then I was an inson and I thought well I don't know what I'm going to get into so I went back and got on in San Francisco.

Interviewer: Did you have any time between that?

Lehning: Yeh I had 30 days. Yeh I had a 30 day leave or was it a 15 day? I don't know whether it was 30 or 15 I don't remember which.

Interviewer: then out to San Francisco?

Lehning: Yeh then I went to San Francisco on my own just to go you know I just had the ticket and I rode out there on it and that was it. So going out there I met a girl and she was a singer and she was going to sing with a group out there and this that and the other so we sat and rode the whole way out there and I had a nice visit with her she was a nice girl. But it didn't work out that way when we got to San Francisco it didn't work out that way she was with the band and guys and we just went over to see her one night and that was it. And we had while I was there I think three weeks two or three weeks waiting for a ship.

Interviewer: So are we into April at this point or so March or April?

Lehning: Yeh April, April the 18th I think I graduated I got my commission that was in April in 45, 44.

Interviewer: 44

Lehning: I think it was April. I went on active duty July the 1st 1944, 43.

Interviewer: So this would be April 44.

Lehning: Yeh because I was three years in. So anyway I ran into a fellow that I knew was out there from home and he took me to all of the places and we went to the different places where they were all friends and people and we'd drink a little bit every night. And I had good experience we ran into two girls one night and so we picked them up we went to different places with them we all had drinks and all of that they got in we got in cab said well we're going to go back home. They said well that's alright you go ahead because we're not going to go with you anyplace but we had a good time so I said well that's nice to know I said good luck to you and they said good luck to you but we had a nice time. They were good kids so that was alright and then so that's the only date I had. And I looked up some Lehnings out there and I ran into them but I couldn't make any connections with family but they are connected because all of the Lehnings are connected their all from Germany. And from Asus Lorraine and I was 50 percent German my dad was 100 percent German and his mother and father were 100 percent German so that's how that all came about. But anyway then I waited out there and I had to go swimming every morning and I hated to swim I couldn't swim I couldn't swim from here to the end of the room but anyway I'd make it around that pool once and that was enough for me. So it was a big pool and I don't know how anybody ever got anyway. But anyway that every morning at 6 o'clock we'd have to get up and go out there, boy that was tough. So anyway that was all over and we went on board the ship and the master ship the ship we were on was the Day Star.

Interviewer: The Day Star.

Lehning: The Day Star and that was from Denmark and so they were working with the United States at that time so we went and got on at San Francisco.

Interviewer: What kind of ship was it?

Lehning: It was a freighter it was a freighter all the holes were filled with bunks and stuff just to take personnel. And we didn't have anyone to go with us I mean we were just zip and that was it but it was 30 days getting from there to New Guinea and that's where I went from there to New Guinea. And when we across the equator well first I was assigned as an officer to take care of the cleaning detail so I had to clean the whole ship with a crew all of the members. And we had to go ahead and clean the ship and we did every day then in the morning and in the evening and then we had meals and all of that taken care of so. Then when we crossed the equator of course we had to have the captain's mass and all of that for King Neptune. And we went over with the King Neptune and I was the first one to go through that outfit because they all knew me because I was all over the ship everyday you know. And they put me through a pretty good heavy go but I was

Interviewer: Was that like winning a gauntlet or something like that or

Lehning: Yeh but you didn't get beat or anything like that. But you know they'd say your going to kiss my rear end and they'd put their elbows up like this and you'd have to kiss and that was no good cause it was greased and everything you know the guy did. But anyway and everybody just sitting there laughing all the other guys that had been through it. So we my last deal was that after passed everything else was your going to get dressed in your blues and your going to climb the highest part of the ship and get out and look out until we tell you to come down. And man and it was hot it was hot and I had blues on and my hat and oh I thought I was going to drop off you know but I hung on to it pretty well and I did that and I came down and that was tough.

Interviewer: How high was it?

Lehning: Oh it was the high mast it was on top of the mast on the ship.

Interviewer: Now as this towards the summer?

Lehning: Yeh in June or July no in April and May.

Interviewer: April and May.

Lehning: But at the equator it doesn't make any difference if its summer or not you know it's just as hot as it can be. So anyway I came on down but I ran into a colored fellow that was there and he was a nice guy but he was older he must have been 40 years old 43 or 44 or older. And I asked him I said what are you doing over here going with us? He said I was assigned to go overseas I said well why what were you doing? He said well I was in the Navy said I was taking care of the yard at so and so base he said they just said I had to go and he says here I am. And I looked at his ankles and they were all swollen you know both of them in his legs and I said what about your swelling legs he says well I've been that way for awhile. I said well did you tell them that? He said no I didn't tell them anything I just got on and went. I said well you hang on a minute so I went down to the doctor on board and I told him what I had found and he said you bring that man down to me I said okay. So I took him down and doc saw him and he said Mr. Lehning he says you've done something for this man you don't know what you've done because he said we're going to send him right home he said he has a heart problem and he has no business being

here at all. I said well thank you very much I figured the same thing and I knew from my experience that that's what it would indicate. So we got overseas in the Melanie Bay 30 days there oh and when we got in the middle of the ocean we had a submarine following us and we didn't know what it was and who it was but we finally figured out it was an American sub.

Interviewer: Now you were unescorted right?

Lehning: Oh yeh we weren't escorted we just had guys on gun boats you know they had guns on the stern and on the bawl. And but anyway we knew it was American then finally he came up and had the flag waving and saw him and oh goodness thank you. But anyway we got on Melanie Bay and they said okay you get off her and we had wooden carts you know cases that we took with our equipment and everything they said well you take that off and you come get these later they said you're going to get moving right now. So we got off carried our gear with us and then we got onboard another ship and it took us to Hilandia which was up the bay at New Guiney. And in the middle of the night in a storm that was out of this world and raining and everything and they made us throw all of our loose bags into a net and they dumped them into this little boat going ashore with us. Well this little boat was full of this net he was going to take it ashore take it off and wed get our stuff there but when we went down and blew everything up and my bag all my addresses all my cards all of my cigarettes everything I had in it I just loaded it with everything I would need. And it was gone so anyway all of my addresses everybody's. So anyway we went ashore and we went to one of the bigger ships which was the commander of the 7th amphibious force. And they called us into a room one day after we were there one day and they said okay says you have a choice we said what do you mean we have a choice? Well you're an amphibious force said you have the small boats that take the infantry ashore said you have an LCD which is a little larger and you take the infantry ashore they said you can take 150 tons and you can carry four tanks. Then they said you have LCIs, LSD now you can take your choice of any of those four you want. Well I had seen an LCT once it's the only ship I ever saw except a small job that we that our seaman ship went on it was a little boat. But anyway I said well I've seen that LCT I thought to myself I said he said well how many want LCTs and I raised my hand. He looked at me and said you want an LCT and I said yes sir I've seen one and I like it he says okay your on. So I said okay and the next thing one or two other guys raised their hand I think but anyway that's how we got out service. And I thought man that little boat looks like the thing to me I said I don't want to get into this big stuff so.

Interviewer: What's the function of an LCT?

Lehning: Alright now an LCT is a Landing Craft Tank. Now in the Pacific there were no harbors there was no place for a big ship to tie up to unload. An LCT in the first place when you go into an invasion would be loaded with tanks or trucks or guns infantry guns and soldiers either one of the three what ever it took to get them up for these invasions. So then after that you'd pull off of the beach you'd land on and LCT is 115 foot long 115 feet and 35 foot wide. I lived for two years on one of those without getting off but twice two years on that amount of space. But anyway when we got in there they got us off and they sent us to where we wanted to go and I went on the old 245 that was my first boat. And what to do was just put me on as a third officer and I would just be a third officer onboard that ship.

Interviewer: Now you had specific training for that at this point?

Lehning: No

Interviewer: So you were going to observe.

Lehning: So I went onboard there and when I went onboard I met the Skipper met the exec and the bosses mate. That's the first three men I met and they said come on in we want to talk with you so I came on in the office and we sat just a little place they had bunks in there and their office in the same room. He said well he said you're the third officer here and we understand that you just got commissioned and you are going to come onboard and be a third officer. I said yeh but I don't want to be a third officer he said what do you mean? I said well you can call me the third officer if you want and you can put it down on the books that I'm a third officer but I'm going to be a seaman. And I said I'm not going to do anything but handle the lines and handle the wheel and handle the engine and do everything that has to be done on this LCT. And I said when I get all of that done I said then I will be an officer and so I did and I never did wear bars or anything I was just like the rest of them and we didn't wear uniforms because we just had pants and cut off pants and anything we just weren't dressed nobody dressed on a LCT. There was 18 men onboard the LCT 15 men and three officers and that's what they kept on them if they could. So I stayed on there and I handled the wheel and going where we went and they'd send us up on little places and take this up to this place and the other place. And we did that and there wasn't anything too much going on as far as war was concerned there in Hilandia because they all had that cleaned out. So but then I went up to we made a run then one night they said get your gear Mr. Lehning you're going to be shipped over to another boat an exec. I said as an executive officer? They said that's right so I grabbed all of my stuff together and put my uniform on got in this little boat and they drove me over to the 959 LCT 959. Now that's a new boat the old boat the 200s had the cord was all back in the stern everything was all back in the stern the quarters and the kitchen and where you sat and where you did whatever you did and your bunks were in there. Then they had a tarp over the front down so far but then that's where we'd sleep outside because you couldn't sleep inside there wasn't it was too hot so anyway that's where the guys slept. But anyway when I got over there on the LCT 959 it was a newer boat and they had it was an LCT 135 foot long and you came back so far and on the port bawl you had a corner that was like this they had a house or a room or whatever bunks were in. And in cabinets for their clothes and this that and the other and it was covered and there was 15 men lived in that there was 15 men. So then on the other side they had the same size and the 959 ended up with three officers no two of us to start with but anyway and there was another officer on board who transferred out. But anyway the two of us I picked out a bunk and the skipper had the bunk the first bunk and he was on the lower but he had the first one there and I just took one on the back. So anyway we had it there when I got aboard that we had a first class pharmacist mate. And I thought well what's he here for and they said well we are the hospital group for our 12 there's 12 LCTs in a group so for these 12 LCTs he's the hospital ship he has to give shots take care of people this that and the other. So I said that's fine so anyway we made friends with the skipper then he transferred off the next day and George Saltmarsh was the skipper in charge. And so but anyway we were at Hilandia and we had the first invasion with Moritie and we went up to Moritie and we had a load of soldiers and everything. And

we made the trip there with a few more LCTs and LSTs and the big ships that came in and blew up everything before you know.

Interviewer: Now an LST is?

Lehning: An LST is a Landing Ship Dock I mean a Landing Ship Tank, Landing Ship Tank. And that was the long one that was the 300 foot long one you know and so we went up there.

Interviewer: And how long of a trip was that?

Lehning: A couple of days I think.

Interviewer: Okay

Lehning: A couple of days either way a 24 hour trip you know. And then we made the landings and everything went great as far as that no very little shooting back or anything and the Navy had their big guns firing too all the time and all of that just like they went in expecting to have a big segment of people in there. But the Japanese knew they were going to come up some way and they took all of their troops and moved them up north finally so that was another thing. So we went to Halmahera and in the mean time we went to Buna and we went to another spot we went to Buna and there was another place there I don't know another one we stopped at but it wasn't anything that was going on too much.

Interviewer: Now when you went up there for those landings what were you anticipating what were you thinking that you were going to do?

Lehning: About that time we were thinking about what was going to happen. We thought well this is going to be a place where we'll see what happened otherwise if we had any we had men on their guns. An LCT had a 50 caliber machine gun on the starboard bawl and 20 millimeter guns on top of the cabins and it had another 50 caliber machine gun on the stern and I think they had another one on port side. There was one north starboard so that's all we had so all we could shoot at would be just in and out and airplanes. So we got up there at Halmahera then we came back to Buna and that's when we found out we were going up to Latte. So this was all the time going then we planned to go to Latte and we got underway and then we were towed up there no weren't either we weren't towed up there we went under our own power no we weren't we were towed because we couldn't when we went to Latte we had to go in LSDs Landing Ship Docks. Now a landing ship dock is a huge ship it's very large and it takes three TCTs in that back stern of it. They would drop their big ramp down and then they would flood down then you would drive on then you had to take your mast down off of that so it would drop down and everything so you just had. So we had to do that before we got there then we went in and we were the third one in so we were on the stern we could look out the back and see the water there. But anyway then while we were underway for that for Latte they had a group there in the ship that worked on any of the engines that they wanted to be worked on decked them then they painted the ship repainted the ship at the same time on the outside and the bottom and all of that. Put everything on it make sure it was going to be alright when we got to Latte. So anyway by the time we got Latte they pulled up and let us come on out and by that time we knew we were going to go so we just backed out

of it then we headed for the beach. And we had stuff we were carrying and everything too all the army stuff. So we hit the beach at Latte no complaints no nothing and everything was alright and the Japs had pulled back over the hill into the other part of the island and they were just waiting for them. So that's how that happened and how we got into there. But as time went by the 32nd when did the 32nd division come in I don't know whether they were before or after the I think they were after the Philippines Sea the battle of the Philippines Sea. Now we're working in this harbor at Latte and you see men their all doing the same work the same thing got a whole line lined up on a beach with all of these LSTs coming in. And when we come in you'd have a LCT here and a LCT here and you'd have this about 40 feet between them. SO you had to come in and we had an anchor that was the size almost of a big ship that they would drop t wasn't a little anchor like we carry you carried a big anchor. Because you would drop it 150 to 200 feet behind you that is so that when you got up on the beach you started your engine and you would pull yourself off along with your engines going see. That's what they had the big anchors for so anyway when you come in like this you'd get in so far you'd get to where the nose of your ship was with the other you'd say all ahead full well back about 15 feet out say all the way full and you put all the power you had and you just went zoom. You had about 2 and half foot on each side and you had to line those up just right see and if you didn't boy you just ripped the other guy up and ripped yourself up and just did everything. Well we worked for two year or three years and we never went into a ship I mean a repair ship or any where we didn't have to have anything done except they made us do some changing later on. But anyway do but we got into Latte and then about two days or three days later the Battle of the Philippines Sea started. Now our whole harbor was full of ships all carrying everything that had to be unloaded and this that and the other brought ashore. And all the LTCs that were there were there when they pulled out all of those big ships because of the battle when it started they knew they wanted to get them out and get them away from this battle we woke up one morning and there wasn't anything but LCTs in there. And here this big battle was going on right in between Samar and the Philippines and that's where we were. If they had of come down and come into that they could have knocked out all of us just like that that and that you know.

Interviewer: Now how did you get your news then how did you know?

Lehning: How did we know we just got up and looked and we knew something was going on? And then the news came form this shore and that's the way we got the news of what was happening see. But man that was a hold your breath time and the fellows were let me get back to the fellow cause we were let me say this. One day the 32nd division was coming in we got the word where are you going to unload the 32nd? I said man that's great I know a fellow from home there names Herb Ewing and I said I'll have to see if I can find him so anyway I was still Executive Officer so when we got our load I saw one of these big cannons coming off one of these big pieces of equipment I said sargent I said you with the 32nd? He said yeh I'm with the 32nd I said do you know Captain Ewing he said sure he's my commander. I said well where is he? He said well he's on the other ship over there. About that time boom komokoziies and they came in just like everything just at us so anyway we got away we didn't get hit.

Interviewer: How many of them?

Lehning: Oh I think there was about three or four. And they just took one ship at a time whatever they wanted to have. And Herb said well man he said when they came in they came right over us and he said we're all down on the deck but he said you can't dig a hole through a ship he said no said I know you can't. But anyway so he got ashore and I went in when we dropped the load I told the skipper well pick me up on the next load because I'm going to find Herb. So I did I found him and we had a nice quick visit and I listened to his commanding officer tell them where they going to be what their going to be doing and where they expect to have some resistance and this that and the other. And we talked a little bit and I saw his daughter was just born before I left and I told him all I can tell you is you've got a sweet looking girl. And the first time I ever saw a man like that cry and he cried and he said you know I haven't been home since the start of the war and I said I know. And he hadn't because they got whipped in Buna there was 11 men in the 32nd division that got out of Buna 11 men out of all of them and he was one of them. So he went to Australia and they had training down there and they reformed everybody and they brought in new men and that's what he had when he came into Latte. So anyway but we only had that one stop after the war was over he came back to Carole and I was there so we had and he lived on 28th Street and I lived on 28th Street and we had a good visit. And I just saw him before I left to come down here so it was a nice time. Now when I say we didn't have anything to do we had work on the ship to do because we had to clean up decks on the ship every time we dropped someone off because of the mud and dirt and everything that got on it. And then we had to keep it painted up dotted here and there and we had to worry about our engines they kept those checked up pretty good. And as I said we didn't have to go into anything for repairs and for nine months I was at Latte.

Interviewer: Excuse me let me stop you right there and reload another cassette.

Tape 2

Interviewer: There we are so we were in Latte.

Lehning: Yeh and so we stayed there about nine months and we worked Latte 24 hours a day for nine months. And we'd go out and we now they had no supply ships for us we had no way of getting any food or anything like that. So if we got a load of food which we always did once in a while we'd go real slow getting back to the beach. And this one time we had we a tie up with food I was standing on the back of the stern looking down and all of a sudden I see the water coming up over the stern. I said man we've got too much food on here I said let's just stop where we are guys so everybody stopped bringing the stuff on and we were stacked up to here you know. And I looked again and I saw more of that water coming in and we were going lower and lower and I said guys take this food back off we've got a leak somewhere. So they started all of our crew helped that time they never we never had to do anything like that we never had to go on and load anything. They always had men that came onboard our ship who loaded the stuff and saw it get on and then we'd just take it in and then we'd unload it on the beach. But anyway the guys just all of a sudden saw the same thing and they all started throwing cases of food back up on the other ship and I mean it was fast doing. So I finally looked down and there was one of our tops to the where you open the thing to get the water out if you got any in so anyway that was off and I saw it laying down on the deck there and I said oh man you know so we got that and we got our pump out and put it in there. And they pumped that water out just as fast as they could and

finally we put something around it to keep it from going in there and they pumped that water out and that boat came back up again. And I told the guys up on the ship I said we've had all we need we're going in the beach they said you go right ahead. So anyway we put the cap on and got it all ready and the guys came in and they said this is the closest we've ever sunk this thing. I said yeh sure it is but anyway we got it working. So anyway we went in with it but we went slow because we had to get food. So out on the front out front bowie we had three big bowies on those boats it was put together in three pieces and so and they put it together in Melanie Bay when it came in the original crew. So and the bawl you never know about these ships but in the bawl they had hit a storm the night before when they were putting it together and it hit that thing and when it did it just bent those down there and they couldn't put any bolts in it when they were putting it together. So they said man we just can't do it so they just had it and the water would come in but that's the only place we had to keep food so I told them get all of the food you can get and get different foods and I said put it in that number one up there and then we'll go on ashore. So we just muffled along muffled along you know and man I mean they stacked that things full and it was just like we had food but we didn't have meat. We had some canned meat but we didn't have a lot of it so we got meat one time and we had in the back stern behind the place where remember I told you they had a compartment on the port side and a compartment on the starboard.

Interviewer: Yes

Lehning: The starboard was for officer's port was for crew now behind that at the stern of the ship was a small compartment and that was the kitchen. Now the kitchen had one regular size home icebox so we didn't have any freezing area all we had was that little square up at the top to put meat in. So if we got meat we just jammed everything we could get in it and what we couldn't we cooked. So anyway that was the way that went and when we ran out of meat which we did at that battle there when everything stopped coming that time. We were there I guess a couple of months without food we had the food we had but then it ran down to just base stuff but we eventually got another load.

Interviewer: Was it eatable?

Lehning: Oh yeh

Interviewer: It was good?

Lehning: It was good so that was all we had we never knew what we were going to have some of the labels were off the water had gotten some of the labels off. So you never knew what you were going to have for dinner or lunch or breakfast but anyway that was it. And the guys all made out pretty well with it everybody didn't get too mean or too bad sometimes they had little arguments and stuff but we stopped that. And that was the way it was at Latte.

Interviewer: So 18 of you must have gotten pretty close.

Lehning: Oh yeh yeh yeh yeh. Now at Latte we also got a plane and we were on the beach and one plane came over and day and just came down and started firing everything at us and dropping dropping dropping whatever he could do. But he wasn't hitting the ships he was in front of the ships getting the

beach so when he came in my gunners mate saw him coming so he jumped to his 20 millimeter right quick and he loaded it and he had it back and he started shooting that un and I saw his shells hit the man and the rest of it and he just went on down the beach a little and then dropped and I knew we got him I said I know that. So anyway that's how we got one then we got another we got two ships two airplanes that's all the damage we ever did. So that was a pretty good deal and painting the flags up on the ship and all of that. And we had one set of pictures that we made and I have a group of them at home in a frame and it shows what an LCT does the work we do and how we do it. And so that was nice and the boys were odd it was an odd bunch they were from all parts of the country. The motor max machinist they knew what they were doing about it they knew how to handle the engines they knew what to do and the electrician knew how to handle his work. The bosom finally we got a bosom mate aboard a first class bosom and he knew how to handle it everything. Well like the time we lost our we had one ship we were tying up to when you come in a ship is here and you would come in like this and you would come in like this to get on a ship and when you'd get a storm your coming like this. And all of a sudden we just slipped in like that and it hit the motor that the anchor was on and that anchor cut loose and just dropped right there. Well then the motor wasn't running so we couldn't do anything so we had to cut the cable leave that after we were loaded and then go on hit the beach as best we could easy in and then after that got ride of our stuff we had. Then we backed out the best we could easy and because we weren't there long we got motor stuff we just got over backed out and then the motor man got on and he took that cable form that anchor thing and took it out on deck and he sat there and he did all of those cables strips you know. You've got a cable and each wire running around well he would undo those wires so far out then he would put that through the anchor like this around and then he would put that in there and how he ever did all of that and got that done I'll never know but he sure did he was great. And so anyway that was his job and he'd see the ship was painted and he'd see the guys got the lines up whenever they were coming in to tie up the ships. And then the guys would in the front bawl there was two cabins they were oh I would say about that wide and they'd have an engine in it and you could take up on either side they had two engine and you could drop your ramp and then one of you bring it up you know bring up the ramp. So they would do that too I mean the engineering department would run the motors and they would always have them ready to run and everything and we didn't have any trouble. So that worked out very nicely.

Interviewer: It sounds like the overall level of competence was really high.

Lehning: Yeh it was it was it was good with these guys because actually we got the worst guys in the Navy. Really they were and I had some of them came aboard when we went to Okinawa we had one come aboard and man he was he was tuff but he was a nice guy but he was tuff. And then I had a nice guy he was a quarter master a young quarter master came aboard and he was nice but he was a kid. And they would kind of pick on him once in a while and I'd have to get in on that and stop that kind of stuff. We still have times when we would get together Clay Mock was the quarter master at that time now we see each other oh once every year tow years. And get together and he always says well skipper you saved my life he said and I can't get over that and he says so I owe you a lot and that made me feel good you know when things like that happen. And I never had I only had one boy that we had to send out because he was something else boy we were down in Latte but we were on Samar the Island of Samar

and we worked there that nine months. And at that time we had a time when we were tied up in Samar and they said we want to know if you can take a load of beer to the crews club down to the land next to Latte. I said sure we can take it he says we're going to count everyone we put on then we're going to count everyone that comes off. And he says if it isn't right you're in trouble. So I called the whole crew together I said now guys here's the set up we either take it or we don't take it. They said we'll take it we won't bother it I said alright now because if you do we're gone they said no we will take care of it so everybody did. They loaded it and they counted it and we took up to the beach and took it up there and he counted it coming off and he came back and said skipper I said yes he says we've got eight cases of beer too many on board your ship. I said what do you mean too many and he said well we counted eight more than we had so you've got the eight cases of beer. I said man bring it aboard cause the guys will be happy to have it. But they wouldn't let us go in I went in to see the bar man it was two blocks long just a wooden bar. But anyway I said bring it in so we got it and they brought a barrel full of ice and they said we brought you a barrel of ice and you can just dump it in here put your beer in get it all cold and you can have a big blow out tonight. Well we did we sat out on the deck and sat around it and just sat on the deck that's just all there was to it and one guy would get a can and he'd just pop it and down it would go. Another guy would get one and pop it and down it would go well they were all laid out that night I didn't say a word to anybody cause were not supposed to do that you know. But anyway they wouldn't let us go ashore they said no you can't go ashore because this is only for the crew of the 7th fleet. I said hell we're 7th fleet, no your not your not a ship well we weren't you see we were officers in charge we were not Captains we were officers in charge of our vessel. So anyway that was a night that we all enjoyed and I didn't drink a lot of beer so I just had one can and that was all I wanted but the rest of the guys they just laid out the next morning we didn't even try to get back. But after that after we had everything we pulled out and anchored near the beach then we took off the next day. But that was something else but that was the kind of stuff then one time they brought on board at the dock they had a little floating dock down at Samar and the voids that were just up against the earth they would come out so far so we could go and land on boat. And one day they came in said skipper we've got a load for you I said a load of what? Well we've got some stuff we want to give you and take it out and see if you can just dump it I said dump what? They said liver I said what do you mean you've got a load of liver? Said we've got so much liver we don't know what to do with it said nobody will take it. I said well what do you want me to do with it I'm not going to keep it he said no you don't have to but you're going to load it on here. I said alright but somebody's going to give me an order of what to do with it because I said you give me a load of liver that's a hundred ton of it I'm going to have to do something to get ride of it. He said well you just take it out and dump it in the ocean I said alright but somebody better give me a piece of paper telling me to do it and they wouldn't do it. So I backed out and waited a little while and nobody ever did come by and they never did come by and they said just get ride of it so we went out and dumped it. And so boy we had to wash that deck down boy did it stink but anyway those are kind of the odd deals that you run into. And it was interesting but that's what makes a situation go because it takes every kind of a person and every kind of a ship to give you something to do to give you something to being ashore so that the guys there can have what they want and have what they need. And we used to as I say we brought in everything from ammunition and that was another thing when they loaded ammunition on us now this was a little ship this was just work ships. And there was 15 of us in this group well there was more than that in Latte but in the group that we were working. When we come in to get

a load we never knew what we were going to get. Now one day we went in and we got large cranes big huge cranes. And this big came over the side and I said man hold it up there I was watching I said just hold it up there easy don't even push it one way or the other I said let that down easy. He said oh it's alright nothings going to happen. I said what do you mean nothings going to happen and he let that thing down and when he did it broke the cable and it fell on that deck and its you know a long way up to a ship and it fell on the deck put a hole on our deck and stayed there like this. And knocked the ramp down just and when it hit the ramp it took those big iron deals and it just went like that and I said oh my God I said now we can't raise our ramp we have to take it in to get it done just right have it cut off and get the right length. Well it dropped that ramp but anyway we I tried to I got lines and we put lines in it to hold it in to keep it from going over the edge on that where it knocked that ramp down. And I said man this isn't going to work its not going to work its going to go. And I said what are you guys using up there don't you know that you didn't have but one wire on that one iron he said yeh but it said it was a 25 ton. I said that's a 35 ton crane that's ten tons over what you had in there I said it's a wonder you didn't kill us all. And you know nothing ever happened with that but they never said a word about it when that thing went off. It went off the bawl and we coulnd't stop it there was no way to hold it it snapped the lines and everything and just went off. Well that night and it was night by then we had to do something to go cause we couldn't go our ramp was straight down the bawl and that was a ramp that was as high as from there down to the floor and it was high that way in the water. So Is aid well guys we've got to get that ramp kicked up and they said how are we going to do it and I said I don't know but somebody's going to do it. And they said well we're not going to do it and I said what do you mean you're not going to do it? They said we're not going to go down in that water and do that said and that's night time said man that's bad water in here you know you've got all kind of fish in here. I said well that's not anything new you guys have been swimming once in a while yeh they said not where there was fish we could see the bottom I said you can't see the bottom out here. So I said alright give me the stuff so they rigged a mask for me over my face and they ran a hose through it ran it at the top and then I had to have a U shaped thing you know where you screw it in and go down and put it on the rank top. And so I took that down with the cable with the stuff and I hooked it on but it took me quite a while to get it down that night. Nobody else would do it and I said alright I'll do it so I did. I went down and I did it got it hooked up and then they said okay and then they rolled it up the got it up then we got all of the chains up saw where they were and I said man we've got to go in the beach and put a top on this hole. So we did we went in the beach and we told then what we needed and it was like that the army came out and they put a top on us and welded it in you know. And then they cut off the chains and measured that and got it just right and hooked up again and I said gee thank you fellow you were a lot of help and they said that's alright you did a good job and a I said well that's the way it was.

Interviewer: At this time you didn't particularly like swimming right?

Lehning: Oh no I didn't like to swim in the first place but I had a rope around my waist and I said now if I'm loose and running down there you guys pull me out. So anyway nobody else would go in the water and I said well we've got to do it so we did it and that was one of our good deeds.

Interviewer: Where did you go form Samar?

Lehning: Well we went from Samar we were in Latte and we went from Samar to we were in Samar when the war was over I think it was. We were there until July and then or June when was it June or July? July the I don't know it was June or July when the war was over but anyway we were there that length of time then they said well your going up your going to take a trip well the war wasn't over.

Interviewer: June, July the war was over in August right?

Lehning: No it was over in August the 6th of August something like that. And we were tied up to a repair ship getting ready because we knew we were going to be oh yeh let me tell you this, this is good. On about the first of oh something in June back maybe a couple of weeks form that maybe in August July it was in July. The skipper our commanding officer who had 48 LCTs under him now that's four 12 groups and so he called us all to come over in one outfit all of the skippers and that was in our group. So there was 12 of us sitting around his office at a desk and he said I want to tell you fellow something. We said what do you want to tell us he said you don't know it but you're going to be the first to go in on an invasion to Japan. I said I'm supposed to be going home man don't talk to me that way I said I'm going home he said no your not going home. I said well Bob and I are going home together said no your not you're the two oldest skippers on LCTs in the Pacific right now. Well we had gotten out lieutenant JGs already so we had gotten our we got that just before that and he said so you guys are going to lead the way. And I said we can't lead into Japan and he said here's the book and he gave us a book that thick and he said now take it back with you and study it. And we said study it and he said yes now turn to page so and so and so and so that's where you're going to be coming in.

Interviewer: Wow

Lehning: And I said what do you mean? And he says you guys are going to be the lead groups to go into Japan. He says because you know how to handle your ships and you know how to get in and out. And we thought to ourselves man this is not going to work but we said okay so we took them back to our own ships and all of the officers the three officers was all there and by that time I was skipper and my other skipper had gone back home in June I think it was May or June I think he went back. So I took over and so I said well if that's what you want that's what you get. So we went back and we looked at it and

Interviewer: What was going through your mind?

Lehning: Oh it wasn't going through our mind it was going through our eyes. We saw the amount of work that the Japanese had done in each one of their beaches. Now the beach at Nagasaki where we went into was the first beach to be hit. And we were going to take our 5th Marines in and we were going to hit that beach. And in that beach they had all kind of crosses and sticks down you know with all of the top cut off so when we went in there and we got into any kind of things at all we'd be right there and we'd be there forever. Then we say where they had guns in caves now you know the Japanese fought out underground they fought underground in everything that they were in. And when they got to Okinawa they were all underground and it was there was tunnels everyplace they could go from one section to the other to shoot and then get out and go over and shoot here. And they'd do all of this and nothing would happen and then they'd come back to there and they'd shoot over there we'd hit over there. They knew what they were doing and they were killing a lot of people as you know at Okinawa.

And then beside that they had all of them komokoziies coming down at Okinawa. And that was the greatest thing that they could do and they knocked out a lot of ships and I can't remember the number but I do know there was a lot of them. And so anyway we went back and we went through that book and we studied that whole thing and we said well that's it and they said you can't tell anyone about it we're not sending any mail out nothings going to happen until after the invasion. And we thought well

Interviewer: And this is July.

Lehning: Yeh in July and August no August it was just before August in July and boy we thought this is not going to make it because there's no way your going to get in and out of that place at all. And because the homeland they were al ready with everything they had guns they had ammunition they had people and they had them all aligned to go wherever they had to go on the beaches. And had the big guns there and just they would have taken 500,000 if not more of us the first day if we'd have thrown them in there they'd have shot them right there and just let them build up. And more so when I got there well then the war was over they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

Interviewer: As long as we're on that knowing what you knew at this point what might be ahead for you what was that news like to get?

Lehning: Well it was very it wasn't too good I mean we felt like man they are just making shot gun people out of us I mean we're going to be in there and they're just going to shoot us and that's going to be it. When there's enough of us dead they'll have enough of us to climb over us.

Interviewer: What did you feel when you heard about Hiroshima?

Lehning: That's what I'm saying oh Hiroshima? Oh man we said what was that you know we didn't know anything about it nobody knew it. They said it's an atom bomb that was dropped and it killed that many people. And I said great let's keep going you know and they did and they dropped that third one and I guess the third day and the next day or two days or something and they dropped it on Nagasaki. And that's where we were going in and so when we found that out well we had already left Latte after that bomb had dropped. And they put us on a zero degree heading out of Latte and that's when we went up to Okinawa. That's where we were gonna go anyway for the invasion. So we got up there and when we finally did my engines went out cause where we were they didn't do them right and didn't hook them up right and we just we had two engines out and we just took them to Okinawa. Then we got in Okinawa and they worked on us there and they got us fixed up again and we went into Nagasaki. That's where I broke my toe because Okinawa is where we came in to the typhoon that 85 mile an hour winds and 100 mile an hour winds and they sunk more ships at that typhoon than I think the Navy lost almost completely. But I won't say completely because they had a lot of airplanes that came in and bombed them and dropped into them and the harry carry jobs and all of that it was a tight thing at Okinawa that was a real fight and we weren't there thank goodness we went after that. Then we got ordered there in the mean time that's where I broke my toe.

Interviewer: How did that happen?

Lehning: Well we were we were trying to get off the beach after that typhoon we were up on the beach and it just blew us right off the beach and didn't blow us right on cause it just worked us on. I had my anchor out I had my engines backing I had everything going I could and it just shoved us right on. So anyway I had my foot and my left foot we had the top of the LCTs had a cabin on the top deck behind the 20 millimeter gun it was space like this and you climbed up and you got in to there. That's where you wheel you engine controls and everything and we were used to climb the ship from the top we climbed all the way to the top and looked down and holler our commands to the fellow in there. So they had a top to the there was a window like came up or rather a hole and came up and had tow inches of armor plate. The whole thing was armored by the way that all that area was armored and they had that on top of there and I had it up now when you put it up there was a place that you had two little holes like this and you had this on a chain well you ran this in like this and that locked it up. Well I didn't put that in that day and I would stand here and when I put this foot up it hit that and it came down and just caught that toe and almost cut it off. Well you talk about painful s so anyway that happened before we went into Nagasaki. And anyway I came out and my pharmacist mate was there and I said man I can't stand this you've got to give me something so he put me on morphine. And I'd take a morphine shot about every six hours something like that and then I got up to Okinawa we went in to get loaded and I walked to the hospital and they said we're loading up to go. They said we can't take care of you I said okay goodbye and I turned around and walked back to my ship again. And it was tuff to walk I mean it hurt so anyway I got back there and I said man just keep giving me the stuff because they can't do anything with me. So they did and that's how my executive officer calmed the ship with the group all the way out to Sasimo. And then the next day they turned us around three of us and we went back to Nagasaki. And we stayed in Nagasaki four months and I was there four months. Now that is the four months that after the bombing and when you go to Nagasaki you go in a narrow about the size of well you don't know how wide a cruiser was but a cruiser is wide but it's not any wider than this house or maybe wider than this house. And that is all the space you have to get into that little space of water in Nagasaki so you go through that then it just straightens out this way then it makes a round deal this way then it comes back this way then it comes back to that narrow thing again. And that narrow part is about yah long and they said well this is where you're going to tie up right here. We said why can't we come in well you can't hammer because you can't get enough water in there they said. I said oh that doesn't sound right to me but I said okay we tie up on this side and then the fifth Marines which we had we unloaded the stuff on left. And that was in to a dry dock area and when we'd go over there we'd look off into that dry dock area and it was full of these little submarines I mean there must have been 150, 200 of them in there. Just those little short submarines two man submarines and I said if they would have cut those loose when we made our attack on them which they were going to do it would have been all over to start with. So that was another thing when we saw that but anyway we knew that the bomb had exploded there right down the road.

Interviewer: How far down the road? Could you tell?

Lehning: No I couldn't tell it was they say ground zero was well they said it was I guess I don't know how far. But as they said when the first bomb went off said it was above ground it didn't hit the ground. So it went off stop and all of that went down is what killed all of the people there and then said it just went

on like this and the parts went out. Well it was close enough to me because where that where that dry dock was was a building and it was completely gone except for the steel part that was standing up. But the whole thing was gone and I said well now a lot of power came there and they said well we know but it was just a half light and this that and the other. Well what happened is anybody that had cancer intestinal cancer the VFW came out with it the government said you can go up to the VFW locally and have a check up and let them decide what you had and what was there. And if you are permissible to be to get disability and I said man I've had two cancers and I had a twelve hour round I had cancer on the last thing and I said there was three of them and I said I don't have any big intestines left I don't have any rectum left I don't have anything down there that I know of and I had a floating cancer. So that's why I went to Mayo and I went up there they did a 12 hour operation on me cleaned me out and I had 28 days of radiation and chemo at the same time before that.

Interviewer: How long ago was this?

Lehning: Seven years going on eight.

Interviewer: When did the VFW make this policy?

Lehning: This last year just this last year. And I said that's great and they checked me and they said Mr. Lehning you've got 100 percent disability. I said your right because I said I can't hardly get around and they said well we're going to give you 100 percent now there redoing it because they know what's happening and the president says well we've got to get the money out of this I'm afraid that's what it is because know I'm don't think I'm going to get 100 percent disability. I don't know what I'm going to get if I get anything but I told them I said look I stayed there for four months and I said if I can't get it all from that and come up with these cancers and these things happening and I said I'm going back now because I have three aneurisms and I've got to have that done. And I said that's all connected and so I said that's my story and he said well I'm not a medical man I'm just going to figure out how much radiation you've got. And I said I've got a lot of it because I never left there.

Interviewer: Now did you guys talk among yourselves about it at the time?

Lehning: No we had no idea had no idea at all. So anyway I just talked to this gentleman just yesterday and he said well I'm going to have to check to see just how much you can get. I said all I'm telling you is I can't handle myself I've got to have help I've got to do this that and the other whatever I had to do but you know and I said then I'm going back up to Mayo's right now. I said you may not have to worry about me after next month I said I may not make it back I don't know. But anyway that's what happened so now I'm going to wait and see what they do because if they say well you didn't have enough radiation I'm going to say I had all the radiation anybody else could get who are you going to tell me had more radiation than I had. Because I said I was out in the open all the time I worked right there in that little 150 feet job that 150 yards I had to run my boat and that's all we did except for one day we went out and came back. I said you know I said what are you trying to tell me he said well I'm just trying to tell you I have to do the others I feel sorry for you but I've got to figure out how much you've got. I said well after 80 years or 40 or 60 years how are you going to know how much I've got. You know that's all gone down now.

Interviewer: Are you still in contact with other people who suffer from this?

Lehning: No I didn't know nobody else. One fellow said he tried to get it and he didn't get it I said well you weren't there long enough and he said well I guess not. So I said well that's the way it is. So anyhow that's how that happened and finally I was there at Nagasaki and all of a sudden on day we saw a train coming and these sailors were walking down from the train station down the edge of the water and they were all officers. And I said what did they send them up here for they said there all coming up here to relieve us. I said that's good and then each one had one of the officers and then a skipper and a skipper and a skipper and I said where's my orders and they said you don't have any order and I said why don't I have any orders I've been here longer than anyone else I've got my hours that I'm supposed to have to go back. They said well you don't have any orders I said I just gave myself some orders I said I'm heading back with the rest of these jokers I said nobody's back without me and another fellow was the same way two of us. He said no way I'm going back too so we all just said here, here's your ship we're gone. So that's what we did we just took off and went back to the commanding officer which was in Sasibo. And we got on a train and we rode back and that was the way it was and we went aboard and he said what are you doing here? I said I want my orders and he said I don't have any orders for you. I said you've got a radio don't you? He said yeh and I said get a hold of Washington tell them you've got a man without orders I've been here longer than anyone else and there's tow of us and we're not going to sit here and see these other guys go back and we don't go back. He said well Mr. Lehning your right but you don't have any orders. I said get on the radio and tell them and tell them to get me orders right now with this group that's going back. So they got on the radio and they got hold of the people in Washington and they said wait a minute so they waited a little while and I finally said did you get a answer yet? No, did you get an answer yet? No finally they got an answer and they said he's right he's due to come back we had 24 hours before something that we had to be overseas and I was up to 28 or 30 or something like that. Well they told us we were the two oldest ones in the Pacific and they weren't going to send us home. Said man what are you talking about so anyway they got us our orders and we finally got onboard this ship and it was a hospital ship and it took us all of the way back to Seattle. Then we went through storm after storm to get back too. Then I got back to Seattle and I tried to call my girlfriend because she lived up in Seattle lived up in Burlington or something up there but I couldn't get her so I said I'm just going home. So I got a fifth of liquor for the second time that I had a fifth of liquor since I left and I got my train tickets and I got on a train and sat down and we walked with I think it was five officers back there in that one in the restaurant and we sat back there and talked for two days. And we finally got in one night and got home and I had called my mother and said I'm home I'm coming back in so she met me in Chicago. And that's when we had a nice visit with everybody and I saw Hutch Bill Hutchin my friend who was in medical school at the time. And he called me and said come on down and I came on down and met him at his I lived in North Avenue and Park when I was in school I didn't live with her but my roommates four of them in pharmacy said well we're going to live together. We lived in a YMCA before that said we're going to live get somewhere and we'll let you know where it is I said just go ahead and get something. So they called and said we got a place said it's a little bit far from school but we can make it. I said okay what is it? North Avenue and Clark the Plaza Hotel I said my aunt lives there. They said your kidding I said no I'm not kidding said that's where my aunt lives. They said well that's where we're going to live too. So that's where we lived for a year.

Interviewer: How long were you in after you got back to the states?

Lehning: Yeh I came back in when did I come back in? I came back in January.

Interviewer: Of 46?

Lehning: Of 46 and I got in January of 46 and then I came home for 30 days and that's when I found out about everybody and everything and I got on a train in Carole. I went down to Memphis to visit my uncle there and I had a nice visit with him for a couple of days. Then I went from there up to Jackson Tennessee to visit with another uncle and I had a nice visit with him for three or four days three days. Then I got on a train a B&O train coming out of New Orleans or wherever because a girl I had dated at one time after I had broken up with another girl lived and was a hostess on a train so I met her on that train and went to Saint Louis with her. And I thought you know I was ready to get married I was a wreck I was absolutely shaky I couldn't settle down I was just a wreck. So I wanted to get married I was ready to get married but I didn't say anything to her about getting married but anyway I got on the train with her she came in I had a drink on the train a couple of drinks and talked to the fellows back in the club car. And then after that we went back and got in a hotel she checked in then we went to the hotel. I said well I'll meet you in a little while and we'll go out to dinner and have time to do a little talking and she said okay. So we did and she knew I was going to be there to meet her not doubt about that so we talked and we had a little fun a little visitation and she was a girl that I was serious about but I never approached her never tried to do anything you know that I should have. And we had a nice visit and everything and I said well we'll go upstairs and sit in your room see what's going on talk a little while and she says okay so we did finally I said do you think you and I can get together? She said no we can't because I'm engaged I said why didn't you tell me that before I made this trip? But I said I'm enjoying it anyway I appreciate it so I went on a train and went home and that's when my mother on that day in what was it April, April the no it wasn't April it was in February the 20th I was home for my leave I was on a 30 day leave at that time. But that was about 15 days into my leave when I got there so I said she said are you going to call this friend of yours in New York? I said no I got mad at her and I said I'm not going to call her she said yes you are I said no I wrote her when I was in Japan and it was Thanksgiving and I got a letter from her telling me all the fun she was having and who she was dating and what she was doing and I said no way I'm not going to call her. Well it ended up that she said yes you are I said no I'm not so she called her on her birthday and she answered the phone and she talked to her and she said here's the phone talk to this girl. And her name was Vera, Vera Mund and she was from Germany born in Germany. So I said to her we talked a little bit and I said well it's nice talking to you and she said well where are you going and I said I have no idea I said I go get orders and where ever I go is wherever they send me. She says well you mean you don't know whether you're coming this way or not? I said no I don't know where I'm going. She said well do you think it would be alright if I came down to visit you? And man my ears stood straight up you know and I said you want to come to Carole and she said yes I I'm going to come to visit you. I said alright you come on. I couldn't so no to the girl and so anyway she came down she came to Chicago first from New York to Chicago my aunt and my cousin met her there at the station at the New York Central Station and they said to her are you Vera? She said yes, do you know Fred Lehning? She said yes, are you going to see him? She said yes, are you going to take the Illinois Central? She said yes, and they looked at each other and they said you speak awfully good English and

she said yes I do. They said weren't you born in Germany and she said yes I was. How long have you been in this country? Since I was four years old she said. Oh well now can you imagine that happening? She said I thought they were crazy she said I didn't know what to think of those cousins of your and your aunt she said but anyway they took me from New York Central and put me on the Illinois Central and shipped me down. But she said you know that was a bad trip because she said after I got down to Champaign I kept talking to the conductor and I said look put me off at the next stop he said no you've got a ticket that says Carole Illinois. She said yeh but I don't want to go see this boy. He said yep you've got a ticket for Carole Illinois and you're going to get off at Carole. She says please put me off said I don't want to go. He said you've got the ticket your gonna go. So anyway that was all the way from Champaign all the way down she was begging to get off. Well anyway at 9 o'clock that night I met her at the train and it was out in the country it was out away from town. But when I saw her got off there I grabbed her we kissed each other and I said Vera I said this is it she said yes it is and I said that's great I'm glad to have you. And I quieted down just like that I settled down I had no more get up and go to me had no ideas or anything. But three days later I asked her I said do you want to marry me and she said yes I do. I said then you've got a husband so we decided to get married but I said we've got to do it way. I've got all of these plans you have to have when you get back after all of this is over and you figure well I wasn't shot I wasn't hurt I'm doing fine I'm going to go to school anyway she said I said I have to go to Chicago or Great Lakes to get my orders I won't know then whether I go to California, Florida or New York or wherever I go. She said well we'll go see I said that's fine we'll go up there get my orders then we'll know what to do. She says that's right but you know you've got a year of school to do yeti said yes I do she said I can wait until after that. I said you're not waiting for anything I said if you don't marry me right now we're through you're through and I'm through. Because I said I've had all of the women I want and I said this is it you want to marry me I want to marry you now we're going to get married. SO we told my mother and her mother and look if I get sent anywhere beside New York said you two are going to meet us in Chicago and we're going to get married in Chicago right now. And they said that's alright we'll do that we'll do that you know like this and I said okay so anyway I got my orders for Bainbridge Maryland. I said good that's out past New York so we'll go to New York and then I'll go to Bainbridge. That's what I did and that's when she started getting ready for marriage and I started carrying up liquor and everything back to New York for the party after the wedding and she'd give me stuff to take down for the home and put in where we were going to stay and that was the way we did. And we had an apartment for exactly a month so I stayed in that apartment 30 days and then we had to wait 3 more weeks before I got out and we were married in April and I had to wait until July the 1st to get out so anyway that was the way it went.

Interviewer: July the 1, 1947?

Lehning: Yeh no 46.

Interviewer: 46 okay

Lehning: So I went in July the 1st of 43 I was out on the 30th of June something like that in 47. So I mean yeh so it was three years 46 three years. So anyway that happened and we got married and on our wedding night we stayed at a hotel and I should have known better but I didn't but anyway it was a

surprise to me. But anyway it was a good fashion perfect wedding there was nothing that happened so that was all there and so I looked at her and my mother and her mother called me the next day and they said well how was it and I said I'm not talking to either one of you because neither one of you told me what was going on and I said I had a different idea. And they said no we didn't tell you because we didn't think so and I said well thank you very much. So we got up the next morning and had breakfast then we went over to her house and stayed there because they were out at her sister's house. And so I got over there and we got up the next morning and I said no we got over there and I said Vera we slept over there that night and I said Vera I lost my wallet and she said what do you mean I said I don't have no money I don't have my wallet and she said where is it I said I don't know. She said well we tore up her whole apartment looking for that wallet because I had my wedding money in it I had everything people gave us and everything. And so finally I said well I'm going to call the hotel that's the only place I know and if anybody's honest that's good. So I called the hotel and the lady said wait just a minute and she came back and said yeh I've got it here we've got your wallet and your name in it. That's good I said is there any money in it and she said yeh there's some money in it well I had a well it has a in here it's got two parts and one was a hidden part so I had my money in there. And so I found my money and I said good and I left the girl \$20 I said give the girl who turned this in \$20 I said I at least can do that so they said okay we'll be glad to do that and so we got that then we got back out and we came back to Carole rather we came back to Bainbridge after that. And then we had this apartment there I had arranged for 30 days and then we had a one room after that just a little room and we stayed in there whatever it was so many weeks and we got out then. So then we came back to Carole and I had my friends that were back and they were out of the Navy and the Army and everything and we all were out dancing and carrying on and so we lived with my mother then because I had another year to go back to school. So I went back to school and we went up and we lived in a YMCA one room one bed one desk one closet small one and a wash basin. So I had my big trunk opened up with our clothes in it hang everything up in the closet and that was our we lived a year that way or 9 months and that was the way we lived. Now Vera worked and I worked a little and I was in school and so we did that for a year. And in the meantime they said and you couldn't find a house in Carole there was no house anywhere because everything was all taken up with everybody coming home and everything there. So my mother called one day and she said I've got a house for you and I said where do you have a house and she said well you've got to have a house to live in I said yeh said that neighbor Mr. Honey the guy down the street from us is selling his house for \$7500 and says I'm going to give you that \$7500 and if you want it you can have the house. And I said well good for you but what they had they had 35 people's name on a list that wanted that house and they took that list to all of the neighbors on that block and they picked out my name on each one of them. And they said he gets it and that's how they sold their house the neighbors said they wanted us there so that's how we got in. Then after that I built on the back and there was room for the boys and Kyle's wedding and all of that stuff. So we had a nice time and I came back after I got out of school and passed my examination and got my license and all of that and then we worked for 57 years I think in that store 56 years.

Interviewer: Great

Lehning: And that was the end of it.

Interviewer: I just have one more question for you we just have a little bit of time but. As you thought about your experience over the years did that thought change and what was your over all summary of your experience from the war?

Lehning: I thought I was very lucky to have chosen the duty I want because it was a small vessel and you stayed in a place after you got there for awhile and worked and did things there. And I wasn't in any major battles except for on the beach there at Latte and Moritie and that sort of thing I was in two actually signed up battles in the Pacific. And I felt very very fortunate because of the way it worked out and in fact when I came home I was in the store my father had dies when I was in the service the first of July or July or August the 7th I think it was. But anyway when I came home I got in touch with a Navy recruiter there in town now there was 18,000 people there when I came home 14 drug stores. Now that's pretty heavy going so I stayed to the third drug store. We had a lot of kids in grade school or not in grade school but in junior high, high school 16 years old that worked for me I had three girls all the time and a boy and then I had sometime two boys and a girl. And I have a at hoe I had you know these big cards you know how they are baked on both sides I had about five of those filled with names of everybody I could remember now there was a lot I couldn't remember there was a lot of them that had that I wrote down the names of all of them I worked with. And it was amazing and everyone of them have come back with good remarks about working with me and the thing that I enjoyed most after I sold my store and I quit working is I would go to the post office I have a post office box and every day I'd go there, there would be two or three people in the post office say hello Mr. Lehning I could never remember names I have a hard time remembering names. But I would always say to them hello how are you you know and just visit with them like I did at the store and they'd so you know we sure miss you and I'd say well thank you I appreciate that and I didn't realize that there was that many people that knew me or that would say those things to me. Because when your working and you have people and you deal with them you don't have any of that in your mind you just have everything going and you do what you have to do. And I was very proud of all of that and it was that's the way it was so I feel real good about my work. And a lot of people say well Mr. Lehning I remember coming in and I didn't have any money I needed an ice-cream cone and I said well you got it and they said yes I did you didn't charge me (tape ended)