

Edward Lueders Interview

Interviewer: All right, Ed, give us your full name.

Edward Lueders: Edward Lueders.

Interviewer: And you were born where?

Edward Lueders: I was born in Chicago in 1923 on Valentine's Day, which I claim as my holiday. I'm in charge of Valentine Day.

Interviewer: And how did you get out to Utah?

Edward Lueders: I was hired, very fortunately, by the Gathering of Eagles in the English Department here in 1966. I'd been bouncing around the academic world since 1948 when I started Ph.D. work at the University of New Mexico, and that desert world down there got in my skin and I had to come back and Utah made it possible.

Interviewer: All right, tell us about how went into the military, what you were doing just before then, what year was it -- let it unfold. Tell us what happened.

Edward Lueders: It was 1943. I was a junior in college at Hanover College in Indiana. And, along with a lot of undergraduates and graduates, I was drafted and didn't resist the draft. It seemed inevitable to all of us. It was a matter of when rather than whether, even though there were conscientious objectors, and I honored them and I still do. It just was a natural course in the 1940's as things developed that you would be drafted if you were a young man of draft age, and I was -- 1943, March.

Interviewer: You were how old?

Edward Lueders: I had just had my 20th birthday.

Interviewer: And, did you enlist, or were you drafted?

Edward Lueders: I was drafted.

Interviewer: And tell us what happened, how you got -- how you got selected, what they wanted you to do in the service. How did that all happen?

Edward Lueders: Oh, gosh. That's a complex story which I've just written out in the first draft of a memoir that I've undertaken. I had induction in the Chicago -- my home was in Chicago -- and I was inducted there, sent up to camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, and then down to Keesler Field in Mississippi near Biloxi for basic training. And while there, I got tied up -- tied up? -- I got a break of being active in a radio program that emanated from WWL or WLW -- I've forgotten -- in New Orleans. It was a radio show that originated on Keesler Field Base and was called "Free For All," a weekly show, and I'd had a little experience with radio in Chicago at NBC before I was drafted. And I just lucked on to that and, as a result, I was classified for Special Services, which is entertainment and recreation for troops. From there, I bounced around some more. Came out of all places to Kearns, Utah, which was an overseas replacement depot, as we called it. From there to Riverside, actually Arlington, California, and out of the port of Los Angeles across the Pacific to India.

Interviewer: Now, you were a musician. They selected you as a musician at that time?

Edward Lueders: Not at that time, although, ever since I can remember I was playing the piano and getting better and better and better by myself. No training -- but, an aptitude that kept me going. So, whenever there was a piano in sight, I tended towards it and played it and so it was

another kind of inevitability that I had a talent that could be used for entertainment from within -- not the U.S.O. kind of entertainment -- and that's the way my career in the Army fell. I was classified special services, I played the piano, and I had some radio experience at NBC. I was a page there a couple summers, and the Army took advantage of what advantages I had to offer.

Interviewer: So, when did you head overseas? Tell us about that journey and getting to India.

Edward Lueders: You know, these are hard memories to pinpoint. Even though I've written about them in a novel, that's almost entirely autobiographical, and I have the dates in there, but in a matter of speaking, I disposed of those dates when I wrote about them. They're on the record, so to speak. Let's see -- when did I go overseas? Well, I got out to Kearns on my way overseas in the fall of 1944. I went overseas in December 1944.

Interviewer: Tell us what it was like getting on that troop ship, or how did you get there? What kind of ship did you go over in?

Edward Lueders: It was a general series that had been built as troop ships and named after Army Generals. About two thousand men, sandwiched into our sleeping quarters and canvass slots, almost. And the rest of the day, we could wander pretty much at will, but spent most of our time as I recall in chow lines snaking through the entrails of the ship to the mess hall and then out and back in the air again. It was a month long trip from Los Angeles to Bombay. The ship was zigzagging its way across the Pacific to discourage submarine activity and the closer we got to South Pacific area, why, the more the zigzag seemed important to us. Otherwise, it just seemed to delay. We'd go watch the wake and I have a very clear idea of the wake of the troop ships which were leaving -- marking our passage across the Pacific and away from our own lives and into who knew what. We didn't know where we were going until we reached Melbourne.

Nobody could get off the ship except the Officers and the naval people at Melbourne, and then we went across the bottom of India and then finally disembarked in Bombay. And then, since this is a narrative of getting me in my final position in the China/Burma/India theatre, then we had a five day train trip across the belt of India to Calcutta.

Interviewer: What do you remember about that?

Edward Lueders: What I remember is that we were in cars -- just the barest kind of railroad car you can imagine with a hole in the vestibule on one side on one end, slats for seats across each side of the car on which we sat, on which we slept. And in the morning, the engine would stop at a watering place with a watering tank and all the GI's would all get out and line up along the cars towards the engine where they were extruding from the engine boiling hot water, taking on more water and emptying out the engine, and we would hold our helmet liners under the spout and get one helmet liner full of water, which then would be our ablutions and everything else -- our needs for the day -- aside from what we got in mess hall. I remember seeing a tiger. We were going across; right in the middle of India as I recall, and at some distance where the tree line and the forest behind, and they're going in the same direction the train was going, was an Indian Tiger. Came out, went along the tree line, disappeared back in. And then arriving in Calcutta, uh, unforgettable transition in to the world of Calcutta during the war with refugees dying in the streets -- well, you couldn't tell the living from the dying. There were naked people everywhere, people carrying on the business, bustling around the streets of down own center of Calcutta. Beggars everywhere, hands out to the passing crowd, and we were shuffled from the train in to six-by-six and had to walk a few blocks, and that was a shocking walk to get to the trucks and load up to be taken out of the city about 15 miles up to a base called "Barrackpore," where I was assigned through the rest of the war.

Interviewer: Now who was giving you orders of where to go and what to do next?

Edward Lueders: Who knows? Somebody down up the line. You know, this is a part gag I haven't had this on in so long. It feels a little confining to tell you the truth, but it still kind of fits. And, I was a "Buck" Sergeant -- well, I was a Private at that point, and you knew the people around you, you knew the sergeant in charge of your immediate unit. You saw officers all over the place, but they were just officers -- they were another echelon. So, who was giving the orders? I don't know. I didn't know then. I just followed whoever was in charge of my unit and they said go over this way, line up. Hurry up and wait. And we did.

Interviewer: So, tell us about some of the assignments you performed and where you went.

Edward Lueders: I was assigned to a Special Service Officer at that point -- I did know who was giving the orders -- Second lieutenant who was the Special Services Officer at Barrackpore. His name was Kenneth Mann, Lieutenant Mann. A very good man, well-named. And there was a new service club that had just been constructed at the base and I was part of the personnel there looking after entertainment, working with some of the athletic materials, and guys that would play softball and a little bit of basketball -- a few hoops around. So it was kind of a routine duty until my piano playing came to the fore because Special Services headquarters had a place called "Hastings Mill," a British-Indian mill that had been taken over its head quarters by the Air Transport Command, which was my unit. Until they got the very good idea of putting together a GI entertainment unit to travel throughout the China/Burma/India theatre where American personnel would just flood out in to back water situations, just out by themselves on air strips, unreachable by the lives that they left behind. And it was a good idea. So, there was a gathering -- thanks to Army record keeping of guys -- GIs in the theatre who had entertainment experience

to put together small groups to travel around and entertain these people at the outposts, some of the larger units as well. And I was a pianist. And, we did script, so to speak, but mostly ad-lib performances on bases that were so fundamental in the equipment available. And the kind of routines entertainers usually could depend on, they just weren't there. We would turn up almost as a surprise. No publicity, we were on our own traveling strange areas of Asia. Particularly, I remember -- if I can wander a little more on this -- I remember going to areas of interior China which were strictly medieval, walled towns, and we would be sleeping in make-shift barracks with side arms under our pillows. We were issued revolvers because of the bandits that would occasionally swoop down from the surrounding hills and plunder the town and we were prey to that if they came in. There wasn't much to protect us except ourselves. This comes to mind because we were strictly non-combat troops. But in dangerous situations, being flown over what we called "The Hump" -- the Himalayas -- from bases in Assam, upper Assam, in India, over the Himalayas and mostly in to Kunming, China, and from there we would book ourselves through the Air Force Officers that were at hand to hitch a ride almost to the next place that we might put on our itinerary. At one level, I must say, it was a grand adventure. At the other level, because everything turned on the fact that we were serving the country, we were at the beck and wishes of the military, this was not a joy ride by any means, and serving a purpose.

But, even though we might have a revolver beside our pillow when we slept, we weren't faced with battle situations. We weren't faced with an enemy face-to-face or very close to it, well, with one exception in Burma. In a small outpost in Burma called Bhamo -- B-h-a-m-o -- where the American contingent there, a small one, had just retaken the area from the Japanese, and people don't remember that there was a war going on all over the globe, and in Asia particularly, it seems a strange thing nowadays to suppose there was a possibility in a place like Calcutta where

we had to dim-out because the Japanese were threatening from Burma. In any case, that was dangerous because there'd just been the turnover in holding the territory. And I remember giving a show -- making bad GI jokes for guys from an improvised stage in Bhamo, Burma, who just the week before had been hand-to-hand practically with the Japanese.

Interviewer: That must have been interesting. Tell us what you were feeling when you would see these guys who had obviously been through combat and what they'd experienced. How did that make you feel and what do you remember about that?

Edward Lueders: A little bit like Charlie Brown in Peanuts. Other people were doing it right, and we were just kind of there to watch and just do our best and uh -- there's something to be said in areas that we were in that were modernized very much, but I suppose they had been, I still have those memories of something that seemed to be the dark ages.

Interviewer: Is there one place that sticks out in your head that you went and maybe you encountered GI's? And I want to ask you, how did the GI's react? Were they appreciative?

Edward Lueders: A number of us that I naturally fell in with were drafted from college or even had been through college and had education, so their perspective followed the leads of their education and mine did, too. And then there were guys that were drafted out of menial situations, the beginning of their own career, wherever that may have led them, in the world of manual labor. I remember the barracks I was assigned to in at Keesler Field where I had my basic training in Mississippi had, uh, a group of young guys. They seemed like kids to me even then -- although I wasn't much more of a kid than they were -- who were illiterate. Not just functionally illiterate, they had never had the chance. It was alien to them to read and write. Americans in the same uniform. And so I guess my answer to the question is since this was such

a uniform effort of young men in America, that we had the whole range of concerns, attitudes, language, perceptions, uh, a good many of the GI's at the enlisted ranks that I was among were mostly having a lark -- just good time fellowship, buddies that were being told where to go and what to do and went and did accordingly, but in groups that were male-bonded. And so there was camaraderie of that sort on all levels. You sought out people that had your own kind of interests, your own kind of background, even though you were in what we loosely called the "war effort" in the same place and at the same level.

Interviewer: Did you have a buddy?

Edward Lueders: A buddy? I had any number. The memoir I am trying to compose -- well, not trying to, I am -- I'm getting through the war years right almost as I speak. I've organized largely in terms of my relationships with friends. And so I have been recollecting, uh, the buddies -- if that's the right term -- at each stage. You wouldn't necessarily stay with your buddy because you got shifted around from place to place, position to position.

Interviewer: Anybody in particular?

Edward Lueders: Yes, any number. I'd say at least a half dozen that I kept up contacts with because we were closely allied at one time or another during our service, particularly musically speaking, the two fellows that eventually I toured with as a Jazz trio. I played piano. Norman Simpson from Massachusetts played drums and did vocals, and, uh, faked his way on a base when we could find a bass for him to play. Also was like our kind of a non-com; he was one rank above us all the time, so he took charge. And Ray Warren -- H. Ray Warren from Georgia - - who played electric guitar and made his own electric guitar. He was an electrician in the service, and this was a day when the electric guitar was a novelty, pretty much. He was in the

ground floor. But that was our trio. And we traveled together. We were bunked together. We played together, which was important because Jazz music depends on that kind of mutuality of feeling and expression.

Interviewer: What would you play? What are some of the pieces you would play and some of the numbers?

Edward Lueders: All the standards: early Jazz -- the Gershwin pieces, Rogers and Hart pieces were our favorites. Um, sometimes, places that were very entertaining to guys, like, "Georgia on My Mind," like "Stars Fell on Alabama," like the New York tunes, "Manhattan, Manhattan" serenade. Like, uh, even non-jazz tunes so we could work in the geography, like "California, Here I Come," "Spring Time in the Rockies" (laughter). But we'd improvise. We didn't have music. I don't even read music. I didn't there and I still don't -- uh, me and Erroll Garner. If it weren't for Erroll Garner, people wouldn't believe you could do it without learning in the traditional way and, uh, and reading the notes on the page. Makes me think of Wingy Malone, an old one-armed trumpet player who got a gig at one time -- this is just a story I like to tell. They had arrangements and somebody put the music in front of him and he said, "Hey man, I can't do anything. It's just a bunch of grapes to me." While I am not proud of it, improvising has always been, uh, my manner. I can't play the same thing the same way twice if I tried. And the trio depended on three-way improvisations and, uh, that's the way we lived, too, when we had a chance.

Interviewer: You were telling me earlier -- before we started the interview -- about what you did and the difference between the high-profile USO shows. Tell me more about that.

Edward Lueders: Well, you put your finger on it. We were off-stage, on-stage, off-stage. We made do with whatever we found, wherever we landed. Uh, we did shows on air strips. We did shows practically in the latrines. Wherever we could, uh, get people together, uh, not necessarily knowing we were coming. So there's an improvised basis for our performance, uh, while we were there, we could see what the situation was, make local jokes. We didn't have to be prepared; we were part of the guys. No girls, only jokes about them. Whereas the USO troops were doing their thing in a high-style working, as much as they could, with the brass, having things all prepared for them. I must say we were kind of resentful of their popularity in the sense that that's what entertaining the troops abroad amounted to was having Bob Hope and people. I don't mean to demean in any way what they provided because there was certainly important, if only, because of the mass of people that they were able to put together for shows, and because of their money raising -- they were raising bonds by -- this was publicity stuff for the Army needs. We were below the line on all of those matters. We were just there with the guys to see if we could put on a show.

The first tour I went with was a small one, only -- there was seven of us, I think. One of the guys was a ventriloquist, a young kid who had taught himself how to be a ventriloquist, and had built his own GI dummy with cast-off clothes and, uh, mechanisms that didn't always work. There were guys who did stand up routines that, of course, were full of GI jokes and uh, so it was a different level of entertainment. And still, we were professional -- we thought of ourselves as pros, whether we had that background or not. There were pros, by the way, who were in charge of us when we were gathered together in Hastings Mill outside of Calcutta. The brass, the uh, the officers in charge, the Special Services Officers in all the ranks were people from Hollywood and uh, pretty well known celebrity people. Most the media in charge of us and the enlisted men

I've always, uh, Tony Martin, the actor-singer. Tony, I remember used to -- we'd come in the morning to rehearse. He'd clap me on the back and in mock Brooklyn easy say, "Hey Eddy, how's your Mutha?" (Laughter). Well, it was a kind of jolly beginning to what was pretty grim business when we hit the road and got on the plane and took off over the hump and to who knew what.

Uh, some people might remember a band leader named Larry Clinton. He was known for "The Dipsey Doodle" was his composition, he was an arranger. He was the Captain in charge of these entertainment units, and Melvyn Douglas, the Hollywood actor, wonderful actor. We loved Melvyn Douglas. He's the same person as he was in the movies -- dependable, reliable, friendly, concentrated on other people rather than himself. I think he was a Major at the time. He was a Special Service Officer over all of these. Well, there was kind of a top to bottom, and we were in the bottom, and we had nothing to do with that kind of, uh, "hoorah" that accompanied the USO troops.

Interviewer: Was there anything particularly touching that you ran across when performing somewhere? Anything--

Edward Lueders: Almost always. I -- and these are generalized recollections -- I can remember a few places that I've rehearsed in my memory long enough that I have probably changed them in the process. There were always guys that would come up and want to be friends with us, and so we had that role to play, too. We were a connection with our mutual past. A different kind of connection that they got through their buddies and through their officer relationships with enlisted men. We were something -- we, we came in sideways, so to speak, not from above, not from below. And so, there'd be a follow up -- guys coming, arms around our shoulders. There

were good feelings. Uh, but I can't isolate any of these. It's just a general impression that that's kind of what made it work and then we'd get ready and see where our next itinerary move might take us. We had orders so that we could, uh, ride alone or we could hitchhike just about anywhere where there were ATC -- Air Transport Command -- personnel.

Interviewer: You did a tremendous amount of flying.

Edward Lueders: We did. I have no idea of the air miles, except I remember, over "the hump," over the Himalayas, which we did on one occasion, first time -- I, uh we were in the bucket seats in the back. Norm Simpson, who had congenital kind of heart problems that he didn't talk about. He was a Christian Scientist, and a good one -- did his work. I was worried about him, particularly, as well as myself, because, uh, before we took off, the crew came in and they said, "Hey guys. Stay in your seat. Don't move around because, uh, I don't know how high we have to fly, but, uh, we'll be pretty high, so the oxygen is going to be a little thin." They had oxygen, we didn't. And, that was not very good tip off to say, "Hey, have a good flight." We were concerned all the way till we got to (inaudible). The air was pretty thin, and so we sat there kind of rigidly in our bucket seats and took them seriously. Well, there were a lot of dangers. That's what I guess I'm trying to say -- this was not an easy ride for anybody in the Army. There may have been people in the States that, uh -- but they were dislodged from their lives too. All of us -- all of us were taken away from the lives that we would have been living, and made a part of this gigantic effort to see the world through the exigencies of what Hitler and, uh, the Japanese warlords had loosed upon the world.

Interviewer: Were there any particular dangerous flights that you remember?

Edward Lueders: Dangerous? Hmm --

Interviewer: That you were shot at?

Edward Lueders: The only one that comes to mind was going in to, uh, an airport in Chongqing. Chongqing is on the Yangtze River, and, it had been under siege and a lot of the population of Chongqing was living in caves on the side of the very broad kind of canyon above which the city was built. And there was an air strip under construction. I've forgotten where we'd flown from, but we were headed from Chongqing. And construction meant that there were hordes of Chinese coolies all over -- that's a word that I use advisedly because we called them coolies. They were manual labor of the most basic kind, pulling these gigantic rollers to straighten out what was going to be the air strip, and the word that we had was, "Yeah, you can land there." There's another strip in the middle of the river in Chongqing, uh, which was Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters. And the mission -- I'm doubling back to explain the mission of the air transport command flying out of India and in to China -- was mainly to fly supplies to the Chinese Nationalists. Most people don't realize that -- they know that the Russians were our Allies; they didn't realize the Chinese were, too. Although both of these countries were under siege within in civil situations that were, after the war, very much a part of the world history that follows World War II. In Russia, Communist Russia, and in Nationalist China with, uh, Chinese Communists are still underway in the mainland. Well, anyway, flying in to Chongqing turned out to be a very hairy business because that air strip wasn't ready. It was still being constructed. And we had a hot-rod pilot, too. We came in once, and, uh, he made it all right and he missed -- somehow he missed these guys pulling the rollers on the very strip we were landing on. I can actually remember looking out of the window and seeing them go past as we landed. Finally stopped, didn't hit anybody. But that was not just a danger to us; it was a danger to them. And probably

not an isolated sort of problem, because the air strips we landed in all over -- China particularly, and a couple in Burma -- were very, uh, rudimentary. And these were cargo planes.

Interviewer: Um, as the war progressed, you could see the war was going to be won. Um, where were you? Where were you when the bomb was dropped in Hiroshima? Where were you, do you remember?

Edward Lueders: I was in India -- Barrackpore. Uh, and when the war in Europe was over, we were still very much in the war. The war wasn't over for us, even though the battles were being fought elsewhere in the South Pacific. The Japanese were being turned back again and again across the Pacific Isles, and we'd get intelligence of that. There would be bulletins, and we'd, uh, kind of pay attention to what was going on, but it was at a distance from us. We had almost a private war, in Mainland Asia. It was a war of feeding China, for us, getting Chiang Kai-shek and his forces somehow up to snuff so that, uh, whatever they were doing to repel the Japanese and get ready for possible invasions here and there, they had what we could offer. We didn't think very highly of the Chinese at that time. We thought they were squandering what we were -- but this is from the ground up, this is enlisted guys. So what did we know --

Interviewer: So, when the bomb was dropped --

Edward Lueders: When the bomb was dropped, uh, you know, it's strange, and I am probably, uh, at too great a distance to be accurate about this. But personally, the biggest bomb was the death of Roosevelt. Now, how can you explain that? Well, I think our distance from battles in India and China, and the fact that we were a part of the war and he was our leader. There wasn't any question about Roosevelt. Roosevelt, regardless of what you might think of him politically, you didn't think of him politically, really, if you were in the service, he was our spokesperson at

the top. And somehow, completing the war, uh, going on without FDR at the helm made a huge difference to us. There was a loss of a sort that, uh, I guess was kind of like losing your father abruptly. And of course we didn't know he was crippled. It wasn't popular knowledge that he was, uh, under siege himself from his Cerebral Palsy, at best. We always saw him as he was pictured in news reels and the newspapers, seated in his cloak, or in the arm of one of his sons. And his voice and his manner, uh, was the voice and the manner of the whole war somehow. And I know I'm over-doing this because certainly the atom bomb -- Hiroshima, Nagasaki -- were events of staggering sort, and they did end the war with Japan and we were engaged with Japan. The European war, I had two brothers who were in Europe -- survived -- so I had a personal kind of involvement of what was going on there. But when it was over, it followed all of those, uh, news reports that gradually looked better and better for the defeat of the Nazi regime.

Interviewer: I am just curious, what were you doing when the bomb was dropped? Do you remember where you were, what you were doing when you heard -- because it meant the war was over.

Edward Lueders: Yeah, you know -- isn't that curious. I don't remember the circumstances of where I was. I was probably in Barrackpore where after our tours were over, we would be sent back to our dispersed entertainment units and back in to our regular assignments where I was a Special Service Sergeant, so to speak, at Barrackpore, India, which was a main air base. There were two main air bases in the Calcutta area. One was called "Dumdum," which was the name of the area, the Dumdum airport, where most of the heavy traffic of VIPs and passengers coming and going -- top brass people -- would go in to Dumdum, which was closer to the city. And the other was Barrackpore, which was Air Transport Command in the Calcutta area.

Interviewer: Tell us about coming home, when you came home from the United States.

Edward Lueders: We had to wait, until, uh -- for discharge -- until we had sufficient points. You had points for length of service, battle scars, number of such elements. And we were, uh, dispersed back for discharge in that basis. So there was, uh -- it was all numerical. You had a sense of how many people were ahead of you. And, uh, the war was over, in, what -- fall of '45. I was discharged in March of '46. And I was not back on a troop ship headed across the Pacific to the U.S. -- San Francisco is where we arrived -- until February. So was it August, "V-J Day"? From August until February, 1946, I was just going at daily duty, Special Service in Barrackpore, India, putting shows together for the base, issuing softballs to the guys, keeping the guys that were waiting almost in line until their point total was sufficient to get them on shipment. It was a long, kind of difficult time. The war was over -- what were we doing? Why couldn't we go home and be with our sweethearts? Why couldn't they send us all at once? Well, of course they couldn't, and people had to take care of all sorts of things to close out bases too, gradually. The shut-down had to be over a period of time. When I finally did, uh, come up, we managed to be shipped as a trio. The same guys I told you about, so we could entertain on the troop ship. That was Norm Simpson's idea, and it worked. He was able to sell it to the Transportation Officer when we were in the holding pattern waiting to get on the ship. The three of us did ship back on the General Tasker "H. Bliss" was the name of the troop ship coming back from the port of Calcutta to San Francisco. Another thirty days, incidentally. Uh, and this is the basis of the novel I wrote about, it's a very autobiographical novel. Instead of a war memoir, I took on the challenge of writing it as a novel. And I gave my stories almost equally to these three guys who played in the jazz trio on the ship as well as remembering on the ship their adventures and misadventures during the war time in the CB I. And that novel -- this is a plug

for it, I guess -- but the novel was published in 1989. It took me a long time to decide and consolidate my recollections in to a book. I had some grants, luckily, from the NEA and from the University of Utah that gave me time to write the novel, published in 1989, and has, uh, been reprinted by the University of Utah Press in a paper edition just this year. Since the interest in World War II that -- now that us geezers are getting old enough that people realize the stories are going to go with us when we go -- there's a surge of interest in what we have to tell. And that book tells much of what I've been telling you, and a lot more.

Interviewer: What was it like when you saw, you came in to San Francisco?

Edward Leuders: Came in to San Francisco at just the right time of day, the sun behind us sinking over the Pacific, the Golden Gate being golden in the setting sun, and in to the bay and uh -- there's no comparable experience to that. The end of our period of time abroad back in our own where we belonged all along. The cheers -- just an entirely great experience, and uh, the highest moment you can imagine at a time. And then very efficiently, I must say, the Army moved us up the river to a place called Pittsburgh, where we were separated and sent our separate ways to what were called separation points -- mine in Wisconsin -- and we were discharged in good fashion. Once we hit the shores of the United States, the efficiency -- the Army was not always efficient -- (laughter) but it worked then. And it got us on our way and it got us back in the arms of our loved ones and our own lives, which had been really wrenched out of sequence. And there's something to be said there for all of us, not necessarily the battle troops, but all of us who had been away and had to realign ourselves with our civilian lives and our families and with the experiences we had had even though we were doing, by comparison, less violent things with our lives. So it was a difficult, difficult readjustment to make, on both sides -- for the families as well as the returning veterans in World War II. We know the

displacement and the lack of concern, comparatively speaking, that came from Vietnam War, when the veterans arrived from that. We are very much aware of that, and can't be too much aware of it because it's a wrenching experience for those troops. And now, the people returning from, uh, the Middle East and Iraq and, uh, we're more and more tuned in to the disruption and the, uh, disjointed kind of lives that come out of the war experience. We weren't ready for that in World War II, and of course, there was a victory and of course we were greeted with parades and all kinds of uh, celebration, but at a private level, at a private level, each person in uniform shedding their uniform and becoming somehow themselves at one disjointed connection with the past they had left three, four, five years earlier. It's no small matter of the rift in lives that was involved in that, uh, return from war.

Interviewer: You mention loved ones. What loved ones did you have behind? Did you have a sweetheart, did you have --

Edward Lueders: Had a sweetheart, my first wife Judy Demery. She and I had been sweethearts in college. We corresponded faithfully throughout the war. I think she wrote me every day. Lovely, lovely person to return to, except for this disjointed selfhood that each of us had had separately. I never asked her to marry me; it just was assumed we would be married. And very rapidly, probably too rapidly, as was the case very often, we were married. Uh, we had our children, we had our lives again to live, and, uh, I went back to college, thanks to the GI bill, which helped me all the way through Ph.D.

Interviewer: You mentioned you had brothers?

Edward Lueders: Two older brothers.

Elizabeth: Can we wait for just a second?

Interviewer: Just one minute.

Edward Lueders: The event in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on the troop ship – the General Bliss -- which is at the center of my novel, was a man overboard. A report of a man overboard. And, the resulting turn about to search for the man over board reported overboard. Uh, and that came to stand for me, as it must have for the 2000-odd men aboard with me, for the unknown soldier of World War II. I mean, that's pretty dramatic, I know, but it works. I used it in my novel for the purpose -- for the novel purposes -- because that stopped the return to America. During the period when we searched for the man overboard and gave the opportunity, in reality, as well as the way I use it in the novel, to think back over our experiences, and to retell them, so to speak -- well, we did retell them. It was, uh, it was a zone of time when, because there was a possible death of one of us out in the space of the Pacific Ocean, it was almost literally in the middle of the Pacific -- no bounds to the sea and circling horizon, except for, as I use this novelistically, except for the wake of the ship which was also disrupted in the circular pattern necessary to search. There was a disconnect from both the war time and the peace time that was ahead for us to reflect on the appearance, and so the novel does this, and we in fact did it on the ship. And the stories that we told one another, uh, were sometimes individual and sometimes group stories. "Oh, yeah, I remember that," you know, that kind of throw-back to the events themselves. Or "Hey, remember the time when we--," the sort of things when groups of veterans do after they've returned, if they get together. But we did it there before we actually returned in that kind of still center of the homeward journey while we searched – “we” being everybody on the ship, the naval people responsible for trying to meet the emergency, and you'll have to read the novel to learn more about it.

Interviewer: Two things --

Elizabeth: We need to go, sorry.

Interviewer: The irony of the name "Bliss."

Edward Lueders: Yes.

Interviewer: And the irony of all this stopping, and it says something about the American character, all this to stop and go look for one man, hundreds and hundreds of men stopping to go look for one man. Tell us about that.

Edward Lueders: A footnote to that is that I've discovered later that during war time in a battle situation, uh, they wouldn't have stopped for a man overboard. But this was peace time, but it was still under Army control, and the Navy people did the best they could. Did they find the man overboard? Once again, you'll have to read the novel. That's my trick.

Interviewer: All right.

Elizabeth: But could you tell us the story? Because these viewers, this is something that we want to put on TV for people to, uh, get your first hand, your first hand story.

Edward Lueders: So what more would you like from --

Elizabeth: Well, I'd like to know if they found the man --

Edward Lueders: Oh.

Elizabeth: And I'd like to know maybe one, at least one story that was told that you heard on the troop ship "Bliss."

Edward Lueders: Well, of course these were our old stories, the trio. And, I don't have stories from other sources than our own experiences, which is the business of the autobiographical novel. They're my stories. And they're my stories which I, uh, hand out to each of the three musicians who were my characters, patterned loosely after Norm Simpson from Massachusetts and Ray Warren from Georgia, the real buddies. They are -- they make my own record of the events and the stories and the episodes of my Army career in the CBI.

Interviewer: I guess what we're asking here, what we need is for you to tell something rather than a narrative than you just told, tell us something personal that you, about that trip. Tell us, I was standing next to somebody, or something stands out--

Edward Lueders: On the ship itself?

Interviewer: Yes.

Edward Lueders: What stands out, uh, well, I'll pick this. When you went to the mess hall in the middle of the ship, there were two meals a day. One late morning, the other mid-afternoon. Um, and you had to form chow lines, came over the speakers, "Come to form chow lines for the first meal," or for the second meal, if that was it. And you did. And the chow lines started on the deck. Actually, started down -- but by the time you got in it, the line was already formed from the mess Hall and what was the Navy term for it, I can't remember -- all the way snaking through the entrails of the ship up to the deck entrance. And you'd get in line and then you'd have to follow it as you proceeded till you got to this small area which people were actually being fed in. You get your tray and you move it along and the port guys on KP would slop it on your tray and you know, you'd move along. And then stand up, uh, on poles with little round tables on the poles and you'd stand around that and eat your, whatever the slop was, and uh, that's

disrespectful of Navy food, I know, but it usually felt like that. And then you'd, uh, go past the inevitable big barrels with boiling water and dump the trash out, and then boiling water be on your way, and you would exit at a low level on to the deck which was closest to the water. And then you would go on the outside back up to where ever you wanted to go above. Well that exit, after you've been in the middle, into the outside world after you'd been maybe the better part of an hour in the chow line, and then that relatively short line eating and getting out, was like coming out of a life in a cavern and suddenly the world above ground. And yet, the motion which from the main deck would be passive. At that point, you'd see the wash of water going past the hull. And, I am building up to a moment in my own experience that I had almost every time I emerged from the chow line over thirty days. I'd take a moment by the rail there, and have an urge to go overboard. A controllable urge, but the urge that made me wonder if the man overboard hadn't done what I -- in, the passing impulse -- hadn't done, uh, but had the impulse to do. It's somehow punctuated this, uh, when we did have the man overboard situation, in a very personal way, how easy it would be somehow for a soldier, maybe -- what would be the motivation? Could it have been somebody who fell overboard by mistake? Was there a tussle between two guys in an argument that, uh, one of them went overboard? Or was it voluntary? Somehow a suicidal impulse given at a moment, whatever background might bring you to that.

Interviewer: A "Dear John."

Edward Lueders: Yeah. All of us fearful, at some level, of all of our hopes that had built up over years of what awaited us when and if we survived the war. Uh, there's this hidden drama, I think, in every GI life in World War II, and I must suppose in every war situation -- what comes after. And so, I felt that center for my novel was a keystone for all the possibilities that I could write in to what was really a memoir in novelistic form. And it is what the artist in me or the

(inaudible) or the English Professor, uh, to turn it in to literature if I could, rather than simply a memoir. And I'm still doing that.

Elizabeth: I'm good.

Interviewer: That was fabulous.