



Leslie G. Lund

United States Army Air Corps

Sergeant

Pacific Theater

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Interviewer:
Rick Randle

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Rick: Tell us where you grew up and your early life up to December 7th.

Leslie: It was very uneventful. I went through all of the local schools here in Salt Lake. My good friend lived just across the street from me was born on December 7th and we were planning a party and we were all together that morning and I for one didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was. I was seventeen.

Rick: What high school were you going to?

Leslie: West High. Most of my friends were older than me so as soon as they were able to they enlisted into various branches of the service and I tried to when I turned eighteen then I found out I was color blind so they wouldn't take me in the navy or the marines. So I just waited until they drafted me and went up to Fort Douglas. They loaded me on a truck and sent me out to Kearns and stuck me in the army air corp.

Rick: So this was right out of high school?

Leslie: Yes. I graduated in June and in July I was in the army in 1943.

Rick: Tell us what Fort Douglas was like at that time and give us a detailed description of camp Kearns.

Leslie: I don't remember much about Fort Douglas. I went up there and took a physical. I only spent three days there. It was in a wooden building. None of the brick buildings were used for the recruits. They shipped me out of there, and I can't say that much about it.

Rick: Did they have that circular drive at Fort Douglas with the homes with sandstone foundations?

Leslie: Yes, I believe so. They still had barns and equipment there for mules and horses.

Rick: Then tell us your experience at Camp Kearns in detail.

Leslie: When I first got there they asked for anybody who had been in the ROTC and I had been. I was also the tallest one in the squad so they put a little medal corporate stripes on my helmet. From then on I was a cadet corporal. It kept me out of going on KP. When the rest of the group was on KP I was on fire watch. I'd spend the night walking around watching those wooden barracks. And that was the only time I really spent on the base. I was allowed to go home every night and since I lived in Salt Lake I did. I had a car and drove it back and forth most of the time. Part of the time I rode on the gray-line bus. I spent a lot of the mornings half asleep because I never got onto the base until the last minute, which was about 1 o'clock. I'd get up at five and start doing close-ordered drill, and I got to where I could march in my sleep.

Rick: Were there very many other soldiers who went off base to sleep and live?

Leslie: There were quite a few. The ones who lived in Salt Lake, (it seemed like most of my friends came from Cedar City and St. George, and quite a few came up there from Texas), they didn't have the opportunity to get off base like I did. They didn't have a place to go every night.

Rick: Describe what Camp Kearns was like.

Leslie: It was pretty dry and dusty and hot. I went out there in July and August and the first part of September and it was the hottest part of the year. It was as hot as it could be, and opening the barrack windows was the only air-conditioning you got a night. It was pretty windy so you got a lot of ventilation that way. It was just basic training and marching. We had wooden rifles to train with, except when we went to the rifle range, and they'd issue a rifle to take. They had obstacle courses that ran around the perimeter of the base that they'd take us over frequently. When we went on longer marches we'd go off base and head out mostly west. There was nothing out there but wheat fields. We never did get out as far as Magna. You were just out there in wheat fields and weed patches and just wherever the DI decided you were going to go.

Rick: Was it an eight-week basic training?

Leslie: I think it was eight weeks, yes.

Rick: 5600 West is where I'm thinking. Westridge golf course is to the west of there. Is that where the Kearns camp was?

Leslie: We marched out that way, yes. I don't know how far the fence was around the camp. I remember marching out (hiking out) in that area. There were warehouses where the railroad spur came in. All the supplies came in there. The rifle range was about where Kearns high school is now, maybe a little further west than that. They trained us with carbines. We shot frequently there and I was a pretty good shot because I spent a lot of my young life with a rifle.

Rick: That was the M1 carbine.

Leslie: I don't know if they called it an M1, but it was a carbine, yes. Occasionally one of them would wear whatever it was that wore out on it and it would turn into a full automatic.

Rick: Tell us about that rifle range. Did they have somebody in the pit up there waving a red flag if you missed and a number if you hit the target?

Leslie: They did. The targets pulled up in the air. You'd have one guy down on the ground, and he had a red flag. For every miss they'd wave that maggie's drawers across the front of the target.

Rick: That's what they called it? (laughs)

Leslie: And for a hit they'd put up a small bulls-eye-sized marker and cover the spot where the bullet hit.

Rick: And that's how you knew if you were good or bad or what have you?

Leslie: Ya.

Rick: Tell us about the other part of Camp Kearns. Was there a second section of people waiting to be shipped overseas?

Leslie: When I was out of basic training, I don't remember anybody but as far as I was concerned they were all there for basic training. I don't remember any segregated section of Kearns. I really couldn't tell you.

Rick: After your eight weeks of basic training, what happened?

Leslie: There was a railroad station there and they put us on a troop train and pulled us off on the sighting somewhere for a day and a half, then hooked us up to a train and headed east.

Rick: The railroad station was right at the camp?

Leslie: Yes, in Kearns.

Rick: When you were getting ready to ship out, you stayed there at that sighting for a day and a half?

Leslie: No, they pulled us out of Kearns, but they stuck us on a sighting somewhere where I don't know and left us sitting there until they had a train, I suppose.

Rick: It wasn't in Ogden was it?

Leslie: No, it didn't go that far. It just got us off base maybe five or ten miles, and we sat and then we headed east. We went through Denver. I ended up in Madison, Wisconsin to a radio school. From radio school we went onto another troupe train in Chanute field, Illinois to a radar school. Then from Chanute field to Boca Raton, Florida to another radar school. And from Boca Raton they finally gave me a 10-day leave of absence. I came home to Salt Lake and spent my ten days, and went back to Boca Raton. The next day I got on a train, went back to Salt Lake, and took my overseas training there, which was at Kearns. It was about the same as basic training. They had us run the obstacle course on the track and then I was a sergeant at that time so they gave me a crew of guys and some paint and brushes and we went out and painted an obstacle course. And that was my overseas training.

Rick: Was it in a different area than your basic?

Leslie: No, it was in the same area, which wasn't very far from the theatres, which I'd been in before.

Rick: They had two theatres out there on the base? Do you recall the names of them?

Leslie: No I couldn't. I probably saw one or two movies. While I was there for basic training I was still able to go home every night, so I did.

Rick: So how long did you spend there the last time?

Leslie: The second time was about two weeks.

Rick: Did you eventually get shipped overseas?

Leslie: Yes. We went to Seattle and boarded a ship and went to Honolulu, Hawaii. I was based at Hickham field for a while, and they moved us on out from there to catch up with our outfit that we were assigned to in Guam.

Rick: This is after the Americans had occupied Guam and taken it, right?

Leslie: Yes.

Rick: At Camp Kearns do you remember John Agar and Dean Martin?

Leslie: No. I remember one of the other big-time singers. It wasn't Dean Martin. I saw this one singer that was based there and he wore an officer pink uniform, but he wasn't an officer, he was an enlisted man. But he wore tailored clothing. I never heard him entertain anybody.

Rick: Do you remember his name?

Leslie: It seemed like it was Tony Bennett, but I'm not really sure.

Rick: Any other experiences dealing with Camp Kearns that you'd like to share; any hardships or funny things that occurred there?

Leslie: The only funny thing was one of my drill instructors when I was doing basic training. I told you I spent a lot of sleepless nights. One day he turned the rest of the platoon off in another direction and he let me march off by myself and had all the rest of them follow me to see how far I'd war before I woke up.

Rick: So you were in a daze, and the platoon went one direction and you went another?

Leslie: I was out in front. I was the tallest in the squad, so I was squad leader, so they let me walk off by myself.

Rick: Any guys from out of state that complained about desert training?

Leslie: Ya. A lot of guys from Texas were complaining about it and I thought that was odd because it's probably hotter in Texas than it was in Kearns. They'd complain about the dust and general heat. It was pretty hot.

Rick: After you left Boca Raton, getting shipped back to Utah was a nice thing for you wasn't it?

Leslie: It was. But I didn't get to stay home every night. I had to get back to the base every night. The night before we left we were told we were leaving the next day and they had already taken our class A uniforms away from us. And in order to get a pass out of the gate you had to have a class A uniform. So the sergeant who was in charge there knew that I lived there and I asked him for a pass, and he said he couldn't give me one but he had a pad of signed passes in his desk drawer and if I could figure out how to get a class A blouse to wear out the gate, he'd turn his back. So I got a pass out of the desk and I paid a guy a dollar to borrow his jacket, put it on and went home and told everybody goodbye.

Rick: You went on a troop ship over to Guam?

Leslie: I went to Hawaii first.

Rick: What was it like going over on the troop ship?

Leslie: It was awful. It was a converted liner of some sort. It had bunks in it that were stacked and they folded up against the wall during the day and they'd drop them down at night. They were laced canvas and every day and night it stretched further and further until they were hanging down inside the framework inside of them.

Rick: How many deep were they?

Leslie: Probably seven or eight. If you turned over you could bump the guy with your shoulder in the bunk above you and troops on the ship were terribly sick. I've never seen so many sick people in my life. I never did get seasick. I was lucky. But seeing that many guys sick was enough to turn you anyway, and it was a long, slow trip.

Rick: How long did it take you to get there?

Leslie: We were out a long time. We had a blimp that followed us most of the way just as an escort. There wasn't any convoy. This blimp stayed with us until we were almost there and it seemed like we were on the ship for maybe ten days.

Rick: Was there a threat of submarine activities?

Leslie: Yes, and every time they'd think they were seeing a sub they'd make us all go below decks.

Rick: Would they zig-zag?

Leslie: Yes, they were zig-zagging all of the time. They'd make everybody go below deck for a submarine scare.

Rick: How long were you in Hawaii before you got to Guam?

Leslie: I was in Hawaii for November, December and part of January.

Rick: And you went over to Guam by boat?

Leslie: Yes, then we went further south. We didn't go straight to Guam though. We went to another island and they formed up a big convoy there, then we went to Guam. Actually that was after Guam. There were only two or three ships that went from Hawaii to Guam, and we went to Saipan first and unloaded, then to Guam. We had to unload on those cargo nets where you climb down into a smaller boat and go ashore on that. Then they flew us from Saipan to Guam, which was probably a forty-minute flight.

Rick: What were your duties after you got to Guam?

Leslie: That's where I was in an 11th bomb group and they had B-24's and I was a radar mechanic. We took them out of the planes, worked on them in the shop, reinstalled and tested them, and that was it.

Rick: Did you hear anything about the atomic bomb or anything prior to it being dropped?

Leslie: No, but we knew something was going on because the B-29's came. There was a group of us that flew over just to examine these monstrous airplanes.

Rick: That was the first time you had seen a B-29?

Leslie: Yes. It was a big airplane compared to the B-17's and B-24s.

Rick: Were you on Guam when the atomic bomb dropped?

Leslie: No, I was on Okinawa. Our planes bombed Iwo jima almost every day and night. They bombed it constantly until they invaded it. After the invasion started then we started to pack up camp and got ready to move. We then moved to Okinawa.

Rick: You weren't part of the invasion force?

Leslie: No. That's when they made of the big convoy to go into Okinawa.

Rick: Tell us about your experiences on Okinawa and leading up to the end of the war.

Leslie: It's not very interesting. It was routine. We maintained radar equipment and once in a while make a flight.

Rick: Were there any Japanese that hadn't surrendered yet?

Leslie: Yes, there were some on Guam too.

Rick: Were they snipers?

Leslie: We had a few scares where they had been through the camp. There were some marines based there and they went up into the North end of the island and chased them out of caves. Occasionally someone would want to go with them, and they'd take them with.

Rick: Tell us what you remember about VJ day.

Leslie: I got a night picture of that at home. The sky was full of tracers. (Okinawa) It was the night after they'd dropped the bomb. They'd told us that they'd dropped an atomic bomb, which I didn't understand. I just knew it was a super bomb. That night was when the tracers went off. It sounded like everything on the island was shooting. I'm sure somebody got hurt. You couldn't help it with all of that stuff in the air.

Rick: What was going through your mind?

Leslie: I was as glad as I could be. It really made me think that the war was about over. I was surprised when they didn't surrender after the first one.

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I figured that when they dropped the atomic bomb that the war was over, but I was really happy with the thoughts of getting back home and like I say, that night they fired all of these tracers into the air and filled with sky with them. Everybody was firing up in the air. That didn't happen after the second bomb went.

Rick: So that was even before VJ day?

Leslie: Yes, that was when the first bomb was dropped. There was a big celebration all over.

Rick: Were the ships out on the dock shooting anything?

Leslie: It was hard to see where they were coming from. You just knew anything that had tracers in it would be shooting up in the air.

Rick: You eventually were sent back to the U.S. after Okinawa.

Leslie: Yes, after they broke us up they put us in different engineer groups and things like that just to kill time. We loaded up on a ship and headed for home. We were still in sight of Okinawa and we had mechanical trouble. We twisted a screw or something on the ship and so we sat there for another five days in water bobbing around. I got home on January 6th.

Rick: Tell us about the harbor.

Leslie: We came into San Francisco under the Golden Gate Bridge. I know there was a ship that came out to meet us that had a whole bevy of beautiful girls on it waving at us and hollering. They were blowing the ship's whistle. We pulled on in there and transferred onto a smaller ship and went further up the river into Fort Ord. A couple days later we got on a train and came to Fort Douglas. We were there for a day and a half, and I was out.

Rick: Tell us about what you were thinking when you went under that Golden Gate Bridge.

Leslie: (pauses, emotional) That was just unreal! I was just glad to be home! It was a beautiful sunny day.

Rick: You appreciated the United States a lot?

Leslie: Yes I did.

Rick/Liz: Describe to me the obstacle course at basic training.

Leslie: There were walls that you had to climb. There was a rope climb. You had to go up a rope and onto a platform and come down off of there mostly on a ladder, jumping half way. It wasn't too high to climb, but easy to get back down. You'd jump into nice soft sand. They had low fences that you had to vault over. They had poles lined across ponds. You had to cross those like a tightrope across logs. Part of it was crawling underneath barbed wired. You had to get down on your belly and scoot along to prevent from getting hung up in the barbed wire.

Rick/Liz: How long does it take to get through an obstacle course?

Leslie: Really not long. They expect you to make it pretty fast. You run as fast as you can go when you're usually carrying a pack and it's a load.

Rick: I've heard stories where you had to crawl under barbed wire with live ammo over the top. Did you have that experience? **Leslie:** Never did.

Liz/Rick: Did guys talk about recreating in Salt Lake City?

Leslie: We went down there a lot to go dancing at the Coconut Grove. There was another little dance place. We also went out to Salt Air a lot. The old Salt Air train was running then. It was a big resort and a lot of big name bands came out there. Black rock beach was open. That was my beach of choice. That was about the recreation.

Rick: Was Lagoon open in those days?

Leslie: Yes it was, but it wasn't as popular with me as Salt Air, but there were plenty of things going on there.

Liz/Rick: Can you describe the atmosphere of the city streets when the soldiers were down there? Was it crawling with GI's at that time?

Leslie: There were a lot of soldiers on the street. Even the ones that were on leave were required to wear uniforms at all times. So there were a lot of soldiers on the street, and a lot of people resented it. It was the same way in Hawaii. There were more sailors than army there and the Hawaiian people weren't all that happy to have us there. At least I didn't feel they were.

Soldiers were resented because I think they had too many GI's there in their territory and faces. It would be normal to not like it.

Rick: Were you single at the time?

Leslie: Yes

Rick: Which was better to date girls, Salt Lake or Hawaii?

Leslie: Salt Lake! Hawaii was crowded. There were probably more sailors and GI's there than there were civilians but Salt Lake wasn't that way. Salt Lake was filled with pretty girls, always has been.

Rick: Leslie, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with us.

Rick: