



Andy Landforce Oral History Interviews, June 28, 2013

Title

“The End of the War and Returning Stateside”

Date

June 28, 2013

Location

Veteran's Lounge, Memorial Union, Oregon State University.

Summary

In interview 4 Landforce provides further detail on his unit's support role during the Battle of the Bulge. From there he discusses his company's movement into the Pacific theatre, including movement ashore in the Philippines and preparations for landing in Japan. The remainder of the interview is devoted to the conclusion of the war, Landforce's discharge from the armed forces and his return to civilian life.

Interviewee

Andy Landforce

Interviewers

Mike Dicianna, Debora Landforce

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/landforce/>

Transcript

Andy Landforce: And the dog and the cat goes off and takes a nap. [Laughter] But I think I'll postpone it. No, but you know, it's interesting. A lot of my friends, my peer group, take naps.

Debora Landforce: Yes.

AL: I don't have time for naps.

Mike Dicianna: [Laughs]

DL: I know.

MD: I make time for my nap.

DL: [Laughs] Yeah, seriously.

MD: That's a big deal for me.

DL: Nothing wrong with a nap now and then.

MD: Okay, so you have it kicked on. Okay, so we're going to restart our interview after a wonderful lunch, and a tour around campus, the old Poling Hall where Andy spent four years here, from 1938 to 1942.

But when we left off, we were finishing the Battle of the Bulge, where your unit supplied General Patton. Now, I understand that your unit crossed into Germany as the troops advanced. And, do you remember how you guys, how your unit got into Germany, where they entered Germany at?

AL: No, I don't. I don't remember how we—at that time, for some reason, I wasn't paying attention to boundaries. I think I had a full assignment to carry out assignments we had, and we—because we spread out. When you send their platoon out one place, and you—I was doing the best I could to keep track of everything. So, I don't remember when we moved into Germany. And someplace along there—for some reason, I remember Munich. I wonder if that was close to the end of the war. I think I was in Ulm, Germany, when the war ended, but for some reason I remember Munich better.

MD: Now, we had related to us a story about, they were selecting locations for submissions, and you went in with three other commanders and sat down, and those other commanders didn't make it.

AL: Well, the battalion would hold periodic meetings of company commanders to issue out the assignments. Yes, and I remember walking—coming in a little late, and there was one chair left. I sat down in that chair, and I'm here today because I sat down there, and not to the fellow to my right. The fellow to my right, and the captain on my next, those two lost their lives, and a number of soldiers, in interdiction fire at night. Because we did a lot of movement at night to keep from the surveillance from aircraft. But interdiction fire is when you have crossroads—a main road, and then you have another road coming on that you might turn right or left on. And so, on this one occasion, where the ADH—the flares went in first, and then the ADH come in and hit mobbing—cannon fire. And so, the company commander there was killed on that one, and the next fellow over. So if I'd have sat down in his place, I'd have been, probably, at that crossroad. Then I was at another one later where I escaped, but I lost a number of men in my company. When the lights came on, I jumped for the ditch. I ran for the ditch, and I beat a soldier, one of my men—the driver. I beat the driver to the ditch because we went to the right. He jumped on my top and he took a shrapnel right through the middle of his body, and so I'm—I was here just a little faster. But anyway, and that's—those things come to mind once in a while, but. So, I'm fortunate that—think about the luck, walking in and there was one chair left.

MD: Otherwise?

AL: Yeah.

MD: You wouldn't be here. So, the war ends in Ulm, Germany, in March of 1945. Tell us about your feelings at the end, V-E Day, Victory in Europe, with the celebration. What celebration?

AL: [0:05:02] We got the news. I got the news, company commander, then we held a company meeting, where this time I announced it, and everybody was just elated. I mean, I'm going home, I'm going to see the old—and so on, and so forth. But, when they disbursed back to their trucks and so on, you got a weapon with you, and one of the ways to celebrate is to shoot. And I got out of there real quick. Now, I jumped in my Jeep and got out of the way. Within, under Eisenhower's command, officers could drive. Under MacArthur's command, you couldn't; you had to have a chauffeur. So, I just went out—I don't remember where I went—for a while, and come back and it was all called down. The war was over, and that's when we had some disciplinary problems. But we handled them. Sergeant Coleman anticipated them, and we handled them, and then my company was elected, out of the battalion, to go to the southwest Pacific.

MD: How was the feeling of your men? They thought they were going home, and now they're going to the Pacific.

AL: We got a lot of resentment—a lot of resentment. And Sergeant Coleman handled disciplinary problem after disc—in other words, he sent the men to me. He'd explain to me what they've done, and so on and so forth, and then I would explain what disciplinary—we took freedom away from them. However, I remember the orders come down to move, and so we moved to Marseilles, France, for a port of deportation for the southwest Pacific.

MD: Now, were there a number of the trucking companies like you, that ended up getting shipped to the Pacific theater?

AL: So far as I know, I was the only company. I was the only company. Because we got on a ship there, and went to Mediterranean, the Rock of Gibraltar, the Atlantic, down through this—the Panama Canal, the Solomon Islands, New Guinea. We ended up in the Philippines. Yeah.

MD: Now, I understand that you, you guys went ashore in Lingayen Bay in the Philippines?

AL: In the Philippines, yeah.

MD: Now, was that part of an invasion, or was that just basically a landing?

AL: As I remember, it was basically a landing. However, there were Japanese people that were occupying the area, so there was a danger there may be some firing. And Sergeant Coleman painted my face—got me to paint my face black, and dress in uniform like everybody. So as we went—I don't remember now getting off of a landing craft, or how we got into a ship from there, but I remember wading into shore, and remember, "Hey, this water's shallow, and isn't very cold." And so we got in, and then we got—we waited. I don't think we waited overnight. But then we got into trucks, and it's a long ways from Lingayen down to Manila. I don't remember where we spent the first night. But the assignment was to be at Novaliches, which is out of Manila, where we bivouacked, with the tents and everything, training for the third wave on—on Japan.

MD: So, that must have been quite a shock, going from the cold and rain and snow of Europe to the tropics.

AL: And when you think about—when I think about, we're changing uniforms as we came in. I think we changed uniforms in Panama, because we were in the Panama Canal for quite a while. And we got into sun tents, and changed clothes. And all of the clothes I had, it goes into the Army, and I've often wondered what happened to it, all of the different sizes, "You're bigger than I am. I'm pretty small," and so on. But it was issue, Army issue.

MD: Yeah, because you got clothes as you needed them, wasn't it? They just issued you?

AL: Right. Yeah.

MD: Now your time in Manila, did you—did you and your men get a chance to experience the Philippines, to be able to see things there? What was your experience in the Philippines?

AL: [0:10:02] Well, Novaliches is a rice-growing area out of Manila, and banana-growing area. And you till the field, your rice patties, with oxen, these, I don't remember, but big animals. And children would ride the backs of these big

animals as they were pulling, cultivating the ground for growing rice. We got our laundry done—there was a river that was close by—by taking it to Philippine ladies, who took it down and dumped it in the water, then beat it on rocks, to beat it out. So, when you have a wet garment and you hit it with a bat or something else, it knocks the water out. And it was warm; it was warm country. But I had a tent with a big—a pretty good-sized tent, with sleeping quarters in it. And I elected to stay on a cot rather than have a basket in the air.

MD: [Laughs]

DL: [Laughs]

AL: But anyway, so, our daily routine then was in the morning until about 10:30 or 11, and then we'd have a space in the afternoon, in the heat of the weather. And Coleman did a marvelous job, because when you have idle men, you would have some problems. And he settled—when the men got irritated with each other and got into fights, he settled it all up. He did not come to me with it. And yet, I don't remember how we were able to avoid real serious problems. And then when, when the war was over, oh, dear. I remember being in the tent, laying there, and the perspiration was gathering in the britches here, and in comes a Jeep. And the driver sat there, and a second lieutenant handed me the note. The war was over. This was 1945. I had forgotten the month, myself, now. And the war was over, and General MacArthur had accepted this, the war finishing. And I thought, "Hot dog! I've made it home. I'm alive." When I gave the note to Sergeant Coleman, and I didn't—I waited until after lunch, but I'm the only one in the company who knew the war was over, because I didn't want to disturb him from his lunch and a little break. And this was his instructions—now, under MacArthur, you couldn't drive a Jeep yourself. When I gave him these, the war was over, he said, "Captain, sir, you get in that Jeep and get out of here, and if you can, don't come back until tomorrow." Well, so I jumped in the Jeep, threw in my sleeping bag, and I didn't come back until tomorrow. I understand they shot up a lot of ammunition in celebration.

And then, with orders right away, my company became port clearance for Manila, so then as the company commander, I became the commanding officer for port debarkation for the United States, which I didn't have to determine which company, which unit went first. All I had to do was communicate with the company commander, and line up the different jobs that we had. But I had three platoons that worked with me in setting things up. So we shipped the people out, and finally our turn came.

MD: Now, is this when you were promoted to major?

AL: I wasn't promoted to major until after, at the time of separation.

MD: Oh, okay.

AL: Yeah. Yeah, and we saw some of the—I was going to go through my military record so I would be better with dates and time, but I got swamped with this. So I did; I read the orders where I was to become a major. But anyway, but that was in—but my separation was Camp Beals, and I'm separated from the service on June the 19th, 1946—no, yeah, yeah. 1946, yeah. [0:15:14]

MD: Yeah, because the war ended basically at the end of the—

AL: I think it was May 15th.

MD: So it would have taken you to get across the ocean. Now, when you were processing your men out, you said that they left before you, most of your troops?

AL: Yes.

MD: Actually left before you. Was Sergeant Coleman with you 'til the end?

AL: Sergeant Coleman was with me right up to the end, in San Francisco, that was the port of separation for my troops. But I had received these other messages, so I was still active in the service. And that was another decision. But as we parted, one of the things that I think sticks in my mind so strong to this day, Sergeant Coleman handled everything very beautifully, and when he came out from the door, walked across the dock, I had a 3-to-5 card in my pocket, two of them.

And I said, "Sergeant Coleman, you are one of the greatest men I have ever met, and a great leader. I would love to have you meet my family. I want my family to meet you. Here is my permanent address. And here I would like to have you point out—uh-oh, excuse me. I would like to have you point out, and give me your address in Chicago." And he looked up at me, and he said, "Captain, sir, I never want to see you again. You are white. I am black. And if you came to me in Chicago, and if my family saw me talking to you, I would lose respect."

This is in 1946, by a man who, unbelievably, was able to not socialize with me. We never got familiar. And then he laid it out; he knew me pretty well. He says, "Captain, sir, you's not very intelligent, but you're smart. And you are one of the finest officers that I have served under." Isn't that amazing? But when you, can you think about character, and you think about determination, and you think about that composure to be a real leader, I felt numerous kinds of respect. The blessing of respect for this man, the way he handled all kinds of—the way he handled me, it was just one of the big memories of the service, was handling, was the influence this man has left on me, on being a leader, and being an administrator. Yeah.

MD: And you never saw him again?

AL: Never saw him again. Never saw any of the men in my company. Never did, and had he been [unclear], I would love to have him meet my family so my family could meet him. But anyway, that's war. And so, I—I just wish everybody could know the man behind that face, that color is just another phase in human, in animal development. Yeah.

MD: Your experiences in World War II are unique in the fact that you, you know, did have this—this whole racial component, on top of the horrors of war. And that's why, you know, your story is so important. One of the things that always is in the back my mind, wondering about, what were your feelings when you walked through the door and saw your wife again? Homecoming?

AL: Okay. She met me at San Francisco, on the dock. And she come walking with a white blouse on her. And I thought, "Holy cow! That's my wife? She's beautiful." But she's a more beautiful person than, besides being a beautiful person. [0:20:01] And that was a very profound effect on both of us. And she, again, had a personality like Sergeant Coleman—very calm, very mature, analyzing facts and figures, and you don't let your emotions run away with you too much. You'll get the full mileage out of them. And that started 69 years of good living. Yeah.

MD: One of the things that I wanted you to have the opportunity to do is, you said that you didn't want to glorify war in this interview, and I do believe that we have gotten the true feeling of your experience. But is there anything that you would really like to add, any further thoughts about your experiences in World War II, or you know, during that whole period during your life? We'll just let you kind of let you go, as far as what you feel is important to give to the youth of tomorrow.

AL: What's important? Oh, peace. What's important to me is: the human being, regardless of the color of your skin, is capable of feeling sorry and wanting to help a baby when it cries. We have that kind of compassion built into human beings. And when you come to this point, which hit me a number of times, where we are selected by men, other people that I never met ordered me into the war, and ordered me in to kill people to defend your country.

MD: Yes.

AL: I remember that and then we walked on with those swords and the rest of those things, and I had set up a room in Lawton. We then went from there to Arkansas for our honeymoon. I like to bass fish, and so we rented a boat on a little lake and we went around bass fishing, and we never caught a thing – wrong time of the day. We came back, and then we had to return to Fort Sill. But there at Fort Sill, she got a job in an airplane factory sewing fabric together for the curtains in planes and things like that.

I sit here, where the government has spent thousands of dollars on my ammunition, not only from field artillery, but I practiced a lot with the company. And I actually look at people for their qualities of good leadership, good morals, good character, and a spirit of living, and liking it. And so when I come away from the war, time after time when I see violence and so on, my feeling is no, no, no! Aren't we more humane than this? And my gratefulness to be alive trumps almost everything else now, and has for a long time.

And think, hey, when are we going to have leadership in this world, if ever, where we would respect the mother and the father? Because to me the problems of the world end up with mothers and fathers not training their youngsters. Having a degree in wildlife management, every living, warm-blooded animal in the world, when they give birth to their young, they definitely devote their life to being sure to prepare this young person, this young baby, my offspring, to step out in the world and make a living. And we, with our nervous system and capabilities, we should have a time in life when we have the medical opportunities, the communication opportunities—we ought to be the happiest warm-blooded animal on earth, all of the time.

And that's kind of some of my summary for having lived through the war, is a gratefulness to be alive today, and my feelings that our country really needs us to be parents, better parents. Look at all of the unhappiness. Look at all the happiness that we miss by not being parents, and allowing ourselves to enjoy being parents. Anyway, that kind of ends up my feelings on the war.

MD: Why don't we fix the microphone now. As we did before our first day of interview, with Deb has got some items that she's heard all of her life, and perhaps wants to make sure it gets included in this interview. And so I'd open the floor to your daughter.

DL: [Laughs]

MD: For any questions that she would like to answer.

DL: So Dad, I know after the war you had an opportunity to stay in the military.

AL: [0:25:01] Oh, yes.

DL: And you and Mom made a decision to move into civilian life.

AL: Yes.

DL: So I think that's interesting, how you did that with Mom. Would you mind sharing that part?

AL: Okay. Yes, this is a big decision in life. My first reaction was when I got promoted. Hot dog! I'm away from common labor. I'm going to have pressed pants and shined shoes from now on, and I'm going to make a good living. I don't have to go into the gold mines or anything. And as we're riding home, and I pop this up to Evelyn, and I'm quite enthusiastic about having a good future in the military with me, we came to the point where she says, "Andy, I need to express my feelings on this. The war is over, and I do not want to be a military wife, and go from place to place like we have gone to, and be ordered around. I want to live in the northwest, and with your degree and mine," because I put her through college after she—when I went overseas, "we will have enough. We will have enough. I would like to have a home with some flowers, and neighbors, and maybe we can have children." This was her goal and destination.

And she controlled our family. She influenced our family, to where, when she passed away February the 4th, 19—2012, she had reached her destination, because she had managed her life like a river. A river knows where its destination, right from the beginning, and it knows how to get there. Running water never gets tired; you keep going. And so we end up with a family of three children, three grown men and women, all as different as night and day, all with opinions, all with feelings, but we follow some guideposts for hers. One of them is, like we've mentioned before, don't make statements when you are emotionally wrought up or mad. Have composure. When you have a difference, excuse yourself, but keep class, and keep your honor in yourself. Come back later; come back later. And then the other one: there's no crime in having a difference of opinion, like I mentioned before. The fault lies in bitterness and controversy. We followed through that very well. Then I had three children that followed our life, as that we are going to—every day we are going to do our best, and cope with the rest. And when she passed away knowing her family was there, she knew she was a loved woman. She had her children. We have our beautiful home with flowers; and we have our nice neighbors. She had reached destination. And so, we are finding quite a bit of solace over that, to try to cope with the reality of her passing away.

DL: Thank you. Thank you for going over that, because I'm glad that we had the lifestyle we did. I think that was a good choice for you and Mom, that you made. And another piece that I'm always curious about, during your time in the war,

was the communications with home, with mom, with your parents. How did you get any word back and forth with the people in your life, when you were overseas?

AL: Communication was a critical part in your living, because when we got to Europe, and I wrote letters, they are censored. Your letters are censored. You wrote a letter, then I censored them for a lot in the company, but I was overwhelmed, so we got others to censor them for leaking military information. But I continued to write letters home, not very many; didn't have access to pencil, paper and stamps, and so on. I don't think I was assertive enough. But I write a few letters home, but not many, not many.

MD: Did you receive V-mail?

AL: [0:30:00] I received V-mail. And that was one of those emotional traumas in the company. How long do you go to a mail call, and have the letters passed out, and you don't get one? Day after day, nobody cares enough to write you a letter. It's a morale buster; it's a thing that you have to cope with. But in my case, I got letters every once—sometimes two—sometimes two because Evelyn would write to me. And there again, the letters did not leave me desperate to be with her; they were how things were going at home.

MD: Kind of a link with home?

AL: Yeah.

MD: Did you receive the *Oregon State Yank*?

AL: No, no.

MD: The magazine that—

AL: No I didn't, no.

MD: Because we've got copies of that. I'll make sure you get copies, so you can catch up with what you missed in 1944 and '45. The *Oregon State Yank*, it was put together by some women on campus here, and they communicated with Oregon State alumni that were overseas. So I will—like I say, I will make sure that you can read the *Oregon State Yank*, which you should have read in Germany in 1944.

AL: Right. Very thoughtful, and thank you.

DL: [Laughs] That's great!

MD: I think we have got.

DL: A couple more.

MD: As long as he's good, we're good.

DL: Okay, are you good for a couple more questions, Dad?

AL: Well, let's try it.

DL: Okay, so there's a couple of things that I always think were interesting, that when the men left for the war from Oregon State, I think I've heard that the women moved into fraternities, fraternity houses. Or, things changed on campus a lot.

AL: Yes.

DL: And I've always been curious for more detail. I know Mom and Midge, her cousin—did they both live in a fraternity? And how many years did they continue going to school while you were overseas? How did that timing work out?

AL: Evelyn moved into the Theta Chi fraternity.

DL: Okay.

AL: And when we got married, the agreement and the statement that Evelyn's mother made was that, "Now that you're married, Evelyn is your responsibility." So that's when I had part of my pay diverted over for her education. And so she graduated in June, 1946, but I didn't get here in time for it.

DL: Oh, uh-huh. So, then she graduated in June, and then shortly thereafter went to San Francisco to meet you?

AL: I don't remember the timing that well.

DL: Mm-hm.

AL: I don't remember the timing on that, because I cannot remember going to her graduation, but I remember her getting the degree. So we each had a degree, therefore we should be able to make a living that we'd have enough.

DL: Uh-huh. Okay.

AL: Yeah.

DL: And then after the men came back, did they come back, and a lot of men came back into the fraternities, and things went back to kind of how it was before?

AL: Yes. It took a while for transition to happen, because they didn't come back and go right to school right away, quite a few of them. But a lot of them came back to go to school.

DL: Mm-hm.

AL: But I don't remember the pulse of the campus at that time.

DL: Sure. Yeah, well you were graduated.

AL: Yeah, yeah.

DL: So, I guess my last thing would just be what it was like as you came back from the war, reintegrating in society? Because of course, you've had this very, very intense experience for many years. And so I guess, one of the questions would be what that was like for you, psychologically, to become a civilian again? And then also, the reception of other people to you, as having served in World War II and coming home? And maybe particularly Grandma and Grandpa, you know, Mom's parents? How did they feel about your service in the war? How did your own parents feel, and welcome you back? What were those years like, from having so much involvement in who you were in the military, to becoming, then, a professional in a different field?

AL: My feeling was cloudy. [0:35:00] Number one, there's, I'm back to searching for a job. And so I get my discharge served at Camp Meade, and I guess the desperation to get away from common labor dominated me quite a bit. Now, I've got to go out looking for a job. So my attitude was, "Hey Evie, let's go fishing first." [Laughs]

DL: [Laughs]

AL: And so she followed me back up to my folks' in Snoqualmie, Washington, and that beautiful moment we backpacked into Lake Calligan and Lake Hancock out of Seattle, Washington. And we went back there, and hanging over me: I've got to go to work. I've got to find a job, and so on. But I had applications here at Oregon State, and then with the Oregon State Game Commission, and then the National Park Service, and everywhere. And I couldn't get a goal. I couldn't line up on a target that I was headed for. I'm living off of you, and I am not capable—since you start making a living of a life for yourself, at that time, I wasn't capable of not wanting to provide my own way. That's what made it so difficult for Evelyn to be my wife for a while. I decided what car we was going to buy. I decided where, when I finally got a job, where I would—the house we would buy, where we would live and everything. And then when I finally did get a job, and still

was boss, still had everything, and to have your mother, when our oldest daughter was two years, about two years old—sit down and say—I bought the house, I put a new flooring in it—and say, "Andy, I'm tired of having to ask you for grocery money." That was a change in my life, a change in my attitude. And then when we sat down, "I want to have a husband, and you are a father, and you are missing life because you're work-eat-and-sleep. There is so much love and kindness in the world, and you are stepping by all of it. And I would like to have you be a father and a husband." And that's where we then started to talk about money, and she's handled it ever since. [Laughs] So.

DL: Well it's huge—I appreciate you sharing that, because it's a huge transition, until you're commanding hundreds of men all over Europe, and then coming back and trying to live with one other person in an entirely different environment. I do think, however, as I recall, that World War II veterans were, at least, respected and included in society. So I am sure people had a lot of pride in your service, and respect for you having served.

AL: Debbie, I can remember—you've awakened the feeling. When you saw and heard the compliments of being a veteran, "Thank you for serving your country," and so on, I felt time after time, "Oh, no. I made it. I was given a tour all through Europe and all of the way through here. Don't honor me with anything. I didn't really get into the thick of battle like an infantryman or the marines, and some of the others. I was support troops all the way through." And it felt kind of wrong to honor me too much as a veteran. I want it—oh, I want it to be for the fellows that had to step over a body and keep going. There's where I want to honor you for character, for determination, and for service to your country. But a person like me? I didn't think that I deserve much of the honor at the time. Well, I still don't. [Laughs]

DL: But others respected you for having served. I mean, didn't they?

AL: Others did.

DL: Mm-hm.

AL: And then we saw—Evelyn had a pin, "My husband's in the service." You know?

DL: Uh-huh.

AL: And so on. And I keep wondering why, the ribbons I got and my insignia, I only found the major insignia.

DL: Mm-hm.

AL: [0:40:00] So maybe Evelyn's got them someplace, because I didn't feel that my part in the war was that significant. But I guess if you didn't have ammunition or food, you did what was significant. [Laughs]

DL: [Laughs]

MD: That's very true, because, I mean, it was the support function of the military, and the Army runs on its stomach.

DL: Mm-hm.

MD: And that is just as important, and it sometimes gets overlooked. And that's why your history is another component of these oral histories that we're collecting about World War II veterans, because your story is unique, and it needs to be preserved because of—because of all of the things that you went through. And so that's why it's so important that we—because like I say, children, kids 50 years from now are going to be able to watch this interview with you, and understand more about some of the other parts of the conflict that they wouldn't get any other way.

AL: History repeats itself. George Washington said to his troops crossing the Potomac that you went to war on a full stomach. You had to have a full stomach to be a warrior. General Eisenhower comes to me in Charmes, France, and one of the first things the General of the Army says, "Did you have enough food?" One more time, we [laughs] have to have a stomach full of food to give us a positive feeling, and the courage, and the character to do what you are supposed to do.

MD: Here, here. Very good. This has been great. [0:41:54]