Lea, Luke Interview pt 1 5-11-95

[Speaker 2]
This is a conversation with Mr. Luke Lee at his home at 407 Westview in Nashville, Tennessee. The date is May 11, 1995. Now, Mr. Lee, will you tell me what your...

give your name and then tell me what your rank was at the time you... well, the time when you retired. Okay.

I'll hold the microphone.

[Speaker 1]
Okay. You want my name. My name is Luke Lee, 407 Westview Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee, 37205.

My telephone number is 615-292-1824. Now, you want my rank?

[Speaker 2]
Well, you are retired.

[Speaker 1]
Oh, I was discharged. I'm not retired. I was only in the service about eight years, and so I didn't retire.

I received an honorable discharge.

[Speaker 2]
I see. And what was your rank at the time you were discharged?

[Speaker 1]
I think my rank was captain, and you automatically get some kind of promotion when you retire or resign, and I think I ended up in as a major, but most of my rank in Japan was that of a captain.

[Speaker 2]
Uh-huh. Well, since I know nothing about you, I may ask some questions to find out some of these things, but I didn't know. I thought you were a career military man.

No, no. But you were not. No.

[Speaker 1]
I feel like a career military man because I spent about three years out in the Far East, so I feel like a career military man.

[Speaker 2]
Tell me about some of the circumstances then of your joining the service, and when was that?

[Speaker 1]

The Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, the way I remember it, was in December of 1941. I had been a draft classified as 3A, a 3, as I had a wife and children, and I wanted to join the service because my father had been in World War I as a colonel commanding the 114th Field Artillery and had served in Japan, that means had served in France, and I was always interested in our general service, and I wanted to join. And I was offered sometime in 1942, there was a boy that came here that interviewed people, and I was offered a captaincy then if I went into the service.

I told my father this, and he said as I knew nothing about military and wanted to go in, it would be better for me to ask my draft board to change my status so I could be drafted and go into the service. And this was done in 1942, and my draft board changed my, from a 3A classification to a 1A classification, and I was drafted and then went to Camp Forest down in Tallahoma, Tennessee, and then went to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where I was classified to go into the Air Force. And from Chattanooga, Tennessee, I was sent to the basic training center at Miami Beach, B.C. Basic Training Number 9 at Miami Beach. And I went through the basic training there, and I think that was about 17 weeks. And while there, I had applied for Officer's Candidate School, and I went to Officer's Candidate School at Miami Beach. And from there, after a short tour of my old squadron, I was sent to the Air Intelligence School at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

And I went to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1943. And in 1943, after graduating from the Air Intelligence School, I went to the Pentagon and to the A2 section at the Pentagon. But the Pentagon was so filled, our office started out over at Gravely Point, and we finally got into the Pentagon.

There, I worked on the Air-Ora battle in Yugoslavia and in the Mediterranean. And one day, the commanding officer of the A2 section that I was in, Colonel Bill Turner, asked me to go with him to Eglin Field in Florida. And we flew down in an old B-25 to Eglin Field to see the first firebombing of Japan.

And he and myself went up into a tower at one of the Eglin Field's installations and saw the first firebombing of a mock village in Japan that had been built there at Eglin Field. After that, I was indoctrinated by somebody who told me of the wonderful fire apparatus and protection that Tokyo had. And in the missionaries' talk, I'll tell you later about that, that proved to be a complete joke of the Japanese fire department that I ran into later in Tokyo.

So from there, I went to Colorado Springs in the A2 section of the 313th Wing of the 20th Air Force and was trained there. And we were sent to Portland, Oregon and went overseas by vessel. And then we went into Tinian.

And I was stationed in the A2 section in Tinian and would go over to Saipan very often and then to Guam. The 20th Air Force was under General Hansel. I think that's H-A-N-S-E-N.

I'm not sure. But we had not been able to destroy any portion of Japan. We hadn't been able to hit much in Japan, the truth must be known.

By the 29s, it was just starting. General Hansel was relieved by General Curtis LeMay. And I happened to be in Guam on the day that General LeMay came in.

I think I'm now talking about January of 1944. LeMay had been in Europe, and then he had been the commanding general of the 20th Air Force that was then stationed in India. But India was too far from Japan for the 29s to be able to hit Japan.

So General LeMay took over the 20th Air Force with headquarters in Guam. And I happened to be there that day, and one of his crew asked me, would I like to come down to Guam? And I said, yes.

And I was transferred from the A2 section of the 318th Wing to the A2 section of the 20th Air Force and served under General LeMay there. Now, I can tell you a little bit about the beginning of the destruction of Japan. On April 7, 1945, General LeMay called in for the pilots, co-pilots, bombardiers, and navigators of all the wings from Tinian and Saipan to come to Guam.

And he told them that there was going to be the firebombing of Japan and that the mission would be at 7,000 feet. I remember this briefing well because the pilots and co-pilots and crew made a lot of oohs and aahs. And General LeMay said that if he heard another ooh or aah, he was going to lead the mission himself and that the crews had nothing to worry about as the Japanese anti-aircraft was set for about 30,000 feet and this mission was going to be at 7,000 feet.

So this was the beginning of the real destruction of Japan. And that lasted for about five missions. There was a mission over Yokohama, another mission over Tokyo, another mission over Kobe, and then I think the last mission was over Nagasaki.

Every day, the strike photos would be developed at Guam and sent back by air to the headquarters in Washington. The headquarters in Washington did not believe their photos. So LeMay called me in, told me that he was sending me back with additional copies of the strike photos and said for me to brief the general staff about the destruction of Japan.

This was on April 12, 1945, because the flight I was on, we stopped in Honolulu, and that was the day that President Roosevelt died. So I continued my trip on into Washington, briefed the general staff, and then I returned on out to Guam. That took place again, as LeMay didn't have any confidence in the general staff interpretation of what was taking place.

So he leaved orders later and called a group of us officers in and said that he had received orders to pinpoint bombing in Japan. And he ridiculed that because all of the pinpoints that had been sent to him had been destroyed. But he picked out 14 officers to open the lead crew school at the Muroc Air Force Base.

It's now Edwards Field at Muroc. And he asked would I like to go back as the intelligence officer. I said I'd like to go back as the intelligence officer because there was a lot of difference between the intelligence officer and just an intelligence officer.

So I went back and was the intelligence officer of the lead crew school of the 20th Air Force. And we had crews that had had 25 missions over Europe and had 10 to 12 missions over Japan, came back for further indoctrination at Muroc Air Force Base. The war was winding

down very fast as Germany had surrendered, had been defeated, and I think that was in May.

I was still in Guam in May, but this took place, the best that I recollect, in June and July. The atomic bomb, which was one of our groups, had not been dropped by, I think that date was in August, the 8th and 9th, first into Hiroshima and then into Nagasaki. And that was the beginning of the end of World War II as far as fighting was concerned.

I think the peace actually was signed somewhere in September, September the 3rd, by General MacArthur. I was returned back to the States along with other people as I had sufficient points, more than sufficient points, to get out of the Army. I was actually in Boise, Idaho, being subject to discharge, and I'm now into November of 1945.

My father was sick, and I talked to Miss Percy, my stepmother and aunt, because my father had married her. She was the younger sister of my mother after my mother's death. And I talked to her every day and told her that I wanted to come back and see Colonel.

And she said that if I came back, why, he would be worried about himself and that I would probably upset him some because she thought that he was all right. I had a feeling that he was not all right and went up and told the people of Boise that I didn't have time to wait for my discharge, that I was going to Nashville as I had accumulated way too much leave being overseas, and that I'd be back in a few days. So I took a train from Boise, Idaho, to Nashville, and en route every junction, why the train stopped, why I called Nashville.

And I had a feeling at 6 o'clock the night he died, that he died that night, and then I got into Omaha at 8 o'clock and called, and they said that my father had died at 6 o'clock. So I came, I was en route to Nashville, and then two days later he was buried. And the babysitter who took care of the children while I was at the funeral told me when I returned that a Colonel McCormick from the Secretary of War's office had called and said, regardless of the time I got in, to call him at the Secretary of War's office.

So when I got back, I called Colonel McCormick, who had stayed after hours, to get my call and said he couldn't discuss what the Secretary of War, Mr. Patterson, wanted to discuss with me on the phone, but that they had sent a number one air priority for me to fly into Washington, and that they would change my orders when I got to Washington, which would cover the trip. But they would appreciate very much if I would come to Washington, be there at 9 o'clock the next morning to see the Secretary of War. Well, I hesitated a long time because there wasn't any way they could order me there.

So I decided that I would go, and I met the Secretary of War, Mr. Patterson, at 9 o'clock, and I think I'm now about November the 20th. That's 1945. And he said that he wanted to talk to me very confidentially and that if I didn't accept what he wanted to talk about, please never discuss it with anybody.

But if I accepted it, why, the country would appreciate it very much, and I thought I could contribute. He said that the present plans were to try the major Japanese war criminals like they had set up the same thing in Germany and were in the process of trying the major German war criminals in a trial, that Preston Truman had appointed a Mr. Joseph B. Keenan, who had been formerly a deputy district attorney and was a friend of Mr. Keenan's, to head

the mission to go to Japan, but that they needed a man who could get along with civilians, get along with the service, and that General MacArthur had accepted me after having turned down several other applications or suggestions that the secretary had sent to General MacArthur, but that General MacArthur would take me. And he said that I would never regret going to Japan. I asked him how long he thought that I'd be there, and he said three months.

That three months turned into three years. Anyway, I said that'll be all right with me, I'll do it, but I want to return by way of Nashville. Well, he said there are two plane loads of people waiting for you at San Francisco, and they can't take off till you get there and want you to be out there immediately.

But anyway, we compromised, and I came by Nashville, told my family goodbye, and went on out, met in San Francisco, and the operations officer told me how glad he was to see me as he had two C-54s there all ready to be loaded, and these civilians were driving him crazy. So we start out from San Francisco and fly into Hawaii, which I'd gone through several times before, of course. And the governor, I guess, of Hawaii entertained us there that day while we were waiting for the civilians to get over their flight into Hawaii.

So we took off the next day and flew nonstop into Tokyo. We landed at the old airport there about 9 o'clock at night, and Tokyo was far in the distance, about 20 miles. But we get in, and Mr. Keenan and myself are billeted at the Imperial Hotel, and the others are billeted at, I think, the Daiti Hotel. So that was the beginning of my experience in Japan. All the civilians were having a fit to meet General MacArthur. I took the liberty of calling Larry Bunker, who was General MacArthur's chief at his office there.

I ran into his office and said these civilians wanted to meet General MacArthur, and he arranged for them to come down the next day and meet General MacArthur. And I got them out of there after interview for about 15 minutes. And then we had to get offices for them to start working, and had to get billets for them throughout various other hotels in Tokyo that the MacArthur people had taken over after they went in there in September.

We're now in the 22nd or 23rd day, we lose a day, 24th day of November of 1945. And that's the beginning of my experiences in Japan, which I can outline to you now.

[Speaker 2]
I'd like to have that. Maybe you'd like to have a little pause now when you're talking. I want to ask you, these civilians, that was the occupation force, more or less, these civilians?

No, no, no.

[Speaker 1]
The civilians that I referred to were a group of civilian lawyers, some secretaries, that Mr. Keenan, who was head of this unnamed, so far it had been unnamed, but it became the International Prosecution Section. We had two plane loads of civilian lawyers who had worked at the Department of Justice or who Mr. Keenan knew and wanted to employ. There was a very fine lawyer there from Cleveland, Ohio by the name of Hawkshurst.

I remember his name. The former Washington, D.C., District Attorney was one of them, and he had several helpers that he carried along with him. And then there were various people in the Department of Justice that Mr. Keenan had known when he was in the Department of Justice. So we had two plane loads of civilians. I was the only military person. And of those civilians, I guess there must have been six or eight secretaries.

One was Evelyn Alexander. Another one was Elizabeth Bowen, B-O-W-E-N, I think, who had a stenographic service in Washington. They were very good.

[Speaker 2]
And this in preparation for the trials?

[Speaker 1]
For the preparation, preparing, first of all, to see who they were going to investigate first and who they were going to try. So this was just the beginning of deciding on the interviews of the Japanese that they suspected that would be tried. So we just set up this section.

It was called the International Prosecution Section. Later, while that was expanded, where each defendant was furnished an American lawyer as well as a Japanese lawyer. So we had both the prosecution lawyers and the defense lawyers were U.S. citizens. Now, we get into December, and I think it was the day after Christmas of 1945. A long cable came in outlining a meeting that the Secretary of State had had with the Russians. And outlining that the same setup would take place in Japan that had taken place in Germany, that there would be four controlling powers, namely the United States, Great Britain, Russia, China.

China took the place of Japan. I mean, took the place of France. France had been the fourth or fifth member in Germany.

And then there were four or five of the major countries that I've just named, but there were 11 countries involved in the International Prosecution Section. The people who had been mostly hurt, and I'll try to put them in the order of how mad they were, the maddest were the Filipinos. They had a great big delegation there.

The next were the Australians who were very bitter. The next were the British. And then, I'll have to stop.

We fitted in about number five as far as being bitter, maybe four. There were 11 countries. The country that took the least interest that was a member were the Indians.

But we had delegations there from France. I'll have to name them. The United States, Russia, China, Great Britain, France, the Filipinos, the Australians, the Indians were 11.

There was, I guess you would say, yes, the Dutch were there and the Netherlands. I think that'll make up the 11 countries that we had. Mr. Keenan was head, American, was head of the section. Then there was a country, and there was a judge who came in a little bit later. From each country there were 11 judges, and that formed the tribunal. Then, as I said, you had the defendants.

Now there were about 22 finally agreed upon to be the major defendants of major crimes. There were minor cases and trials going on in the Philippines. I think there was one in Guam.

There were several in China trials, and I think there was one or two other places in Japan where we had trials. I know we had a large contingence of lawyers in Yokohama as well as in Tokyo. That began the setup.

We had to find a building to hold the trials, and then we had to find the additional quarters because you must remember that Tokyo was 90 percent destroyed. The government, U.S. government I'm referring to now, had taken over a lot of houses and repaired a lot of houses, had repaired a lot of embassies, and that some of the delegations stayed at their embassy for a short period of time. The Russians stayed at their embassy the whole time, and I'll tell you a story about the Russians in just a minute.

[Speaker 2]
Would you like to stop a minute?

[Speaker 1]
No, I'll catch my breath in just a minute. I'll have to try to think of some of the things to try to get it in the order that it took place. The people were billeted at various different places throughout Tokyo.

We found the building that we converted into a place where the trial was finally held by accident. I was driving around and saw a building up on the side of a hill, and I had a Japanese driver, and I'd be able to talk to him by prodding him on his left shoulder if I wanted him to turn left, his right shoulder if I wanted him to turn right, and I prodded him in his back if I wanted him to speed up, and I hit him on top of his head if I wanted him to stop with the walking cane that I had gotten from the end.

So anyway, that was the building. So we finally had a building where we had offices and where we could hold the trials. The personnel were billeted at various different places over Tokyo.

Mr. Keenan and myself lived for a while at the Imperial Hotel. Then the engineers had fixed up the Ettore House. Ettore was the leading jeweler on Ginza and had a brick home, which we took over, and that filled up so fast we then took over Baron Mitsui's home at another end of Tokyo and moved there.

So we're now set up to function, to live, and these various different people were appointed investigators and they were appointed to interview people, and you carried a Japanese interpreter because there was very little English spoken except at very high levels, so you had to have an interpreter. So that starts the beginning of the trials. Sir William Webb of the Queensland's Bench, Chief Justice of the Queensland Bench, was Australian, and he was named as Chief Justice of the Court, and he was a very fine person.

Now, I'll stop for just a minute and tell you this, and I'm a little bit ahead of the... I had to get into the construction of this, which took us in some time. But at the end of December, another cable came in stating that the same setup would take place as I've just outlined, but this cable said that the Russians were sending out a very, very fine general, and that under the theory that was going to take place at the United States, Russia, Great Britain, and China would have the military forces in Japan to be able to control the Japanese.

Well, General MacArthur didn't need anybody besides the U.S. troops there. He didn't need anybody, but anyway, they had the right to send in and take over certain areas of Japan. General MacArthur had been named Supreme Commander for Allied Powers.

He actually wore two hats. He had a military situation, and then he had this government situation that he had to administer. So the Russians sent over a very, very fine, high-ranking general who had been one of the defenders of Stalingrad, and he came over and said that he was delighted to serve under General MacArthur, and General MacArthur said that he was delighted to have one of the great defenders of Stalingrad there.

And this Russian asked for Hokkaido, and General MacArthur said that he was sorry that he couldn't have Hokkaido. He had picked out a place for the Russians down in Kyushu, which was about 800 miles south. To make a long story short, the Russians never sent a troop into Japan.

When they couldn't get Hokkaido, they didn't want them having the Kyushu 800 miles south. And this was the reason I'm bringing this up now. This was the beginning of the Russian determination to try to have Japan communist.

And MacArthur was determined that Russia would not be communist. You had... You mean Japan would not be...

Would not be... I mean Japan would not be communist. And I'll tell you a couple of things that I think are really a part of history.

I don't know how well history records this situation. But you have to remember that China was now beginning, just beginning to become communist. And the Russians were putting tremendous effort to get the Chinese to be wholly communist, which they finally did do.

That was on one side of Japan. And on the other side of Japan, you had Korea. And the northern part of Korea was already being communist.

And then you had the Russians coming down to the edge of... from the north. And they did their best to have Japan become communist.

And MacArthur was very, very smart. He didn't have to make any public announcements or anything of that kind. But he handled the situation.

And he began to administer Japan through the emperor. So you had one side, the military, and then the other side was the civilian side. And MacArthur had completely taken over the emperor and where the emperor was very friendly to the Americans.

And he didn't want to see Japan become communist. The Russians were determined to indict the emperor. And if you had indicted him, was tried and convicted and probably executed, MacArthur was determined that the emperor not be indicted or be tried.

It never came out as apparent as I'm telling you. I'm just telling you some of the things that took place. You had these 11 countries.

So one day, probably the closest man to General MacArthur was a man named Courtney Whitney. And under him was this man. Not under him, they kind of had different jobs.

But it was Larry Bunker who was MacArthur's secretary. He called me and asked me to come down and asked me what the vote was on indicting the emperor. And I told him the vote was six to five to indict the emperor.

And I know that he reported that to General MacArthur because the next day he asked me to come down again. And he said he understood. And so William Webb and myself were very friendly and I said, yes, we got along fine.

And he asked me what I suggested. And I said the only thing I know to do is I can't talk to the Australian prosecutor. I don't know him that well, but I can talk to Sir William Webb.

So Sir William Webb, I called him and asked him would he like to go down to the Eto'o Peninsula. The Gulf Stream is only about 200 yards away from the Eto'o Peninsula. And the weather was warmer down there.

And there was a golf course. I asked him to come down there and play golf. The American government had taken over that hotel as the Rest and Recuperation Hotel.

And we had that hotel and had the golf course. So Sir William Webb and myself went down and spent the weekend playing golf. We never talked about anything.

On the way back, we talked about what a good job General MacArthur had done and how he'd handled the civilians. So I felt sure that after Sir William Webb had seen the countryside and seen these people he wouldn't come in contact with, he knew that the Emperor was doing a good job. So when we came back, never was anything ever discussed.

But when we came back, Larry Bunker called me and wanted to work on a trip there. I said, we had an excellent trip. He said, how's the vote?

I said, the vote's going to be six to five not to invite the Emperor. Because I said, Sir William Webb, in my opinion, will get the Australian prosecutor to change. And that's what took place.

Sir William Webb, I'm confident that the Australian prosecutor to change his vote. And that vote was six to five not to invite the Emperor. And that was the reason that Japan never became a communist country.

[Speaker 2]
Testing?

[Speaker 1]
Testing my recollection. I'd have to look it up. But I think there were 22 of the major Japanese war criminals that were tried.

And I think that they were all convicted. There were some put to death. And I'd have to look up and see those that were put to death and those that were just given sentences.

The Indian government voted to acquit everybody. And the other people were very much put out that India had been even included in these war trials. As I said before, the bitterest people, the people who had suffered the most, in their opinion, were the Filipinos, the Australians, the British who had lost some of their people in China.

The Chinese were very, very bitter. So it was a tie in my mind as to who was the bitterest. But those people were all determined that all of the Japanese that they could get would be tried and convicted.

I think that the Dutch fell into that category also. The Dutch were very bitter. So when you went into Japan, you had the stage set where these trials were going to take place.

[Speaker 2]
Testing. One, two, three. All right.

[Speaker 1]
The stage was set for any one of the Japanese that they had interviewed and decided they would try. And these 22 countries, I mean these 11 countries, India didn't take much participation and so it would be really more accurate to say the 10 countries because the Indians were just there. I'll tell you a little side story about them in just a minute.

But the feeling was very bitter and very intense because you have to remember that the Chinese had suffered and the Philippines had suffered, the Australians had suffered. To a certain extent, the British had suffered. They'd lost some of their battleships, some of their men, and they'd lost the control of Singapore, these cities that they'd always held.

The French were, I would think, kind of really indifferent. But the French are the people who got us involved in Saigon, I mean in this war that we had no business getting into because we were on the wrong side because the people were friendly to the United States, but they were mad at the French. But we had supported France, so therefore we supported France in this situation, which was a mistake because that war could have been avoided.

It should have been avoided.

[Speaker 3]
Which war are you talking about?

[Speaker 1]
I'm talking about this last war they had.

[Speaker 3]
Vietnam.

[Speaker 1]
Vietnam. The Vietnamese people, first of all, are very decent sort of people. They were very friendly for a while before the war came along with the French, and then they thought that the French were going to come back in and take them over, and they didn't like that.

So you had a Vietnamese anti-France and France-Vietnam. There were a tremendous number of Vietnamese, much to my surprise, in Tokyo. So you not only had some people

who were trying to do what was correct, you had some people who were trying to cause trouble and to make any changes that they thought would be helpful to their country.

You can't blame them for that, but I'm going back now for just a minute. I'll put in about the Indian thing. I just thought that was funny.

I had nothing to do, really, with the billeting of these delegations that would come in from these foreign countries. But sometimes when they couldn't find anybody else, they'd call me. So I was called one night and said that the Indian delegation had arrived at the airport, and what should they do with them if the Indians didn't have any embassy there or anything of that kind that was in shape?

They might have been bombed out. I said the only thing I know to do is put them out to British Embassy. They had room out there at the British Embassy.

So the Indians were taken out there to the British Embassy. But the next morning they came down, and the head of that delegation came to see me, a man named Merriman. I think he was a communist, really.

He came to see me, and he said that they didn't want to stay in the British Embassy because the British were too dirty. And I always thought it was the right place. So some of these little things are kind of funny.

You laugh about it at that time, and I still laugh about it now. Now, so you had a cross-section going on between the French and the Vietnamese who were there. And the French delegation was headed by a very, very fine— I can't think of his name now, but I can see him.

We were good friends. Marshal of France. He had lost his arm.