LG
Interviewed by Barry Chad
Interviewed at his apartment at Seneca Hills
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<u>*Interviewer's Note*</u>
War stories. A life of hard work; mill work; bricklaying since he was 27 until he retired. This interview concluded with some really really nice, sensitive jazz guitar playing. He apologized, I think, for the guitar being somewhat out-of-tune, but, you couldn't prove it by me….

<u>Interview</u>
bc: [I am setting up the digital voice recorder and a back-up cassette recorder.]
LG: You remind me of these orchestras—they'll come in and give a little concert and they have all these amplifiers. It takes them 45 minutes to set up and they give the concert. After the concert is done, it takes them 45 minutes to get the things taken apart. So, if you're going to play the bass guitar, you better look forward to that.
bc: Yeah, when I go to concerts, and these are just small concerts, it takes the kids like an hour just to set up their equipment and to tune it. Unless they're really in a hurry…. In fact, one of these venues I went to they have something called the Attention Deficit Disorder concert. [LG laughs.] There's like fifteen bands and each band can only play for 10 minutes. They tend to use one another's equipment, but they gotta get right in, play, get out.
LG: Where do they have this?
bc: At a place in Wilkinsburg called "Roboto."
LG: Oh my, I'd like to visit that.

bc: So. You did construction.
LG: Yes.

bc: Before we got the machine going, you said you worked on the U. S. Steel building [now the USX Tower] and…?
LG: …the IBM building, National Steel building (it's down near the Westinghouse building). I didn't work on the Westinghouse building; I worked on the building next door. I worked on that apartment across the street from the [Mellon] Arena. I think it was financed by Alcoa…and whoever owns it or runs it now, I don't know.

bc: When were you doing this?

LG: You remember when the U. S. Steel was being built?
bc: [1967 – 1970].
LG: This was before I went to the U. S. Steel building. We were building a telephone building across the street. My boss comes up to me one day and he says, Tomorrow at 2:30, you get yourself a laborer, an apprentice, and go across the street and get a hold of the superintendent--and that's when the masonry started in that building. I was there for 16 months.

bc: How did you get involved in brick-laying?
LG: Don't hold this against me: I was going to high school. My dad said to me. Do you want to learn a trade or do you want to go to school? I said I wanted to learn a trade. We were living in a farm then. So he brought me to a bricklayer/contractor that he knew and that's where I started. You don't start laying bricks [today]. You have to carry the bricks first to see what the heck it's all about. Well, eventually…and then the [Second World] War was coming: there was no more construction. So, I went to work in a mill for—not a year—seven months or so, and then I was drafted and went into the Army when I was 21. This happened in Brackenridge. The farm was in Fawn Township. It was Fawn Township, Tarentum, Brackenridge, and Harrison Township—their school boards are joined right now. When we lived in the farm, I went to grade school in Natrona Heights. Then I had to go to a country school because they didn't have enough money to pay tuition to Harrison Township. And then, when I went to high school, they didn't have a high school then. I went to high school for two years and that's when I started apprenticeship with the bricklayers. Then I had to give it up during the War because there was nothing going. You know, they weren't allowed to build…they weren't building buildings--period. We worked mostly then on houses. So I went to work in a mill—Allegheny Ludlum (they're still operating)--for a while. And then I went into the Army; then I spent four years in the Service—got wounded.

When I was still an apprentice, I just didn't stop work on the job. Right after work was done, I'd go to…this guy needed a chimney built; this guy need his foundation lifted up. And that's where I learned a lot by myself. And then I came home from the Army and I seen bricklayers working on the walls; I says, Hell, I can do it that good. So I joined the Union and that was it. That was my career.

bc: From what you say, the apprenticeship back then is different than apprenticeship now.
LG: Yes, today we have schools. I'm still in the Union. They still carry me. Our local in Pittsburgh bought [and established a training center in Monroeville.] Our local has classrooms in there for apprentices. They teach 'em how to read plans, how to do complicated work and they judge 'em; they're graded on this. They only do it one day a week, but at least they do it. That's the way they get their feet wet.

bc: You were drafted.
LG: I was drafted. Our gang from our street, we kept talking: shall we join the Navy? shall we do this? shall we do that? And, by that time, it was time to go in. It

was only six months after Pearl Harbor. And we all went and we all went somewhere. So I got into the artillery.

bc: Where did you get your basic training?
LG: Virginia, Tennessee, Florida, Arizona. (Mostly.) We were scattered around other places in the United States [as well]. We were stationed in Kansas for a while. They were six months maneuvers, they called it. And you lived like it was combat, under combat conditions--let's put it that way. From Monday morning to Friday night. Then Saturday you could take a bath out of your helmet.

bc: A bath out of your helmet.
LG: Hell yeah--where else are you going to take a bath? Sometime we were lucky: there was a camp in Alabama, Camp Rucker, and we'd go in there and take a shower. This was only at the end of the week 'cause Monday morning combat conditions started--pretend--they were maneuvers. The other divisions--like if you were fighting another division, like they were blue and you were a different color…I guess the generals were maneuvering around, and that's where we came in…

[They did not use live ammunition.] They had "umpires." When the umpire seen…(he was right there all the time)…and when he seen that this one troop got advantage of the other troop, he'd come running down and he says, "You're shot! [pointing at one soldier] You're shot! [pointing at a second soldier] You got shot in the leg! [pointing at a third]" And then they'd have to carry him out like combat conditions. That's how they learned.

bc: When you went overseas, where did you go?
LG: We landed in Scotland, went through the Midlands. We went down to southern England, west of London, far west of London. We got our new cannons and we had to go to Wales to calibrate them, like you calibrate a gun. Then we went back and D-Day came along…

…and you never seen so many people in all your life—that beach was full of humanity! and they couldn't put them all in at the same time. I didn't go in 'til "D-3." We went into Normandy three days after the Normandy invasion. We went in the third day. We landed at Omaha Beach. And then, from there, we joined another division and we went up, took Cherbourg. I had a jeep; I was driving the jeep. And the whole pier was on fire. We were up on a pretty high knob and you could look down and there was firing still going on, but the whole damn thing was on fire. And there were ships out there waiting to come in to dock to bring in supplies 'cause that's the only means they had of bringing in a lot of supplies at one time. I'm talking about the Allies.

After Cherbourg was taken, we went down for one day of rest; then we headed east toward St.-Lo and that's where I got hurt.

bc: How did they drop you off at the Omaha Beach landing?

LG: I went over on an English boat. It had one gun, one prime-mover, which is a truck that pulls the cannon, and my jeep--was the only vehicles on it—you know it was small. And then most of our battery and some of the other fire battery was there, the batteries that took care of that gun, the crew. We were equipped to land in six feet of water with our jeep. Them two English guys that were in charge of this boat, they landed us in <u>that much</u> water [LG illustrates less than a foot of water]: I didn't even get all my tires wet. [Six feet of water]: we were prepared. You've probably seen movies…seen these GIs diving in—you know…when the front [of the landing craft] goes down? And they have to walk in to shore. But we were lucky.

bc: And you were wounded at St.-Lo.
LG: [Reaches alongside a chair and brings out an impressive, framed, glass-covered display case which includes a number of the medals he was awarded.] You know, you can buy these in any store…But I have verification from the Army that I earned all these.
bc: That's a Purple Heart, isn't it?
LG: Yes, and the bars are what you wear in your lapel.
bc: What's that?
LG: That's the *Croix de Guerre* from France. They awarded it to the Unit. [When I had this case made up at "Deck the Walls" in Monroeville], I wanted to put my watch in there, the watch that I went through combat with, and I have it here and it's engraved on the inside. I want the framers at the shop to put [my watch] in there and I want them to put my division insignia in there.
bc: The dog tags look in perfect condition. That one says "Army of Occupation."

bc: So you were injured, where were you taken for rehab?
LG: I went to England.
bc: And then, did they send you home for a while?
LG: Nope.
bc: They patched you up and and they sent you back.
LG: They were going to.

In this country, the artillery—they call it a battalion—it's comprised of five batteries: Headquarters Battery, A, B, and C. A, B, and C are gun batteries. They have four guns each and then the Service Battery. I was in Service Battery. We service food, ammunition, the whole bit for the whole battalion. Well, something happened to our clerks. They left, they went to another outfit…whatever…and the First Sergeant come up to me and he says, How 'bout you goin' up there and learnin' how to take care of service records? Well, I says, Okay. So there was still a guy left there: he taught me what you're supposed to know. Service records--when a guy had a [vaccination] shot, when he was paid, and how many allotments he has. You have to keep up on this. (This was still in the States.) Before we went overseas, I was what they call a liaison agent. That means: the colonel and the major and me…I was the driver of the jeep…they'd go up and scout around [and] say, We're going to put A Battery over here; we're going to put B Battery there; and C Battery over here. I had to know where the guns' batteries

were. Then, when it was time for them to get ammunition, I had to lead the ammunition train up to C Battery, B Battery, and A Battery. That was my job. When we got down to brass tacks, every battery had their own supply trucks. I think they had three.

Well, when we start going towards Cherbourg, they had to get the Quartermaster to come in with three extra trucks for each battery ‘ cause that meant that there was a helluva lot of ammunition there. (I’m talking about shells.) They called it a “cloverleaf.” There were three shells. Two guys could pick it up. Maybe a strong guy could pick it up. They’re about this long. They were laying [on their side] and they had handles [on either side of them] and you then took them apart and there was your shell. That’s what they’d feed into the gun. They called them howitzers. They didn’t call ‘em guns, they called ‘em howitzers. It was a hundred and four caliber. And there was three battalions in our division of a hundred and five millimeter cannons. And then they had a backup which was a hundred and fifty-five millimeter. They were bigger guns and they could be behind us and still bring fire down in case they were needed. They would always shoot in front of the infantry when they called down fire. We had to send up forward observers. They’d go up there; they’d sneak up: they’d say, Well, there’s tanks up here, and there’s a group of men here. [The forward observers] would call back for fire. And the fire would come down; and if it was too far ahead, they’d say…Deflection and Elevation…whatever. They used those terms. They’d shoot one shell up there. Then they’d shoot another [shell] short. You can be sure the next one’s going to land where they wanted it to—right where these tanks were. So that’s how the artillery operated. And I’m telling ya…our guns…they [the enemy] thought we had automatic guns [that’s how fast we were getting off shots.] There was four guns in a battery: “Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!” Just consistent. That’s why they thought it was automatic. Those crews—all they done [was] practice, practice, practice. And when they needed them, they were there, “Bang! Bang! Bang!” And that was only one battery and we had three firing batteries in a battalion and there was three battalions of artillery. Plus, the big ones was another batallion.

bc: And under what circumstances were you injured?
LG: After we took Cherbourg, we went down for a day’s rest and they [the enemy] seen us pull in this bivouac area, but they didn’t start shooting. It was dusk. And they had artillery too…the 88…that 88 millimeter gun that they had was a fantastic gun. They knew where we were because they had four years to calibrate every damn crossroad in France, and they had it calibrated. If they wanted to bring down fire right there, all they have to do is look in their little book, “Bang!” they had fire right there. And so they knew we were there and about two o’clock in the morning, that’s when they started. That’s when they got me.

They got eight of us, I think. Two guys got killed. We evacuated.

It’s funny now. It wasn’t funny then. They tried to get my jeep goin’, but it was blown to hell. It’s dark. Guys come runnin’ out to help. So we got on another jeep.

I think they was takin' us two at a time, they were going to take us back to field hospital.... Got a g—d----d flat tire! "Come on! Just keep going!" And then we run up against two horses that were loose! and they were in the middle of the damn road! and it's dark...and they had to get them the hell out of there!

Well, we finally got back to the field station and they started...temporary, you know.... Then they send you back to another hospital...and I don't know how many hospitals. In fact, one of the hospitals you could see the bombs hittin' outside of the damn thing. They were still shooting at us! And I said, well, one thing I don't want to be...I don't want to be captured. That's the first thing. I don't care if I die. I don't want to be captured. And, you know, you're all doped-up when they're hauling you in these ambulances. So, this one time we went to a bigger hospital and it's [misting], it's raining a little bit, a mist...so as soon as they take you out in the stretcher, it's hitting you in the face...and miserable to begin with...and I'm half doped-up and I looked at the guy in front of me carrying--he had a German uniform--and I looked back and the guy behind me carrying me had a German uniform and I says, "G— d--- it! I got captured!" Here they were prisoners helping the medics! Oh was I glad!

They were captured [prisoners], and they put them to work. Some of them prisoners—that was the best thing that ever happened to them. They had three square meals a day and, if they were fighting for the Germans, they had a gun in their damn back. If they don't do it, "Bang!" They killed 'em.

So then, eventually, I got down to the beach and we went back to England on an LST (Landing Ship Tank). It's got the two big doors in the front.... And the English Channel was really quiet that day: you didn't know you were movin'. And they had a lister bag. (It's full of water and it's got spouts all over: you need a glass of water, you push a button and you'd get clean water.) The only way I could tell we were movin'—every once in a while I'd see this thing swaying. Then I knew we were moving.

So we landed in England and I went to a general hospital then. They wanted to see what was going to happen with my wound. I looked at it once and never looked at it again. It scared me. It looked like a big steak.... They took two patches out of my [backside]: one four inches square and one three inches square and they put it on there with plastic surgery. And I was in the hospital for 207 days. And one day they said, You can go to lunch today. I said, Well thank God. Crutches and the whole bit. Eventually I got better and then one day a guy came down looking for clerks and he says, You go up to the office Monday morning at 8 o'clock. Report up there. So, Monday morning I went up and they interviewed me: Payrolls! that was duck soup for me! And I said, Do I have to fall out for any formation? because they make you fall out for formation to walk (rehab) to get better. And I said, Do I have to fall out? [He] says, No. [I said,] I'll take it. From then on I had it made.

bc: You know, that's the first time I've ever heard anyone say "duck soup" other than because of the movie with the Marx Brothers.

LG: I'll be darned. [He laughs.] …with a buddy…we had to take care of one company. They had this convalescent center set up like an infantry regiment: A, B, C, D company and so forth…and that's the way they set this convalescent center up. People were coming and going all the time…even the officers. You'd have one officer one week and next week there'd be another officer…and personnel, the same thing. You went in as a "D" class; then you went to "C, "B," "A" and when you were "double A," you went back to your outfit. Well that's when I got this job as a clerk. I latched up with one of the other guys; he had another company. And he was a fantastic typist. And me…I was one of these, you know [he demonstrates the "hunt and peck" method of typing.] So we start pouring out payrolls. One payroll was <u>that</u> thick. Sometimes, at three o'clock in the morning, we're still working on payrolls…so we didn't have to fall out--we'd sleep in the next morning. No problem. O.D. [Officer of the Day] would come along, says, What's this guy doing in bed? He works nights. That was the end of it. Then, as soon as a guy came in [to the convalescent center], we had to look him up, get his signature, and we were allowed to pay him to the last pound. (They paid in English pounds.) And if you came in today, and you hadn't been paid for six months, next day you had your pay in your pocket. And they thought it was all <u>me</u> that was doing it. Of course I instigated it: I had their signature, put their name on the payroll and they'd get paid. (They just loved me—because they thought I was a damned magician. They'd scrub underneath my cot. They'd bring me breakfast. I'd say, These guys really love me. But I loved them too.) They knew what I could do. They says, Hey! this guy here he's just comin' in. So, man, I'd get right after that guy and get his signature. And then, on his ward alone…all you have to do is sign it and…we were allowed to pay him…. We had some big payrolls. One time our personnel director said, We have to go to London and <u>count</u> the money. We counted a million dollars. That was what we took back with us. And we counted it. Cash. In English pounds. [Pounds] were worth $4.03 then. (After the War it went way down.) I was fortunate, really fortunate.

bc: And that's how you finished your tour of duty.
LG: Yes, and then the War ended. Guys like me, they were all wounded. All our clerks. They were all wounded from different divisions. It was medics—who weren't allowed to carry guns. (This was a convalescent center, run by the medics.) Well, they had a prisoner. We had to chase a prisoner often. [He laughs.] Carry a gun and taking him to lunch, and when you do that, you don't have to salute anybody; you don't have to salute the officers. Some of these officers they didn't know that…they're lookin' why I didn't salute them…(I'm carrying a gun; I don't have to salute you.)

We had one guy—he had a wife and kid in Texas. (This was a prisoner [when we were in England].) He had a wife and kid in Texas, and he went AWOL [Absent Without Leave]. He started shacking up with a girl and had a baby to her. And he was gone for like a year-and-a-half…a long time. And the mailman found out

about this GI living with this woman. So, first thing you know, he's a prisoner. We'd play cards with him all day long. I'll tell you how meek the guy was. He says, Here's your gun, he says, here comes the O.D. You'd grab your gun, pretend you were guardin'…. He wouldn't hurt a fly. [He laughs.] This was after the War ended in Europe. So then we started getting [vaccination] shots for Japan…well, that never happened; and we were finally discharged [in 1946].

They sent me home. They kept sending you a telegram: "Your leave has been extended for 90 more days." "Your leave has been extended for 60 more…." They didn't want you! …so they'd send you a telegram. And then, one time, they said, You can come to New Cumberland Gap to be discharged. So that was that.

[Before I went to the Army,] I had hay fever real bad. Then, when I went to the Army, we went to Florida—no hay fever. The following year I was in Arizona, another year we were in England. No hay fever there. In four years I never had hay fever in the Army except when I first went in--in Virginia. And, when I came home, we landed in New York. They took us to New Jersey on the ferry and, bang, I start sneezing. I went to the medics and told them about this hay fever…because I had a problem with it before I went to the Service and he said, Well, we'll have to put you in a hospital for tests. I said, Like hell you're putting me in the hospital. I'm going home. [He laughs.]

[The VA used to be in the Fulton Building in downtown Pittsburgh. The Fulton also housed service organizations: the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Jewish War Vets. Then the VA moved to the Federal Building.] In fact I worked [on the Federal Building] too. [Then the VA Hospital was opened in Oakland.] After the War I always belonged to the Legion. [The American Legion was instrumental in helping with my disability issues.]

[I was 26 when I got back to the United States.]

bc: What did you do when you got back?
LG: I went back to the mill. They gave me a job that, if I'd have stayed [when the War started], I would have been promoted to this [particular] job. That's the way they were doing things. I said, Hell, that's not for me—working in the open hearths—what they call "second helper." "First helper" he runs the furnace; you're the second helper; you're underneath him.

I asked them if they'd give a six month leave—they wouldn't do it. So I quit. I went out, started laying bricks. First thing you know I got into the Union. And that's been my life ever since. I thank God that my leg held out all my life so I could support a family. Thank God I was able to get through it.

bc: When did you pick up playing guitar and mandolin?
LG: When I was a kid, I used to play mandolin—not good. I think I was in second or third grade. Then my older brother and my sister—they had their crowd--they were teenagers. And they'd say, "Come on, play for us, play for us!" And I'd say,

"No, I don't want to play." And they'd say, "We'll give you a dime." So everybody pitched in a dime [he is laughing] and I got 90 cents or something…and I played on the mandolin. I'll never forget that. [He continues laughing.]

Then I started taking lessons on the violin. I took three lessons. And I said this isn't for me. My dad used to play the guitar. There was always a guitar around the house. And my brother played the banjo. There was always a banjo around the house. He also played the mandolin. There was always a mandolin around the house. And, first thing you know, I start playing simple chords on the guitar; and I learned to play the mandolin; and then I learned how to play the banjo. Not professionally. (Of course I did get paid for jobs that I went on with some professionals.)
bc: What kind of music?
LG: Mostly low-cut jazz…nothing…well, some of the songs Frank Sinatra sings…. But it was a lot of fun for me, more of hobby. Then my wife got sick and I quit playing the guitar altogether….

bc: So you've had a long work life as a bricklayer.
LG: I've been laying bricks since I was 27—until I retired. [We discuss H. J. Heinz's proud skill as a bricklayer.] You know [Winston] Churchill was a bricklayer. I'll tell you what: I used to work seven days a week—five days on my job; two days me and my buddy we would contract. If you're working for yourself, time means nothing. You go there at daybreak. You come home in darkness. So I couldn't wait to get back to my job so I could take it a little easier.

bc: [We look through some of LG's photographs, including LG in his pajamas in his hospital bed in the Army, recuperating.]

[At my request, he picks up his guitar and plays. From the very first notes, I realize that this is *nice, really nice, classy, breezy, sensitive* jazz.] "I could be here all day," [he says as he plays another tune, to this willing audience. And then he plays "A Foggy Day in London Town," picking up the tempo, as his clock chimes in the background.]
bc: Thank you. Thank you.