

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1241

STANLEY J. BOLEMBACK

Interviewed

by

Frank Kovach

on

July 11, 1989

STANLEY JOSEPH BOLEMBACK

Stanley was born to John and Sophie Bolemback on July 17th, 1917. His family lived on Poland Avenue until he was married. They had two homes on Poland Avenue. The last was at 1080 Poland Avenue.

He attended St. Stanislaus Elementary School for eight years. His ninth grade education was received at Woodrow Wilson Junior High. He attended South High School for 10th, 11th, and the first semester of 12th grade. He left school to go to work for the family on their dump truck in 1936. In 1937 he began working at Republic Steel Corporation.

On June 7th, 1941, he married Mary T. Baglama and they had a daughter Sonia in early 1942. Mr. Bolemback was drafted on March 7th, 1942. He was accepted for service in the U.S. Navy. After training in Brooklyn, New York he was assigned as an "Armed Guard" aboard various transport ships. Most of the crew were merchant marines. There were approximately 40 U.S. Navy personnel, including a Navy Captain and Chaplain, who were responsible for manning the guns on these ships.

He served aboard ships on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Eventually Mr. Bolemback was promoted to the rank of Seaman First Class and was in charge of a battery of guns on the ship.

The transport ships Mr. Bolemback served on carried various cargoes including: troops, aviation fuel, planes, helicopters, heavy equipment, and various other supplies for our servicemen in Europe and in the Pacific.

His most vivid memories of battle include a kamikaze pilot's attempt to sink their ship. The pilot was unsuccessful and landed in the water about 100 yards from their

ship. The crew pulled the pilot from the ocean and he was put in the ship's brig until they could turn him over to U.S. authorities at an American port.

Mr. Bolemback's home port was at Brooklyn, New York throughout the war. He was discharged in December of 1945.

Upon returning home, Stanley, his wife, and daughter resided with his wife's parents on Madison Ave. in Campbell, Ohio. They eventually bought a plot of land on Renee Drive in Struthers. Stanley and his wife built their current residence at 240 Renee Drive on this plot of land. He and his wife Mary currently reside at this home.

He is a member of St. Joseph, The Provider Parish in Campbell, Ohio. He has belonged to various organizations during his lifetime but is currently an active member in only one organization, The American Croation Citizens Club.

His hobbies include sports and gardening. Mr. Bolemback has been retired from Republic Steel Corporation since 1977.

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INTERVIEWEE: Stanley J. Bolemback

INTERVIEWER: Frank Kovach

SUBJECT: life at sea, wartime convoys, kamikaze attacks,
married servicemen, baseball at sea, life jackets, ~~et~~
brig.

DATE: July 11, 1989

K: This is an interview with Stanley J. Bolemback for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the World War II project, by Frank Kovach at 240 Renee Drive, on July 11th, 1989, at 2:05 p.m.

Mr. Bolemback do you want me to call you Stanley or call you by your nickname, Shy?

B: It doesn't matter.

K: OK. Why don't you start us off by giving us a little bit of your background as you were growing up?

B: I grew up like a normal kid, went to school, played ball after school, got a job with Republic. [I] went in to the service, came out of the service went back to Republic, worked there till I retired. That's it.

K: Are you a local native of Youngstown, Ohio?

B: Right.

K: You attended Youngstown schools?

B: I attended St. Stanislaus, a catholic school, then I attended Woodrow Wilson Junior High, then I went to South High for three and a half years, before I quit to get a job in Republic Steel.

K: You quit during the depression?

B: After the depression.

K: You remember the depression from growing up?

B: Yes, I do.

K: Could you tell us a little about it?

B: Like any other family, we were poor, didn't have nothing to eat, were on relief, had to go downtown to pick up the food, potatoes and cabbage, [they] wouldn't even allow you on the streetcar to come home with it you had to carry it home, all the way from downtown. That's it.

K: Do you remember Pearl Harbor? Could you tell us a little about it?

B: Well, what I remember about Pearl Harbor is when it happened, I was at home at the time. I wasn't in the service then. All I knew [was] that once Pearl Harbor, we would all go in to the service. I was drafted in to the service late because I was married and had a child. I still was drafted into the service. [I] Served 28 or 29 months to December of 1945. I was in the Navy. I had 28 months, 24 months I had sea duty. I was assigned to three different ships for 24 months. I was in Atlantic and the Pacific. [I] went through the Panama Canal three or four different times back and forth. [I] Got an honorable discharge and came home and continued my life.

K: You say that you were drafted and volunteered for the Navy?

B: Yes, right. I had a choice of Army and Navy. I said I sooner go in to the Navy and they said my examination showed I was healthy or well enough to go into the Navy. Somewhere they wouldn't take them in to the Army or the Marine Corps if they weren't fit for it. I got examined the same day as my brother and he suggested we both go in to the Navy and they took me in to the Navy and they wouldn't take him. He cried the whole way home from Cleveland. To me it didn't matter I didn't care what branch I went into.

K: What were your first impressions of going in to the Navy, of Navy life?

B: I didn't like it first because I was married and had a child. Second, when we got in to the service down in Brooklyn, New York, I was a northerner and we had all southern people over us and they treated us like dogs. Because they were southerners and we were northerners. They made fun of us the way we talked instead of the way they talked. But you couldn't say nothing to them about it because they might give you extra duty if you complain about it. After that when we got aboard ship everything was all right.

We had good clean life aboard ship, good food, good places to sleep, but we didn't know if we would be below water or above water the next morning. Other than that, we were fired upon a lot of times, hit a couple of times, but never really in any danger. One time a Kamikaze hit the front of the ship--they call it the bow--hit one of the guns stationed there. It never did any real damage to the ship, we never took on water or anything. It just scared us. So we didn't qualify for any medals or we didn't want any medals. We're lucky to be alive waiting to come back home, get liberty. Free pass go out and see whatever city your gonna see take in liberty to go out. What it was just like after work you go out and enjoy yourself for 10-12 hours that was it. I was in what they called an "Armed Guard". It was the Navy, and every eight or ten months we'd come back to the States and have like 10-12 days off to go home. Then we would go back and you get reassigned to another ship. You didn't know whether you were going Atlantic, Pacific or where you were going.

K: You said you did your basic training at Brooklyn? What was an average day at basic training like?

B: Basic training was more or less like half a day. They just took you out in a yard and gave you exercises and tried to teach you about guns and planes and ammunition. It was more or less getting you prepared for what you were gonna do. Then after dinner you more or less you just sat in the balcony waiting for an appointment to go be assigned to a ship. If you weren't assigned to a ship you were off at four o'clock and you were free until eight o'clock the next morning. Then the next day you went through the same procedure. But it wasn't what the Army calls basic training. We didn't have none of that.

- K: Where were you stationed in Brooklyn?
- B: All I know is the Armed Guard Center. I don't know, just in Brooklyn.
- K: Did you stay in barracks?
- B: It was barracks type [having] where you had a couple hundred in a barracks. But it was you were more or less on call to be assigned to a ship so if you want to spend the night in the barracks or if you wanted a pass to go out visit Brooklyn or New York, you could do it. As long as you were back at eight o'clock the next morning. [When you'd] come back the next morning you had to go through more or less a shake down so you didn't have any bottles on you of any whiskey or guns or anything.
- K: The first ship they assigned you to, what type of ship were you on?
- B: It was more or less a supply ship. We took troops across or supplies. Sometimes we took troops and planes, on top of the deck. [A] couple times we were assigned to a ship where we just took fuel across. One ship we fueled, we had fuel for the sixth or seventh Air Force, and the fuel was 100% octane. If we ever got hit, we would've needed a parachute instead of a life jacket. It would just blow up. That would be it. There would be no survivors.
- K: Were the crews on the ships all Navy personnel?
- B: All Navy personnel, right. Everyone was Navy. The only work we did aboard ships was we would stand guard, we used to have eight hour watch every day, stand guard two hours then off two hours. All the time. It was 12 hour watch and 12 hours off. At night you would get two hours of sleep then go back on duty. They had about 12 men on guard all the time. Twelve men on 12 men off. Then they had a reserve outfit for if someone got sick or couldn't stand their watch, then they would fill in. Our job was to stand watch and to take care of our guns, make sure the guns were working properly, always clean up, ammunition was in good order.
- K: In your service in the Atlantic Ocean, where did you ship out of?
- B: We would ship out of New York and we always would come in to England. One trip we come in to Italy, but why I don't know. Most of the time we come into England and what we had aboard ship--oil, gas, or sometimes we had planes, then we had helicopters, armored tanks, or we had personnel--we unloaded them and the personnel would be all Army men. Then from there I don't know where they would go. The Navy took you over there and the Navy brought you back.

K: Any u-boat problems while you were in the Atlantic?

B: No, we never had any problems. The only problems we had in the Atlantic was with the ocean. Some days you would more or less have to strap yourself to your bunk to sleep. You had your meals served to you in a coffee cup. The water was so rough, and that was like in June or July. We used to eat in like regular restaurants, it wasn't a cafeteria because we used to sit at a table and get waited on. They used to have to get the tablecloths and soak them down real good so none of the food would slide. Whatever the food was, they would give it to you in a coffee can and you would have to hold it in one hand and eat with the other hand. You couldn't eat any other way. The ships were forever rockin and rollin. At first you couldn't sleep, you couldn't walk across the deck. The water would forever be coming over the top of the deck, always. Why it was that rough out there I don't know, but we made a good half a dozen times it was always the same. Why I don't know.

Most of the times we crossed the Atlantic we would be in a convoy. A convoy would be sometimes a 100-150 ships. In a convoy we always had what we call a "coffin corner" if we carried high octane gas, that was the edges of the convoy, because if we got hit we would go up and the rest of the ships would be safe. If we were inside the convoy and got hit the other ships would get damaged or hit too. Traveling in a convoy seemed to be real safe because you had a 100-150 ships with you. Every three minutes the bull horns would go off and you would zig-zag all the way across the ocean. The reason we were in the "coffin corner" was because we carry high octane, but I always felt safe with all those ships there, but the only draw back was the only one that's fast is the slowest ship in the convoy. If the slowest ship could only go 12 knots that's how fast the convoy went. Then we found out that if you travel by yourself you were capable of going 21 knots an hour that's what we would go, 21 knots an hour. We would get there much sooner and safer I thought.

K: So you broke away from the convoy at times?

B: No, you didn't break away from the convoy. You would be assigned that way. If you were assigned in New York to be in convoy so and so that's what you go in. Sometimes you were assigned to go across by yourself. Then we felt better that way. We still had to zig-zag all the time, but we could travel 21 knots instead of 10-12 knots. Just imagine you get in a convoy sometimes the oldest ship can only go seven to eight knots that's what we had to go. And you travel at that slow pace, it's just like a sitting duck. The Navy was a lot of fun, it was clean, good food, good places to sleep, never had to dig a fox-hole. [I'm] glad I went to the service, more or less live like a serviceman.

K: Did you ever come under heavy attack when you were in the Atlantic Ocean?

B: No, not ever in the Atlantic. Never in the Atlantic, just once or twice in the Pacific. We got those kamikaze planes, but that was as you were nearing shore, not out in the middle of the ocean, Atlantic or Pacific. [It was] always when you were hitting shore. We saw some of those Japanese planes that were shot at, hit crashed in the water, but like I said, we were never under any real threat, outside if they would have hit us. One time a kamikaze tried to hit our ship with his plane but he missed. He went maybe 100 feet in front of it and hit the water. We bailed him out. [We] put him in the brig aboard ship. They have what they call a brig aboard ship, so if you do something wrong you were thrown in the brig, just like a regular jail.

One of the worst things you could do in the Navy while your out at sea is get a sunburn, you get a sunburn you automatically go right in the brig. Once you got sunburn and you get sunburn out on the ocean like that, within 10-15 minutes you get a sunburn where you can't do anything. Your actually all blistered and everything else, because of the water and the sun. The reflection, you sunburn real fast. I never spent any time in the brig. It was a lot of fun. I thought it was more fun for single sailors that don't have anything to worry about back home outside of his parents. I was married and had a daughter.

K: You say that when you returned back after you had taken whatever your cargo was to Europe you were not assigned necessarily to that same ship?

B: We would be assigned to that same ship till we came home. Nine times out of ten after we unloaded we took that high octane gas over seas, we had nothing to bring back, they would fill the ship with water, the tanks. They would call it ballast, we come back empty we couldn't do another shipment. We never brought anything back, there was nothing there to bring back. But if we took like servicemen over, the Army, then we would sometimes bring the Army back. Either because they were wounded or ready for discharge, or some had put in their time and was coming back to get reassigned to another outfit. There was nothing there for them to give us for something to bring back. Coming back when you had those tanks full of water, you more or less relax, and it felt like you were on a pleasure trip. Going over, you never knew. A matter of fact, the Navy did issue us life jackets but we never even put them on. [We] always had them under our bunk or somewhere, because if we got hit we wouldn't need a life jacket, we would just automatically just blow apart, the whole ship. The life jackets were part of the Navy gear so they had to give them to us.

K: You say you served in the Pacific too? What was it like in the Pacific versus in the Atlantic?

B: Well, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, it always looked like you were in the winter time, it was cold, windy, the seas were real rough. The Pacific was like a cruise. Nice and warm, smooth ocean, a lot of sunshine, no matter what part of the year. You still had to do your duty, you still had to do what you're supposed to take care of the ship and keep watch.

Sometimes we hit a foreign port, we were restricted, no one was allowed off the ship. It used to take us about 10 days to get to England, in a convoy, then we'd hit England and everybody would be restricted and no one would be allowed off. We'd have to stay on ship maybe a week or so, then we'd start back home. Sometimes it would be like a month and a half, maybe a month before we'd touch land. Why they'd restrict us, I don't know. But like I said you had your duties to perform aboard ship, if you did perform them, and if it wasn't serious enough to put you in the brig, they would restrict you the next port you hit, they wouldn't allow you to leave the ship. It was like penalizing. Especially coming back to the States everybody tried to do their job so they wouldn't be restricted when they came home. If you had enough time aboard that ship, and enough time would be eight to ten months aboard the one ship, you could get off on a 10-12 day leave, then be reassigned to another ship. You had no choice what kind of ship you were gonna be reassigned to because they took you alphabetically. You were in that armed guard center and waited to be assigned to a ship. If they took 50 guys, they start at the alphabet A, then go until they got all 50 guys. So everybody aboard ship was either A, B, or C for their last name. That's the way they did it.

You had no choice, you couldn't tell them you wanted this one ship or that ship, they told you, which I guess was alright. Once you're aboard ship, you come back and you get off the ship, your leave is up, you go back to New York or in the Brooklyn Armed Guard Center. You want to get assigned to a ship right away, you don't want to hang around the base because you have a better life aboard ship, as far as food. Aboard ship you dress like a civilian, if you wanted to wear slacks, or if you wanted to wear tennis shoes, loafers, or t-shirts, or a baseball hat, you did that until you hit a foreign port, then you had to dress like a Navyman. That was one good thing about it.

The food was always good, and plentiful. I never had what they call them eggs, powdered eggs, never had any powdered eggs or skim milk. We always had enough maybe fresh milk till about a day or two before we got to a foreign port, then we would run out of it. But we always had fruit, apples, oranges, bananas, pineapple. Always had enough of that. That was the benefit of being in the Navy, you had good food, clean place to sleep.

You slept in bunks aboard ship, three high, in rooms where there was maybe like 12 in a room. Three high, you know three, six, nine, twelve. One guy in charge that everybody kept their area clean, no throwing your shoes around or socks, or stuff like that. We had locker inspections like every other day, so you couldn't

throw your stuff in a locker you had to hang it up or fold it up and put it in. That was a good thing about it. Most guys have their wife's picture in their locker or their girlfriend's picture.

So, in the evenings when you were off duty, or didn't have too much to do, you'd sit down and write letters, send them back home. Sometimes you'd hit port and have eight to ten letters to send back home, you just date it when you wrote them. Not much you could write about, you get up you see the ocean, you go to sleep, you get up you see the ocean, you get up, just tell what happened aboard ship. They were all censored, you couldn't tell what way we were going or what we were going to do, or what we carried aboard ship. So there wasn't too much you could write about.

K: How did the mail catch you? The mail that came to you.

B: We would get it when we would hit an American port, or if we would be gone more than two weeks, we would get it mailed into the port we were in overseas. If we were gone say two weeks, we would get mail say when we got to an American port, and we would get all our mail at one time. My wife would write like every day, if I got say 12-15 letters, I would have to check them for say this date that date, so I wouldn't read this one first and then that one next and be like a week ahead of it. That was the way we got our mail. Sometimes you know, it's like I say, we leave New York, and our destination would be England, then something would happen that would change our destination. Like the one time we were going to Italy, so our mail went to England and we went to Italy. So by the time we got the mail from England to Italy, we were on our way back so we'd have to wait until we came back to the States. Our mail would go there, we'd never get it, they would ship it back and then we would get it. The mail got a free ride. You get used to stuff like

that. I guess the Army used to get their mail like every day or every other day or once a week. We had to wait more or less till we hit an American port.

K: You say you were assigned to three different ships, were they all the same type?

B: More or less. If your assigned to a tanker, that's what you take, you take fuel, plus you may take like planes on top or bulldozers, tanks, but it was mostly fuel that you take. The other ship I took was supplies, most of it was like hospital supplies. The third ship I took was for personnel, Army men. The Armymen, couldn't mingle with us, they couldn't come to our cabin, they couldn't eat in the same place we ate, they had their own mess hall. Sometimes you get to know some of the people, some of the Armymen, so you take them with you. Take them into your cabin, maybe try to sneak them in to get a meal because they ate

Army chow, just like with those muskets or whatever they had. We would go into the other cafeteria and sit down.

They painted the ship while we were out at sea, the outside of the ship, hanging over and painting the side. Because you were in saltwater, you had to scrape and paint the ship all the time, always had to paint and scrape the ship. If you painted a section of the ship, maybe a week later that section is all peeled already, starting to rust. So you had to scrape it and repaint it. Out at sea, the ships don't last that long, they have to be painted and scraped. I forget what they call them guys. They were hired by the Navy Department or the United States Government. They weren't any part of the service. They had their own places to sleep, their own places to eat, they weren't aloud up in the gun turrets. A lot of them work about eight hours a day aboard ship, then it was either sleep or stay in their cabin, or get drunk the rest of the time. Those guys lived like a civilian, they drank aboard ship, they were allowed to bring their own drinks, whatever they wanted, but we weren't allowed. They were civilians and we were servicemen, that was the only difference.

It was a good life, it was clean like I said, if you didn't get hit, which we didn't. We never lost anybody aboard ship. We had a few guys get sick, and we had to get a helicopter come over and get them off and take them to a hospital. We had a chaplain aboard ship, we went to mass. The captain more or less was like a philosopher. He was always trying to preach to the people and talk to them. Our captain was in charge of us, and the people who did all the work aboard ship, they had their own captain, that was in charge of them. Our captain had nothing to do with them.

K: Are you saying you were aboard a merchant marine ship?

B: Yeah. It was the United States Navy with merchant marine personnel that worked on it, that's all they did was work on it, but it was a United States Navy ship. They had like a foreman in charge of them. I guess he had the title of a captain. It was the armed guard personnel, we were the United States Navy, we maintained the ship, we maintained the guns, and we stood watch aboard ship.

K: Did you eat by yourself?

B: We ate by ourself. We had our own sleeping quarters, we never mingled with them, sometimes you didn't even see them unless they were working out on the deck. Other than that you never saw them. They were working in the engine room, so you never saw them, unless you had a reason to go down. We were always told never to go to the engine room.

K: About how many regular United States Navy personnel were aboard your ship?

B: I'd say, it had to be over 40. That takes in the captain and all the people that wore stripes, seaman first class, seaman second class, the guy that gave the signals, what they call him?

K: Signal Corps.

B: Signal Corps. We had people in charge, the regular seamen. We were all like one bunch, the only one that didn't mingle with us was the captain. He had his own quarters, if you had anything to say to him, you had to go to his quarters, and that was the only time you more or less saw him. We had people in charge of us. Another thing, when you're aboard ship and you're out at sea, every morning before dawn, everybody in the Navy had to get up and go on top deck, and more or less stay for a half hour watch, because that was the time they said the enemy attacked most, just before day break, where it's not light enough and it's not dark enough. It's pretty hard to spot them. So we had to circle the ship, everybody just kept watch, maybe for a half hour. Then we'd go down into the kitchen, we'd always have coffee, or milk, or pop, or cookies, or sandwiches, whatever we wanted. Every day we had like seven pounds of salami, or bacon, bologna, that was for us, you know, when we get off the deck for morning watch, whatever they called it. Then the guy that had to go on watch in an hour and a half, he'd probably get an hour and a half sleep, have his cup of coffee and a sandwich, then he'd go to sleep. Two hours later he'd go up on watch. He'd stand two hours watch, then he'd have his breakfast. You didn't have your breakfast before you went on watch. So if you went on six to eight watch in the morning, you wouldn't have your breakfast until after eight o'clock. If you went from say, eight to ten, you would have your breakfast before eight o'clock in the morning. They had a system you know. They never tried to put anybody or make him feel like he was neglected or anything. That was one good thing about it.

Like I said, a couple times when the siren went off that we were under attack and planes coming over us. Everybody had to get aboard, everybody but the armed guards, they didn't have to. They come out on top too, they figured if something happened they'd have a chance to get off. You'd get that alarm, it kind of scared you because, you know. There was never any threat of a torpedo hitting us or anything like that. Truthfully, there are no submarines out in the ocean. They say there is, but more or less they're on the coast. Maybe a hundred mile from inland. Submarines don't go all the way through the Atlantic or Pacific oceans. Our biggest danger with torpedoes when you hit the foreign nation, or the airplanes and that was it. We were lucky, we never got hit so we never had to take on water. If we got a direct hit we wouldn't have to worry about water. The navy always had a, when they signed you to a ship they told you the name of a ship, and they took you to that ship, with all your gear. You didn't know where you were going or what type of ship it was.

The one time we were assigned to a ship, as we got on the ship, and were assigned to our bunks, we noticed that all the water lines, all the lines aboard ship were covered with dents, whatever you call it, asbestos. So right then and there we figured we were going up north somewhere, North Pole or somewhere up close to Russia. We were on the ship two days, and something happened, they canceled everything, we got off the ship and got on another one. They never tell you where your going, even if you get on a ship that's going to England, they don't tell you. You have to find out for yourself. I guess they do that for security reasons. I thought that trip took me to close to Russia or the North Pole or somewhere would have been exciting, but it probably would have been a cold trip. Like I say even when you leave New York going to England, you have to have your heavy gear on two days out of New York because it gets so cold out there, so windy, and the ocean is so rough. You go to sleep the ocean is like glass, you wake up the next morning it's...

K: You say at one time a kamikaze pilot tried to hit your ship and he landed in the water in front of the ship. Is that the first time you had any actual contact with the enemy?

B: No. It seemed like every time we would hit a foreign port we would run into trouble, but it wasn't that great, and most of the times it was down in the South Pacific, instead of in like England or Italy. It seemed like more or less in the South Pacific. Why, I don't know.

K: Did you ever transport any prisoners of war, or see any prisoners of war?

B: No. We took that one but he was the only one. We kept him in the brig till we hit an American port, then we turned him over to the Americans. What they did with him I don't know. They never told us. They told us, it was none of our business.

K: You mentioned something about going into battle and the feelings. Could you tell us a little more about that when you were in general quarters and going into battle, what the feeling was like?

B: You mean aboard ship?

K: Yeah.

B: Well, like I said you were a little scared that's all. Sometimes you didn't have time to think. When that alarm went off, your first thought is to get up to your gun and maintain it, and hope for the best. Some kids would start crying, some would like freeze, they couldn't move. Younger kids. That's why they had the extra personnel to take care of these kids you know. You get a young kid that just

enlisted or was drafted in the service, he's as brave as you could find, but once that general alarm goes off, he freezes. There's nothing you can do to him. It's on your mind, you know that you don't know what to expect. You hope nothing happens, and if something does happen, what are you going to do about it. There's nothing you can do about it. There's no way you can help yourself. On land you may try to run away or hide, or pretend like your hit or something, aboard ship you can't do anything. You get hit, you get hit, and that's it. You never want to hear that general alarm go off, but it did go off.

We were lucky, compared to other stories we heard, we had a good life aboard the ship. We had a safe life compared to what other people had to go through, like the Army or even the merchant marine. I wouldn't want to be in the merchant marine or in the Army. When I found out what the Navy was like. But the Navy was just like if your hanging on to a balloon and you can't let go, because there's nowhere for you to go or not what for you to do. That's what they try to teach us, your on to protect yourself and do the best that you could, and that was it.

K: When you returned to the U.S. to port say in Brooklyn or New York, did you have much contact with the USO?

B: Yeah. The USO was always there for the Navy. Once you hit an American port, you didn't want any part of the USO, you wanted it when you were aboard ship. When you hit a foreign port, you wanted the USO because it always had coffee and donuts for you, but they were stationed right at the docks. The Army, couldn't even get in touch with the USO, the USO never gave them anything, because if they were in the front, the USO would never go there. The USO for the Navy was wonderful because of right where we were. When you hit a port in New York and you got off the ship and the USO was there you either wanted to go to Times Square or go to a game, whatever you wanted to do. Call your wife on the phone. You could have done that at the USO, they give you a free telephone. Most guys either wanted to hit the lights in New York or like I said, I went to Yankee Stadium, I saw the other team, at the Polo Grounds, I saw Madison Square Gardens. I tried to see everything I could while I was in New York.

K: How about leaves? Did you get a chance to come home while you were in the war?

B: No. The only time you could come home was like I said when you were assigned to a ship anywhere from eight to ten months, and it hit an American port. But if your aboard ship 10 to 12 months, overseas or going to a different port somewhere over seas you cannot get, you have to wait until you hit an American port. Same way with money, you cannot get any money if you are in a foreign port, you have to wait until you came to an American port. What I'm talking about

is our pay. We would get paid once a month. Now if we got paid two and a half weeks ago, and now we get shipped out, your not going to get paid in a week and half if your in a foreign port. You have to wait till you get back to the United States then you get what's coming to you. It might be like a month and a half's pay. My pay was like \$32.00 a month, Because my wife and daughter got the rest of what I was supposed to get. Maybe they got more than what I was supposed to get, but they got paid what a single man would get, so I had like \$32.00 a month. More or less I had to buy cigarettes, writing paper, fountain pens or whatever. Get a hair cut, had to pay for that. So I only had \$32.00 so if I hit an American port and I wanted to go out and get a drink somewhere I couldn't hardly do it.

A lot of times you hit an American port and everybody gets off the ship except the ones that had to stand watch, and the watch on the shoreline was maybe two Navymen at a time, and they would serve like four hours at a time. So take like four men to stand watch every day out of 40, the others would get off the ship. But always we would run into a merchant marine and they would take us out and show us the city. A single man could do it, but a married man it was pretty rough, you want to buy a few souvenirs, or go out and see a show. Most of the servicemen got in free, or to a ballgame only had to pay so much to go in. I stood in line one time at Yankee Stadium, I got in a line where it said servicemen only and I was in a line about ten minutes a guy hollered over, said "hey, sailor come here," walked over to him and he give me a ticket and I walked in with him.

K: Did rationing effect you at all, being in the Navy?

B: Did what?

K: Rationing of gasoline and food. Did that effect you in the service?

B: Not in the service. No we were never rationed for anything in the service. We were rationed when we came home on leave. We got I don't know how many gallons of gasoline per day, and how many packs of cigarettes per day. We had coupons, that we turned for gas and cigarettes, but other than that, there was no rationing at all.

K: Did you have any contact with any of our other allies while you were in the service?

B: No. You see, a lot of times we didn't even know who we were fighting. You know, aboard ship, you don't get in touch with anybody aboard ship unless they fly over, or are in a submarine. Submarine shoots a torpedo at you, you don't

know if its German, or Japanese, or Russian, you don't know who they are. The personnel knows, but they won't tell you. Like I said, they never even told you where you were going.

K: After the war was over in Germany and Japan, you were still in the Navy. What was your duty then?

B: Everything but stand watch. The watch was like cut one fourth. Instead of having 12 men on a watch, they had like two or three men on watch. One thing, every night you open up your port holes. During the war, you never opened up a port hole at night. So after the war was over, every night you open up a port holes. Port holes had a double glass, plus a screen. Glass on one side, glass here, the screen in the middle, so you'd have to open up both port holes. The lights were on at night, it was just like a cruise ship then. Other than that, there was no lights on the ship at night, you walked the decks in the dark. You had the light from the moon. Once the war was over, it was just like a regular cruise ship, and then you enjoyed it because you knew you weren't going to get attacked by anybody. You just waited to get back home. Then you got back home and went to the armed guards center and waited for your discharge papers. They'd give you a ticket to go back home to your home town, and that's it.

K: Did you transport any American troops back home after the war?

B: No, we didn't. We took a lot of troops over there, but we never brought any back. Our biggest problem, like I say, I had 24 months sea duty, I got sick every time we shipped out. I got sea sick every time we shipped out. I thought I was the only one, but it seemed like every sailor that got aboard ship got sea sick. Especially if you go to England, the water is so rough out there. It got so bad, some people couldn't even eat. Some people vomited so much they couldn't vomit any more. There was a captain in the armed guard, he said he had something like 30 years of service with the armed guard, and every time he shipped out, he got sick. So you never get used to it. Some people get used to it, some never get sick, some never get over it. Some, like our captain, he'd get sick but he wouldn't let us know about it. He'd try to act brave. It's nothing to be ashamed of because it's just nature. The captain used to tell us, we had a purser aboard ship, like a doctor, he always said he would give us pills for sea sickness. One person that we got to know pretty good, we hit shore and he'd go out with us have a few drinks and see the sights of New York, says they weren't nothing but aspirin tablets. So he'd give you a couple of aspirin tablets, you took them and you felt better, but they were nothing but aspirin tablets. So it was all in the mind I guess.

K: What was it like coming home after the war?

B: Well, you didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what to expect. I thought that my job would be safe when I came home, which it was. My department wasn't because they promoted a lot of people, in the line of seniority, but they bypassed me because I was in the service. When I came back they said I couldn't move ahead of those guys, and that was their ruling. Even though I belonged to the union, the union said there was nothing they could do about it, that I was in the service. They gave me my job back. Then I went in the line of seniority. That was the only thing I had. I served my country, and I didn't get what I thought I should get, which wasn't a big deal because you only get a few promotions. What happened while I was with the company, I worked myself up to the big job I could get. All I lost was the 28 months I was in the service. It was kind of bad because you think anyone that comes back from the service thinks he's a hero, but some guys were gold bricks, some guys never did their job, but they still were in the service and they still considered themselves a hero, that people should bow to them as soon as they hit American soil. I didn't figure it that way, I figured it was I was glad to get back home, just get my job back and get my life straightened out.

It was an experience that a civilian will never get on his own, you know, going into the service. I don't think I want to go through it again. Outside of taking the servicemen over, the supplies, and the gas, I don't think we contributed that much. I always felt sorry for the guys in the fox hole, or the marines that really fought for our country. We did our job, what was asked of us, but we were never in actual combat or you kill me or I kill you, stuff like that. Like I said, I don't know what the Army had but we had all the latest papers and magazines, stuff we could play around with. The only time the army had stuff like that was when they were in the barracks. We had that all the time. We weren't allowed to use any electric razors, no radios, nothing aboard ship. The only time you could use that was when we came close to shore, or if you're in a dock, then you could use your radio or if you wanted to use a TV set, like electric razors. That's the only time we used them. Other than that, you couldn't get anything on the radio anyway if you were out on the ocean. There wasn't anything to pick up.

K: How about the people in the community, your friends and family, how did they receive you when you came home?

B: Well, I guess they were glad to see us. My wife was and my daughter was old enough. She was about four years old. She knew I was gone. We just picked up where we left off and started to live. I don't think I'd want a son to go into the service, my son, if I had one.

K: Why's that?

- B: Well, I don't know, I just think the United States or any other country in the world should never fight. I figured that countries get into war only because of over-population. I figured that's the only way to bring the population down. A lot of wars are fought with no meaning. There's no reason to fight, but they fight. Just like you take these people in Africa and the other states, they're fighting forever, there's never a stopping point, and what are they fighting for? It's just that the United States or whoever is supplying them with guns and ammunition and they're always fighting. It seems like there is no reason for it. If you had a reason to fight, like the war I was in, when they attacked Pearl Harbor, I thought they had a reason to fight. They shouldn't have involved the entire United States to settle the differences of what happened in Pearl Harbor. That's my opinion. Another thing, like they always say, it doesn't matter which war it is, the rich get richer, while the poor get old and lose their lives.
- K: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about World War II that you've been thinking about?
- B: No, not that I know of. Like I said, I had a good time, I enjoyed myself, I didn't want to be there, but since they drafted me. I had to be there. Being a married man, I don't think I would have enlisted. A lot of little things happen that hurts an individual. Now I always say if the rich were treated the same as the poor, in a war then they wouldn't mind. I was in the Navy. I never saw one rich kid in the Navy, that I saw. Where were they? There had to be a lot of rich kids in the service. If you saw them in the front lines, there would have been maybe one or two that wanted to go there. Other than that, you never saw them.
- K: Anything else.
- B: That's about it. The only thing I know is the next war, I was too old to go into it.
- K: You mean Korea?
- B: Yeah.
- K: Did you belong to the reserves after you came out?
- B: No, like I said, they didn't want to ask everybody to join the reserves. Like married men with children, they didn't even want us. It would cost the government too much to be in the reserves. They would have to pay him, and pay his wife and family. Single men they wanted in the reserves. Like George they wanted in the reserves.
- K: You mean George Vogrin?

B: Yeah. Then they called him back into the actual service. I don't think I would have gone into the service because I was married, they didn't even care for the people that were married.

K: How about veterans benefits. Did you take advantage of them after the war?

B: I had insurance while I was in the service. I think it was \$10,000, I had to pay for it, then I dropped it when I got out. What I was paying while I was in the service, I think they almost tripled it when I got out. Because you weren't in any danger of getting killed. That's why they raised the premium, it was still a good thing, but I still had the insurances that I had from back home, plus the insurance I had down at the mill. I figured I would drop that. They give you good insurance while you were in the service at a good price, but once you got out they like tripled the premiums. So I just dropped it.

K: Anything else about your active duty in the service that you remember now before we finish?

B: No. That's about it. I don't know any more. I did what they asked me to do. To the best of my ability and that was it. They didn't ask for anything more and I didn't give them any more. What they wanted I did and that was it.

K: Thank you for your time.

B: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW