

Interviewee: Bertil “Bert” Sandberg

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 15 February 2002

Location: dining room of the Sandberg home, Mendota Heights, MN

Transcribed & edited by: Thomas Saylor, March – April 2002

Bert Sandberg was born 28 July 1925 in St. Paul, the son of Swedish immigrant parents. He attended Mechanic Arts High School in St. Paul (class of '43), where he excelled at football, basketball, and track. In September 1943, several months after graduation, Bert enlisted in the US Navy. After completing Basic Training at Farragut Naval Station, Idaho, Bert volunteered for amphibious operations and was sent to Virginia for training.

In May 1944 Bert joined the crew of USS *LST 1018* (LST: landing ship, tank) and departed for the Pacific Theater. On *LST 1018*, he served as one of the four-man crew of a Higgins boat, used during Pacific island invasions and equipped with a front ramp that dropped, so that troops and equipment could be landed at or near shore. During 1944-45 Bert participated in seven amphibious operations in the Philippine Islands and Dutch East Indies; among these were Leyte (Oct-Nov 44), Mindoro (Dec 44), and Mindanao (Apr 45). Following VJ-Day in August 1945 Bert served on *LST 1016*, which was assisting in the transportation of Japanese troops from all over the Pacific back to Japan. Bert finally returned to the US in May 1946 and was discharged that same month with the rank of seaman first class.

After military service Bert attended Augsburg College in Minneapolis (1946-50) and was then self-employed. His companies included Sandberg Steel Erection, with projects worldwide, and American Crane Company. In 1952 Bert married Carol Ziniel; the couple made their home in Mendota Heights, Minnesota, and raised three children.

Bert passed away in April 2003.

US Navy, 1943-46; USS *LST 1018* (1944-45); USS *LST 1016* (1945-46)



Photo: LST vessels of the same model as *LST 1018*, offloading cargo.

Caption with photo: Five LSTs beached at San Fabian, Lingayen Gulf [Philippines] while unloading trucks, circa January 1945.

NavSource naval archive, <http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160697.htm>. Accessed 7 February 2016.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

B = Bert Sandberg

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: This is 15 February 2002, and this is the tape with Mr. Bert Sandberg. First Mr. Sandberg, I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy day to sit and have this conversation. Thank you very much.

B: You're welcome.

T: At the beginning, can I just ask you when and where you were born?

B: I was born 28 July 1925, on 9th and Wacuta [in downtown St. Paul], right across the street was Bethesda Hospital. So I didn't have to go far.

T: So right in downtown St. Paul?

B: Yes.

T: And you went to grade school and high school in St. Paul, too?

B: I went to a grade school called Franklin School, that's in what they call lower town now. It was very interesting, because most parents of the kids who were there with me were immigrants.

T: Your parents were also immigrants.

B: My parents were from Sweden. Most of my friends were Irish, Italian, and we had a few blacks. But they were not immigrant.

T: And you finished high school in 1943, is that right?

B: June of 1943 I graduated from Mechanic Arts High School.

T: So you were in high school, a sophomore or a junior, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

B: I think I was a sophomore. It was December of '41, and it was on a late Sunday night. I'll never forget. We had played basketball and we were at Bridgeman's, a restaurant, an ice cream store, on the corner of St Peter and 7th [in St. Paul]. And we stopped in there—we had an old Model A—and one of the boys came out and says,

"They bombed Pearl Harbor!" And nobody knew where Pearl Harbor was. We didn't know what he was talking about. "Where's that?" "Hawaii," [he said]. "But where's Hawaii?" It was very... *(pauses three seconds)* kind of a shock.

And the big shock came as the next day we went to school at Mechanic Arts, it was a Monday, and they had an assembly saying about the war. I think Roosevelt signed the declaration two days later. And he [the principal] says, "And now we're going to sing "The Star Spangled Banner." And nobody knew it. So he said we all had to go back to our homeroom, study it, and come back in half an hour! We all came back, and then we could sing "The Star Spangled Banner."

T: How did you react once the news kind of sank it what had happened?

B: To be honest with you, I was so wrapped up in sports and that... I guess I didn't know much about the outside world, like Germany, Japan. I figured nobody could beat us. I didn't know any better. I didn't know we were so poorly equipped.

T: How did your folks react, Bert?

B: Well, my mother and father, you know... *(pauses three seconds)* My mother didn't talk English too good, being a foreigner, and my father had to work all the time. So we never... In those days, immigrants didn't communicate that much with their fathers and mothers. But I do know that in 1938 my mother still was not a citizen, and it came out in the St. Paul *Dispatch* [a daily newspaper] that all non-citizens might be shipped back to Europe if they don't get their citizenship. And, boy, did my ma get it in a hurry.

T: Really? So it had an impact on her in that respect.

B: That was in '38, before the war, but that's when Hitler was marching.

T: Now do you have brothers or sisters?

B: I had one brother, Bob. He was two years older than I was. No sisters.

T: Did he enlist pretty much right away?

B: My brother wanted to go; he was a pretty good student. He wanted to fly. A lot of students... He was at the U [University of Minnesota, Minneapolis], as a freshman, and I think that he wanted to join the British up in Canada. A lot of them were joining the British Air Force. But he didn't go. I don't know why.

T: Was he then drafted into the US Army?

B: My brother was drafted into the Army in February of 1943.

T: And he served in Europe, or the Pacific?

B: My brother was in the Combat Engineers, I think it was the 106th; they took their training down in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. He went overseas, and just before Omaha [Omaha Beach, D-Day invasion, June 1944]... He wasn't in the Omaha invasion, he was in the... *(pauses three seconds)* He went in later on, but he was taken prisoner at the Battle of the Bulge. And he went from 200 pounds down to 104. He was freed in April, I think... April, yes, about two weeks before the war was over in Europe.

T: Was that difficult on him, being a Prisoner of War?

B: Yes, my brother never came out of it. I think that he, he said he got beat up by the guards, but I doubt it, because he... All drinkers have to have an alibi. He never came out of it; he drank. He got married. When he was married—he got married when he was in the service—we had a construction company, so I kept him on the payroll. But when he was drinking I told him not to come around, because he was a bad example.

T: When did he pass away?

B: He passed away about four years ago.

T: Now you joined the Navy. What went into your decision to join the Navy?

B: Well, it those days it was kind of an honor and privilege to be in the service. It's not like lately. Everybody was going, and I was a little younger. A lot of my friends were 18, so they were gone before I was. And I remember, they were so strict, Pat Conway didn't even get a day's leave, because he had to go to Minneapolis the day we graduated. And then he went to Farragut [Training Center, Idaho]; he went in the Navy. Most of my friends went in the Navy, and so I guessed I would go in the Navy, too. I had never seen an ocean, and it was actually the Japanese Navy that had caused all this, and I figured we wanted to get even with them.

(1, A, 104)

T: Now you enlisted, and it was not right away that you actually were called up, right?

B: You're right. I turned 18 on 28 July [1943], so I ran down there with Pat Conway's brother, Matt, who was going to be a priest, and he wanted to join. Yes, so it was about two weeks before I turned 18. The reason you did it in those days, if you joined at 17 you could pick your branch. If you didn't, then you're at the mercy of your Draft Board—they put you where they want to put you.

T: So you could have ended up in the Army?

B: Yes.

T: How did you feel once you had enlisted? What kind of feelings did you have once you had signed the papers?

B: I kind of felt proud. But it was nothing in those days; everybody was in. And if you didn't go in... I had a friend named Pat Lee, who served on the [battleship] *Massachusetts*; he had flat feet, and they made him 4-F. And he was so embarrassed, he trained picking up marbles with his toes, and he passed to get in. It was no great thing; everybody wanted to be in the service.

T: So there was a desire to be in, as opposed to being on the sidelines?

B: That's right.

T: Did guys who were in the service look down on those who weren't in?

B: Oh, I don't think so. I had a friend named Pat, another Irish kid, that talked about three or four of us guys, older, to go in in February. My brother did, even though he had had rheumatic fever when he was a young fellow. He [Pat] had a heart murmur, and they made him what they called in those days 4-F. And he was just crushed.

There were a few that worked in war plants, and a lot of the farmers didn't have to go in, but I didn't care. I didn't care if they were in or not.

T: How did your folks respond to you joining the Navy?

B: Well, I remember, my father was working at a war plant in New Brighton [suburb north of St. Paul], and he came home, and I said I wanted to join. He says, "Well,"—and he put his arm around me; I'll never forget it—"You know, Bert, this country has been pretty good to you and your mother, being foreigners; I am proud that you're joining." My ma didn't like it so much, but I told my ma, "Look, I am only two weeks away, they are going to draft me eventually. Let me go where I want to go." She said okay. They had to sign for you in those days. *(telephone rings in background)*

T: When you were in the Navy, for your Basic Training you didn't go to Great Lakes, down by Chicago, you went somewhere else.

B: Yes, everybody went six hours away to Great Lakes. For some reason our group was shipped to Farragut, Idaho, which, if you have ever been to Farragut, Idaho, it's about a two-and-a-half day trip on the train, going through Montana. That's where I ended up. *(telephone continues to ring)* I think Great Lakes was overfilled.

T: So they sent you guys to Farragut. Was that a new part of the country up there, in Idaho?

B: I had never been west of Fargo [North Dakota], so it was completely new.

T: How would you describe your Basic Training experience?

B: I had come out of high school running track and I had done a little boxing, so I was in excellent shape. I suppose like everybody else I kind of showed off and all that. I was as good as anybody—rowing a boat, running cross country. But I didn't have to do much of that, because for some reason I got very lucky and I was on their football team.

T: Did you want to be on the football team, or did they select you?

(1, A, 157)

B: They had tryouts. There was a guy in our company, and he says, "Can you run? We don't have anyone who's quick." I said, "Yes, I can run." I had a track record, and I figured I was pretty quick. I went out, and I was very lucky, and I made the team. I never thought I had a chance.

T: Now why did the base have a football team to begin with?

B: The base had a football team. (*grandfather clock chimes begin*) There was Camp Benyon, Camp Scott, which I was in, Camp Waldron, there was about six camps, and they played among themselves.

T: All within this naval training facility?

B: Right.

T: And then the champion, which was us... (*pauses three seconds*) and we were pretty good. I was lucky, because I had a line in front of me that could open holes for anybody. We played Gonzaga University, which was in Spokane, Washington. Hate to tell you the score: 55 - 0.

B: You guys beat them 55 - 0?

T: Unheard of in those days.

B: And then we played Washington State. They had an All-American by the name of Bob Kennedy, and he had a line in front of him of 17-year old high schoolers, and we just walked over him, too. It wasn't fair; we had good coaches, we had good equipment, and we had guys who had played pro and college. So it wasn't fair.

T: Did you like playing?

B: I loved it. In fact, I loved it so much, I could have gone home on leave two weeks earlier, and I stayed for the last game. Everybody in my company thought I was

nuts. Because for a lot of guys that was a chance to go home before they shipped out.

T: So you didn't get a chance to come home before you shipped out?

B: I did come home; they arranged it for me. One person was a lieutenant commander, and he had a lot of pull. He said, "Don't worry about it, you'll get your leave." Only thing bad about it was that I didn't go home on the train with all my buddies I had been in camp with.

T: Did you have to go by yourself?

B: With a different company.

T: Would you say, by and large, that Basic Training was positive or negative for you?

B: I would say negative, because we didn't do much shooting. We didn't use much arms. I think I got out on the rifle range once, but they had those old rifles, those Springfields. I didn't get maggy drawers—that's when you missed a target completely, the guy flags a red flag. They call it maggy drawers.

No, I thought they could have given us more training. That's my personal opinion.

(1, A, 192)

T: Did you feel unprepared when you left?

B: Well, I was lucky. I went to radio school, and then I didn't like it, so I quit. They were taking volunteers for the amphibs [amphibious forces], and no one wanted to volunteer, and I said, "I'll go. Anything to get out of Farragut." I volunteered, and the next thing I knew I was on a train going to Camp Bradford, in Little Creek, Virginia.

One of the things I was disappointed in is, when we pulled into the train station in St Paul, which is the Union Depot, I was only four blocks from home. And they were going to be there for two hours, switching. So I asked the officers if I could run up and see my mom. "Nobody leaves the train," he says. We get to Chicago, and the guy decides they can leave the train. And then I never saw my mother until May of 1946.

T: Now you went to Virginia. Is that where you picked up your LST?

B: No. In Virginia you had your Basic Training. It was kind of funny, I said to some guy, "Look, there's the Atlantic Ocean." And the guy says, "You dummy, that's the Chesapeake Bay." (*laughs*) To me it looked like the ocean.

They trained us down there, pretty good physical. We would use walkie-talkies, and we stayed in Quonset huts. It wasn't like the Navy anymore; it was like the Army.

T: But by that time you knew you were going to be on an LST?

B: Do you know what they had there for an LST? They had a blacktop, painted. That was our first trainer. You stand over here, you stand over there. But then they shipped us to Norfolk, and that was tough. Liberty there, you've probably heard stories, "sailors and dogs keep off the lawn." And you can't blame them, because there were so many sailors there.

One of the things I did see was Robert Taylor, the famous movie star, and Van Heflin. A very nice guy. He was an officer in the Navy.

From there, they marched us from Camp Bradford, in Little Creek, to the train station, it was about five miles, or six. They had a (***) , with a band, in front of us. Then we pulled into Boston, into what they call the Fargo Building. That's by the South Station, if you know Boston. And we were in the Fargo Building, which was a big warehouse, about twelve stories. At the top floor was the beer gardens. I remember the first time I went there, I asked for a beer, and the guy said, "That'll be a *kwahtah*." I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "A *kwahtah*." He meant twenty-five cents.

And from there we picked up our LST in Fall River, which was the big shipyard for Bethlehem [Steel Company], and then we trained, and from there we went down to New York, Pier 92. I was very lucky, we all got to go to the Stage Door Canteen, and all the movie stars were there. From there we—do you want me to keep telling?—I can take it all the way across.

T: Did you go through the Panama Canal?

B: Next stop, we left... People didn't know it, but right off Florida was Torpedo Junction, where the German subs sat. And they were knocking ships out like you wouldn't believe. From there we went down to Guantanamo Bay [US Naval facility in Cuba] for gunnery practice. Gunnery practice in the Navy is to have an airplane fly with a sleeve behind it, and you shoot at it. First day we didn't hit anything; by the third day we got a little better, we tore it up.

From there we went through the Panama Canal. Very interesting going through the Panama Canal. We saw all these guns, and some guy said, "The guns you see is only half. The rest is camouflaged." It was really unbelievable; there were 40mm guns all over the place. We came out on the other side, and all of a sudden a PT-boat comes racing at us. Here our skipper—all they are is an ensign, I don't think he'd had more sea duty than me—here we were going into a minefield. And he didn't even know it.

T: Bert, what was the crew on an LST?

B: It was 102 men. Then we left Panama and we went to New Zealand. Do you realize it was 32 days that we didn't see land? An LST goes nine knots, possibly ten at flank, that means top speed.

T: Nine or ten knots? That's it?

(1, A, 253)

B: That's all they can go. And the reason that we went the southern route was that the Japanese subs could get us and sink us with their deck gun. They had a five-inch gun. But then they couldn't get back. So we took the southern route. That's what they told us. There were eight of us. Thirty-two days without seeing land. Wow.

Then we got into New Zealand, and we got liberty. Right away they moved us in, we picked up troops, and we went into Morotai [invasion of Morotai, in the Dutch East Indies, on 30 September 1944]. It was just what they call a "milk run" in the Navy, because we didn't see... we didn't shoot at anything.

T: Morotai was in September 1944, right?

B: Right.

T: You mentioned going on shore leave in New Zealand.

B: Yes, it was in Auckland. There were so many Marines there. Marines and Navy on shore is like... not a real happy group. They don't mix very well.

T: Why is that?

B: I suppose the Marines think they are better than everyone else. *(laughs)* They didn't mix very well.

T: Were there fights occasionally?

B: Yes. The Shore Patrol had their hands full; remember, the Shore Patrol is for Marines, too. Marines are just a small branch of the Navy; some people don't know that. Marines are attached to the Navy.

T: When guys went on leave, what did they do?

B: Well, first of all, it's probably 1000 guys to a girl. *(laughs)*

T: *(laughs)* Not very good odds!

B: Odds like that, even Robert Taylor I don't think could have made out with a girl. *(laughs)* But guys drank, got drunk. That's all they had to do. We were just kids, not very sophisticated. Nobody wanted to go see historical sites or things like that.

T: Were most of the guys not causing problems? Was it a small minority of people causing the problems?

B: I would say that the best people were the people from the Midwest. Not because I am from the Midwest, but they were the best. The biggest troublemakers were from the East coast, and maybe Texas. They thought they were a little bit better than everyone else. None of them could fight, but they thought they could!

(1, A, 282)

T: Now on board your ship, 102 guys, I guess you got to know people pretty well?

B: You get to know them well. First of all, in the South Pacific, I didn't talk to a woman for almost two-and-a-half years. Think about that. Just hearing that voice, you don't care how she looked.

Yes, they got along pretty well, they kind of buddied up by age groups. The oldest guy in our outfit was 30 years old.

T: The oldest guy on the entire ship?

B: We called him Pop.

T: He must have felt real old to you guys.

B: He was married, and he was homesick. We used to rib him, he'd be writing to his wife, her had her picture. Another guy walked in, "Do you think she's loyal to you? She's out with a war worker." Most young guys never had a girlfriend, you know. I never had a girlfriend, none of them did.

T: Well you guys were young when you went in the service, I mean, you were eighteen.

Let me ask, what kind of things caused problems on your ship, as far as between people?

B: We had a couple of boatswain's mates; one was from St Augustine, Florida, and the other one was from some place in South Carolina, and they were a little different. Say what you say, but those Southerners, well, they didn't love the Northerners much, you know. They were a little touchy.

T: Did they stick to themselves a little more?

B: One hundred percent. They stuck to themselves. You kind of paired up with a guy from the part of the country you were from. The kids from California were the best.

T: Did you do the same thing, find people to hang out with?

B: You know, overseas I never met one guy from Minnesota. I was very disappointed. I met two from North Dakota. I wasn't very popular with the guys. I didn't like guys from Iowa, but Missouri I loved. Good kids from Missouri. You kind of paired up with somebody who thinks like you do.

T: Did you have a best friend on board ship?

B: Yes, I had a very good friend, Tom Garbett. He was from Brooklyn.

I was kind of lucky. We had a guy named Jimmy Slattery, who was a light heavyweight champ of the world, not Golden Gloves, but pro. He took a liking to me, and taught me how to box. So I was fortunate, nobody smarted off to me, because I was boxing. I wanted to work out and box, because I wanted to go back and play sports. That's all I thought about, going back to college to play sports. Little did I know it was going to be a little tougher to get in, because my grades in high school weren't too good.

T: But you weren't thinking about that then.

B: No, I thought I'd walk in, because of sports.

T: Did you have Regular Navy guys on board your ship, too?

B: Good point. *(pauses five seconds)* I think we had one or two. On your dog tag is USNR, US Navy Reserve. I don't think I ever saw a guy with a dog tag with USN on it.

T: That would be Regular Navy?

B: Yes. But I don't think I ever saw one.

T: How about your officers?

B: Our officers were amphibious officers, and they were all Reserves. Our skipper was named Commander Williams, who graduated from Harvard. Our top-ranking officer was a JG [Navy rank: Lieutenant Junior Grade]. As we used to say, a JG is an ensign that learned how to swim!

T: What did you think of your officers on board the ship?

B: *(pauses three seconds)* The Navy, the enlisted men, doesn't associate with their officers. You've got to call them "sir" all the time, by their name. It's all right, you know, when you are 17, 18, 19, you don't care.

T: So there was a formal atmosphere on board ship?

B: It was terrible. We had a couple officers that were 23 or 24, they couldn't go on leave with us. They were not allowed. One had starboard side, one had port, they had to go out by themselves, with the older guys. And we were having all the fun, the enlisted men.

T: On board a ship like that, with only eight of them, with long time at sea, I hope they got along with each other.

B: We don't know. But I know one thing, one time one of the officers picked on our cook. And remember in the Navy we had beans for breakfast. So the cook filled it up, instead of sugar, salt, and it was almost impossible to eat it. He did it because he was mad at this one officer, but we all went along with it. The officer came down, and we all said, "This tastes good, what are you talking about?" It was almost impossible to eat, but we all stuck up for the cook. The officer was mad.

T: So was there a kind of camaraderie between enlisted guys?

B: You get that when you go in combat. Before that you don't have it. That is my personal opinion. When you start seeing somebody get killed—we fished a lot of Army guys out of the water, and sailors—you start thinking. And we didn't have any chaplain. We never went to church.

(1, A, 340)

T: Your ship was too small for a chaplain?

B: Too small, yes. We were on the beach. The beaches we were on had just been taken maybe a month before, so it wasn't built up.

T: Was there a lot of turnover among the crew on your ship? Did guys come and go?

B: You mean leave the ship? No, you only get new guys when somebody gets... We had two guys killed, and we got two replacements. That's all that I know of. We had one guy that broke his leg, and think we got one for him, too.

T: So you kept pretty much the same crew. That's different from other ships, isn't it, where they had guys coming and going much more regularly?

B: I heard, that you could transfer, but I just heard that you could transfer with someone on another ship with the same rate. But none of our guys ever transferred.

T: Let me shift and ask you about some of the invasions you were involved with, because you were involved in a number of them, many in the Philippines.

B: Actually we were down in New Guinea, and we had troops, and we went to Leyte [Philippines], that was the first one. Everything went perfect; there was no (***) on

the beaches or anything. We landed on the north side of Leyte, I think, where they were going to put a landing strip, and the second day we found out what the war was all about. We were at general quarters. You were always at general quarters a half hour before sunrise and a half hour after sunrise, because the Japanese liked to come in following the sun, and you got blinded and you couldn't see them.

I remember, we saw a couple of ships get hit. We didn't even know the word *kamikaze*. We shot him down, and instead of hitting the water he hit the ship. The word *kamikaze*, I don't think we heard about that until... I don't remember. We called them suicide planes. I do know that no one could write home about it, because they did not want to let the Japanese know how bad the damage was that they were doing to us.

T: Did you ever have one of these *kamikazes* hit your own ship?

B: Sure, yes. We cut one in half, and it landed on our ship. The pilot didn't, but the tail and the fuselage landed on our LST, and each guy got a band (*motions with hand around wrist, like wristband*) from the plane. Aluminum, kind of a bracelet. Of course I lost mine about a week later. I went to a ship's reunion, and there was a fellow there that still had it, and I offered him a couple of thousand dollars for it, and he says, "Oh, no, no." But his wife says, "We'll make a deal." (*laughs*) I wanted to get it for my kids.

T: But for him it obviously still meant quite a lot.

B: I think he was on old age pension, and I took not very good advantage of him, but I said, "I'll give you \$2000 right now. I'll write you a check if you give me that." He said no, but his wife says, "If he dies, you'll get it tomorrow." (*laughs*)

T: Did you ever get it?

B: No. I didn't want to push it.

T: Now, this first invasion, Morotai—what was going through your mind before the invasion started?

B: We knew the invasion was coming on, because, I'm guessing, about 5:00 in the morning the battleships started laying a barrage down. You wouldn't believe it, shelling the beach.

T: Was it loud?

B: Wow. And you could see the guns come up and go "ba-boom" (*motions with hand*)...

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.

T: And there were six battleships there?

B: Six battleships shelling the beach the next day. And then there were six there, and then about the third night in Leyte—we'd seen some *kamikazes*—Tokyo Rose [Japanese wartime radio broadcaster] got on the radio. And she told us how bad we were and how our wives were running around and that—I never called anybody a 4-F, but that's what she called them. She said, "And the Jap fleet's coming in to annihilate you." I don't know if you know that story. And we all laughed. The next morning I looked up—one battleship, the *Mississippi*, was sitting there shelling the beach; the rest left. She told us, "The American fleet got scared and left you." That's when the Japanese fleet was coming in to annihilate us on the beach. You probably know the story on that.

T: No, tell me.

B: The story is, there was an admiral... what was his name... (*pauses three seconds*) I can show you in a book later. They were coming in to annihilate all us amphibious craft, and we didn't have a chance if they came in. And Halsey [Admiral William Halsey; from June 1944 commander, US Third Fleet] went the wrong way and... didn't you know that? That's one of the biggest... Halsey almost got court-martialed. He went after the fleet, the Japs sucked him in. He went after the fleet, and they were coming into the Straits, and we were lucky. We had admirals named Oldendorf and Spruance; they crossed a "T" on the Japs. [this section refers to Battle of Surigao Strait, 24-25 October 1944, part of the Leyte Gulf engagement]

T: This story I've read, yes.

B: They saved us. It felt kind of funny, because Tokyo Rose was telling us what was happening.

T: Were you guys scared, or worried, or what?

B: You know, that's a... you know, I don't think you really get that worried. You know, you figure... I don't know, to be honest with you. I know one thing, when you're at general quarters for four or five hours, and nothing comes over, and then they start announcing, over the phones they'd say, "Don't follow them in." Because our Navy pilots... if you know how they had it, we'd be on the beach, the Japanese [planes] would come in, and our Navy pilots would meet them forty miles out and try to shoot them down. And they [US planes] would come in, but they had orders not to come in. But a lot of them followed them [Japanese planes] in, because they wanted to get a kill. I saw four or five of our planes shot down, because when one guy pulls that gun—every other bullet is a tracer, so you can see how it looks—very interesting...

T: So a number of our planes were downed by friendly fire?

B: Friendly fire, yes. But they didn't call it friendly fire, they called them stupid. Our guys, you know. And you didn't know, we weren't that good, and an airplane looked like an airplane. (***)

T: The first time your ship actually hit the beach, was that at Leyte as well?

B: We hit the beach first at Morotai, but that was what we called a milk run, because you didn't fire your guns. We did get stuck on the beach, and we got pulled off; they had some tugs there, too. The stern anchor couldn't pull us off. Let me describe that to you: when you go on the beach, you drop a stern anchor with a cable and then you pull yourself off. And if he goes up too far, the cable can't do it. (*pauses five seconds*) Leyte was where we saw what the war was really about.

T: What do you mean when you say that?

B: We saw the *Princeton* [CVL-23, light carrier, commissioned 1943] on fire, it was a carrier, and I saw about four or five other ships get hit.

T: By *kamikazes*?

B: *Kamikazes*. It kind of brought back memories of 11 September [referring to attack on New York City, 2001]; when they hit, they just explode, you know. And the *Princeton* had a lot of planes on the deck, and they all blew up.

It was nice, we pulled out of there and went back and got more troops. Going back, when we left Hollandia, New Guinea, to go to Leyte, they said that was the largest ship convoy of all times, I think about 800 ships. And that was a long haul, I am going to guess 1500 miles.

T: At nine or ten knots!

B: Oh, and they hated us, the destroyers. You see, we were protected by DE's, called destroyer escorts; they could go up to 25, 30 knots. It's like babysitting your grandma. We were so slow.

T: They couldn't go any faster than you.

B: No, they couldn't go any faster.

T: Was that the most difficult invasion, at least from your perspective?

B: No. Anytime I used to get calls on 15 December, you can ask my wife, from all over the country asking, "Do you know what day this is?" "Yes, I know what day this is—the day we went to Mindoro." Mindoro [island in the Philippines, south of Luzon] was an island; that was really something. We went with about 10 or 12 other LSTs, and we had a couple of carriers. But we never saw the carriers; they

were out, farther away from us. We had a whole slew of PT-boats with us, and a few destroyers.

It was kind of interesting. We had a... our captain was smart; I can see why he went to Harvard. We carried troops. This is something you are going to be surprised about; we carried troops, some of the LSTs carried gasoline, for the airplanes, when they get the strip built. Did you know, we had a big number on the side? We think that some of the Filipinos—not all the Filipinos were loyal, some were pretty loyal to the Japs—and we figured they went down on the beach and checked: “1018 carrying this, 1016 carrying that.” Because about two days out of Mindoro, a plane came down, and flew in, just right down the convoy, and we think he was looking for numbers, and that he knew which ship was carrying what. Because that night the ones that were sunk were the gasoline one and the one carrying ammunition. Blew right up.

T: You think they searched them out, those two ships?

B: He probably went down there and said, it’s in this column—you went in columns of six, you know.

T: In a convoy, you mean?

(1, B, 114)

B: Yes, when we were in a convoy. And then outside of that was the destroyers. We didn’t worry about submarines because we didn’t draft much; we only drafted about ten feet, if that. Torpedo would go right underneath us.

T: So for you the danger was from the air?

B: From the air.

T: What made Mindoro so difficult as an invasion?

B: For us, we saw the most action; we lost the most LSTs. *(pauses three seconds)* We always talk about it, guys on our ship... 15 December. You know the funny thing about it, my brother was taken prisoner 15 December? The same day. I told my mother, you could have lost us both the same day. 15 December he was taken prisoner at the Battle of the Bulge.

We were at general quarters continuously. You sleep in the gun tub; you go to the bathroom right in the gun tub. You stayed there, because at Mindoro they kept coming over on us.

T: On a regular basis? Or just every so often?

B: We never got secured. The officers will secure you from general quarters, and there was always some reason... Our radar was picking up planes in the area. But

radar wasn't that good in those days though. So to be on the safe side they just kept us at general quarters.

T: Did you land troops on the beach at Mindoro?

B: Yes. And that's when we got a little surprise again, too. We were right by a hill, a high hill, and the Japanese came over, and they came over the hill, so you couldn't pick them up on the radar until they were on top of you. So then you're at general quarters again. So you get no sleep.

(1, B, 144)

T: And that works on you, too, after a while, I guess.

You mentioned that once your ship lost a couple of guys killed in action.
(clock chimes audible)

B: We got... *(pauses three seconds)* at Iwo [battle for Iwo Jima, February-March 1945], on the beach we got hit by mortars. I wasn't on the ship then, I was on the Higgins boat. It's kind of funny, you know, an LST carries two Higgins boats, and a crew of four for each, a total of eight.

T: Now how many guys can a Higgins boat transport?

B: Thirty-two. Or a jeep and ten. Thirty-two infantrymen. Marines call them riflemen, and the Army calls them infantry. Now during an invasion, they take you off early in the morning, you go out to an APA [attack personnel transport vessel], and you circle around. They had a beach master, and they use semaphore. One of the guys on the Higgins boat could read semaphore; I couldn't. I was a bow hookman; I made the Army or Marines put their pack over their shoulder so they could take it off. A lot of those guys couldn't swim, and those packs were very heavy. They lost a lot of men at Tarawa [Battle of Tarawa Atoll, November 1943] because they drowned; they couldn't get their packs off. So my job was to say, "Hey, take your pack so you can go like this *(motions with arm as if taking backpack off his shoulder)* and get it off." That was my job, and drop the ramp when they actually hit the beach.

T: Did the Higgins boat have a ramp in the front?

B: Yes, we went right up the beach. The worst thing about a Higgins boat was broaching. Broaching is—I don't know if I'm pronouncing it right—but you go up on the beach, and the big waves, if they catch you, they can turn your boat around like that *(makes sideways motion with hand)*. Then you're in the infantry!

T: So you had to hit the beach exactly front on?

(1, B, 168)

B: Exactly perfect. And if the waves took you and flipped you sideways, they would throw you up on the beach. Those Higgins boats were plywood, with Rolls Royce engines. They had two engines. We could go pretty quick, I'd say—I'm guessing—18, 19 knots, I'm just guessing.

T: But much faster than the LSTs?

B: Oh, a lot faster. You use Higgins boats for picking up mail, for liberty. See there's davits, you lower them down, and bring them back up.

T: At Mindoro, for example, the Higgins boats were down, and you transported guys to the beach.

B: No, at Mindoro we didn't, because there was only—they claimed—about 300 Japs there.

T: So you took the LST right up to the beach?

B: Yes. They didn't even drop us [the Higgins boats], they didn't need us. Most of the troops that went there were from... were Army engineers, for building an airstrip. It was not... the landing was not bad at all. I guess one guy got killed by a water buffalo, at least that's what we heard. Kind of a joke. But we were so close to Clark Field [airfield], that's in Manila, and the planes came over all the time.

T: Where were the two guys on your boat killed? Was that here at Mindoro?

B: I think, if I remember, it was at Iwo [Iwo Jima], where the Japs were up on Mount Suribachi and were throwing hand grenades—they had the best mortar fire in the world, I don't know if you knew that, and they hit us. I was gone...

T: You weren't on the ship...

B: I wasn't on the ship, thank God, when they got killed.

T: You were not at Iwo Jima? The ship was, but you were not?

B: No, I was on another one [LST]; I had transferred to [LST] 1016, or 1018. [records indicate Bert was still assigned to LST 1018 in February-March 1945; he joined LST 1016 on 4 May 1945]

T: *(kitchen noises audible)* Can you describe that...

B: Well, I was at Iwo a little later, you know. Not during the initial landing [in February 1945].

T: When were you there later? After?

B: I think they secured the island about... it took them about 30 days to secure, 15 February until... *(pauses five seconds)* I think we were there about a month after; it was pretty well secure. And we went back a year later, when the war was over, to have a... kind of a testimonial or something *(pauses three seconds)* for all the guys.

T: In February 1946 you were still, still out there in the Pacific?

B: Until May 1946.

T: When you are taking this Higgins boat to land, it takes some minutes obviously to get from the ship, or wherever you have these troops, to actually get them to land. Can you describe this?

B: It takes sometimes half an hour. When we pull alongside an APA, that's a ship, people don't realize that the Higgins boat is banging against the ship, and you have to be careful. We had a couple of Army guys got their legs between there, and they got them crushed. So when they came down the cargo net, they threw the cargo net in the Higgins boat, and we'd hold them [the cargo net] when they were coming down, so they [troops] wouldn't get hurt. Then you go out, and you circle around...

T: With the troops in your Higgins boat now?

B: ...circle around until the beachmaster tells you when to go in. They you come in on a line. Circle around like this *(circular hand motions)* and then he sends you in, *(straight ahead motion with arm)* and you go, *humph*.

T: So it's coordinated with a number of other boats from different...

B: There's, you know, 40, 50, 60 Higgins boats, if not more.

T: What was going through your head out there? You are waiting to be sent into the beach. What are you thinking about?

B: *(pauses five seconds)* Glad I'm not going on the beach!

T: Really?

B: No. You know, everybody was pretty quiet. Pretty quiet. At least I was quiet. You're doing your job and... *(pauses three seconds)* You know, when you are 17, 18, 19, you think you are going to live forever. That's the way I can put it. If somebody is going to get killed, it isn't going to be me.

T: Did you think that way, too?

(1, B, 222)

B: Yes. I figured that I was coming back. I had a lot of faith in God, and I am not trying to... don't want to sound like an atheist in a foxhole but, I mean, I just figured I was coming back.

T: So you were circling in the Higgins boats. How about the troops you were carrying? How were they doing?

B: They don't actually come in until we land the troops.

T: The guys that are in your Higgins boat, I mean; they are sitting there? You are going around with them, too, right? How are they doing in the boat?

B: *(pauses four seconds)* Kind of quiet. *(pauses three seconds)* Probably one of their sergeants are talking to them, "Check your guns, and see that you don't get water in them, and when we hit the beach you are going to go here *(points left with hand)*, you are going to go there *(points right with hand)*," you know. That's about all I can say; I didn't listen that much. My job was to make sure that they... it was pretty well crowded in there, and I am up on the front part.

T: So as you were approaching the beach, you had an unobstructed view of whatever was there.

B: There was a little steel there, because the ramp wasn't plywood, the sides were plywood. Steel with kind of a corrugated iron that... what do you call it... made it more stronger. When you are in the first part of the waves, after our battleships have laid down a barrage, there's nobody around. So it's best to be in the first five. Because that's when they come out, dig themselves out, that's when you... chances of getting hit are more. They changed that philosophy at Iwo; they [the Japanese defenders] left them come in [allowed the invading troops to land on the beach], and then get them. They figured the ships would be taken care of by their *kamikazes*.

T: So when you approached the beach, is there a time when you felt the most stressed, or the most tension?

B: *(pauses three seconds)* Gee, I can't answer that. I mean... *(audible voice interruption; Bert's wife in background)*

To be honest with you, *(pauses three seconds)* I know some Army guys were saying the Lord's Prayer, that I know. And I know some of the Catholics were kissing their medals. *(pauses three seconds)* I don't know, I just figured I was going to live. That's not very nice to say, but I...

If I told you a couple of things that happened when I was in general quarters, you'd think I made them up. We actually sometimes wished Japs would come over so we could shoot at them. We wanted to get some planes for our ship; we only had four. I'll never forget, after the war, when the cruiser *Saint Paul* came alongside us,

after the war, they had none! And we had four! And we just... I am going to get a ship's log—I have a ship's log; I'll show it to you. Yes, we had four planes; they used to paint a flag up there. But you also have to remember, too: ten LSTs, four airplanes get shot down, maybe each LST said he shot it down, and he puts a flag up! (*laughs*)

T: (*laughs*)

B: To be honest with you, well... We know we knocked two of them down, because we had half of them land on us. And our skipper says, "We knocked it down; put the flag up."

(1, B, 264)

T: And you put up flags for each one that you knocked down?

B: Yes, we put up flags. We were kind of proud of that [being able to shoot down planes]. We didn't have any firepower.

T: So people felt, especially yourself, that as bad as things were getting, you were going to live through it.

B: Yes, I really did. I remember when my mother wrote me and said that my brother was missing in action, and I got... well, I figured, maybe it can happen. But, no, I didn't... I had a lot of faith.

T: In your opinion, were most guys on your ship the same as you?

B: Absolutely. I'll tell you a true story; it may be hard for you to believe. We were—me and Jimmy Gare, from Brockton, Mass[achusetts]—we were on a 20 mm gun, and (***) and we were saying, "Boy, I hope they come over today, we been standing here all day." The guy behind us, a guy named Genkis—we called him hump because he was always chasing girls, and he had no... he was kind of an asshole—he says, "What, are you guys nuts, praying for some planes to come over?" He was kind of older, and a little scared.

T: It's curious, you say he was a little older, like things changed with age a little bit?

B: He was married, had children. Had something to look forward to.

T: And you young guys?

B: Happy-go-lucky. It's how I can describe it. I never thought I was going to get killed.

(1, B, 284)

T: Let me ask you: on your ship, were there minorities? Filipinos, blacks?

B: Yes, we had two black cooks. Turner, from Baltimore, and we had a guy named Johnson, I can remember that, because at first I thought he was a Swede. Their job was to be mess cooks for the officers. *(pauses four seconds)* Nice guys. Johnson couldn't read or write, and one of our officers taught him how to read and write before he went back. And Turner won all the crap games, we had crap games. The Navy gets paid, you know, once a month, in American currency, so we had money. And you shoot craps. Turner won all the time. We were trying to figure out if he had phony dice or not, but he always won. Then, when he won a lot of money—he probably won forty, fifty, sixty dollars, a lot of money—he'd give it to the officers, and somehow they could get it back [to the United States]. Well, he had a lot of money back there. All of a sudden he gets a "Dear John letter," his wife divorced him, and she had all the money!

T: The money he had sent back?

B: Yes. Then everyone said, "The Lord punished you, for cheating on us!" *(laughs)*

T: Did these black guys get along pretty well on a ship where everyone else was white?

B: They had it kind of tough, I think. That would be tough—two guys. They never said anything... They had quarters by themselves. We were all in the same group, and they were off on the side of the quarters. But they didn't have to stand watch. They didn't have to man a gun. That's what kills you.

You know, in the Navy, you're four [hours] on [duty] and four off and, boy, you don't get much sleep. Well, let's say you take the twelve watch, you're on at 12:00 and you're off at 4:00, and then you can't go to sleep because you've got to wait until the sun comes up, at general quarters, and then they work you during the day. Everybody was permanently tired. And you know what the funny thing is? I never heard of... what do you call it, mononucleosis; nobody got sick. I don't know why.

T: These black guys, did they mix with other guys, with white guys?

B: Yes, they shot craps with us, and... *(pauses four seconds)* There wasn't much to do. Nobody in our outfit knew how to play an instrument, so you didn't have anybody playing an instrument. *(pauses three seconds)* You just sat around and talked, about what you were going to do after the war.

T: One more question about the black guys on your ship: When you went on liberty, did they go with you?

B: Sure. We protected them. They were one of us.

T: So you guys got along okay?

B: That Johnson was big as a horse. Couldn't fight, but he was big. Yes, we took them on leave with us.

(1, B, 314)

T: Now, you mentioned that on ship there wasn't much to do. Was boredom a problem?

B: Terrible. Don't forget, we didn't have any library, no books. On a small ship, we don't get fresh fruit; when a supply ship comes in, right off the bat the battleship sends over [for supplies]. They go right down the line. When they get down to us, we get nothing. That's another thing I didn't like: "the Navy's well fed." We had dehydrated spuds. And I didn't drink coffee, I drank water. It's amazing I still have my teeth. *(clock chimes in background)* We took Atabrine, for malaria, because we were on the beach. It's a pill. Turns you kind of yellow.

T: How else did guys kill time on the ship?

B: Talk about their girlfriends, talk about sports, argue about states. Minnesota was pretty good in football in those days; "we're better than you." We didn't have any checkers, no library. *(pauses four seconds)* We played a lot of cards; I didn't play cards, but a lot of them played a lot of cards. A lot of cards.

T: Was there drinking on board the ship?

B: You're not allowed.

T: I know you weren't allowed to, but did it happen anyway?

B: Yes, it did. Do you know what we carried across [on the original trip over from the US]? Forty thousand cases of beer in (***). Rupert's beer, from New York. The twelve to four watch was drunk every night.

T: Did your officers know this? Or just sort of turn a blind eye?

B: The officers told us to steal about a thousand cases for us, because when you got liberty, on the islands it was on the beach with two cans of beer.

I didn't drink, though. I got drunk a couple of times, but... They [ships' officers] suspected us, that we were drinking. They'd pull that old crap like, you know, "Johnny Jones said you were drinking." And I said, "I don't know." Everybody sticks pretty close together.

T: Do you think the officers were really trying to catch you?

B: Yes. You can't blame them, they have to keep a tight ship.

T: So they knew what was going on. Was the drinking a problem?

B: No. Nobody walked around drunk. It's impossible, because the beer was locked up. Somebody else had the keys, not us.

T: But people were able to get access to it, you said, right?

B: We did when we were bringing it over, because they [the LSTs] had these vents for when you carry equipment in tanks, to take the fumes out. We went through there; the beer was down there. We didn't take tanks, though, we'd open it and went down there. And we were (***)

To answer your question, on New Year's Eve, a guy named Freddy Gardner, from Newburgh, New York, took some paint—you know, you can make alcohol out of paint, I don't know how he did it—he really got drunk. They didn't find him for two days. They thought he fell over the ship.

T: What was he drinking? Something distilled from paint?

B: You can take paint, or alcohol, and you mix them up, and you get booze out of it.

(1, B, 350)

T: Some of the guys on the subs used to have what they called torpedo juice.

B: We didn't have that. He [Gardner] had something.

T: Let me shift the topic here. How did you stay in touch with family and loved ones while you were overseas?

B: I was not a very good writer. I probably... I didn't write very many letters. And my mother didn't write very many letters, because she was an immigrant. To be honest with you, I didn't care—when I got a letter from home, I got homesick. For me it was almost better not to get letters.

T: How about other guys? Was mail important?

B: Oh yes. Those guys were looking for mail all the time.

T: Did you get mail delivered to you regularly?

B: Yes. And also, everybody let everybody else read letters. Letters got passed around. Also we had a lot of fun with a couple of guys, white guys, that had girlfriends, guys that weren't very good writers. Guys would write letters for them. I didn't. You know what they'd write in it? *(laughs)*

T: They didn't write what they told them to write, did they?

B: No, they are telling them "Boy, I met a girl over here, screw you."

T: Guys did that kind of stuff? *(laughs)*

B: Yes, sure they did! *(laughs)* I didn't, but we had some who did.

T: That's kind of cruel!

B: Yes. We had a guy named Suggs—S-U-G-G-S—from Chicago, he got a "Dear John." When they got a "Dear John," they'd go nuts. And you know something? They [wife] get the ten thousand. You cannot get a divorce when you are overseas. You cannot. And that's what killed them—that if they got killed... He says, "That bitch will get my money." We only had \$10,000 insurance, you know.

T: And because you couldn't get divorced, she'd get the money?

B: She'd get the money. You can check on that one; I know that well.

T: What about news? Did you get news at all?

B: No. Once in a while. We had an officer from Minneapolis named Conrad, and he got the paper once in a while. No, we never did. Our news came from our radiomen.

(1, B, 371)

T: So it was tough to stay in touch with what was going on?

B: You know, people don't know this, when you make an invasion, people back in the States know more about it than you do!

T: The news get back there faster?

B: Yes. And you're only one little section. We'd say, "How are the troops? Are they moving in?" "I don't know." People don't know that; they [people at home in the US] knew more about the war than we did. Until later. After about four or five days, then you started getting it [news]. Especially Leyte [Philippines, late 1944], you know, they went into (***) [gives a location, probably Tacloban], that was a town there.

T: And you were able to get news there?

B: No, the Army comes in, and they set up. But we didn't have any paper, any *Yank*, or what do you call it.

T: Like *Stars and Stripes*?

B: No, we never got it; we were too small. Being small was crummy.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: This is tape two with Bert Sandberg, 15 February 2002.

Let me ask you, did you make lasting contacts during your time in the military? People you stayed in touch with?

B: Want to hear a funny story? I got transferred off the [LST] 1018 in 1945, me and another guy, because I told you, I got in trouble with a boatswain's mate. And after the war we had our first ship's reunion, in Cincinnati. And I guess I am kind of proud, because all the guys said, "Is Sandberg coming? Is Sandberg coming?"

T: This is the 1018?

B: Yes. And I didn't know this. They said, "He's from a 'Saint', in the Midwest." So they showed me letters at the reunion, to St. Joe, St. Louis, St. Cloud. They finally called a guy in St. Cloud. Not St. Paul. And the mayor got the letter; I saw the letter. "Can you look up this shipmate of ours? We'd like to have a ship's reunion?" They brought it over to a guy that was a historian or something in town, in St. Cloud, he says, "You know, that guy might be in St. Paul." He looked it up in the [telephone] book, and there was Bert Sandberg. He called my wife, and he said, "Was that your husband, or son, on LST 1018?" "Yes," she says. "Well, they're going to have a ship's reunion, and they'd like to have him there." That was about four days before. But they really wanted me there bad.

T: What year was this, Bert?

B: (*pauses seven seconds*) In 1987 or so. We didn't have one until '87.

T: So a lot of years had gone by.

B: Yes, a lot of years.

T: Were you in contact with anybody else?

B: And then I got in contact with them, but only then.

T: So for decades after the war, you didn't really have contact with anyone.

B: No, I didn't know where they were at. We didn't have any addresses, you know. Just like the Japanese dog tag [war souvenir], I put it in a drawer and I didn't take it

out until, maybe... After you get a little older you get a little nuts and you want to...
(pauses)

T: When it means something, or you start thinking about things?

B: Yes. (pauses three seconds) And we have had three ship's reunions since.

T: Do you go to each one of them?

B: Yes. But we are down to eight guys! (laughs)

T: Let me ask you a question: Why do you go?

(2, A, 49)

B: Oh, I think it's... (pauses three seconds) I don't know why I go, because the stories are so bad. "Do you remember this? Do you remember that?" Half of it is baloney. Oh, they bullshit something awful, you know, but they are still proud. At least we were in the service and saw combat. We're proud about that.

T: Let me shift the focus. You were in the Pacific when President Roosevelt died, in April 1945.

B: You bet; I'll never forget it.

T: Where were you when you heard that news?

B: I don't remember. It was April; I know I heard it, and we thought, "Oh my god, now the war is going to last longer again." Everybody knew that H.V. Kaltenborn—that's a news commentator, you don't remember, you are too young—said that the war in the Pacific would be over eighteen months after the war in Europe was over. He didn't know we had a bomb.

T: Nobody did.

B: And that's about right. The war in the Pacific, you know, if we didn't drop the bomb, we were set to go in [the invasion of mainland Japan] in November [1945].

T: And that would have taken a year, anyway.

B: So I remember when he died... Everybody was a Roosevelt man, everybody. I don't remember anybody who wasn't. We had a couple of rich guys that were Republican, but most of us were Democrats. This is a generation of people that came from nothing. You know that. I went to kindergarten in 1930, and the teachers, half of them, didn't even get paid. But they taught, because, what's the use, it was something to do. And maybe (***) they didn't push us hard enough.

T: How did you react, personally, when you got the news?

B: You've got to remember, still I was seventeen [Bert was born in 1926; thus age nineteen in April 1945]. Think back when you were seventeen, you weren't thinking much about politics or presidents or things like that. I knew Roosevelt was... I saw him when I was a kid; he came in a touring car from the train depot, and my father always talked about him. The only thing I figured was, "I hope the war isn't going to last longer." Most of all I thought about that aspect.

(2, A, 90)

T: Well, you were also in the Pacific in May 1945, when the war in Europe ended, against Germany.

B: Yes, we were happy.

T: What do you remember about that?

B: Well, we used to laugh, we used to see some of the movies [newsreels], we'd get movies in. Here's the Germans, five or six thousand at a time, surrendering. And we said, "What kind of a war is that?" Because you didn't see that where we were at. We laughed; we said, "Jesus, man."

And I remember when they [US forces in Europe] were going like crazy from... We had a map in our, our galley, they call it, and here we were going through Germany, and all of a sudden the Battle of the Bulge, and it starts going the other way. Remember, they were retreating, the Germans tried to get to Belgium. "Geez," we said, "What's the matter with those guys? We're never going to get out of here."

And I know that we were all wanting to go to Japan, to get it all over with. We weren't worried. But when they dropped the Bomb, and they quit. *(pauses three seconds)* I was a friend of Harry Truman the rest of my life! *(laughs)*

T: Let me ask you about the atomic bomb. At the time, did you feel the US government was correct to use the atomic bomb?

B: Absolutely! *(adamantly)* I'll talk that against anybody!

T: Do you still feel the same way today?

B: Same way. Finally, after some of these people didn't feel that way, did you know that the prime minister of Japan, about a year ago, said in the paper that it was the greatest thing Truman ever did? I'll tell you why, in my eyes, we got to Japan, we saw how they were waiting for us. You've got to remember, they still had 5,000 airplanes; I don't know how much fuel they had, but they had 5,000 airplanes. Remember, they only had to go from here to that house over there *(motions out the*

window to a house approximately 100 meters distant). We were going on the beach, so they didn't have to go from Japan to Okinawa, about 200 miles.

And the women were even trained. Did you know that? And everybody. I say that by dropping the Bomb Truman killed about 85,000 in Hiroshima and about 90,000 or something in Nagasaki. People forget that 500,000 died from incendiary bombs in Tokyo. [casualty estimates vary greatly; this is higher than most estimates] It was only a shock that stopped it. And you know the history of the islands, there was about twenty, twenty to one. We killed twenty Japanese for every one of us. I'd say they would have knocked us off the beach [at an attempted invasion of Japan]; there is no doubt about it, I saw their guns and emplacements.

Then by my own personal thinking we would have come over with B-29s and we would have blanketed an area, and then we'd have moved in, and it would have been a slaughter. So a lot more people would have died. In the millions. I really believe that; I am not talking silly. In the millions. They were going to fight. By that time, we would have really been mad at them. We only had two Bombs, you know.

(2, A, 136)

T: Now within a week of Nagasaki, Japan surrendered. How did those on board your LST, and you personally, respond to the news that the war was over?

B: Happy. It couldn't have been happier if I had won the lottery for a million, for twenty million dollars. Everybody was happy. "We're going home," that's all you heard, "We're going home." (*clock chimes in background*) And then we got that setback that we weren't going home.

T: Yes, I want to ask you about that in a moment. But the mood on your ship was one of being happy, being relieved, that this was over.

B: Everybody was just happy. Happy. All of a sudden, bitterness towards the Japanese kind of slacked up.

T: Did you notice that happened pretty quickly?

B: When we got to Japan, I wasn't too bitter against them. You know, I talked to them, I gave them my lunch, the poor little kids and that. But I saw what we did to them—Yokohama was just flat. It was just...

The funny part of it, when I was driving, going from Yokohama to Tokyo on liberty—off shore they call Navy liberty—I am standing in the subway, and I'm six foot tall, and these guys [the Japanese] are all up to about here (*motions with hand to middle of chest*), and one Japanese guy says "How many points have you got?" The Japanese guy says it. And I said, "I ain't got enough or I wouldn't be here for a minute."

T: He said it to you in English?

B: Yes, he said it in perfect English! He says, "How many points have you got? When are you going home?" I says, "I don't really know, I don't want to be here; I wish I had enough." I'll never forget that. They are all little guys, you know. Don't take them by how they are now; they are eating better. Right after the war they were all small.

T: Can you describe here the job that you were doing that kept you in the Pacific until early 1946?

B: Yes, I can tell you; I was mad every day. There were about five of us on the ship that got trapped like I did. There were about five or ten of us, in my age group.

T: I see. So other guys had been rotated off the ship?

B: Yes, a lot of them!

T: No wonder you were bitter.

B: Yes. I said, "Geez, why wasn't I married?" Or, "Why didn't we get some credit for (***)?" Some of them were replacements that were going home before us. And they came over after the war. Can you believe it? Talk about being bitter. There were about ten of us left.

T: So you still had a full crew, but most of them were new guys.

B: Right.

T: Well, what were you doing?

(2, A, 172)

B: Well, we found out that we were now going to take the Japanese back from the islands. Well, we didn't care so much about that, I said, maybe I can get some souvenirs. Everybody was crazy for souvenirs during the war.

And this is another laugh: When they came aboard ship, they had nothing. No guns, no dog tags, no nothing. They had them just, like... (*motions with hand from top to bottom, to suggest removal of clothing, everything*). I didn't even see them checking them off.

T: So the Japanese had surrendered on these islands to US personnel, and were going to...

B: They were waiting to go home.

T: So they were going to be picked up by your LST, and transported at nine or ten knots all the way back to Japan.

B: You got it. From September [1945] to May [1946].

T: So how many of these runs did you guys make on your ship?

B: Oh, we made a lot. Ten, fifteen, maybe twenty. We went to China, to Truk Island, we went to Korea, they had a lot of troops there. And it was like, "Why are we taking these guys home? They're our enemy." But you know the good old United States, so we did it. But it was kind of interesting. We got to see things. We did lay over maybe one or two weeks between every trip. You know, I got to see China. I wouldn't have seen China. And the islands look all the same; if you've seen one... We couldn't tell them apart, outside of Iwo Jima. There was no vegetation on Iwo [Jima].

(2, A, 193)

T: What about these Japanese? What impression did these defeated Japanese make on you as they were filing on board your ship?

B: I don't know. They kind of respected us, I think. But I'll tell you a funny story. We used to feed them... Do you know what a GI can is? A GI can is a kind of a garbage can, about that high (*motions with hands three feet tall*) and that wide (*motions with hands two feet wide*). And all they ate was rice. That's all they ate. So, do you want me to tell you what we did, how we (***) them up? We had three GI cans, and then we had it hooked up so they get some kind of steam under, to cook it. Well, the first day out, the Marines didn't want to eat with the Navy.

T: Our Marines? Or their Marines?

B: No, their Marines. We had Jap Marines, Jap Navy, Jap Army. And the Navy didn't want to eat with the Army. So our skipper says, well, "We're serving at a certain time," and then they had their own little group. And then they hung around. I've got pictures...

We worked them a little bit. They were not allowed in our gun tubs. (*pauses three seconds*) And we said to ourselves, here we are—down to about forty men then, you know, on board the ship, only forty—and there's probably about 400 of them.

T: Did that worry you at all?

B: I don't know, but I'll tell you what: If they wanted to take the ship over, they could take it over in about two minutes. Yes, it was probably about forty men, they call it a skeleton crew. Just enough to run the ship. And I've got a picture of them, Christ, there were 400 of them on there, at least. But the funny thing is, they never checked them off. They just pushed them on. Cattle. They were sleeping on the tank decks, they were sleeping all over the place.

T: Were there ever problems with the Japanese?

B: Not a bit. I think that when they were defeated, they were... There were no problems at all. They would even bow to us when we walked around the ship. This was their bowing, you know. They knew they had lost, the Emperor said to surrender, and they quit.

But we used to have fun with them, telling them, you know, "Mt. Fuji blew up." We'd always lie to them, you know.

T: You had some that spoke English?

B: Not very many. Just their officers.

T: You transported both officers and enlisted?

B: Yes.

T: Was there interaction between the American crew and the Japanese?

B: Outside of my friend Red Sachotsky [correct spelling unknown], you know he was going to throw one over the side and... When you walked around, they made a path for you. I guess they respected being defeated. They were very well organized that way, how do you say it...

T: Deferential?

B: Yes. That's their culture.

T: Did they kind of keep to themselves?

B: It was around November and Christmas, too, and everybody's home, and all my buddies are home now, and the guys that didn't even go overseas are home. I'll never forget, when they came to pick them [the Japanese] up on a, kind of a, what do you call them, a pop-pop boat, because their engines go "pop, pop, pop," and they probably put thirty at a time in them. And we were washing—I didn't, I wouldn't do it—but they were washing down the deck [on our ship], and the guy went "Ooops!" (*makes waving motion with arm*). He sprayed them! (*laughs*)

T: This is December, so it was cold.

B: Colder than hell; they froze! (*laughs*) He says, "Ooops!" Drenched them with water. But they all laughed, you know, "Ha, ha, ha." Don't forget, they were glad they were going home, too. They were still alive. Remember that they were overseas at least eight to ten years.

(2, A, 239)

T: Now when you were in Japan, you had a chance for shore liberty.

B: Yes, I loved it.

T: What can you say about Japan, when you saw it?

B: When I first saw Japan, I said, "How did they ever have the guts to jump on us?" There were no buildings left, so I didn't know, I said, "How did that country declare war on a country our size?" That's what went through my mind. I didn't realize we had destroyed most of it. Most of their homes are bamboo too, you know; they burn out like...

We took a cab. They had charcoal. Cabs run by charcoal. You know that? Did you ever hear of that?

T: No.

B: I don't know how they did it, but he ran out and threw some charcoal in there again. Yes, I had a pretty good time there. *(pauses three seconds)* Well, the first time we were in town, we were going to take a bath, and everybody's swimming naked. Men, women, everything, you know, in this public bath. We never heard of that. Also, the men wanted to take a leak, they just took a leak. Out in the public.

T: Anywhere?

B: Yes, sir! When women wanted to, they just squatted down and took a leak. Anywhere. And the woman was always two steps behind the guy. And the guy had an umbrella.

T: Were you angry at the Japanese?

B: I couldn't have been too angry, I went to a couple of whorehouses. No offense, but... Do you know something? They would not have intercourse with blacks.

T: The Japanese wouldn't?

B: Nope.

T: So if you went there with black guys, they would service the white guys?

B: Well, I think they finally, they got some, but I know they wouldn't screw around with them.

T: Was that a problem for these...

B: We just would go, and then we went back to our ship, you know. And then we'd go out and ride around. I saw the Imperial Palace, I saw that hotel that stood up... What was that great architect from Wisconsin, what was his name?

T: Frank Lloyd Wright?

B: Yes. His hotel. It stood up during the big earthquake. I saw that. Most of it was bombed out.

T: Did you feel bad for the Japanese?

B: You know, I did towards the kids. I started to feel bad, you know, they had nothing to eat. And do you know who I really felt bad for? They had a lot of White Russians. White Russians, selling apples. They were kicked out [of Russia] in 1917 by the... Remember, the White Russians were with the Tsar [reference to the Revolution and Civil War in Russia]. And I saw this old guy there, with a moustache and I said, "What are you doing here?" He says, "I been here since (***)". He spoke English. You know, Russia touched all the way up to Japan. On the ocean there.

 Their women were kind of pretty.

T: The Japanese?

B: Yes, they are pretty women, you know. They're little. And the man is the boss. Women have no rights.

T: Was it difficult to meet Japanese men or women?

B: Well, here's what they had when we were there. They had people walking around with "interpreter" armbands (*motions around upper arm*). That means that they spoke English. You just took one of them, and then you'd give them something. You didn't have to, but that was their gimmick for how to make money.

T: They organized that themselves then?

B: Yes. The thing that amazed me the most of all, was they sent the kids down on the beach with Japanese yen. Bushel baskets full of it. It had no value. And then the Americans would say, "Give me that, and I'll give you American money." They stopped that.

T: They wanted the American money?

B: That's right.

T: With dollars they could buy stuff, and with yen they couldn't?

B: Yes, it was powerful. I'll tell you another trick: They loved American cigarettes, cartons. So we had a little thing going. *(pauses three seconds)* You know, we had a guy that was an expert, he was a cook, he could take it [a carton of cigarettes], and put it over the stove and get the cellophane off, and we'd put two packs there *(motions to the left)* and two packs there *(motions to the right)*, and fill the rest with paper.

T: And seal it back up?

B: Yes, but they caught on pretty quick. *(laughs)* Number two, they didn't want any Old Gold [cigarette brand], because they got stale quick. They wanted Camel [brand] or Lucky Strike [brand], I'll never forget it.

(2, A, 287)

T: Were they selling those?

B: That was black market.

T: Cigarettes as currency?

B: Yes. And then, talk about souvenirs, I saw trainloads, boxcars, full of Jap rifles. Just stacked from here to there *(makes arm motions)* with Jap rifles. We come in, and they said, "How many guys aboard ship?" It was Army then. "Forty," [we answered]. "Take forty rifles." "Okay." Brought them back to our ship. Second day, too. Third day, I said, "Hey, we don't want to haul them anymore." "Well, take them out and throw them in the water." I sent six of them home, but I don't have one left.

T: Did you give them all away?

B: I guess so. And I had a Jap flag I took off a Jap cruiser that was half sunk in the harbor. See, we were lucky on the Higgins boats—we could travel around, too.

T: Because they are small, right?

(2, A, 299)

B: We went up to the thing and got it... We were lucky.

I maneuvered myself in a good spot there, and we always went ashore, bringing officers ashore. In the islands we brought the officers who talked to the Red Cross workers. But not us; we weren't allowed to. And so, (***) this guy says, he had a good point, he says "I never saw a two-story building [slang reference to a female] the whole time I was in the South Pacific." *(laughs)* And you know what they did, how smart they were? When we got back to the States, they had these good-looking girls coming down to the ships selling subscriptions to magazines. Slick. And the guys didn't care what that cost. Just to talk to them. I'll never forget

it. It was in San Francisco. *(both laugh)* They weren't whores or anything, just business ladies.

And I also saw a woman in overalls. I never saw that before.

T: This is when you got back?

B: Yes. I said, "Not in my hometown; they don't dress like that."

T: Well, let me ask you about your hometown. When you got back to St. Paul it was the middle of 1946, right?

B: Yes. They were forgetting about the war.

T: How had life in St. Paul changed from when you left to when you got back? It was almost three years.

B: I don't think it changed any. No. We [St. Paul] built the first building [probably meaning large office building downtown] in 1948.

T: In downtown, you mean?

B: Didn't change any. Funny thing, I was born and raised, you know, half a block from the Union Gospel Mission. A lot of them were bums, a lot of them were poor. This one guy was crippled, a bum, he was sitting on the steps—he was there when I left, he was there when I got back! *(laughs)*

T: So St. Paul hadn't changed! *(laughs)*

B: I said to myself, "Who's the dummy?" *(laughs)*

T: Bert, what was your initial reaction to being out of the military?

B: I tell you a very quick story. We were out—don't forget we couldn't get out right away. Guys in the South Pacific, they wanted to check us out, and see if we had some disease or something, I don't know. Right out here at Ft. Snelling [in Minneapolis], we were going to get out. And my (***) had a left eye, it was bad when I was a kid. But you didn't wear glasses. You couldn't have glasses during the Depression. And you didn't want to wear them anyway, they called you four eyes. My left eye was bad, so I cheated to get in the Navy. I memorized the chart, supposed to have 20-20.

T: You memorized the chart?

B: Yes. So when I come out the guy says, "What's the matter with you? You had 20-20 when you went in. Your left eye is bad. Did you get hurt?" "I don't know," I said. "Well, you better put in for some disability." I said, "Fine. How long do you have to wait?" He says, "Three days." I said, "Don't want it. Don't want it!" He says, "I'll put

it in anyway." I said, "I don't want it! I want to go home." So to this day I got Mark Dayton [Democratic senator from Minnesota] just checking if that guy was a bullshitter or not. That's all I want. I said, "I'll sign a disclosure. I don't want a dime or nothing. I just want to see if he was an honest guy."

T: So you are having that checked now?

B: Yes. Mark Dayton is a good friend of mine.

T: He is a good guy to have as a friend these days.

B: Well, I helped him out. He's very wealthy, and when I was backing up Perpich [Rudy Perpich, Minnesota politician], I told him I'd raise twenty thousand, and he threw in ten. And it looked like a (***) . And I had a lot of parking lots, and I gave it to the (***) house to park for the... down here on Harriet Island, do you know where that is? I own about ten acres down there. So I gave it to the (***) house, these two guys, I says, you can give the money and... there was a concert, lasted about five days. About the third day, these guys are on \$8,000, and I said, "Wait a minute. I am going back on my word. We're going to spilt it three ways." But I ended up with five thousand and I gave it to him [Mark Dayton]. Because, I don't care if he's a multi-millionaire, he did me a favor. That's my philosophy. Boy, and I don't think anyone has ever given him a dime. But I get Christmas cards, when he sees me he hugs me, you know.

T: It's important to take care of people, then? When you take care of people, they take care of you?

B: That's it. I don't care if they're rich or poor. If they are nice to me, I'm nice to them.

T: That's a good lesson.

Let me ask you: What was the first thing you did when you were out of the military? The very first thing.

B: I went home, took off my uniform, threw it in the trashcan.

T: Did you really?

B: Yes. You couldn't get white shirts then. Couldn't get shirts. And don't forget, I went from 150, or 160, to about 180.

T: So you gained weight in the service?

B: I just got bigger, not gained weight. I just got bigger. I didn't have no clothes. *(pauses three seconds)* So I went down looking for clothes. And that's another thing. Went down looking for clothes, and everything was all bought out by everybody else

that was out before us. Everything, on everything we were six months behind everybody. Every time I turned around. All my girlfriends from high school, they were all married!

T: So it did make a difference getting home late! *(laughs)*

B: I didn't care. I didn't get married until I was 28.

T: But being late—you noticed that, that you were late for everything.

B: I was late for everything. And you know, *(pauses three seconds)* it burned me up that these guys in the States got out before I did.

T: The guys who never shipped out, you mean?

B: Yes. That's the only thing that burned me up.

T: What was the hardest thing for you with readjusting to being a civilian?

B: Well, when I got home, my mother had rented out my room—we had a boarding house—so I had to sleep on a rollaway bed, in the living room *(pauses five seconds)* And I wanted to start making money. I wanted to go to school to play sports. I really knew that I would never make money going to college; I just wouldn't make it. I was obsessed with trying to get rich. It may be goofy, but I was. But, *(pauses five seconds)* I adjusted quickly, and *(pauses three seconds)* I did some things that I don't even want to talk about, that I wouldn't have done if I wasn't in the service. Little goofy things, you know.

When I was in high school, I was a trainer. I used to run every morning like a boxer. I never took a drink. Then I went in the Navy, and what else was there to do? I mean, everybody else was drunk, so you've got to (**). Maybe they'll (**) if you're not. That's a poor alibi, but I am just telling you the truth. Poor excuse. I adjusted pretty good, I think.

T: How long did you live at home?

B: I lived at home until I was 28.

T: So while you were a student at Augsburg [College, Minneapolis] you lived at home?

B: Yes.

(2, A, 365)

T: What was the easiest thing for you, being a civilian again?

B: Being able to go down and buy what I wanted to eat. *(pauses three seconds)* And you know what, too? In that November [1946], it snowed a little bit, and I just loved it. I hadn't seen snow for three years. I hate it, you know, but it was kind of fun. I made a snowball. *(pauses three seconds)* It didn't take me long to get rid of that idea!

(both laugh)

T: Last couple of questions here. What did the war mean for you personally, at that time?

B: I don't even know. Everybody else went; I was just like a number, like everybody else, just going. But as I get older now, I am proud that I served. I'm proud that I got to know people from all over the country, New York, California, Midwest. I'm glad I served. And I told my wife, if my son is called up, he's going. These people that don't want to go in the service... I said, "He's going to serve. He's not going to embarrass me." 'Cause I really think that it doesn't hurt to be in the service. It grew me up in a hurry.

T: Do you think a lot of guys might agree with you, about growing up in a hurry?

B: I think so. You know, like I said, it was not very nice that we saw shows where the women were naked. We never saw a naked woman in our lives. But you really grow up in a hurry. You grow up in a hurry, because you know what it's all about. You live with people that you would never live with.

T: That's right, you never would have met most of those people.

B: No, I never would have met them. Some good, some bad. The majority of all Americans are pretty good people. That's my philosophy.

T: I think you're right. Last question: In what ways, Bert, do you think the war changed your life?

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.

B: I think I was kiddish. Even though I played sports and that, I was a kid. Going in the service, I grew up, I got more mannish. I was more confident in myself. Different attitudes. During high school, I didn't even go to prom. All I did was sports. And you get kind of a stale personality. And I think I got a better personality. I'm sorry that I didn't study hard in grade school and high school and get a better way to present myself, but I was lucky. It was lucky that I met people that took a liking to me. And I was able to do things I wanted to do.

I think that some of those people that took a liking to me were in the service, too. And when they found out I was, it was kind of a (***) . They never said it, but we would kid about it, you know. Judge Devit, one of the best judges in town, he was at Leyte, and when he found out I was there... And his destroyer got hit, he got the

Navy Cross, I mean a Bronze Star. He took a liking to me. President of American Hoist and Derrick, who was in the Navy, was on an LST I don't know how that ever happened, because he must've been the oldest guy, I think he must have been an officer. He took a liking to me. We kind of took care of each other. It would be like the old days, when the Shriners took care of the Shriners, and the KC's [Knights of Columbus] took care of the KCs. And I think that, after the war, people that didn't go in the service never brought it up, never talked about it.

Where would I see so much, travel so much? I found out there was such a thing as grass skirts that you saw on Bob Hope and Dorothy Lemore shows. I found out that Australia was very interesting. I saw that and enjoyed it. Japan. You've got to remember, I was a person that never left the city of St. Paul.

T: So it was a big world.

B: A big world. They say that travel makes you more intelligent. I don't understand it, but I guess it does. They say you get wiser and smarter. I don't know what it does, but it does something to you.

T: Something good?

B: Yes. And I do think that now, as I get older, and go back to being a stronger Christian again, I thank God that he took me through.

T: Would you say, on the whole, that you are a better person because of your war experience?

(2, B, 59)

B: By far. There's no doubt about it. I learned how to make my own bed, and I still do. I know how to... I've never complained about a meal, never, in a restaurant. Not after the service, the stuff we ate there. *(pauses four seconds)* I remember, like I told Carol [Bert's wife] the other day, I said, you know, when I was overseas I would have given a hundred dollars for an ice cream cone.

T: You didn't have ice cream on your ship?

B: No, we didn't have any. And I have given two hundred dollars for a hamburger. You see, that's the kind of thing. And you get back, and pretty soon you forget all about it. But then step back and say, "You know what? I can go down and get anything I want." I couldn't do it then. I couldn't get off the ship.

T: So having that experience helped you appreciate?

B: Appreciate (***) number one, appreciating that... It just made you a better man, I think. I really believe that it wouldn't hurt to have military service for kids 18, 19. That's my personal thinking. You know, I see so many of them that are like babies.

And I'll end up with this: I'm proud I was American, because when we went into war, World War II, we were way under. We went over and fought the best that Hitler had, and we went over and fought the best that the Japanese had. And we turned that war around in Japan in, in May of '42, when we... And because Americans were tough. Did you know who the first *kamikaze* was? The first *kamikaze* was Fleming, from South St. Paul. He dove into a Jap cruiser.

(2, B, 90)

T: When was that?

B: May of '42. Coral Sea battle. No, not Coral Sea, Midway. He dove into it. And I read it the other day—some Jap came out and said it, "Don't blame us—your first one was Fleming!" Fleming went to St. Thomas High School. He got the Medal of Honor.

T: Is Fleming Field in South St. Paul named after him?

B: Yes. He's the first one. And you know what? That battleship that (***) Kelly is supposed to have sunk? Did you ever hear of (***) Kelly?

T: No.

B: Well, it was bullshit. We got to Japan, and there it was sitting there. But we needed a hero. There was a song, something like, (*singing*) "Uncle (***), heroes get to go there, there's Washington and Lincoln and so-and-so, and (***) Kelly, too." That was a song. And there was (*again singing*) "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition." Do you remember that one?

T: Yes, that one I have heard.

B: But there it was. We laughed, and there was the, I think it was the *Nagato* or something that he was supposed to have sunk. There it sat. It was in the harbor when we got there. [this reference unclear]

T: All fabricated?

B: All fabricated.

T: Bert, let me conclude by just saying thank you very much.

B: Let's go eat!

T: I'm for that, too.

END OF INTERVIEW