

Interviewee: William "Bill" Sadler

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 16 March 2002

Location: the basement of the Sadler home, Roseville, MN

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

William "Bill" Sadler, inventor and entrepreneur, was born 29 March 1926 in St. Louis, Missouri. At age five his parents moved to Norfolk, Virginia, in search of work; it was here that Bill grew up and attended high school. In November 1943, aged 17, he volunteered for the US Coast Guard; with knowledge in the field of engineering and communication, Bill was made a cadet officer. Within a short time he was serving in the Merchant Marine, on board a cargo ship bound for North Africa.

Throughout 1944 and early 1945, Bill Sadler crisscrossed the Atlantic on various cargo ships, calling at ports from Morocco and Italy to Belgium and the Soviet Union. Often carrying munitions or weapons, his ships were repeatedly under attack from hostile aircraft.

In mid-1945, Bill transferred to the Pacific theater, where he spent the remainder of his enlistment, until mid-1946. Ports of call included Guam, Saipan, Okinawa, and Japan.

After his discharge in August 1946, Bill moved to San Francisco, where he became a pioneer in the new medium of television. In 1953 Bill accepted a job with Hubbard Broadcasting (KSTP-TV), which brought him to the Twin Cities; here he founded several electronics firms, among them Miratel and Dotronix, of New Brighton, Minnesota. Customers included the airline industry and NASA.

At the time of this interview (March 2002) Bill lived in Roseville, Minnesota, where this interview took place.

Bill Sadler passed away on 16 June 2003.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

B = William (Bill) Sadler

[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 the 6th of March 2002, and this is the interview with Mr. Bill Sadler. First, Mr. Sadler, thanks very much for taking time to talk with me.

B: Thank you for listening.

T: Briefly, to begin, can you say a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

B: I started off my life in St Louis, Missouri, and lived there until I was about five years old. And then we moved back to Virginia, and lived in the city of Norfolk, and went to school there. And actually went into the service from there. I got fascinated with aviation at about age eleven or so, and always thought I was going to go be in the Air Force when I joined the service, but that didn't work out.

T: Did you join the military, or were you drafted?

(1, A, 19)

B: No, I volunteered when I was seventeen years old.

T: And how did you decide which branch of the service to go into?

B: Well, I wanted to go in the Air Corps, and they right away determined that I was only seventeen years old, so they wouldn't accept me. You had to be eighteen before they would consider me, and in those days you got drafted at eighteen, and they were calling up men very fast, and I wanted to select my own branch of the service. So, in the meantime, I was going to school at night, at William & Mary extension, in Norfolk, Virginia, studying electronics and Morse code, trying to get my FCC telegraph license, which I did.

And that led me around to talking to other services. And so I talked to the Coast Guard, and they said, "You mean to tell me that you've almost finished pre-engineering at William & Mary College, and you can copy code at thirty-five words a minute?" And I said, "Yes, I can." And they said, "Young fellow, I think we could find something for you to do." So I signed some papers, and nine days later I was put on a ship and sent to Casablanca, North Africa. And they called me a cadet warrant officer.

T: The ironic thing is, we were talking earlier, most people have these long, lengthy discussions of Basic Training, and for you it was simply basic training on the job.

B: Yes, it was cadet training on the job. I knew how to copy the code, that was no problem, and then I knew enough about the transmitters that I could operate them. The first lessons I really had to take were in decoding. I had to be the decoding officer also. All of a sudden the responsibilities were dumped on my shoulders, and I just had to work with it.

T: When did you join the service?

B: The first papers I signed were in November of '43 and, to be perfectly candid, I didn't know whether the Coast Guard was going to put me into some training, or into their service. I think they needed men so badly for the Liberty ships that they decided to take some of the men and just send them directly to the ships. And that's what happened. I wasn't sure whether I joined the Merchant Marine, the Coast Guard, or what. But, anyway, my discharge calls it the Coast Guard and... *(pauses four seconds)* It was just an experience. I was all over the world.

T: You enlisted in November of '43. Did you ship out pretty much right away, or was there a lag time?

B: No, there was hardly any lag at all, about nine days, I think. As I recall, it was a little over a week, and all of a sudden they called me to sign on aboard a ship.

(1, A, 65)

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

B: Well, they knew I didn't want to get drafted. I've often joked about it, I didn't want to walk in the mud, but I forgot how soft water is! *(laughs)* But, actually, I did want to make something that was technical, electronic, and so I knew that if I qualified myself I'd probably start out with a commission. Which is actually what happened.

T: Did your folks have to sign papers for you to go in at age seventeen?

B: Right now I didn't actually do that, but I did tell them that I was eighteen. Because they wouldn't accept me in the Air Corps at seventeen, and I thought, "I am going to find the same darn thing in the Coast Guard." But they never questioned it. It never became a problem.

T: Do you think they actually knew you weren't eighteen?

B: I think they did, and I'll tell you why. I didn't get my ensign's commission until April of the next year [1944], when I was then truly eighteen. And I asked the

captain, "Why didn't I get the commission in New York?" And I can't use the language he did, but he says, "You little devil, we found out you're not eighteen years old. We should have court martialed you."

T: But being short of men, they didn't?

B: I don't know if they knew during the trip, but I think when they issued the commission, they looked into it more carefully. And I did have a Norfolk driver's license, so if they'd have checked that they'd have found out. So somehow they knew.

T: Well, it doesn't sound like there was much checking of credentials before they were willing to accept you and put you on a ship.

B: They were building ships so fast they didn't have crews. We had about twenty guns on the ship, counting the 20mm's and the three-inch 50s and the five-inch .38. We'd sometimes sail with only an armed guard officer and five armed guard crew. They were Navy. So guess who shot the guns? There were several air raids in Naples [Italy], and I was on a 20mm machine gun.

T: You either shot your own guns, or there was no one to do it?

B: There was no one to do it.

T: Do you remember, you must have been in high school then, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, on 7 December 1941?

B: You know, for some reason, I... I heard about it, I knew it was happening, but the time and date didn't... I know when it was from history, but it didn't seem to... For some reason, I was either working very hard, or working late at night, or something, it didn't... I believed the war was coming anyway. I had a feeling it was coming. *(pauses three seconds)* By the way, Pearl Harbor is one of the few places that I didn't get to visit during the war. I was all over the Pacific, and all over the Atlantic, and in the Mediterranean, but I didn't get to go to Pearl Harbor until my wife and I took a vacation in Hawaii one year.

(1, A, 108)

T: So, for you, the event of Pearl Harbor didn't have a real enormous impact at the time?

B: Well, I don't think it motivated me to do anything that I did. I knew I wanted to become a (***) in either aviation or electronics. And I think it might have moved that along a little bit for me.

T: Right. Your first voyage, very few days after you actually signed the papers—what kind of a ship were you on?

B: It was a Liberty ship [mass-produced, US-built cargo vessel].

T: Briefly, what about the size of the crew, or the type of cargo you carried, these kind of things?

B: We would typically have a crew of about fifty-five people when we were fully manned, and sometimes even sixty. And, also, if we carried prisoners, or we carried soldiers, which we did—we were convertible to carrying people—then we would have a medical officer—normally we didn't have a medical officer on board—and we'd have a chaplain, which we didn't normally have. So the crew would grow if we were carrying troops.

T: Did you carry troops frequently?

B: Several times. Not only that, we brought back about 2700 German SS officers out of France. Three trips, somewhere around seven hundred, eight hundred each time.

T: From France to the US?

B: Yes. We'd go over with ammunition, foodstuffs; it was a big ship. Then they would convert it to carry troops, and we'd bring prisoners back.

T: These ships were pretty flexible as far as what they could carry?

B: They had worked out several systems. I remember the hammocks, which the troops and prisoners would use, were five high. I used to joke that the guy in the top would get seasick.

T: No kidding. There must not have been much space between those bunks.

B: No, there wasn't much space between the bunks.

(1, A, 136)

T: Do you remember your first voyage? Was it to North Africa, did you say?

B: Yes. My first trip was into Casablanca, North Africa. I remember Roosevelt [US President Franklin Roosevelt] had met with some of the heads of nations there just a little bit before we got there. [Churchill and Roosevelt met here, in January 1943] We went to visit where that meeting had taken place.

Another peculiarity of my assignment, it was actually a court martial if you got caught carrying a camera. Because we carried ammunition into several cities, we loaded ammunition from several cities, and if you were captured during the war,

you would be disclosing the cities where you might have dropped off or received munitions. So you couldn't have a camera. Well, I brought back—I think I showed you a little bit earlier—some pictures, and they were all taken by sidewalk photographers. Maybe that was stretching the limit a little bit, but most of the guys were doing it.

T: Were getting photographs taken, you mean?

B: Yes.

T: Did people have cameras, too?

B: I suspect they did. We didn't shake the ship down for cameras particularly. We did for alcohol. They were very strict about alcohol on an ammunition ship. Very often we'd have bomb detonators stacked two decks high on the hatch covers, in wooden boxes. And a fire, or a fifty caliber tracer bullet fired through that, it would be a mess. The whole ship could have gone up.

T: Carrying ammunition, which you did on more than one occasion, does that create a certain level of tension or nervousness for the crew?

B: The first time you see it loaded, it's kind of an awesome sight. I remember, I was loading at the Army ammunition depot in Norfolk, Virginia. My family lived there, so I asked my dad one night if he'd come back to the ship with me the next morning to see my ship. And he'd never been aboard any of the ships that I sailed on, on which I sailed. And he was very quiet. I couldn't understand why he was so quiet. We were walking through, and he was looking, and they were dropping, they were putting a large stack, amounts of bombs in the hatches, in the cargo area. And he looked at me and says, "Billy, is this what you do?" I think he suddenly realized his son was at war, and it was dangerous.

But we had signs all over, you know, "No Fires," "No Smoking." It was a court martial if you were caught smoking on deck. No way. They were very strict about alcohol and about smoking.

T: Why so strict about the alcohol?

(1, A, 171)

B: Any drunkenness that might occur, where someone might use bad judgment in handling some of the material, or throw a match on the floor, or anything like that—we knew we only got one chance, and then it was gone. I've seen those ships blow up, and it's an awesome sight.

T: Were there places on board the ship where one could drink or smoke in a controlled area, or not?

B: We had mess halls. They had a crew mess hall, and we had an officers mess hall, and usually there was always coffee. You could find some kind of, of chocolate milk or... We liked it when we carried troops, because then they'd have ice cream on board. We didn't always have ice cream, so it was an advantage to have some troops on board. *(laughs)*

T: Was it a different kind of atmosphere as well when there were troops on board?

B: There was a lot of, of camaraderie, of playing and so on. I remember, they had a, a kind of a musical event on one of the hatch covers, and they'd sing, and play instruments. You'd see them that way going over. And I also brought them back.

T: Our own troops, you brought them back?

B: Yes, and it's different. They'd all changed. They sit around the gunnels of the ship and not say a thing. Wasn't any dancing on the hatch covers. We brought back some pilots from Italy, and I took them over originally. I didn't know any of them individually, but it was the same group. And they were different men.

T: How would you describe the difference?

(1, A, 193)

B: Well, they were very quiet. The outgoing activities, they just had stopped. The, we used to call it the hundred yard stare, that's what they looked like.

T: Did you also bring back wounded prisoners, wounded troops as well?

B: No, we did not. We had no adequate medical facilities at all for troops. Even for ourselves we didn't have anything other than some medical kits, and we didn't have a medical person on board, not even a nurse. When we carried troops, there were nurses on board, and there were medical people, and there was a chaplain. It was more like a military ship than a freighter.

T: How many troops could your ship carry?

B: If we were really stretching it we could carry nine hundred. That's a lot of people.

T: So you needed a chaplain, medical people, all that stuff.

As an ammunition ship, did you sail in convoys generally?

B: Not always. If you were breaking off for a small port or harbor... In fact, we went all the way from Augusta, Sicily, to Bari, Italy, unescorted because we hadn't occupied the Adriatic Sea at that time. In that convoy we lost—it was a seven ship convoy, of which we were the commodore of the convoy—six of the seven ships. But that was in the harbor. There was a fire. They'd been bombed [the harbor at

Bari] the night before they arrived, and there was a fire in one of the holds of one of the ships that had been bombed the night before, and the six other ships that left us ahead of time—we ran aground in Brindisi [Italy]. We were drawing thirty-three feet, and the harbor wasn't made to handle ships of that size—went up from Brindisi to Bari that next day. We were late; we didn't arrive until dark, just in time to see the whole harbor go up.

T: Those were also ammunition ships?

B: Yes. Now I don't know what kind of ammunition they had, but probably mostly five hundred pound bombs. They were flying out of Foggia, Italy, to northern Italy, to bomb different areas, and they had run out of ammunition. So we were a rush selection out of Augusta, Sicily, to get up there.

(1, A, 223)

T: How does it make you feel when you realize that you could have very well been with those other ships?

B: That didn't strike me until I saw what they were doing the next day. They gave a blinker signal to estimate ETA [estimated time of arrival] the next day at twelve noon—we couldn't imagine how they were going to get that harbor operational in, you know, just a few hours, but what they did is, they plowed the debris from the explosions into the holds of the [sunken] ships that were right there at the dock. And we were discharging over, literally, the bodies of some of the men we knew the day before to get explosives into that harbor.

T: Also, as a ship carrying ammunition, were you a target for either submarines or aircraft?

B: All the time. I would say in the first eight or ten trips that I made, some kind of attack took place on those trips. I think I showed you the aerial photo that was taken by a reconnaissance aircraft. We were coming home empty that way, to Baltimore, for repairs, and we'd all cheer and applaud when we'd see an airplane. The submarines wouldn't waste a torpedo on you if you were empty—and they could tell by the waterline on the ship. They'd just shell you with their deck gun.

Well, as the war got on, we were getting better and better armed, we had a five inch/38 on the fantail, we had a couple of three inch fifties [large caliber machine guns] on pedestals forward, plus a three inch fifty in the nose, and we'd carry around ten twenty millimeters [small cannon]. So we could make a lot of noise, if they surfaced. But, at the early part of the war, we didn't have aft guns, so they'd surface and shell the hell out of you [merchant ships in general].

T: Did this shelling by a submarine happen to you personally, to a ship you were on?

B: We never got a direct hit from either bombers or from surface vessels. We were in battles, but we never actually got a hit. The first trip after we left Casablanca, we went to Bizerte, which is on the tip of Libya, up on the northeast coast [Bizerte is actually across the border, in Tunisia]. And the first day in there, the first night in there, we were in an air raid, and I had never fired a twenty millimeter machine gun. They strapped me in the twenty millimeter machine gun, and said, "Shoot in bursts, swing through the target." And that's when I got my gun training.

T: That was your gun training? A couple of sentences?

B: And, "Get in there!" Now we had Navy armed guard loaders loading the guns, but we didn't have enough to shoot the guns.

T: Can you describe that experience, what that was like?

B: I think when you get to doing a job, doing something, it kind of leaves you for a while. You just do what you are told to do. Sometimes it's worse after it's over. Then you start thinking about what could have happened.

T: So, at the time, is there just a sense that, "I have to do this," and there is enough happening that one doesn't think about it?

B: Yes, you start worrying about loading. I jammed one machine gun—I was firing too long a burst, and it jammed. And in the light of the attack we were able to replace the barrel. There was a spare barrel in the ammunition magazine, and we were actually able to replace the barrel. I got burns across the back of my hands where they dropped the barrel on my hands. I didn't have asbestos gloves on; they did. The loaders had them.

T: So they could handle the barrel?

B: It slid out of there and fell on my hands, pinned my hands to the deck.

T: The barrel was heavy?

B: Yes. And hot. They were trying to place it... They couldn't put it back in the ammunition magazine, because it was hot. So they were trying to find a place so it wouldn't roll around on the deck, and in doing so they let it fall on my hands. When they picked it up, why, it took some skin with them. Wasn't a serious burn, but both hands. See, *(shows faint scars on backs of hands)* it goes across there, and you can see here, there's one here. After fifty-five years they're starting to fade away! But they're still there.

(1, A, 270)

T: Was there another experience like that that you can recall?

B: Nothing other than when our gunnery officer fell overboard when a tanker ahead of us blew up. And he (*pauses three seconds*) I didn't know that he was in the water, but, anyway, the explosion of the ship ahead blew him overboard, or either he fell. He was standing in one of the gun tubs. Just in the light of the fire I could see a man hanging on his life jacket with his face in the water. And I figured, if he is still alive, he's going to die if someone doesn't get him out of there. So I dove off the third deck up, into the water, and got over to him. And the fire now [from the burning tanker] is getting very close. And of course we stopped; we weren't going to go through the fire.

The convoy, when you have that trouble, if a ship is stalled for any reason, they leave you. The escorts go with the convoy, and you are out there all by yourself. Sometimes, if they have enough escorts, they'll leave one behind, but if you're a straggler, they have to take care of the group.

Well, I got to this man in the water, and I splashed the water away from his face—the fire's getting so close—and he was coming to, but he was trying to reach for his cap. He had just made full commander, and he had so much gold braid on the brim of that cap it was actually sinking! Must have got knocked off when he hit the water, or something. Well, I finally pushed him away from that, and swam with him over to the side of the ship, and I kept yelling, "Drop the pilot's ladder! Drop the pilot's ladder!" And finally—there's a lot of confusion—someone heard me, and they threw the pilot's ladder. A pilot's ladder is a rope ladder with wooden steps. He threw that over the side. And the swells were about seven feet. Of course he's going up and down with no trouble, but if I pushed on him I went under the water.

So I got him over to the side of the ship, and one of the swells carried him up, and I pushed him against the ladder. Well, he was conscious enough then to grab the ladder. Then the next wave, I grabbed the ladder, got up behind him. I still didn't know who it was. It was not very light. I knew it was an officer, but I didn't know who. We then helped him one step at a time. And the gunnels of the ship, they were seven or eight feet out of the water. Anyway, he got aboard, and went up to his quarters, and I didn't see him any more again that night.

The next morning, he was looking for the young fellow that pulled him out of the water; he had heard the story by then. And he came to see me—we had worked together some during the trip. He says, "Bill, are you okay?" And I said, "Well, yes, I guess I'm okay. I burned my hands a little bit, but I'll be okay." And then I remembered that I lost my wristwatch overboard trying to get him on to the ladder. And it was a brand new one; mother had given it to me for Christmas. So I said, "Wait a minute; no, I'm not okay. I lost my wristwatch overboard trying to get your ass out of the water." Anyway, he says, "You did?" And I said, "Yes, I did." And he says, "You're sure you're okay?" And I said, "Yes, I'm fine." He says, "Young fellow, when we get back to Baltimore, you're going to get a new wristwatch." He bought me an anti-magnetic, shock-proof, luminated dial, everything damned thing you could get! (*laughs*) And you know, I still have that watch, and it still keeps... I've had three cases on it, but it still keeps good time. An old wind-up wristwatch. I saved his neck.

I kept in touch with him for quite a while after the war, but somehow, as families grow up, and you move around the country... I don't really know where he is now. I do know that my first commanding officer, first radio officer that I sailed with, lives down in Tampa, Florida, and he was up to see me a couple of Christmases ago. He was in the water a couple of times, I was in the water once—voluntarily, I jumped over to get that guy. He said, "You know, Billy, we were lucky!" *(laughs)*

(1, A, 312)

T: No ship that you were on was ever sunk?

B: No, I didn't lose a ship. I lost a whole convoy. You see, I was the commanding officer of the communications for that convoy, for those seven ships.

T: You made a lot of trips in the Mediterranean, North Africa, and in Europe. Earlier [before the taped interview] you also mentioned a trip to Murmansk, in Russia [then the Soviet Union]. When was that?

B: That would have been... *(pauses five seconds)* Anyway, we went up... We had some explosives on board that time, and we had food, quite a bit of food on board. I don't remember what it was, but it was packaged food of some kind. They were starving to death. And apparently... *(voice trails off)*

Anyway, the Russians were trying to make friends with us, back in the early nineties, and they had apparently searched the records of the ships that went into Murmansk, and looked at the officer crews of those. We got calls from the Russian embassy in Washington, D.C. If we would send in and verify our trips, as I showed you [Mr. Sadler earlier showed original papers documenting his numerous journeys], there would probably be a medal awarded, which did happen. I didn't get to go to the ceremony to formally accept it, because I still work, but they sent it to me *(shows medal and certificate)*, and you saw it.

T: Do you remember anything about that trip to Murmansk?

B: Nothing, other than it was bitter cold. We'd have an inch or so of ice all over the deck. We actually ran a cable down inside of the gunnels so you could latch onto the cable, so you didn't slip and fall overboard, or get washed overboard. If you fell overboard, you'd only live three or four minutes in that kind of water, not very long. Certainly in ten minutes you'd be out of commission.

T: Were you with a convoy of ships that time?

B: Most of the time. When we got to Europe we would break up the convoys, and some of us would go down in the Mediterranean, some of us would go... After we got east of the Azores, why then we'd start breaking up the convoys. I sailed by the coast of Portugal many times going into the Mediterranean. If we went north, why

we'd go on up into the English Channel. We went up the West Schelde River into Antwerp several times. *(pauses three seconds)*

There's a ship in the English Channel that's sunken, but the masts still show above the water. That's an ammunition ship, and the reason it's still there is that they can't figure out how to move it. The ammunition's been sitting there since the war, and any friction or disturbance might cause it to explode. So it still sits there. It's right off the Thames; you can see it sitting out in the Channel.

T: Of the different places you went—North Africa, Casablanca, Oran, you went to Antwerp, London—which of those cities made the greatest impression on you, a visiting naval officer?

B: *(pauses four seconds)* Well, I've never really thought about it that way. I, I was impressed, especially North Africa, of the poorness of the people, and the conditions of the cities. Some parts of Oran still ran the sewers in the streets, in the gutters. A lot of the people don't have—I think it's probably that way somewhat today—they didn't have the sanitary facilities. It was just a mess.

I've often told my wife... We had a neighbor that came from Oran, neighbor lady that lived next door to us, and she told what a beautiful city it was. Dorothy [Mr. Sadler's wife] wants to go visit it some time, and she's in for a great disappointment, if she goes into the suburbs. Now some parts of downtown have been cleaned up, but it was very poor.

T: Did you make a point of trying to get around and look at cities when you made port?

(1, A, 349)

B: Yes, I did. I enjoyed it. We often time didn't have much time in port. You know, in two, three days they can take a lot of equipment out of the ship, and you just move on to the next port. I tried to make it a point to tour. I remember I *(pauses three seconds)* dated a couple of young ladies in Casablanca, and I had a chance to eat in a North African restaurant. And that was an experience; the food was different. I remember the peaches that they served with the dinner. They were almost all pit; there was hardly any meat on the peach at all, maybe only a quarter of an inch. Where I had been in California not too long ago, the peaches were like four inches in diameter with a little tiny pit. *(pauses three seconds)* But it was just different. The food was different. They served some seafood with the head still on, which bothered me a little bit. *(laughs)*

T: Were people generally friendly towards our servicemen?

B: We were worried in Italy, you know, because they were fascist. When we went into Italy we were afraid that we would not be treated very well. But in a matter of just a few days, after some of the shooting stopped and the air raids stopped, why we had all kinds of (***) trying to get aboard the ship, and people, hustlers, trying to

sell things on the street, so they kind of forgot about the war. I really don't ever recall an encounter where I was challenged by a civilian or a person from some of these cities that were fascist cities at one time. *(pauses three seconds)*

But I was impressed with the poorness of North Africa. Now Casablanca is a lovely city to photograph, it looks beautiful, but get back in the alleys, back beyond that, and see what it's like. It's worse than any slums that I've ever encountered in the United States.

T: Quite a contrast to the postcards?

B: Oh, yes.

T: Now in Europe, you were in Antwerp and also in London.

B: *(pauses five seconds)* I think... I think war damage is what bothered me more than anything else. I didn't really get an impression of the city; I got more of an impression of what the war was doing. *(pauses four seconds)* You just have to see it; it's hard to describe.

(1, A, 373)

T: Did you notice that in Antwerp, that this was still close to the actual fighting?

B: We actually had explosions just a block from the hotel where I was staying. They hit a theater and killed a bunch of GI's. We had... These were V-2's [German liquid-fuel rocket, with a one-ton warhead; used beginning 1944] or V-1's [German jet-powered flying bomb; used beginning 1944], they used both. The V-2's were coming within a thousand feet of our ship, and they were shot from about forty-five miles away, in Holland. I was actually on a tram, and it blew all the windows out of the tram. I believe I have a bracelet here at the house made out of the skin of a V-2 rocket. We just cut some fragments of it, and...

Especially in Antwerp, we wouldn't stay with the ships, because we were mostly explosives. In fact, one trip we carried 8600 tons of gasoline, in what we know as jerry cans. And these we on pallets, so they could pick them up and out them on a car right away and run them to the front. Well, this is about at the Battle of the Bulge [December 1944 – January 1945], they were running out of gasoline. So we made a trip with nothing but gasoline.

T: From the States?

B: Yes.

T: Talk about being a sitting bomb!

B: Oh yes. And when you are sitting there with bombs, it's even worse. *(laughs)*

T: You spent a lot of time on ships. And you only made twelve knots on most of these ships, you said, top speed.

B: That's about right.

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

T: About time on ship—what does one do on ship to kill time, day after day after day?

B: You play a lot of cards. We had a card game we called 'slaughter'. What it is, is seven-card stud, but you need three of a kind to win. And if you drop out of the pool, why, they keep playing until someone wins the pool. It's a quarter limit, and you would win seventy-five dollars sometimes! No one got three of a kind or better. That's one of the things we did.

I was a model airplane builder before I went in the service, and of course on a ship you have nothing to use for raw materials. So I found that the antenna wire that ran the full length of the ship, it was seven strands of about number twelve copper. But it was twisted. So I looked at that, and I thought, "Maybe I can make that work." So I took and unraveled these strands, and I put the one end of the copper in a vice, and then I got a pair of vice-grips, and pulled, and you jerked it real hard (pulling motion with arm), pull as hard as you can, stretch it a little bit. It takes all those kinks out, and all the swirling comes out. I built a Voyager aircraft... who made that thing now? Simpson Voyager, I guess it was called. It was a cabin aircraft. I made the frame from this copper wire, and soldered it all, made all the controls work...

You've got to do something, or you go crazy. This was a scale model, but it only had about a forty inch wingspan. I made the ribs out of this copper wire, and soldered it. And then, "What can I cover the darn thing with?" I thought of several things, and I finally decided I'll use toilet paper. And what are you going to do with the perforations? What I did was, I made them look like the stitching, I put those over the ribs, so that they look like stitching. Then I had to paint it. Well, we had some lantern paint; we could paint red, green, and yellow signal lights with this lacquer paint we had on board. So I painted it, it turned out an ugly green. We had no lathes, so I couldn't get good wheels. Well, when I was leaving the ship in August—this was the *Tradewind*, leaving the ship in August of '65... I'm sorry, it was August of '45, the captain said, "You're really going to leave? You're going to quit going?" I said, "Yes, this is it; my last trip. I'm not going to sign over. I'm going to get out." By then I had over three years. [this was probably 1946, the year Mr. Sadler was discharged] He says, "Will you do me a favor?" And I said, "What's that?" He says, "Could I have that airplane?" He wanted that thing. And I gave it to him.

T: You'd had this thing with you for a while?

B: Yes, it was with me for about three trips. Every trip I got it a little further along. And I said, "One condition: You've got to go to the hobby shop and buy some rubber-

tired wheels that fit that aircraft.” He says, “I’ll do it.” I don’t know if he did it; I kind of lost... When I moved back, you see, I moved back to San Francisco. But his name was Captain Furbis Opriet [spelling may be incorrect]. We used to call him “Captain (***)”. *(laughs)*

T: On board your ships, were there ethnic minorities—Hispanics, blacks?

B: Oh yes, sure.

T: Specifically, what minorities?

B: We had blacks in the galley that were doing cooking. I don’t think... let’s see, none of the deck officers were black, I don’t think. There were some, as I recall, some armed guard personnel that were black. *(pauses three seconds)* The thing that caused the greatest raucous was when we had some female nurses when we were carrying troops. That was rare for us to have ladies on board. So you had to clean up you vocabulary a little bit. You can’t act like a dirty old sailor. No, I don’t recall... Seems to me we had a Chinese fellow on board, and I know we had a black cook.

T: Did he cook for the officers, or for the enlisted men, too?

B: They cooked for everybody. They had one galley on board. But we did have an officers’ mess and an enlisted mess, and there was no allowance for fraternization. The officers couldn’t fraternize with the enlisted men—we used to cheat every once in a while; I’d take off my ensign’s bars, throw my hat in a jeep, and I’d go ashore with some of the guys. There were some nice, great young men in the Navy. I enjoyed... We’d go out on double dates together *(pauses three seconds)* so those rules were kind of rubbery. But when you were on board, you damned well better...

T: So there was a strict separation between the officers and men?

B: Absolutely.

(1, B, 87)

T: Now you were a very young officer. Did you encounter difficulties with enlisted men who may well have been older than you?

B: I was lucky in that I didn’t have a large reporting group. I only had three other radio operators that reported to me, so I didn’t mix well with the rest of the officers, even though I was kind of young. When they played cards, you know, they tried to show me all the tricks. They didn’t know if I knew them yet. Well, I caught on to that pretty fast. No, I never really had any difficulty.

I did have an occurrence where one of the naval armed guard sailors was a boxer. I had boxed a little bit, but I didn’t really plan it as a sport or anything. Well, someone told him that I could, could handle the gloves okay, so he challenged me

one day. He said, "Bill, if I ever catch you up on the hatch cover I'm going to knock your tail off." And I said, "I wouldn't try that if I were you." Well, he teased me a couple of times, so finally I talked to one of the other officers. "I'm going to go up and spar with that guy a little bit, just to see what the hell he can do." He says, "Bill, I really wouldn't. If you lost, it might affect morale on the ship." So I didn't let it happen.

Well, about two or three months go by, and I think we were in Oran. And I got challenged again. But the old man [slang for captain] and the chief mate had gone ashore. They had requisitioned a jeep and they were off. So we were on board without the captain on board. So of the armed guard thought it would be alright now. So he challenged me, and I said, "Alright, you're on." We put on the gloves. They made a ring out of the hatch cover. We just danced around a little, and the sailors were starting to boo because we weren't mixing it up. Well, I was trying to feel him out. I really didn't want to hurt him, I really didn't. But I wasn't going to let him hurt me, either. All of a sudden he let one fly, and knocked me on my butt, took me right off my feet. I thought, "This guy ain't kidding." So I kind of sat there for a few minutes, and now they're starting to boo because I didn't get up right away. So we danced around for a little while, trying to get myself organized again, and they started to boo again. "Come on, mix it up you guys."

So I'm feeling pretty good now, and I decided he would hurt me, so I hit him as hard as I could, and knocked him down. Now we're both dancing around, because he found out I can him. I was in good shape then—I was in track, and a lot lighter than I now. All of a sudden they all started to say, "Hey, the captain's coming." *(pauses three seconds)* This is a tough story. When the captain came, we scattered and took off. Well, word got around that we had done that. Skipper said, "Don't do that anymore." That's about all there was to it.

A couple of days later, this sailor called me aside and said, "You ever go ashore?" "Sure," I said. "You ever go ashore, I'll buy you a drink." We became very good friends. And he went crazy during the war.

(1, B, 134)

T: Did he really?

B: Yes, he did.

T: What happened to him?

B: We were in Naples, and we'd been bombarded several times that day and evening. German aircraft. JU-87's [German dive bomber] passed so close you could almost feel the prop wash as they flew over the warehouses we were discharging into. Anyway, we'd been at it for about a week. It'd been hell, no sleep; we were up every night. One night we got word that there was someone running up and down the deck, with a butcher knife or something, a knife. And in those days you couldn't turn on any lights outside; we were all blacked out. If you lit a cigarette on deck, it was a court martial, both for danger of fire and for danger of being seen. You can

see a cigarette for five miles at sea on a clear night. No lights. He said, "He's threatening to kill somebody, and he's running up and down the deck." So they issued carbines [rifle]; we weren't normally armed at sea. They issued carbines to three of us, and they said, "Bill, don't let him hurt anybody. I mean, if he's out of control, shoot him."

So now we walked all over, and a ship's got a lot of places to hide at night. And you couldn't turn on any flashlights or anything. We searched for, I don't know, maybe an hour, and didn't find him. Well, word got back to us that they'd found him in one of the johns, or heads, crying. So right away we went to go down and lock him up. We got there, and lo and behold, *(pauses five seconds; with emotion)* it was my friend.

(ten second pause)

T: You didn't know who it was until then?

B: *(shakes head no; quiet, but emotional)*

T: Bill, what happened to him after that?

B: We tried to get a Navy ship to take him off our hands, because we had no medical facilities.

T: A Navy ship? Was he regular Navy?

B: Yes, he was a gunner. But they wouldn't take him. And we said, "Well, we have no facilities for him." On those ships they have a rope locker on deck, it's got a big heavy steel door. And we were leaving, we couldn't wait forever for a ship to come around and pick him up.

T: You couldn't leave him there?

B: No, we couldn't leave him there. So, what we did was, we took this rope locker, and they cut a porthole in it, and they welded what we called chain link fence over it, so he couldn't get out. This could be locked from outside—and this is heavy steel door, there's no way for him to get out of there. They made a cot for him in there, and he cried all the way back to the United States. *(pauses three seconds)* We fed him. I don't know what happened to him, because they came aboard and took him off the ship. I have no idea what happened to him.

T: That's a tough story.

B: Yes. *(pauses five seconds)*

T: Was it tough for you because you saw who it was?

B: You know what even bothered me more? How would I feel if I'd shot him? Not knowing who it was.

T: So there were tough times on board these ships, too?

B: It was not a cakewalk. Something else that... I don't know if you want to cut it out of the tape, but... When we had seven or eight hundred troops on board, we didn't have enough toilet facilities. We only had toilet facilities for about sixty people. And now what are you going to do? What they did is, they took two one by tens, or one by sixes [pieces of lumber], I guess they were, and they strung them out with tapers down to the gunnels of the ship. So there was like an outhouse, and they'd cut holes in it, and very often there'd be fifteen or twenty men, they'd hop up so the waste went over the side of the ship. Now this is meant to be funny: one guy would be going to the potty, another guy would be seasick, and he's puking, and another guy's going to the potty (*laughs*), and another guy's seasick and puking. It was not a pleasure cruise!

T: Was that a problem, getting used to being at sea, not getting seasick?

(1, B, 190)

B: Yes, you have to sort of acclimate to it. I remember, it was so rough going across the North Atlantic—I was fortunate, I had a single twin bed, just an oversized bunk bed—you lock your feet around a mattress, you stick your feet in the slot between the edge of the bed and the mattress, and hang on to the mattress at the top so you stay stationary enough to sleep. Otherwise you could roll right out of bed. I've seen a Liberty ship roll thirty degrees. That's a hell of a roll. You'd walk on the gunnels on the bulkhead one side, and then the ship'd roll the other way and you're walking on the kick mold on the other side. And that would go on for days sometimes. The ship would do about twelve knots and, well, a storm at sea doesn't move much faster than that, so you just stay with the storm. We've had it rough all the way across.

T: Did ships sometimes fall prey to storms, and get sunk by them?

B: Oh sure. They broke up. Some of the Liberty ships broke in two.

Speaking of sleeping, one of the most annoying things that can happen to you, is the guy in the quarters below you would leave a Coca-Cola bottle, or some bottles, and they'd roll (*makes rolling sound*), bang! (*makes rolling sound*) Bang! (*makes rolling sound*) Bang! You'd have to get up and go find him, and get him to pick up the bottle that was rolling on the wooden floors. With a steel deck you could hear it just as well up the next floor as down. Drive you crazy, you know! You're trying to sleep. My shift was 4:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Of course you could have whatever shift you wanted; that was the one that I had. So I'm up early every morning.

We carried French Moroccan troops from North Africa, from Algiers, into Italy. We'd carry four, five, six hundred of them. It was the religious season, and

they'd beat a drum, boom! (*makes drumming motion*), and blow this little flute all night long! Then the French officers that commanded these men would get out on the boat deck, and I'm trying to sleep, you know, I've got to go to work in the middle of the night. Well, they'd be singing, (*sings part of a French language song*) all day long, drive you nuts! And then they'd clap and laugh. It was not a pleasure trip!

T: How long did that take, to get over to Italy?

B: It was governed somewhat by the convoy. The slowest ship in the convoy is what they all have to maintain. Now we could do about twelve knots, which is like thirteen miles an hour. And that's a pretty good clip; you can get over in about three days, four days. (*telephone rings*)

(*tape paused*)

T: You mentioned earlier that there were ethnic minorities on board your ship. Let me ask you, when you were at sea, how would you describe the relations between whites, blacks, Hispanics, on ships you were on?

B: I never, we never had a problem of any kind. I mean, we all had jobs to do, and we were busy. Even on the first merchantmen, before we started, before the wartime people came along, there were some of them still sailing, you know, that were young enough to still be sailing, and some of them were minorities. Engineers were minorities. You know, when we were officers on those ships, we had a steward, that would make up our bed and take care of the cabins, and some of those were black. But there was never a problem, I am not aware of it.

T: Let me ask you this: how did you stay in touch with family and loved ones back home?

B: Well, they had they called V-mail. The envelope was the paper. You folded it all up (*makes folding motions with hands*). We wrote a lot of letters. When we got to a port they'd mail them all at one time. I had mail come in that was three, four months old, but eventually it would catch up with the ship. Remember, we were moving constantly; we never stayed anywhere more than two or three days. Just moving all the time.

T: Did you write a lot of letters yourself?

B: At that time in my life I really didn't have a close girlfriend. I'm kind of glad I didn't, because with all that, you'd be here or there, all over the world. After the war I got married, but during the war... I had met a few ladies sailing. I met a Belgian girl, I think I told you that story. If we'd had the GI-Bill provisions at that time, I think I would have brought her back. Just a tremendous lady. But we didn't, so there would have been all kinds of complications to get that gal out of Belgium. That's what they told me. But I... (*pauses five seconds*)

Coincidence, talking about girlfriends, I was in New York City with our Third Engineering Officer. He was a big, tall, redheaded guy, and I'm about an average-sized guy. We were so fussy as young officers; we wanted girls, he wanted a tall girl, and I wanted one my size. So if we met a couple of ladies we wanted to take to a movie or something, they had to be just right for him, and just right for me. We were in New York, walking up and down; we walked from 42nd and Broadway all the way to Central Park and all the way back—and that's a long walk [together about two miles]. So finally he says, "I'll take you to a movie. This place is just loaded with GI's; white caps [sailors] all over everywhere." We were going to go to the old Palace Theater, to a movie. We were standing in a line, and it was already fifty people long. Out of the crowd I hear, "Yoo-hoo, Billy." And I thought, "Who in the heck could this be?" It was a girl I went to high school with!

She was in New York modeling furs. She was about the right size for me, and she was with another tall model. Red said, "You got to be the luckiest devil in the world! We ain't going to a movie tonight!" (*laughs*) In the middle of all those people. And she'd never seen me in uniform, so I don't know the hell she recognized me. Come running right out of the crowd. I say, well, you know, you get tired of looking, they'll come to you! (*laughs*) Young sailors!

(1, B, 264)

T: Let me shift to the Pacific, because you spent part of your time in service there. How much of a change was that, going from Europe and North Africa over to the Pacific?

B: Before I leave Europe, I spent my first Christmas [1944] in Antwerp, at the Battle of Bulge. That's the first Christmas I had in battle.

In the Pacific, the first thing I noticed, the areas in which we sailed, they were warmer. We were more comfortable. Anyway, I transferred to the Pacific. Flew across in an old DC-3 [cargo plane]. It took nineteen hours to get from New York to San Francisco!

T: First, was it your decision to go to the Pacific?

B: Yes, I volunteered. I thought the European war was going to start winding down, and I was required to stay in for four years, so I thought, "I may get out to California." I got out there, and they assigned me to a ship called the SS *Tradewind*, which the Navy called an AKA [attack cargo ship]. As we got more experience, we got better ships. It was a turbine-driven ship, and it was quite a bit faster; we could do about twenty-one knots, compared to the other one only doing twelve. So we could cross the Pacific in about ten days.

Right away we started carrying... First things we carried were communications gear and, again, explosives. (*pauses three seconds*) I am trying to remember which island we hit first. I think the island of Guam [captured by US forces, August 1944] was the first place that we hit after I went to the Pacific. We [US forces] hadn't been in there too long. That's a nice little island, and I enjoyed

that quite a bit. Then, later in the war, we started carrying food, foodstuffs. We [the *Tradewind*] were what they called a reefer, a refrigerator ship. They could shut down parts of that and carry cargo and foodstuffs.

Anyway, we got to Guam, and we had something like seven thousand tons of potatoes. One trip we had beef. The potatoes, they didn't take them fast enough, and they kept opening up the hatches and taking out a truckload and then coming back and taking another truckload. The potatoes went bad over a period of three, four weeks. The hot climate, the muggy climate. Can you imagine, having six or seven thousand tons of bad potatoes?

T: Bad potatoes smell really awful!

B: You're telling me? I was sleeping on top of them! *(laughs)* And we had the same thing happen with beef one trip. They didn't have enough cold storage provisions, and they'd come aboard and take a few sides of beef. That happened... Both occasions of the ship having food spoil was in Guam, on two different trips.

(1, B, 295)

T: Two different trips? So you would go back to the States, pick the stuff up, and head back to Guam again.

B: We were out in the middle of the Pacific in August [1945] when the Japanese decided not to fight. But we were at Peleliu [one of the Palau group of islands], we carried supplies into Peleliu.

T: After it was under US control? [Peleliu was secured by US forces in November 1944]

B: Yes. They had taken the island, they were on the island. I remember walking that long runway, that coral runway, and I actually got dizzy from the bright sunlight before I got to the end of the runway. Sun was bright, and the coral is almost white when you're looking at it in the sunlight.

Then we went into Okinawa. In fact, I was able to go up into the lookout point of General Hodge [Lt. Gen. John H. Hodge, US Army], that was one of the last fights they had. I brought back some souvenirs from there. I got a real chewing out when they found out we had been up there, because there were booby traps.

T: Okinawa was already in US control when you were there? [Okinawa was secured by US forces at the end of June 1945]

B: Yes, but there were booby traps, and I didn't know that. I think there were three of us that climbed the hill and went up to where General Hodge had made his last stand. That was a scare.

I did the same thing over in Cherbourg [port city in northwest France]. The Germans had blown up their eighty millimeter eighty-eights [80mm 88s] that were

anti-aircraft guns. They put a shell in the barrel and then fired it, and it just tore the barrel all to pieces. I went to the ammunition magazine that they had that supplied those guns. What I really wanted was some German twenty millimeter and thirty-seven millimeter [20mm and 37mm] small cannon shells. I did see the skeleton head painted on the door [danger symbol], but I went in anyway and picked up a couple and brought them back to the ship.

T: Could you use those, or were they just souvenirs?

B: No, I wanted to disarm them. I decided to disarm the damn things, take them apart. Right away I figured out that you could screw the head of the bullet itself off, and I could see that that was a firing pin, which meant that the bullet itself was combustible; it would explode. I thought, "That's clever." When I was finally able to work the bullet out of the shell, I observed a tiny hole in the back of the bullet, which means that it could fire from, from firing this way (*hand motion forward*), or if it hit something it would fire. So it was a tracer plus an explosive shell. We had nothing like that. Well, I am taking it all apart and the gunnery officer comes in. He nearly fainted. "Do you know that damn thing could go off?!" And I said, "Of course I know it could go off." But it didn't go off. And he says, "Don't do that anymore!" (*laughs*) That's one of the risks a young man will take sometimes, when he probably shouldn't have done it.

T: Can you describe what you saw at Guam or Peleliu or Okinawa, as far as the conditions there?

B: The first one where I got quite an impression was at Saipan [one of the Mariana Islands; captured by US forces July 1944]. When we got to Saipan, we had the (*pauses four seconds*) curiosity of young men. We were looking around at some of the wreckage, we were looking around, and we came upon a stack of rifles, Japanese rifles. I mean an extensive stack; there had to be a couple hundred of them in that pile. I had been forewarned that those rifles, the machining on the bolts was very poor, and you could get blow-by from the bolts. So I was very careful. I went through several rifles until I found a bolt that was nice and snug. I was looking for rifles where the stocks had not been damaged too much, from having been thrown in the pile.

Well, I got two rifles, in first class shape, and brought them all the way back to the United States. Then I got word that wartime contraband was being confiscated by customs officials at all the ports. They didn't want any of those guns to get in. I was not going to give up those rifles. So I thought, "I'll tear the rifle down, and I'll strap it to two one by four [1x4] boards." It was getting near Christmas time, and I wrapped it up in Christmas paper and it looked like a Christmas present. I had two of them. Well, the first night—I was in Seattle—I left the ship carrying that over my shoulder like it was a gun. The guard saluted me and waved me on. (*laughs*) I got that one off okay, but I thought, "If I bring that thing back here again, a second time, he might..." But he didn't, so I got both guns back home.

The only trouble is, when I moved to Minnesota [in the early 1950s], I left them on the top of my clothing cabinet in the TV station, and the next year when I went out there, they were gone. Someone else found them. But they were in beautiful condition.

(1, B, 343)

T: Was there a lot of picking up souvenirs and trying to take them back from the war zones?

B: Yes, I'm sure there was. Almost everybody had some memento or something. I wasn't interested in any guns or anything especially, but there were so many of them there, and it was a curiosity. So I thought, "Well, I'll bring them home."

You asked me how I reacted to the islands. I actually got ashore at several of the islands. We were ashore, and docked where we could go ashore. I was impressed. I went all over Guam. In fact, being a radio operator, I was very impressed when I saw them burying just tons and tons of beautiful electronic equipment. Apparently there was an unwritten agreement with the suppliers that they would not flood the markets with that stuff in the States when they brought it back as surplus. Instead they'd bury it, or throw it away.

I was able to get some parts, spares that I needed for my transmitter on the ship. I got a spare receiver, and I actually brought it on board. I went out and stopped a bulldozer from covering it up. I said, "I've got a requisition for one of those radios, and here it is." They were just burying the stuff. I mean, there was a lot of it at Guam.

T: The war was over by this time?

B: Yes, the fighting had stopped. You know, there was some soldiers still in the hills of Guam for many years [the last Japanese on Guam surrendered in 1972]. At Okinawa, too.

T: You were also in Japan after the war ended. Maybe you could say a little bit about that experience.

B: Let's see, one of the first trips we made in there, we went into Yokosuka [port city, on Tokyo Bay]. Just by coincidence, we were tied up to the dock, within sight of the *Missouri* [US battleship on which the surrender document was signed, 2 September 1945], when the surrender was signed. We were in Tokyo Bay. I'd seen Europe by that time, but this was awesome. We went in through Yokohama [on Tokyo Bay], and we got up to Tokyo, (*pauses three seconds*) and it was just hard to describe. Everything was gone, everything combustible was gone. This was just from the firebombing, not from the atomic bomb. There is no way to describe it. Like a great big dump that burned. Nothing identifiable anymore.

Then the next trip we went into Sasebo, Japan [port city, on the southern island of Kyushu], and that's thirty miles away from Nagasaki [second atomic bomb

was dropped here on 9 August 1945]. So I got permission from the captain to visit Nagasaki with a shore party. Seven of us went ashore. *(pauses three seconds)* They had a train that ran from Sasebo to Nagasaki, an old coal burner. It's only thirty miles, but it took three hours. One way, three hours. We go there, and weren't able to go into the train terminal; we had to get off the train early, because the terminal was ruined. It was all blown up and burned. The water tanks had melted, the steel tanks had melted from the intensity of that flash.

I did get concerned, in fact I think I can honestly say this was the only time in the war I was really concerned. We walked into the city, and I suddenly realized that all of the Japanese soldiers that were guarding the city were armed. And here we were, in Navy uniforms, unarmed. All you need is one kook in that crowd, and you're in real trouble. So we were real careful not to confront them.

We stepped into one building, kind of like a cement block building. The building had burned, and was gutted internally. But the building was still essentially standing. I stepped on what was apparently the roof at one time, and my foot went through because it was burned. Then I saw something shiny down underneath the floor, so I reached in to see what it was. As I got more and more out of there, it was a china cabinet or something that had fallen over on its face. As best we could determine, it was a place setting of eight.

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

T: Bill, you were talking about being in Nagasaki, and there was a cabinet with place settings with china.

B: The whole building had caved into the basement, but we were down in the basement. This must have been a second floor piece of furniture. Only one of the place settings was broken; the plate was broken, and the cup was broken. And we had seven in our shore party, so we each got a plate and a cup and a saucer that we brought back from target center in Nagasaki. Now the plate was shipped from San Francisco to Minneapolis when I moved here, and they packed it very carefully with straw in a big barrel, but when it got here the plate was broken all to pieces; the handle was knocked off the cup, and the saucer was cracked. Well, I was able to glue the saucer, put the handle back on the cup, but the plate wasn't salvageable. Now this isn't meant to be a joke, but the atomic explosion went off and wrecked the whole city, and that survived; the truckers broke it driving here from California! *(laughs)* I am sure they dropped that barrel off the back tailgate of the truck or something. I was really unhappy at them.

T: How about the Japanese people that you encountered? What did you make of them?

B: Surprisingly, they were very courteous. I didn't speak any Japanese—I picked up a few words, but not enough to carry on a conversation—and I really didn't have any trouble at all. When we were in Yokohama, we had Japanese soldiers working the cargo, and that was my first encounter with the Japanese one-on-one. The

Japanese were operating the winches that ran the cables to lift the cargo to shore, moving the big boom. The boom was supported by what we called a mainmast, and the boom can be lowered so you reach farther out, or bring it up closer to the ship. They were moving the boom, and that cable's about a, I'd say, a half-inch cable was wrapped around what we used to call a nigger head, but it was a dumbbell on the end of it, so you'd keep it tight and that would make this big boom. Well, this boom's a hundred feet long, and it was half-inch steel; it weighed maybe a ton or more.

Well, the little Japanese guy that was running the hoist didn't pay attention, and he lost one loop on the dumbbell. And then of course he couldn't hold it tight enough, so the thing's coming down, it's falling. There was a little Japanese soldier standing right at the mainmast, where the pulley on the deck and the cable went up. The cable came out of that pulley, and came back to his left leg, and absolutely turned it into mincemeat. Smashed his ankle all to hell. I was the officer on duty at the time; we didn't have a medical person on board. I said, "What the hell am I going to do?" We decided to make a splint out of some packing cases, and at least get him on shore so the Japanese can help him.

Then one of the Army officers was on our ship for something, he says, "Let me help; I'm a medical officer." So he came over. It was a compound fracture; there's nothing you can do. We were able to tie his foot, and we put him on a pallet and let him over the side with the hoist. As we were putting him on the pallet, the Japanese guy said something. This Army officer had just come up from Okinawa, and he says, "Did you hear what he said?" I said, "I don't speak Japanese." He says, "The little son of a bitch thanked me! I've never had one of them show emotions before. But he realized we were trying to help him. Crime of the whole thing is, when we put him on shore, they have no medical facilities. He's going to lose that leg." Nothing to do. But he said, "He thanked me." That was one of my first experiences with Japanese.

(2, A, 70)

T: What was your ship doing in Japan after the war anyway?

B: We carried food. The Japanese were starving to death. From Seattle, Washington, as fast as we could go. Back and forth, back and forth. We carried eight thousand tons of frozen beef. Feed a lot of people. Those whole cities were leveled, they were... I think after they realized that, that MacArthur wasn't going to just come in and take over, we worked with them, and we had no trouble. They were actually polite, and we had no trouble at all. When they realized we were bringing them food, really trying to feed them, to keep them happy, why their attitude... I don't think the people had a bad attitude anyway; it was some of the military and government people that had the poison.

T: You were in Japan, or at sea, until early 1946, is that right?

B: Somewhere in there. I've forgotten. I think it was August of '46 when I actually stopped, made my last trip. [Bill's ship records state it was indeed August 1946]

T: Were you making trips in the Pacific that entire time? Basically delivering foodstuffs?

B: Our soldiers and sailors that were already out there on the ships needed food all the time. They say it takes twenty-four supply people for one soldier. We had our own troops to supply, we had people who were starving to death.

T: So even though the war ended, your job didn't.

B: No, we continued to supply.

T: Did you carry people at all? Transport Japanese, or Americans?

B: We carried troops, but that late in the war we didn't. I'd say from the end of '45 on we didn't carry any troops at all; it was all food.

T: Were other ships doing the same thing, carrying food?

B: Oh yes, you bet. I don't know how many, but there were quite a few. You see, we were a big ship; we could carry an awful lot of food. I know what about eight thousand tons of bad beef smells like! *(laughs)*

T: Your enlistment should have been up in 1947, yet you got out of the service in 1946. Did you request to get out early?

B: If you had not been assigned to another ship, you could stop sailing. They issued what they called a "continuous service award," so if you sailed constantly, you didn't take a month off or go back to camp for a while, if you sailed continuously, you could quit at three years. I wanted to get out! I had seen enough water and enough places. I think I can count forty cities; I've been marking up an atlas upstairs. Every time I look at it, I see another city I was in.

T: So you decided to get out. Before you got out, had you already begun to think about what you were going to do next?

(2, A, 118)

B: Not really. I had a pretty good idea I was going to go into electronics, I had already decided to do that; that hadn't changed. But when you don't really know when the war's going to end, you tend to not think ahead too far. You just don't know.

T: After the war was over, you were just running supplies to and fro in the Pacific. At that time did you begin to think about the next step?

B: *(pauses three seconds)* I guess I was really... After I got checked into a place to live in San Francisco, I decided it was over. I wasn't going to worry about government or military any more. I felt I had done enough of that. I got a job as a radio service technician at a radio shop, and I worked there, I don't know, several months. My salary, by the way, was 98 cents an hour. *(laughs)* I thought, "There's got to be something better than this I can do." So the first thing I did is, I went to Samuel Gompers School. I was working the television; I was trying to build an experimental television station. And I asked Ken Nielsen, "Why doesn't Samuel Gompers School have a course in television?" And he said, "That's a damned good idea. Because it is coming." And I said, "There ain't no doubt; you are going to have television." So I had the privilege of being one of the first teachers of television out in San Francisco, with Samuel Gompers School. I was teaching basically electronic fundamentals, but with an orientation to how they would be used in television.

As I mentioned, I actually built a station in my basement, at 639 Clayton Street, right in the Haight Ashbury district, and put it on the air. About two, three months after I was operating the thing, some guy called me from over in Berkeley, from 50 Hawkin Lane. He said, "I'm picking you up." I think I've told you that story. True story. So I not only said I was going to do it, I did it; I put the thing on the air, built the cameras, built what we call the monoscope. I even invented what we call intercarrier sound, which they just started using here like ten years ago in regular TV sets, where you mix the sound with the video so you don't need to have two transmitters. All televisions stations now have two big transmitters, and you don't need one of them.

T: How would you characterize your adjustment to civilian life, Bill?

B: *(pauses five seconds)* I don't think that I had any real emotional hangover when I first hit the street. As you get older, *(laughs)* you begin to realize that you were lucky.

T: Do you think you were lucky after the war, or do you feel you worked for what you got?

B: I was pretty determined. As soon as I got my first job with the television station, I knew that was going to be it. That was with KPIX, that's CBS in St. Louis. I got to mixing with the broadcast group, and the engineers, and so on, and I think I mentioned that I founded the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, San Francisco chapter, in 1948. And I was instrumental in organizing the first membership committee. So I was getting to be known pretty well as a television engineer in the city. I know in the San Francisco *Chronicle*, or the *Examiner*, almost every other day, there was something in there, "Bill Sadler did this, Bill Sadler did that, or he's over here, he's running this show." It was kind of fun to become known in a profession that was growing like crazy. So I built KPIX, and then I went over and built KRON-TV San Francisco, almost literally built the building.

Then I got involved with Hubbard Broadcasting. Mr. Hubbard had heard about me through RCA engineering group, and he said, "How would you like to be

director of engineering for a group of television stations?" He called me out there in San Francisco. I said, "That might be alright. What's the salary going to be?" Then he named the salary, but he says, "The only problem is, I've got to get you here right away." And I said, "But I have to give our station two weeks notice." He said he really didn't want to do that, but I said, "Mr. Hubbard, I haven't worked for you yet, but I'd give you two weeks notice." He thought about it a minute, and then says, "Okay, as soon as you can. I'm going to send you a letter." That was the way Stan [Mr. Hubbard] was, very abrupt, and very demanding. But he and I learned to work very well together. My wife and I visited him two or three times, after I left the station, at his Florida home.

(2, A, 165)

T: You stayed with Hubbard for a number of years then?

B: Almost ten years.

T: As a conclusion here, what did the war mean for you personally, at the time?

B: *(pauses five seconds)* Between the fear of going... I knew I had to go... I think that, politically, I wasn't too involved in the war; I didn't really understand fascism all that well. But after I got exposed to the war, and saw some of the things that were going on... I saw children die in a bombing, I mean, this really hurts. You grow up real fast. *(pauses three seconds)* I knew really how bad it was; it didn't take very long to find out.

I was in an air raid in Naples, and the next morning we were asked to go ashore and help the people that had been injured. The place was a mess. We came upon a family, apparently, three children and a mother, living in two walls that were left of an apartment. It had collapsed, it was gone. When we came upon them they hadn't had any help yet; it was daylight, but they hadn't had any help yet. There was a child *(emotionally; pauses five seconds)* in the rubble, dismembered, looked like he or she might have been a year old, I couldn't tell. There was another child, in her mother's arms, that was as red as a tomato. I don't know what was wrong. I had a medical officer with me, but... And she was shivering, like this *(makes shivering sounds)*. And there was a little girl playing with a rag doll, sitting out in the middle of the floor, just sort of staring off into space. *(emotionally; pauses three seconds)* That's hell.

T: I imagine one does grow up in a hurry. *(pauses three seconds)* You got out of the service and you were, what, twenty years old?

B: I was twenty-one yet.

T: It must have felt like you were a lot older than that.

B: I was a pretty serious young man. But that's how you get to be director of engineering at NBC when you're twenty-five years old. You have to go at it, and know you are going to get there. Hard work. Ever since I have been an adult, I've had three jobs all the time. I still do. I've got a factory in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, I've got one up at Elk River [Minnesota], and I've got two operations out in New Brighton [Minnesota].

T: Do you ever envision a time when you get away from that?

B: When I sold my first company, I stayed with the company that bought it for ten years, and when I left I thought I was through with the display business. So we bought this house here in Roseville about 1976, and remodeled it, and I thought, I've had enough, I'm going to quit. I told the company that I wasn't going to sign over; I was going to take my ten year leave. I had some buildings, some income property, so I had to have a secretary here. I put that office in *(motions to office in house)*, and moved the garage forward. I thought, I'll just speculate, do some investing. I had enough money to get the kids through school and all that. But I suddenly felt that I was rotting, so I got another job with a new company that was trying to get into the display business, and got them started. I don't want to sit around and rot; as long as I feel good, I'm going to be doing something. And that's the way I've lived my life.

(2, A, 207)

T: You really have. You've kept busy from the first memories you've shared with me. *(pauses five seconds)*

Let me thank you very much for the interview, Mr. Sadler.

END OF INTERVIEW