

Myron Bazar
Narrator

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Saratoga Springs, NY

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Home of Myron Bazar
Saratoga Springs, NY

Myron Bazar **MB**
Wayne Clark **WC**

WC: Today is the 5th of August, 2011. My name is Wayne Clark, I'm with the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center in Saratoga Springs. And we are in Saratoga today at the home of the Bazars. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and date and place of birth, please?

MB: My name is Myron Bazar, and I was born in the Ukraine. And I came to this country when I was about five years old.

WC: Whereabouts did you go to in this country?

MB: I settled in Amsterdam, New York. My father was in this country before, and they brought me over. And they left my mother behind in the Ukraine, and they were divorced. So I lived with my father here in this country. And since I was five years old, I spent all my school years and high school in Amsterdam.

WC: What year did you graduate?

MB: 1941.

WC: And, let me ask you, do you remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

MB: Well, I'll start slightly before that. When I graduated from high school, the United States government had a program at that time, very few people are aware of it. The WPA, Work Progress Administration. What the government was doing, through Roosevelt, he thought that possibly we could enter this war in the future, the way it was going in Europe. So in every city the government put up a building, and in this building there was a machine shop. He was training people, people were being trained voluntarily, if you wanted to join it, in how to operate lathe machines, shaving machines, and so on, at no cost.

So in Amsterdam the government put up a building, which is still in existence, with all this machinery. I went in for training, after I graduated from high school, on different types of machines. And this carried me until the attack on Pearl Harbor. When I was a civilian at that time, in November of 1941, I had a car. And it was a Saturday afternoon, and I was driving and listening to the football game at that time, Armory and somebody else —

WC: And that was in December —

MB: And that was interrupted by a special announcement from Washington that all volunteer enlistments into the Navy were terminated. I'm sorry, I've jumped my story. This was not in 1941. This was in 1942, in November.

WC: This was after Pearl Harbor.

MB: Yes that's right. My memory is not serving me properly.

WC: No, that's fine.

MB: And they said all enlistments into the military service have been terminated, and from now on the Navy would be under the draft system. And I always wanted to join the Navy. I was only two blocks from the post office when that announcement came in, and the Navy recruiting officer was in the post office. I went in and I told them I came to join the Navy, hoping he never knew about this news. And he never knew it. So he signed me up, gave me a short medical check, and he said, "You're in".

WC: Now let me ask you, why did you pick the Navy?

MB: I don't know why. Maybe I thought the land war was too dirty for me, or what. I have no idea. But I had a partiality...I always followed the Navy... when Roosevelt spent a one billion dollar increase in the Navy...I was really enthused about the Navy.

So I get a phone call Monday, and he says "You know what? There was an announcement that came from the government that all enlistments were terminated on Saturday, the day you came in." And the recruiting officer, he got his rank by how many recruits he served. So he says "What I'll do is I'll backdate it by one day. Don't tell anybody." So he backdated it, and I was in the Navy. He says – now this is in November – "We'll pick you up in the end of December to take you to Newport, Rhode Island".

So in the meantime I was working in a small factory which was manufacturing machinery for the Russians. This machinery was to make boxes for bullets. The factory could only turn out six machines a year. So what happened, I was working in the year 1942 in this factory, and all of a sudden the war came back to the factory and said "We can give you a deferment". They didn't realize that I'd already joined the Navy. "We can give you a deferment because those machines we sent to Russia in a convoy going to Murmansk, Siberia, was sunk by the Germans, and all the machines were lost." And he said, "You'll get a six-month deferment. We have to make six more

machines." I said, "Fine". But in the meantime when I heard this announcement, I joined the Navy.

So in Albany they put us on the train going to Newport, Rhode Island. And we got into Newport, and the buildings we were stationed at were built during the First World War. The important part on this was, the ceiling height was only seven feet, and, medically, it was improper for a bunch of sailors to be sleeping in this room. So they had a point that all of the windows had to be open. This was in January in Newport. Well everybody, for three months, slept with their clothes on, due to the fact of the low ceiling.

Technically, I was a musician. I played in different bands before I joined. I played in cowboy bands, big bands, Polish bands. I played in a symphony orchestra.

WC: What kind of instrument did you play?

MB: I played the clarinet and the tenor saxophone. So at the termination – the reason I mention this – the termination of my training at Newport, they said "You're lucky. You're going to be sent to Boston." I said, "Why?" "You're going to Wentworth Institute, which is a technical school, and it's been taken over by the Navy to train engineering aboard ship." And he says "The beauty part of this is you're going to stay in a four-star hotel, the best hotel in the Back Bay section of Boston." The name of the hotel... the Somerset Hotel.

So they took me to Boston, and this hotel was unbelievable. They kept the staff, they had the same kitchen, the same chef, the same waiters, and they had a string orchestra of eight pieces on a balcony in the dining room. And they always played for breakfast, they played for dinner. So they had service, the same women waitresses, the same food they served the civilians when the hotel was a civilian hotel. At the top of this, the commanding officer of the Navy guys at the Wentworth, stated "You're a musician. I'm going to formulate a band. We need a band here because we have a certain amount of students". And the program was four months. So I was relieved of

all duties. I had weekends off. I brought my car from Amsterdam to Boston. They had a garage to house the car. And every weekend I would take off in the car, and either go home or whatever, and so on.

WC: What kind of a car did you have?

MB: I had a Plymouth. I bought it in 1941. It cost me \$700. And it was a nice car. So I would travel back and forth in the evening because I was relieved of all duties. In the evening I would travel around Boston, and make dates with different women, and everything else. It was a great life, considering the fact we were stepping out of a recession. Because the family I came from, it was kind of a middle class family, not poor. And so what happened, when I graduated from Wentworth —

WC: Let me just go back a little bit. What did you learn at Wentworth? What type of engineering?

MB: Oh, engineering of pumps, turbines, steering mechanisms, and refrigeration, everything technically aboard, mechanically aboard ship.

WC: All right.

MB: Then, upon graduation, they said “Hey, the commanding officer told me you’re a lucky guy. Washington’s going to send you to Syracuse.” I said, “What for?” He says, “The Carrier Corporation. The Navy has a small school there teaching refrigeration and air conditioning, and you’ve been selected to go to Carrier.” (He laughs) “The program’s going to be...we’re going to give you allowance, you live anywhere you want. The only thing, you have to be at work at 8 o’ clock in the morning and you’re out at 4 or 5 o’clock in the afternoon from the school. You’re on your own.” Geez, I couldn’t believe this life!

And so I worked at Carrier. There’s only about ten students. And they had teachers there from Carrier teaching us air conditioning and

refrigeration, and all that. And then I would finish and I'd get in my car and go to my apartment. I was subsidized for meals and the apartment and everything else. So that only lasted about five weeks.

So what happened upon graduation from Carrier, they said "You're going to be sent to San Francisco. And it's a new construction. It's a fleet oil tanker, and it's under construction, and you're assigned to it to handle all the air conditioning." Well, they didn't have much air conditioning, just for some of the officers. Until the ship was complete. Then they couldn't tell me how long it would take. So they put me on a train for San Francisco.

Now the interesting part aboard this train is this. Very few people realized how the public was involved in this war. So the train would go to different stations to pick up water. I don't know how many miles you'd go, they'd stop and water it, because the train was wood and coal fed.

WC: An old steam engine—

MB: Yeah, and there was a lot of steam, you'd lose a lot of water. And you had to supplement the water aboard that train. So when you start getting into the Midwest, you hit very poor small towns where the water tower would be. And here's the interesting part. The train was stopped, and you'd get all these women from these poor villages come to the train with food, everything they could possibly give you which you might need. They'd give you clothing, like socks and sweaters, and they were so devoted to the country in relation to this war, they would try to do something good. They were too remote from the big cities to do anything in the factory, but what they could do is give it to the troops. So you'd go there, you'd get sandwiches, they had everything there, because the train would stop for about an hour. And you would get all this material if you wanted to take it. And I couldn't believe it. These poor people were devoted to this war and devoted to this country. And giving something which they could very ill afford.

So anyway we land in San Francisco, and the ship was being built in San Francisco in a new Kaiser plant, shipbuilding plant. And Kaiser was their hero at that time, turning out ships in a hurry. And they says, "Well, this is September, it's going to take at least four months. There's only seven men, Navy men, which would be aboard this ship. You're one of the seven. All the rest is civilian workers. Your job is going to be to walk around and make sure everybody's working, nobody's sleeping, and whatever might be. And we're going to give you allowance, a very sizeable allowance, for food and housing. Geez, I couldn't believe this! I picked the best hotel in San Francisco (laughs). I was there in this hotel for four months, and food in the hotel, and all I had to do was be aboard ship at eight o'clock in the morning and get out at five o'clock in the afternoon.

Oh, before that, I sold my car in Syracuse, because being transferred to San Francisco it didn't make sense. They wouldn't allow it; I had to go aboard a train. So I got \$1100 for a car I paid \$700 for in 1941. So I go aboard ship in that four month period. They give you an armband that said SP, shore patrol, it's like a policeman in the Navy. For four months I couldn't find a person that was sloughing off, sleeping, and so on. Everybody was so patriotic, it was unbelievable. At that time, the Americans' feeling they had in the war was not Hitler, it was Tojo, because we got hit at Pearl Harbor. So the Americans had the feeling "We're going to get those Japs, we're going to get those Japs." They weren't speaking of Europe. And even when we got involved in the war in Europe, it was never Hitler. "Let the Europeans take care of Hitler, we'll take care of Tojo".

So after four months, that year 1943, it was the best year of my life. It was so different, and it was so financially rewarding. I couldn't hardly believe it. So I get aboard this ship, and we were supposed to be with the fleet all the time, the new fleet. There were two fleets, the 3rd Fleet and the 7th Fleet. The 7th Fleet was the old vessels, old battleships. The 3rd Fleet was all the new stuff, the big battleships, the New Jersey, the Wisconsin, and all the new carriers. There were about twelve carriers. And so because the new fleet was much faster, the old fleet was slower, so the old fleet was always left behind to

pick up the loose stuff which the new fleet either invaded or bombarded whatever it might be.

WC: Now, your ship was for refueling?

MB: Yeah. We stayed with the fleet. As the fleet went out, we went with them, slightly in back. And they would go off for two months. They would bombard, or invade, whatever it was, the Marshall Islands, Saipan, whatever it might be. They needed oil, being out there for two months, the carrier needed gasoline. So we would supply them at that time in the ocean. We'd be out for two months, almost three months, and never see land, just with the fleet. And the fleet would come in close to the land and invade, and we would be farther back, totally out of the picture, although we're involved in that invasion. I had six battle stars; I'll speak of the islands we invaded.

The first trip we made was to the Aleutians. They needed the fuel for airplanes, they needed some oil for the ships. So we went up in the Aleutian Islands in the month of January. That was a disaster. It was so cold. The ship was twenty thousand tons, that's what the ship weighed unloaded. It was a big ship, about six hundred feet long. When all the ice froze on that ship, everything was frozen. We had to chip the ice off the walkways, we had to put ropes in walking areas, something to hang onto so you don't slip.

So that lasted for a month, then they sent us to Hawaii. Well, at that time, Hawaii was beautiful. There was a famous beach—

WC: Waikiki?

MB: (Nods) Waikiki beach. There were only three hotels. The Royal Hawaiian that was the number one hotel, and there was two others, and that's all there were. So we're in Hawaii roughly for about two weeks, and it was very interesting because we met the 27th Division in Hawaii. The 27th Division came from the Albany area, it was Troy, Albany, Amsterdam, and—

WC: I think from Whitehall, too.

MB: Yeah. Let's see, I'm trying to remember... Well, anyway, it was the 27th Division. So I met a lot of guys from Amsterdam, and they were in Hawaii because they were taken into the service temporarily in 1941. The famous song at that time in 1941 was "Goodbye, Dear, I'll Be Back In A Year". That was from our military and that time.....they still have it....?

WC: The National Guard?

MB: That's it, they were all National Guard troops. They were taken in by the government for one year training – we were not in the war –

WC: 1940. It was 1940, and then they--

MB: Is that what it was, 1940? Ok. I met all these fellows from Amsterdam. And they said, "Boy, this is a beautiful life!" So what you said (points to interviewer) was right. "We've been here almost two years, and we love Hawaii!" But that was a bad statement. What happened, the first invasion after the Marshall Islands, we went the Marshall Islands, they recaptured the Marshall Islands. Then they came back to Hawaii, and the next invasion was Saipan. Now, they sent the 27th Division in 1944 to capture Saipan. Now that was a tough battle.

WC: That was.

MB: Very unusual battle. It involved civilians, [unclear] civilians committed suicide –

WC: It was the famous banzai charge there.

MB: We were in a harbor of Saipan because that area was captured. And they were farther into the island. And the only time we'd go out

of this harbor was in the evening, because the Japanese submarines would be in that area. So every time we'd go out, starting--it was not dark yet, it was dusk--and geez we got missed by a certain amount of torpedoes, and boy, if we'd ever got hit by a torpedo...a tanker? It's like a bomb. We missed a lot of torpedoes, and we'd go back into the harbor.

Now, next to Saipan was another island, about four miles separated the two. Tinian--that's where the atomic bomb airstrip was. And at that time, we didn't capture that island, we were trying to capture Saipan. So, this is a funny story. On Tinian, we're in that harbor, and on Tinian the Japanese had one tank. Those Japanese tanks were like toys, with a small gun, and so on. So what would happen, from somewhere this tank would come out, if you looked in the binoculars, this one tank would come out from somewhere and shoot at the ships. (Laughs) The Navy had everything there! They had battleships and so on. Every time the tank would come out, Boom! The world would come to an end. All these guns unloaded from all these ships for this tiny tank. And when they hit that island, there was so much smoke, powder, dust in the air, you couldn't see what happened till it settled. When it settled, you don't see a tank. Then all of a sudden, about two hours later, the tank would pop out again! This went on six times, then the Navy would blast away, and totally miss again. And the tank is not there, he hides somewhere. Then he'd pop out and shoot. Six times before they got this tank.

Well anyway, what happened in Saipan, at the end of Saipan the Japanese were desperate. They had no choice. They went into a banzai charge. And the 27th Division was right there in front of them. When they took and started screaming, blowing horns and everything, I was not there, we were in the harbor. We could hear some of the noise, or we'd pick it up on the radio, which was being transmitted from the battlefield. And they took a banzai charge on the 27th Division. It's known, but they don't publicize this. The 27th Division ran. They just took off and ran. They didn't know what hit them. And I lost two good guys from Amsterdam that I knew very well. They got trapped and killed in this banzai charge. Then,

eventually, it was stopped. And of course, they took the General in charge of the Division, I don't know if he was a....

WC: His name was Smith.

MB: Is that who it was? They took him out of that area completely. Oh (gestures to interviewer), you're totally aware of this.

WC: Yes.

MB: Anyway, so that happened there. That was the end. The tank was killed in Tinian Island. Then they sent us to the South Pacific. They sent us to Guadalcanal. There still were Japs on the island, but there was no real fighting. I remember this. In those islands--there are many, many islands in the South Pacific--Halsey had a sign, big billboard put up on one of the islands where you come into that area between two islands, you see this billboard lit at night. And the billboard says this, "Kill those bastards! They're no goddamned good!" You know how Halsey talked. "Kill Japs, kill Japs!" to build up your morale. (Laughs)

Well, anyway, a lot of those islands were still occupied by the Japanese. One island had eighty thousand Japanese, but they were all bypassed. And they were starving [unclear] because they could not be fed by the Japanese fleet.

Then, after that, our next engagement was the Peleliu Island, which was south of the Philippines. And the reason MacArthur— MacArthur was in charge now, not the Navy, but he was using the Navy. He wanted Peleliu because he needed an airstrip because he made a proclamation "I shall return". Regardless of the war, he was going to return to the Philippines. And of course, as we know now, the Philippines should have never been captured. Never should have been taken by the Americans. They should have been bypassed. But MacArthur made it a point, to back his statement "I shall return".

Peleliu was a big battle in relation to what the Japanese were. For the first time, they would commit suicide when they were totally desperate. Not one Jap was captured. It was a tough battle, and that battle was never publicized. We finally captured Peleliu, and we got an airstrip, and when the airstrip was finished, he invaded the Philippines. Well, we were involved in the Philippines. Once again, the new Navy was involved; the old Navy was also involved because in the Philippines there are many islands. And they bombarded the coast, bombarded the Japanese areas and so on, bombarded the naval base that used to be American. That was about 60 miles north of Manila, is all bombarded until they invaded.

In that battle, what happened – we got a citation in this case – there were three American cruisers, light cruisers. They were close to Taiwan, at that time known as Formosa. They were hit by aircraft, and everyone got hit by torpedoes in the critical area, but they didn't sink them, the three of them. But they damaged, ruptured all their fuel tanks, and they were dead in the water. And we got a call to dash into this particular area, and they were patching up, and so on, to store fuel so they could get their engines going again and get out of the area. So they had these three cruisers, and there were Japanese airplanes in that area. They came over, and they would drop bombs and they would miss. Bad shooting. We fueled the three of them. They got the engines going, and they got out of the area. I forget the name of the cruisers.

So anyway, we're in that Philippine area for quite a while, then what happened, when the Japanese were losing the war in the Philippines, the Japanese made a suicide policy from Japan. Their biggest battleship, I think it was the Yamato, 18-inch guns. It was the biggest ship at that time for any particular nation to have. And they sent this ship down into the landing area where the Leyte Island is. They gave the ship enough fuel just to get there, and they were supposed to beach that ship and they were supposed to use their guns for the continuation of the battle to help the Japanese. I think that was the Yamato. At that time it weighed about 65 thousand tons. As the ship was going down through the Philippines, it was spotted by the new

Navy aircraft carriers. And the aircraft carriers went to work on it. They hit it with eighteen torpedoes before that ship was sunk. We were not involved in the battle, we were out of reach of the battle. So anyway, what happened after the Philippine campaign.... we were scheduled to go to Tarawa, that was the next – oh! During the Philippine campaign, the Japanese took part of the fleet as a diversion, when they sent this battleship down with a certain amount of cruisers. And they sent a diversion north of Japan. Of course, we broke the Japanese codes at that time, for at least two or three years, so we knew exactly what they were doing. And what happened, Halsey was in charge of the 3rd Fleet. The Fleet was rotated by Nimitz: Halsey and somebody else. And Halsey was in charge. He was always looking for a fight. He got waylaid by going in that direction after the diversion the Japanese were setting up, whereas they were sending in their main fleet into the Philippines to wipe out the landing areas, and so on. This Halsey never knew. So, we were with Halsey going north, and all of a sudden we got a word “Turn around and go back,” and we didn’t know why. So the whole fleet, Halsey turned around and headed for the Philippines, quite a distance away. But he never got there in time. So the old fleet faced the main Japanese fleet. Ok, the main battleship was sunk by aircraft carriers. They had baby flattops, and the biggest one they had there was the Princeton, that was sunk in that battle. The reason I know it was the Princeton is that I had a good friend that was aboard that Princeton. So anyway, this battle raged in the Philippines. Halsey was still in the ocean, running south, never makes the battle. And the 7th Fleet did extremely well. They stopped them, and the losses were about equal, Japanese and American ships. And Halsey never got there in time.

So then, as you know, we captured the Philippines. They went to the suicide situation, and we were starting to learn what these Japanese were about, and we were starting to get highly concerned because the landing in Japan was very shortly in the future, and we knew we would have an awful lot of losses. Considering how the Japanese were when they’re pressed, they’re desperate, and they fight the hardest.

The next place we were supposed to be – that’s where the doctor came into the picture with his cruiser, Atlanta – was Iwo Jima. That’s the next one. That’s where the doctor was involved in the bombardment of that island. And we headed for Iwo Jima. And then we got orders to go back to the States, why I do not know. And we sailed back, and on the way back, about 10 hours out of San Diego, the news came out that Roosevelt had died. So we had a certain amount of repairs –

WC: How did you feel when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

MB: Everybody was for him, totally. There’s very few Americans....the job he was doing, was a great job. Then of course, we never knew about Pearl Harbor. Was that instigated by our government, or wasn’t it? It’s still in debate. They were looking for an outlet to get into the war. Europe was in very sad condition. France would belong to Hitler, and the only country left was England, and England had very little. So the picture for Europe was: Hitler was going to take over, totally, Europe and England. And they got so desperate in this country, that a lot of prominent people, manufacturers, started siding with Hitler – did you ever know that?

WC: No, I didn’t.

MB: It’s published. They started having meetings: “Are we on the wrong side? Should we be with Hitler?” That’s been published. Because it was such a desperate situation in this country in relation to Europe. The war was lost in Europe. England was wiped out. Hitler could take them any time. Not realizing that Russia could stop Hitler. Which they did. Russia, they say now, ninety percent of the war in Europe was based by the Russians, they did it. And, of course, my wife was involved in that area. A lot of things she knows, and of course she went through your program.

People were against Stalin. Stalin made a new policy of “Fight for Mother Russia”, you’re going to lose your country. It meant that people in Russia started changing their opinions, and they started fighting harder. And we know what happened, Stalin started moving to the left, and the movement started going back.

Well anyway, we were in San Diego for a period of time for repairs. That’s the reason we went back to the States. Then we headed out again. We never made Iwo Jima. Okinawa – we got involved in the Okinawa battle. At that time, we came back, looked around and they were still fighting. And we were in the harbor of Okinawa, and they give us land duty. You never go on land, you were always in the water. In fact, you develop a sense of smell so you can smell an island without seeing it, by the air, by the foliage. Due to your sensitivity of this pure air in the ocean for two or three months. The amazing part about Okinawa, all these little villages were destroyed. Externally, they were shacks, internally, beautiful. All ceramic, fabulous. The Okinawans are an offshoot of the Japanese. The Japanese never did like them. Internally, they were palaces, they were so clean and the people so proper, unbelievable. It was a shame [unclear] all the destruction on Okinawa.

After Okinawa, we were always being sent back to Hawaii. Then the ship was meant to go, we didn’t know where. It was in debate where the ship was supposed to go.

Anyway, it came to the point system of getting out of the service. I had enough points because I went in in 1942, and I had enough points to get discharged.

WC: This is before Japan surrendered?

MB: No, that’s after the surrender. I missed the main point. After Okinawa came the bomb, and so on. We were not in that area. And Japan surrendered. So they sent us to China. They sent us into the Yellow Sea. The Yellow Sea is very strange. It’s a big sea between China and Korea. And when you hit the Yellow Sea, it’s a

straight line (gestures a dividing line), Yellow, and blue. That's where the Japanese current goes up into Japan. So we went into the Yellow Sea, and we had a lot of close calls. The Yellow Sea was loaded with mines. The Americans dropped all these mines because there was a lot of Japanese shipping from China into Japan. That part of China, Manchuria, was taken by the Japanese. There's a lot of mineral wealth [unclear] and whatever there is. So the airplanes loaded Yellow Sea, the submarines, with mines. All you see is mines! You're dying! They float on top with points (gestures points). When you're going through, and we're in a tanker, we're loaded with materiel. And when we're going through, the only thing that saved us, they told us to go into the Yellow Sea toward the city of Tientsin. Tientsin is on the river on the top of the Yellow Sea. And Tientsin was a big city, about a million population. You're going north, and the wake of the ship – the mines were not anchored, they were free floating – one mine was only ten feet away – the wake would shove it over when we were going through a minefield. Anyway, we never got a hit. We got into China, we got anchored into Tientsin because the Marine division was there, there was about two or three Marine... These were the tough guys who went through Guadalcanal and all that. Boy, you didn't give them any bullshit! Boy, they were tough! You'd meet them in bars in Tientsin, and they're like a bunch of animals, unbelievable. They were in the Pacific so damn long that their nature changed. The fleet was out on the ocean, patrolling, and the reason for all the Marines was the Communists. The Communists were moving into the proximity of Peking, at that time the big city was Peking. The Marines were there, they didn't know exactly what to do, throw them in and fight the Communists, or show force and they might change their mind.

When we were there in the city, there's a lot of warehouses which store a lot of equipment by the Japanese, which were illegal for the Chinese to have. And they had warehouses full of cameras, Zeiss cameras, the best cameras. Thousands and thousands of cameras. And the Chinese would now resell them. These are the national troops, they still owned that Peking area. And they were selling them for \$10 each, they had fabulous cameras. So, now we had

cameras. We could never have them, we could never take pictures during the war, and the fleet is out there and they don't have cameras. (Laughs) So we would load up with cameras. We fueled the fleet and we'd show them the cameras and they'd go berserk. "How much do you want?" "\$100" And they're loaded with money, there's no place to spend the money. So they were sending the money on ropes – we were going over the ocean – and we'd send back the cameras on the ropes. So we supplied them with cameras.

A point which I missed from the past, we had all this oil for the fleet, going back into the war. Where did oil come from? It came from the Arab States by the merchant marine, that was a civilian outfit, it was not the Navy. They would come, they would load up in Saudi Arabia or wherever the countries were, and they'd bring.... It was all distilled in those areas, so if they had diesel oil we had airplane fuel, and we had fuel for ships. We'd always meet them out on the ocean, there's no place to land. There were transmission pipes, and the oil would be transferred onto our ships. They totally supplied, all during the whole war, from the Arab States to the fleet. Now (chuckles), these merchant marine carriers were smart. When they loaded up their ship with oil, they loaded it up with liquor. We found out they paid a dollar a bottle in the Arabian country. They would have thousands of cases of liquor. The captains, they never stopped this trade because they needed liquor, everybody needed liquor. When we were side by side, we were unloading the liquor, and it was \$30 a bottle. They paid a dollar, and they charged \$30. How many bottles in a case, I don't know. So all these cases were unloaded onto the military ship. That's how the Navy got their liquor, right from those merchant marines. They probably had other ways too, airplanes, but the majority of liquor came through those ships..

So while we're in China, the city of Tientsin had an international settlement. They had a Russian settlement, and the Russians had a vodka factory, where they made vodka. It was 150 proof, and they charged us thirty-five cents a bottle. We had to sneak it aboard our ship because now it's a different situation, it's not the merchant

marine. The fleet is out there, and they need more whiskey. (Laughs) Whatever you could sneak onto our ship, when we meet the fleet, we told them "Hey, we got vodka" "Send it over!" We were charging \$35 a bottle, we paid thirty-five cents! That's the end of that particular story.

In Tientsin, the Marines had a good deal. They would hire these women for a dollar a day to clean the tanks, clean the buildings they were in, and all that stuff. And once there was a cathouse in Tientsin, 5000 prostitutes, unbelievable, in one huge building. And they had a line that ran a mile long of Marines and Navy guys because they hadn't seen a woman for two or three years. This was another world completely.

Now I want to backtrack on my story to Hawaii, going back to 1944. There were cathouses in Hawaii, I'm sorry to say this; maybe you don't want to know it...

WC: No, no that's fine.

MB: One of the whorehouses was close to a church. And that line of sailors, because most of the people in Hawaii were sailors, most of the sailors would have a line, speaking of lines, and they'd go past the church for this house of prostitution. Then the civilians on the island start screaming "What is this, what is this?" The Navy didn't know what the hell to do. They sanctioned it because these guys are on the ocean, the submarine guys are out there for months, and the Royal Hawaiian [unclear] was given to the submarine guys to sleep in when they are on vacation. The Navy tried to find ways how they could change all this, not eliminate it. It was never eliminated. I don't know how they changed it. I never went to one of those houses.

Anyway, I came back into Tientsin, 5000 prostitutes. The way the prostitutes.... The families in China, unbelievable. Europe was bad after the war, the destruction. China was a hundred percent worse. The starvation, the poverty, and they'd be living in these shacks.

And the families always stuck together, they never broke apart. If there's children, the children take care of their parents. Now, going back in the houses, inside they were like castles. Outside they were shacks. They were so clean, so proper, speaking of the Chinese.

From China... We were there when they signed the treaty. We left Japan when they signed the treaty, we were in the harbor. We were not involved in that treaty. We went back to China in September, October. We were in China about four months, then we went back to Hawaii. And that's when the point system came into the picture. I had enough points to go, and I hated to leave my friends, but I decided to go on the point system. They put me on an LST and from Hawaii I went to San Francisco. From San Francisco I went to Long Island. There's a discharge base there in Long Island, and that's where I got my discharge.

But to continue the story involved in this war, after I went into civil life, I found out the Navy had a preference system. They had all this materiel to sell, the public didn't have it. They wanted to get all this materiel to the public as fast as possible. So they had different companies sell this materiel in different parts of the country. Our area had five bases. In Voorheesville there was a huge base, Scotia Naval Base another one. In Ballston Spa, those buildings along the highway where there's a shopping center, that was all owned by the Air Corps for storage. And I find out about this, and they give you a special certificate, a preference certificate that you were in the military, you can buy. A civilian could not buy, a veteran could buy. I didn't have much money, and I start buying materiel, and I bought an awful lot of jackets in Ballston Spa, Air Corps jackets, those [unclear] jackets--

WC: Oh yeah

MB: --for two dollars each. The government charged only ten percent what it cost them when they had it made. A lot of that stuff was made in 1937-38, during the Depression. The prices were giving-away prices. My problem was money. I should have got a partner,

should have got a bank, but I was piddling. No problem, I bought a lot of stuff in Voorheesville, and so on. There were mistakes that were made on those sheets. There was so much materiel you could not see it. They'd have these long buildings with tables, and all the tables was paperwork starting from A to Z. If you're looking for air conditioning, it's under A. So I get this one sheet, and I couldn't believe what's on there. Twenty-five horsepower motors, and this, and all that. It was a central air conditioning set, five of them all together. The price was \$7.99. I'm stupid, I'm young. I go to the office of the company, and say "Look, I want to buy this stuff, but you guys made a mistake." "No, there's no mistake." And I'm forcing the issue, like a dummy, I said, "Look, read this, read this! Is this \$7.99? Is it what it says on this sheet?" And they don't read it. They says – you see they're trying to get rid of this stuff – "What you see on this paper is what you get." I figured, I'm going to haul this stuff out to some farm, and then forced to haul it back. I was thinking like a kid. And I'm pushing and pushing. So they say, "Ok, come back tomorrow and we'll check it." I come back tomorrow and they said "Well, it's not \$7.99 like what you got, it's \$799, and I couldn't afford it. Like a dummy, see.

I was in that surplus, piddling away, you put an ad in the newspaper and all the stuff goes in a hurry. But, once again, all the jackets went up to the university at Lake Placid, where it's cold. When that wind hits, you know the students freeze. At that time I sold the jackets to Tom Constantino, he had a [unclear] company up in Amsterdam. He bought them. That's where he got his start. He bought them all, he took them to the university, he sold them all in one day. Then I said, I can't piddle around, I'm making some money, but nothing great. I figure I'd better go to college. Because they had a government... you know, they paid for everything. And I went to school, and that cut out my surplus business. The problem was money.

WC: Where did you go to college?

MB: Alfred, in the western part of New York State. And that ended it. And I went into the General Electric Company for three years, and I was in the Steam Turbine Test Division. Got very good pay and all that. Then I found out a shortage of motels, there was almost no motels in the area, in the western part of New York State. I'm driving to work, and I see these beat-up hotels loaded with cars. The Thruway is being built, and people are sleeping in their cars. I figured, Jesus, there has to be a motel – you know the word motel comes from Florida. So I go to a bank, and they say, "Oh no, a motel in a northern area? That should be in Florida". I got my father to give me \$50,000, and I started a motel, the first motel in upstate New York. Nothing in Albany, nothing in Schenectady. The first motel in Amsterdam. That motel was filled every night. I was expanding, expanding. I started out with ten rooms, then I wound up with sixty rooms. Then it called for a restaurant. We wanted to make, not a motel restaurant, but an area restaurant because once again there's no competition in Albany or Schenectady.

WC: Myron, I'm going to stop you here. I'm going to change tapes.

WC: OK, you were talking about the motel and restaurant.

MB: We figured we had to make a restaurant that was totally different, not based on a motel. We had property that was big enough, and there was a big waterfall on the property, a lot of beauty. So we developed this restaurant, the Tepee Restaurant. It was all glass, and the subject was a forty foot big waterfall, and trees growing inside. Rockefeller was the governor at that time. He heard about this restaurant, and he told his staff, I want my major decisions to be in this restaurant, because Rockefeller was strictly outdoor people, and he became a customer of ours. When he made a major decision, that every city on the rivers in New York State had to have a filtration plant. That was a major one; there was a lot of money involved. He said "I want to make it at the Tepee". The water, the trees in the restaurant, it's all out of stone and glass. And the press is there, everybody is there. The governor of New York City is up there. He makes that statement at the Tepee Restaurant.

Eventually, we were building a house on the property, and we felt — that's what started this (points across the room)-- we needed some paintings on the walls. We knew nothing about paintings. Then somebody says, go to Macy's in New York City, or in Albany — or one of the major stores in Albany, I don't know if it was Macy's or not. And it's all nice paintings, you know a blue couch and a blue painting, a red couch and a red painting. I said, "Wait a minute. I've read about old paintings, and there's nothing in the area." Luckily I ran across somebody, and he says, "You know what, go to New York City, go to Parke-Bernet." At that time it was Parke-Bernet, not Sotheby's. Sotheby's bought them out. "You want old paintings? They sell old paintings there."

So I go to New York City (laughs), we walk in on an auction. John Merriam was the president at that time. His father owned the company. The item that went on the stage: \$35,000, \$45,000! I said "Geez, I'm in the wrong building". It sells for \$70,000! I never knew old paintings sold that high. Then as we went along we found out that there were cheaper [unclear], and you get to talk to people there. Luckily we met one dealer, and he says "You know what, American art is a giveaway program. Nobody's buying American art. Americans, you know, they're stupid, they don't know any better. They buy European art." Well, of course, American art is always second rate to European art. But he said, "American art--people are going to get back into their history. The paintings in the area — Yellowstone, pictures of...this is America, this is not Europe." He said "Buy American art". And American art was so cheap, we could afford it. And every cent we made in the restaurant, we started pouring into art. The reason was, we go to one auction, and a painting is sold for \$1,000. Six months later, same painting at auction, same painting sells for \$3,000. And it escalates up. And I say, "This is unbelievable, the way the American...this is what the guy said... the way the American art is selling!" So we start buying American art.

WC: Let me ask you, once you got out of the service, you mentioned about going to school, going into business. Did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

MB: Did I stay in contact with who?

WC: Any of your friends from the service.

MB: No. We never, till about fifteen years ago they had a ship's reunion, from Chicago. Somebody from our ship, which I knew, would have a yearly reunion of that ship. But the problem was, on these reunions, the first crew that went aboard that ship – I was in that first crew – they rotated the men because they needed experienced men so badly for the Navy. There's so many ships being built, they couldn't get experienced help to supply these ships. You couldn't put a guy in the Navy and all of a sudden you put him on a ship. You had to teach him. This is not the military. The Navy was technically more inclined. You had to be a technical person, either outdoor, indoor, whatever. And so the first crew only lasted six months, then they start dispersing, they put them on other ships. They're experienced after six months--

WC: Now you were known as a "plankholder", right? Because you were with the ship from the beginning.

MB: Right. And then when you have your class reunion, you don't know exactly...you lose track of these guys because there was so short a time they were on with you. It was a constant rotation, and much of that rotation, believe me, was due to seasickness. Some people that were in the Navy, like the first crews we had going to Hawaii, the people we had that'd get seasick, unbelievable. They knew the Navy, but were useless to them. They had to put them on land-based operations. I was going to mention something about seasickness. Oh (laughs), we went through the worst typhoon ever. A typhoon in the Pacific is called a hurricane here. So this one typhoon that hit, it was in 1944, in the Taiwan or Formosa area, the waves were sixty feet high, and we had a ship that was twenty

thousand tons. You know (gestures up and down with hands), it was like a cork. And you see these guys lined up along the rail throwing up. I didn't get seasick, I don't know why (well, I did once). What happened was these old time sailors, these chiefs, they see this line of guys on the rail throwing up, and they'd holler out "Ok, guys, breakfast! We're having oysters this evening!" (Laughs) And those guys would have a double shot of throwing up over the side.

Well that pertains to the typhoon. In that typhoon, we lost three DE's, destroyer escorts. They rolled so badly that their masts hit the water, and three capsized. There were many ships, the smaller ships, destroyers, lost their masts when they rolled against these huge waves, it would snap off all the masts. They claimed that was the worst typhoon they ever had in that area right up to the present time.

Of course, as I mentioned to you during our coffee break, an interesting point, when we were in the Coral Sea. The Coral Sea is between New Guinea and Australia, and the Coral Sea can be so calm at times it looks like a mirror. There isn't a ripple in that ocean. Any ripple there is made by the ship. And the five-inch gun went off, and I said "What happened?" They spotted a sea serpent four miles away, and that sea serpent – we could see it – it came up in loops, down, up, down, up (gesturing with hand). When you can spot something like that four miles away, it had to be huge. And the gun crew kept on firing – they were bad shots! We figured we're in trouble with that five-inch gun – these guys don't know how to shoot. They never hit it.

Then the next interesting point, besides the war, we're in the mid-Pacific, in the middle of the night, the ship rams something and knocks everybody out of their beds, it was so bad. And the captain thought it was a torpedo, but he didn't hear an explosion. He couldn't understand....He said, "Well, maybe we rammed a semi-submerged submarine". It was so bad we had to return to Hawaii. We couldn't send somebody over, underwater to see...we couldn't stop the ship, we were in a war zone area. Nothing penetrated the ship, no holes in the ship. But he felt that we should go back to

Hawaii and have it checked because it was so bad, it disturbed everybody, it knocked them out of bed. We get to Hawaii....nothing. They figured we hit a sleeping whale, a huge sleeping whale.

WC: Didn't you have a story about flying fish, or something?

MB: Oh yes. (Chuckles) In the Pacific you had schools of flying fish, and they were always in schools. There'd be thousands of them. When you're going through, and all of a sudden it's like the sky turns black. They don't go very high, maybe about ten feet, and it's all flying fish. And they don't have a course [unclear]; if the ship's in the way, they go straight. If they hit your ship, you're loaded with flying fish. The story I gave to the fellows in the coffee shop: at that time, we're transporting on, above deck, a partial Marine division, and they're all sleeping above deck because the weather at that time was beautiful. At night, when the flying fish hit that ship, and hit those Marines, they jumped up with their guns and they start shooting. They never heard of flying fish (laughs).

And the next point about not pertaining to the war, twice, at night you get in that warm climate, you want to sleep. You're not air conditioned. And the ship is steel, it's hot. At night you sleep above deck. There's a lot of pipes above deck. They sleep on the pipes, in between the pipes, and so on. And you hit a tsunami. And those two tsunamis, we found out later, came from Alaska, from an earthquake. When that wave hits you, we would be sixteen feet above the water. That wave goes over the top of the ship. Now, you got all these guys sleeping. We didn't lose anybody – medically, yes – it wrapped the guys around the pipes and everything else. The second tsunami we got hit with was, we were open to a hatch which led the main deck, and there was a radio there, and Tokyo Rose was giving a big lecture on the deficiencies of American troops. We were all listening to the radio. And all of a sudden, that open hatch – total water pours in, unbelievable, with a lot of force. It knocked all the guys all to hell, all their clothing went into the drains, and so on. It was another tsunami that went over the ship. At that time, we didn't know what a tsunami was, they just called it a big wave. Most of the waves at that

time, the ones [unclear] came from Alaska, from the Aleutian Islands, and so on.

So, technically, Wayne, you've got the high points of my story, and I'm still trying to find this fellow...he's going to be very important to you. Still trying to find his phone number of this fellow on Lake George. Because he was in a major air carrier that was in all the battles. He was on it, and he says yes. The only thing is, he was with Vanderbilt. And Vanderbilt, somebody says his horse was coming up on sale, and somebody came up to Vanderbilt and says "Your horse is going to be sold", so he dashed off. A lot of people, we lost track, but the fellow gave me his telephone number. He said "I want you and your wife to come up and see me". And he explained that, he never got injured in that crash against the flight deck of that carrier. He never told us why he went in that direction. Then, I forgot all about it to look for it, but I'll look for it and if I find it...I hope he's still alive. He was maybe in his twenties at that time; he must be pretty close to ninety by now.

WC: Let me just ask you one more thing. Did you join any veterans' organizations, like the VFW or the Legion?

MB: No. Because the reason is, even now, for me to come to coffee it's tough. I'm busy. We're so busy. We had the restaurant going, we had the motel going, we had the art business going. The big business turned out to be the art business. And the art business is not local. We dash to New York all the time, Sotheby's or Christie's. Totally busy, we're more busy now than ever before. The reason being, both sons went into art. Ok, there's a lot we know, they don't know. One son is building up on Lake George now. So we're helping out their stores. They have different sales, "Come to [unclear]. What do you think of this painting?" We're more busy now than we were back then. We never had time.....

Tape ends.