

**William 'Bill' Freer
Veteran**

**Larry Hacking
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on April 10th, 2005
American legion post
Saugerties, New York**

Q: OK, it's Sunday, April 10th, 2005. Melon Musinski Commander of American Legion Post 72 Larry hacking in Saugerties New York and I am here with?

BF: Bill Freer United States Navy.

Q: Were you enlisted?

BF: I enlisted, and I went into service in Albany, NY, October 1st, 1943.

Q: Do you remember your first days in the service?

BF: Absolutely on service or the first day?

Q: First day and carry from there if you want.

BF: All the first day with the physical sitting on the cold marble benches. We stayed overnight at the YMCA in Albany the next day. We loaded the board, the New York Central Railroad train and left for Sampson Naval training base.

Q: Do you remember anything about your boot camp experience?

BF: I remember getting off at the bus. The first greeting from all the sailors present we were classified as shark bait, shark bait, shark bait, that was how we were greeted.

Q: Remember your instructors?

BF: I remember but not by name and some of their favorite comments are not meant for a family program.

Q: What was your MOS? Your job assignment would did you join?

BF: Because I had the kitchen experience at boot camp, I was one of the monitors for the chow line and the serving counter. And that carried over from boot camp I went to electrician school Sampson New York for 16 weeks and there because of my experience as being the monitor, I was made the Division officer in the class at school. I graduated, interestingly enough there was 120 in the class. The 1st 13 went to ICC school in Washington. I came out 14th and missed by three hundredths of a point from being the man who was 13th. And his name was William Fuller, and my name is William Freyer. So, I often thought a table has been reversed. What his assignment was, I would have had, and I wonder to this day how he made out because my assignment could have been his. So 300th of a point might have meant. Life or death to me.

Q: So, after school after your electrician thing where did you go?

BF: I went aboard the USS Arkansas, which is the oldest battleship in the fleet at the time that thing was laid in like 1911. And was in World War 1 and I went aboard and March of 1944 at the Boston Navy Yard.

Q: And then after that?

BF: After that, we left for Europe by way of the northern row, which was passed Newfoundland Greenland and nine days later we arrived in Belfast Bay, Northern Ireland. From there it was just practice and waiting until the invasion of Norman.

Q: So, you were in the D-day invasion on the ship?

BF: I was in the invasion of Normandy in fact, Eisenhower reviewed the invasion fleet a week or so before and as he went by, I was peeling onions in the vegetable lock.

Q: But you were an Electrician [Laughter]

BF: The invasion of course was June the 6th, but it was originally scheduled for June 5th. So, to make up for the 24 hours the invasion fleet sailed north in the English Channel for 12 hours and then we turned around and sailed South for 12 hours to make up for the 24 hours. Our ship was at Omaha Beach, and we stayed there until we bumped out at Shore Bird, which was June 25th. What I remember most vividly was how choppy and rough the channel was. And on the first day we came up the engineering force, which I [Unclear] being an electrician. After almost 24 hours, we came up for some air and sunshine and at the time we were bringing amputee cases aboard because there were no facilities on the beach to treat those men. And while we were bringing him aboard, a German bomber went overhead, he was so low I could see his silhouette in the cockpit, and he missed us. But I was afraid that he would turn around and then machine gun us to death and we made a quick exit and went back below decks through the whole course of the war which was 4 invasions 2 in Europe and two in the Pacific, the Arkansas was never scratched.

Q: So, after Normandy where did you go?

BF: After Normandy, we went to southern France. There was an invasion there to help with the main frontal assault in Normandy. After that, we returned to the states in October of 1944 to be rearmed in the Boston Navy Yard. Then we proceeded for the Pacific, we left Boston the day after Election Day 1944. Through the Panama Canal and up to the West Coast of the United States, we went to California Long Beach to be exact. On January 20th, 1945, we left Long Beach for Hawaii Pearl Harbor, where we picked up supplies and then headed east towards Iwo Jima. And we participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima. We started the week ahead before the ground assault, bombarding the fortifications.

Q: So that was the third invasion?

BF: That was the 3rd invasion. Then after that, we were in the invasion of Okinawa which was the most difficult evolving invasions for the Navy because during the invasion of Okinawa, the Navy lost warships and men and they did the entire war. A lot of it was due to at the time the Japanese kamikaze attacks. And we were fortunate enough we shot down 6 ourselves and as I said we were never touched.

Q: Did you remember any of your friends from the ship?

BF: Oh yes, we stayed close. You know, you had some closer than others. After the war it was some time before we had our first reunion. And a couple of my shipmates who I look forward to seeing. Forward to seeing him, never made any reunions and we lost all contact with them, which was very disappointing.

Q: There haven't been any reunions since?

BF: I've been to probably four or five, but now due to the advanced age of all of this we haven't had one in number of years.

Q: Did you get any medals for citation?

BF: Only the nor most, nothing special or even normal ones of the European theater, the Asiatic Theater, the Philippine Liberation, the good conduct, and the basic ones but nothing special.

Q: So, you weren't in layup or invasion of the Philippines?

BF: No.

Q: and did you stay in touch with your family?

BF: I wrote every other day, my mother wrote to me every other day.

Q: how was the food on the ship?

BF: Well, that was one of the reasons I chose the Navy because our kitchen and our bed went with us. We weren't sleeping in foxholes or snowbanks like the Army boys and the Ballad of Bulge and so forth.

Q: did you get to see any C&E, R&R or any USO shows?

BF: Oh yeah, I saw Irving Berlin came aboard, Jack Haley, it was a pitcher from the Detroit Tigers version of trucks, they called fire trucks virtual fire trucks. And there was others not so well known that I don't recall at this time. But Irving Berlin was the most famous.

Q: Get any leave like in Australia or Caledonia?

BF: On the islands out there for R&R, where you get a canopy year or something. It wouldn't help you at all but one of the islands name was Mog Mon. You probably never heard of it, but that's what it was, and we were at course in Guam as far as named places, there was nothing special.

Q: Do anything for good. Luck?

BF: No, the good Lord took care of us, you don't go through 4 invasions and not get scratched.

Q: Do you have any photographs of your friends?

BF: We had aboard ship a yearbook. For the Atlantic and the Pacific and I have them both and they will be handed down to my children and grandchildren.

Q: Where were you when the war ended in the Pacific?

BF: let's see... When the war ended in Europe. 1945 we were at Okinawa, and to celebrate that the whole ARM model lined up and shoot the broadside all at once. And our ship backed up about 3 feet into water because our main battery was 12 inch and we had 6 turrets 2 guns to a turret. And had 12 inch guns. And at one time my duty was a Searchlight platform. And I put a penny on the deck of our platform and 12 Guns went off the broadside. The penny from the vibration jumped to my waist, which was approximately 36 inches from the vibration. What you did was when they were going to fire a buzzer sounded, you turned your head away and closed your ears to protect yourself. And if you didn't do that, you did it enough times you had a symptom they call shall happy [Laughter].

Q: So, when your [Unclear] surrendered you were [unclear]?

BF: We were [Unclear] Okinawa and well, that was August. When we got the word, we were watching a movie aboard ship because the Japanese, they were vanquished at the time, there was no air or naval power that they had left. But one interesting note. We never traveled unescorted. We always had Destroyers and destroyer escorts as our picket line for anti-submarine protection warfare. The only time that we ever traveled unescorted was when we left Guam for the Philippines in June of 1945. And we couldn't believe we're how come we're out unescorted. And of course, the officer said Japan's Navy is not a power to be reckoned with anymore. So, the answer to that was why the hell don't they send us home. It made our Voyage uneventful. A month later, the Indianapolis made the same voyage and was torpedoed and sunk, with 1000 sailors losing their lives. I think we were a decoy because the Indianapolis broad part of the atom bomb to the Pacific. The Atom bomb was brought over in three parts and assembled in Guam. Indianapolis brought Park and I think the Japanese intelligence knew that and they were laying for the Indianapolis, and I think we were sent out as a decoy. But of course, the Japanese were smart enough to know that was the Arkansas and not the Indianapolis much later than Indianapolis went down.

Q: where were you when you departed from the navy?

BF: Well [Unclear] After the war we were in Buckner Bay, and we got a weather warning came up with Typhoon. So, we left Buckner Bay to get out into the East China Sea where the typhoon hit us. There were waves 100 feet high. We knew they were 100 feet because our wheelhouse was 100 feet above water level and the windows were broken in our wheelhouse with the waves. We were fishing bodies out of the water for days after because small craft were absolutely unmanageable, they were just floating like quarks and then banging into bigger ships. The Heavy Cruiser Pittsburgh the bow was ripped off by the storm. And that Ship managed to get back to Guam without a bow and to dry dock and to me that was one of the greatest accomplishments of American ingenuity and workmanship that you could build a ship that would maintain its watertight integrity. Without a bow.

Q: So, after?

BF: After that, we did what they call the magic carpet, we we're out in the Pacific and every available naval vessel that would be headed towards the states. Would bring Army

and marine personnel back home so we could get them home as soon as possible. And that's what we did. We picked up army divisions. But to make room for that, I spent a couple of afternoons on the crane because the electricians ran the cranes. And I myself probably operating that crane. Dumped millions and millions of pounds of shells into the Pacific. We didn't need them anymore and we had to make room for supplies and for the oncoming soldiers. I often wondered today what the environmentalists would have thought of that [Laughter]. Mostly what I dropped in were Bombard Mitchells, which were about 800 lbs. apiece. And the armor piercing shells which were About 900 to 1000 lbs. apiece and they were used for naval gun battles and of course, the other shells were used to support the landing troops. And we made a couple of trips, one to Hawaii. And I'll tell you one feeling that I'll never forget is we're on our first trip home. We've got the soldiers aboard, we're coming into San Francisco. And we're sailing onto the Golden Gate Bridge, and our band is playing California Here we come. Quite a feeling.

Q: Beautiful band on the ship?

BF: Oh yes, we had a good band.

Q: So, then it was San Francisco [Unclear]?

BF: San Francisco celebrated Navy Day and we made another trip to Hawaii Picked up Some more soldiers back again. And then came Leave time for us, Christmas I left Oakland, CA. The railroad station here at Treasure Island On the 20th of December. And the 20th of December Was the Greatest day of American railroad travel. More Work passengers were carried that day than any other day in the history of the railroad. That was to get the servicemen home for Christmas. My hometown was Poughkeepsie, NY. And I got home Christmas Eve, about 8:00 at night. And I'll tell you what a feeling that was to come home alive and come home Christmas Eve. Was there for 30 days and then I went back to Treasure Island. They wanted me to reenlist for Six months because our ship was to be taken for a test in a bikini atoll. That test was July 1946, and I said no because our ship was going to be blown up by an atom bomb. My ship was my home for two years and I didn't want to see it blown up, and I didn't want to sacrifice 6 months more either, so I turned it down. But in July of 1946, the Arkansas Was blown up, they told me and sent me pictures when the bomb exploded, my ship went about 40 feet in the air. It now rests on its port side and being a toll at bikini At the Pacific. I would then... I'm not sure the exact date, but I was discharged in Mido Beach. On the 16th of May 1945. And I was down at... Brooklyn Navy Yard for six weeks or a month just waiting for discharge.

Q: So, after your naval experience did you go back to work or take the GI Bill?

BF: I took the GI Bill, and I went to school for a year. I didn't get a degree, but I didn't care for the courses I was taking. I guess it was too much of a change for me after the war years just to sit with a textbook.

Q: how did you exactly become an undertaker for a while?

BF: I always had it in the back of my mind that I wanted to try it. Because I figured I was a cook prior to that, and you got to eat, and you got to die. So, I was always sure of your job [Laughter].

Q: So, nothing of that came from The GI bill you did that on your own?

BF: I did that on my own in fact, I was a cook. I worked at Smith Brothers Restaurant in Poughkeepsie before I went in service. And my father said he would Sign my enlistment papers. He says you're the one that's got to go. You ought to have the right to choose where you want to go. But he said just do me one favor on your application. Don't put down your work cook. They might send you right out but if you go for something else they might. Send you to School, which ended up to be true.

Q: So, you joined American Legion?

BF: Joining American Legion. Why I waited so long I don't know. I was discharged in 1946, but I didn't join the Legion until 1950 or 1951 and my uncle was a World War One veteran, and He was always after me to join the Legion. I joined it and then when I came up [Unclear] used to work, I never transferred so, I would have 54 years now, but it's not continuous because I never bothered to transfer it over then I joined memory hack it I think it's around 1963 or 1964, not sure.

Q: How does your service experiences affect your life after?

BF: Lot of memories. But I think the best way to sum it up is to say I wouldn't take \$1,000,000 for my experiences and I wouldn't do it again for a \$1,000,000 [Laughter]. Because I know my luck would run out. You don't go through 4 invasions and walk away without a scratch.

Q: OK. Anything else you'd like to add?

BF: No, I think I pretty much covered it from Normandy to the typhoon. Well sometimes, maybe a little humor if we anchored out and there was leave and of course some of the boys come back, they weren't able to walk up the gangplank and be an E division. My division operated the cranes, so we would bring them aboard in cargo Nets [Laughter].

Q: OK [Laughter].

BF: I'm not going to give any names though [Laughter].

Q: OK. All right then. Thank you very much.

BF: It's been a pleasure.

Q: Yes thanks.