

Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Captain Sam Baker for the NOAA Heritage Oral History Project. The date is October 29, 2023. The interviewer is Molly Graham. It's a remote interview with Captain Baker in Scottsdale, Arizona, and I'm in Scarborough, Maine. I was first curious to hear more about your parents' lives before you were born, what your mother's early experiences in Louisville, Kentucky were like, your father's immigration experience, and the events they lived through, like World War I and Prohibition.

Sam Baker: Well, surprisingly enough, Molly, they never talked about their experiences. My father told us a little bit. My grandfather Baker was married to a woman, and she died. He immediately married another woman because he had small children and had to have somebody there to take care of them. My Uncle Harry was thirteen years older than my father, although Uncle Harry never admitted it. My mother never talked that much about it. Although she was born in Louisville, Kentucky, we never knew much about that. I never knew what my grandfather did in Louisville to make a living. I suspect he had a small grocery store in Clarksdale. He amassed a lot of property for some reason. I don't know how he did it, but he left all of his children property. It was mostly in the colored area. My father said that his mother was a baker, an actual baker; she baked bread. We had a picture of the oven in the backyard, which was a dome-type oven that you heat up, and then you put the dough in there, and it rises without any additional fire. He told us about coming to this country, and his uncle sent for him. His uncle's from Dyersburg, Tennessee. Their name was Fishman because his mother's maiden name was Fishman. He told us not too much. My father, when we asked him to teach us a foreign language that he knew, he said, "No, you're, you're an American. English is your language. That's what we should speak." Well, he and my mother spoke Yiddish together. Years later, I realized they didn't want us to know Yiddish, so they could have their conversations together. [laughter]

You remember a lot about your father. I remember going in when he was shaving in the morning, and he had the straight razor and the strap, and he had to hone his razor. He'd put a little dab of cream on me, take the razor on the backside, and shave me. We didn't have any long conversations as a child. I think I told you I had scarlet fever at four, and I remember it was around Christmas time because we had all the fireworks, and that was the only time fireworks were available. My father came home normally at night after we had already had dinner. We used to sit and talk to him while he was eating. His favorite dinner at night was two slices of dark Russian rye bread on a plate covered with cottage cheese and covered with sour cream. He said that's the best meal in the world. That was a take back from when [he] was a kid. That's what they had. He was a good eater. After the Depression came, he started drinking a little bit. That was to make it so that he could forget the Depression because it must have been a horrendous time in his life to have worked all those years and finally have gotten in the success column, only to see it destroyed in such a short time.

MG: When and how did they finally recover from the Depression?

SB: My father never recovered. He got right back to farming because that was primarily what he knew, but he never got a large acreage. Three hundred acres about was all he would do. But he made a living for us. My mother worked. She was a great seamstress. She took over the tailoring job for (Lander's) Department Store. That brought in some money. I remember I used

to go down and meet her to try to – she never would ride on my bicycle. She said, “I’ll walk.” But I used to carry the groceries. We were a close-knit family. Mother ran the family, at least to us, because Dad was always so late in coming home.

Emma’s grandchild, (Ida Belle?), [who] was named after my mother because my mother's name was Ida, came to live with Emma when she was about three. She lived there until she went off to junior college. Then, after she got married, she still came and brought her two children to see Emma. Emma was a member of the family, and Mother always sewed for them, for Emma and (Ida Belle?). I remember, as a kid, they wanted me to wear knickers. They were elastic right below the knee. Also, they wanted us to wear long stockings. I had such a problem. I thought that was girlish, and I didn't want to wear them. [laughter] But we settled that. I didn't do them anymore.

MG: During the Depression, and even before and after, was the Jewish community in Clarksdale a support to your family and others?

SB: No, we were a support for them. See, as a farmer, Dad had a contract with Delta Grocery & Cotton Company that he would sell them his cotton, and they would loan him the money to farm. We had groceries. Each sharecropper had a list. We printed out a list of groceries, and he put what he wanted, and I, as a little kid, added them all up. I knew how many pounds of flour came in a barrel, and we used to have to weigh it out and divide it up. We always had something left over. But we would give that to Emma, and that was what she had to plan her meals for the rest of the month. We had a lot of cake. We had dessert twice a day. We were all skinny as a rail. We really were. Nobody was heavy. We all ran it off. I was always doing something. In the spring, Mother always bought fifty baby chicks from a Memphis hatchery. They were the softest thing. If you've never felt a baby chick, try it sometime; nothing is softer than that. I used to build cages to keep them outside because the rats would take care of them.

I was always building something. I don't remember who sponsored it now, but we used to have these little races down the hill. I was interested in Boy Scouts. I just had a nice childhood, and so did my sisters. I think I told you, or maybe I didn't, my oldest sister had such great artist ability. She used to draw fashion designs in the early '30s that my niece has today. They're still current. The art teacher asked my mother to please let her take advanced art, which was six dollars a month. Mother said we just can't afford it.

In the Jewish community, if there were desperate families, it was kept behind the scenes. I don't remember it because I was small. I know the community brought over a young Jewish man, his wife, and a couple of children. He was supposed to be a kosher butcher, but it never worked out. About six months later, he moved to another town. It was a close-knit community. I have a picture of all the Sunday school kids on the steps of the temple, sixty-five of us, which is a pretty good-sized Sunday School for the Jewish community, which was the smallest community in town. I don't recall very much antisemitism, except around Christmas time. Then they would call us Christ killers until I confronted a young man. And I said, “Where do you get that information?” He said, “From the Bible.” I said, “No, it's not. It's not in your Bible. Christ didn't preach killing; he preached peace.” I said, “You ask your pastor about it.” And he did, and he apologized. He said, “You're right.” In '34-'35, our rabbi was never ordained. Rabbi

Freyman was just the oldest, most informed Jew in town, and he acted as a rabbi. Two men went to New York to get a rabbi. They couldn't pay the price for a rabbi, so they got a Yeshiva student. We called him Rabbi Tolochko. He came down; he had a wife and two small children. He was very good, very knowledgeable. The congregation picked up. But you have to remember, Molly, some people drove forty miles to come to temple to bring their children. On the High Holy Holidays, when they weren't supposed to travel, some people let them stay in their home. It was a very close-knit community.

MG: Was this Temple Beth Israel?

SB: Yes. I now belong to Temple Beth Israel here. Congregation Beth Israel.

MG: Which denomination?

SB: Well, surprisingly enough, it was Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform altogether. There wasn't enough of either one to run the temple. The Orthodox would start the service, and when enough Conservatives and Reforms came, they would take their Torah downstairs to another [inaudible, and they would come back up for the final service altogether. The temple was only five hundred feet from our home. I used to walk as a kid [with] Mother to services Friday night. We used to have to sit up in the balcony because, at that time, it was Orthodox. Then, we moved down below when they changed it. It was a good Jewish community there. We got along well with people. We integrated. We had our relationships.

MG: Did you attend Hebrew school?

SB: No, we never did have Hebrew school. We asked our dad to teach us. He said, "No, English is your language." He used to use that all the time. My father loved fish. We used to buy a little barrel about that big of salted herring or mackerel. He used to take out one when he wanted it, soak it overnight, and wrap it in wet newspaper. We had a coal stove. He put it right on top of the coals. Emma would make the biscuits. By the time the biscuits were ready, his fish had been steamed. He and I used to eat it. It was delicious. It really was. A little salty yet, but delicious. I didn't realize until much later in life that mackerel is probably one of the most abundant fish in the world – mackerel and herring. They spawn almost everywhere in the world. When we were in Alaska one year on board the ship, two young people tried to get some people in Unalaska, Dutch Harbor, to help them open a cannery for herring, and nobody would work. It was a sad case up there.

Let me divert a little bit and tell you about an accident. This was in '58. I had located some DEW [Distant Early Warning] Line sites, and they were going to start building. We were on our way up to Dutch Harbor for the first time of the season. We passed a tug towing refrigerated trailers, stacked three high, four across, and they had two rows of that. That was twenty-four trailers or thirty-thousand pounds of frozen food, which we were going to use for the DEW Line employees. We ran into a storm, and the waves were horrendous. I was on watch about midnight. We were taking a beating. I asked the captain if we could anchor behind Fox Island, get up early in the morning, and we could get to Dutch Harbor shortly after noon. Well, while we were anchored there, the tug and tow went by even in that bad weather. We got to Dutch

Harbor about noon, and he wasn't there. About two o'clock, he limped in. He'd taken a big wave on the front of the trailer, and it crushed the bottom trailer, and the two top ones had fallen over in the water. I went over there, and I said to the captain, "What are you going to do with all that frozen food that's exposed?" He said, "There's no frozen place here. You want it, take it." He said, "I prefer you get it than it goes bad." We went back to the ship and had a launch come over. Molly, we got a ham and a turkey for everybody. We had frozen strawberries. They were going to eat awful well. They had steaks. They were going to have a feast table every day. I was the tide officer aboard, and the tide gauge man from Dutch Harbor came over to give me his records. I said, "Would you like some fresh food?" He said, "Yes." I took him over there, and the captain said, "Sure, have the people from town come in." I told him, "Tell people from town to come in." Nobody came. So the next day, he came back again. I said, "Why didn't they come?" He said, "Commander, I don't want to tell you." I said, "I want to know." He said, "Can't you bring it to the door?" Molly, these were people whose only fresh food other than fish was lamb that was flown over from the other island at twenty-five cents a pound. Here, they wouldn't get in their skiff, come over, and take fresh frozen food. I don't understand it.

Let me tell you another story. In 1960, we were on the new ship *Surveyor* up in the Bering Sea. We planted some buoys, and we were taking oceanographic work. And it's foggy. You couldn't see a hundred feet. I hear this, "Ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba" – an outboard motor. Before long, here comes this seal boat. You know what a seal boat is? It's a boat made of scrap lumber and walrus skins laced together. There was a man, his wife, a little baby, and another man. They had one long shank outboard motor, and they had another one in their boat. They had two drums of gasoline. We lowered the gangplank, and they came aboard because everybody in Alaska at that time in the Bering Sea area knew we had a doctor and dentist aboard. They wanted the doctor to examine the baby. It looked like it may have been three or four months old. They always wanted to come aboard because we always had watches at a very cheap price. We still made a lot of money for the PX [post exchange]. He bought a couple of watches. His wife and baby were examined by the doctor. I said, "Where are you going?" He said, "To Nome." I said, "Why?" He said, "Oh, to see some friends." I said, "Just like that, in the boat?" He said, "Yes. What's wrong?" I said, "Where's Nome? You got a compass?" "No, I know where it is." He pointed out. I looked on the [inaudible]; he wasn't off one degree.

That's one incident. The other one is about people that wouldn't come and get food. When you think about the stories up on the Arctic Ocean, the people up there didn't have any guns. A bow and arrow wouldn't bring down a polar bear. How do you get a polar bear, which would supply them with an enormous amount of meat and a beautiful fur that they could use for clothing? They took a walrus bone, narrowed it down, bent it easily until it made a U-shape, put it in blubber, which was seal fat, took it outside – it froze. Took it until it made a little ball. They see a polar bear. They roll it to the polar bear. The polar bear swallows it. When it defrosts, it opens up, [inaudible] his intestine, and they wait four or five days, and he dies. That's ingenious. That took a smart person to do that.

MG: That poor polar bear. You're describing a place where people are very connected to the land and the food they eat.

SB: And tundra. You can't walk on tundra. I tried it. You get on the top, you balance, and your foot goes down two feet until it's solid ground. Let me tell you a little personal incident. When we were going to Alaska, Harry Swanson, who was one of the pilots, had a single-engine big plane that, during the war, the Department of Defense hired him to station barrels of gasoline along the Arctic coasts. His plane was a Boeing, similar to the Beaver – big wing, very powerful motor. He could carry three barrels of gas. He could drop one or two and use the other one for fuel to come back. He said, "I had a native guide that guided me where to go. The Army gave me a down sleeping bag – inner and outer bag. My guide had a beaver blanket. When we stopped for the night, I climbed in my sleeping bag. He took the beaver robe and folded it over." He said, "The first day, it was great. The second day, it was great. The third night, I didn't sleep too well. The fourth night, I was freezing because all the moisture was collected in the bag. The next morning, the native would throw the blanket over. All the ice crystals would freeze. He'd shake it off, roll it up into a little ball, and put it in the plane." Harry said, "The second trip, I had a Beaver blanket." He said, "Sam, there are trophy bears thirty miles north on the Porcupine River." He said, "You want one?" I said, "Oh, that will be nice to bring up a trophy bag." I said, "What do I need?" He said, "You need a .30-06. Go down and get a Winchester .30-06 and buy about a dozen silver-tipped bullets and another bullet to zero in on." We're up on the Porcupine, and I zeroed in my rifle. One day, the helicopter pilot said, "Sam, I don't have much to do. You want to go get your bear?" I said, "Sure." We flew up there about twenty minutes flight. There was a bear there, Molly. She was about twelve feet tall. She stood up, clawing at us. She had a little baby. I wasn't going to shoot her anyway. The pilot said, "Where do you want to land?" I said, "Back at camp. I'm not going to deal with one of those guys without a guide [along] with me."

Sam White was another one of our pilots. He had an old Army World War II single-engine plane that they built. Sam had a tent, a stove, and a rifle. If you had to go down with Sam, if he didn't die, you were alright because he'd keep you alive until they found you. Sam learned to fly for miles and [was] the first man to come to Alaska with an airplane. I said, "How long did it take you?" He said, "Two hours." I said, "Two hours? And you were flying alone?" He said gas was awfully expensive. [laughter] Molly, if I'd had a recording when we got back to Fairbanks on the way home from that project, I would have had a wonderful award-winning book. Sam used to tell me about hunting and fishing. I said to him, "Is it legal to shoot a moose from the pontoon of your plane?" He said, "No, you got to have one foot on dry land." When I saw him in Fairbanks on the way home, he said, "I hate your guts." I said, "Why?" He said, "I was going to my special island to check on how things were because I had a hunter coming in in a week, and I wanted to see how things were going." He said, "I cut the motor, and I was coasting into shore. And the biggest bull moose I'd ever seen in my life was there. I got down on the pontoon, and I remembered what you said. The last thing you said was, 'Don't forget, Sam, you got to have one foot on dry land.'"

The (Waynes?) brothers, who started Alaska Airlines, were in the same bar with us. They were telling stories, Molly, about the early flying days, and I believed them because when I was on the Air Force research project in 1950, one of our test instruments went out, and I'm waiting in the airport for a replacement. It wasn't a scheduled airline. They flew it up to Anchorage, and we had to wait for some small plane to bring it over. There was a young woman there. I guess she was in her mid-twenties. She was chewing on her nails. She said, "Oh god, I shouldn't have

done it. I shouldn't have done it." I said, "What?" A pilot had rented a plane from – he loaded the back of the plane. He loaded everything to [inaudible]. He got in. He closed the door. They gave him things through the window, and he put it in a net on the door. He was loaded to the hilt. The wind was right across the runway. She kept saying, "Oh, god, I never should have rented it to him." It got down to the end of the runway, and he took off. As soon as he got airborne, the crosswind captured him; he turned into the wind, and he just stayed there. He wasn't doing anything. She was praying, "Oh, god. My boss is going to kill me." Because she thought he was going to crash. Finally, he got up enough altitude, and he buzzed us. He was going to go land when he buzzed. [laughter] He was going to land on sandbars to deliver this merchandise and pick up gold or fur to bring back to sell. They trusted each other so much in those days. I don't know whether there are any books written about it.

When we were in Beaver, his son was ten years old and had never been out of Beaver. The young kid said to me one day, "Mr. Baker, do you like geese?" And I said, "Sure. They're great." He said, "You'll buy the shells?" I said, "Sure." So he came back with four geese. I said, "How many shells do I owe you?" And he was indignant. He said, "Four." [laughter] Those geese were very good. We cooked them in the postmaster's house, and he took the kid to Fairbanks on a buying trip. He bought him two little cap pistols. He couldn't get over it. But the thing he loved was the movies. He went to see – they had movies every now and then in the schoolhouse. But in Beaver, the only vehicle was an old World War II weapons carrier with no exhaust system. So when they cranked it up, it was loud. When a kid got into Fairbanks, they got into the pilot's station wagon, and they start driving, the kid said, "Stop, stop." They stopped, and they said, "What's wrong?" "Where's the noise?" [laughter]

One day, the postmaster said to me, "Sam, make sure you come to the post office this morning after the plane comes in." You can tell when the plane comes in because of all the noise. So, I went there. It was a day that a young social worker from Fairbanks had arrived to take applications for unwed mothers. She sits down at his desk, and she's a very proper, nice-looking young girl. She looked like she just finished college. Maybe she's twenty-two. She's setting her things down; she's organizing her desk. And then she pulls out the first paper. She calls out this name. This very pregnant young girl, maybe sixteen, comes up. She sits in the chair. The young lady says, "Your name? Your age?" "I'll be sixteen next month." "Sixteen? Okay, and who's the father?" I don't know. It could be one of many." Her head is going down towards the paper. She says, "What do we do?" One old lady in the back stands up – "Wait until the baby's born. Look at the baby. That's the father." [laughter]

MG: It sounds like this was an area that required these kinds of resources.

SB: The schoolteacher and his wife were both teachers. They were government employees that they sent there. I asked him how it was. He said, "Some students are good. Some students are off three months. We should have school twelve months a year because they forget so much. They don't take books home to read. We have to go back half the year. By the time we go – we only get about half a year forward progress." But I met two Norwegian men who were in their late sixties, early seventies. They were trappers, and they told us they had a trap line. They had a house. They had a cabin – a half-day travel so that they could walk if they needed to get shelter for the night. We were talking. They said they're going to retire next after this coming

season. I said, "What are you going to do with your dogs? You're going to give them away?" "Oh, no, we're going to shoot them." "Why?" "Because people don't take care of their dogs the way we think they should. And we're not going to let them starve to death."

As I told you earlier, there's a story everywhere you go. There was an elderly Japanese man there. His wife made me a pair of moose skin moccasins with beads on them, but she cured the hide in urine. Maybe she couldn't smell it, but I could. I tried everything in the world to get the smell off, and I couldn't. They were a young couple at Point Barrow, but coming down to Beaver, she gave birth on the trail. He built a snow cave, put her in there with food, and came into Beaver and got help to go back and bring her down. He established a mink farm, and he caught salmon during the spring and summer to feed the mink. They had ice caves, as I told you earlier. They dig down far enough, you get into permafrost. You store your fish there, so they don't spoil. You go down with an ax when you chop them up – it's like ice – and you feed it to your dogs. Well, he had a most successful business. But when the war started, and they rounded up the Japanese, the commissioner from Fairbanks came there, flew in, and said, "I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I know you're not one of them, but I've been ordered to pick you up." Well, while he was gone, his daughters sold off the mink to breeders, and he lost his business. A nice little man. Spoke English very well.

There are other stories. I used to watch this program on television, [which] showed these trappers and how they had boats, and they went over the trails and built their cabins. I think Alaska is very interesting. I spent three summers on land and four summers in the water – not in the water, but on the water. Some very interesting things. In '59, when I went up there with (Seaborg?), a skipper on this ship – I don't remember what ship it was. It was a Canadian submarine chaser, I think. It was wooden. We were in Whittier for July the fourth. Janet flew up to be with me. She took the train from Anchorage to Whittier, [which] backed up thirty-eight miles because there was only one track, and they couldn't turn around. We had a great weekend. We went into Anchorage and stayed at the base there. We were driving around, and a moose confronted us on the road and didn't want to get out of the way. [laughter] I was afraid because it was a rental car, and I didn't want him to damage it. I gave him lots of leeway. I have a picture of us standing there on the dock with me. A great time.

MG: You mentioned the Japanese internment camp that your friend was sent to during World War II, and I wanted to ask if your family had relatives who were still in Europe or any who were lost during the Holocaust.

SB: My father's mother and his sister were victims. We don't know whether they were victims of the Russians or the Germans. Just, they were gone. I had a cousin who went to Skaudvile, Lithuania. For years, I thought that was the name of the town. But when I was working at Brookhaven National Labs, there was a man from Lithuania who said no, Skaudvile is the county, and there are a lot of little villages there. My cousin went back and photographed the houses. He didn't know where his great-grandmother lived or anything. He went up to the graveyard [which] was up on the top of a hill. He paid some people to put the gravestones back up. They'd all been knocked down. He took pictures of the gravestones and all. I never went back. I wanted to, but it just never came around.

MG: When did you become aware of what happened?

SB: What do you mean?

MG: When did you become aware of what happened to Jews during World War II?

SB: Oh, very early. In the late '30s, we knew about it. When the young man came there to our hometown, they brought him over from Europe as a refugee. And we had articles in the paper and all. We knew what was going on. That was one of the reasons I volunteered when we went to war. It's just one person, but I wanted to volunteer.

MG: Last time, we talked about how your teacher switched your dominant hand. What was the reason given for that? Then I'll ask you a little bit more about your education growing up.

SB: Well, they figured that left-handers were wrong. It had to be – you had to be right-handed. You had to conform with the majority or the vast majority. I only knew one other boy – Sam (Schwartz?) was left-handed, and they didn't change him. They say left-handed people, as a whole, are smarter than right-handers.

MG: And more creative, I think.

SB: Well, I guess so.

MG: What changed for you in ninth grade when you went from having difficulty reading to loving to read?

SB: Well, Mrs. Walker was the schoolteacher. When I had to go to summer school, my mother said, "You pay for it. I'm not going to pay a dollar and a half a week." So, I paid it. There were six of us in the class. I remember Nancy Fitzgerald. Her father was an attorney. She failed. But we all passed with high marks because we had individual attention from the teacher. We had nine book reports to make during the sophomore year each year for four years. They gave us a list of books. Molly, the library was our second home because we had no encyclopedia. The nice thing about it – when you went to the library, if somebody had an encyclopedia out that you wanted, you just sat right with them because they were going to get the same subject that you were. There were a couple of homes in town that had their own encyclopedia. But we weren't able to have one. We did our homework around the dining room table. It was a round oak table with a center pedestal and legs. At the end of the legs was an eagle claw and a ball [inaudible]. We helped each other.

My father, when he was fifteen, quit school. They tried to give him schooling in Tennessee, but he didn't want it. He could solve a basic algebra problem in his head [and] give you the answer, but never know how he got it. He couldn't tell you how he got it until we took algebra in high school and figured out our answers, and then we showed him how. He was very good at numbers. He could do a string of adding multiplication all in his head. That was good, I guess. As a kid, I was making a little money on the paper route, but I needed to give my substitute some time. Every now and then, I would go work on the farm with Dad for a day on Saturday and let



(McGuire?) take over so I could give him some experience. One day, they were baling hay. In those days, they didn't have the [inaudible] baler. They put the bale in one spot, they brought the hay in, and then the man would throw it into the hopper. The arm would push it down, and then the ram would push it forward. They put me on the other side. When the man on this side passed the wire to me, I'd take it and put it through the block for him to grab and tie it up. They tied it when it was small. When they got out of the ramp, it expanded and tightened up the wire. The debris from the hay was falling all on my neck. After a while, the man on the other side stopped, and he said, "Come out here, Sammy." I came out. He took his handkerchief, dipped it in water, wiped my neck, and then wrapped it around my neck so no more could go. I made a dollar all day long doing that. But I got a compliment. After a while, he said, "Sammy, you're doing pretty good. You're keeping me busy." The next time I enjoyed it was – Dad used to raise sorghum, which was a type of cane that was small, but had a lot of juice in it. They used to make about a hundred gallons of sorghum syrup, which you can buy today in the store. Not as sweet as sugar cane molasses, but it's good. I picked cotton, but that was – you can't pick enough cotton to make a living. You have to really know how to do it. I had a lot of experience. I drove dad in the truck on Sundays out to the place. I guess he did that to show me what farming was like. But when I was overseas, he had had enough; he sold all of his equipment and everything and forbid my sisters to write me about it. When I got home, I said, "Dad, let's go out on a [inaudible]." "Don't have it." I said, "Why?" He said, "I didn't want you to be a farmer."

On Guadalcanal, Molly, it was a mountain that had grown up like this [inaudible] spine, and it decayed. There was flatland on both sides of the mountain. We were on one side. That's where all the Marines fighting was. There was a coconut palm tree every twenty square feet. You really got sick of coconuts in a hurry. I wanted to find out what the island was like. One day, I got a jeep, and I drove all the way down to the end of the island. That was the remains of the house foundation there; they had burned it down, and you could see where it was. There was a lime tree. I picked some limes for the bar, although I didn't drink. Then there was a little pepper plant about that tall, and there were some red peppers on them. Emma had taught me how to make pepper sauce to season up your meat. I got out my handkerchief and started picking the peppers, and my fingers start burning. I got a little small – about that much – and I took it back to camp, went by the mess hall, got a little jar, put them in it – broke them, and put them in it. I didn't save one for seed. I regret that for the rest of my life. I put the vinegar in and sealed it up. I put it in my tent for about three or four days. And then, I brought it to the mess hall for lunch one day. I put it on the table because you could sprinkle it. I put a little hole in the top. You sprinkle a little bit. Gave it a nice flavor. A major opened it up, took one out, and he said, "Oh, I love peppers." And I said, "Major, I wouldn't do that if I were you." He said, "A lieutenant doesn't tell a major what to do." I said, "You're absolutely right, sir. I apologize." Molly, if the doctor hadn't been sitting there, he would have died.

MG: Oh my gosh.

SB: His throat swelled up. The doctor had to put a knife down to keep him open for a while until it settled down. He didn't come to the mess hall for three days.

MG: Yikes.

SB: Wow. They were so good, but I didn't save any seats.

MG: Where would you have planted it? Would you have brought it back to the States?

SB: No, I'd send it back to Emma to plant. I don't know. I don't know whether I told you or not – when we got ready to leave Guadalcanal, they didn't have any place for me to go on board ship. Did I tell you that?

MG: No.

SB: Well, when they were loading us to go to Okinawa, we didn't know where we were going, but we were going. All the LSTs [Landing Ship, Tank ] – you know what an LST is.

MG: Yes.

SB: Its doors open up, and the ramp goes down. Then, there's a ramp from the top deck down to the second deck, so you can unload all the equipment that way. Anyway, the LSTs came up all on the beach. It was a nice beach. I tried to – my sister Alma sent me a pair of goggles, and they were beautiful fish. Some of them were about that big – all different colors – just come to you. I made a little spear, and I put it right there, and he was over here. [laughter] I never speared one. Anyway, they dropped the ramps, and the beach master calls out, “You there. You here. You there.” Then they were loaded, and they moved off. One LST left. And I said to him, “Where do I go?” He said, “Who are you?” I said, “Baker. Third Battalion, Company C.” He looked; he said, “You aren't on the list.” I said, “Where do I go? I stay here?” He said, “No, get aboard this one.” So we got aboard, and my men had no place to sleep. They slept on the amphtracks. I said to them, “It's alright.” They found me a bunk. Well, this LST was the flotilla commander's ship. It was a one-star Admiral. They didn't call them admiral then; they called them commodores. Molly, most of the officers on there were giants compared to me. I weighed 150 pounds, and I was five-ten and a half. We're sitting down for breakfast, and the commodore is having fresh eggs. And we're having whatever you call it. This lieutenant is looking right at the Commodore. He said, “It's a goddamn shame that we have to eat this slop, and somebody else can eat fresh eggs.” The commodore never broke [his] stride. He just kept right on eating. [laughter]

One day, we went through a storm, and it delayed us a little bit. I was up on the bridge. It was just like a (tent?). The ship's captain was a lieutenant. He was so proud. He says, “Commodore, we're making nine knots.” And I said, “For goodness sake, put out the wings. Let's take off.” The Commodore looked at me. If looks could have killed. [laughter] I guess the Navy thought us marine officers were a bunch of hooligans. But they were good guys. I don't remember what I told you about. Did I tell you about Lieutenant (Stingly)?

MG: You did.

SB: I went to him because he made two under-firing landings. I said, “(Stingly?), I'm going to be a greenhorn when I go ashore on the next operation. Tell me what to do that will make me less of a greenhorn than I was going to be.” He said, “Sam, take care of your men when you can,

and your men will take care of you when [they] can. It was good advice, Molly. I took care of our people everywhere.

Two incidents I'd like to tell you about. When I was on the *Pathfinder* in '57, I was a ship's officer. We needed some help. I put the word out. A young Black man came. He's about six feet two and weighed about 250 pounds, a big guy. He had a Coast Guard license. So, I hired him. The boatswain came up to me later on. He said, "Lieutenant, I don't know how he's going to fit in here. He's the only one." I said, "Well, let him try." Well, he turned out to be one of the best recruits that we had for the year. He stayed on a number of years.

Now, go forward to Washington. I was head of the National Geodetic Survey, and we had one Black professional who finished from a small Black college over in Western Maryland, Virginia, or West Virginia. He applied to go to Ohio State to get his master's degree in geodetic science, and we sent him. Christmas time, he called me at the house. He said, "Captain, can I come talk to you?" I said, "Sure." He came over, and we went into the den. He says, "I got to quit." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because my math is too weak. I can't stay up to class." I said, "No, I don't want you to quit. Here's what we'll do. The next semester starts in January. That semester, you drop out of school. You'll work full time for us eight hours a day. I don't care what hours you work, but you'll work eight hours a day. We'll send you work to do. And you'll go to school for math all on your own; you pay your way. You won't get paid from us, except for as a regular person. When you think you have enough math to go back, let us know, and we'll put you back on full-time schooling." Well, it worked. He went that spring semester. The summer semester, he increased his math capability, and he finished. He got his degree, and we celebrated. Unfortunately, he passed away from a kidney problem shortly after I retired. But we elevated him there.

My parents taught us everybody was equal. The color of your skin didn't make any difference. You judge people by who they are, not by how they look. I have to always remind myself of that when I see people with so many tattoos. It's a turn-off to me. I guess it goes back to when I first saw tattoos on the ship *Hydrographer*. On payday, they'd come back, and they would be all (festered?) up. They were not like they are now. The story then was how drunk you were when you got your tattoo. I pass it over, but the first indication is, "My god, look at those." But everybody has a choice.

MG: Growing up in the South during the Jim Crow era, you must have seen a lot of racism and discrimination and probably attended a segregated school. [Editor's Note: The Jim Crow era in the South was a period of legalized racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans, enforced through restrictive laws and policies, lasting from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century.]

SB: Yeah. We didn't have any buses, so there was no bus thing. I don't remember riding the bus in Memphis because we never went. Well, when I had my [inaudible] accident, we went there by train. Or did we? Maybe my uncle took me. We saw it in our schools. But Molly, my county had a junior college only for Black people that was free. But it wasn't easy for a Black person in the South. That's the reason they wrote the songs they did, to express their – not anger, but displeasure or lonesomeness from being [inaudible].

MG: Speaking of music, Clarksdale was well known for its blues musicians, such as Robert Johnson.

SB: And you can understand why they were picking cotton and singing because picking cotton is monotonous. They were singing, or somebody was singing, just to entertain them to make the day pass. They had their moments of joy. They had their cooking habits. They learned a lot [about] how to survive. When they went to the city during the war to work, it was very difficult. Because in the South, they were hand fed. We supply you with all your food and your clothing. You get your money at the end of the – most of your money at the end of the crop. When they went to work, they got paid every two weeks. They didn't know how to save money for rent, and so many of them came back and said they didn't like it. Well, I don't know whether a study has been done on that. I would imagine it was the older ones. The younger ones probably liked to be away. They had their freedom, and they had a new life different than down South.

MG: Was there any Klan presence in your part of Mississippi?

SB: I never saw Klan. But that was because there were some very influential Jewish people in our community. Now, I did witness two hangings of two Black men. Let me explain that to you. When the Depression came, some people couldn't eat. As I told you earlier, there were little stores out in the country. They sold canned goods, clothing, and necessary items. The Blacks had no guns, but what they did was they would take a plow handle, a stick of wood, or a knife, and they'd go rob. There were some people that died during that. The state passed a law that if you robbed with a lethal weapon, you were considered a murderer. Well, they never got the word, and so they used a plow handle, and that was a lethal weapon. They were going to resurface the bridge across from the white section of town to the business district. They put a little walkway down by the jail. It was Friday morning. We had to deliver papers before school. As we were going by the county jail, there were two that they hung right there. It shouldn't have been done.

But let me tell you another incident. Bootleggers were quite prevalent in the Prohibition period. And so the people got together. They elected Mr. Lombardi, sheriff, who advocated no more bootleggers. The county commissioner swore him in the very night he won. He raided all the bootleggers that very night, and he put all the booze that they found in the jail in a cell so that nobody could get to it. Thirty days later, Mr. Lombardi dies of a heart attack. The county commissioners appointed – I can't remember. I remember his name. I remember going out to his house. He was a teetotaler from Friars Point. He saw all that liquor in there. The first Saturday, he got two convicts, and there were empty barrels on the tailgate of the truck, and the whiskey was in the truck. As they drove around town, these convicts were breaking the whiskey in the barrels and collecting the glass. People were running out there with their hats and drinking it. The whole downtown smelled like a brewery. But Captain Tom Gibson – he was a [inaudible] veteran. He was quite a guy. We had some very nice people.

The tallest building in town was the McWilliams building – six stories. The first elevator in town. He was the son or the grandson of the man who built the building. He had a son, Gary, who was in our Scout troop. He used to send a truck in and pick us up at – when the levee broke

in '27, they put the new levee inland. The old levee was behind the new levee. He had a house back there in the ground between the two levees. And he gave that to us for overnight camping. Molly, we went out there. He took us out that one Friday night. It was about thirteen miles to our Boy Scout house. There were no screens on the windows, and the mosquitoes ate us up. We got through Friday night and Saturday night, which was the Saturday night before Mother's Day. We couldn't stand it anymore. About ten o'clock, we decided we were going to walk back to the church where we met and then walk around the block a couple of times; we had a fourteen-mile hike. In those days, flashlight batteries didn't last very long. We all had flashlights, so we started out. We knew the road. It was a little moonlight. We could see. About four o'clock in the morning, we got tired, and we said, "Well, let's take a little nap." Then we'd get up. We get back to the church about noon time. While we were sleeping, armyworms came over. Now, armyworms were millions and millions of worms that walked through and ate everything green. We were rolling and tossing in our sleep. When we woke up, we were a mess. They were all over everything. We packed up, and we got to church just as they were letting out – Mother's Day church. [inaudible] We went around the block a couple of times to get our fourteen miles. We're standing out there when Mr. and Mrs. (Bobo?) came out [inaudible] together. Mr. (Bobo?) recruited me for scouting. We're standing there. They walk right by. They never saw him. Well, they saw him, but they didn't acknowledge it. He said, "Mother?" She never turned around. We had to walk home. It was another half a mile. I got home, and Mother saw me at the front. She said, "You go around the back." I went back there, and she said, "Take off everything but your under-shorts." Then she gave me a bar of soap. I took the hose and [took] a shower. She said, "Now, do it again." [laughter] Then I came in and took a bath. For years, I reminded some of the scouters about our Mother's Day march. Scouting had its good points and others.

I had a wonderful childhood. I had an experience growing up in college. I really think that if I had gone to a junior college for a couple of years and then transferred to State after I'd grown up more, I would have done much better. But that's water over the dam. You can't get it back. I had a good career.

MG: Even though your parents weren't highly educated themselves, they really encouraged your education. I was curious why you chose Mississippi State University as opposed to another college or university.

SB: Well, because one of our scout leaders was a member of the levee board, an engineer. I don't remember where he went to school or if he ever told us. When I went to see him, and I said, "I'm going to Ole Miss" – he said, "Where are you going to school?" I said, "Ole Miss." He said, "No, you were going to be a civil engineer, weren't you?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Go to State. They got a better school." So, I went to State. You didn't need any preparation. Now, Molly, I never heard my mother say anything to my older sisters about going to school. But she always reminded me, "You're going to college," because in those days, it was the man who made the living. Many people in those days looked at women going to school for the "Mrs." course. I think it was prevalent throughout the country, not just necessarily where I lived.

MG: I was curious about what made you interested in civil engineering. Why did you want to pursue that? What did you hope to do with that degree?

SB: I wanted to build bridges. I thought that was the greatest thing in the world. We had a railroad crossing of the river in town. We had two bridges. The bridges were not much of a bridge, but the railroad bridge was. I always wanted to build a bridge. Of course, I didn't realize getting out of school was just the first step for learning how to build bridges [if] you're going to have to do anything. My project at school was – did I ever tell you about that project?

MG: I'm not sure you did.

SB: Well, the last semester, in steel and concrete, you had to design whatever the prof told you to. So he told me to design an industrial crane inside of a warehouse that could pick up fifty tons, which is 100,000 pounds. He said, "You don't have to design the electrical part. You don't have to design the structural part." He told me how much it weighed and so forth. You had two concrete pillars and a concrete roadway between the pillars. You designed one section, and you just repeated it along. You had to do the [inaudible] section because that was different. Because it rolled up, and you had to stop it there. It was fifty feet wide. I hadn't done too well in school. I worked on this, and I was the only one in the class. The prof and I had all morning together. He taught a new class after lunch. It took me about four or five weeks to do all the design work. I had to do all of the mechanical drawings and everything, showing all the steel and the concrete and everything else – all the rivets in the steel – a machine that moved back and forth. I turned it in, and about two weeks later, he came to me, and he said – pardon my French – "I could kick you in the ass." I said, "What?" He said, "Where have you been all this time? Your report was excellent. I couldn't find but minor errors in it." So, that was encouraging.

I was a half a credit short of graduation. I went down to talk to the dean of engineering. He said, "Sam, what would you like to do?" and he gave me some choices. One of them was to do a time-motion study at the creamery, which was part of the school's Agricultural Department. I [inaudible] a time motion study. I went to the library and got some books and read them up, went down there, and observed how they got the milk in, how they weighed and recorded it, put it in a [inaudible], how they formed the butter and all and the cream. And wrote up my report and gave the creamery a copy. They adopted some of the changes I suggested. I figured it was a success, and I got my half credit, so I graduated. Then, didn't know what to [do]. Well, I had to just wait for the Marine Corps. I wrote them a letter that I had graduated, and I got back a nasty telegram that they knew I graduated, and they'll let me know when I was to report. About two days later came that telegram to notify me when I was going to report, and my tickets would arrive and so forth.

MG: If the war hadn't intervened, what do you think your post-graduation plan would have been?

SB: Well, I would have gone back to State. But little did I know – Molly, after the war, I went back to State to see if I couldn't take refresher courses. I was informed that you can't take refresher courses unless you take advanced courses for your master's. I'd been out of school for three years. I didn't think that – I'd lost a lot of my knowledge – not lost it, but I don't think I could recall it that easy. I'd have to go back again. I was willing to do that until I got the job with the Coast Survey. I enjoyed it. Then, when they offered me a permanent commission – I

liked the service. As I said, I volunteered to be a full-time Marine. Colonel (Shaw?) said, "You'll have no trouble with my letter of recommendation," and I thought I was in. Life teaches you. If I had stayed in the Marine Corps, I would have been in the Korean War. I'd have been in the Vietnam War. Lord only knows whether I'd still be alive.

MG: Before we move on, what else do you remember about your college experience? What was campus life like? What would you do for fun?

SB: Well, there wasn't much fun there, Molly. We made fun. The three guys across the hall had a big room. Our room was only about eight feet wide and about twelve feet long. They were all in the Ag [agriculture program]. They were sophomores. They were dressing chickens. We bought a frying pan, a hot plate, and some oil. Every Friday night, they brought the chickens home that they had cut up. We had fried chicken, and it was pretty good. Then we went home for Christmas and came back, and we found a note in our room that we could have the hot plate and the skillet back at the end of the semester. [laughter] Cooking was not allowed. Well, it was an old dorm, and everybody tried to burn it down after the newspapers came on Sunday. They never did, but a few years after the war, they did burn down, and it was a blessing. We were out of it. There was a lot of humor around. There was crap shooting down the hall and poker playing. The school didn't seem to bother you for playing poker, but they didn't want you shooting crap. There was hazing, and I found the best way to do hazing was to say, "When are you going to get started?" after they'd done it. It'd make them so they'd say, "Get the hell out of here." So they wouldn't bother you again.

MG: Was this part of pledging to a fraternity?

SB: No, I never went into a fraternity. They had a Jewish fraternity there, S-A-M [ΣAM, Sigma Alpha Mu]. But the year before I got there, the [grade point] average of the numbers was about ninety-five. I wasn't in that category. We had about four or five Jewish students from up north [who] came down primarily because tuition was so cheap compared to Northern schools, and the living was cheaper, too. Registration was roughly 150 [and] a few dollars for books. You could eat on twenty dollars a month. Your [inaudible] is 160. For maybe four hundred dollars, you could go to school for a year. That's pretty cheap.

MG: Was the war a big topic of discussion on campus? Were you following along with the events of the war?

SB: The biggest topic at the beginning, Molly, was where in the hell is Pearl Harbor? We had to go to the library and get some of the maps to find it. It wasn't on all the maps. It was a small place. Then there was concern about people. Everybody was anxious to go in. The ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] people were there. At State, you had to take ROTC the first year. I can't remember whether it was the second year, too. I think just the first year. There were a lot of rumors going around, and then we got word back from the people, but it was the class that graduated in '42 that really went to the front, and they wrote letters back. There were people that went to the Air Force. There were recruiters on campus. You were well aware that we were at war. In some respects, it woke this nation up. In some respects, it changed our lives

forever. Women then became members of the workforce in massive amounts of numbers. In the Coast Survey, many of the officers volunteered to go in the other branches.

(Noble Martin?) was my [roommate]. I met (Noble?) first when I was sent from Washington to Pensacola to join the *Hydrographer*, but they were out at sea. (Noble?) was on the shore, directing some signals for hydrographic work, and I want to tell you about that. (Noble?) had been in the Marine Corps during his assignment. He'd come back out. He was Lieutenant Commander. We established some signals on shore about ten feet to twelve feet high. We built a lot of wood over survey monuments, and I did some survey work for him. Then the *Hydrographer* came. Now, when we went out during good weather, Molly, we had a drum of wire aboard and an anchor, and we had a reader, a tabulation of how much wire had played out. We started out. They dropped the anchor from the wire, and the ship started going South. This was along the beach, East of Pensacola. There were three officers on the deck with the sextants flat, taking angles between the – and then they were calling it down below to the chart room where they plotted it. They plotted those. I went up there and took a sextant. After we were going quite a bit, you could see them – you could see the signals quite a distance. Then we dead-headed it out some more. We were doing hydrographic work. The wire was giving us a precise distance to check with our visual. As we got farther out, we had more proper accuracy with dead reckoning because we had the signal of the distance we were doing. Then we went back in and did it again from another line.

I've done that, and then I did hydrographic work. We had an electronic system that gave us one arc in the Gulf. We needed some [inaudible] tubes. This was a tube that Hewlett-Packard made, and that's when they got started. I happened to have met through Mrs. Matheson – they had a jewelry store in Seattle, and they went – I'll think of his name. Anyway, he was at Stanford when Hewlett and Packard asked him to come look at what they were doing. They were in a garage. They wanted a thousand dollars for twenty-five percent of their company. He had said, "Sammy, I had a thousand dollars, but all I saw was this tube here." [laughter] Well, we ran out of [inaudible] tubes. They dispatched me over to McGill Field. I found they had some surplus ones. They gave me a couple of them, and we went back into operation.

There were two guys from Washington who came down to handle it; Angelo was one of them. He was in the Washington office for years. Maybe somebody else can supply – then that was another man that was there [who] came down. I told you, I left the HHydro and went to [inaudible], I think it was. Anyway, we were on the *Hydro*. We were out at sea. Commander (Johnson?) had hit his head. The ship moved. He hit his head on something. I'm trying to think of the officer's name. Captain (Johnson?) came down and took some chicken out of the refrigerator to eat and put it on the counter. This young officer reached in, picked it up through the porthole, and took it out. Captain (Johnson?) came in, and he looked. He's rubbing his head. He went in the wardroom [inaudible]. [laughter] Finally, this officer came out and [inaudible]. [laughter]

I was junior officer aboard. I had to enter the tide corrections, and then I added them as to what the depth was. I needed somebody to check it. I went to Commander (Johnson?). And I said, "Commander (Johnson?), I need somebody to check it." "Go get Roger to do it." Roger was an MIT or Harvard graduate, full commander. I said, "Commander, he's a full commander." He



said, "It's all right. Roger will do it. He doesn't care." [laughter] There were four full commanders aboard ship at one time. Lieutenant Commander Martin and me, an ensign. You see, they all rose in rank during the war and no more ships. Then, they started retiring. The old-timers got together and talked. Surprisingly enough, I don't ever recall Captain Peacock coming down for lunch or dinner, except during Thanksgiving and Christmas, he came down. Captain Anderson replaced him, and then I left the ship. I had my experience with the Air Force for two years. Did I tell you about when I was going to leave? I think I did. It was a good, close-knit group of officers there. They entertained each other. They knew each other for years. They helped each other. It was a close-knit group. It wasn't always agreeable. They were always anxious about the assignment sheet coming out in November. Everybody was anxious. Of course, after I'd been ashore for four years on hydrographic work, I knew I was going to get sea duty for four years, and I did. That wasn't any surprise. But going to Cape Canaveral was a big surprise and a wonderful assignment. Being assigned to the Washington office, as long as I was, was a great, great assignment. I thoroughly enjoyed my career. Life opened up some things for me. As I told you, I had a loving wife, and that was the greatest gift I've ever been given.

MG: Tell me how you met Janet. I read it was at a progressive party.

SB: Well, a progressive party is where you meet at one house for cocktails, the next house for salad, the next house for the [entrée], the next house for dancing and dessert. Well, I don't remember the first three houses. I just remember we went from one to the other to the other. At the last one, we were dancing. I noticed her, and I asked her to dance. She said, "You're dancing well." I said, "I got two left feet." But that's when I asked to take her to lunch. I didn't ask her for a date because I didn't think she would give me one [with] that short introduction. Then, I told you about missing – why I waited so long. I used to drive from [inaudible] to Sacramento – five hours. I'd get a motel room, and I'd see her on Friday night and Saturday all day. On Sunday morning, I would come back to Eureka, and that was seven hours. I couldn't come but every other week. We oftentimes went to a movie, and I'd fall asleep. She would say, "Why are you falling asleep?" I said, "I got up so early this morning to get on the road." [inaudible] officer, I couldn't leave until I had signed the checks. Then I went to see her at Christmas time. I met her father before I asked her to marry me. I did ask him if I could marry her. We bought maternity clothes for her in a department store in Salt Lake City when we were in Nevada and went over for that. When we went to Seattle, she met a lot of the wives. Some of them were pregnant, and they told her about which doctors to go to. They were good. She liked them.

The Coast Survey officers in Seattle was a nice group. They looked after one another. And [inaudible] (Short?) was most kind to her. She had four boys right in a row, and (Jerry?) was on the *Pathfinder* the year I was there. (Jerry?) couldn't stand smoke, and Commander Matheson at the time, and Jim – I don't remember. The chief engineer's name was Jim. [inaudible] replaced him. They both would light up their pipe. (Jerry Short?) was a senior officer, so he was sitting close to them. He used to get up and leave even if his dessert hadn't been served. We all got together and selected him as a caterer because the caterer sat at the other end of the table, so he could stay there long enough to eat his desserts. We did a lot of things aboard ship that people didn't know about. For instance, Commander Matheson liked rum ice cream. They made rum ice cream every Sunday. I used to go to the galley and talk to them. I said, "Don't you have

other flavors?" "Yes. But the commander says he wants ice cream." I said, "Well, hide it. Hide the rest of the rum flavor." And they did. He said, "Where's my rum ice cream?" And the steward said, "It's all gone, sir. We don't have any more [rum] flavor." "Order some more," he said. [laughter] It was a good ship.

One thing I didn't like is that the captain of the ship did all of the piloting in port. None of the junior officers had a chance to bring it into port or take it out to sea. It was always the senior officer. Why? I don't know. When were we going to get a chance to learn? I failed to write the office about that, but that was my biggest concern about the ship. You had to learn to be the pilot when you were in charge, and that's not the time to learn; that's the time to teach younger officers how to do it. I came to Washington in '56, the spring of '56, to confer with Mr. (Simmons?), the chief mathematician in the geodesy division, because I couldn't get closure on some of my triangles. We had a good discussion. He educated me a lot. When I was there, Captain Harris was the first oceanographer that the Coast Survey had ever had – Dr. Harris. He said, "He wants to see you." So I went up to see him. And he said, "I want to show you the plans for the new ship, *Surveyor*, and get your comments." So I said, "What's the cruising speed?" He said, "Twelve knots." I said, "Then it's outdated before you build it. We can't even stay up in the convoy." He said, "What should it be?" I said, "It should be sixteen cruising, eighteen at tops." Well, that'll take a lot more power. I said, "Well, how many screws?" He said, "One." I said, "When you're up in Alaska, you don't have a tug to help you. If you don't have twin screws, you're limited as to what you can maneuver." "Well, that would be a lot more expensive." I said, "Don't build it if you can't build it right." The reason he showed me that is because he wanted to show me all the space for the oceanographer labs and everything else. I said, "That's great, but at twelve knots, it's too expensive for you to go from place to place timewise. You got eighty people aboard; you're paying a tremendous salary every day versus the additional oil you need to go faster." It didn't make any impression on him.

MG: Was this Dr. Harris Stewart?

SB: Yes.

MG: He was a Scripps graduate who must have joined the Coast Survey around this time, and he went on to found AOML [Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory].

SB: In the fall of '57, or the spring of '58, there were a number of us officers [who] went to the University of Washington for a short oceanographic course; they taught us how to take Nansen samples. I thought the Nansen bottle was a really ingenious device. I have one, and it still has the mercury thermometers in it. The Nansen bottle – where is it? We'll get another session, and I'll bring it out. Would you like to have it? I'll send it to you.

MG: I'm sure it's something we'd be interested in.

SB: It's about this long. You put a cable down, a steel cable, and you measure as you put it down. You have the counter. They screw on, and they stand up. You have a weight that you put around the – it opens up, you put it around the cable, and drop it. It hits the top of this, and it releases the cable, and the Nansen bottle is full of seawater – that area – and it turns over. When

it turns over, it closes the valves, top and bottom. As it closes, it drops the next [inaudible] for the next Nansen bottle. You can hold your hand on it. You can feel the cable move when it flips. When you get the last one, then you bring it up, and you unscrew them, and you take them out. There's a little valve in there. You pour the water into a ball, you label it, and then you put it away. Well, we were doing – we've done that a lot of times on the ship that I was on with (Seaburg?). We took a lot of Nansen bottles on the *Surveyor*. In 1960, I was teaching someone how to do it, and I reached over to get a case of empty bottles, and when I did, my back cracked. I was in the process of making this boat sheet for the ship. In three days, we had to do the – it was a mammoth job with no equipment and nobody to help me. I had to teach everybody. Anyway, my back started getting worse and worse. The doctor said, "You got to decide whether you want to be over or up straight." I chose to be over. I couldn't bend up much. Finally, I finished it with the help of the crew and officers. We sent it up to the captain, and I went to bed. [inaudible] came by to see me, and I was trying to get out of bed, and I couldn't get out. He said, "To hell with this, Sam," so he went and got some help. They carried me down to the sick bay, and the doctor gave me a shot to relax the muscles. Captain Matheson came down and said, "If you wanted a day off, why didn't you ask for it?" And he left. I don't know whether he was joking or serious. It bothered me. I never did ask him if he was joking or serious.

MG: You had started to talk about this training in oceanography that you were taking at the University of Washington.

SB: They showed us how to take the samples, and then they had the machine for getting the salinity. They told us that in the Atlantic Ocean, the reason the Navy developed the bathysphere, where they dropped it down, and they recorded on a smokescreen screen – a little needle – is because the water from the Mediterranean Sea when it comes into the Atlantic Ocean, lots of it isn't mixed with the other water; it stays together. You can locate that by the specific gravity of it. The Germans had a great oceanographic system. They found out that sonar wasn't as effective in certain areas of the zone, these salt zones in the Atlantic Ocean. That's the reason they were [inaudible] in that area while they were quiet. The American ships with sonar couldn't detect them there as well. It was a very interesting course. It lasted about six weeks, I think, about twice a day, twice a week. Maybe it was longer, maybe ten weeks, and gave us a lot of practical experience. I used it almost on every cruise from then on.

MG: Jumping back a bit, after the war, you were in New Orleans and Pensacola for some time. Were you still in the Marines at that point?

SB: Well, the Marines put me down as discharged from New Orleans because they had a naval base and a marine detachment. I didn't want to get out that early, so I didn't take my health record with me. When I reported for a discharge, they said, "Where's your health record?" I said, "I don't know." "They didn't send it to you?" I said, "No." They said, "Well, would you take a discharge without a health record?" I said, "No. I want you to have a ...". Excuse me. [RECORDING PAUSED] Ask me that question again.

MG: I asked about being in New Orleans and Pensacola.

SB: I had some friends going to LSU up at Baton Rouge. On the weekend, I'd go up there. They asked me to stand duty. I did. I said, "Okay, I'll stand it during the week, but not on the weekend." I went to see [Andrew Jackson] Higgins. If you're looking at the World War Two record, he built the Higgins boats that went ashore, and they had a ramp that dropped down. They were now building structures where they put two ceramic panels, steel panels, and foam concrete between them. It was colorful because they had enamel on the outside. The refrigerator was panels with a door. They built a rack to go inside. The whole house was really a conceptual house. You could go there in the middle of the day in one of those rooms, and it'd be very comfortable because no external heat could come through the walls. Well, they built a few of them in Ohio, but it was a good concept. I don't know why they couldn't have gone more. Finally, I decided, "Okay, just give me a physical" because I wanted to go to Washington and find out why I wasn't selected for a permanent commission. Then, the events that happened there changed everything. When Commander Pierce came out to teach me how to clean the instruments, then that changed my whole career as well.

MG: Was that your introduction to the Coast Survey?

SB: Well, I was when I was doing the safety surveys, I was in the Coast Survey as a professional. But then, when I became a deck officer, which they don't have anymore, that was a prelude to going into the Commissioned Corps. He was there in September. I think I served about six or seven months as a deck officer. I took a big cut in pay to go to be a deck officer.

MG: What I want to make sure I understand is your introduction to the Coast Survey and how you joined.

SB: Well, when Commander Pierce came out, we had a good relationship, the two of us, because he was staying in that same house I was staying in, and we rode together to my work. At night, we rode to get food and so forth. He told me about the commissioned service. And he said, "Why don't you join us?" And that's when I said, "Well, send me the papers." I submitted my papers, and we were in touch by telephone. I didn't see Charlie Pierce again until '57 when we were in Ketchikan with the *Explorer*. I have a picture of Charlie Pierce coming aboard the *Pathfinder* for lunch. I'm a lieutenant commander, and he's an admiral, and there's Captain Quinn. What was his skipper's name of the *Explorer*? He was there. We have a picture of him in the wardroom. I don't know what is going on in the wardrooms today. I remember the wardrooms being like a very, very nice hotel dining room. We had decorum. You dressed. On Sunday, you put on your coat and tie. During dinner at night, we oftentimes wore coats. Maybe it was foreign to some of the people, but I liked it. As a matter of fact, here where I live, we have two dining rooms. One, men don't have to wear a coat. The other one, the men do. The food is different. About half the items are the same. I love to go in there because I relax. Maybe I'm different. I don't know. But I think it's much nicer to be dressed up. I never learned anything about a deck officer. I just accepted the fact. I don't remember where I was sworn in as a deck officer. Maybe I went to somebody. They swore me in.

MG: That was your first position with the Coast Survey as a deck officer.

SB: As an officer class, yes. Then, when I was sworn in September the first by Captain Peacock, that's when I got a uniform. I went to the naval base in Pensacola and bought a uniform because I was going to be in uniform.

MG: I think next time, I'll just ask you in a little bit more detail about your assignments with the Coast Survey, and you can walk me through your career. You've given me an overview and so many anecdotes already, but I want to make sure we're not missing anything from your career. I'll look forward to that.

SB: All right. Thank you, Molly.

MG: Thank you. So nice to see you. Be well. Good luck with your book events.

SB: Thanks a lot. Bye-bye.

MG: All right. We'll be in touch.

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