EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #109

Capt. Eugene Somers

USNA Class of 1941

May 12, 1988

Interview #1

I went to the Naval Academy in the summer of 1937. Prior to going, I had finished Winfield (Kansas) High School and completed one year at Arkansas City Junior College. I went in without a competitive entrance exam. I got a direct appointment on the basis of my one year of college.

Coming from the Midwest where I had lived made for an abrupt entry into not only the East Coast, where I never had visited before, but also into a military academy. I didn't even know what one looked like, much less ever been part of one. But I was fascinated with it. I was just as happy as I could be to be a part of it. I had good roommates who were more experienced in the military environment than I, and they did a lot toward indoctrinating and helping me get started during my plebe summer. In the first two years I did well at the Naval Academy in the things in which I was grounded, such as mechanical drawing, English, mathematics, and chemistry. But hanging in there was not without problems because the work environment was very, very stringent and hard. I really liked the outdoor aspects and the camaraderie of the school—all male at that time. I really felt that I had a great opportunity and I worked hard to stay there and do as well as I could. The

boys who came in through prep schools or who had a naval background had a lot going for them; they could hit the ground running when they got there. They knew what they were supposed to do and what it was all about.

[Well, a significant portion of them went through those prep schools to give them an edge.]

Yes. One of my roommates went to Randall Prep, which is almost like the Naval Academy's first year, so he was more or less repeating his first year there. He knew about reveille and the room inspections, which were all new to me. He softened the blow for me. We went to Europe on our midshipman cruise and did the East Coast cruise in destroyers during our second class summer. We did a South American cruise during our senior year. Of course, we were cut short, as you know, and had a February 1941 graduation due to the imminence of war.

After graduation, I went to destroyers. I put in for an East Coast destroyer and got a West Coast destroyer, of course. Actually, I got an East Coast destroyer that had gone west to Hawaii by the time I joined her. I went into a rotation of duties and ended up as an assistant gunnery officer. Usually, you did a little engineering, a little deck, and a little gunnery—that sort of thing.

[What destroyer was this?]

This was the *BUCK* DD420, a one-stacker. It was a rather new destroyer. I joined her in Honolulu. We sailed out of Honolulu for what we thought was to be ten days of fleet exercises, but instead it turned out to be a classified mission. As soon as we got out of sight of land, we went alongside a cruiser and exchanged mail. When our mail was opened, it

ordered the *BUCK* to proceed to Guantanamo Bay to join a special task force. We had left people on the dock; wives were coming out.

[This was in the summer of 1941 before the war had gotten underway.]

Yes. We peeled off with a cruiser, three or four destroyers, and I believe, a battleship, which created a little division. We transited the Panama Canal at night so we couldn't be seen, supposedly; however, there was a Japanese freighter on the Pacific side as we went through at dusk. We went through on the night of June 6 and 7. We went to Guantanamo and picked up provisions—no liberty at all—and then to Newport. Only the skipper and the exec got ashore in Newport, where they picked up some maps and charts and further orders. We left and ended up in Argentia, Newfoundland, where we joined a task force to take U.S. Marines over to Iceland. It was, essentially, a non-stop trip from Honolulu to Iceland. From then on, the ship was in wartime status. We dropped our first depth charges on July 9. I remember it because my brother's birthday is on July 9. We were on the North Atlantic run.

After about three crossings, I left the *BUCK* and went to the *WILKES*. The *WILKES* had been in two major accidents. In the first one, she had had her bottom damaged in Newfoundland when she ran around with three or four other destroyers. She had to spend a couple of months in the Boston Navy Yard. After she had been fixed up and was being sorted out, she was rammed at the harbor entrance and was put back in the Boston Navy Yard that same night.

[She was an unlucky ship!]

She was unlucky. I joined her just as she was leaving after that second set of repairs. I felt at the time that I had had a string of intensive duty. The *BUCK* had been just

coming in for an extended overhaul for something like six weeks or so and I had been looking forward to that because I was very much in love with a young lady at the time (whom I later married). Instead, I walked off the *BUCK* onto the *WILKES* and out again. The *WILKES* was the junior ship at sea and she always had to be the first one to sortie and the last one to come in. You know how things work when you're the junior man. It's like being a graduate student.

I stayed on the *WILKES* and we did some more crossing of the North Atlantic, to Londonderry, and to Scotland, and up in those northern waters. It was a bad time to be there—a very intense battle of the Atlantic then. You would never fail to see flotsam and jetsam. The weather was terrible most all the time. When it wasn't cold and windy, it was foggy and windy.

We left convoy duty and went to the invasion of North Africa. We were at Casablanca. Then a couple of trips later, we went into the Mediterranean and were based in Bizerte with the Third Army. We supported the Army troops in their invasion of Sicily. My old ship, the BUCK, was sunk shortly after that while making an attack on a suspect submarine. She blew up. Less than a third of the crew got off. They think it was either a mine or a torpedo that hit her when she was making an approach for a depth-charge attack.

Then I left the WILKES and went to a new ship, the MARSHALL. She had been built by the New York Shipbuilding Company, and we took her on the shakedown cruise. We went straight out to the Pacific with the fast carriers to Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. We were at the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea. We got in a lot of shooting, a lot of activity, and a lot of travel. Of course, there were kamikazes, but we never got hit. We were pretty well-trained.

Then I came back and picked up a new picket destroyer in Orange, Texas. We were heading from for the Panama Canal to go back out to the Pacific when we got word to come back and join a task force up in Casco Bay, Maine. They were doing experimental gunnery work, trying to find an answer to the kamikaze problem. That was Admiral W.A. "Ching" Lee's task force. Admiral Lloyd Mustin also played a very prominent role in this. (His son Lloyd Mustin, Jr., is now a rear admiral.) We started operating with this task force, Task Force 69, out of Casco Bay, and it was very interesting. Engineers from M.I.T., Lincoln Labs, and Harvard would come out and ride on our ships to watch us fire and would take down data and perform analyses. They would go back and make modifications to the equipment—quick modifications to guns, and modifications in techniques and tactics—and we would go back out the next week and try those changes. It was a fast turnaround in those days. We had the money and the people were organized. To try to do now what we did then would take ten times as long. You would have to go out and fire, then come back in and write a report, then the report would have to go some other place, and then it would get lost…The test and evaluation, incidentally, we were so successful that they continued the group after the war ended. It is now the OpTeVFor, Operational Test and Evaluation Force, based in Norfolk. Any weapons, before they go to the Fleet, have to be tested and evaluated by OpTeVFor. Somebody made a very sound decision when they created that group.

After the war ended, instead of being the gunnery officer on the destroyer and participating in the exercises, I joined Admiral Lee's staff that became OpTevFor—it was OpDevFor at the time. I participated in the evaluation of weapon systems, ammunition, and tactics. I was the staff officer that rode the destroyers out to sea.

I resigned from the staff—resigned my regular commission—and picked up a reserve commission. I was in the F.B.I. when the Korean War broke out three years later, but my experimental developmental gunnery work took me back on active duty into a special weapons project, the nuclear weapons developmental group, which was a joint Army/Navy/Air Force group. I spent five years of active Navy service in that group. Then I went to the C.I.A. to their nuclear energy division, producing worldwide intelligence on nuclear programs. This was particularly pointed, of course, at the Soviet Union and their development programs, saying when they were going to have what kind of weapons and how many. That was our main mission in life.

I keep active in the Navy as much as I can. I live right outside of the Naval Academy gates. When we moved in and got settled in a little bit, I went over and volunteered to help at the academy in any way. Fortunately, I got a call to work in the U.S. and International Studies Division. One of the professors wanted to do some outside work and he asked me to give some lectures.

[You would be right at home in international affairs, I would think.]

Right. I had firsthand experience.

[I would think there is a lot that you cannot talk about in regard to your international expertise.]

Yes, there are instances and operations that we can never talk about. But there was still plenty to make a good presentation. I chose to talk on the role of intelligence in international affairs. There is a lot we can say on that—how the National Security Council was formed, how intelligence is collected, etc. Of course, you get some real fancy questions.

[Especially from a class of bright young midshipmen.]

Then they have the Naval Academy Foreign Affairs Conference every year. I think there are about three hundred in attendance from all over the world. Most of the attendees are in their senior year but some are in their junior year. They form into round tables—into discussion and topic groups. I monitored one of those last year when the topic was the role of technology in international affairs. I was capable and fairly up to date on that. I chose to be an observer. I just sort of roamed around and helped out where I could. I hope I can participate in the conference every year. It's a week of really excellent speakers, like Jean Kirkpatrick and General Haig. They haven't had Ollie North, but might some day.

The Naval Reserve Far East unit is based in Tokyo, but the meetings are all over the Far East. I used to go to those and commanded the unit for two years.

[For a good portion of your time with the C.I.A you were out of the country, were you not?]

Yes, about fifty percent of the time. It's very unusual for a technical person to be outside that much. I probably had more time outside than any other technical person in the C.I.A. The C.I.A is divided into intelligence producers, operations, and technical. Those are the three career branches. It's very seldom that they let the technical people into the operational side. I bridged that gap and it made a very interesting career. I was able to combine the best of both. For instance, when I was in Tokyo, I was responsible for the air operations—the products of over-flights—that came through there. There were a lot of problems in those days, with Gary Powers and that group flying. It was a highly exciting time then, really.

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #109

Capt. Eugene Somers

USNA Class of 1941

May 10, 1989

Interview #2

[We went over very briefly your stay at the Naval Academy, Captain, and if you could go back to that a little bit and any additional observations you may have with regard to the academics. You commented that it was hard, but you didn't really say anything about your coursework. I know the regimen there is quite different from what it is in other academic settings.]

The first thing that struck me was the lack of choices in our curriculum. We could choose a language; Spanish, French, German, or Italian. Other than that, there were no options. Now of course, there are many.

Also, we were graded every day in every class. We would have assigned reading or study sessions and were expected to be able to discuss any subject matter in the course of that reading. We were graded every day on what we wrote on the blackboard or gave as an oral presentation in the classroom. It was a very regimented and demanding grading system.

I forget the exact proportion of our grade that was based on daily recitation versus our six-weeks exams. I do know exams counted for a lot, because I got caught in my second year on two exams that I felt I had passed, and I had not. In fact, I got very poor grades; with 2.5 being passing, I got a 1.3 and a 1.8 on physics and math. Those were fairly strong subjects for me. Students would always compare notes after we got out of the exams, "What did you get for number 1; what did you get for 2?" I felt I had done well, and then discovered that I got these miserable grades on the exam, that made me "Unsat." I lost my Christmas leave, and was in danger of leaving the academy. I had to work extremely hard to bring those two subjects up to a 2.5 by the end of the mid-term. I did so by giving up everything else, putting blankets over the windows and doors after "taps," studying at night, and studying under my blanket--just literally cramming. I had to get at least what we called "star grades," 3.5, 3.4, in the second half, to bring those failing grades up to a 2.5. I did it.

[Do you think that this system is superior to what is used in normal educational circles?]

The Naval Academy has to cover a very, very broad and extensive amount of material in a very short time. That's what they were trying to do, I think, give us an introduction to all of the subject matter in four years. Now you're not expected to have this thin layer of knowledge across such a broad range of subjects. I think they go into more depth--more specialization.

Several young men who came in had very strong academic backgrounds. These were men with two or three years of college. I recall one, Jim Bradley, in the class of 1945,

who actually had a degree in electrical engineering when he entered the academy. However, he still had to start with freshman physics and chemistry. He had to do the whole thing, but to him it was a breeze, and, of course, he got good grades. My academic background was good, I went to good schools in Kansas and had one year of college.

[What about discipline? I've heard a lot about the harassment of the plebes by the upper classmen and this type of thing. Any experiences that you particularly remember?]

Yes. I was harassed along with all the other plebes, but I didn't come from a bed of roses in my youth. I grew up in a large family and we were taught discipline. I don't think the discipline bothered me as much as it bothered a lot of others. I felt that I was mistreated on only one occasion. An upperclassman, who I felt was a bit sadistic, got a broom and beat my ass until it hurt. I was physically hurt and bruised.

[I have heard that that happened.]

I didn't think that I deserved it.

[Anyone that you knew?]

Yes, he was a second classman down the hall. Everybody knew him. He was noted for being a little bit mean to many of the plebes. He was not well liked by even his classmates, and was not commissioned upon graduation.

[Someone from the class of 1940?]

I think so. The class above is always the one that gives you the worst time.

[Well, you also have a kind of protector in there, do you not? Your sponsor from your first classman.]

I had a good first classman, but I don't think I ever had to call on him to temper somebody's actions. I didn't find the hazing was really that bad. Of course, some people became targeted by upper classmen for some obscure reasons; they thought he was getting away with something, or he had tried to get away with something, or he fought the system and they saw it as "training" or retribution. I got along pretty well with everybody. I guess I was so busy with academics that I didn't have time to get into a lot of trouble.

[What about the faculty?]

I remember them as, I guess, impersonal--they of stood apart. I don't think I had a personal relationship with any of them. I can't recall a single incident where I had a personal contact outside the classroom.

[What about Uncle Beanie?]

Yes. He was good. He was our company officer and became sort of a father figure to us. He was a much loved man and deserved every bit of it. He taught us to be Naval officers. He had a certain amount of compassion for our class and, I think, for most people. He was the type of person who got respect by just being himself. He was a good role model for us and a good influence while we were there. He helped to ease the bumps and grinds of daily living. He had a sense of humor that would peek through every once in a while in the midst of the heavy discipline. He could get you out of some pretty dark corners when you felt the walls closing around you.

[I've heard some say that he didn't take things too seriously, overtly seriously.]

Overtly, right, but he was a serious man.

[He put things in the proper frame of reference.]

He was a very professional Naval officer, but he was a good enough Naval officer that he didn't have to be overly militant about it. He was, above all, a human being. I think that in a tough battle situation, he would have been as tough as anybody you ever knew. At the Naval Academy, he was there to build character in young men and his approach to it was not to beat them into submission, nor to insist on an undue amount of discipline, but to build men into leaders and good officers. Those are the kind of people you look back on as the ones you'd like to emulate.

[What about extra-curricular activities; athletics and stuff?]

Intramural sports were all I had the time and the skills for. I came from a small midwestern town. We had no large organized sports program; we had no football team. Track and basketball seemed to be big sports in high school, but Winfield High athletes were not in the league to compete with the boys who had come in from larger schools. At the academy I went out for boxing--the company boxing team--and was in a match or two, but I was seriously outclassed.

[Did you do much sailing on the bay?]

I loved to sail and go out on the small boats. The last two years, I had my license in all classes of boats from "star" down through half-raters. A group of friends used to take the boats out on Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. During second class summer, we could take overnights up and around the bay to St. Michaels, Oxford, and Easton and other places in that area. I enjoyed that.

[When you took an overnight, did you sleep on board?]

We would leave on Saturday noon, eight of us, with a crew and an engineer on board a forty-foot launch with sails. We'd go up the bay to some place where there was a regatta, go ashore, have a good time, then come back to the boat to sleep. The next morning, we might go ashore or perhaps just cruise back and have a swim off the boat. It was fun, a nice outing.

[When you left the Naval Academy, you were assigned to the *BUCK* and spent some time in the North Atlantic. You commented that you dropped your first depth charge on July 9, 1941, which is well before the United States was involved in World War II. Are there any details you recollect of the circumstances of this action at this point in the war?]

Yes, details are still clear. Europe had been at war for sometime. The Nazis were winning the Battle of the Atlantic. A small number of U.S. destroyers were assigned to support the British in keeping the lifeline to the United Kingdom open. On our first trip across the Atlantic the *BUCK* was part of a very mixed escort group that was taking four large convoys across the Atlantic. The group was composed of British Corvettes, Canadian Corvettes, Australian Corvettes, Polish-manned British Corvettes, old destroyers--anything that could make the crossing and carry depth charges was put into service. Some were old four-stack destroyers that were converted up in New York and Boston and handed back to the British. I had a classmate, Tom Wolfe, on an A.V.S four-stacker, and went to visit him in Argentia, Newfoundland. He had a tiny stateroom and had installed a hammock across the top of his bunk to catch the seawater leaking in through the seams of the ship.

[I think Captain Hagerman was in one of those four-stackers up there during that period of time.]

Yes, he was.

The ships were old and just barely able to make it in the rough North Atlantic. None of our ships not even our new ship the *BUCK*, was built for the North Atlantic weather. I recall that on several crossings a seam at midships on the *BUCK*'s deck would crack open and we'd have thick steel plates welded over it every time we came back into harbor.

The *BUCK* was sea-worthy enough, but still was not built nor equipped for that kind of duty. I don't know if you have ever been in the North Atlantic in winter, but the weather is something beyond anything you could conceive of. Our searchlight on the after deck house, high above the waterline, was knocked over one time. Thirty- or forty-foot waves were not uncommon and we would roll and pitch for the entire crossing.

[This is strictly from the weather and the violence of the sea. No problems with icebergs or anything.]

No icebergs, but we would ice up. Going into a storm, the life lines would become ropes of ice, three to four inches in diameter. We'd get so much ice on the deck and superstructure that the ship would actually get top heavy. One could tell by the period of the roll of the ship when it was reaching a danger point. We would then turn and go with the wind and sea so teams of men could go out on deck with clubs and baseball bats to break the ice off.

[You had to break the ice off?]

Yes, then we would turn back into the storm and rejoin the convoy. We would get as far as we could and do the same thing again. We were not equipped at all for northern

operations. The crew had no foul weather gear worthy of the name. We had pea jackets but they were not waterproof. It was very difficult to be a lookout on the bridge, dressed in a pea jacket, a little sweater, and no boots. I would say it was almost two years before we really got good Navy-issue heavy weather clothing. In 1941-42, we actually picked up boxes of clothing from the Red Cross in Boston, so we would have enough warm clothing at sea--out of uniform, but somewhat comfortable.

[What was the reaction of the men to having to deal not only with the weather, but also with the fact that they were in a war-time situation when the United States was still at peace with Germany?]

It was high adventure. We loved it. I don't recall a single dissenter, not a single one. We felt we were there first, in a leading role, because everyone knew what was coming. It was just nasty though, just plain nasty. For example, we couldn't cook a decent meal when the ship was rolling heavily because everything on the stovetop would be spilling and grease would become a fire hazard. We would exist on cold sandwiches for days at a time.

[Was there a serious problem of sea-sickness?]

We felt miserable all the time. We would run from the top deck down into our bunks because the worst place to be in rough weather is down below in a closed compartment--it affected everybody. But after being out for two or three weeks on a run, we would become somewhat immune to it. The main problem was hanging on, keeping a hold on something. This was not just a storm; this was day after day of bad weather. The

wardroom had stantions--poles--from deck to overhead beams, between every chair. Each chair was lashed down so it and its occupant wouldn't be catapulted across the wardroom.

[Now how could the German submarines find targets in that kind of weather?]

We often sought bad weather to avoid them. They could find us, but getting up to where they could do a lot of damage gave them problems when it came to firing guns or torpedoes. Basically, they could do little more than stay deep and listen. So we would very often seek bad weather to avoid them.

[For them to come up to torpedo depth would put them right in the middle of the storm.]

You're looking at twenty- to thirty-foot waves. What was the torpedo guidance system going to think when the torpedo was at zero feet and then down up to twenty-five feet? They must have fired a lot of torpedoes that went astray. Incidentally, I have a very good letter from a German submariner that you might be interested in.

[I certainly would. Is this after the war he wrote to you?]

This was written recently. He's been over here now for a number of years, but his sense of recall is phenomenal; where he was, what he did, and how he achieved his ranks. I think it's going to lead up to the point where he has established what submarine sank the *BUCK*. I have received this letter via a survivor of the *BUCK*, George Brooks(?), who is now chairman of the board of the Association of Families of the MIAs and POWs.

[Well, the German--you said he is here in the United States now--where does he live?]

He lives, I think, around the Chicago area. He gives a very good accounting of the German submarine service; he has written on what some of the disciplines and operations were. He apparently has made quite a study of documents that have become available from both German and U.S. resources since 1945.

Back to your original topic concerning depth charges dropped before war was initiated. On a routine patrol during escort of troop ships we picked up a good sound contact on a submerged object and the captain made the decision to attack. We did so and the results were undetermined.

[Do you have any other thoughts about your duty on board the *BUCK* early in the war?]

Well, it was just hard. I've often said that the hardest part of the whole war for me was that period, the first year after we came around from the Pacific, because we weren't prepared for it. We were learning. It was hard just to exist at sea. We were on watch-and-watch all the time at sea, then running a division and training in between, and when we came into the yard we had a list of voyage repairs as long as our arm. We had to be aboard almost full time to see that the repairs were all taken care of. The turn-around time was very quick. We might be out six weeks and then in the yard for only six days.

[Do you know whether we lost any ships in that North Atlantic run due to icing up?]

I do not know if any capsized, but several were lost due to poor visibility and navigational errors caused by the wind and sea conditions.

The next ship I went to, the *WILKES*, was in an incident where the *WILKES*, the *POLLUX*, and the *TRUXTUN* went aground up in Newfoundland, ripping out their bottoms.

The *POLLUX* and *TRUXTUN* were broken up on the rocks and sank, losing a lot of men. The *WILKES* was able to back off after several hours of some remarkable ship handling by her skipper. She was just going out again after repairs in Boston Navy Yard when I was transferred onto her from the *BUCK*. So yes, we did lose those two, and several others in collisions with ships in the convoys.

[None of them capsized as a result of them being top-heavy?]

No. They all made it as far as I know. But I well remember the list of voyage repairs. When we were one-day out from returning an East to West convoy, we would break radio silence and radio our repair orders into Boston Navy Yard: "Will need this, and this and this brace, etc., and this replaced and. . . ." When we got in, there would be seventy-five workmen standing on the dock with their tool kits ready to come aboard. The yard superintendent would come aboard and sit down in the wardroom and we would give him an overall description of the repairs we needed. The workers would be in there with chipping hammers and other tools, starting on work they knew we needed.

[Putting it back together again.]

They patched us up and sent us out again.

[Well, was the duty in the North Atlantic on the *WILKES* pretty similar to that on the *BUCK*?]

Very much so from convoy duties. We did a lot of steaming and dropped many, many depth changes. We were a little bit better prepared for action. Also, we had some operations in the South Atlantic, at Casablanca, and in the Mediterranean.

[And you went into the North African invasion?]

Yes.

[Any specifics on that? Were you involved in shore bombardments during the North African invasion?]

Yes. We were in shore bombardments--supporting the landing troops. We did a lot of firing in there. In fact, we emptied the five inch-38-caliber magazines.

[What was the primary opposition you had to contend with? Was it from subs, shore bombardment or air attacks?]

Exactly that--all of it, and Vichy Fench destroyers and cruisers as well.

[All of the above.]

There was a very tough shore battery at Fedala, right above Casablanca. We had quite a duel with them for some period of time, right at dawn. The destroyers led the landing boats in as far as we could, probably to within 3,000 yards of the beach. The troops landed, just before dawn, and we provided them with gunfire support as they hit the beaches. We expended well over seventeen-hundred rounds of five inch-38-caliber ammunition in counter-battery fire. The action was pretty well subdued by mid-afternoon. However, there were some Vichy French ships that came up from the south. We didn't have radar, so we didn't pick them up, but they knew where we were. The first notice we had of their arrival was from a number of red and green dye-colored spouts of water coming up. The French were firing spotting rounds at us from their destroyers and cruisers. Each ship had a specific dye color, so they could tell from which ship the shots had been fired. I remember they splashed water on us, and we were straddled, but we didn't receive any hits.

We returned fire and the *WILKES* is credited with setting one destroyer afire, causing it to be beached just north of Fedala.

[Did you all move out or react?]

We reacted, but we were called back. The skipper was a very aggressive wonderful officer and as soon as he found out where the shells were coming from, he went to flank speed and headed toward them preparing to launch our torpedoes. The division commander called him back. He said, "Somebody else is going to take care of them." We were highly disappointed.

Then several aircraft came over, fired machine gun rounds at us and we fired on them. By night, we had secured the area pretty well. The Allies put down a mine field, with an entrance gate, around the harbor, and the ammunition ships and the troop ships--troops who had not landed in boats--pulled inside the "safe" harbor created by our mine field. We were all settled down for the evening, patrolling outside the gate, when all of a sudden BOOM! The *ELECTRA*, one of our newest ammunition ships, had been torpedoed. Then another ship was hit. These ships were inside the net! What had happened was the enemy submarine in Casablanca harbor had, as soon as the action started, quietly gone to the bottom alongside the pier.

[So they were inside all along when you set it up!]

They were inside. So, in the dark, they came up and sprinkled a few torpedoes around the harbor.

[But how could they get out of there?]

They came up to the surface and went out over the tops of the mines. One of the destroyers picked up a submarine in its searchlight on the surface, heading out to sea--clearly going at best speed on the surface.

[Seems like they were sitting ducks on the surface like that.]

Well, it was dark and there was confusion. We could see the sub directly between the destroyer next to us on the surface going under full power.

We did not have the opportunity to fire on them without the danger of hitting the other destroyer. It was directly in our line of fire. So we held off and watched the submarine slowly disappear as she dived.

We had to be careful. We got a few shots in at the periscope, and we pursued it with the sound gear. We picked up the body of a French sailor the next morning, so either we got him, or the BRISTOL, the other ship, did. That was a nice bit of action.

We sent our crews over to help save some ships that had been torpedoed. I forget how that ended except that it turned into quite an ordeal, because the rescue crews from our ship and several other ships got into the booze lockers and got drunk. Our bo's'n mate came back angry because he had lost his submersible pumps that he had taken over. He had them down the hatch, pumping water out, and some drunk came along with an ax and said, "We're going to just close the hatch." Instead of pulling up the pumps, the drunk cut the lines to the pumps with the ax and dropped them down into the hold of the ship. Our bo's'n mate was really upset.

We actually fired so much during the action that the leather "bloomers" on the guns melted. We emptied most of the five-inch 38-caliber magazines. I was the gunnery officer

and the skipper told me, "You've probably fired more rounds of five-inch 38's than anybody in the Navy." (Probably about 2,000 rounds.)

[You've made reference to the skipper of the *WILKES* a couple of times. Tell us about your skippers on the *BUCK* and the *WILKES*.]

The *BUCK* was a disaster. Our skipper was an alcoholic--a man of not great conviction in anything that he did.

[I thought you weren't permitted to have alcohol at sea.]

Well, I don't know where he got it, but he did. I remember once when the *BUCK* was going out of New York harbor and he was out on the wing of the bridge giving orders. The exec/navigator said, "Let him go." The captain, having just returned from the shore, was so far gone--talking to himself--that his orders were incoherent and meaningless.

[And he stayed in command?]

These were hard times. There was a time when you developed defensive measures and it was all understood. We had enough competent people on there to take charge.

[I would have thought you would have been concerned about going to sea with someone you couldn't put any more reliance on than that.]

We were, but there was nothing we could do about it. He was there. Most of the time, he was harmless and did what he was supposed to do. The best times were when he just stayed in his bunk, stayed down below.

[Let the executive officer run the ship.]

Right. It was exactly the opposite on the WILKES. We had a very bright, very wonderful officer for a skipper, and also for the exec. They made a good team and the exec ran with an even hand, enjoyed life, and thought everybody else should.

[Before you left the WILKES, you took part in the Sicily campaign there. Any particular incidents coming out of that campaign?]

That was an interesting operation. It was not on the same scale of Casablanca for us, but we did a lot of firing in support of the Third Army troops landing and advancing--you could actually see them--maneuvering across the terrain. They took an old abbey that the Germans and Italians had used as a fort. A couple of incidents stand out; one, on the first night of the invasion. We had troop transport planes coming in from nowhere. The destroyers were lined up off of the coast, listening to the radio and responding to what was asked of us in the way of the "call fire." We saw these big transport planes coming in down the beach from us. We didn't get a chance to fire on them, but probably would have if we had had the chance. Other ships fired and brought some of them down; they were our own troops. There must have been, I would say, seventy-five men in each of those planes. I know our ships destroyed one, maybe two or three of them. I've read about that tragedy since and am always grateful that we were not in a position to fire. The incident was attributed to a lack of communications between the troop carrier command and the Navy command.

The second memorable thing was that we got a lot of aircraft action there. Some German Stukas hit one of the ammunition ships that accompanied us--a large ship--and it burned and burned for several hours. Then, I just happened to be looking through the

telescope from the range finder in the director when it blew up. There were apparently a lot of phosphorous shells in the ship because they spun out, spiraling white smoke. It made a very spectacular sight, one I've since seen several times in some of the photographs of World War II.

[In a situation like that, did the crew have time to get off the ship before it blew?]

Probably so. I think it was pretty well abandoned by the time it blew up. It was up the beach about a mile or so. I think that it must have been evacuated.

[You were talking about the planes being shot down. I would think that a situation like that would be moving at such a rapid pace--what with everything going on at the same time--that it would be pretty difficult to have time to really think about what was going on until it was over, wouldn't it?]

Yes. It is often very difficult to sort out the true facts. The incident of friendly fire on the transports was just tragic. In the write-ups that I read, there was a lack of communication. The transport group bringing them in did not let the Navy know that they were coming or there would have been a message saying, "Between ___ and ___ hours, these troops will be arriving at ___. Expect them and be alert for them." Those things happen but need not. It's a shame. It makes you sick.

[It reminds me of the Persian Gulf incident when they shot down the Iranian airline.]

A similar thing happened out in the Pacific one time. We were on patrol duty near Japan and this bogey kept appearing out about ten miles. The division commander sent one of the destroyers (there were three of us) to investigate, but they couldn't identify it through

an exchange of identification signals. I remember this destroyer skipper said, "The next time he comes close enough, we will let him have it," and they did. Then he maneuvered over to pick up the remains and I remember his coming on voice radio and saying, "We have picked up a piece of aircraft debris, with a white star (U.S. markings)." Silence. There was complete silence. Silence sets in a heavy way in those situations. But those things happen. Apparently the electronics were not working properly on the patrolling aircraft.

[After the invasion of Sicily, you left the *WILKES*?]

Yes, and went to new construction--the *MARSHALL*.

[Where was this, back in Brooklyn?]

Yes. That was in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. She was a spanking new twenty-one hundred toner. All the war experience was built into the design.

[When was this, about 1943?]

1943.

[By that time, you had radar, I would think, on new construction.]

Right, radar. We had better gun arrangements and that sort of thing. She was a twenty-one-hundred-ton, flush-deck destroyer, with better living quarters. We were better equipped. The Navy yards were experienced and they turned the ships out in better shape than they had before. The main problem on that ship, as I recall, was the crew. When the crew came aboard on commissioning day, fully three-fourths of them had never been to sea for even one day. We took off from New York to go to Guantanamo from Norfolk for shake-down training in some moderately heavy seas. The decks looked like a holocaust or something--with all those sick soldiers out there. They didn't care where they were: “Don’t

wake me, I'm dying, I don't care, I'm glad." We were doing speed trials, and speed tends to make more people sick. It made me sick because I had been on "yard duty" for a couple of months and had lost my "sea legs." I can always stand a slow roll, but when you get this corkscrew motion, I am vulnerable. Those poor kids!

[Your petty officers were all experienced.]

Yes, they were all experienced at sea. We were all "experienced," two or three years, maybe!

[Who was your c.o. on the *MARSHALL*?]

That was Sinclair Wright. Again, an excellent leader. He was younger than J. B. McLean on the *WILKES*, but a very fine person, a very good leader, a very good Naval officer. He took us all through the commissioning and the training and transit westward to Hawaii.

[Other than sea sickness, the shakedown was fairly routine, I take it.]

We just trained and trained and trained and trained; that's all we did. We selected our crew, got our battle bill in shape; tried this man as a loader, this man as a passer, this man on twenty-millimeter or forty-millimeter or five-inch. . . . We were "building a crew;" organizing 350 to 375 men into a cohesive organization. We trained fast in those days because we were at sea so much. While at sea, we could train. We got the fundamentals in camp and around training centers, but it was altogether a different story when we were out to sea.

[You learned fast when you're out in the theater of war.]

That's right--big incentive--and free from encumbrances, with nothing else to do. We drilled everyday. Everyday, we'd have loading drills and firing drills. We fired target practice at anything you could see, a barrel, a box or any floating object. We made depth-charge runs. A lot of it was impromptu. The skipper could go up and call out a quadrant at any particular time. We didn't know whether it was training or real. We could get raw recruits into good shape in a very short time. We had to because crew turn-over was fantastic due to the rate of new ship construction. On those North Atlantic runs, we'd come back and BuPers would strip off a third of the crew every time and send them off to new construction. They were the seasoned ones--they had made a trip or two and were old hands. Then we'd get an equal number of raw recruits.

We got many different kinds of people. One time, I think it was on the WILKES, we had thirty or forty men who had been given BCDs, bad conduct discharges, on anything from murder to AWOL--missing their ship--but they wanted a second chance and we took them.

[You needed manpower.]

We needed manpower and they wanted a second chance. They made out pretty well. Young, yes, some of them were so young. I was young then, but these looked like fourteen- or fifteen-year old kids. I remember this one young fellow, a blond kid, named Dean. We used to kid him, "Tell us how old you really are!"

[They would claim about seventeen or eighteen.]

Oh, yes. But, I know he wasn't. He was kind of a mascot more than anything else--probably fourteen- or fifteen-years old.

[The *MARSHALL* then went to the South Pacific.]

Yes.

[In time for Saipan?]

Saipan, Tinian, Guam, and the second battle of the Philippine Sea.

[What role did you have?]

Gunnery and senior watch stander.

[What role did the *MARSHALL* play in these engagements?]

Her principal role was picket duty--screening around the fast carriers. Although we did some shore bombardment in support of the landings, we were particularly involved in the trips and screening between Japan and the task force. We would interpose a picket line between Okinawa and Japan and operate around it. But mostly, we provided an anti-aircraft screen for the carriers. We did do a little landing support, but mainly it was our job to stay with the carriers and be on that outer screen, protecting the carriers. In the second battle of the Philippine Sea, of course, we got in lots of shooting--the big "Turkey Shoot" day! We had a lot of good well-trained gunners on that ship.

[Right.]

I recall that once when several destroyers in the screen were firing at towed sleeves for practice, the *MARSHALL* had knocked down the target in three or four successive runs. The destroyer squadron commander sent the message: "To give the rest of the screen a chance, *MARSHALL* will not fire on subsequent runs." We were proud!

On the day we went after the Japanese task force, the first position report of the enemy was in error. Our planes had already been launched to attack, having been gone for

an hour or so when they got a second position report. The enemy was much more distant than the original position reported. It became obvious to everybody who was listening in on the traffic that our guys couldn't get there, attack the enemy ships, and get back. It was obvious that we were going to have a lot of aircraft losses, and we did. All that night, we were up--lights on in the task force--searchlights up in the air, things I hadn't seen in three years, and our planes were coming back.

[Did that increase the danger to the task force by being lit up like that? Did that make it perfect for subs?]

Perfect for submarines or any other attacking aircraft that might be around, but it was the chance we had to take. The planes coming back might have enough fuel to make one pass--one carrier, one landing--or maybe none and they'd have to land in the water.

[There was no thought of moving the task force closer to them?]

Oh, we went like bats out of hell from the time the second position report came in. We turned around and went flank speed to close the distance. I remember the carriers could go faster than the destroyers in any kind of sea, and they even went out ahead of us--left the rest of us. It was that serious. Unfortunately, in order to recover the planes, the carriers had to turn around to provide wind across the deck, and widen the gap again because of the prevailing wind direction. That worsened the situation. Every time they were recovering, it would stretch out the distance the returning planes had to fly. I don't know how many planes we lost. I would guess a few hundred, but they were replenished within the next week or so.

[You were losing a lot of manpower there also.]

Most of the manpower survived. We brought in six or eight pilots the next day. We steamed on the path that they had taken for the attack and return, and on destroyer line abreast, picking up everyone we could see.

[Everything was calm and the water was warm so they could survive.]

Yes, favorable except for sharks. Sharks came to most every site where we were picking up the rubber boats. A shark would be out, sniffing around a cigarette pack or something the crew had thrown over. We kept a Thompson submachine gun on the bridge, and I remember shooting a shark, walking a line of shots up his back, blood spurting and the other sharks going after it. The pilots were glad to see us.

[You were actually quite lucky though, that the Japanese did not have a number of submarines out there.]

We were. We really were. They could have taken their toll.

In the middle of all this melee--in the darkness and with the lights on, jammed up flight decks, and crews coming in shot up or something--one pilot came in against orders. The flight deck was fouled because an aircraft had landed and broken its landing gear and couldn't taxi up in front of the barrier. This pilot said he was coming in and the landing officer said, "You can't come in. The flight deck is fouled." The pilot said, "I'm coming in anyway. It's my last pass. I have absolutely no gas." He did come in and he ran into the plane that was parked there and killed a crewman who was in the back seat of the plane. That's something to live with.

[It would have been better if he'd ditched his plane and let them pick him up.]

Right. We had no problem with that. I don't remember losing a single pilot to a controlled water landing. Planes ditched easily.

There was a humorous incident in the midst of all this melee. There was one plane up there, circling, with a red light flashing. It was a Japanese plane whose pilot was lost off Saipan or Tinian, or some place, and was looking for a place to land. He'd come around and buzz the carrier; he wanted to land aboard, but they wouldn't let him.

[Why?]

He probably would have fouled up the flight deck. The command waited until he was out on the perimeter then had a destroyer shoot him down. I forget whether they recovered him or not. He would have made a good POW.

[Speaking of Japanese aircraft . . . at this point, the kamikazes had come into play, had they not? I know later on there was some testing of trying to improve the response to kamikazes, but at this point in time, what was your experience?]

We had lots of shooting while in the circular screen around the carriers, all of this was controlled by doctrine and we had fun but restrictions as to sectors. Some successes, some got through. However, we had some that came very close. Once when we were out on picket duty, right in the shimmer of the moon between the task force and Japan, this plane came in on us and went right over us at stack level. We got only a few rounds off and he disappeared. I don't know whether we downed him or not, but we couldn't find any visible evidence that we had.

[You didn't see him hit the water?]

I think we did. He came right in on us at high speed and low level, and dropped a torpedo. The crew saw the bubbles from the torpedo run, but it must have run deep under us. There was absolutely no reason for him to miss.

[What kind of feeling did you get--I know things were moving so fast that you don't have time to stop and think about your feelings--but seeing that torpedo drop right in your path?]

You just decide to do the best you can.

[You react?]

You react. That's right. I had the deck when he was coming in and I called the skipper. We had a new skipper who was not as popular as the first. He came out and I wanted to go to General Quarters (and should have) because I'd watched this thing develop. This was not the skipper that we had before. This was another commander, one we had picked up in Honolulu--a lot like the first one on the *BUCK*. He said, “Well, let's look at it. Let’s be sure.” As soon as Don Amato, the watch officer, came up, I said, "Don, go to General Quarters. I'm going to the director." Just as I went up the ladder and was diving into the gun director, the gunnery officer's position, this Japanese plane went “woosh.” We got off a few rounds of five-inch .38 and 40 mm but had no confirmed hits or debris. It happened so fast. What are you going to do?

[I thought you automatically went to General Quarters and then thought about it after you were in position.]

We should have. We had the director manned and were tracking the target, and had "ready" five-inch 40mm guns loaded and ready to fire. I should have sounded General Quarters before I called him. He was a very strange and cautious man.

[Any other specific incidents there in the South Pacific when you were with the *MARSHALL*?]

We picked up twenty-two or twenty-three Japanese sailors who were off a sunken cruiser. We got to see the enemy firsthand and some of them were very emaciated. They had been at sea for quite some time in an open boat with only a canvas cover. One or two looked like they were well fed--the cook was very fat, really fat--the rest of them were skinny. They'd been baked and starved for some time. We got a lot of souvenirs out of that incident.

[On board ship, where did you put prisoners like that?]

We had them strip as they came on board and then put them up in the fóc's'le under armed guard. We had a little place on the after--called "Tube Alley"--where the propeller shaft goes through. They were long, narrow compartments, not much good for storage or anything back there. We put them back in there, carried them around a while.

[Did you keep them on board until you went back into port?]

No. We passed them over by boatswain's chairs to bigger ships later on. There's a brig aboard the destroyers, although it is also used for other things. There was no hostility that I could see nor was there any from our crew towards them. We were curious about them and they were glad to be aboard, I'm sure. They didn't know what was going to happen to them at first, but gradually, the ice was broken and cigarettes were passed out.

We were asked to assess them for those who appeared to be most intelligent--had any English-speaking capabilities--and these were the first ones passed over to the larger ships for intelligence purposes.

[No one aboard the *MARSHALL* could speak Japanese, could they?]

I don't think so. No. It was up to them to speak a little pigeon English.

[I would think so. After the second battle of the Philippine Sea, you were transferred out of the *MARSHALL* and came back stateside to work on a project for trying to determine how to better respond to kamikaze flights.]

I was detailed to another new ship: the *HENRY W. TUCKER*. She was designed and built as a platform picket ship. The *TUCKER* was one of the few that was built, or modified I'm sure, in the later stage of its being built, with the best radar, and additional guns, and anything new coming along in ammunition. With the commissioning of those ships we were destined to go back out as a radar picket.

[I think you mentioned in the first interview the fact that you had people from MIT and Harvard aboard trying to help design improved ways of dealing with kamikazes. How do you go about improving your response to kamikazes? Did you try to shoot them down before they got to you? What did you do?]

We used different kinds of weapons, fusing and doctrine. For example, there was a barrage fusing, where everything would go off at five hundred yards or a thousand yards or wherever; a VT fusing, testing different kinds of settings on VT fuses; and a proximity fuse set to go off at twenty or thirty feet, whatever, from the target. We also studied different kinds of director controls: Do you wait for a director or do you use sight-control for

individual guns? How much tracking do you put in before you open fire with a five-inch? We also looked at different kinds of gun sights for the forty-millimeters and the twenty-millimeters, the newest ones based on the gyroscopic action. How do you do it? How do you train for it? What kind of ammunition should you use? What tactics?

[The purpose is to try to shoot the plane down quickly, before it gets so close.]

Or chew it up, when it gets in close. One of the big faults of all gunners is opening up too soon so they've expended their rounds by the time it gets within range. They should wait until he's well within range, but then, how do you estimate range? We had things they could hold out in front of them that were designed for the different planes. When the wingspan filled the gap, then the plane would be within range. We had little simple things like that. But, it boiled down, mostly, to experience. And, really, who is going to stand there with this thing held up in front of them to gauge wing span?

[I was getting ready to say, it certainly wasn't modern computerized technology.]

No, but, that was for twenty-millimeter machine gun control. Maybe you would have a lot of second loaders or somebody who's not occupied to perform that function for you. They took a lot of data and did a lot of work. We fired against towed sleeves and different kinds of targets for training, the whole retinue of training.

[Well, how did you simulate a kamikaze attack?]

You couldn't, really. There was no way with something coming in straight at you. They had drones, but even a drone coming in can do a lot of damage aboard a ship, kill people, set a fire. We would train using fast-passing targets. For example, we would have a plane fly low and fast up our beam or across the front of water, or we would have a surprise

drill, put a spotting round out there, telling the crew to "fire on that." Most of the training was in "quick response."

[But that isn't the same as a manned plane diving at you.]

No. I don't know of any way you could simulate that except in sophisticated training devices. The best way to simulate now is in a simulator such as they have for training astronauts. They had something like that at major training centers at the end of the war. The trainee would go into this big training dome, get in a regular harness for a twenty-millimeter or forty-millimeter gun, and there would be motion pictures of Japanese planes diving and coming in at different angles.

[That would be to train your reflexes more than it would be to develop new gunnery.]

Exactly. I don't think they have much today in the way of gunnery that they didn't have then. I'm not sure of that. There are some new types of ammunition, perhaps, to ward off high speed aircraft or missile attacks. It is mainly just getting a lot of stuff up there and as well directed as possible and getting the kind of crew training that would let you respond properly--not too soon and not too late.

[Now, before you were able to get back out into the war zone, it had ended, I take it.]

Right. We had all our training completed on the *TUCKER* and were nearing the Panama Canal, when we got the orders to come back to join this new task force in Portland, Maine. We operated between Portland and Boston. We did our modifications in Boston and our support training up in Casco Bay. We were up there much longer than we expected

to be. I remember the wives came up. We were at first going to be there three weeks, and then we were going to be there another three weeks. The wives didn't know whether to go back home or stay with us. Time together was a precious commodity. We were up there when the war ended.

[Why did you resign after the war ended?]

I guess I was tired. I had a very good job at the time. I was with the Operational Development Force (OPDEVFOR), a newly formed unit to test all ordnance before it was assigned to the Fleet in Norfolk. But I had had a lot of sea duty, and almost no family life. Also, I thought that the Navy was probably headed for a long period of stagnation, slow advancement in rank and that sort of thing. I look back on it and I was either foolhardy or it took a lot of courage. I was married at the time with two boys and I was on a career path that could have led to a very good life. I guess I thought I could make it better.

[Did you go directly to the FBI when you left?]

Exactly. I quit on Friday and went to the FBI as a special agent on Monday. I went through training at Quantico then to the Detroit field office, operating out of there in the northern part of Michigan. Then I came back to Washington and just plain, routine work.

[What was the nature of your work with the FBI?]

In Detroit, it was everything. I would take off on Monday morning with a briefcase full of leads on different kinds of cases. A lead could be for a bank robbery, kidnapping, or it could have been a background investigation--we were doing a lot of background investigations at that time. Some work was on the Alger Hiss case. I remember crawling under the porch of this house in a bad section of Detroit and digging out a jar of money that

had been stolen and buried under there. Agents would get a lead sheet, go to such and such an address, do this, do that, interview so and so, and report back. We would cover that lead then go to the next town and do something else. It was hard work, six days a week, and on the road for five of the six.

I was in Detroit for eight months or so, maybe a year, and then came back to the Washington field office. Here, it was just everybody in town working on background investigations. The Marshall Plan employees; the Turkish Aid Bill officials; and everybody coming into the CIA had to be cleared. The Washington field office was composed of a hundred men doing nothing but just neighborhood investigations, background work.

[Does the FBI get involved in the routine background investigations for security clearances, for example?]

Right.

[That's an enormous number of military personnel alone.]

I think the FBI did it for the CIA until the CIA could do it for itself. Now the CIA does all of its own, and the military does all of their own. The FBI just couldn't possibly handle it. They handle a lot of the senior officials in the executive department--federal judges--and I think that's about where they stop. They couldn't possibly do it all now, it would be an enormous organization.

[It would be so unwieldy. Mr. Hoover, of course, has been more controversial in recent years and since his death. What was the feeling of the agents toward him at this time?]

He was Mr. "God." Benevolent to his agents in a way but ran a very tight ship. If you had a new baby, you got a congratulatory message. I lost my oldest boy to polio while I was an agent and I got a letter of condolence signed by him and a call by a couple of senior officials. They were very attentive to those kind of amenities. On the other hand, if you stubbed your toe and embarrassed the bureau--about the worst thing you could do was embarrass the bureau--you could take a five-hundred-dollar pay cut. If, on the other hand, the next day you went out and captured one of the "ten most wanted," you could get a thousand-dollar raise. He was one of the first officials who got the right to hire and fire at will, without recourse to the normal civil service reclaima.

[So, he used the carrot and the stick.]

Yes, he did. He was able to do that as a condition he set in his agreement to take on the job of Director in the early thirties. Now, there are several agencies, the CIA among them, that have the same policy and privilege. The director can hire and fire at will, without any reclaima.

[I know in more recent years, and also when you were with the bureau, there were claims that there were a lot of investigations of public officials for the purpose of preparing rather sizable dossiers on them. Did you ever experience that?]

No. I never experienced that at all. I really didn't. I think that if it happened, it's overblown. I think it probably did happen later in Hoover's tenure of office. I left there in 1950, and he was a relatively young man at the time.

[I think it was probably in the later years.]

Yes. In the later years, he became vindictive.

[From there, you got involved in nuclear weapons development. In what capacity was this?]

The organization that I went to when I was recalled to active duty in 1950 was a joint atomic weapons development program, the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project (AFSWP). They handled nuclear weapons for all three services: the Army, the Navy, the Air Force. The AEC did all of the development work to meet the requirements stated by the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The military would develop a requirement for, say, a two-thousand-pound air-deliverable weapon with twenty kilotons yield. The AEC would develop that weapon at Los Alamos and Sandia Corporation.

[Was this a reaction to the Korean War or was this something that would have been in the works anyway?]

It would have been in the works anyway because the United States and its allies, were in a very, very tight and deadly race with the Soviet Union. We knew we had to stay ahead of them, because whereas we can have weapons like that and not use them except to maintain peace, we know that the same would not hold true for the Soviet Union. If the Soviet Union, i.e. Stalin and his successors, had the wherewithal to conquer the world, to subdue other world powers, they would have done so.

[How did you get involved with nuclear weapons?]

Gunnery experience. All my experience in the Navy was ordnance and gunnery related. Throughout the war I was either a gunnery officer or a fire control officer, both in the development and operational sense. The DOD had formed this joint group (AFSWP), and they needed personnel with gunnery experience; so I was brought into the Project. I

was assigned to the Naval Ordnance Lab out in White Oaks first, merely working on forming up test teams to go out to the Nevada Test Grounds to measure the effects of atomic weapons: radiation, over-pressure, fall-out, earth movements, acceleration, and so forth.

[You said you'd been pretty good in physics. I reckon that came in handy.]

That's right. I put it to use out there. I went out on two or three fields trips, two or three tests series, and then came into the AFSWP staff at the Pentagon as chief of training to the three services. It was a good job. I like training.

[You were considered to be on active Navy duty at the time.]

Yes. I was a Navy commander--made commander--on active duty and in uniform. I didn't wear a uniform out in Nevada, however. We all wore work clothes out there. It was pretty primitive living--pretty isolated duty. We'd go out there and stay a month at a time for those test shots. When the test program was phased down, I went into headquarters at the Pentagon as Chief of Training for the staff. Most of the actual training was at Sandia Base. I spent a lot of time out there. We designed training courses for the maintenance and delivery of the weapons, and for staff officers studying the effects of atomic explosions. We did an exercise one time on how many weapons it would take to help the French get out of trouble at Diem Bien Phu. What size weapons, where should they be placed, and so forth. I don't know where the request came from or why it came, but we did the work. Of course, they never used it for that. I stayed on active duty for five years, 1950-1955. The scientist who was technical director for AFSWP was "drafted" as the chief technical intelligence officer for the CIA, because of the importance of the nuclear weapons race with

the USSR. He asked me to come over and be the deputy chief of the Nuclear Energy Division of the Directorate of Intelligence in the CIA.

[Now, what would the CIA's involvement be in the nuclear energy field?]

Our principle responsibility was to develop the national estimates of Soviet capabilities. This was a very, very tough job, because we had very little reliable intelligence coming out from behind the iron curtain. There was some information from German scientists returning from the Soviet Union who had been in their program for several years, but they were kept mostly in the research institutes rather than up in weapons production. Through a world-wide network of data collection programs, we measured every nuclear blast that occurred within the Soviet Union.

[Did you try to develop intelligence sources within the Soviet Union?]

We did, yes. We studied everything. We were not able to get a bomb and measure it directly, so we started with the scientific and technical aspects. What are the Soviets studying? Heavy water, uranium? Are they studying other exotic minerals? How many men are they sending out to the uranium fields? How many shovels are they sending out to supply the men who are in the uranium fields? You get into those kinds of tenuous measurements.

[Very basic.]

Well, how do you measure? In those days, we didn't have overflights by the U-2's or satellites.

[No satellites.]

No satellites. How many rail cars of ore could you count in East Germany? There you would get an agent to help you count those railcars. You would try to get a meter near them to measure the radioactivity. You'd try to get a sample to measure the uranium content of the ore. The uranium content of the ore would be so many grams per ton, they've got so many tons in each car and so many cars; you developed those kinds of esoteric measurement systems. Once you get the amount of uranium ore, then how much is going to be converted to plutonium and how much to U-235, or is this done? How many weapons of what yields are possible with the amount of fissile materials produced?

[I hate to cut this off because I'm really interested in this, but if you're going to make your six thirty appointment, I'm afraid I'm going to be running you kind of short.]

Captain F. Eugene Somers USN (Ret.) later retired from the CIA in 1973 after tours of duty in Tokyo (3 1/2 years), London (3 years), and Saigon (2 years). He was then employed by Borg Allen Hamilton from 1973-1985. He then finished out his employment at USATREX International at the State Department from 1985-1999.