

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT J. AMUNDSON
LORAN signal monitor, Coast Guard, World War II
2000

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Amundson, Robert J., (1925-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 48 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 48 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 48 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Robert Amundson, a Baraboo, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a navigator with the Coast Guard. Amundson recalls how he chose the Coast Guard and describes basic training at Manhattan Beach (New York), which included Morse code and swimming. He discusses learning the Long Range Navigation (LORAN) system at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and his work at LORAN stations on Nantucket Island (Rhode Island) and Baker Island (Central Pacific). He touches on being a “gofer” for a construction group at Nantucket Island, moving equipment through the Hawaiian Islands, and organizing at Kanton Island (South Pacific). Stationed at Baker Island for seventeen months, Amundson describes his duties monitoring the LORAN signal. He examines the effects of having a small group isolated on the island and describes entertainment options, which eventually included movies and softball. He talks about the food, the wild birds on the island, an attempt to make a swimming pool using grenades, and Coast Guard dog men with Doberman pinchers who were on dog patrol duty. After three weeks of liberty in Honolulu (Hawaii), he recalls being sent to Moclips (Washington) to work on building another base. He mentions using the G.I. Bill to attend the University of Texas, being inactive with the Coast Guard Reserve, and attending three LORAN group reunions.

Biographical Sketch:

Amundson (b.1925) served with the United States Coast Guard during World War II. He was honorably discharged from service in 1946 and eventually settled in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.

Transcribed by Emily Johnson, Volunteer, 2008.

Checked by Channing Welch, 2009.

Corrections typed in by Katy Marty, 2009.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

Interview Transcript:

- James: It's the 25th of September, year 2000, speaking to Robert Amundson. Where were you born, sir?
- Amundson: Baraboo, Wisconsin.
- James: And, in 1925?
- Amundson: Yes, sir.
- James: And when did you enter military service?
- Amundson: 1943. September 1943.
- James: And where was that?
- Amundson: Ah, we met in Illinois—I honestly don't remember if we were sworn in Milwaukee or Chicago. We had three, four of us that gathered together and that was that.
- James: What branch of service is that?
- Amundson: Coast Guard.
- James: And, how did you happen to choose the Coast Guard?
- Amundson: Well, I was a senior in high school in 1943 and all of us were kind of tested to get in the Naval Air Corps and at that time that sounded like a pretty exotic place to be. And so I had applied to take the test and I passed the test, I was told. I still have some sheet of paper, but I apparently failed the physical and I never figured out if it was feet or eyes (laughs) or what it was. Subsequently I found out it was probably a good idea I didn't get in the Naval Air Corps (laughs). Just think, I might have flown with George Bush, though.
- James: That's true.
- Amundson: Anyway, I was interested, as a lot of young people were at that time, of becoming involved, and most of my classmates were joining or being drafted or something or other and I thought, boy, the Coast Guard is blowing up submarines in the North Atlantic. That sounds pretty exciting. And really, that was kind of the

motivation I guess for joining the Coast Guard. I knew nothing much more about it.

James: Hold it for a second. We need to have your signature so we can -- in this space there. Then we can print any material that we get from this interview.

Amundson: Sure. Ok.

James: When we ever get around to writing a book.

Amundson: Yeah, ok.

James: All right. OK.

Amundson: Yup.

James: Back on cue. Well, I'm not as familiar about Coast Guard training so work me through that. You went to where and how long was it?

Amundson: Yeah. Well, we trained in Manhattan Beach, New York, which actually was the site of a summer resort that the Coast Guard had taken over as a major East Coast training base. And we were there three months and we learned the rudiments, particularly how to obey and (laughs) and something about code, you know. We had a modest introduction to Morse code and—

James: That was standard for all--?

Amundson: Pretty, yes, everybody --

James: Coast Guard recruits?

Amundson: Everybody went through it.

James: You were expected to know the Morse code.

Amundson: Well, you had to know the Morse code at least, you did, at one point I think and you know, to a degree, semaphore. At least we had a rudimentary education in it.

James: I see.

Amundson: We had to practice saving ourselves at sea if we were on a ship that went down or was going down.

- James: How did you practice, swimming in the ocean?
- Amundson: Well, we didn't swim in the ocean. I remember swimming in a swimming pool. One of the practices had to do with taking off a pair of dungarees, tying a knot in each leg and then pulling that into the— (laughs) pulling it down and supposedly there was enough air to keep you going. So that swim would have been pretty exciting.
- James: Somethin' like water wings.
- Amundson: And how to get away from oil, and push oil. And it was--I suppose it was practical and probably people that ultimately used 'em.
- James: Did they train you in any, with any weapons at all?
- Amundson: Well, we had, I don't recall. I honestly don't recall a lot of firing. We did, you know, a lot of marching, and you know, we had the Saturday parades and so on and so forth. And it was a full-blown military operation.
- James: Sure, I understand. Any navigation in that?
- Amundson: Not, again, rudimentary, that was what — you had the blue jackets manual to the extent that that would help you, why --
- James: You knew where to look up the answers.
- Amundson: Yeah, that's right. No specialty education, no training at that time.
- James: Right. So finishing that, then, you're prepared for whatever they ask.
- Amundson: That's basically it.
- James: Right. And so, what did they do with you?
- Amundson: You know how to tie your shoes at least (both laugh). We had, I think we had an option to, at least, apply for certain things. I can remember considering submarine duty. They were looking for, you know, people throughout the services for some of this stuff.
- James: You mean you could just transfer from the Coast Guard to the Navy and --

- Amundson: Aah, mm hmm. I mean that would have been possible, I guess. And I think they were looking for, they must have screened those things pretty carefully because they were looking for the right kind of people and again, I think ultimately (laughs) I don't know that I would have enjoyed being on a submarine. But you know, when you're that age you don't know from nothin' as they say. You take a shot at these things. So, in any event, I—you take a series of tests, and this, we happened to be, a bunch of us were selected to go to school up in Boston which was run by MIT, but it was kind of a rudimentary education again, in this navigation system being developed—had been developed a few years before called LORAN.
- James: Is that an acronym?
- Amundson: Yeah, it's Long Range Aid to Navigation. Couple of letters from each word. And we were there, I think we were up there about three months, two and a half, three months and that was very good duty because we stayed in the Brunswick Hotel, which wasn't a bad hotel at that time. We had basically free liberty, most of the time. We had little, small duties. We had occasionally to hit the dinner detail, dish detail I guess or something like that. And once in awhile, we'd have to help load a ship or whatever. But that was—our basic function was to try to learn something about this system.
- James: Was this difficult?
- Amundson: No, I don't think it was difficult because, I think, a lot of it was over our head. I mean the technical part of this stuff was—
- James: But what they asked of you was not legitimate –
- Amundson: No –
- James: You didn't have to know all that.
- Amundson: No, we—you know you had to pay attention and you had to—
- James: But you're dealing with radio signals, it that --
- Amundson: Yeah, basically that's it. Yeah, it was, well, the set up was a signal would go out of a master station and it would feed two slave stations that would be tuned into that frequency and they would, the operators would make sure that that signal matched the blip signal-type thing. And they'd drift and need adjustment and so on

and so forth. As long as they were in sync, why ships and planes could receive that signal and determine their navigational position.

James: Then they knew where they were.

Amundson: Yeah, mm hmm. It was apparently a very successful system. It was used extensively in the North Atlantic throughout the Greenland coast and up through there, Nova Scotia, Green -- and it was used along the East Coast and ultimately along the West Coast. But it was primarily, at least the part I was acquainted with best, was in the Pacific. It stretched from the shoreline of the United States, ultimately at least, to uh, all the way to the Philippines and basically to Japan by the time the war was over.

James: These are radio waves that would curve with the earth.

Amundson: That was my understanding, I guess, and I --

James: Because if it didn't then you'd have to have a station every twenty-five miles.

Amundson: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

James: Okay.

Amundson: And I don't know, technically I can't give you a logical explanation. As I indicated I have a friend though that probably can do a better job.

James: Well, that wouldn't mean anything to me or anyone else here.

Amundson: Well, yeah, but that's a good observation, though, that's right. Yeah, it wasn't a tower that was eighty miles high.

James: Right.

Amundson: Right, yeah.

James: Okay. But, it was, you did broadcast from it and receive from a tower about a hundred feet in the air?

Amundson: Yeah—I think our antenna was something like ninety-eight or ninety-five feet, something like that.

James: Did the weather bother the signals and reception?

Amundson: Well, uh, no, I don't think it did. I don't think it had any bearing on it. It must have been pretty—our weather on the spot I was located on was nothing but—well, you had one monsoon season that lasted about three weeks and the rest of the time it was absolute sunshine there. Probably people would think it'd be an ideal resort for about three days. (Laughs.) So, that was it. But at any event, this was our training and then we went to Nantucket Island where they had a national working station and we were there for two-three months.

James: Practicing, really.

Amundson: Practicing, yeah, and then we went to the West Coast where we were staged and got together with a construction group. And we were sort of gofers for the construction group and we were going to be left on our respective bases. The construction group was kind of interesting. It consisted of people that were, tended to be older than most of us. Most of us were young recruits. Well, there were exceptions, too, but uh, most of 'em were young recruits. But the construction group, actually it was comparable to the Seabees. They had recruited guys that had been in building trades or, I don't know, could, uh, run bulldozers—

James: What were they constructing?

Amundson: Well, they'd construct the base. We had to—

James: Because you came as empty.

Amundson: Well, this was kind of a -- our base was a little unique.

James: After you got through basic.

Amundson: We went— want me to just go on like this?

James: Well, you can hold it just a second.

Amundson: Yeah.

James: After Nantucket, then you took the train across the country?

Amundson: Yeah, we did. Mm hmm.

James: Then the Navy took you over to your island?

Amundson: Well, yeah, we took a train across the country and it was about the time where we might get a leave and they decided we'd better go

to California and we had staged this at Alameda. That was the big Coast Guard base at Alameda. And so, we went to Alameda and about three days later, we got permission (laughs) to have a brief leave. So I came out on the train again and came back to Baraboo. (Laughs.) For about four days or something.

James: You still hadn't been on a Coast Guard ship.

Amundson: Oh, heavens no.

James: Just a rumor (laughs).

Amundson: We're just getting ready, yeah. But in any event, we got back and then our group was, we went overseas on a, well, basically a troop transport, and LST. And we stayed in Hawaii and brought more gear together and, you know, brought the additional personnel components, I suppose, that were needed. Then we got on an inter-island ferry, which was in the Hawaiians. The Haleakala. The Haleakala had freeboard of about four feet. (Laughs.) So, you didn't sit on this tub and there were about 200 of us on this thing. And there, a separate ship had taken a few of the guys and loaded up most of the equipment. And this was some fairly heavy equipment, generators and you know, all kinds. I think it took us, it took us darn near two weeks to go to Kanton Island. Kanton Island is south of the equator, just directly –

James: I know where it is. I've interviewed a guy who was there.

Amundson: Have you? Really?

James: He lives in Madison.

Amundson: No kiddin'. Who's that?

James: Armin Krum (??). He's a veterinarian.

Amundson: Oh is he? What was his branch of service?

James: He was in the Army.

Amundson: Oh was he really? Yeah, they had some Army—

James: He was based there because that's where they refueled the airplanes going to Hawaii.

Amundson: That's right. Yeah. It was a Span--

James: He started the war there, before the war. Before the war started he was there.

Amundson: Really. Is that right?

James: In the far-off Pacific and then ended the War on the Elbe River, looking at the Russians.

Amundson: Boy, did he ever cover terr—

James: Now, that's a career.

Amundson: That is territory.

James: Two theaters of war. —

Amundson: I'll be darned.

James: 8,000 miles apart.

Amundson: Isn't that something? Well, Kanton was, uh— Kanton was --

James: They had missionaries there.

Amundson: Yeah, it's an atoll and they had, there were some natives there and it was kind of interesting to be there. It was a Pan-American stop, too. That was the route. I think it was Palmyra or Christmas Island or so on. Anyway, we're down there for a month or so, getting organized and then the ship loaded up our gear and took it up to Baker and at that point we were all through with Kanton and we stayed on Baker. I stayed there without getting off for about seventeen months, and, —

James: Baker is near what? I'm not—

Amundson: Well, Baker is about, I think—

James: I thought that's close to Midway, but—

Amundson: No, it's thirteen miles north of the equator and about 300 miles east of the International Date Line.

James: Okay.

Amundson: So it's ah-warm.

James: Exactly.

Amundson: Yeah.

James: Constantly.

Amundson: Yeah (Laughs.) Which was --

James: When you arrived on Baker, you were the first --

Amundson: Well --

James: People on that? Or was that a deserted island?

Amundson: It had been a deserted island. However, the Army Air Corps had taken it over. I can't remember if it was Army or, I think it was Army that had taken— it was the Army. The Army Air Corps had a pretty good sized base there because it was used as a fighter support base just before we got there. As they moved to the west, why you know, these islands cleared out. They had built a number of buildings. It was quite a heavily used base, I think. It had a runway that was about a mile long, which was, I mentioned earlier that this thing was about thirteen mean (??), elevation was thirteen feet above sea level so it ain't very high.

James: No.

Amundson: And, ah --

James: When did you arrive there?

Amundson: We got there in July, let's see, June, I guess it was the latter part of June of 1944. I left in October of 1945. And anyway.—

James: So, when you arrived, you had to set up your own operations outfit (??)?

Amundson: Yeah, it had, I think the Army had pulled out the last of their stuff about three months, about the time we were going, getting' goin' overseas.

James: They must have had some quarters there.

Amundson: They had some quarters but they were not the kind that we used. They had a chapel and they had a pretty good-sized operation

there. And we retained some of the buildings. Others were flattened and used for other purposes and so on and so forth. The airstrip remained so we had an occasional plane that would come in. And, at any event, it was just— it was, I indicated earlier, a mile long and about three-quarters of a mile wide.

- James: The Coast Guard had this— you were the only outfit there.
- Amundson: The Coast Guard was, at our time, was the only outfit there except during (laughs) our tour of duty we had three Army weathermen that were stationed there. They moved them in. That was about halfway. It was kind of nice to get some new blood there, to see somebody different. But in any event, uh that's where we were and once we got there they started the construction operations started and we all pitched in on that. And, you know, functioned in some form or another. The base was erected, I think went into operation in early September of '44.
- James: How about settin' up the equipment? You didn't do that right—
- Amundson: Well, you helped to a degree, but I wasn't on the technic—
- James: So the equipment required a technician to—
- Amundson: That's right, we had technicians and each watch, we operated within a watch, we had about four groups that stood watch. And each watch had its technician. We were "scopies" and we, our role was to make sure the signal matched and if there was some kind of a problem, why, the technician would work. We had, a, each of these bases had a radioman. A proficient radio man, ah --
- James: All these technicians and radiomen were still Coast Guard?
- Amundson: Oh yeah, yeah. Radiomen, we had a, we all had a, we had a very good motor machinist mate who was the--who kept the generator going, kept the electricity working. And, I tell ya, these guys were important parts of those operations. We had a pharmacist mate as a doctor. A marvelous fellow, I had, or we had, from Arkansas. And he had had some training, but I think, once was in the service, but he was just a grand person, and we were fortunate to have him.
- James: Sure.
- Amundson: Amazing what the aches and pains you can develop that you never knew you had when you have nothing else to do. (Laughs.) I remember feeling my lymph glands and saying, "What the hell are

these?” And he assured me—I think I must have played with them so much that I finally went to him and he explained what it was. I was pretty naïve. At any event, that was it. So we --

James: Everybody’s health during that year that you were there remained pretty good?

Amundson: We were pretty fortunate. I can’t remember if somebody was taken off for an appendectomy or something. I don’t --

James: If there was an appendectomy they would, the corpsmen wouldn’t do it. They would just fly them --

Amundson: We’d have to call somebody at Kanton and see if they could come up and—

James: Sure.

Amundson: Yeah. So that was --

James: You didn’t have a hospital then.

Amundson: At Kanton.

James: Oh. Not at --

Amundson: Oh, hell no. We had no, no, we had no hospital. The pharmacist mate was it (laughs). Plus aspirin or whatever else you had. Uh, we did get—for a time they sent out some dog men so that if we were invaded, the dogs would bark (laughs). That was a little different. We had a mongrel. We had two dogs on the island.

James: Guarding — the island? That was --

Amundson: Two dogs that happened to be there.

James: Your first line of defense was two dogs?

Amundson: Two dogs. No, they-- well, (laughs) when we were down at Kanton, and after the Army had left there was a three month interval and I think they had a lieutenant commander and two enlisted men up there. And it was always a mystery as to how the lieutenant commander lost his life. It was -- I don’t know what happened, but he apparently went swimming. They said he was lost swimming. We were not permitted to swim. The tide was pretty tough.

- James: Oh, really (??)
- Amundson: Yeah, and there were, I don't know that there were fish that were going to bother us particularly, ah, Um, but you know, most of the time it was pretty boring. You read a lot, and, you know we'd—
- James: Did they bring in movies?
- Amundson: We eventually got movies, yeah. After about two-three months we got movies and we got fairly regular shipments that, a lot of our mail was dropped by plane and they'd drop a can of movies, and that was really helpful.
- James: How big was the outfit on the island, roughly?
- Amundson: Twenty, what was it, about twenty-three people.
- James: Small group.
- Amundson: Yeah. Small group and wouldn't see anybody else and wouldn't do anything else.
- James: Right, but you got a USO tour stop?
- Amundson: No, no, no. No, we had —I had an opportunity, as I said after I'd been there, I don't know, well over a year, fourteen-fifteen months, to go to Kanton to have my—some dental work done. That's where I think it was partly an excuse to give us a break or give us someplace.
- James: I see.
- Amundson: So I did happen to see, strangely I met a guy from my hometown who was a Naval pilot (laughs). You know, that was, that had a lot of people at that time. They'd have three-four thousand people at a time.
- James: Sure.
- Amundson: And the USO troops always stopped there so that was kind of neat. No the rest of it was-- just -- we played ball. We had a -- our chief, incidentally, was a chief warrant officer. Didn't have a lieutenant JG or anything, not even an ensign.
- James: He was the highest ranking officer on the island?

Amundson: He was the highest ranking guy there.

James: Chief warrant?

Amundson: Yeah, Ennis Adams. He was a very good guy. He was smart enough, he kinda let people alone. He was—maintained a military posture, but he, among other things, he liked to play ball. (laughs). So we really didn't have enough people for a ball team unless we had -- we always had to have three people on watch the radioman, at least one operator and the technician. So we played ball every week. He said if we didn't play ball we'd have to march (laughs). So --

James: Nobody had malaria?

Amundson: No, no, we all liked to play softball. So we played softball. He was crazy about it, so we liked that.

James: Oh, that was nice.

Amundson: He was a good guy. He did have an occasional drink (laughs). And he liked cornbread, so --

James: I bet there was no liquor available, was there?

Amundson: We could order beer. We ordered beer. When we originally came down there we could put in a beer order. So we did that, yeah. And then we ran out of it. And then eventually, we had an opportunity, you know, to have it delivered. I mean we could order a few cases of beer or something and they brought it in. So that was nice. It was good.

James: Tremendous (??)

Amundson: When the Army had pulled out they left all kinds of K-rations, and our favorite meal, frankly, was to take whatever the Army had left (laughs) and eat that because we ate a lot of mutton to start with and (unintelligible). Meals were --

James: Nobody likes the mutton.

Amundson: No, goodness, no. Meals were not sensational.

James: Right. They uh, but you had a regular mess hall there that would—

- Amundson: We had a mess hall. And on our day off, we had -- watch us four on, eight off; four on, twelve off; four on, twenty-four off. About every third day, why, we would, a couple of us would have to be the scouring aids. You know, help the cook.
- James: Sure.
- Amundson: We had a cook, an assistant cook, the other personnel: pharmacist mate, a motor mach, a couple of seamen that helped him. That was, you know, it was about the personnel. We had a chief, uh, who was, well, we had a chief also. He was fundamentally the technician or the head control of the LORAN operation. Basically, that was his function. I was going to say about the, uh, what was it? The old man, as we called him, he was probably thirty-eight or something like that but I have an interesting story. We had no equipment or anything. So he wrote to some kind of command and requisitioned, I don't know, \$1,500 worth of equipment, ball equipment, baseball equipment and stuff. Well, we ended up with about four softballs(laughs). I think he had ordered uniforms (laughs). Our biggest steal was when a Navy plane flew in one time. They needed some repair, and they had eleven or twelve guys and we immediately had a ballgame. That was the biggest break --
- James: Highlight of the year.
- Amundson: Highlight of the year (laughs). Anyway, as you can see, it was sort of a non--
- James: (unintelligible) in your own little world—
- Amundson: We're in our own little world, that's right.
- James: There were no trees up on Baker Island to speak of?
- Amundson: No, brush, a little bit of brush and many, many gooney birds, a lot of gooney birds and frigate birds. It was a big frigate bird nesting place. I don't know if you're familiar with a frigate bird. They've got a wingspan—
- James: It flies for about a year without coming down.
- Amundson: Oh, a huge wingspread on them and they get a goiter that they have. And occasionally there would be a Bosun bird, a beautiful bird with an exquisite couple of tail feathers. And even then, they were protected in theory. Finally I think I did get up behind one of

them and yanked a feather one time. They were very difficult to get near.

James: How about fish? You must've eaten some of the fish.

Amundson: We'd shoot fish once in a while. And we would get, we'd get, a, we wouldn't get lobster but we'd get some crabs that were pretty good once in awhile. We would boil some of them. So, but, not on any regular basis. It was just too hard to come by. I mean, this was, there was no mechanism for getting at them.

James: (unintelligible) some guys (??) unintelligible.

Amundson: We didn't have any boats or anything.

James: Grenades, they'd just throw a grenade.

Amundson: Well, we did throw. We'd shoot. We'd, you know, just take a rifle and you'd pop 'em into a school of fish and you'd get a few fish out. But, (laughs) one interesting story. I shouldn't go on with all this nonsense.

James: No, it's good.

Amundson: Ennis Adams, our commander, Chief Warrant Officer, decided that we needed a swimming pool. Well, we had a gunner's mate, that's right. One of the guys was a gunner mate. So we, he was going to have "Guns", take some grenades and blow or begin to blow a hole and then put some dynamite in there. So they got to the point where they had some kind of a hole and they put a couple of sticks of dynamite down there and I was, I think I was on watch or something at the time. I wasn't around. And there was a whale of a noise and uh, you know, we all wondered what was -- well. We knew roughly what was going to happen.

James: Right.

Amundson: But anyway some of us were on watch and what have you, and (laughs) Ennis said, kind of a dark sense of humor, but he came into the mess hall. Seems to me this happened shortly before lunch or something, dinner in the evening. He came in and he said, "This was all we could find of Guns." (laughs) And he had a boot. What a macabre sense of humor. Isn't that awful? This was about he level of our operation. (both laugh).

James: What about the swimming pool? Did it get built?

Amundson: Oh, heavens no. There was a hole about this big. (laughs)

James: That's all?

Amundson: Yeah. No, we never swam. We really didn't, no. There was a tough tide on the place. Yeah. So anyway, that was Baker Island. That's what I did. We were on there seventeen months. We finally got off the thing and I tell ya we were really fit to be tied. It was very difficult at that time. You know, they took some of the older guys, they would have built up more points. And we got points for -- we did get points for remote duty or what did they call it --

James: Sure.

Amundson: Whatever it was. So that kind of you know helped the increase in enough points to get relieved. But it was tough, I tell ya, when some got relieved and we, most of us got relieved at the same time. There were two or three people that went off for one reason or another earlier. But throughout the year, but most of us went in one fell swoop and the motor machinist mate was left. And I don't think he could handle it. Apparently he really went off.

James: Had a breakdown?

Amundson: Yeah, and I can understand it. It's just --

James: That was my next question. Did some guys get sorta stir crazy?

Amundson: Yeah, uh, but I mean nobody ever ran amok. But I think --

James: I would think the pressure would get to some of --

Amundson: people, yeah. I think we all felt it. It was just, the monotony was just indescribable. I mean that was, if you made any kind of sacrifice (laughs) during the war it was monotonous, it was just total monotony.

James: Just total boredom.

Amundson: Yeah, I mean the relief is, uh -- you got the same sun and the same location (laughs) and the same bright sky and the same water. You know there's, there's very little that. Oh you fiddle around and do different things. We, he did have us assigned to do different things. A couple of us ran the evaporator. We evaporated ocean water for our drinking water and stuff. So we had little duties like that which

at least, you know, broke things up a little bit, but no animals outside of a dog that somebody hit with one of only two cars we had on the island and killed that. So (laughs) that took care of that. Our pet.

James: Your protective guard dog?

Amundson: Well, that was one -- no, it was a funny thing. They went out (laughs), one time, after we'd been there must have been six-seven months, they sent out four Coast Guard dog men. Dog men, the Coast Guard used to provide dog patrol duty for some of the invasion stuff. Anyway, we ended up with four Coast Guard dog men and their dogs. The great big Doberman pinchers and you know how people used to contribute dogs for the service. That lasted about four months and then they got shipped someplace else.

James: Like a (??) (unintelligible).

Amundson: Oh, heavens yes.

James: One dog could easily—

Amundson: I think one dog could do the whole nine yards (both laugh). Oh, dear.

James: What were those guys like, that ran the dogs? Were they any different?

Amundson: Yeah, they seemed to be a little different. (laughs). They were dealing with some fairly tough dogs I think at times. I remember waking up one morning and seeing one of those Dobermans looking at me (laughs). I don't know how he got in the barracks or where he slept, but there he was and I was pretty quiet.

James: Oh.

Amundson: Ah, brother. (both laugh) Anyway, that was the deal. So, we got off, we went back to Honolulu and then to complete this circle of nothing but successful endeavors we were set (laughs) -- we finally got to go home. That was really nice, though. We got, we were there about three weeks and really had a nice liberty.

James: Sure.

Amundson: That was great. Then we went home. We were assigned with a bunch of Army guys and a whole flock of Coast Guard people.

Bunch of us had kind of come together again. They took a lot of us off about the same time. We got on a Dutch ship called the Poly Lout (?). It was a freighter but it had been somewhat converted. Had bunks and things . And a day out of Honolulu it broke down and we were towed all the way back to San Pedro.

James: Oh, my.

Amundson: It took fourteen days (laughs) to get to San Pedro. If you can believe that.

James: Well, you practiced boating boredom, so --

Amundson: Yeah, we were good at that.

James: You were good at that.

Amundson: Yeah.

[End of Tape 1, Side A. Ca. 30min.]

James: Then you got out of the service --

Amundson: That was not then.

James: Oh.

Amundson: Just to finish up real quickly, I did, we had more duty. I wasn't, you know they discharge people on the basis of points and so I still had time to serve and they would keep, continued to build these bases. And they were building bases along the Pacific coast, these LORAN bases. So I was assigned to Moclips, Washington which was on an Indian, Hoquiam Indian Reservation. And that was the (laughs), that was the opposite of no rain. That rained -- the state of Washington gets a lot of rain. We were on the Olympic Peninsula and it rained and rained and we were trying to pour footings for buildings and stuff like that and that was a mess. That was great. We left, I was there until April and we finally got--

James: April of '45?

Amundson: April '46.

James: '46.

Amundson: Yeah, So I was there -- yeah, April of '45 I was out on the island. So that is basically what went on. It was a very modest service career, like I say.

James: Well, you did your duty.

Amundson: Well, you did what you were told to do.

James: Right.

Amundson: I guess if they told me to go to Greenland I'd probably gone to Greenland. Wherever.

James: Certainly, we all did, whatever. After you got out and returned home. Mm hmm. And you went to school right away, I see, used the GI Bill. Here?

Amundson: I started here. My dad was a civil engineer and I came down and took a year of civil engineering and then I decided I liked architecture. And I, ah, I went to the University of Texas and enrolled in architecture and then I found out I wasn't really a, probably I wasn't going to rival Frank Lloyd Wright or any of his contemporaries and so I eventually got a degree in education. Taught school for a few years and—

James: At what level?

Amundson: High School.

James: High School.

Amundson: And ended up at American Family and I spent most of my career there at American Family in Madison.

James: You're retired?

Amundson: Oh, yeah, yeah. Quite awhile.

James: My son works there.

Amundson: Oh, does he? What does he do?

James: Computer programmer.

Amundson: Oh, yeah, they got a few of those.

James: Yeah, he says it's a small group, he said, of thirty.

Amundson: God, they have so many peop-- I think they've got an awful lot of contract providers, too. Haven't they? They must have. I know they did at one time, yeah. Oh, I was involved in the beginning of that stuff. I was pretty much in the office administration end and so I've seen a lot of that out there.

James: Right. Okay. And then you got married, when? After you got out?

Amundson: Yeah, I got married after we were out 1951, I married gal from Baraboo, Jane Morton. And—

James: Who wrote to you every day of --

Amundson: No, no, I was writing to somebody else there for a while. So I got my little "Dear John" letter, too (laughs). We all have to have some--

James: Oh, you got one of those?

Amundson: Oh, sure. (laughs)

James: Was that a surprise?

Amundson: Yeah, a little bit. But you know, it wasn't—

James: You were young enough you could stand it.

Amundson: It wasn't earth-shattering. Well, I'd run into somebody in Boston, you know, (laughs) that was pretty nice.

James: Sure.

Amundson: But those letters quit pretty rapidly. You know there wasn't much of an opportunity to pursue any of this, and --

Amundson: Pretty flexible.

James: Have you ever seen that gal again?

Amundson: No, And, the one from my hometown though, was a gal that I had, ya know, gone with in high school and stuff.

James: I see.

Amundson: But times change and things change and you get over the heartbreak (laughs).

James: Certainly.

Amundson: Pretty flexible.

James: Right. Did you join any veterans groups?

Amundson: For laughs, the guy and I joined the Veterans, we joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars when we were on the island one time, and that's --

James: [unintelligible]

Amundson: We (laughs) pretended we had a meeting. No, I never really did. I didn't do anything with --

James: Uh huh. Now tell me about your-- do you keep track of any of these twenty-two guys?

Amundson: Yeah. I'll tell you that we went, had a reunion with many of these people, or not so many of the twenty-two that were on the island but with people in the same line of work that were on one island or another. And had the good fortune of visiting with a bunch of them just two weeks ago, in, near Detroit at Frankenmuth, Michigan.

James: So how many are left?

Amundson: Well, these reunions have been going on for quite a period of time. Some have gone to many of them. I've gone—I had gone to a couple, one in San Antonio three years ago, one in Kentucky and this was the third one. And they -- some have been going to these for, I guess, starting ten years after they retired or something.

James: Is this just a general Coast Guard or is this (unintelligible) LORAN group?

Amundson: No, this is, this is a LORAN group.

James: LORAN group.

Amundson: It's a LORAN group. So we had known many of these, if we didn't know them on the island, we knew them going to school or good friends. A Fellow from Milwaukee was a good friend. Somebody from Green Bay. So I knew people like that and if we would have

an opportunity to get together as we did in Honolulu after the war and so on, why we had good times. We knew them, but it was fun seeing them. I—the fellow I served with on watch as my partner is still there and he was—that was, the first one of these he'd gone to. He's a guy that had suffered a little bit of a kind of a semi-serious illness recently, but he was okay. And the fellow who was our leader of the watch, the technician, was a guy I hadn't seen since we left the island and he was there. He's blind, but he was there and it was so much fun talking to him. But I ran into—and another guy from Chicago that was on the island but not on my watch, he and I have been friends for many years, uh, was there, with their wives, and it was really fun. So I saw, probably, at that reunion a dozen people that I'd been with one way or another for a little time. It was really neat. It, I think there were probably thirty of us there or something like that, plus the wives. And some of these have been quite big in recent years. But, you know, how many times can you tell each other the same thing?

James: Exactly.

Amundson: But this was good, it was great.

James: Well, that was wonderful.

Amundson: Yeah, I was so tickled to see George, the fellow who was blind. He was, we'd always kind of team up, two against one on these watches, you know. We'd argue about something (laughs). Apparently, I sang "The Streets of Laredo" quite often, 'cause when I saw George he said "Are you going to sing 'The Streets of Laredo'?" (laughs) I don't think he wanted me to. So that's, uh, I went back and worked up in Washington until April and got to go home, and discharged in St. Louis. So, that was that.

James: Right. Did the Coast Guard ask you to join the reserve?

Amundson: Yeah, I was, and I was committed to it theoretically for seven years I think, something like that. I mean it wasn't, I didn't—

James: Inactive.

Amundson: Yeah, it was inactive right, but I was kind of surprised when Korea broke out that I might have been ripe for that.

James: But they never heard anything?

- Amundson: No, never got a call. I'm sure they were involved someway or another. Some of them, probably this kind of stuff because it wasn't that long after the war. I'm sure that— I'm sure that that was -- I never thought of it that way but I imagine it was a fairly major player over there at the time.
- James: That's how I happened to go to Korea because during that time, in World War II, I was in medical school and entered the Navy B12 program so they had my number. I had orders within a month after—
- Amundson: Did you go to medical school right away though? How did you happen to get into medical school?
- James: Well, had I finished my pre-med --
- Amundson: Oh, you had.
- James: And I joined the B12 program because I wanted to stick with the Navy --
- Amundson: I see, okay.
- James: Because if I was going to go to war I wanted to be in the Navy, and --
- Amundson: Well, you know I told you about applying for the aviator position. And a friend of mine in high school that I have seen a couple times at reunions was telling me that, and he was, he passed his physical, too. So he was assigned, I forget where he went to school, Ohio State or some place, but in any event, (laughs) he got a degree. He never left. He never had to do anything else, but he had told me that the reason they were putting that full court press on for -- and this was 1943 I guess, for these high school kids, these seniors in high school was because they were, theoretically at least, loading up for an all out air war against Japan. And they feared the casualty rate, this was really comforting news, the casualty rate was going to be so great that they really had to get a flock of these kids out there.
- James: Right.
- Amundson: So, what might have been.
- James: That's right. All right. Very good, sir.

Amundson: Well, listen, it's fun --

James: Thank you.

Amundson: Fun talking on it --

James: I appreciate it.

Amundson: It's more humorous --

[End of Interview]