Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

Robert W. Blake

Radioman, Navy, World War II & Korean War

1997

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Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Robert W. Blake, a Boscobel, Wis. native, discusses his U.S. Navy service both in World War II and the Korean War as a Radioman and a Storekeeper. Blake expresses his feelings after the attack on Pearl Harbor and his enlistment at age 17, in the middle of his junior year in high school. Blake talks of entering the Navy on February 27, 1943, boot camp in Great Lakes (Illinois), and being shipped to Bedford Springs (Pennsylvania) for eighteen weeks of radio school. Blake discusses his assignment to Norton Heights (Connecticut) at a naval training school for communications where he also learned signalman duties. Blake discusses his assignment on the SS Ward Hunt which was used for hauling troops and supplies over to the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Italy. Blake mentions that his primary duty while aboard the SS Ward Hunt was to listen for distress frequencies. Blake also refers to the German Wolf-packs as being the biggest concern aboard naval vessels at this time. Blake says that a ship in his convoy was even blown up by Wolf-packs at one point in an Atlantic crossing. Blake refers to his service alongside Merchant Marines; he also addresses in detail the animosity often felt between the Merchant Marines and the Navy, and the various incentives and bonuses the Merchant Marines received for entering "dangerous waters," while the enlisted Naval officers didn't receive any extra incentives. Blake describes his detachments and reassignments to the SS Bulkero, at that time the world's largest tanker, as well as his later assignments to the Liberty Ship Robert R. McBurney and also the Edgar W. Nye. Blake speaks of the two typhoons the Nye endured while in Buckner Bay (Okinawa) and of the damage to both anchors and a large hole the Nye sustained during one of the typhoons. Blake mentions also how he was in Okinawa (Japan) when the Japanese surrendered and how blackouts were no longer necessary on the journey home. Blake also comments on shooting down floating mines while coming home. Blake relates in detail his use of the GI Bill to attend school, using 52-20, and using the GI Home Loan to buy a house. Blake mentions his enlistment into the Navy reserves in 1947 and his call to active duty in the Korean War in 1950. He tells he was sent to Port Hueneme (California) to a Seabee Battalion, but was hardship discharged three months later due to his wife's pregnancy. Blake also worked out of Truax Field for the Air Force as a statistical crew member and data processor, though he was not enlisted in the Air Force during this time.

Biographical Sketch

Robert W. Blake served as a radioman and storekeeper in the U.S. Navy in World War II, and the Korean War. Although originally involved with the American Legion and the VFW, more recently, Blake has shifted his focus towards being an executive officer in the U.S. Armed Guard, naval group. Blake now resides in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark D. Van Ells, 1997
Transcribed by WDVA staff, ca. 1998.
Transcript edited by Brooke E. Perry Hoesli, 2007.

Interview Transcript

Mark: Today's date is January the 9th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview over the telephone today with Mr. Robert Blake, a native of Boscobel, Wisconsin, and a veteran of World War II and Korea, Good afternoon. Thanks for taking some time out of your day.

Blake: Okay.

Mark: I suppose we can start at the top as they say, and why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Blake: Okay. I was born and raised in Boscobel, Wisconsin. I was coming out of a movie theater on a Sunday afternoon when I heard about Pearl Harbor was in 1941. I was 15 years old.

Mark: Yeah. And what was your reaction, and what do you think was the reaction of other 15-year-olds? I mean, how does a 15-year-old view such a momentous event?

Blake: Well, I was ready to go even then. A lot of friends were going in the service, and I wanted to do that myself. So as soon as I was 17. I left in the middle of my junior year of high school and was put in the Navy.

Mark: I'm interested in why you chose the Navy. There were a lot of different service options. You could have joined the Air Force, the Marine Corps, the Army, whatever the case may be.

Blake: My dad had been in the Navy and he'd been a radioman, and he worked on radios part time. So I felt that would be very interesting, and that was what prompted me to go in the Navy and become a radioman.

Mark: I see. So you had to approach a recruiter, and you told him that you wanted to be a radioman in the Navy. And what did he tell you? No problem? Is this going to be a problem?

Blake: No, they didn't say any problem. I just had to take my chances. They said the field was open and I should have a good chance for that after I got out of boot camp.

Mark: I suppose at this point we can just sort of go through your military training experience. Why don't you just walk me through going from the recruiter's office off to boot camp and then off to learn how to be a radioman up to your first duty station.

Blake: Okay. I entered the Navy on February 27th, 1943; went into boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois. I finished boot camp, had a short leave home, and then was shipped to Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania, which was a Navy radio school. That was on May 26th, 1943. Spent 18 weeks there learning Morse code and sending and receiving on radios and to some extent how to repair them.

Umm, I was a Seaman Second out of boot camp. Out of radio school I finished 27th out of 148 in the class, and I was promoted to a Radioman Third, Third Class Petty Officer.

Mark: Sounds like you moved up fairly quickly.

Blake: Skipped the Seaman First rank.

Mark: Now, I was in the Air Force. I still to this day find the Navy rankings mystifying. So I'm a little confused in that.

Blake: All right.

Mark: In terms of your basic training, now this is where you were introduced into the military, and some people don't necessarily adapt well to military life. And basic training also brings together people from all different parts of the country.

Blake: Right.

Mark: I just want to explore a little bit more about basic training. Was there anything that you found particularly difficult? Did you find it difficult to adjust to military life, for example?

Blake: Well, in boot camp, but at that age I was rather shy and there was a lot of older people. So I was put on quite a few watches where they thought I wouldn't complain as I was young and vulnerable.

Mark: Was that true do you think?

Blake: Yes, until I complained, and then finally I was taken off of some of those. But I did have to go through a lot in boot camp.

Mark: You know, some vets tell me that, for example, in boot camp the language was a problem for them, the salty sea language I guess.

Blake: That didn't bother me. I had heard all of that I guess before I went in--

Mark: Yeah.

Blake: --from high school.

Mark: Yeah. What sorts of other guys did you train with? I mean, did they come from the Midwest such as yourself or was it a pretty good mix?

Blake: No, they were from all over really.

Mark: Any problems getting along? Any southerners fighting the civil war or anything like that?

Blake: No, no, nothing like that. I think there was three boot camps at that time. There was one in Great Lakes; one in Farragut, Idaho; and one way up in northern New York.

Mark: In terms of the discipline, sometimes it's hard to get used to following orders and that sort of thing. That's why they have the basic training. Was that a problem for you or for anyone around you? Were there people who couldn't adapt in your particular basic training group there?

Blake: Oh, sure, there was some, you know, that didn't want to follow orders and everything; but, like I said, I was only 17 and I was young, and I wanted to make--at that time I had planned on making a career in the Navy. but there was a lot of discipline. I adapted to that pretty well.

Mark: And in terms of radioman, then you went to radio school.

Blake: Right.

Mark: You know, basic training was a mix of people from all different kinds--in all different walks of life. In terms of radio school, I suspect when you get to the

specialized training certain characteristics might come out. Were there certain characteristics about the radiomen?

Blake: Well, we were given tests before we went to see if we were adapted.

Mark: Right.

Blake: What fields we were adapted to.

Mark: And so were you and those around you particularly well-inclined towards machines and gadgets and that sort of thing?

Blake: Yes, I think so. Everybody in the radio school-- Well, there was a few that didn't make it, but by and large I think everybody there pretty well graduated from that. Some of us that had a higher ranking were made Petty Officer Thirds or Radiomen Third Class right away if we could send and receive so much Morse code, and so I was in that upper part of the class.

Mark: Yeah. So how long was it between your basic training and your radio training? How long was it until you started to get on the ships and perform your duties?

Blake: From Bedford Springs 18 weeks of radio school, I left there in October of '43 and was assigned to Noroton Heights, Connecticut, a naval training school for communications, the merchant ships, and this included signalman, semaphore flag with the blinker light. And so we had to learn signalman duties as well as radio duties. This was a communications pool school for the Armed Guard.

So I think I was there-- Let's see, October '43

I went there, and that lasted until--that was about five weeks of communications training. Then I was attached to Norfolk, Virginia, to a port director there for a shipment. That was on December 1st of '43. On that date I was assigned duty as a radioman on the U.S. armed merchant vessel, which was a Liberty Ship, the SS Ward Hunt.

Mark: Now, that was a little-- You were in kind of a different service. Was that what you expected when you joined the Navy, or what sort of expectations did you have? I mean, when you think of the Navy you think of Battleships or Destroyers.

Blake: Right. That isn't really what I expected, but while I was in radio school in Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania, a lot of our instructors were old radio

operators from the Merchant Marine, and they were telling us how this duty was and there wasn't near as much regulation and so forth as there was on the regular Navy ships. So several of us thought that sounded like a pretty good deal, so that's how we signed up for that. That was volunteer.

Mark: Yeah. And so that was okay with you then?

Blake: Yes.

Mark: You were disappointed that you weren't in the thick of it more I guess.

Blake: No. I volunteered for it.

Mark: Yeah. So why don't you tell me about the first ship you were on.

Blake: The first ship, the Ward Hunt, was a ship equipped with more guns than usual for a merchant ship. We hauled 500 troops over to the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Italy. The holds were stacked with bunks so we could haul all these troops, and we went in convoy. We had a lot of Navy aircraft carriers and a lot of Navy ships guarding the convoy. I think it was probably one of the largest convoys up to that time that had gone across the Atlantic. I don't know how many ships, but there was a lot of them. And it took us 18 days from Norfolk to Strait of Gibraltar where the British escort ships took over and the U.S. ones left us. And then we went on into Oran, North Africa, and visited the Third to north Africa, Algiers. We shuttled back and forth between North Africa and Italy taking troops and supplies for about six months.

Mark: And in one of these convoys what is it specifically you are doing? Are you taking messages to and from England or something?

Blake: Listening primarily to a distress frequency, which was--there was never any traffic on there unless there was a distress or a ship sunk or a downed plane or something like that. So that's basically all we listened to really was that one frequency.

Mark: And what were your biggest concerns out there? I mean, I would imagine German wolf packs would be one of them, but perhaps there were others.

Blake: That was the biggest one, right. Yeah, they were around. We never got fired upon, but some of the ships in convoy had, and they were such a large convoy that we almost didn't see it. You heard about it.

Mark: Yeah. Now, this is your first trip in an ocean-going vessel overseas I take it.

Blake: Uh-huh.

Mark: Some of the infantrymen I talked to described the trip overseas and the sea sickness and that sort of thing. How did you adapt to life on the water?

Blake: Very well. I never had a day of sea sickness. It worked out very well.

Mark: I suspect there were others who did though.

Blake: Oh, yeah, many of the troops.

Mark: So the men you are bringing overseas, how much contact did you have with them?

Blake: Oh, we talked to them off and on deck. They mingled around on the upper deck during the day, and then at night of course their bunks were down in the hole.

Mark: And what did you talk about, baseball or girls or whatever?

Blake: Yeah, a little of everything I guess. We were sitting in our mess hall eating steaks and French fries and peas, and we were on rations of course, and some of the guys, they would offer some of the Navy men two or three dollars for a steak sandwich. Some of the guys were selling sandwiches to the troops.

Mark: I suppose there is always an entrepreneur out there.

Blake: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Now, one of the things you sometimes hear about is the difference between the Navy and the Merchant Marine. I assume on these ships you had Merchant Mariners too.

Blake: Oh, yes. They were the crew for the ship. The only Navy crew were gunners, gunner's mates, and radiomen and signalmen.

Mark: Yeah. Why don't you describe the relationship between the Navy and the rest of the military and the Merchant Marine.

Blake: There was some animosity between the Navy and the Merchant Marine. Individually we got along well with them. We talked to each other and everything, and there was no problems. But the Merchant Marine, as they got out maybe five miles they got extra bonuses for dangerous waters and then they get a little further more money for more dangerous waters, and even the mess boys that served the chow to us were making really big bucks, and so that didn't set too well with the Navy guys, but we got along.

Mark: Yeah.

Blake: You had to.

Mark: I suppose. You were all on the same ship together.

Blake: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Under a disciplined regime, to some extent anyway.

Blake: Yeah. We had a Navy officer in charge of the Navy crew; and he, of course, was the officer in charge of all security on the ship. He could even tell the captain of the ship, who was Merchant Marine, what to do in case of security. So sometimes they had their little battles too, they would be not agreeing with each other on different things because the Navy officer was in charge of the gun crew. And on this ship we had a communications officer also because we had an extra big crew. So our communications officer was overrated by the signalman. Gunnery officer was the senior officer. He was over all the gunners.

Mark: So in all you were on four merchant ships and one Liberty Ship; is that right?

Blake: Three Liberty Ships and one tanker.

Mark: Oh, I see. I see.

Blake: This was my first one.

Mark: Why don't you just tell me a little bit about the different ships you were on and what exotic ports of call you went to and what you were transporting. For example, was it always troops or were there supplies too and that sort of thing? Just tell me a little bit about the ships.

Blake: Well, a lot of equipment too, I mean, equipment and supplies. And I got back from being on this Ward Hunt--let's see, I came back in-- June of '44 I detached from that ship. Once in a while the Navy radiomen and the merchant radiomen-- The merchant radioman was always the senior radio officer, and so if they had enough merchant radiomen on there then the Navy radiomen were let off and put on another ship. So on the way-- Six months I was on there. There was two of us Navy and one merchant, senior radio officer. When we got back they found another merchant radio officer to go on so--as well as the other one, so I was detached in Norfolk. That was in June of '44.

From there I was assigned to a tanker, the SS Bulcarro (??). That at the time was the largest tanker in the world as far as capacity was concerned. We hauled 165,000 barrels of gasoline, high-test gasoline, oil, whatever. And we would usually--on that tanker we would load up down in Beaumont or Port Arthur, Texas. One time we went down to Caracas in the West Indies, down the Caribbean and fueled up. And we would fuel the ship. We were only in port on this tanker maybe a day or two because it didn't take long. Then we would head out across the North Atlantic to England and we made a couple of trips that I was on. And we saw one tanker-- We were in convoy again on these trips, and the North Atlantic was very rough. Of course this tanker was a lot faster than a Liberty Ship. Liberty Ships basically were going 7-8 knots. Our convoy with this tanker, 14-15 knots. We could pretty well outrun submarines, but some of the wolf packs still were around, and on one night one of the ships got blown up while we were on the way over. But we never were hit ourselves, and we pulled into Liverpool and Bristol, England, unloaded our cargo.

Like I say, on the tanker we were only in a couple days and we were on the sea again and so I was on there until November of '44 when I was detached from there. Then I was sent to the Armed Guard center in Brooklyn for reassignment. I spent, oh, two or three months in this Armed Guard center. Let's see. November of '44. And then, let's see, January-- I was there from November of '44 and into January.

January I took a troop train to the west coast and ended up in Seattle, where I caught another ship, another Liberty Ship, the Robert McBernie (ph). That was February of '45. We made one or two trips--one trip out into the Pacific and back. We were back in May of '45, and I was detached from that ship. I caught the Edgar W. Nye (ph) in May of '45. We went down into the South Pacific on the Nye (ph) and picked up-- We had a convoy that picked up four Navy Fleet hospitals, and we were heading to Okinawa. And at that time they were building hospital facilities outside of Japan in Okinawa and around there, prepared to invade, and it was about a

million men. So that's why all the hospitals were taken.

We were in Buckner Bay in Okinawa until-- See, we got there in November. I was in two typhoons while we were there, two wicked ones. One of them we were floundering around in Buckner Bay in Okinawa there and both our anchors had broken. The other ships had had to stay in port because they were half unloaded.

They couldn't go out to sea because the cargo crew ship didn't--we could have tipped over and sunk. So we stayed in the bay and banged into each other. We got a hole 19 feet long, four feet wide in our side.

Mark: How did that happen?

Blake: We got rammed by another ship--

Mark: Oh, I see.

Blake: --floundering in the storm.

Mark: Yeah.

Blake: And they welded a big piece of sheet metal onto the side of the ship, which wasn't too secure. Then after the Japanese surrendered while we were there, and then we headed for Shanghai, China. We were supposed to bring some troops back when they saw the ballast of our ship with that metal plate on had a hole. They said, "No way you are going to haul troops in that ship." So we headed back.

Then from Shanghai back to the states took us 31 days, and we got back about the 21st of December I think, and at that time I was sent home for 30-some day leave before I went to Great Lakes and was discharged.

Mark: So you got to travel around the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Blake: Right.

Mark: Almost around the world.

Blake: Yeah, pretty much, pretty much.

Mark: You know, going from port to port now most of your time is obviously spent on the ship, but occasionally you must get some shore leave or whatever it's called.

Blake: Oh, yeah.

Mark: What does a sailor do in Shanghai or London or whatever the case may be?

Blake: Shanghai we just went around and shopped around. Of course, there were some bars there already that were catering to the U.S. servicemen which we could go to. Some of the guys, of course, were looking for a good time. I was always a little too scared to go out, get involved with some of the wayward women with all the diseases and everything, so kind of stayed clear of that.

Mark: Yeah. Are there any particular places that stick in your mind as the most exciting, the most fun?

Blake: Oh, Oran, North Africa, was a pretty good city to have liberty in. There again, we would go out and go to town, and usually we just went in there and drank and shot the breeze with maybe some British sailors or somebody like that, just hang out.

Mark: Yeah. So do you recall your reaction when you found out that the war was over? First of all, the European war, did you even know when that ended, and your reaction when you knew the whole thing was over?

Blake: Well, that's--yeah. Let's see, European-- I can't remember, where was that then? **[Side 1, Tape 1, Ends]**

We weren't even-- Yeah, I'm not sure when that was- when VE Day was or where we were. VJ Day though, I'll never forget that. We were listening to the radio, stand radio watch there in Buckner Bay in Okinawa, when the Japanese surrendered. Everybody started screaming over the circuit, you know, "The war is over. The war is over. We're going home." And the guy in charge of the circuit was trying to clear the circuit, "Could you guys knock off the chatter? Get off from there." Of course, nobody would do it.

And then the merchant captain had picked up--he had some booze on the ship, and he had picked up a bunch of Australian beer we had gotten somewhere, so they broke out all the goodies and we had a good time celebrating.

And coming back it was so much different, coming back from when the war was over. We were 31 days that we traveled back alone, all of our lights on and didn't have to worry about keeping dark and black and blackouts.

Mark: Must have seemed kind of strange to you.

Blake: We kept some 20 millimeter shells, so we shot down a lot of floating mines on the way back. There was a lot them out around the Pacific. I don't know how we ever got by all of them at night. We didn't have any radar or anything like that on merchant ships.

Mark: So-- I am sorry, you were going to say something.

Blake: It was just the people out on deck that were on watch that had to see these things. If it was dark at night, boy, you wouldn't be able to see anything. We were just lucky I guess.

Mark: So you were discharged and everything by the end of 1945 then it sounds like.

Blake: No. I got home on leave just a couple days before Christmas of '45. I had a 31-day leave, and then I was sent to Great Lakes for final discharge. I had to wait down there two or three weeks to have enough points to get out. So I got out then on February 1st of '46.

Mark: I see.

Blake: So I was in almost three years.

Mark: Yeah. And was this a free and clear discharge or were you in the reserves or how did that work?

Blake: No, I wasn't in the reserves. It was a discharge. But then after I got out and when I started college in Madison here a friend of mine and myself that had grown up together and he had been in the Navy too, we went and signed up in the reserves in, oh, '47 I think it was, thinking we could make a little extra money that way. But then they had no slots for any of our ratings here in Madison, so we couldn't get in the active reserve where we could make monthly amounts of money. So not until I started to work in Platteville after college I went down to Dubuque, Iowa, and got on the reserves down there, and I changed my rate from radioman to storekeeper after going to (inaudible) school.

Mark: Yeah. I want to come back to the reserve thing, but I want to focus for a minute on the immediate post-war period. When you first got out in January of '46 what were your priorities? I mean, what did you want to do and how did you go about pursuing those goals?

Blake: Well, I knew I was going to go to accounting school on the GI Bill, but that couldn't start until September, so, oh, we drew 52-20 for quite a while.

Mark: I'm interested in the 52-20 actually. How did you find out about that?

Blake: Well, that was-- Well, all of these benefits were related to you at the time of your discharge.

Mark: And they told you about them when you were discharged?

Blake: Had all the these things available to the veterans, right.

Mark: And so when you came back to Boscobel-- That is where you went back to; right?

Blake: Right.

Mark: I mean, you pretty much knew that you had the GI Bill on the 52-20 and you could get a home loan if you wanted it and you knew that when you came back?

Blake: Yes, sure.

Mark: How did you go about applying for the 52-20? Did you have to go to Madison or something?

Blake: No. We could get that right through the county seat. It was 18 miles to the-- And, in fact, they came to Boscobel, all the veterans who would sign up for that, and there would be a big line of people waiting outside the municipal building every Tuesday or whatever day it was that you had to sign up.

Mark: Were there a lot of guys signing up for the 52-20?

Blake: Oh, yeah, yeah. There was a lot of them. Well, there just wasn't all that many jobs, especially in a small town like that.

Mark: Yeah. Yeah.

Blake: And we knew we were going to go to school in the fall. We weren't really actively looking for a job. Of course, if they found you one you had to take it.

Mark: Yeah. And if I recall correctly, you are supposed to go out and look for one too while you are on the 52-20.

Blake: Right.

Mark: Did you?

Blake: Well, somewhat, but like I said there wasn't really anything there. We weren't looking very actively.

Mark: And when you came back where were you living? Were you with your folks yet or did you--

Blake: Yeah.

Mark: And while you were drawing the 52-20 then you are in the process of applying to go to school--

Blake: Right.

Mark: --here in Madison.

Blake: Right. Well, and then this friend of mine and myself, two or three of us went back to high school and took a couple of courses and got our GEDs then.

Mark: Oh, you hadn't finished high school. Yeah, that's right.

Blake: Right. So then during that time before I went to college in September we got a GED, high school diploma.

Mark: And then you did go to college.

Blake: Right.

Mark: At UW here.

Blake: No. It was Madison Business College.

Mark: Oh, I see. Why don't you tell me a little bit about the Madison Business College after World War II. I mean, I've spoken to a lot of vets that have been to the UW here, other schools. They'll tell me how it's filled with

veterans. I mean, I had one gentleman who was in art school and he said even that was filled with vets. What was your experience with the Madison Business College?

Blake: We were about 95 percent veterans, maybe five percent that weren't, that were just going there out of high school.

Mark: Mostly men?

Blake: Yeah. A few women, but most of them weren't going for this hundred-week course, two years. Some were for so-called master of accounts degree. Most of the women probably were taking one-year courses or secretarial or something like that. With the two- year, hundred-week accounting course, yeah, about 95 percent of them were probably men.

Mark: Did the GI Bill cover your expenses? For example, you not only had tuition but you had to relocate to Madison and feed yourself and that sort of thing.

Blake: Yeah. This friend of mine and myself that were going, we got a room on West Wilson, and then we did get so much from the GI Bill for subsistence as well as books and tuition, that sort of thing, but it really wasn't enough. We got part-time jobs at Madison newspapers and worked there for a few years.

Mark: Was it hard finding those part-time jobs?

Blake: No. It didn't seem like it was too difficult. They had-- Well, the newspaper was usually looking for people to help get the papers out like on weekends and delivering to the paperboys and such as that.

Mark: So this degree took what, two years, three years?

Blake: Yeah. It was a hundred weeks, two full years.

Mark: That's two years, yeah.

Blake: Yeah.

Mark: I'm trying to do the addition. I am not very good at math.

Blake: August of '48.

Mark: And then it came time to find full-time work.

Blake: Uh-huh.

Mark: And you did.

Blake: I got an office manager/accountant's job at a Ford dealership in Platteville.

Mark: Again no problem finding work?

Blake: No.

Mark: What I'm thinking is with the 52-20 there were a lot of guys out of the service, right out of the service, flooding the job market. By the time you had gone through the schooling and everything that problem seems to have been alleviated to some extent, at least in your experience.

Blake: Well, in that field anyway.

Mark: Yeah. So how did you get in the Korean War? I noticed you put Korean War on here.

Blake: Well, I was working at this Ford dealership and I was in the reserves, and like I say we went down to Dubuque then and we got into the organized reserve where we were getting paid monthly or quarterly for the meetings. We went every Monday night. And then in 1950 when the Korean War broke out they were calling everybody back for active duty, and they had me still listed as radioman, and radiomen were one of the first ones to get called in the Navy. So I got called up as a radioman and it took me a little while to convince them that I wasn't a radioman anymore, I was a storekeeper. So they finally got that all squared around, my paperwork and everything. But I was in. I was called back.

Mark: I see. And what did you do?

Blake: Well, I was in Great Lakes for a while. That's where we went, and then they assigned me to the Seabees and I was sent to Port Hueneme, California, to a Seabee battalion. In the meantime I had put in the several letters and everything that were required for a hardship discharge because my wife was pregnant with our third child at the time and she was having all kinds of physical problems.

Mark: Right.

Blake: And moneywise we were hurting, so--but by the time-- I was out in Port Hueneme for a while anyway before all these letters and everything were approved by the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington, and it took quite a while for these to come through, and then they finally did in December of '50. So I was only in three months.

Mark: Still that's--

Blake: But it disrupted my whole life.

Mark: Yeah. I suspect after that you left the reserves.

Blake: They asked if you wanted to stay in the reserve or get out completely. You got to be kidding. (laughs) Let me out? No, I got out completely then.

Mark: Yeah. I have just got one last-- Oh, to get back to the veterans' benefits thing for a minute, you went to school and you got a job. Did you use the GI home loan or anything like that?

Blake: Yeah, I did, and after I worked in Platteville for-- Well, when I got back from the Korean deal then I got a job with a Dodge and Plymouth dealer in Platteville, and I worked for him until April of '52 when I was offered a job up here in Rural Insurance Company. So I came up here in April of '52 and then immediately sought housing, of course. So we bought an older house with a down payment borrowed from my mother-in-law and then a loan from Anchor Savings and Loan and then a certain part of that loan from the state veterans at two percent.

Mark: Okay. Was it a problem getting that loan?

Blake: Well, yeah, it was a little difficult.

Mark: What did they put you through?

Blake: Well, a hassle about what the house was worth and whether I could afford it and all that sort of thing. We finally got all that resolved, you know, that my monthly income would allow me to make the payments. The payments were only $63 a month between Anchor and the state veterans alone. So I couldn't rent it for that.

Mark: Would you have bought the house without the loan?

Blake: I couldn't have. I wouldn't have the money. I would have had to have found a loan somewhere.

Mark: Yeah. It seems to me there was a federal loan too.

Blake: Well, yeah. I never explored that on the GI bill, but I don't know if they had housing loans at that time or not.

Mark: I was interested in how you found out about them, the loans.

Blake: Oh, about these veterans' loans?

Mark: Yeah.

Blake: Well, the county service officers, and then I was the quartermaster of the VFW club in Platteville while I was down there, so we were apprised of all the different benefits at one time or another.

Mark: Which leads me to my last area of questions, and that involves the veterans' organizations, and you did indicate that you are a member of the Legion and the VFW.

Blake: Oh, I joined the American Legion as soon as I got back to Boscobel from the service, so--

Mark: For what reason?

Blake: It was a veterans' group, and we wanted to still, you know, be active and patriotic and all that sort of thing. Then after I moved from Boscobel up here to Madison I didn't really stay in the Legion. I didn't pay the dues. And then when I got to Platteville then after college and started working down there I joined the VFW there, and they got me as quartermaster because I had the accounting background and everything.

Mark: Yeah. I was going to ask if you were what you would call an active member, and you were the quartermaster--

Blake: Well, I was there in Platteville, you bet.

Mark: Post quartermaster.

Blake: Yeah. Yeah. I took care of all the books and membership, and they had a

bar, and I took care of all the accounting for that.

Mark: No small task probably.

Blake: They wouldn't let me get rid of it. Unless you get somebody to do that for like $10 a month, you know, they want to keep you. So I kept it all the time I was there until I moved up here.

Mark: And you continue to be a member of the VFW today.

Blake: No, I didn't.

Mark: Oh, you didn't?

Blake: No. After I left there I really never kept it up, and I never really belonged to anything until I got into the U.S. Armed Guard, naval group now that we're in. We're real active in that.

Mark: And when did that start?

Blake: Oh, that's been going now for several years, but I didn't get in it until Kendall Neibauer (ph), one of the other guys that you interviewed-- He had a license on his car and everything "U.S. NAG" and a "U.S. Armed Guard" sticker on his bumper on his pickup, and I had been meaning to talk to him for about a year. I kept seeing that. And he came to a garage sale we had at our house one day, and I said, say, fellow, I have been meaning to talk to you for about a year." I says, "I was in the Armed Guard." And so, "Oh, God." He gives me the paperwork right away, you know, to sign up. So I signed up.

I have been in it now a couple, three years. Of course, there again they find somebody that's wants to be an officer, why, I started out as purser, which was doing all the accounting type stuff, and last year I was secretary, and now this year I am the executive officer. Next year I'll move up to skipper of the group. That's Illinois-Wisconsin combined.

We have about 450 to 500 men in Illinois and Wisconsin. But we are all at an age, you know, of about 69 to 70 years old because the Armed Guard was disbanded in 1945. So everybody is getting older and we are losing more members every year. Eventually we will all be gone. But it's real fun to be with a group like that; and everybody has, you know, just had common experiences in the past, and we are all about the same age group, and it's a real fun, friendly group.

Mark: It sounds good.

Blake: Yeah.

Mark: You've exhausted all the questions that I had. Is there anything you would like to add, anything you think we've skipped over or anything?

Blake: I can't think of anything right offhand. I think we covered my whole Navy career here. I've gone from '43 up until I got out of the Korean deal. And then you don't want to explore my employment or anything since the end of the war I don't think; do you?

Mark: Only if it is military related.

Blake: Oh, it was.

Mark: Okay. I'm interested in how the military impacted upon the rest of your life too, so--

Blake: I worked at Rural Insurance starting in '52, and then in '59 I took a job as a data processing officer out of Truax Field for the Air Force, and that was sort of a deputy to the Major, Air Force Major, that I worked for. He was in charge of all the statistical crews and data processing and computer type things for the 33rd Division, and I was in charge of all of the military and everything that were involved in the actual operation of these machines. So I was sort of like his deputy. I was a GF-10, and it was sort of the equivalent of a captain in the Air Force, and I had master sergeants and I had about 35 military and civilian people working for me there.

And then from there in--let's see. I started in '59. Then in '62 this friend of mine that I had been with in all of these things in the past in Boscobel that had been in the Navy, he worked out there too, and he had a GF-11 job in base supply, which was running the computer actually. My job before that was just machine, accounting machines. They weren't-- we didn't have a computer, but we had the forerunners of the computer. So he left and went to Colorado Springs, and I took his job in '62, got promoted to GF-11. That was-- I guess I was equivalent to a Captain, Senior Grade, next thing to a Major out there. But it was five years then I worked for the Air Force in Traux, and I really enjoyed that too. I guess I really came to think the Air Force probably had more to offer than the Navy really.

Mark: Why was that?

Blake: Well, the officers and the men, for one thing, were so close to each other, you know, and they'd party together, and in the Navy this never happened. The officers were--socially they were separate from the enlisted men. You couldn't go out and socialize together.

Mark: Yeah. The question I had in mind was how did the military generally I guess change over the course of World War II up to the early '60s when you were a civilian employee. I mean, you were in a position to sort of observe that sort of thing. Do you think that was the way the Air Force was, or do you think the military had changed perhaps?

Blake: No. I think the Air Force had always been that way because I had always heard, you know, even when I was in the Navy that during World War II when the pilots and their men were up there in the planes together, you know, and they were in close quarters--and the same thing might have happened in submarine duty in he Navy, I don't know--but they were so closely involved in limited amount of space most of the time that they became very close.

Mark: Yeah.

Blake: You know, and socially you were pretty much the same. And the Air Force never really frowned on the officers and men, you know, getting together and going out and partying. All of the old-- They still had their own clubs, like NCO club and officers' club, and airman's club. If they wanted to go out on the town, why, there wasn't anything against that really.

Mark: So you came away with a favorable impression of the Air Force then.

Blake: Yeah, I sure did. And they had a lot of good fields that you could train in too like, you know, computers and accounting and all that sort of thing, same as-- pretty much the same as the Navy. I think career wise if a person was to go in either the Air Force or the Navy to get experience in one of those fields, computer field or whatever, they'd both be pretty comparable in that respect.

Mark: Yeah. Well, again those are all the questions I had, unless there was something else you wanted to add.

Blake: No. That should pretty well do it.

Mark: That was very interesting.

Blake: Well, thanks for letting me do this.

Mark: Yeah. Thank you for taking some time out of your day.

Blake: All right. No problem.

[End of Interview, Side 2, Tape 1]