

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
COSMAS HOFFMAN
Deck Hand, Merchant Marine, World War II
1999

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Hoffman, Cosmas. (1924-2014). Oral History Interview, 1999.

Approximate length: 59 min.

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Cosmas Hoffman, a native of Madison, recounts his World War II service in the Merchant Marine plying the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Indian Oceans, and in the Pacific Theatre. Hoffman entered the Merchant Marine in fall 1942, and received three month's training at Sheepshead Bay Maritime Service Training Station in New York. He states that he chose the Merchant Marine over the military because he wanted "to see the world," and, therefore, he exercised his preference to be stationed on a Liberty ship over a tanker because Liberty ships were in port longer, the unloading process allowing for shore time. Hoffman covers the manning of the merchant ship; his duties did not include operating the guns, with Coast Guard men being assigned each ship. Pay had been determined by a zone schedule as a bonus; by mid-war, however, and Hoffman's entry, the Merchant Mariner largely had to subsist on minimum wage. Although the average trip was two weeks, Hoffman states that he was sometimes at sea for nine months. Hoffman affirms the veracity of an article that claims that the wartime practice for ships to "zig zag" actually placed them in more danger from submarine attack; he tells of watching torpedoes narrowly miss ship. Zig-zagging also necessitated an ocean-crossing in the Pacific of thirty days. He locates the spots in his travels where his ship was particularly susceptible to attack. He compares the experiences of going through the Suez Canal with that in the Panama Canal. Hoffman relates a humorous mistaken-identity prank that he perpetrated in Cape Town, South Africa. In providing an accounting of the typical cargo carried in the Merchant Marine, Hoffman illustrates the oft greater danger the Mariner faced. If explosives were aboard ship, the sailing was done solo. Although he attests the food to have been generally good, Hoffman reports that he became undernourished, and contracted boils, when a voyage lasted longer than the three-month's supply of food; such a lengthening occurring if impressed in a war zone. Hoffman reminisces about a not-so-coincidental fortuitous, but bittersweet, meet-up north of New Guinea that he had with one of his seven brothers-in-arms; bittersweet because "Bud" soon thereafter died when he was near being sent home. The sudden appearance of beer aboard ship in August 1945 alerted Cosmas that he would be going home. Following the Allied victory, Hoffman extended his time at sea for two years, working as a ship pursur for the Grace Line, a passenger/cargo carrier serving the route from New York to the west coast of South America. Hoffman expresses no regret at having chosen the Merchant Marine; although it took forty years for the federal government to declare the Merchant Marine as military—and Mariners as deserving of benefits—his goal of being a world traveler was fulfilled. Postwar, the Hoffman House restaurants would bear the name of him and his brothers.

Biographical Sketch:

Cosmas Hoffman (1924-2014) served in the Merchant Marine during the Second World War. After the war he and his brothers opened and operated the Hoffman House chain of restaurants.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999.
Transcribed by Linda Weynand, 2012.
Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2016.

Transcript:

Hoffman: I was just wondering—

McIntosh: At least I want to get this on videotape while you're deciding whether it's a—so you can hold us up. 'Cause this is a medal given to his mother because of the fact that each star on the medal represents one of her eight sons that was in military service in World War II. It's really unusual. Yeah. Okay. So, now—

Hoffman: So when the parents passed on I kind of took this and hid it.

McIntosh: Sure, all right.

Hoffman: I didn't say too much to the other brothers. Of course, now I'm down to only three brothers, anyway—or two brothers, anyway, so—

McIntosh: Wally is gone?

Hoffman: Starting from the top: brother Jerry is gone—he was a Marine. Oh, I see—help you out on that tour, help myself out at the funeral.

McIntosh: Sure.

Hoffman: This is an unusual picture. I had a larger one, too, someplace: The first to return after the war, and so forth. They had us brothers march as the lead start of the Memorial Day Parade.

McIntosh: Oh, uh-huh.

Hoffman: Yeah. Okay, here.

McIntosh: Yeah, I used to see this posted in the restaurant.

Hoffman: Yeah. There's still one up in Ishnala [Supper Club, Lake Delton, Wisconsin]. Let's see, I got to start—here we go. Usually they're posted by age. Jerry's a Marine. He's the oldest, and he was in the Marines. Then the next—

McIntosh: And where is he?

Hoffman: Over here.

McIntosh: Yes. I mean, is he dead?

Hoffman: Oh, he's dead.

McIntosh: I see. Okay.

Hoffman: Fran. Oh, here's Fran. He was the second oldest, and he was a trooper, 1-0-1: 87th, 1-0-1. And the third would be brother Cy, and he's dead. Cy was Army, and he was the third, followed by Bob. Bob was in the Air Corps, and he's still living and then, followed by Bud [Sylvester] that was killed in the war. This picture I myself got down in Sydney, Australia when I found out there was one taken in some studio down there because we met overseas in New Britain [Papua New Guinea]. Then comes brother Walter. Let's see, where's Walter? Oh, here's Wally. He was in the Merchants and then later Navy.

McIntosh: Where's Wally?

Hoffman: Here.

McIntosh: He's the one that was in my class at West High [Madison, WI].

Hoffman: Oh, is that right?

McIntosh: Yeah.

Hoffman: Oh, '44—

McIntosh: '41, yeah.

Hoffman: '41, yeah. Okay, that's Wally, and of course he's dead, and then I come in here.

McIntosh: That's you.

Hoffman: Yeah, I was '42 West. Oh, Chuck [Charles]—he was the Navy.

McIntosh: He was the youngest.

Hoffman: No, Tom was the youngest.

McIntosh: Oh.

Hoffman: This is the one that wasn't in the war--the only one. He was what we call our "Vilas Park Commando" because every time we sent something home from the war—a helmet or a gun, you know—he would play army in Vilas Park. We got pictures of that. That's kind of cute. And then Charles was the youngest.

McIntosh: I see.

Hoffman: Yeah, that's the way we line up.

McIntosh: Yeah, beautiful family. We need to have your signature so we can reproduce copies of this tape, you know, as we need 'em.

Hoffman: Okay.

McIntosh: Right in front of that space there, Cos.

Hoffman: Okay. You and Charlie Larkin, I guess, are friends?

McIntosh: Yeah. We have lunch every Tuesday.

Hoffman: Every Tuesday?

McIntosh: Every Tuesday [Hoffman laughs]. Yeah, I've known him, oh, sixty years, I guess.

Hoffman: Is that right?

McIntosh: Oh, yeah.

Hoffman: I was real happy when Charlie's—well, not because of Charlie's wife dying—but I was real happy that he found Bob Connor's wife, you know, because they were friends anyway.

McIntosh: Yes.

Hoffman: And it turned out it just great for both of them.

McIntosh: It worked out.

Hoffman: Just worked out just great.

McIntosh: Yeah, Charlie and I were at Madison General [Hospital] at the same time.

Hoffman: Is that right?

McIntosh: In training, yeah.

Hoffman: Oh, I'll be darned.

McIntosh: So, get you started. You were born in Madison.

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you entered the military service in 1943.

Hoffman: Well, I really entered in the fall of '42 because I went through Sheepshead Bay [Maritime Service Training Station] in New York. That was where the training was.

McIntosh: For the Merchant Marine?

Hoffman: For the Merchants, yeah.

McIntosh: Now, they have a school out in King's Point [United States Merchant Marine Academy], New York.

Hoffman: Oh, yeah, there's a military school—I mean King's Point Officer Training School.

McIntosh: Uh-huh.

Hoffman: Mm-hm.

McIntosh: But you went to—

Hoffman: I went to Sheepshead Bay. That was where they took all of us and took us into training.

McIntosh: All the civilians and turned 'em into sailors.

Hoffman: It turned us into sailors.

McIntosh: Tell me about that training.

Hoffman: Ah, it was about three months or pretty close. I would say pretty much military training. We were issued uniforms, Navy uniforms, and we had to march down New York's Times Square.

McIntosh: Oh. Great picture. [laughs] Looks just like you.

Hoffman: But you can see it was all, ah--we wore much the same as the Navy guys. You know, the caps and everything.

McIntosh: Right.

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did your training include operation of a 3-inch 50 [caliber]?

Hoffman: No, because that was— the gun?

McIntosh: The gun, yeah.

Hoffman: No, each Merchant ship had eleven Coast Guard gunners on it.

McIntosh: I see.

Hoffman: Yeah, we had eleven Coast Guard members on every Merchant ship, and they took care of the two guns. Well, there was more than two. There was a big one—a 4.5—the big one was on the bow. And then we had—

McIntosh: That was a 5-inch 50 [caliber]?

Hoffman: A 5-inch 50 I think it was.

McIntosh: Okay.

Hoffman: And they had a steel around that about like this, you know—in a circle, steel. And that got bent in a--you'd think that's a lot of strength, but I saw that get bent in a storm. And then we had two, four—gosh, I don't really recall what they were. Gunner guns, you know. So that was our protection for our Merchant ship.

McIntosh: Now, did you sign on with a company, or how did this work? Did they assign you?

Hoffman: Well, the first thing is you go through your training and so forth, and you become non-military. We're not military at that point.

McIntosh: I understand.

Hoffman: That came in later. Then what we would do is get our qualifications for—I started in as a deckhand. Then we would go to a union hall, and you never knew where you were going just like, you know, you were military. You never knew you were going except when the ships were listed on the board and if you wanted a certain ship—like I never wanted a tanker because tankers are never into port long enough; they're in and out. I always took the old slow Liberty ship because by the time you emptied five holds of cargo, and maybe even they had to take some cargo along, that took quite a bit of port time. And that's what I wanted more than anything. So, I—and every time—you would throw in your card—you'd get a stamp when you first entered the union hall. Then you would go

ahead—that was UAW [United Auto Workers] at that time. Well, Walter Reuther—the guy was the head of it. Yeah, remember him? You threw in your card, and the oldest ones got the ship. Then you get issued the ship, and you go to that ship, check in with the captain, and he'd assign you to where he wanted to put you. Then the ship would sail, and you never knew where it was going, yeah.

McIntosh: When you stepped aboard you didn't know?

Hoffman: You never knew where it was going, unh-uh. Most of the time when we were heading to the war zones of course they would put us in convoys, and sometimes we'd go and circle maybe three, four hours until they put maybe 150 ships together. Then pretty soon they'd go off.

McIntosh: How many were there of you—the deckhands? You say you started as a deckhand. Now, in an average Liberty ship, what are we talkin' about here?

Hoffman: Well, let's see. In a Liberty ship you had three shifts so you had three deckhands per shift and two shifts of four hours each day. Out of that four hours you took one hour at the wheel, one hour on lookout, and one hour standby. That happened three shifts a day. So it took nine for that. Then we had a bosun [boatswain] mate, led the deckhands and so forth. And from there on in you went in to your officers: third mate, second mate, first mate, captain. And then up here in the engine room you'd start in with the—

McIntosh: And they were all civilians, too?

Hoffman: They were all civilians too, mm-hm, yeah.

McIntosh: So this crew marked out— where were your quarters on a Liberty ship?

Hoffman: The bunks. Four guys to a bunk, but there was only three guys, but there was room for four.

McIntosh: I see.

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: So you just alternated whatever shift you were on.

Hoffman: Yeah. Oh, when we got out—when the trip was over we would probably come here to Mr. Lawrence here on the Selective board, and we would be issued or we would be entitled to two days per week at sea up to a maximum of thirty. So if we were out thirty weeks, that would give me

fifteen days of home time for when I come home. Of course sometimes it was nine months. Then I would check in with Mr. Lawrence—

McIntosh: Mr. Lawrence is officially what?

Hoffman: Was the guy—the head of all the the Selective Service here in Madison.

McIntosh: Ah. I didn't know that.

Hoffman: Yeah. And he was the guy, and if you didn't check in—like one time I had checked in, but they didn't keep a record of mine. They were looking all over for me. In other words I'm AWOL [absent without leave]—

McIntosh: Right.

Hoffman: See, and [laughs] they finally found me here at—found me at sea. So I guess that took care of that. I said, "Hey, talk to Mr. Lawrence in Madison. He's got my in and out." And then what I would do is, because I wanted to see as much of the world as possible, I would come in—the first trip I went out the East Coast—New York to Oran [Algeria], North Africa—and then a return to New York. Then of course I would spend my time at home and then I'd go to the Pacific coast. That trip over, I'd come back into Madison, then go out—that way I could tell I could do more, you know, seeing-the-world type thing. That's the way I did my deal.

McIntosh: Tell me more about your job. As a deckhand you were specifically—you cleaned the decks—

Hoffman: As a deckhand you—

McIntosh: You run the pipes and all the—

Hoffman: No, not the pipes 'cause that's engineers.

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Hoffman: Yeah, that's the guy who [inaudible] down on the deck if you're down below. Ours would be to steer the ship, watch out, and also—at the end of the day that's true: you worked on the—swabbed the decks and chipped the paint.

McIntosh: Yeah. I remember that. I was on a hospital ship for a year. That noise never left me. I think it was about a month after I got home I could still hear those guys doing it, day and night, it seemed.

Hoffman: Well, you always chipped. There was never a day that there wasn't chipped paint.

McIntosh: Or painting.

Hoffman: And painting 'cause they'd start right all over again.

McIntosh: Yeah, yeah. [laughs] I was impressed with that.

Hoffman: Yeah, and then of course you did all your mooring of the ship and unmooring of the ship. Sometimes you had to do the winches if they were short of winch people.

McIntosh: Tell me how—what they'd do.

Hoffman: Well, the two booms that are layin' on it like this on the ship go out, and then there's cables that go to 'em.

McIntosh: To pick up a load or—

Hoffman: To pick up cargo and take it over to the dock or from the dock over there. And you had two winches. Usually that was done by a union person that wasn't even on the ship, but many a time you'd get in to port, and they didn't have those people available so we'd have to do it.

McIntosh: Was that hard to learn?

Hoffman: Well, it was kind of tricky at first.

McIntosh: It sounds that way.

Hoffman: Yeah. Well, you gotta tighten one and loosen the other, you know, and stuff like that.

McIntosh: It's a technique they learn.

Hoffman: Yeah, but I got fairly good at it after a while.

McIntosh: Your average trip across the Atlantic was how long?

Hoffman: I think probably that trip—

McIntosh: From New York to Duran, for instance.

Hoffman: Oran.

McIntosh: Oran.

Hoffman: I'm not—don't—

McIntosh: Roughly.

Hoffman: Roughly on that, I would say roughly maybe two weeks. Yeah, it never traveled fast.

McIntosh: Thirteen knots?

Hoffman: Twelve, thirteen knots about it, yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah. See, my hospital ship was just a converted Liberty ship.

Hoffman: Oh, is that right?

McIntosh: Oh, sure.

Hoffman: Oh.

McIntosh: So I know about the insides of those [laughs].

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. Once in a while I'd take a Victory ship. Victory ships were a little bit better than—

McIntosh: They're a little bigger?

Hoffman: It was an upgrade. Well, it was an upgrade from a Liberty.

McIntosh: In what way?

Hoffman: Oh, it was a nicer ship. Well, it had more sleek—it was a better bow, and it was faster, better quarters.

McIntosh: I must have been on one of those because we came back on the Pacific at about eighteen knots most of the time.

Hoffman: Uh-huh. Yeah, that was a faster, faster-knot ship, mm-hm.

McIntosh: But to cross the Pacific took a while, though, didn't it?

Hoffman: Well, the Pacific would take almost thirty days. Well, you know what the problem was, Jim.

McIntosh: Zigzagging?

Hoffman: They're zigzagging. And do you know that it was twenty years after the war was over, I pick up a *Reader's Digest*, and it was a fallacy, the zigzagging [McIntosh laughs]. It was established that you were more in danger on a zigzag route than you were if you were just going.

McIntosh: Gave the submarines more chance.

Hoffman: Gave the chance to— they knew—even though you did it sporadically and never had a pattern—they knew you were going to do it.

McIntosh: Right. So they just had to wait.

Hoffman: And so they just kind of lined themselves up, because I've seen torpedoes just go right on the side, or right in front, or right and miss. You know, they almost had us. Of course, they'd wait for us, and going into Australia—not Australia, New Britain, Port Moresby, that was a narrow. So they knew we had to go in, and that's where they really kind of—I almost caught one there.

McIntosh: But you never did? You never were sunk?

Hoffman: Never got sunk, no.

McIntosh: How close? Tell me about how close.

Hoffman: Well, looking down and you could see it go right by ya.

McIntosh: Just parallel to the—

Hoffman: Yeah, and the little waves—static.

McIntosh: Those were Japanese torpedoes?

Hoffman: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: In the Pacific.

Hoffman: Except over on the Atlantic they waited for us to get through the—

McIntosh: English Channel.

Hoffman: No, not the English Channel. They didn't hit us there.

McIntosh: Straits of Gibraltar?

Hoffman: Gibraltar. That's when they would come down, and they did our chip painting for us 'cause they would just strafe. And [laughs]—

McIntosh: Strafe?

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. Came down and strafing—

McIntosh: Oh, you mean airplanes?

Hoffman: Yeah, airplanes. That would do the chip painting for us [laughs].

McIntosh: Mm-hm. So that scattered everybody.

Hoffman: Well, we all went down deck naturally.

McIntosh: Anybody get killed there in one of those air raids?

Hoffman: Ah, no, unh-uh.

McIntosh: But it wouldn't slow you down or change your course?

Hoffman: Oh, no, you just kept going. They just caught us in the narrows, see, when you're in the Mediterranean Sea.

McIntosh: But only bullets aren't even going to stop that ship. What was their objective?

Hoffman: I have no idea. I have no idea because they weren't giving us a torpedo or anything.

McIntosh: No bombs, either?

Hoffman: Nor bombs, no, unh-uh. The torpedoes came out there in the ocean, you know. I sailed—one convoy was 221 ships.

McIntosh: One convoy?

Hoffman: Mm-hm and one convoy on the—that was the Atlantic. And the one convoy on the Pacific was 186 ships, and that one we circled around for three hours, and then we dropped anchor. We had to go by ourselves because we had explosives on, and they didn't want us that close to other ships.

McIntosh: No point in sharing that.

Hoffman: No. So we went by ourselves. About seven of the guys signed off right away. These were guys that had been career Merchant people, and they were older people than we were, and they had a right to sign off. So they just—that's enough.

McIntosh: They didn't want any part of that dynamite.

Hoffman: No, no part of it. They just signed off. So then it took us a while to get some more crew, you know.

McIntosh: Did you get liberty when got to, say, Oran? Were you off ship at all?

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. That's the part that I liked about it.

McIntosh: So you had a chance to look around.

Hoffman: Oh, sure. You kept your watches same as you did if you were at sea. So if you had a four hour—if you weren't on watch during the—when you were not on watch you'd go to shore, is what you did. And sometimes you'd change your watches, which you could in port, and so you maybe get a longer time in port. Or some guys didn't want port time, so you bartered that. I bartered a lot of port time.

McIntosh: [laughs] Was there anything particular about Oran that you recall?

Hoffman: No, that was nothing but the old Moslem, never saw the girls—

McIntosh: No place to eat or drink that was remarkable?

Hoffman: Nothing unusual, unh-uh. That was a –

McIntosh: A bad liberty.

Hoffman: Bad port [both laugh]. That was a bad port.

McIntosh: Anywhere else on the Atlantic side that you enjoyed particularly?

Hoffman: Oh, I had a lot of good ports. Oh, sure. I had, well, take England: Portsmouth, Port Plymouth.

McIntosh: Plymouth, okay.

Hoffman: Or Portsmouth. Marseille, France. Suez Canal area was a great, you know—

McIntosh: What did you do there?

Hoffman: Well, the time you waited for ship to go through, and so forth, sometime that may have been a day.

McIntosh: Did you go through the Suez Canal?

Hoffman: Oh, a number of times. I had two round-trip trips in my deal. They weren't all just short trips. The last one was after the war was over. I stayed in another almost two years after the war. The only reason I did that is because of the Grace Line people—W.R. Grace? They had the control from New York down to the west coast of South America. They came out with eleven “Santa” ships [ships whose names began with “Santa”] after the war. These were nice ships: they were part cargo and part passenger. So you could buy a ticket on ‘em. And they had—you go through the Suez Canal—not the Suez, but the Panama Canal—and hit about, oh, Buenaventura [Columbia], Arica [Chile], Valparaiso [Chile], San Diego [Venezuela]. What's that other one? Bogota [Columbia]. You'd have five ports that they would—and if you had bought a ticket you could get off as, you know, a passenger. Get off and stay as long as you want to, and get on the next one because there's always going to be another one in four days. It was all Santa ships. Four of ‘em that hit the Caribbean after the war, they were actually passenger ships. So I stayed because I was then a purser; I had a purser ticket. That's the guy that does most of the detail work. Then the big racket on that is because you got all that exchange of money you would buy money when you leave a port, and then you'd—cheaper—and you'd sell it on the next trip for its full value, see. So there was a lot of rackets that you could do after the war.

McIntosh: Not smuggling?

Hoffman: No, there wasn't any smuggling, unh-uh. You may have sold your sheets out of your bed for some barter, but [laughs]—

McIntosh: That's about it.

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: What did they pay you when you first started as an able seaman?

Hoffman: Well, see, that's what really keys me off, you know. Everybody says, “Oh, you guys in the Merchant, you made that big money.”

McIntosh: I never heard that.

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. Well, they did make good money. When the Merchants first started out they put the world in zones. When you went into a zone you

got a bonus. Otherwise you didn't get paid much—probably about minimum wage of today or somethin' a little above. Not much more than the service people. When you went into a zone you got a bonus for going into that zone. You went to another zone, you got another bonus. If you went back to that zone in one day you got two bonuses.

McIntosh: What would the bonus amount to?

Hoffman: Oh, \$400, \$500, \$600.

McIntosh: Dollars?

Hoffman: Dollars! That was a lot of money back then.

McIntosh: That was a good deal more than they were paying you originally, basically.

Hoffman: Oh, I never got in the zone area though. That was before my time, but that's where the people that talk about Merchant Marines in that day was, "Hey, you guys are making fortunes." Well, they did make good money, but then of course the government cut that off, and then you went just into a—

McIntosh: When did the government cut that off? Do you recall?

Hoffman: I would say probably they cut it out at the end of '43.

McIntosh: It was mid-war time, though.

Hoffman: Yeah, mid-war. Yeah, yeah. And the only time that I was involved with a couple war zones was over in the Atlantic coast; nothing in the Pacific. After that time, of course, it was all over anyway. So really, very frankly, other than being with the military and doing their carrying for 'em, I've been into war zones just because we were carrying—

McIntosh: Tell me about your typical, ah, cargo—that's the word I'm thinking of.

Hoffman: Well, explosives, a lot of it.

McIntosh: A lot of it.

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. A lot of explosives.

McIntosh: In big boxes?

Hoffman: Big, big boxes, yeah, a lot of it. Well, on one trip we went over to Perth, Australia. They put eleven P-38s [heavy fighter airplanes] on deck. In other words they were stacked like this on deck, and we saw 'em take them off, and we saw 'em two days later in the air. I wanted to jump right on one, but the guy that tried to get me to do it, he couldn't do it. I mean, I couldn't do it.

McIntosh: Vehicles? A lot of vehicles?

Hoffman: A lot of vehicles.

McIntosh: You put vehicles on deck, mostly?

Hoffman: Ah, no, some went in the hold.

McIntosh: They did?

Hoffman: Yeah, jeeps and so forth—they went in the hold. And a lot of our cargo was bringing back the troops when they were--remember when the point system came in?

McIntosh: Yes.

Hoffman: They used our ships to bring back the troops.

McIntosh: Right. 'Cause ordinarily you didn't bring back much, is that right?

Hoffman: Well, not too much, no, 'cause there was no cargo coming back.

McIntosh: No, right.

Hoffman: Wehrmann from down here on State Street: Wehrmann Leather Goods? Well, he was on—got his points, and we had about twenty-five that were gonna come back with us. That's where that fourth bunk came in for me. So I said, "Anybody from Madison?" Here comes this one hand, and it was Wehrmann.

McIntosh: Which one? Which Wehrmann? Frank or Bob?

Hoffman: Frank.

McIntosh: Or Jeff? There were three of them.

Hoffman: No, Frank.

McIntosh: Yeah, Frank. Yeah, he was older. He was a little older than I.

Hoffman: Oh, is that right?

McIntosh: Yeah. Nice guy.

Hoffman: And I says to the captain, I said, “Hey, one of the guys out there,”—otherwise, you know, those guys have to go down in the hold sometimes, you know, to sleep, and that’s a lousy place. I said, “Gee, I got that fourth, you know, bed, and a friend of mine from Madison,” and so forth, and the skipper said, “Oh, fine. Let’s just treat him as a crewman,” you know. So he got to eat with us, could sleep with us.

McIntosh: Well, that was better than the rations they were giving you on deck—

Hoffman: Oh, no, they got fed pretty good.

McIntosh: Did they?

Hoffman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: How was the food? Tell me about the food.

Hoffman: Well, the food—every trip was a little bit different. If it was a short trip you had pretty good food. If the trip got beyond three months then the food was beginning to, well let’s say, run out. We were caught with—well, I don’t want to say “caught,” but we got over in the war zone over there in Australia, New Britain, and everything going up to Guadalcanal and then on up. They froze all us Merchant ships over there. In other words, froze us: forget what your original plans were to go back; you’re stayin’, and you’re gonna load up a lot of stuff on your ship. You’re going to follow us through on the campaign. That’s where I caught my brother “Bob” [Frederick “Bob” R. Hoffman].

McIntosh: With military supplies?

Hoffman: Yeah, military supplies. But now, in order to get to eat they would give us—I remember being an acting purser on that ship. I went in there, and I had my manifest for food. I picked up an orange that was laying all by itself in this great big refridge storehouse. I picked it up and was going to eat it ‘cause I hadn’t seen an orange for a long time. The guy said, “Put that back.” I said, “What do you mean, put it back?” You know, they had plenty of stuff. He said, “I said, ‘Put it back,’ didn’t I?” Now, here’s an Army guy telling me this, and that just hit me wrong because I had enough. You know, I’d been over there already probably five months, and I ended up four more months after that. So I says, “The hell with you!” and I threw it at him. I was so pissed ‘cause that was out of line. Now,

see, that trip we had to fight for every god damn piece of food we got from, you know, the military, and many times we didn't have that much. I developed boils and things in my body because—undernourished.

McIntosh: The only good food then you had is what you put on the ship with you when you left?

Hoffman: About three months.

McIntosh: After that it got pretty chancy then.

Hoffman: Yeah. Then you had to, you know, buy it or issued by the Army or—

McIntosh: You had a good refrigerator or a frozen section on your ship, though?

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. One of my trips was a reefer, too; that's in other words that's all refrigeration.

McIntosh: Yeah, I saw those in Korea.

Hoffman: Well, that one was to Hawaii, Guam. We followed the Army up to Okinawa, and I think that was the trip we ended up in Tokyo Bay: Yokohama. Yeah. And that reefer—when you're on a reefer you're pretty well known because everybody wants a [McIntosh laughs]—you know.

McIntosh: Get somethin'.

Hoffman: Yeah. And sometimes that reefer is carrying food for other Merchant ships, too. That was a pretty good duty.

McIntosh: Well, yeah, that assignment. I mean, you get a sheet that told you how much of what you were supposed to unload at each spot. So you couldn't change that, could you?

Hoffman: No, no. We didn't have a pre-designation of who was going to get what. They came to us. Those manifests came to us as we were going along those, you know, our routes. There's going to be so-and-so over, a ship over, and they're going to have—"Give 'em so and so, so and so, so and so."

McIntosh: Right. Did you carry some beer so you could drink it ashore?

Hoffman: Sure. That was a funny part of it, too. When the war ended in August, you know, I was on the way to the Pacific. I didn't see a bottle of beer in that whole trip, and I was out about two weeks, I would say. When that

war ended, beer came out of the walls [McIntosh laughs]. Booze came out of the walls!

McIntosh: On board ship?

Hoffman: Yeah, and I never knew where it was. Well, everybody had some—[**End of Tape 1, Side A**]

McIntosh: Stored somewhere.

Hoffman: Stored some place. And of course the captain had a lot of it [James laughs], and all those guys, mates, captain mates, and chief engineer, you know. Well, Ruppert beer out of New York. I drank a lot of Ruppert beer. Yeah. That's how I found out about the end of war, yeah.

McIntosh: Was that on the radio, it came over your?

Hoffman: Yeah. So I couldn't be around Times Square or a place here to find a girl to bend over and kiss her like I seen in the picture [James laughs]. I had to celebrate it with the guys which was fine with me.

McIntosh: Uh-huh. Tell me about meeting your brother.

Hoffman: Well, that was real funny because, you know, if you remember, your folks never knew where you were. So you had to have a, what is it, a PO [post office] number? We were working with PO numbers.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Hoffman: And so I never knew where any of my brothers were, either, you know. Of course as you know, when your letters came home you had all that clipped cutouts that somebody edited for you so your folks could never know? But I knew. I was told, when I was heading for Perth with those P-38s, I knew that my brother "Bud" [Sylvester]—"Bud" was a captain navigator, bombardier navigator—that he was somewhere over in that Pacific area. Just where, I did not know. And I started writing letters to this PO number. He got my—unbeknown to me, this is after—he got, being a captain in the Air Corps—he got to get more information than I could get. I just kept writing, "I'm over in here", giving little hints, you know, type of thing and so forth. When I got into Perth I checked that PO and see what I could find out there and somebody said, "Gee, I think that's up in New Guinea, New Britain up there." So, by God, this one day we got orders to go ahead and load up materials and take up to New Britain—Port Moresby is where we went first. That's a bay right on the end of New Guinea. So I checked there right when I got up there and so forth, and nobody really told me anything except I could feel something. I knew

that—I knew I was in—I knew I was pretty close, you know. Then we had to sail, and we got out of Port Moresby, and we went to the north. The Japanese were hidden now, and so we followed the northern part of New Guinea, and the guys were fighting the war, see. That’s where those Japanese dug in, you know, practically homes. So we were told to drop anchor, and there was no port or anything. We were just told to drop anchor north of New Guinea. I thought, “Well, I don’t know what’s ashore so I’m going to go ashore.” I didn’t know if there was a town there or anything, and I’m just gonna see, and as I was going—we had a little boat—as I was going in here comes one of these amphibious coming out, and we’re about, oh, maybe from that corner to here. We’re going to pass.

McIntosh: Ten feet?

Hoffman: Yeah. And I heard this voice say, “Get this pulled over there. That’s my brother!” [McIntosh laughs] Well, “Bud,” see, that “Bud,” he of course got more information than I could get, and he followed me, and of course it went right into his area.

McIntosh: Yeah. He knew where you were all the time.

Hoffman: Well, not all the time, but pretty close. Well, I got to spend a week with him. Every day the routine was this big roar of planes would take off and go out on a mission, and then when that mission was over with later in the day one would peel off, wiggle its thing, come over the ship, and then I would go ashore. We spent every night together. That was a good trip as far as food goes because I got him chickens and things. He got me booze, too, by the way. He had booze.

McIntosh: Sure.

Hoffman: So we exchanged, and we had a good time and everything. He was on his forty-sixth mission. Those guys, if you remember, flew fifty and went home. Went home, you know, fifty missions and then they were told to go home.

McIntosh: He made fifty missions then [??]

Hoffman: Yeah, and from the fortieth mission on those guys were given just milk runs [routine trips]. In other words, nothing to really war—no bombs.

McIntosh: What was he flying?

Hoffman: B-25s. But he was on his forty-sixth mission. I said, “Bud, how come you’re still flying and dropping bombs?” He said, “We were short. So our crew said, “Come on, let’s just finish off the fifty with bombs.”” And he

caught it on the forty-ninth. That night, that night when that group came back that plane didn't peel off, but that didn't give me any idea of anything. I just went out there, and then they told me. He got it that day.

McIntosh: That's a shame.

Hoffman: So I knew it before—

McIntosh: Yeah, he really came close to—

Hoffman: Well, his officer was real nice to me. He took me to his big box, you know, which everybody's got, and all of his personal things were in there. He let me have anything I wanted. All I did was pick out two things. One was a pewter-type cigarette case that had "For Dad" on it. And another was a little box, kind of a jewel box, that had "For Mother" on it. I took those with me, and it's a good thing because not one piece of that whole personal box—about this size, almost—got home. It was all [inaudible], but I had those two pieces I gave Mother and Dad.

McIntosh: Yeah. So of the nine brothers, eight in the service, and how many got home again?

Hoffman: We lost only one.

McIntosh: He was the only one you lost.

Hoffman: Luckily.

McIntosh: Yeah, that was—

Hoffman: Lucky, right.

McIntosh: Pretty lucky, yeah.

Hoffman: I almost got to see "Bob" [Frederick] and Fran who were in Antwerp, Belgium, too.

McIntosh: Oh.

Hoffman: Yeah, and that was funny because I was over there at the same time they were, but neither one of knew anything. It was only after the war was all over that Bob—I said, "Bob, you know, you're talking about Antwerp. When were you there?" 'Cause he was in the German invasions over there. And we put it together, and he said, "Hell, I was there at that time!" And he said, "Fran was there at that time!" Brother Fran.

McIntosh: Did he see him?

Hoffman: Well, yeah, they got together. And wouldn't that have been something?

McIntosh: The three of you, yeah.

Hoffman: Because I was there—just didn't know it.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Hoffman: Could have had three of us together.

McIntosh: Well, that would have been really unusual.

Hoffman: That would have been fun.

McIntosh: Tell me about going through the Suez Canal. What was that like?

Hoffman: Suez Canal that—well, I'll put it parallel with the Panama Canal.

McIntosh: Yeah, that would be my next question.

Hoffman: Yeah, well, see the Suez Canal was not as well of a canal. You worked with elevations and so forth, but nothing like the Panama Canal. You know how many there are goin' up. Suez Canal they just had these little—

McIntosh: Tugs?

Hoffman: Motorized things that pulled you through, except the wider parts of it you could start the engines through.

McIntosh: Did you keep power? You kept power on?

Hoffman: No, not all the time, no.

McIntosh: Oh. They just pulled you dead.

Hoffman: Pretty much, and then if you got to a wider part of the canal then you would power and just go through. It was a lot different than the Panama. It was a lot—it wasn't near the—

McIntosh: Right. That's what I really wanted to find out.

Hoffman: Not nearly the—when you talk about the canals and locks and so forth— not near like the Panama. The Panama was—

McIntosh: Much faster?

Hoffman: Faster and it—

McIntosh: But faster than going through the locks, then.

Hoffman: Oh yeah, they got the little—like the carts.

McIntosh: The Panama took you all day, right?

Hoffman: Yeah, it took me pretty much all day, yeah. We had about six or seven levels that we had to worry about. I went through the Canal—Panama—I'd say about six times; Suez, a couple of times. The last trip that I was—as I said I made two winter trips to the west coast of South America because that was good duty. Then I'd come up, and I'd stay—by that time I could stay all summer if I wanted to because—

McIntosh: This was after the war.

Hoffman: After the war.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Hoffman: And I could have been a chief purser of one of those Santa ships, too. I was offered that.

McIntosh: Santa? [inaudible]

Hoffman: Santa: Santa Maria—

McIntosh: Oh, the “Santas,” yeah.

Hoffman: Yeah, and so forth, and because of the fellow that I knew who was the chief guy for W. R. Grace—he offered me, and I wanted to real badly. When I made my wishes at home I got a real good nasty letter. “You no good [McIntosh laughs] sea bum. You come home and help us.” You know, they were beginning to open up the restaurant.

McIntosh: Oh, the letter is from your brothers?

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, my goodness.

Hoffman: Brother Cy [Cyril] especially. He [inaudible] me pretty good.

McIntosh: He thought you'd been away long enough?

Hoffman: That's right [McIntosh laughs]. Time to get back.

McIntosh: You were having too much fun, that's—

Hoffman: Oh, come on, that was a good time, you know. The war's over now. Now you can go, you know—

McIntosh: Right.

Hoffman: And so forth, and I could have had a nice job.

McIntosh: What does a purser get paid?

Hoffman: Oh, a purser gets paid—after the war? Oh, I don't know what they got paid. I bet you it was around, the equivalent today may be around \$40,000 or so.

McIntosh: Mm-hm. Well, it's good money.

Hoffman: Good money. Oh, and then made your other [inaudible]. Another thing you did as a purser: you had your shops that you sold llamas rugs and stuff.

McIntosh: Oh, aboard ship?

Hoffman: No, no. Shops on shore. You get acquainted with the shop owner, and say, "Okay, now, I got a crew." I mean, some of 'em were passengers, don't forget 'cause they were— "Well, jeepers, bring 'em in and I'll give you a cut", you know, and stuff like that. Well, the guys that are pursers—

McIntosh: They deal with all the shops on shore.

Hoffman: They deal with the cuts, they deal with the exchange, they deal with the shops.

McIntosh: The cops? How did the cops get in there?

Hoffman: Not the cops. The shop owners.

McIntosh: Oh, just the shop owners, yeah.

Hoffman: Yeah. Yeah.

McIntosh: They just direct the passengers—

Hoffman: Direct ‘em and then you go back and you get, you know. So that after the war that was really quite a deal. That was a good time. During the war, of course, you had to dodge bullets or, you know, subs, and stuff like that. But I still, still really have no regrets choosing the Merchants over the military at that time because I was really out to see the world, you know.

McIntosh: Well, you were what, eighteen years old?

Hoffman: Yeah. Just out of West High School a little bit. But now, of course, I don’t know if you know what happened after when they made us all Coast Guard people.

McIntosh: Tell me about that.

Hoffman: Well, it took forty years to do that. Forty years after the war was over for the government to declare that we were military.

McIntosh: Yeah, ‘cause I know you got no benefits.

Hoffman: No benefits, no nothin’. Just—and my brothers were really mad because they knew that I was more in danger in some cases than they were.

McIntosh: Exactly.

Hoffman: They wrote letters and things like that. Then all at once an Act of Congress came in, and we had to send in a lot of records, and it was between this time and that time—so a lot of your discharge papers and stuff like that and your ribbons and stuff like that. So then we were declared Coast Guard. Then after that, of course, we now have got our own flag that sails right with Navy, Army, Marine. We have our own flag.

McIntosh: Just the Coast Guard flag or—

Hoffman: No, no, no. Our own flag: Merchant Marine flag. I go to meetings once a month down in Florida. These are all guys in the Merchants, and we have our own conventions. We’re invited to speak at all the other services and the other services at ours because we are now one of the branches—military branches. I’m entitled to the VA [Veterans Administration] hospital out here.

McIntosh: You got all benefits, then?

Hoffman: Got ‘em all, but of course you didn’t get any loans for a house or anything, or education.

McIntosh: Oh, you didn't—no GI Bill?

Hoffman: No GI Bill. No, we didn't get the GI Bill because don't forget we're all forty years of age, forty beyond. But every month I go, and it's real interesting how we got our flags—they had to fight for it, finally got it—and how they're being established alongside of library buildings and office buildings. In our parades we march with the rest of the services now with our flag. So we're now military—declared forty years after. They finally did it.

McIntosh: So you attend this every year, did you say?

Hoffman: Every month when I'm down there. We have chapters all over the country, more and more coming all the time. The Merchants getting together and goin' to—

McIntosh: Is the training different now for the Merchant Marine than it was when you went in?

Hoffman: Jim, you know I have no idea. See, what really happened with our merchant fleet—first of all we know the modernization and technology of ships versus our day. Number two is the—when a ship sails for a country they carry the same standard as the country so you get really paid now as if you were on shore, in other words.

McIntosh: I see.

Hoffman: And because the United States standards are so high they're too expensive to hire a United States ship to carry. So all the foreign ships are doin' the carry. Very little Merchants do we have left because our standard of living is too high, and they want to get by—

McIntosh: It costs too much.

Hoffman: It costs too much. So we don't have very much. They were going to close down King's Point, but they just decided last year to keep it open.

McIntosh: Tell me about this card. Do you still have your card, your Merchant Marine card? You could go to sea now or no?

Hoffman: That would be a question because I wanted to do that and sail the Great Lakes. About ten years ago or fifteen years ago I said to my wife, Dorothy, I said, "You know what? Why don't I spend the summer sailing the Great Lakes?" And she says, "Oh no, you don't." I said, "Well, the

business I think can spare me, and, you know, and it'd be kind of fun." So I did check in as to what I could do, and my papers would still qualify.

McIntosh: I see.

Hoffman: Yeah. So they're active. So in other words if you're an able-bodied seaman and you got your ticket for an able-bodied seaman, you're an able-bodied seaman. Nothin' takes it away from you.

McIntosh: But you still pay union dues?

Hoffman: Well, that's the whole thing. I'd have to re-up on the—'cause I retired my union card at the end. I retired it because they went on strike after the war, and so I finally said, "I'm not going to go through—walk a strike line and so forth." So that's why I quit. Yeah. So I'd have to re-up on a union I s'pose. But of course that's no longer going to be in my plans now—

McIntosh: No, no.

Hoffman: 'Cause I'm seventy-five.

McIntosh: Right.

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, of course.

Hoffman: Not that I wouldn't want to, you know, for a couple months.

McIntosh: Now we're going to get into somethin' else. Tell me about the ocean. Did you feel always comfortable with it or take a lot to get used to it, or what?

Hoffman: I was a lucky guy. I saw so many guys get so sick. I even saw a captain that got sick the first three hours out. And here's a guy that's been at sea for twenty-six years, I think it was. And he gets sick. He'd get sick. Then after three hours he'd be all right. And I've seen a lot of guys so sick—really get sick and stay sick for quite a while.

McIntosh: They finally had to get out of that business [inaudible].

Hoffman: Well, no. They stayed, and they got over it, and then so forth. I never got sick. The only time you really get sick, I think, on a ship is if you were on a ship where you had a trailing sea, and it kind of—it can be calm as can be, and it just swells, no break of the water. If that sea was pushing from behind your ship would go forward and yaw kind of back and turn a little bit, and all at once fooh!, up against it.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Hoffman: Yeah. That's when you get sick. Now, I've been in storms where, coming down the west coast of Africa in Zanzibar, we hit a storm out there that just—oh, boy, that thing. It bent that gun deal that I told you about. Now, that's strength, you know. Well, first of all, all the rafts will drop off just by the list of the boat, you know, and our ship was supposed to go over with a list of fifty-three degrees. I'm on steerage, and I'm kept on steerage because the captain didn't trust some of the guys. All I had to do is—if I didn't have a course—all I had to do was keep that thing into the wind. Forget the course.

McIntosh: At ninety degrees, right? At right angles.

Hoffman: No, just stay—if the wind changed here you'd keep the bow there. If the wind was there you'd keep the bow there. Because if it got you, it's gonna—well, we lost our life boats too. We didn't lose them as such, but they broke the davits [crane-like devices]—you know, those are the things that [inaudible] in? Well, the water is so forceful it just broke the davits the boats hung on, you know, that they were out of their cradles. That was kind of—it turned out to be a good deal because you have to go to the next port to become seaworthy. That's the law of the sea.

McIntosh: Don't do that again.

Hoffman: If your ship is not seaworthy you cannot sail that ship. That ship has to go and become—

McIntosh: Pass an inspection?

Hoffman: Yeah, and become seaworthy.

McIntosh: Who decides that seaworthiness?

Hoffman: Well, the captain. He's responsible. So when we went through that storm that we did and it just wrecked the hell out of us and even bent that turret shield, the next port was Cape Town, South Africa. Now, you couldn't ask for a better time, and we were there two weeks. Two weeks to get all that ship seaworthy again, and we didn't have anything to do because there's no watches to worry about. We didn't have to, you know, partake in getting it seaworthy.

McIntosh: Did you have to stay off of the ship during that time?

Hoffman: Oh, no, no. No, no, they put us to work about six hours a day painting again and chipping and so forth [McIntosh laughs]. But then it was ours, and I can tell you a story that you wouldn't believe, but it's just too long to do it.

McIntosh: Oh, it's not too long.

Hoffman: Well, I went—one of the clubs—first of all, what happened is when all the wealthy people in Europe—when the war started—all the wealthy people in Europe went down to South Africa—to Cape Town, in that area 'cause they could. They wanted to get out of the war zone. They didn't want to get bombed, you know. So the ones that could afford it, they just picked up and moved—three and four years. So I moved into Cape Town, and it's a pretty place. It's got great beaches and so forth. Sugar Loaf Mountain over there, there's a cable runnin', and so forth. Three of us went into this nightclub this one night, and the nightclub was—I haven't seen anything—once, yeah, down in Mexico, Acapulco—there's one down there that would be equal. Well anyway, the club is just beautiful. You'd think there's no roof to the club, but there is, but it's all beautiful blue, white clouds. This is as if you're looking up. And the waiters—you have to be six-foot six to be a waiter, and it's like this. They're in their beautiful turbans, sashes, their balloon-type, you know. Whenever they're not doing anything of a service nature they stand around just like this, and right by ya. Just with your eyes. Boy, you didn't have to—all you had to do was look at them, and they'd say, "Want something?", you know, type thing. Well, believe it or not, *Corsican Brothers* was playing at the theater over there. Now, that was Fairbanks, Jr. Remember that, *Corsican Brothers*? And at that time I wore a goatee and so forth, and I couldn't understand what all this excitement was around in this club, except that all at once the excitement was me! I tried to figure it out, you know, what's happening here? Well, they thought I was Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. because he's playing only up the block.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Hoffman: And I resembled him that much. Well, they guys that are with are sayin', "Play the part." Well, I did. We had girls, we had food, we had everything [McIntosh laughs]. And these guys gave us a couple extra, you know, and a couple—two, three officers came in off the ship. The captain was in his uniform, which was helpful. He came in, and he sat at the table, and I told him what was happening. Boy, he couldn't believe what was happening. So, we really got loaded that night. So when we're back on the ship the next day I am beat, all beat. But by the time I recuperate with my day of sleep and work and so forth we all decided to redo it again. Sure enough, we went in to this beautiful club and got, "Here comes Douglas Fairbanks again!" and so forth. Well, unbeknowingly I got

nasty—drunk and nasty, and so much so that I was intolerable. One of those big guys came over, and all I can remember is being picked up like this—not like this, or anything—this guy picked me up practically by my armpits, held me out like this, walked me right to the front door, and told me not to come back again. I spoiled it. I was there for another two weeks. If I wouldn't have spoiled it I could have had a good time. But I spoiled it. But it was fun [laughs]. It was fun.

McIntosh: While it lasted.

Hoffman: Yeah. I know what a celebrity feels like now just because of that one incident.

McIntosh: Did they ask you for autographs?

Hoffman: Oh, yes! I'm autographing and—

McIntosh: So you signed his name?

Hoffman: Yes, and they're asking for pictures, and of course I don't have pictures. So they're taking pictures. [McIntosh laughs]. People are taking pictures, you know, and then I'm autographing, you know. That was before the Polaroid, too. They'd come back in a day or too later, and the next thing you know it's a signed picture. And by God, it's me, you know, signing.

McIntosh: Oh, my goodness.

Hoffman: That was one great experience I'm going to tell you. I really enjoyed that one [McIntosh laughs]. And I spoiled it.

McIntosh: Yeah. Oh, that's a shame.

Hoffman: And that's another thing: about two days later than that I was at the beach, and I was running down the beach, and then you'd try and judge the surf to jump into, you know. Well, I misjudged it, and of course those surfs are pretty deep so when that surf went underneath me the water was only about that deep. So then you hit the sand, and of course I hit it with my nose.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Hoffman: Well, two days later I wouldn't have been able to pull this Douglas Fairbanks anyway because my—

McIntosh: Face was swollen.

Hoffman: Raw! I just actually picked skin right off my face. I looked like a mess. I would never have gotten by anyway. So that made me somewhat—

McIntosh: Right.

Hoffman: Consolation.

McIntosh: Was there good food in South Africa?

Hoffman: Yeah, especially in this nightclub, boy: caviar, all that type of stuff. Don't forget those are all rich people down there, and they were beautiful girls, holy Moses. Today we'd say they're "Number Tens" because they were all girls from Europe.

McIntosh: Were you allowed to date any of those girls?

Hoffman: I dated. Hell, sure I did. I had some fun--especially that first night.

McIntosh: Sure. But they were interested in meeting Americans?

Hoffman: Oh, my, I had girls—that first night I had girls--

McIntosh: Offers—of fun offers?

Hoffman: I took one home, too.

McIntosh: You did, yeah?

Hoffman: Yeah. Her folks thought I was Fairbanks.

McIntosh: They bought it too?

Hoffman: Oh, yeah [laughs]. I did look like him. I got a picture [McIntosh laughs] of me with my little goatee type of thing. I did look like him, and of course he's just up the street in this picture, see, movie picture, see. So I got by beautifully on it. On that one trip I wore a mustache, a goatee, handlebar this way, and I looked really pretty good. Then when I came home—well, I took the handlebar off when I came home. I'm sittin' on the porch with my mother, and she says, "Why are you—"—no, I even took the goatee off. I just kept the mustache, that's right, and my mother says, at 916 Van Buren [Madison, WI] by Edgewood [College, Madison, WI], she says—I'm sittin' on the porch with her, and she says, "Why have you got that mustache on?" I said, "Well, gee, don't you like it, Mom?" She said, "No, unh-uh." So maybe about half an hour later she went in and started cooking the evening supper, and some of the brothers were coming home. I went up and shaved it off for her. Came down, about six

or seven around the table, mother doesn't say a thing. Finally I said to Mom, I said, "Hey, Mom, don't you notice anything different about me?" Of course I was only home a couple days at that time. She says, "No, why?" I said, "Well, I shaved my mustache off." "Oh, you did." [McIntosh laughs]. Then she pauses a little bit and says, "Gee, you did look kind of good with it on." I regrew it and never took it off [McIntosh laughs]. Yup [laughs].

McIntosh: Oh, that's cute.

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's cute.

[subject changes without transitioning dialogue or explanation]

Hoffman: Submarines, mostly. Torpedoes?

McIntosh: Right, but-

Hoffman: And this idea of zigzagging was—

McIntosh: Right, you told me that—

Hoffman: Was way off the [inaudible].

McIntosh: But often when these torpedoes were shot at you you didn't know they were comin', right?

Hoffman: No, unh-uh. You could spy 'em if you were on lookout and so forth, and we would put guys up there in the crow's nest too, by the way—that's the top—and yell down, you know, "Change course", that type of thing, and oh, we just changed course in time a couple of times. Just, that thing would pfft, you know.

McIntosh: You watched a couple of ships nearby get sunk?

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. **[End of Tape 1, Side B]**

McIntosh: Did you render help, or were you not allowed to stop, or

Hoffman: Oh, no.

McIntosh: Or did you get somebody to do the job?

Hoffman: No, no, no, no, no, we rendered help, yeah.

McIntosh: You sent over a small boat to pick up—

Hoffman: Right, survivors. Yeah, yeah, and that was right around that going into Perth with those P-38s was our worst, you know.

McIntosh: Worst with the torpedoes?

Hoffman: Yeah, because they really wanted those planes not to get in the air. They were too exposed, those planes, because they were decked. They were on deck.

McIntosh: An attractive target.

Hoffman: Oh, yeah. They just didn't want them to be in the air against 'em. So that wasn't any fun.

McIntosh: No.

Hoffman: Strafing wasn't any fun. You ought to see how those older fellows looked when those things happened. Boy, I'll tell you, they were ready to sign off and stay right in that country [laughs].

McIntosh: Well, they had seen too much, I guess.

Hoffman: This one picture—let me explain something. When Bud got killed, one of his crewmembers—there was five others that got killed with him, and I met 'em all. In 1950 we were informed that that plane was found, and so what they did is they gathered up all the remains, what was left, put 'em in a common burial box and all the families went down to Zachary Taylor Cemetery in Louisville [Kentucky], and we had a service burial for them.

McIntosh: That was nice.

Hoffman: And I met all the parents of the—

McIntosh: The five boys.

Hoffman: Five boys, and when they found out that I was the last one to see their own sons—'cause don't forget I spent about six nights with those guys—they just couldn't get over it, and of course I could tell 'em things about their son. Then another one said, "You know, we were down there in Sydney, Australia on a leave, and your brother had a picture taken at one of the studios down there that he was going to pick up when he'd go down next time." I said, "No kidding?" "Yeah." So, by God, if we didn't get down to Sydney, Australia a while after that, 'cause I was over there for nine

months 'cause that was the time that I was froze, you know? The ship was froze along with the other ones. When I got in Sydney, Australia I had a picture of Bud, and I went to about—I think it was the eleventh or twelfth studio that the guy went, “Yeah, I’ve got that. Hold it.” And that was the last picture that he had ever had taken.

McIntosh: That particular picture?

Hoffman: That particular one is the last picture he’d ever taken, and that was a posed picture at that studio. And I got it.

McIntosh: Oh, that was really lucky.

Hoffman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Really lucky.

Hoffman: That’s a nice picture.

McIntosh: Have you kept in contact with any of your shipmates?

Hoffman: I did for years, yeah, I did for years, and then, you know, just—we never had any reunions.

McIntosh: That’s probably what made it dwindle.

Hoffman: No. The reunions are really starting right now with other shipmates now because we’re—

McIntosh: Well, then you’ll get in contact again.

Hoffman: We get about fifty or sixty members each month here, and they have their big convention—their national convention-- up in Tampa that I wasn’t down there with just this year. So I will participate more because I got just involved shortly before I came up, maybe about four or five meetings. So I will be more involved with it.

McIntosh: Well, that’ll be nice.

Hoffman: Here’s a nice article that was written, by the way. On our—

[End of Interview]