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Interview with

REAR ADMIRAL ALBERT M. SACKETT

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in the Navy.

Alexander: In what year would that have been?

Sackett: That was in 1937.

Alexander: In 1937, okay. Victor, Iowa...where is that near?

Sackett: Oh, it's not near anything because there are not many large places in Iowa.

Alexander: Oh, okay.

Sackett: It's between Des Moines and Iowa City.

Alexander: Okay. That's fine.

Sackett: It's in east-central Iowa.

Alexander: Were your parents first-generation, second-, third-, or fourth-generation in this country? Do you know?

Sackett: My father was second-generation. My mother was an immigrant. She came over from Belgium as a young girl and settled first in Illinois, and then her family moved to Iowa.

Alexander: Okay, thank you. What part of the year of 1937 was that when you enlisted in the Navy?

Sackett: I graduated from high school at the end of May, and I turned seventeen on June 24 [1937], and about three weeks after that, I entered the Navy.

Alexander: Okay. And when you did enlist, you went to basic training, I assume.

Sackett: I went to boot camp at Recruit Training Command at Great Lakes [Naval Training Center, Waukeegan], Illinois.

Alexander: I understand that place.

Sackett: (Chuckle)

Alexander: I managed to make it to that place myself. In those days, how long did the recruit training take you?

Sackett: I think that recruit training was about twelve weeks back in those days, Bill,

Alexander: It didn't change a lot.

Sackett: Oh, it changes. They shorten it a little bit, and then they discover that maybe something is a little bit lacking in basic training. Then they add on to it.

Alexander: They added to ours because...I was in in 1945, and we were not sure just what we were going to do. Of course, we were being trained, and they had extra training for us for the invasion [of Japan].

Sackett: Too frequently, I think, Bill, we have to add on additional aspects in basic military training to correct some of the ills of society. The kids just are...I don't know. They enter the services without some of the mores and the standards that we had instilled in us through out church and families and whatnot.

Alexander: That's true. There's no question about it. What was your first duty following your training at Great Lakes? What would that have been? Do you recall?

Sackett: My first assignment was the old heavy cruiser USS

Northampton [CA-26] in the Pacific Fleet.

Alexander: Oh, was it?

Sackett: Yes. I went aboard her at the end of 1937, and served, oh, about three-and-a-half years on her, I guess.

Alexander: Who was fleet admiral when you went aboard? Do you recall?

Sackett: I just don't remember who the fleet admiral was. I know that Admiral [James O.] Richardson relieved whoever was fleet commander when I went aboard. Of course, Admiral Richardson had the disconnect, if you can use that term, a difference of opinion, with President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt--and the president always wins. So, Admiral [Husband E.] Kimmel then relieved Admiral Richardson.

Alexander: Oh, at Pearl Harbor?

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: I see. So, Richardson had a conflict with President Roosevelt.

Sackett: Very much so. Do you want me to go ahead and describe it?

Alexander: Yes, what you know about it.

Sackett: As I recall it...of course, I was an enlisted man back in those days, but I've read Admiral Richardson's book as I've read, of course, the Naval Institute Proceedings on Admiral [Chester W.] Nimitz and many

others. But in 1939, we formed the Hawaii Detachment, of which I was a member. There were two cruiser divisions, two aircraft carriers, and a flotilla of destroyers that were forward-based--homeported at Pearl Harbor--in anticipation of this conflict with Japan would be coming on. Then in 1940, we had fleet maneuvers in the Pacific, and the whole Pacific Fleet came out--battleships, the rest of the carriers, destroyers, submarines and all. Then it was decided at the highest levels that the battleships of the fleet would remain at Pearl Harbor. Of course, Admiral Richardson's position was that we did not have the training support to keep the fleet at a high state of readiness. He felt that they should return to their bases on the West Coast.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: As I said, the president won.

Alexander: He always does.

Sackett: Eventually, Admiral Richardson, then, felt so strongly about this that he was relieved.

Alexander: Can you remember about when that was? I know that it's a quick reference.

Sackett: I think that it was...I'm going to say that it was in about late 1940 or early 1941.

Alexander: It was that early on.

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: I would have thought that it would have been later than that if only because I don't know (chuckle).

Sackett: I forget when Admiral Kimmel took over, but I'm assuming that it was in late 1940 or early 1941.

Alexander: Yes. You were still aboard the Northampton at that time.

Sackett: Northampton, yes, sir.

Alexander: What about training at that time? Did you notice a distinct change in training procedures or anything like that?

Sackett: Oh, we had to have a distinct change because, of course, in the Navy that I had entered, I think that we had a total of, let's say, about 80,000 officers and men. Some of our enlisted personnel would go aboard the larger ships--the battleships and some cruisers--and they'd stay there for a full career, their full twenty years, with very little shore duty. Training for the most part was aboard ship.

I happened to be in engineering, a machinist's mate, and as I recall, the only schools that they had for machinist's mates was probably shop mechanics, you know, lathes and that type of thing. We did have schools for gyro electricians, internal communications electricians, fire control. Gunner's mate training, I believe, was all aboard ship. I don't think that there were any Class A schools for them back in those

days.

Then, of course, as we started the expansion of the Navy in 1939, the "brass" [higher echelons of command] ordered new construction here and there, and it was after that, with the rapid expansion of the Navy, that they had to institute the training system that basically we have today with our Class A, B, and C schools for enlisted personnel.

Alexander: Yes. Of course, as an engineer, as a machinist's mate, your duty station under fire would have been with your equipment, wouldn't it?

Sackett: Yes, in the engine room. After steering was another one, repair parties--damage control and repair parties. They varied, but it was generally below decks, yes.

Alexander: What about the Northampton? Was she an early ship? I don't remember the Northampton.

Sackett: The old Northampton came out in 1932-33.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: She was a heavy cruiser. There were about six in her class. The Houston [CA-30] was one; the Chester [CA-27] was another. We had 8-inch guns. We had nine 8-inch guns. I'm going to say that we had about four 5-inch antiaircraft guns. Then, of course, when the war came along, they added more guns, especially 40-millimeters, 20-millimeters, and that type of thing.

Alexander: Yes, more armament. How long did you stay aboard the Northampton?

Sackett: I stayed aboard there for about three-and-a-half years.

Alexander: So, you were off of it and to other duties, then, by 1941.

Sackett: Yes, the Navy put out a call for volunteers to go to their school for diesel training...

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: ...because we were going to bring in several diesel-powered ships. I had been out at Pearl Harbor for about two years--homeported there--and I thought that it was time that I probably moved on. So, I extended...I think that I extended [my enlistment] rather than reenlisting at that time. You had to have at least two additional years of obligated service to do this. So, I came back with a draft of sailors from the Pacific Fleet that went to New London, Connecticut. The Submarine Base is where we went for diesel school.

Alexander: Oh, you did?

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: Is that right?

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: Later on, there was a big one in Gulfport [Mississippi].

Sackett: Gulfport, Mississippi? Is that right? I'll be

darned. Okay.

That would have been in 1941, before the [Japanese] attack on Pearl Harbor. I was back in the States.

Alexander: Were you back in the States at the time of Pearl Harbor?

Sackett: Yes, I certainly was. I had put the USS Jamestown in commission.

Alexander: In 1941, that's right.

Sackett: The Jamestown was a yacht that the Navy took over. I believe that it belonged to the Thompson family, copper magnates. The name had been the Savarona as a yacht. I went to the Jamestown, and we certainly had an interesting first summer on her. In the summer of 1941, we made the midshipman's cruises from the [United States] Naval Academy [Annapolis, Maryland] on her--for the plebes [freshmen].

Alexander: Oh, you did?

Sackett: With the war in the Atlantic, the Navy decided to cancel the traditional midshipman's cruises, but they still wanted to give the plebes a little experience aboard ship. So, we went to Annapolis and carried about 110 midshipman at a time on a two-week cruise on Chesapeake Bay.

Alexander: Oh, just in the bay?

Sackett: Just in the bay.

Alexander: Yes, it would have been too dangerous to go out to sea.

Sackett: Yes, that's right, especially on the Jamestown. We had no guns and no sonar at that time.

Alexander: That's interesting. But, of course, as a tender, you did get some of those things later.

Sackett: After we finished the midshipman cruises there in September of 1941, I think, we went back to the Brooklyn [New York] Navy Yard, and then they converted this yacht into PT boat tender. We had a gasoline [storage] capacity of about 40,000 gallons for the PT boats. The PT boats used aviation gas.

Alexander: That's right.

Sackett: So, they cut a big hole in the side of the ship and converted some diesel tanks, and we slid this 40,000-gallon tank in there.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Sackett: And we had sonar installed and a few guns. Then they assigned us to the Pacific Fleet.

Alexander: Okay, let's go to that time. Do you recall about what time you went to the Pacific Fleet, approximately?

Sackett: Well, we operated in the Atlantic, somewhat, there for a few months in early 1942 on convoy duty. Then we started out to the Pacific in about June or July of 1942.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: Of course, right about then the Marines were going to

be landing on Guadalcanal.

Alexander: Did you know that at the time?

Sackett: No, we didn't. We had no idea about that. At least I didn't, at my level. After all, I was an enlisted man.

Alexander: What were you [was your rank] then? That's a good point.

Sackett: I was probably a first class machinist's mate at that time. We went out, of course, to Fiji, Samoa, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides. Then, of course, at the New Hebrides the PT boats were brought out on large tankers and then offloaded at the New Hebrides. Then we towed and escorted the boats up to Guadalcanal. So, that would have been when we arrived at Guadalcanal. I think that we arrived there in Guadalcanal in September. The landings were in early August.

Alexander: August.

Sackett: We got there early in September.

Alexander: So, you were right behind that.

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: There's something that I was going to ask you about the passage from the New Hebrides to Guadalcanal. Where did you base the PT boats near Guadalcanal?

Sackett: At Tulagi.

Alexander: You went to Tulagi. Okay.

Sackett: Yes. In fact, what they did--the captain and the chief quartermaster--they went up with a whaleboat, and they took soundings in this river. I guess that it was the Tulagi River, and it was deep enough for us to get up there. The "Old Man" [the captain] took this ship up this river, dropped the anchor, turned the ship around, and we moored to the side of the river--to trees--and we left enough room between the stern for the PT boats to get in there for refueling.

Alexander: Oh, I see, behind you.

Sackett: Yes. And we made nets--camouflage nets--to put over the ship, and through all of those air attacks and everything like that around Tulagi in the Solomons and whatnot, never once did they spot us.

Alexander: Not a surface ship? Not anything?

Sackett: We were well-hidden out up there (chuckle)

Alexander: That's incredible. Do you remember your commanding officer at that time?

Sackett: Sure--Charlie Beasley, who was a wonderful captain, you know. He's now deceased. We all had the greatest respect in the world for Captain Beasley, and I had the distinct pleasure in later years...his son, Charles, Jr., served under me when he was a commander, and I reestablished contact with Captain Beasley at that time.

Alexander: That's very nice.

Sackett: Yes. We had an engine overhaul shop there. We carried spare engines, and we did minor repairs to the PT engines. We'd take them out. If they needed a valve job or a cylinder lining or whatever, we could do the minor jobs of that nature. We were not capable of doing a complete engine overhaul.

Alexander: But they were all diesel, of course.

Sackett: No, no. These were Packard aircraft engines.

Alexander: You had already said that these were using 100-octane gas. Leave it to me to foul up (chuckle).

Sackett: These were Packard aircraft engines. What they really were were 2,500-horsepower aircraft engines.

Alexander: Oh, my gosh, yes. I had forgotten that they used aircraft engines.

Sackett: The PT boats had three of those. They really traveled.

Alexander: They traveled so well (chuckle), I'll say. All right, in that particular action, let me ask you...obviously, your particular ship would not have fired back at anybody, because nobody would have fired at you. Is that right? Would you have any...?

Sackett: We were under attack between the New Hebrides and Guadalcanal.

Alexander: Okay, I wondered about that.

Sackett: We were bombed by Japanese planes, and, of course, we were not hit. We were given credit for sinking a

Sackett: It was a great experience.

Alexander: What was Captain Beasley's rank at that time?'

Sackett: He was a commander.

Alexander: I didn't know what that rank [on a PT boat tender] would have been at that time. All right, you're at Tulagi. You're there. You're setting up, and now let's talk about what you do. What do you do? What does that ship do now?

Sackett: Our job was to support and service the PT boat squadron. We had the gasoline for them. Of course, they were all powered by aviation gas, and we carried spare torpedoes and provisions for them. One of the living compartments--the engineers' compartment, in which I was living--was turned over to the officers of the PT boats, and we all moved aft into the one big compartment where all the hands of our ship slept. But our sole job--our principal assignment out there in the Solomons--was to support the PT boats.

Alexander: Okay, what about your responsibility, in particular, as a machinist's mate first class? Your primary responsibility was still your ship, but did you have other duties, as far as the PT boats were concerned?

Sackett: I had been sent off to the Packard engine school, and my job aboard was to be in charge of the engine overhaul shop.

Alexander: Which was aboard your ship.

Japanese submarine, but compared to a surface ship's engagement, ours was very minor. And we were extremely fortunate that we were never sighted. Somehow the Japs did not know where we were up there.

Alexander: It really is amazing that they couldn't follow some of the PT boats up there, at least from the air.

Sackett: That's right. Oh, Tulagi, of course, was the significant island there. After some of those big sea battles out there...I remember one battle in particular. We had the three heavy cruisers there. All of them had taken torpedoes in the bow, so they were doing temporary repairs there so that these ships could get under way and get to Australia for further temporary repairs before they could steam back to the States.

Alexander: To Pearl or to the States.

Sackett: Oh, we lost...that Guadalcanal--the Solomon Islands--was certainly an area where we had so many ships that were sunk, damaged. But I'll have to say that I was out there when Admiral [William F. ("Bull")] Halsey took over as the commander under Admiral Nimitz.

Alexander: Yes, he did.

Sackett: Admiral Nimitz had named Admiral Halsey to replace Admiral [Robert L.] Ghormley, I believe.

Alexander: Admiral Ghormley, yes.

Sackett: And it was just electrifying--the change in morale,

the enthusiasm. Halsey was just magnetic along those lines. He was a sailor's admiral.

Alexander: We'll talk about him a little later, too. I'd like to.

Sackett: Okay (chuckle).

Alexander: I've heard that from other people, that there was...in fact, it was a Pearl Harbor survivor who was aboard a hospital ship at Tulagi in that same area with you, and he made the same comment--that it was just incredible how everything just kind of just turned over overnight, practically.

Sackett: Yes, that's right.

Alexander: How long were you at Tulagi? Were you there through the entire thing until they secured the island?

Sackett: Oh, Bill, let me think now. We stayed right in this one location there around Tulagi for, I'm going to say, about a year. Then, as we started moving up the line to Rendova and places like that, we moved on forward and assisted in establishing a PT base there at Rendova.

Alexander: Oh.

Sackett: We were used to cart some supplies for the boats and things like that, and then--it was early 1944--the Jamestown came back to the States for a long-needed overhaul.

Alexander: I'll bet.

Sackett: It had just been driven to death.

Alexander: Well, that's really true. When you brought it back in early 1944...

Sackett: That's about right. It was in February or March of 1944.

Alexander: ...I was going to say that that was a long time. That was really coming back from Tulagi, basically, was it not?

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: Yes. Now, you were still aboard her at that time.

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: So, everybody got some liberty.

Sackett: Everyone got liberty. I stayed aboard for thirty days with the captain. By that time I was chief machinist's mate.

Alexander: Thank you. That was going to be one of my questions.

Sackett: I've got to add...you know, the Jamestown was a very significant ship in my career. I went aboard her as a second class machinist's mate, E-5, and I made first class, and I made chief (acting appointment), and then I made chief (permanent appointment). Then, when we got back to the States, I'd been recommended for a warrant officer slot, and the orders were for me to report to Treasure Island [California] to receive a commission because I was younger--I was probably about twenty-five at this time--to be commissioned as an

ensign. So, I stayed aboard for thirty days, as the captain wanted me to do to, to help get the engine overhauled for him.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: Then I left and reported to Treasure Island.

Alexander: Okay, go back and help me with one thing for people who read this.

Sackett: Okay.

Alexander. You were a chief. What was that word that you used at the first. You were a chief...

Sackett: "Acting appointment."

Alexander: "Acting appointment," okay. Now, an acting appointment is not a permanent rating.

Sackett: You've got it. You normally...back in those days you were chief (acting appointment) for a year before you got your permanent appointment as a chief. That was sort of a probationary period.

Alexander: Yes. It was a year even during the war.

Sackett: Oh, yes! Oh, yes!

Alexander: I didn't know that.

Sackett: And let me tell you another reason why. I had been talked to by the executive officer. They were wanting to recommend me for warrant officer when I was a first class, but the way that the regulations read at that time, when the war was over--this was a temporary program for enlisted personnel--USNT, temporary, was

what you commissioned as--and after the war, you were going to revert back to your permanent enlisted status.

Alexander: Which, of course, in your case, would have been...

Sackett: ...first class...

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: ...or if I took it as an acting appointment, then it would have been only an acting appointment. That didn't happen because the Navy stayed larger [after the war], but I decided that I would wait until I had achieved permanent appointment before I did anything.

Alexander: So, you could come back to that.

Sackett: Yes, that's right. That's what I did.

Alexander: That's a lot of incentive.

Sackett: That's right, Yes.

Alexander: Yes, I should say so. So, you went, then, to...you left the ship where? In San Francisco [California]?

Sackett: No, it was in Long Beach [California]--the Terminal Island Naval Shipyard.

Alexander: You left it there. Yes, yes. Okay, and then you went where to receive your commission?

Sackett: I was ordered to Treasure Island, California, up in San Francisco Bay.

Alexander: At San Francisco, yes.

Sackett: And I was commissioned there.

Alexander: As a...

Sackett: ...ensign.

Alexander: As an ensign, all right. In that case, was that a line commission?

Sackett: Oh, yes!

Alexander: Okay.

Sackett: And I was serving in my specialty. See, we actually enlisted with the idea behind it that we would be commissioned, and we would serve in our specialty. Myself, being an engineer, I was going to be a chief engineer.

Alexander: Sure.

Sackett: If you were a gunner's mate or a fire controlman, you would go as a gunnery officer. A quartermaster would go as an operations officer.

Alexander: I see. That made a lot of sense.

Sackett: It made a lot of sense, yes.

Alexander: Okay. Then you left Treasure Island aboard a ship, right?

Sackett: No, I went overseas in a transport to New Guinea and reported aboard an LCI [Landing Craft Infantry] that they had converted to a rocket [firing] ship. They had converted many of those out in New Guinea. This was was the USS LCIR-74. I reported aboard as chief engineer.

Alexander: What did a rocket ship do? I mean, it didn't carry personnel for landing.

Sackett: Well, not troops. No troops. We had about three or four officers aboard and a crew of thirty-five maybe. We had launchers that were fixed on both sides forward, and I'm thinking that there were about twenty-four launchers that held twelve 5-inch rockets apiece.

We would precede the first wave, you know, on the landings. The idea was then, of course...these were very primitive. We didn't even have a gyro aboard these ships. We had no radar. We had a range rocket. The two outer launchers were range rockets, and you would, of course, use "seaman's eye" [best judgment] and whatever else and fire a range rocket to get the distance to the beach. These rockets had a range of about 600 yards.

Alexander: To get the range.

Sackett: And when you got the range to the beach, then you went into time fire, and your last salvo was supposedly landing as the troops would be hitting the beach. They were to come through this maze of smoke, which they wouldn't do. They always waited until (chuckle) we had gotten the last rockets off.

Alexander: I kind of think that I would have, too.

Sackett: I didn't blame them for that, anyway.

Alexander: (Chuckle) They were pretty vulnerable, I would say.

Sackett: They were vulnerable. We usually went in about three

days ahead of time with the minesweepers, and we would provide the minesweepers with close support...

Alexander: Cover.

Sackett: ...and mine disposal when they would sweep a mine and it would surface. Occasionally, if there was a [Japanese shore] battery that would take the minesweeper under fire, we would sometimes launch a rocket attack right on them.

Alexander: What was the first landing that you participated in that you can recall?

Sackett: I did not make the initial Leyte Gulf landing. I got up there right after those landings. Maybe the biggest landing that I made in the Philippines was at Lingayen Gulf.

Alexander: It was Lingayen Gulf?

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: In October, 1944

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: Yes, that was big stuff.

Sackett: Oh, yes. We went in there three days ahead of time with the minesweepers. That was not an easy landing. The Japanese had...of course, at Leyte Gulf, they had started their *kamikaze* attacks, and there were *kamikaze* attacks on the convoy all the way up and in Lingayen Gulf, too.

Alexander: Okay. Now, this puts you, then, in the 7th Fleet.

Sackett: Yes, sir--[General Douglas A.] "MacArthur's Navy."

Alexander: In "MacArthur's Navy." Who was the flag officer...I'm just asking this because I don't remember.

Sackett: The commander of the 7th Fleet, I believe, was Admiral [Jesse B.] Oldendorf.

Alexander: Oh, thank you. It was Oldendorf. That's right. I remember.

Sackett: I was with the 7th Amphibious Force. I can't recall his name--the admiral that had the 7th Fleet Amphibious Force. I can't think of it right now.

Alexander: No. For our purposes that is not important. Okay, I'm visualizing that ship. I've seen pictures of the launching vehicles. I just didn't realize that they were LCIs, but I guess that I should have. After you had done that barrage work for the landings, where did you go? What did you do?

Sackett: In the Philippines we withdrew, and we'd go back to whichever base that we were operating from, and we'd prepare for the next landings. We made innumerable landings throughout the Philippines area, as you know..

Alexander: Yes. Well, Leyte Gulf had a lot of different places that were later...I mean, at Leyte Gulf, I think, didn't they have a lot of different landings?

Sackett: Oh, at Leyte? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But, then, of course, there was Mindoro and Mindanao...

Alexander: ...and Lingayen.

Sackett:a ...and Palawan. It just goes on and on. I can't begin to...I'd have to go back to my records someplace to find the names of them all.

Alexander: Is there anything in that particular series of events, let's say, from October, 1944, to about February, 1945...that's pretty much the period that, I think, was the Philippine Campaign, or pretty close to that. Well, let me put it this way. What stands out in your mind more than anything else--that you can think of--that really stands out in your mind in that activity of invasion, of battle? I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about. If you had been aboard the Saint Lô, for example--the aircraft carrier--you'd have been the first aircraft carrier sunk by *kamikaze* action. That would stand out in my mind, if I had been aboard that ship (chuckle).

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: Do you see what I'm saying? I don't necessarily mean anything that happened just to you, but is there anything that maybe just stands out in your mind that you would like to tell us?

Sackett: Yes, Bill, there is.

Alexander: It's a tough time to deal with.

Sackett: There are times, you know, where you should have a significant...there are times, you know, where you

were young. It was a young man's war.

Alexander: You bet. They all are.

Sackett: These small crews had a mutual camaraderie. I guess that there was a respect for this great Navy of ours to have absorbed this mammoth expansion of bringing officers and men in from all walks of life. You know, the amphibious forces for the most part were commanded by Reserve officers--lawyers, "Indian chiefs," you know?

Alexander: They were citizen soldiers.

Sackett: And, my God, these convoys...they got from one point to the next one! You know, before the war, nobody [outside the professional United States Navy] would ever have believed that this could happen.

Alexander: Isn't that true.

Sackett: But they did it. They had a job to do. They wanted to get the thing over with and get back to their civilian professions. And they did a marvelous job of it.

Alexander: And the magnitude of it is really overwhelming.

Sackett: Oh, yes. That's right. That's right.

Alexander: Yes, yes, I agree.

Sackett: But I just can't think of anything else. I think that that's what...

Alexander: That's all right.

Sackett: ...I took out of World War II with me--a further

enhancement and respect for the men in that Navy. Of course, you know, on my first ship, the USS Northampton, all of the officers were Naval Academy [graduates], except for the warrant officers, and it was a wonderful experience being with these gentlemen. They were real professionals. If you'd have asked me in 1939 or 1940, again, if these non-professionals could do the job that they did in World War II, I'd say, "Hell, no! They couldn't do it!" But they did it!

Alexander: We've always been a citizen military.

Sackett: That's right.

Alexander: That's what's amazing about what we have done. I agree with that. I think that that's a really good point to make in here.

All right, I was going to ask whether there were any casualties aboard your ship.

Sackett: Oh, I think that we had one or two from shrapnel-type wounds. We took no direct hits on the ship when I was aboard. I think that we were pretty close to getting hit down in Borneo, but we took no direct hits.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: We just had a couple of people with minor injuries from shrapnel.

Alexander: Yes, yes. Okay, we get past the Philippines Campaign. Were you brought back to the States? Are you

still assigned to the same ship?

Sackett: I was still out there. And, Bill, again, it was one of those things that happened in your life. You take advantage of opportunities, and I did. I received orders to take command of one of these rocket ships in July of 1945. My Goodness, when I was commissioned, it was felt that I would serve in the engineering department as chief engineer, Of course, I trained and became qualified as officer-of-the-deck, but I had no schooling. The Navy didn't even send us to "knife and fork" school [officer's training school]. There was no navigational training--none of that.

Alexander: No pilot work, either (chuckle).

Sackett: That's right. I had orders, and I took command of another one of these rocket ships, the USS LCIR-34. We were then, of course, getting ready for the landings on the Japanese homeland.

Alexander: The Japanese home islands.

Sackett: We were training out of Subic Bay [Philippines], and we were going down weekly south of Manila Bay making practice runs and things like that in there. It was intended that that's where we'd be--leading the first wave in there on the landings in the homeland.

Alexander: Yes. What was your rank, now, at this point?

Sackett: Ensign.

Alexander: Still ensign.

Sackett: Still ensign.

Alexander: As commanding officer of this ship.

Sackett: If you took command of one of these when you were back in the States, you were [on the] spot-promoted to lieutenant. If you took command overseas, you got no spot promotion.

Alexander: They ran out of stripes.

Sackett: (Chuckle) Something like that. That's right. That's right.

Alexander: (Chuckle) The pay didn't get any better, either.

Sackett: No, no.

Alexander: So, let's look at the end of the war, then. I guess that that's where we are. Where were you?

Sackett: I was at Subic Bay. We came back into there, and the war ended. I was there. My feelings...I know that you're going to ask me about the atomic bomb and the end of the war. I've thought about this a lot, and I've been asked the question before. It was almost anti-climatic. I think that we were keyed up...

Alexander: Of course, you were.

Sackett: ...for the landings. We, of course, knew that there was going to be sizable casualties, but I think that after the long years of the war with the Japanese, we were ready to make them pay a little bit more.

Alexander: There's no question about that. I'm sure about that. I've heard that before, also. I've heard that from

other people. Well, I mean, it's like training as a boxer. You train and train and train, and then you don't get to box. It's a little like...it's kind of hard to do.

Sackett: Yes, that's about right.

Alexander: That's what it is. It's one of the things that non-combatant people can't quite fathom, either--the fact that you would be "kissing the decks" if this all had happened [referring to the troops elation at the use of the atomic bombs on Japan] so that you would not have to go over there and get shot at (chuckle). So, I know how you felt.

Sackett: (Chuckle)

Alexander: All right, then, what happened after that? You didn't go back into civilian life.

Sackett: Well, after that, we stayed around the Philippines there for several months after the war or a few months after the war. Then we started back to the States. We stopped off at Guam, and because I was Regular Navy they gave me orders to take command of an LST that was there at Guam and was operating in the Marianas. My executive officer was fletted up there to relieve me in command of this rocket ship, and they proceeded on back to the States, and I stayed overseas for another year (chuckle).

Alexander: I'm interested in something here now. You had command

of this LCI. Obviously, you knew how to dock it
(chuckle).

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: I've always thought that if I had command that I'd be
"Captain Crunch." I'm pretty sure of that, you know,
but with this rating that you have--this rank that you
have--of ensign...

Sackett: I was lieutenant (j.g.) [junior grade] by this time.

Alexander: Oh, a (j.g.). Oh, okay. Well, that makes it a little
more sense, but, I mean, now you're going to go to an
LST...

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: ...for whatever kind of duty that they did after the
war. They did a lot of transportation duty.

Sackett: That's right. We went up, and we'd go to Saipan and
bring loads back to Guam. You know, it was just sort
of go out to those outer islands where they had made
landings and consolidate all of the equipment.

Alexander: The war materiel and everything, yes.

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: But because you were commanding this ship, then that
would be the natural thing for you to do, was command
another ship. Is that right?

Sackett: Well, they needed me because I was Regular Navy.

Alexander: Yes, everybody else was going home.

Sackett: The commanding officer of the LST had points [for

wartime service], and he was going to be discharged.

Alexander: He was going home, so you took over, then, as a (j.g.)

Sackett: Yes. We spent, I'd say, six months, whatever it was, mopping up there, and then we finally got orders to put this ship out of commission--take it back to the States. We had a load of equipment that we brought back to Port Hueneme, California, the SeaBee [CB or Navy Construction Battalion] base. Then we went into Long Beach, California, and we were decommissioned at Long Beach.

Alexander: When was this?

Sackett: In 1946 sometime.

Alexander: In 1946. Now, you're still in the Navy

Sackett: Oh, yes. I decided that since I'd gotten out of the engineering room with the floor plates, and I liked the fresh air.

Alexander: You liked the fresh air (chuckle).

Sackett: Yes, I liked the fresh air. So, I received orders then to report back to my home naval district, which was Great Lakes [Naval Training Center]. I was an Iowa boy. When I checked in at Great Lakes, they had orders for me to take command of a LSM--Landing Ship Medium--in the Atlantic.

Alexander: I see.

Sackett: So, I then went to the LSM and had command of her for a few months, and then I took her down and reported to

Green Cove Springs, Florida, where they eventually put her out of commission down there. That completed my duty in the amphibious forces, when I placed that LSM out of commission. There was nothing significant in that tour of duty at all. It was just sort of waiting around. The Navy was downsizing: "What are we going with these ships?"

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: We hit upon Green Cove Springs, and that became a repository for many, many LSMs. I don't know if they're still there or not, but that's where they put them.

Alexander: That's interesting. You don't know what happened to them.

Sackett: No.

Alexander: I don't, either. I have no idea.

Sackett: They probably scrapped them.

Alexander: Oh, yes, I'm sure that they were sold for scrap. We're going to continue with this because you obviously stayed around long enough to get a couple more promotions doing some other things (chuckle).

Sackett: Well, it was at about the time that I was the skipper of this LSM that the Navy came out with directive from the [United States Navy] Bureau of Naval Personnel soliciting Reserve officers and we ex-enlisted [personnel] to apply for permanent commissions.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: So, I applied. Not having had any college at all, I had a battery of tests to take, and I took those. They set up a special board in Charleston, South Carolina. I was in there, and I took these tests. I'm not sure that I understood too much of them.

Alexander: (Chuckle) I was going to say that must have been a challenge.

Sackett: But it was very interesting because it was college-level testing, and I wasn't equipped for it.

Alexander: Sure.

Sackett: But, anyway, in a few weeks orders came out for me, and I was accepted for permanent commission.

Alexander: That must have been a real day of relief.

Sackett: Oh, yes. Well, I don't know if it was relief or not. I mean, I was going to stay in the Navy and wanted to stay in as an officer. Yes, I guess that it was pride.

Alexander: Oh, you bet!

Sackett: So, then the Navy, being as it was that I was a permanent officer, decided that I needed some "couth"...

Alexander: (Chuckle) You needed to learn some "couth."

Sackett: ...and to teach me some of the rudimentary parts of being a naval officer that I'd never had before. So, I went to General Line School at Newport, Rhode

Island. That was a ten-month course. Of course, that's where I had my first formal navigation schooling and gunnery. The General Line School was a very good course.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: They had sent me to George Washington University [Washington, D.C.] for three semesters, supposedly to bring us up on things. The Navy, you know, being fair when they got these officers as permanent officers, they wanted to bring them up to be competitive with the Naval Academy standards. So, they sent us to school to get the math through trigonometry, the college minimum requirements for English, and a couple of other subjects. I went to George Washington University for that, and then I went to the General Line School at Newport. Then from the General Line School I went aboard my first destroyer, and, again, with my engineering background, I went as chief engineer of the Joseph P. Kennedy [DD-850].

Alexander: Okay. The Joseph P. Kennedy was not a Fletcher-class destroyer, was she?

Sackett: I can't thing of the class-type, but she was a long-hull class destroyer.

Alexander: Was she more than 2,100 tons, then?

Sackett: She displaced 2,250 tons.

Alexander: Not much more. I see.

Sackett: Fletcher-class destroyers displace 2,100 tons, and we were 2,250, I think it was.

Alexander: And what was the year that you did that?

Sackett: That was in 1950.

Alexander: So, that was in 1950. You went to her as the chief engineer.

Sackett: As the chief engineer.

Alexander: And your rank was...were you still (j.g.)?

Sackett: I had made lieutenant...

Alexander: Oh, you did.

Sackett: ...aboard the Kennedy, yes, and I served on her for, oh, about eighteen months. We were in the first destroyer squadron that was ordered from the East Coast to go to the Far East for the Korean War, so we proceeded out there and spent about maybe nine months out there. We went out through the Panama Canal, and on our return trip they sent us through the Suez Canal. We went around the world on that cruise.

Alexander: Okay, let me ask this. We won't go into a lot of detail on Korea because that's not our purpose, but I would ask you if there was anything significant in your tour to Korea? Was there any type of sea battle? I don't think that there were any sea battles over there, were there?

Sackett: No, we operated with just the general destroyer operations out there. We had shore bombardments at

Wonsan [North Korea]. Every destroyer division would go in there and spend about twenty or twenty-five days. I guess that we had fired a few shots in shore bombardment, but not too much. We escorted the carrier task force--Task Force 77--and we patrolled the Taiwan Straits that went, of course, between Taiwan and mainland China.

Alexander: That's right. Yes, sure.

Sackett: But it was just a routine deployment.

Alexander: Yes. So, you returned from Korea, then, about ten months later, you say?

Sackett: Yes. I got back at the end of 1951.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: Then I received orders to go as the squadron engineering officer with a destroyer squadron down in Norfolk, Virginia--Destroyer Squadron 16.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: I served with them...we had a Mediterranean deployment. Wherever you went, you were going to have deployments back in those days.

Alexander: Sure! I bet!

Sackett: And it was strictly just routine--the presence that our leaders desired that we had.

Then I went to a destroyer flotilla--Destroyer Flotilla 4--following that. I had a deployment to the Mediterranean with her, I guess.

Then, eventually, I went and reported to my so-called first shore duty back at Great Lakes, Illinois, where I had started out. So, twenty years later I was back to where I started.

Alexander: At your home base.

Sackett: At my home base.

Alexander: That's right.

Sackett: I was security officer and operations and plans officer there.

Alexander: At what rank here now?

Sackett: I made lieutenant commander while I was back there. I went back there as a lieutenant, and I was promoted to lieutenant commander.

Alexander: That's good.

Sackett: I was there for about a year, I think, or a year-and-a-half as security officer. Then they established a new billet as operations and plans officer, and they requested that I fill it. I said, "No. There's no way in the world that I can stay here on shore duty and be competitive. I should go in as executive officer of a destroyer." So, I wrote a letter to my detailer [officer in charge of officer billet assignments], and I said, "You've got to keep in mind that I have over twenty years [active duty] for retirement purposes. If you leave me back here, you're going to destroy my career, and I'll have to

retire. I need to go to sea, and go to sea soon!" I got a letter back that said, you know, essentially, that: "An extension of Lieutenant Commander Sackett's shore tour would be detrimental for his career. He's going to go to sea as an executive officer of a destroyer."

Alexander: Wow!

Sackett: So, I reported to the USS Preston [DD-795], a Fletcher-class destroyer....

Alexander: A Fletcher-class destroyer.

Sackett: ...as executive officer.

Alexander: What was her bow number?

Sackett: It was 795.

Alexander: I was just curious.

Sackett: And as I said earlier that the Jamestown was a significant ship in my career, the Preston was also significant.

Alexander: Well, you were the XO [executive officer] there.

Sackett: I was the XO, and owing to unfortunate seamanship incidents that happened before I got aboard, they decided after about three months that since I was "exec" [executive officer]--the captain was relieved [of command]--the Bureau of Naval Personnel gave me orders to relieve him.

Alexander: Oh.

Sackett: And so I sailed to the Far East....

Alexander: You relieved your captain.

Sackett: I relieved the captain right there at Long Beach! Then we sailed for the Far East. The Bureau wrote me a letter about four months later--I think that they had forgotten what they had done--and they congratulated me and said that I was going to keep the ship, and they were going to look for an executive officer for me.

Alexander: (Chuckle) Isn't that something.

Sackett: I had command of the Preston for over two years. We went from almost the bottom of the heap [in efficiency ratings] to the number one destroyer in the Pacific Fleet. When I left her in 1959, we had won all of the "E"s ["E" for excellence]--engineering, gunnery, operations, ASW [antisubmarine warfare]--that they had, and we received a satisfactory report by the Board of Inspection and Survey.

Alexander: Congratulations. That was significant.

Sackett: So, you know, as I say, I had a hell of a crew.

Alexander: That's true, too

Sackett: I was the only lieutenant commander in the Navy in command of a destroyer, and my crew was not about to let me get into trouble.

Alexander: Well, there you are.

Sackett: So, I made it, and I went from there to the Naval War College, and I got promoted to commander, while I was

at the War College in the senior course. This coincided with the forthcoming commissioning of the Navy's guided missile destroyer fleet.

Alexander: Oh, my gosh!

Sackett: I understand that they had established a criteria to get command of one of these guided missile destroyers. You had to have had a previous successful commanding officer tour on a destroyer.

Alexander: You said, "Hi!"

Sackett: So, I had had mine as a lieutenant commander, so they...I understand that there were about twelve names in the hopper, and there were some pretty significant names in there, and I was very honored to be a part of that. There was Admiral [Elmo] Zumwalt, who went on to lead our Navy very well.

Alexander: Yes, he did.

Sackett: The Bagley brothers, who both went on to be four-star admirals were in there.

Alexander: Yes, indeed.

Sackett: And Roger Spreen, and Mark Woods, and all of these men. I had the John King [DDG-3] for a successful tour aboard her.

Alexander: The John King was a...?

Sackett: She was the DDG-3, a guided missile destroyer.

Alexander: All right. Now, is that an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer or not?

Sackett: No. No, no.

Alexander: That was before the Arleigh Burke.

Sackett: Oh, yes. The Arleigh Burke-class is comparatively recent.

Alexander: That's right. They're in the 1980s.

Sackett: No, they're a bit later than that.

Alexander: Oh, my!

Sackett: I was at the commissioning of the Arleigh Burke four years ago maybe.

Alexander: It's more than that

Sackett: It is?

Alexander: Yes. The reason that I say that is because I'm connected with a group of guys in DESRON 23 [Destroyer Squadron 23] from World War II.

Sackett: Yes.

Alexander: And DESRON 23 was commanded by Burke.

Sackett: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Alexander: So, they were there, too, and I think that my memory is correct that it was, like, 1988 or 1989--right in that area. But maybe I'm wrong. But he christened the first ship [of the class named in his honor]

Sackett: I don't think that it was that long ago. Maybe it was.

Alexander: It doesn't make any difference, but that's interesting, yes.

Sackett: But the Preston was in that. Of course, they carry

DESRON 23 still today.

Alexander: Oh, do they?

Sackett: The Preston was in DESRON 23

Alexander: Oh, is that right?

Sackett: Oh, yes.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: In fact, Admiral Burke was the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] when I served on the Preston, and he visited the squadron.

Alexander: Yes, well, that was his baby.

Sackett: What a man! What a man (chuckle)!

Alexander: Everybody says it. Everybody says it. I wish that I could have had the opportunity to meet him. He's an old Boulder boy--Boulder, Colorado. A lot of people don't realize that, but that's where he was born and raised.

Sackett: Well, you know, some quite great leaders were born in the interior. Look at Admiral [Chester W.] Nimitz there in Fredericksburg [Texas].

Alexander: Yes, indeed.

Sackett: Look at Oldendorf--born in a farming community up in Iowa.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: You know, they never saw a ship [in their youth].

Alexander: They never saw the sea (chuckle).

Sackett: That's right. That's right.

Alexander: (Chuckle) Yes, I know. Let's go to that point where you got the star [were promoted to admiral]--the flag [rank promotion].

Sackett: Well, I did not have a college degree.

Alexander: I understand.

Sackett: I made captain without that.

Alexander: When was that, sir?

Sackett: I made captain after I left the John King. I went to shore duty in Washington [D.C.]. I was special assistant to the under-secretary of the Navy, so I made captain in 1965.

Then I got orders to go as commanding officer of a guided missile cruiser--the USS Gridley--and served aboard her for a little over a year.

The Navy came up with a new program--the Bootstrap Program--which the Army had had. This was an opportunity for those who did not have a degree, and who the Navy thought that maybe had some potential for higher rank and who needed a college degree for promotion.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: So, I was one of those selected for that program. You had to find a university that would certify to issuing you a degree within a year, and George Washington University accepted my credits from the War College and Line School...

Alexander: Oh, I'm sure.

Sackett: ...and whatever off-duty credits I could earn.

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Sackett: So, I got my degree from George Washington University.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: And then I went back to Washington for duty. Then I left there, and I took command of the Navy's destroyer school in Newport, Rhode Island.

Then I went back to Washington again. I was head of officer distribution at the Bureau of Naval Personnel. That was when I was finally selected for admiral.

Alexander: During that period.

Sackett: In 1972. That's when I was selected. I was always a little older than my contemporaries because of my enlisted background. I sort of ran [in terms of competition for promotion] with the Academy Class of 1945, which graduated in 1944.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: They were sort of my brothers. I was a little older than them.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: So, I was older when I got selected for flag rank. But I made it! What a wonderful experience!

Alexander: Oh, Lord, yes. How many of them have there been in the past, who have gone from enlisted to flag rank?

Sackett: I don't know. Of course, we had a lot of officers who had served a few years of enlisted service and then went to the Naval Academy.

Alexander: Yes, there a lot of that. I had forgotten about that.

Sackett: I did not not have that opportunity.

Alexander: Which makes it all the more remarkable,

Sackett: But there are not many who have done it. Now, some have said that I was the first who went through all of the enlisted grades. Admiral [Mike] Boorda, of course, I think that he became an officer after he had reached the grade of E-6.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: He had not made chief, you know, but he did it [became an admiral]. I think that there are probably a couple of others. Not too many.

Alexander: No, no. That's really pretty nice. It's been a pleasure. I can't think of any other questions. You've done an awfully good job with this. You really have, unless you can think of something else that I have missed.

Sackett: I'd like to just do a recap. You may not want to use this in any way. You know, I came from a very unique and humble background. My allegiance to my old mother, who lived to be over a hundred--she lived to be a hundred--was just tremendous.

Alexander: Oh.

Sackett: I think that one of the things that always kept me on the straight-and-narrow path was my respect for her. My father died when I was two-and-a-half months old.

Alexander: Oh.

Sackett: My mother--an immigrant girl from Belgium--did not know how to speak English in this country of ours. She had very limited schooling, but, you know, she was one of the smartest persons whom I've ever met.

Alexander: Sure.

Sackett: She'd take me out as a kid, and we'd look at the skies and the heavens, and she'd point out the constellations to me. I'd think, as I got older: "How did this woman ever do this?"--raising four little kids. God, my mother took in washing; she did midwifery. You know, she just busted her butt to keep this family together.

Alexander: Yes.

Sackett: And all of her children--there are two us living now--turned out to be successful in our own fields and whatnot. I don't know. How do you do this?

Alexander: And you said it right. That influence is something that nothing else could have ever given you that much to go on. That's a tremendous education and bonding.

Sackett: You know, there was no money in my family to go to school. The Navy was an opportunity for me, and from the time that I was a youngster I had wanted to in the

Navy. There was a gent who worked in a hardware store, who had served in the Navy for four years during the Twenties. Of course, back in those days-- up until about 1939--when your enlistment expired, you had ninety days to reenlist, or you couldn't reenlist. This man hadn't done that, but he really enjoyed the Navy. He'd show me his pictures and all of this stuff. He had a ripe prospect, you know, to talk to me about going into the Navy.

Alexander: Yes, there was another big influence.

Sackett: And then, again, here is this mother of mine. Here was a kid who had just turned seventeen. The Roman Catholic priest did not think that this young lad should be off to the world with the Navy. Sailors did not have the greatest reputation in the world.

Alexander: That's right. That's true.

Sackett: And we'd try to enhance it everytime that we could [facetious comment].

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Sackett: But she signed for me to join.

Alexander: Excuse me. I'm going to turn over the tape at this point. I do want to continue, if you will.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Alexander: This is side two of the tape. So, we'll begin again from where the Admiral Sackett left. Go ahead, please.

Sackett: I don't know what all you're going to be doing with this, Bill, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention my family.

Alexander: It's very important--and I think that the real importance comes here--in answering that question: "Well, how did this fellow go from where he started to where he finished his career?" And you're on the right track because this is what it takes--that type of help.

Sackett: I married a young girl from back in my hometown.

Alexander: When?

Sackett: Oh, it was in late 1947 that we got married. I knew her folks. In fact, I had been a paperboy. I think that I told you about it--the humble monetary situation that we had. I had to work for a living. I was a paperboy. I started working in the harvest fields when I was between my eighth and ninth grade in school.

But, anyway, I knew this girl's parents well. Her father was the postmaster, and I used to do odd jobs around their house--wash their car, mow the lawn, and all of that kind of thing.

She may have been in the first or second grade when I left to join the Navy, but when I came back after the war, she had grown up. She graduated from high school in 1944 and went to college. After her

second year of college, we got married. So, we got married when this girl was nineteen years of age. I took her from that little community in Iowa, and she followed me around. And, my God, she had our first child when she was twenty. She has given me six wonderful children. Our oldest is a daughter who now lives in Chicago, Illinois; our youngest is a daughter who lives in Washington; and we have four sons in between. We have three sons who live in the Manassas, Virginia, area and one son who lives in Houston [Texas]. Thank God, they are normal, healthy, responsible adults today.

Alexander: Amen!

Sackett: My sons would say that I would be remiss if I didn't say, "Damn, we gave you lot of problems, Dad!"
(chuckle)

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Sackett: But they are very responsible citizens of this great country of ours, and I'm damned proud of them.

Alexander: Well, I think that that's wonderful.

Sackett: This wife of mine is a neat person, and we will be celebrating our fiftieth wedding anniversary next year.

Alexander: Next year.

Sackett: And I've got to tell anybody who might listen to this, nobody who is married that long has experienced all

love and rose petals and things like that. You've got to work at it to be married that long!

Alexander: Amen to that, pal, I'll tell you.

Sackett: It's so easy to say, "So long! *Sayonara!*"

Alexander: Well, that's what's happening too much today.

Sackett: Yes, much too frequently, Bill.