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**Bill Harned** ( )  
 Captain, Retired  
 Marco Island, FL  
 Monday, April 24, 1989

[Sam] ... Bill very shortly will return to his adopted native habitat of Anchorage.

[Bill] Okay, Well, I might as well start at the beginning. Sam and myself went to high school together, but we'll skip those days of the Academy and go right to my first days at sea in the Coast Guard and that was in the *Haida* \_\_\_\_\_ Bering Sea patrol force cruise on the *Hydah*. *Haida*

[Sam] The year was 1934, the year after graduation.

[Bill] I went to the brand new Coast Guard cutter *Atalanta* 165-footer, but very shortly after that, headquarters OK'd my request and (everybody thought I was crazy) I volunteered to be assigned to the *Northland*. It was the only ship in the Navy or the Coast Guard to carry sails at that time. That was really an experience. We did sail it actually, although seldom. The auxiliary diesels gave us about 9-1/2 knots, so you can imagine how fast we went with sails and we did try to use them.

[Sam] Who was your Commanding Officer?

1911 [Bill] My Commanding Officer was William K. Scammel (1977), a very fine gentleman. I had the greatest respect for him. Incidentally, we were at Point Barrow when Wiley Post and Will Rogers crashed. [Sam added, this was 1935 and Bill agreed.] I was detailed by Scammel to recover the bodies and put them in the refrigerator. Fortunately, the ice pack decided to head our way and Scammel said I haven't got time, so Joe Costin [phonetic], the well-known arctic flyer flew the bodies out and I didn't have the doubtful pleasure of bringing them in.

Although the assignment to the *Northland* was suddenly beneficial to an overall career, and enjoyable, I'll have to admit that I was not too good a sailor and the *Northland* had a reputation of moving from side to side and pitch quite severely, so that I decided that aviation would be a good career for Harned.

[Sam] I was in the *Northland* some years later when she rolled 67 degrees.

[Bill] 64 was the most I recall and the period was over one minute from side to side and that was 64 some odd degrees with sail. I thought sure as heck that she many times she was not going to come up and I didn't like that at all. I'd take my chances in aviation. Consequently, in 1937, I went to Pensacola, Florida and became Coast Guard aviator number HV-57. I went to St. Petersburg, Florida and flew all kinds of relics that the Coast Guard had at the time: RD-1, RD-2, RD-4 and even the old Viking single-engine biplane, the Grumman Amphibian, and a bunch of old timers. I almost forgot the names of them.

[Sam] Many of those were named for stars were they not?

[Bill] Yes, they had names as well as numbers. Then there is a famous Hall boat. Incidentally, speaking of Hall boat, I had a record at that time in 1938 as making the longest rescue mission in the Coast Guard. I flew into the Bahama Islands and picked up a man at night landed off shore, landing at night and brought the man back with spinal meningitis. I was put in quarantine for quite a while there and thought what kind of foolishness did I get myself into. Well anyhow, I did not get spinal meningitis. As a matter of fact, I don't think the patient had that, I think he was just wanting to get ashore.

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I really feel I had an interesting as well as worthwhile career in Coast Guard aviation. Probably one of the few officers, and there was probably maybe six or seven of us were instructors at Pensacola in patrol planes, Charlie Tighe (35), one of them, and all of three of us: Charlie, Bob Shunk (35) and myself. All of us became squadron commanders of Navy Training Squadrons. [Bell Sounds] five bells. I've taught four people how to tell time by ship's clock, ship's bell. It's quite accurate if you want to look at your watch and set your watch by it. Charlie, myself and Bob Shunk (35) had good reputations there although having 50 to 100 Navy officers under our command didn't always set quite right with them, especially classmates of the same year at the Naval Academy being junior to us by fifteen days. The Navy changed that not too many years after.

[Sam] All the service academies graduate at the same time now. That is one of the things superintendents worked out.

[Bill] But we were senior for many, many years. Safety was always in the back of our minds and both Tighe (35), Shunk (35) and myself received awards from the Navy commendations for number of hours without accidents. All three of us had reputations as Mr. Safety and we preached and practiced it and it worked.

After I stayed at Pensacola long enough so that some of my students were coming back again as instructors, it dawned on me that maybe I'd been there long enough. It was over three years, and that was a long tour of duty for anybody in those World War II days. So, I asked for a transfer and it happened to be just about the time that Air-Sea Rescue Agency in Washington was established by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Coast Guard and I helped Dick Burke (27) to formulate anything that could do with search and rescues or Air-sea rescues as they called it in those days. And then I was at the right time at the right place to see to it that I got a good assignment. I became the Liaison Officer for search and rescue in the Southwest Pacific area at the tail end of World War II. I used to receive letters from pilots from both Air Corps and the Navy saying that I had saved their lives. It was really a gorgeous feeling.

[Sam] What were you flying?

[Bill] That's a good question too. I wasn't flying anything. Actually, I was on the staff of the 7<sup>th</sup> fleet and I had to travel around so much that I realized it would be advantageous to have my own airplane. So the first plane I got was a TBM, a torpedo bomber single engine, and it didn't have quite the legs that I wanted so I turned that in for a B-24, a privateer.

[Sam] Was that modified for landing at sea?

[Bill] No, I didn't do any of the rescue work myself, I just preached the gospel. I found out that the B-24 was on the survey list, that it was a pile of junk and having flown to Australia and back in it, I was convinced that that was right. I had my Coast Guard crew and they were a fine bunch of fellows and they kept it going, but I turned it in as soon as I got back to the Philippines. By this time, I had quite a few friends in the other services and I got a brand new B-25J and that was a flying machine if there ever was one. We took out I forget how many pounds of combat equipment such as machine guns and armor plate and so forth so that baby cruised at 300 mph and I'll tell you, it was a joy. I had that thing all over the Pacific area. Incidentally, you asked the

question. No, I did no rescue work myself, I just preached the gospel, but instigated lifeguard submarines that went out and took out 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> fighters and fellas coming out of Sumatra and other places. I could ditch alongside the submarine and that was one of the highlights of those boys, to spend the time on a submarine. I got I don't know how many letters and I still have letters of appreciation of what I had done for them, especially saving lives. It is a good feeling.

[Sam] Now who relieved you? Chet Bender (36) was out in that area around that time

[Bill] No, I don't think anybody actually relieved me.

[Sam] Were you there at the end of the war?

[Bill] Yes.

[Sam] So you just wrapped it up and "let's go home"?

[Bill] Yes. I was really unhappy that I had to come home when I did. Actually, I went to Honolulu from Manila in the B-25 and made the Air-sea Rescue annex to the invasion plan, invasion of Japan, for which I was given the Bronze Star, and I figured the war was going to be over pretty soon and I could make an around-the-world trip in this B-25. But no --- I found out when I was back in Honolulu that I had ten days to get back to Manila, the headquarters for the 7<sup>th</sup> fleet at that time and then to get my carcass to Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, DC in ten days.

[Sam] You had to go from Hawaii to the Philippines and then back to Washington within ten days?

[Bill] Yes, and I was a little bit perturbed because I had planned to make this around the world trip and here the powers that be in Washington said no, we want you in a hurry. So, I got back to Washington and found out that I was going to be with the Air-Sea Rescue Agency again, but this time it was for an ICAO conference, International Civil Aviation Organization conference in Dublin, Ireland. So, I got to see quite a bit of the world.

[Sam] Who headed the detachment on the ICAO dating?

[Bill] Lector Webster, Commodore Webster, another fine gentleman.

[Sam] You were on his staff?

[Bill] Yes.

[Sam] Do you remember some of the others who were on that staff with you?

[Bill] There were only two of us who went to Dublin.

But then, the old story of being at the right place at the right time, they wanted a new skipper for Elizabeth City Air Station which was the largest air station of the Coast Guard at that time and I had that job for three years and like Chet Bender (36) and Willard Smith, there's never been an active-duty aviator selected for Admiral, so I followed their example, and asked for a non-flying job. That's when they sent me to Alaska again, this time as Operations Officer and then Chief of Staff in the 17<sup>th</sup> Coast Guard District in Juneau.

[Sam] Who was your district commander?

[Bill] Doc Shields (31), another fine, I was blessed with good CO's.

[Sam] Chet Harding (31) had been there and Shields (31) relieved him.

[Bill] I'm not sure about that sequence, but I know that Doc Shields (31) was.

[Sam] Then Synon came.

[Bill] That's about the time I left I guess. Have you got Synon on your list?

[Sam] . . .

[Bill] Good, I'm glad that you didn't say no, but you are laughing up a storm and I agree with you. He was, well anyhow.

[Sam] Of course you know he's gone?

[Bill] Yes, that's right too.

[Sam] But he was on the list.

[Bill] And you know which list we're talking about too.

[Sam] Yes, we were shipmates

[Bill] So I'm not telling you anything at all. But he was even from the Academy days, "I'll put you on report" oh Squeaky. And Squeaky, he was the original Squeaky, but Synon was almost as bad. But anyway, I'll get on to more pleasant things.

Well, the 17<sup>th</sup> district, I went over to Anchorage on some kind of a conference, I can't recall what kind it was at the request of the city manager and while over there, I was invited to become the Port Director of the City of Anchorage which is a civilian job, of course. And I said gee, no thanks, I've got a good job. Not only that, but it was only three months before the selection for admiral. Well, when I got home from that, you talk about a pillow talk with mama. We sat up all night long and discussed the pros and cons of early retirement and came to the conclusion that by golly it's a long shot of making Admiral. You only have to make three out of five votes, but I knew of one vote that I would not be getting because Doc Shields (31) told me who was going to be on the selection board, so I figured my chances were less than 50/50. And so, I decided to take the job and I retired just about three months before I came up for selection for Admiral. And that took a lot as they say to pull a load, but to this day, I don't mind it at all. It was a very interesting job as port director. I took that little, tiny port with a 620 foot dock and when I left, I had an expansion program to bring it to over 1,600 feet of dock. We had quite an expansion program.

[Sam] That was within Tidal Basin, was it not?

[Bill] No, it was on the inlet. I can't even think of the name of it, but 120 miles from the Pacific Ocean. And, oh we had no traffic whatsoever in the winter time and finally Sea Land Co., modified a couple of big freighters and oh my friend, Admiral Synon of the 17<sup>th</sup> Coast Guard District decided that he would have the Coast Guard icebreaker protect the *Sea Land* as she

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came in. She did in a negative sort of way. It was the *Akona* that he sent over there and the *Akona* got stuck in the ice. The *Sea Land* came plowing on through on schedule. I called up Admiral Synon, brave as all get out and not being in the service anymore. I said, I hope you are satisfied that you have made a jackass out of yourself and he hung up on me.

[Sam] Prior to opening the port in the winter time as you did, was Whittier your primary source of supply

[Bill] No, Seward and Whittier. Whittier was military ships only and Seward had Alaska Steam Ships.

[Sam] Somewhere in that period of time, the Army abandoned Whittier or turned it over to civilians and the barge traffic utilized that. And also at about this time, were they not drilling for oil below Anchorage?

[Bill] Yes. There were several oil wells on and in Cook inlet and those were very interesting days and that is what I was coming to. You're absolutely right Sam, that there are several oil wells in Lower Cook Inlet that produce quite a bit of oil, but, of course, the big oil story of the sixties and seventies or the seventies rather was Prudhoe Bay and the equipment that was sent up there into the arctic was absolutely fabulous. Although there are certain people that said there is no oil in that area, they were proven to be quite wrong. Because today, the United States receives about one quarter of its oil from Prudhoe Bay and that other area that is over there to the east of Prudhoe Bay is undoubtedly even a greater source of oil. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that the oil spill of recent, the Exxon, that has made environmentalists look very good and undoubtedly will be tremendous fight to get to drill in the other area which is really a shame. What's the alternative, buy it from the Mideast. I don't think so myself, that is a personal opinion.

[Sam] Since your retirement and your going to Anchorage as port director, you have made your home in Anchorage, but when did you leave the port system?

[Bill] Five years after I took the job. Me and the Mayor could not see eye to eye and he said you can't talk to me like that and I said "I know I sure can because I just quit," and I quit very unexpectedly and for a difference of opinion. He was a strong man and I was a strong man and we had divergent ideas and so I quit and that has brought me to the last phase of my life. I went down to Mutual New York Life Insurance Company to borrow on a life insurance policy so I could keep my kids in college. The manager -- and I knew him socially -- said hey, what are you doing? And I said, to be honest with you, nothing. He said why don't you come work with us? I said, "don't be silly, Jim, I have always hated insurance agents." This is what I have been doing for the last twenty-five years, life insurance peddler. And frankly, I am quite successful at it. I have a daughter, now she is running the office while I am down here in sunny Florida and it is a good living for both of us. So, that is about it, Sam.

[Sam] So prior to coming here, you had a medical experience in La Jolla?

[Bill] Well no, I had a stroke that resulted in and I'm not sure of the sequence of this because I was unconscious for a couple of weeks. I had a quadruple by-pass and all that took place in La Jolla, California. And now, I came back here to recuperate and I am doing nicely. Although I

still mutter a bit and also use a cane, but my stamina is far from that to be desired, but I can't squawk, I am just a very fortunate person.

[Sam] And you are leaving here in about ten days to go back to Anchorage to fish?

[Bill] I have two sons up there, I'll let them do the fishing and hard work.

[Bill's Wife] Bill did you say anything about being known as Mr. Coast Guard in Anchorage and that he did a lot of work for the foundation and got a lot of money from the people up there when he was in the insurance business and as port director and everybody in Anchorage thinks he is Mr. Coast Guard? You recruit and you do all kinds of things. I heard you say what have you done since you got, but I think it is pretty important for a tape like this [she is Captain Reese-Harned-USCGR-Retired].

[Sam] OK --- go back and review this, fella.

[Bill's Wife] And did you tell him what you did when you worked for the Mutual of New York. You were man of the year and the whole shootin' match

[Bill] No, I did say that I was fairly successful.

[Bill's Wife] But the other part when you had the foundation meeting up there.

[Sam] I recall the articles in the alumni bulletin about your appearance and I did note that an abnormal number of Alaskans were on the Board of Directors of the Foundation.

[Bill] And they were all monied people.

[Sam] Of course, that was one of the requirements to be on the Board.

[Bill] Incidentally, that was my ever-loving wife there, Capt. Vivian Reese Harned. Captain, U.S. Coast Guard Reserve who put in her two bits worth which she is prone to do on frequent occasions.

[Sam] The ladies have the right, they have earned it.

[Bill] They have earned it, you are right there.

[Sam] I noticed your license plate reflects the plurality of Captainship.

[Bill] Absolutely, there is no duplicate of that. It is Alaska license plate *Capt's*.

[Sam] And your plans now are to return north and you will alternate your springtime/summertime in Alaska and your winters down here.

[Bill] We put in the majority of our time up there in Alaska, but we are finding that more and more each year that is a heck of a way to commute. I don't know if we will settle down if and when we do.

[Sam] Well, I note that several of the diehards who have made their homes in the far north Maine and along the coast, all of a sudden are down here in this area.

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[Bill] Climate-wise you have answered your own question there, but tax-wise, it is something else you have got to think about too and that is something that Alaska tax-wise has a lot of advantages.

[Sam] Well then you have to count the days and be sure you don't go six months in one.

[Bill] Very true.

[Sam] We are off on far a-field subjects, so I think that I will turn this down but I would like to thank you for searching your memory. Oh, that reminds me, I've got one more thing I want to ask you about. Back in the days when you were going to sea, there was a book published *Men and Fog on the Bering Sea* and I don't recall who.

[Bill] Max Miller.

[Sam] And he quotes Ensign Harned and Ensign Olson.

[Bill] George Olson (33).

[Sam] George Olson (33), the two of you. I don't recall any particular any matter out of the book, but I do recall the number of times that he credited the next excerpt, usually some fantastic deed to either Harned or Olson. You guys must have buffaloed that author.

[Bill] He was easy, he was easy to buffalo, but he was a real fine shipmate. He was with us on the *Northland*. Actually, George and myself furnished all of the photographs for his book and we visited him in La Jolla and I couldn't track him down went I spent those unpleasant days in the hospital with he or his wife. But, we got a lot of pictures and they were good pictures ones that kind of helped bite the book.

[Sam] I remember reading the book a couple of times, but Lord knows where the copy is now.

[Bill] I have a copy in Anchorage if you want to look at it.

[Sam] It is one of those trivial things that stick in mind and that popped up again at the right moment. Well again Bill, thanks an awful lot.