

# **A Veterans Oral History**

## **Francis ‘Bud’ Medley**

[1-2007]

**Heritage Education Commission**  
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Moorhead, MN

In 2000, Bev Paulson, Heritage Education Commission member, developed a plan to record Veterans' oral histories, starting with WW II Veterans. Bev made a significant personal donation to start our Veterans' oral history project which was supplemented by other concerned individuals, we have recorded 65 oral histories of WWII veterans plus a few Korean War and Vietnam War Veteran. The project is ongoing.

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Interviewer: Polly Wendelbo [PW]

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### **Transcript**

**BM: My name is Bud Medley. And I was born in Twin Brooks, South Dakota, in 1921. Anyhow, we moved to Milbank, South Dakota, when I was 16 years old. My father was a railroad man and we went there. And then in 1938 we moved to Woonsocket, South Dakota. And I lived there until I went into the service. And I went to boot camp in Great Lakes in Chicago, the Great Lakes. And I, after that, I was picked to go aboard this brand new ship. After boot camp, I went to Boston, Massachusetts, where I was given – I got aboard the new Lexington, the USS Lexington. It was brand new, never been out to sea. And I went on it with them to – on a shake-down cruise, and all of us went through the whole thing until – let’s see, “\_+” – anyhow, we went (6 sec) we went out to sea and bro—, to try it out on a trial run. And after that, why we went – started out and we went down through Panama Canal, back to Bremerton, Washington, and from Bremerton, Washington, we went to Hawaii, and from Hawaii we went to the Marianas Islands. And from there we went out (7 sec) and there we went on to the South Pacific. And we got torpedoed in the Marianas, and we had to come back to the United States to get repaired, and got a 30-day leave. (7 sec) After we was hit by torpedo, the destroyers gave us the smokescreen**

**so that the enemy couldn't find us. And we was in the water then, I don't know how (5 sec) but there were times when I didn't think I was going to "\_\_\_+."**

**PW:** (4 sec) And you had the destroyers then that encircled you?

**BM:** **Um hum. And then they just kept us there until we could move. "\_\_\_+" I don't know how long it was. I couldn't tell you. I know it was a long, long time and we finally got to move and we got out of the area and started back to the, to the States.**

**PW:** And did they encircle and protect you all the way back or just out of . . . ?

**BM:** **Oh, no. Just through that one – the Japs was only in that one place, in that area. And then after that why it was kind of neutral there. But back there in the Marianas and all, that's where the Japs were at. The Japs were there.**

**PW:** And when you limped back in to Washington, they called you the ghost ship.

**BM:** **When we came out afterwards, at first they were going to paint it like all the other ships. See it was all camouflaged. And Tokyo Rose kept telling everybody that they sunk us. Well then back there they just made her blue and that's what she's stayed. They never, they never repainted her. She just came back out in the same blue color. That was her name, they called it.**

**PW:** So even to this day then she's the same color as the ocean?

**BM:** **No, she's changed now. She's in a, in a "\_\_\_" in Corpus Christi, Texas. She's been there for about two years now. She doesn't run anymore. The ship is out of comm – well, it ain't out of commission but it . . .**

**PW:** It's retired.

**BM:** **It's retired because they got two new ones. So they retired us.**

**PW:** So it stayed blue during the war, though?

**BM:** **All the war. Yeah. We never changed the color of the ship. We just – every time, you know, they would – we'd have a little battle why they'd think that they – they thought they'd seen a ghost. That's what they always said – I don't know, but that's what they'd always tell us about the ship, that it was a ghost ship. It says – it's in one of these books about the ghost ship.**

**PW:** Did Tokyo Rose know that you really were not sunk?

**BM:** **Well, she did after, when we came back out. But at first I don't think that she did. I couldn't tell you.**

**PW:** And for those who don't know who Tokyo Rose is, can you tell us?

**BM:** **She was just an American citizen. She was telling all the stuff about the Americans – to go home 'cause you're not going to make it anyhow.**

**PW:** She was actually a radio disk jockey.

**BM:** **Yeah.**

**PW:** And she was very popular one, from what I understand, that the soldiers listened to all the time.

**BM:** **Yeah. We listened to her aboard ship all the time, whenever we could. And really always talking about the war and about different things and she played that beautiful music.**

**PW:** (4 sec) So then you limped in to Washington and they repaired you?

**BM:** **Yeah.**

**PW:** And then you had to go back out again?

**BM:** **Um hum.**

**PW:** And then where did you go?

**BM:** **Back to the same place. Got started going further into the islands. We started bombing islands. They were all “\_\_+.” Every island that we touched several times. They just “\_\_.” The planes kept going to every island and bomb. There was only one island that they didn't get. It was called Truk Island and it was too well fortified and too much – so they left it. And we bombed it every morning, up “\_\_”the carrier. We'd go out and bomb them, keep them so their planes didn't kill them.**

**PW:** And then how long were you out to sea doing this?

**BM:** **Three and half years.**

**PW:** Okay, then you mentioned that a suicide bomber hit your ship.

**BM:** **Yeah, um hum.**

**PW:** And how long was that from when the last time was that your ship was damaged?

**BM:** **Oh that – I don't know. I couldn't tell you. We got hit once “\_\_+.”**

**PW:** So talk about the fact that you were a gunner.

**BM:** I'm a gunner.

**PW:** And you were in the front of the ship.

**BM:** In the bow of the ship and every day at noon, pert near every day, a suicide plane would be up there. Then they'd fly around and they'd just start down . . .

**PW:** And I know that . . .

**BM:** there was nothing I could do but shoot. But I never had to shoot because the other guns usually would get it before we did because mine would only shoot "\_\_\_" yards.

**PW:** So how many different types of gunners were on the ship?

**BM:** We had a 5-inch, 40-mm and 20-mm. That's what was on the ship. The 5-inch would go way out, a long ways. That was the first – our first line of defense and then the 40s and then the 20s. That's the way it was. If he got through one, the next one should "\_\_\_" and start shooting. We didn't know – sometimes we were all shooting, like they call it "hellfire and hail." But when they was in the air, everything shot. We just had to blow the thing apart.

**PW:** You wouldn't have had a choice.

**BM:** Huh?

**PW:** You wouldn't have a choice.

**BM:** No, you didn't have a choice. You just, you just shoot and hope you get them before they hit you. They hit the side of the ship and there's nothing you can do.

**PW:** And you mentioned that the – you mentioned to me earlier that when they were doing that, they were trying to hit a certain part of the ship.

**BM:** Oh, yeah.

**PW:** And explain that, please.

**BM:** Well, because they was always trying to hit what they called the main part of the ship, where they could – where the bomb could go down into the magazines and stuff. They always wanted that. If that was – if you hit that, the ship would blow up. But you see, that's why they – all planes try to do that to you. And if they ever do, why then it's usually dead meat "\_\_\_+." It's just hard to say, but . . .

**PW:** And one time then a kamikaze did hit.

**BM:** Yeah, they hit right in the superstructure. Well that's the place where they steer the ship and all the instruments are on that side.

**PW:** So once again you were stranded at sea?

**BM:** Yeah.

**PW:** And then what happened?

**BM:** Well, we just waited for the men to go down and fix it, so we could – if we could get it fixed and then get out – out of there.

See they had four propellers on them. They don't just have one or two; there's four of them under there. "\_\_\_+" they call them, under there. You wouldn't think so but there – and then there's a great big rudder down there. That's what the torpedo tore all apart. You can't steer the ship then because part of that stub probably went into the wheels and you have to wait until they cleaned that up, you see. You can steer the ship with the, with the screws they used to call them. Anyhow, you can steer it with them, one on each side, but when all that junk was on in there, why it's – you couldn't do anything except just kept going round and round until they shut it down. It's kind of hard to try to explain something that I don't know much about.

**PW:** So pretty much three-and-a-half years, you spent just waiting for the kamikazes?

**BM:** Well no, just "\_\_\_+." We were bombing all the islands from the Marianas all the way to Tokyo. Every island as we'd go. We'd try and get, well hit them in the morning – early morning. We always tried to hit the islands in the early mornings. The planes would go up and then, of course, once you send yours up well then the other ones start coming up, too, from on the land. So they'd come out to greet you.

**PW:** Did you ever lose any planes?

**BM:** Oh yes, lots of them, lots of them. Oh yes, quite a few of them. You know, it's just like any other thing, you can't expect to bring them all home.

**PW:** Right. And did you guys know right away when a plane didn't come back?

**BM:** Oh yes.

**PW:** 'Cause there was a lot of secretiveness with that war and that's why Tokyo Rose was important to some of you, because no one ever knew what the other person was doing.

**BM:** And see, our planes had what they call a IFF on it, and we could tell which ones was ours and which was theirs. You know, unless the pilot – sometimes they'd shoot this IFF thing and knock, you know, knock the thing off. Well then, we're thinking –

**we'd call them bogeys so (3 sec) that's what they did. That's what we knew which ones -- when the planes was coming at us, we knew which ones was which by just, by just what they call the IFF on the plane. Yeah.**

**PW:** So during the times when you were torpedoed and bombed, there must have been a lot of chaos.

**BM:** **Not too much. You can't get excited. No, there was men that went down, like I tell you, in those diving suits and stuff, and they fixed it all up. You know, as good as they could, so we could get out of the area, but when you've got that much ship, it's really hard to move.**

**PW:** And as a gunner you were pretty exposed out there?

**BM:** Yes.

**PW:** No shelter.

**BM:** **No shelter. Well, none of the gunners did – see, the 40s didn't have anything either – just like we did, you know. Just a small – the five-inchers, they was in like a tourniquet (turret ?), big tourniquet, the big five-inch guns. That was our main line of defense. Because they could shoot the furthest and the shells would never miss, so.**

**PW:** Can you think of anything else that you would like to share? Some of your experiences when your buddies came back, too, and . . .

**BM:** **When they came home? Yeah, two of them come home. Just one – two of us came home out of the three. My buddy – in the same town, Woonsocket. Yeah.**

**PW:** And what carrier was he on?

**BM:** **He wasn't on a carrier. He was in the Atlantic. He was – he went to Britain. The British – over the, over the Atlantic. He wanted the Atlantic and he got it, so I was in the Pacific. Him and this guy that got killed – Hayes (sp?) – they both went to the Atlantic and a German submarine sunk it. And my buddy was on it and they never even found any of the ship.**

**PW:** Oh, so you never recovered your buddy?

**BM:** No.

**PW:** When did you find out that that happened? Was it . . .

**BM:** **When his parents got that notice that he was gone. My mother – her friend – told me. We lived in the same town. Yeah.**

**PW:** And that's how you found out?

**BM:** **And the war had just started. They said they were taking a load of stuff overseas and that they had been hit. So, that's all I know about that.**

**PW:** Yeah.

**BM:** **Because, you know, just what my mother told me.**

**PW:** Do you remember when the war ended?

**BM:** **Yes.**

**PW:** And were you back in the States at that time?

**BM:** **Yeah, I was back. I got back just two months before the war ended. I came back on another carrier. The Lexington stayed out there. I came back. I'd been aboard the ship all that time until two months before the war ended. I got to go home. The captain said you've had enough, you know.**

**PW:** So you came back two months prior to the war being over?

**BM:** **Um hum.**

**PW:** They sent you back.

**BM:** **Um hum.**

**PW:** And then, what do you remember about the day that the Japanese surrendered?

**BM:** **Well, I don't remember too much about it. We was there at "\_\_\_+" and we heard about it. And the next morning the officer, my officer that I had at "\_\_\_" and he come to me. He says, "Buddy, you're going home." I was discharged.**

**PW:** And happy to go home.

**BM:** **Yes.**

**PW:** Yeah and you came home and found a wife?

**BM:** **No, not right away. I was working on the railroad when I left and my dad was a foreman. And my rail master told me when I left – he says, "Buddy, when you come home, the job is yours." I didn't believe him. As soon as I came home, they said, "Go to work." I went to work. "\_\_\_+" hard.**

**PW:** Anything else that you want to share that you can think of?

**BM:** No. I don't think so. I probably know a lot more but I can't say, you know.

**PW:** I know there is from World War II they always said, "What happens in the military stays in the military." And for a lot of people, for a long time, they just put a lot of things out of their mind.

**BM:** Um hum, yeah. I didn't talk about this for a long time. I just couldn't.

**PW:** Well, I really appreciate your sharing . . .

**BM:** 'Cause I remember all the ones that didn't come home.

**PW:** And the people that were out to sea, that happened a lot.

**BM:** Yeah, the worst part of it, the part that I hated to know "\_\_\_ +." We had burials at sea. And we buried our men right at sea. And we all had to be up on the deck, on the main deck, and up on the flight deck and then they put them in tubes and dropped them into the water.

**PW:** And you saw a lot of those?

**BM:** You know their names are here. When you know their mothers and fathers. Oh, my God. It's not like the Army. They sent them home. These guys are gone. They're gone forever.

**PW:** So there wasn't the closure for the families?

**BM:** No there wasn't. And there was nothing they could say about it; they were just killed in action, that's all. And we all had to be on the flight deck when they had – when they did this burial, every time. Every man that wasn't on duty had to be up on the flight deck. (6 sec) So you can look through the albums and look at anything you like. It just didn't seem right, to put them in the water, but they couldn't bring them back.

**PW:** Bud, I'm sure you didn't know how long you'd be out to sea.

**BM:** Well, I never thought I'd be out there as long as I did. I was there for so long. You just keep rolling along "\_\_\_+," every day a different part. I was in the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, you know, the Red Sea, "\_\_\_." You don't see nothing – but water, but – that's all you see. You know, you don't see much. It's kind of – it's nice to be aboard ship. I mean, I liked it. A lot of the guys, boy, they wanted to go home and get into the Army. They wanted, all "\_\_\_+" kind of, just to get on land.

**PW:** Well, I know you enlisted so that you could go where you wanted to go, rather than waiting to be drafted and sent somewhere else.

**BM:** No. It was easy for me. I just went and that was it.

**PW:** So you still like the water today?

**BM:** Oh, yeah. But I just don't go near it, though. Haven't been on it. Went – last summer, I think, we went someplace and I had a pontoon ride. That's the first time that I had been on the water for a long time.

**PW:** Okay, Bud, you mentioned about being in the Indian Ocean and to the Red Sea. What did you do up in that area?

**BM:** Just looking for the Japs.

**PW:** Was your whole convoy there with you?

**BM:** Yeah.

**PW:** And so everybody had a part?

**BM:** They did. Everybody “\_\_+,” every little convoy had a place to go to look for the Japs. They kept looking for them back and forth, and we finally found them.

**PW:** And tell about the plane that was looking to land?

**BM:** Well, I don't know about that too much, but I was told that there was a plane that was trying to land on one of our carriers and take to our “\_\_+” and stuff, but he didn't try to land. This one they said tried to land.

**PW:** Because his . . .

**BM:** His ship was gone. And see our planes were coming in, too. The one with the bomb – the fleet, their fleet – they was coming back home and this one followed them on home. And so he certainly wanted to find someplace to set down, I suppose, I don't know, I couldn't tell you. You know it was just something that – I think I would find a different place, too. But . . .

**PW:** Tell me us how many ships were in a convoy?

**BM:** Well, let's see, three – six, no, yeah. There's a cruiser, a battleship cruiser and a destroyer on each side of every carrier. The destroyer is the outside one because he's looking for the submarines and that's what he does. He hunts the submarines. And the other two was supposed to try to protect us, you know, so we wouldn't get too much “\_\_+,” but otherwise, I guess, that's all, you know. They always do it that way.

**PW:** And it kind of an order of defense?

**BM:** Um hum.

**PW:** A line of defense?

**BM:** No, you're spread out.

**PW:** Oh, I see.

**BM:** And you can – when you're out there, you'd see that – it looked funnier than heck. You'd be going – standing there watching and pretty soon this head ship would turn and go and the whole fleet would turn at the same time. They would follow each other. And I don't know how they did that, but they did it. But that's the way they did it. 'Cause one would turn – see, we zigzagged. We never went straight. We always zig-zagged all the time. So the submarines couldn't get a marker on us, on the ships. Otherwise, if you'd go straight ahead the submarine can set off to the side and get you. But if you're zigzagging, they can't find you. You know, they can't get a true mark on you. That's why they do that. “\_\_+”

**PW:** I always was wondering, too, about after you said your Lexington was retired, would you ever want to visit it again or would it bring on too many painful memories?

**BM:** No. 'Cause it isn't, it isn't the same ship.

**PW:** Oh.

**BM:** Here's the book. See this. See, there you go. See, they remodeled it after they came back – when they put it – when we came back it was, I think six months, and then they put it in there; and then, when they put it in there, why they (11 sec) they made it so it was more like the newer ships.

**PW:** So you were really on it the whole time that it was in its original capacity then, what it was built for.

**BM:** Oh, no, I was on it all but two months. I got out two months before that.

**PW:** You were on it, initially, as a new ship?

**BM:** Oh yeah.

**PW:** Until it ran its full course.

**BM:** Yeah. (4 sec) See. That's what they rebuilt it. They put, they put the runways on the sides instead straight down the middle. They remodeled it and done that right after the war. I don't know how long – it says in here, but – and then they retired it. So it's in Corpus Christi. I was – I and my daughters was going to go there, but then I got sick and couldn't make it. And now I'm too old to go. And my one

**daughter, she got all these books and stuff and they told her, “Don’t bring your dad, it’s too hot.” You see, there’s no air conditioning in it now. And they said that Corpus Christi – it was so hot. You go down there and you got to be able to climb and they got no elevators in it and stuff. They said they’re going to do it later but they “\_\_+” but I guess, “\_\_+.” They wrote to her and told her, “Don’t you bring your dad.” So we never went. So, I seen it.**

**PW:** Well, thank you sharing your story with us today.

**BM:** I don’t know if it was very much.

**PW:** It was a lot and I thank you for sharing it.

**BM:** Yeah. Okay.

**PW:** Thank you.