

Oral History Interviews, Reunion Weekend 2007

**Interview with George Bogs, class of 1947
Interviewed by Julia Stringfellow
John G. Strange Commons, Main Hall
Interview #4 for June 16, 2007**

Start [00:00:00]

1. Could you please state your name?

George Bogs.

2. And what year did you graduate from Lawrence?

Well, I actually didn't graduate. I was in the Navy, and I was here from March 1, 1944 for sixteen months. And then they decommissioned the Navy unit here, closed it down, and transferred all of us to Northwestern University. So I actually graduated from Northwestern in 1946, ahead of my class of 1947. They had compressed it, and we had tremendous number of hours, I mean some semesters I had 20-21 hours, so they piled that all together and I was able to graduate early. I never had the affection for Northwestern and not alone affection, no connection with Northwestern as compared to Lawrence. Everyone here accepted the Navy boys with tremendous warmth, and it was just a great place.

3. What were you getting your degree in at Lawrence and what did you get your degree in at Northwestern?

It was naval science. So we had a lot of history, had some wonderful English courses, I was in the Navy band, I sang in the choir. Dean Waterman was the Dean of the Conservatory, we made several trips, we went to Milwaukee and sang, we went to some of the cities here near Appleton, went to Chicago one time, and had a concert down there. And of course the Navy was the bulk of the males around here, there were very few civilians because most of them had been drafted. The male contingent at Lawrence who weren't in the service had some physical disability, not mental. It was just a great place to be for my first sixteen months in the Navy.

4. Why did you choose to attend Lawrence? Was it because of the Navy program here?

The Navy sent me, they sent us a list and I took the qualifying exam in high school. They had a list of colleges and universities across the whole country, so I chose one in Oregon and one in Washington state, thinking, well, a lot of my buddies from high school were already in the service and some of them were overseas, so I felt I had to get some distance away from Milwaukee, but the Navy thought of the economy, when they could send me to a unit just a couple of hundred miles from Milwaukee

was much more cost-effective than shipping me to Oregon or Washington. It wasn't my choice, but it really didn't make any difference to me, it was a wonderful experience.

5. And what were your first impressions of Lawrence when you got here?

I was a very lucky person to be able to be here. The Navy was housed at Brokaw Hall, and the ladies who were in the kitchen were retained by the Navy, and we had some good eating! I didn't know about down South cooking, but they were excellent cooks at this time. Now I know about down South cooking. This was different, this was traditional American food, and it was excellent. So we were very fortunate from that standpoint. We were welcomed by the faculty, by the students, I joined Delta Phi Delta, in fact everybody in the Navy was in a fraternity because they just didn't have any male civilians. And it was more club-like than fraternity-like. When we had our functions, we'd invite some of the other fraternities, because we all lived together at Brokaw and so to split up to go into the fraternity houses that was just of course for social events, but we lived in Brokaw. It was a little bit different all the way around, but it was great.

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6. What were some of the activities that you did while you were in the fraternity? Tell me more about the parties that maybe your fraternity would have or the gatherings.

The parties were somewhat on a low-key basis because we had to be over there and back at the barracks by 7, maybe 7:30 each night, except on the weekends. We just didn't have a lot of fraternity life as such. We had some inter-mural sports, the guys were in different fraternity people sports. It wasn't a normal type fraternity because the Navy just changed the whole thing. But it was fun.

7. How many men were in the Navy program while you were here?

I think there were probably about 200, 250, something like that. It seems to me before I got here the program had been going on for a year or two. They might have been housing some of the people someplace else, I don't know how many Brokaw Hall holds, but by the time I got here, March 1 of 1944, all of us were in Brokaw. I had graduated from high school at the end of February, and a lot of the guys came from Milwaukee, different high schools. I didn't know any of them at the time, we got to know each other in a hurry though. I remember I went out for, you went and got your Navy-issued clothing, of course we appeared in our skivvies, and I was turned under pretty far, I took a size fourteen shoe, they didn't have any fourteens, so I had to wear my civilian shoes for about two weeks until they got a pair of Navy-issued shoes that would fit me. We were in uniform, we were all apprenticing, which was the lowest of the low in the Navy, that's where you start. We had several other people in the unit,

they were older, they had been in the fleet, and a lot of them had seen some action in battles.

And then some of them were given an opportunity to come back here still in the Navy, and they had to be downgraded to apprentice, except one man, I think his name was Harold Polanski, he was a chief petty officer. And he helped run the troops. And he was an old guy, probably in his thirties. A lot of us were seventeen, I was sworn in the Navy on the second anniversary of Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1943. But I didn't actually report for active duty until March 1, 1944, after I graduated from high school.

8. What was your daily schedule like here at Lawrence?

We got up at the crack of dawn, it was actually before dawn cracked. And practically every morning, we'd go out and have a run. I know that we'd run through the neighborhoods here near the college, it was Lawrence College at that time of course, and I remember the crunch of the snow in the wintertime, everybody, "Hut two, hut two," and then you hear this crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch. And some of the people would come out every morning and wave at us as we'd go jogging by. I think the city street department liked that because they didn't have to do so much plowing because we trampled the snow down for them. And then of course there was a lot of class, a lot of athletics, you wouldn't realize it now, but we had a rigorous athletic program. I remember doing many chin-ups, if you could do 200 sit-ups, you got a hundred points. I scored pretty well on that.

We had some free time, but you were supposed to use that free time for athletics. We'd go over to the (Alexander) gym and played handball, we played some of the indoor sports, we had a swimming pool, and I had broken my leg as a kid and the swimming coach who was a Navy guy said, "Hey Bogs, kick with both legs." And I didn't realize that I had stopped kicking with my left leg which is the one that was broken. And he said, "Hey, you'd swim a lot better if you kicked with both legs." We played some of the water sports, water polo, try to drown each other, fun stuff.

We had a game they called scrap iron which was sort of a combination of basketball and football. There were no fouls, you could knock a guy down if you were going after the ball. I remember rope climbing was another activity, you climbed up the rope and better not drop off. That was some of the stuff similar to what the training program for physical fitness and at that time, I think I grew a couple of inches after I got in the Navy, but my weight stayed about the same. I probably weigh a 100 pounds more now than I did when I got out of the Navy or when I was in the Navy. It was a full life, but a fun life, everybody griped but it was great.

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9. What were some of the professors that you had here at Lawrence that made a strong influence on your life?

A history professor whose name I believe was Bark, like a dog. I had always enjoyed history and did well in high school. I can't remember, it may have been American history and he was very knowledgeable and a very good teacher, interesting. The English professor I had whose name eludes me, but he was a character. I remember some of the poetry, "Buffalo Bill rode a watery smooth silver stallion and what a man he was," but Buffalo Bill is defunct and that's a very lousy rendition of that particular poetry. He would say it with such fervor and feeling, it kept you interested. We had a lot of math and science oriented stuff. Professor Darling was the science...I get mixed up with here and Northwestern after all these years, I think Professor Darling was the chemistry professor, interesting man and had gone to school in Heidelberg and took fencing and seemed, we tried to cut each other up with swords, and you were a chicken if you wore a mask.

We had practice with the band, we integrated into the college band, but then we had our own Navy marching band. And the choir, if it hadn't been for the Navy, there was one basso profundo, and he was an older guy, he had this fantastic deep voice, and I think he had returned to school probably working on an advanced degree. But he was the foundation of the bass section, great, big tall guy. Of course we got credit for those too, and I had a lot of hours and was able to graduate in the equivalent of three and a half years which was 28 months. I stayed in the reserve after I got out of the Navy down at Northwestern for a number of years.

It was a wonderful experience and very helpful to me. My parents could not have afforded to send me to college and I don't know if I would have had the get up and go vigor to be working and going to college and paying my way through. So the Navy gave me the fantastic opportunity. I didn't mind paying income taxes for about 25 years. I thought I was paying the government back.

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10. What was the general attitude on campus here during the war? Were there any special projects done to help the war effort?

We marched in some parades, the Navy did. We had a lot of speakers, Wendell Willkie was a Republican candidate for presidential office and he came and spoke over in Main Hall, no...

Was it in the Union or the Chapel?

I think it was the Chapel, because that had great seating. We had a number of interesting people, some of the names are failing me after all these years. There was a lot of interest, I would say at that time Lawrence was very conservatively oriented, politically. And Wisconsin was kind of that way. I had a course in Religions of the World, which of course was not a Navy requirement, but it sounded interesting and we had a Methodist minister who was the teacher. I remember my buddies, I had

convinced myself that I could not become inebriated because I would get full, I would not be able to drink anymore, so that therefore I could not get drunk. And they set out one night to prove to me that I was wrong.

And I went to class the next morning, we had a Saturday morning class. Right in the middle of his dissertations about something or other, I said, "How about a few Christmas carols?" And he looked askance at me, my other buddies in the Navy we just broke out into some Christmas carols and the girls in the class joined us and I don't think he enjoyed the disruption of it and I was basically kind of a quiet guy, all of that liquor changed me. Of course we were not supposed to have any liquor in the barracks, that was a definite no-no. We could have been in a lot of trouble, fortunately we weren't. That was an interesting course, even before the singing.

11. How do you feel that attending Lawrence went on to benefit your life after you left Lawrence?

I think the very fact as I mentioned before that it gave me an opportunity to have a college education, although somewhat different than I would have had as a civilian, because it was heavily loaded with science and math. And we had things like seamanship, so it was a special degree that we got, called a university senate degree in Naval Science. And upon graduation from Northwestern, I was commissioned as an officer in the Navy, that was the whole purpose of this thing. I have a tremendous amount of gratitude really, in the first place for the opportunity the government and the Navy specially afforded me. But also because of the location, it was just a great place to be and Northwestern was a great school, too, but from the personal standpoint I just never quite had during my stay down there, we were close to Chicago and we were participating in a lot of bond drives and things of that nature, whereas up here it didn't afford itself quite as often. I feel really gratitude for that opportunity I was given, and I was able to take advantage of it.

12. Well, we're almost out of time. Is there anything else you want to add or say?

I met my first wife here, she was going to the school here, and we became engaged. In fact that was the occasion of the night they convinced me that I could actually become inebriated. We had four daughters, and the marriage lasted for 24 years, but it didn't work out from then on. I remarried and my wife passed away early this year. She was planning to come up here with me, and she had a heart attack in August and died in January.

I'm so glad for this opportunity because for years and years, my company had a trade show that I participated in and it almost always fell on Reunion Weekend. So I was never able to come. So this year being the sixtieth and the fact that I've been retired now for almost five years. I worked for 56 years for the same company, and that's a bit of a record. It was all in all a wonderful experience here for which I'm deeply

grateful. We could have just been cranked out of some other school, and this was a really wonderful place to be.

End [00:21:47]