



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Radford F. Franke, 1907-2000
&
Marie G. Franke, 1908-1998

February 19, 1990 and March 7th, 1990



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INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is an oral history interview with Mr. Radford Franke. Mr. Franke was the lighthouse keeper at Ballast Point apparently from 1929 to 1957. We will cover those years in this interview. My name is Robert G. Wright. The date is February 19, 1990.

ROBERT G. WRIGHT: Will you give me your full name? And where and when were you born?

RADFORD FRANKE: Radford Franz Franke, the 5th of October, 1907, in Oakland, California.

RW: When did you come to San Diego?

RF: I came to San Diego on November 30, 1930.

RW: How come you came down here?

RF: I got transferred down here from Ano Nuevo Lighthouse to Ballast Point Lighthouse.

RW: You were in the Coast Guard then?

RF: Yes, I was in the lighthouse service.

RW: You were in the lighthouse service, but the Coast Guard wasn't in charge of lighthouses, were they?

RF: This is correct. It was under the Department of Commerce. I started out in the lighthouse service. But first I was on the lightship out of San Francisco. I started there in 1927; I was a fireman on the lightship, SAN FRANCISCO, out of the Golden Gate.

RW: That was the name of the boat?

RF: The SAN FRANCISCO was the name of the boat, yes, No. 70.

RW: What I was curious about, you probably finished school, but how did you get involved with the Coast Guard?

RF: It has been a long story. We were one of the poorest families in Oakland, I think. My father died when I was three years old. My mother remarried shortly after that. Her second husband was a foreman at a charcoal camp down in Templeton, California. That was out in the country there and they were making charcoal for the Du Pont Powder Works. I was one of five children, actually, but two of them had passed away before I was born, but I was the last one born. I had two sisters and myself (who) survived; the two younger ones died as infants from infantile paralysis.

We were transferred to Atascadero (California). My stepfather was kind of a wayward man. My mother had gotten ahold of him through a lonely-hearts society thing. He was just looking for some prey, I guess, because shortly after we were in Templeton he disappeared. We lived out at the charcoal ranch in a home out there, but when he disappeared and they got somebody to take his place, we moved into the town of Templeton. We lived in a hotel there. So that went on for a while. My brother-in-law was on the lightship as a fireman.

RW: You mean one of your sisters got married?

RF: That's right. My two sisters married two brothers. It was quite a coincidence. This one man was on a lightship so he asked me if I wanted to go out on her because they needed a fireman. It was a very easy job to get because you did not have to take an examination or anything because it was hard to get people to go out as you stayed out for six weeks at a time. Then you came in for two weeks and then back out again.

The ship would stay there for nine months out of the year. They would come in to have repairs made on it at the end of nine months. So this is when I got onto the ship that was tied up at Yerba Buena Island in San Francisco bay. I enjoyed it very much. I was making \$75 a month.

RW: And no place to spend it.

RF: That's correct. I hadn't learned how to get out and really spend any money anyway. I kept company with my friend who was an apprentice baker. We used to get together on a weekend and we'd go over to San Francisco to the Cliff House. I met my wife over there. Her and a girl friend were at the amusement park at the Cliff House. We were at the Big Dipper and those two girls were standing there looking in their purse to see whether they had enough money. We went over and introduced ourselves and offered to take them on the ride together. So this is how I met my wife. He had the other girl and somehow we got switched around, and to this day he is mad at me because I took the girl away from him. But there would have been no way for him because my wife was Catholic and she wouldn't have married anybody else but a Catholic man. Just fortunately I was Catholic.

RW: What is your wife's name?

RF: She was Marie Peterson. Her mother was Irish and her father was Danish. Her mother died when Marie was just a young girl. She had a young sister, too. Her father was working on construction work out in the mountains and he never had a chance to keep a home for them.

RW: You were at sea for nine months?

RF: The ship stayed out there for nine months, but the crew got off every six weeks for a two-weeks' leave. The officers were off for a month. The lighthouse tender would come out every other week to bring water and supplies to the ship and then the following week a Navy tug would come out and bring newspapers and things while they were taking supplies out to the Farralon Island where there was another lighthouse. The Navy tug would take a liberty party in and take the other ones out on one weekend and the next weekend the lighthouse tender would bring the men who were ashore back to the ship and take the next liberty party ashore again.

RW: How far out was it moored from the Golden Gate (bridge)?

RF: Three miles, I believe, as near as I can remember.

RW: Between the Farralon Islands and the Golden Gate? Did that SAN FRANCISCO lightship kind of roll around?

RF: They had some real weird winters out there, believe me. In fact, when I first went out there (I had never been to sea), I don't know how I ever became a sailor in the first place. I had no idea of even being one except that my brother-in-law had suggested it to me and I thought it was a good chance for me to get started. We got to going through the Golden Gate and I was quite excited about this. I'd run up from the engine room and look out to see where we were. About the third trip up I began to feel kind of peculiar and there was no fourth trip.

Finally, when I got out on the station I was so darn sick I couldn't perform my work for three days. I stayed in bed and my brother-in-law took my duty for me. I wanted to quit; I wanted to jump overboard; I wanted the captain to have somebody come out and get me, but they wouldn't pay any attention to me. After the third day I became quite a sailor. Yeah, I mean the weather out there sometimes ... I can remember standing up alongside of the bulkhead while we were eating our dinner and on one day, one minute we would be almost with our face against the deck and the next minute we'd be back up against the bulkhead.

The ship was only about 200 feet long. It had a one-cylinder engine in it. It was only strong enough to get us out on station and get us back in again because the rest of the time we were anchored. We had to go out when the tide was going out, otherwise we couldn't buck the incoming tide. And the same way, when the ship would come in she would wait till the low of the tide was going in again so that we could ride in with the tide.

I've seen times when we had to have the engines running full forward in order to keep the strain off of the anchor chain, the waves would be so rough. That was a very exciting experience. But after Marie and I got married I didn't like that business of being gone for six weeks and only back with her for two weeks. So I resigned the job.

But in the meantime I had applied for a job in the lighthouses. We were living on Steiner Street in San Francisco and I walked the pavements trying to find a job. It was during the Depression and a hard time to be looking for work. Fortunately, I got a job at the Southern Pacific roundhouse down on Third Street in San Francisco. So I got a job there to tighten up the engines after they would come in for overhaul and get them ready for the next trip.

RW: What year was this? Do you remember?

RF: That would be in 1928 because we were married in June of 1928.

RW: But the Depression didn't come on until a little later, though.

RF: It was already in. Things were beginning to get bad. One of the nuns at the convent where Marie was staying The convent was kept up by businesses in San Francisco that made big donations. This fellow from Pacific Electric Manufacturing Company was one of the donors for the convent and the nun talked him into giving me a job at the factory there. I went over there as a timekeeper. When I worked at the roundhouse, I worked seven days a week, eight hours a day. We had to work while we were getting our lunch - no lunch time or anything, so I went over and took the other job. In the meantime I had my application in for the lighthouse service, so on the 23rd of April, 1929 I was called to go on the lighthouse up at St. George's Reef. But this was a very disastrous life station. It was about three miles out at sea. There was just one tower out there and at times it would get so rough that the waves would break over the top of the light. I didn't think I wanted that kind of a job, so I refused it.

The next one that was offered to me was the Ano Nuevo Lighthouse which was down near Santa Cruz. It was an island that was about a half mile off of shore. I had to accept that, otherwise I was afraid they wouldn't pay any attention to me anymore. So I packed up and got my suitcases and took the bus. My wife was working for the Hartford Insurance Company at the time, so she stayed in San Francisco to keep on earning some money while I was going on down there to experience myself on the lighthouse.

The bus took me down the coast and I got off at a ranch house opposite the lighthouse. I had my overcoat on as it was in April and it was still pretty cold yet. I had two suitcases with my clothes and things that I needed. I started on down through the ranch area and after I passed the ranches I came to the sand dunes. I walked across the sand dunes; the wind was blowing and my suitcases were getting tangled up in my legs. By the way, I was beginning to wonder why I had accepted the job, but I had to go ahead and get that part of it taken care of.

When I got to the beach I had to signal to the island for the guy to come over and get me on the boat. He finally showed up, a fellow by the name of Jack Chambers. He was a bachelor and had once been on the Point Bonilla Lightboat Station. Then he got into the lighthouse service, but he was a real salty guy. He talked some of the worst language you would ever hear in your life, but he was a goodhearted soul.

After I was on the island for about a week and a half I was getting so lonesome. I was getting tired of eating beans out of a can. I finally called my wife in San Francisco and told her, that if she didn't come down right away I would quit my job and come back up to San Francisco again. So she

finally showed up down there.

RW: Were there quarters there for both of you?

RF: There were three men on the station, but because it was isolated we got 96 days a year leave, so there was always one man ashore. That left two of us to handle the duties that were being performed.

RW: So there were quarters that you and your wife could be together?

RF: That's right. There was a two-story house. We lived in the upper story and the keeper lived down below. Then there was a single dwelling where the first assistant keeper lived with his wife. So besides my wife there was the assistant keeper's wife. They were the only two women who were aboard there.

There was always a little bit of animosity between the families, so the best thing they told us at the office when we got down there was to just kind of live to ourselves and not get involved. otherwise, there would be a lot of arguments and things going on. Everything worked out real fine.

RW: It was a cabin fever problem then?

RF: That's probably it, yes, indeed. I got ahead of myself there. I forgot to tell you that before we went down there we had to go to a wholesale grocery store in town there and order enough staple goods to last us for three months. It would be taken down to the dock where the lighthouse tender would pick it up when it brought our regular quarterly supply of coal and fuel oil for the engines to operate the fog signal, and the paint and everything that was needed to run the station for the next three months because we were the only ones who did all the work on the station. We did the painting, the plumbing, the carpentry work, anything that was required to keep the station in operating condition, besides standing our watches.

RW: How was the light powered?

RF: The light itself was run on vaporized kerosene. It was like a Coleman lantern, only we used kerosene that burned in a mantle inside the lens. It had to be watched carefully because during the night when it got cold enough, the vapors would become liquefied again and would flame up in the light. We had to preheat the generator in the light to keep the kerosene vaporized. And, at the same time, we had to keep an eye open for fog. In the case of that coming in we had to get down and start the engines and get the foghorns going so there was somebody up all the time.

We stood six and six, around the clock. We would be six hours on and six hours off. on our off time, by the time we got our meals and got to bed, we would probably get five hours of sleep at one time, if we could get that much. It was a good job; I was really happy with it. We got along very well.

RW: How did your wife take to all of this, she was so limited?

RF: Because of the fact that I had been confined at home for all of those years I didn't mind being isolated and getting paid for it. My wife, being raised in a convent, living alone like that, didn't seem to bother her. We enjoyed reading and we got an old portable phonograph with about a dozen records that we used for entertainment. We'd play them over and over again.

RW: Radios weren't in yet?

RF: The keeper had a radio, an RCA radio with what they called peanut tubes in it. He had to buy batteries to operate it. After the batteries were dead, if he didn't have enough supply to keep him going, then the radio didn't do him any good either. Even our communications with the mainland wasn't too good because we had a suspended line across from the island to the mainland. If a storm would come up sometimes, that telephone line would go down. Then we would be without communication until we could get ashore and get parts.

RW: How far was it from the shore to the island?

RF: It was between a quarter and a half a mile. We had to cross in a dory. The waves would come around from both sides of the island and break in the middle there, so we had an area marked with steel poles to indicate where the calmest water was so we could get back and forth.

A lot of times we would order groceries, like meat and stuff from the nearest town of Pescadero and they would send the food down on the bus and put it in our mailbox. The mailbox was built like an outhouse where a man could go in and sit down if he was waiting for the mail to come and it happened to be stormy weather. The stuff could be put in there for us. A lot of times we would order our stuff in the morning and the bus didn't come up until the afternoon. By that time the wind would come up maybe and we couldn't get ashore. So then our food would be over there spoiling. By the time we could get back over there to get it, it wouldn't be fit to eat anymore. So we had to try to pick a day when we knew the weather would be good enough to get over there and get our food. We would buy bacon and ham. Everything had to be canned goods, canned milk.

We were able to raise chickens out there, so we had fresh meat. We kept eggs, but we didn't have any refrigeration. We had what they called water glass at that time. You mixed the stuff in water and put it in an old five-gallon oil can. We could preserve our eggs in that stuff, so we would always have four or five dozen eggs on hand. They wouldn't be good enough to have sunny-side up because the yolks after they were preserved for a while would break after you opened the eggs up. But they were good fresh eggs to eat.

And we had plenty of fish. Abalones were abundant around there. We ate very expensive-type food, but it didn't cost us anything. But when you get ashore and wanted to buy that stuff, it would be pretty expensive. Then the wife would make chowder out of abalone meat. We could catch some fish just about anytime we wanted it, so we really weren't going hungry out there. We did like to have a pork chop, or hamburgers, or frankfurters once in a while. We would get that by ordering through the mail.

After I was out on the island ... Let's see, I got out there on the 23rd of April, 1929. We spent Christmas that year out there. We had our own Christmas tree with candles on it for lights. Then the next year, 1930, I got a phone call from the main office and (they) wanted to know if I would accept a transfer to San Diego to the Ballast Point Light Station. I asked them if I could call them back. I wanted to talk to the keeper about it. So I asked Chambers and told him that they wanted me to go down to Ballast Point Light Station, and what he thought about it. He said, "For (blank, blank) sakes, go back there and tell them you'll go. It is the best station along the coast." So I accepted the station.

While we were on the island though, we managed to save enough money to go out and buy ourselves a Model A Ford coupe. We paid \$600 for it. It was a good thing we had this transportation. So when we got ready to go down to San Diego we loaded our mattresses on top of the car and loaded things in the trunk of the car we thought we might need when we got down here. We arrived at Ballast Point on Thanksgiving Day, 1930. Mr. Engel was the keeper down here. I have a book that his daughter had written. Marie and I walked into the house to see what it was like and here was an electric light hanging down on a single cord in the living room. And I thought, "Holy smoke, this is really great; we are finally having electricity." We had kerosene lamps on the island, so we were getting into modern territory. The first thing we did while we were there in San Diego, we went down to Holzwasser's and buy ourselves a nice radio. That was our first piece of modern equipment that we had during married life.

RW: Before you get too much into the Ballast Point Lighthouse and how luxurious it was, why don't you tell us a little more about living on the island. What were the conditions there, about the sea lions, and all of that?

RF: One thing about the island, it was very interesting about Steller's sea lions. It was a rookery for them on the north end of the island. We could walk within 50 feet of them, but we wouldn't dare go any closer than that because they would probably attack us. It was very interesting because the females would stay there all the year long, but the males would migrate from Alaska and come down to do their mating. Then they would leave and the females would be there to do their own whelping.

The pups would have to be taught how to swim; they weren't natural swimmers. They would be basking in the sun on the edge of the rocks and the killer whales would be hanging around. That was one thing we had to worry about when we went across on our boat to go ashore. We thought that they would be dangerous, but apparently from what we see nowadays, they are not that dangerous.

RW: What about drinking water on the island?

RF: The drinking water was nothing but rain water. We had no other source of water except from the rain which would fall onto a rain shed and the water would run down into a cistern. We would then pump it from the cistern up into our 38,000-gallon storage tank up on the hill next to the light tower. We also had another tank at the quarters where we would catch the water off of the roof.

The tank on the hill had been replaced by a new tank, but the wood hadn't been treated properly and there was still a lot of dye from the redwood that would get into water so that it wasn't fit to drink. But we could use it for bathing and washing. The water that came through the faucet was only used in the tub for washing clothes and for bathing. The drinking water would come from the tank beside the house. We would have to carry it up to the kitchen in buckets and use it out of the bucket.

When it came to bath time my wife would take her bath first and then I would bathe next. Then we would use the water after we got through bathing to carry down to our garden and water the plants that we had down there, the vegetables. We could raise carrots, beets, turnips, lettuce. We used to keep a lot of kale because we had chickens in the chicken yard. The kale was for chicken feed; they needed a certain amount of grass to eat. The sand wouldn't raise anything except what we planted inside of tin cans, so we could put the water in the cans and let the water soak down into the ground rather than run off.

RW: Did you ever resolve getting along with (the) other family and the old lighthouse keeper?

RF: We got along just by staying to ourselves and being sociable whenever we had a chance. We talked to one another, but there were usually only two men on the station at a time. The keeper was a single man so he would be an easy man to live with. I mentioned already the fact that we had all that time on leave.

RW: And did the women get along?

RF: Well, yes. It was kind of a peculiar situation because the first assistant keeper's wife had a Maytag washing machine with a gasoline engine in it. My wife had a wash board. That is the way she washed our clothes, but there was never any effort made to share the washing machine with my wife. That is the way things were to be. We would never ask them to do that as a favor.

We had kerosene lamps for lighting in our house. We did have a gasoline-powered iron that my wife could use to iron her clothes rather than use the old flatiron. It was kind of a dangerous thing to use, but it was very convenient.

RW: After this lighthouse and living off the shore like that, Ballast Point must have been luxurious to you. You had electricity and you were on shore.

RF: That is correct. And the milkman would bring the milk to the door and we had a paper that was delivered to us. It was a wonderful life and I was very fortunate in being selected to come down here. The man who was in charge at that time, Mr. Engel, was getting ready to retire. His assistant keeper had quit the lighthouse service, so they needed a young man down on the station because there was a lot of boat work to do. This Ballast Point was a light attendant station rather than a (standard) lighthouse. We were in charge of all the buoys and beacons in the harbor. We even had a light which was built on later up at Oceanside at the marine harbor there. At the Ocean Beach breakwater there was a light and fog signal out there. This all had to be taken care of. I was the youngest man who knew how to operate a boat. I was fortunate enough to be selected to come down here.

RW: So you really didn't spend your time at Ballast Point Lighthouse itself at that time, in the early days? You had to sort of roam around?

Tape 1, Side B:

RF: That is correct. There were only two men at Ballast Point - there was myself and the keeper, Mr. Engel. His wife stood the first watch from six till ten every night. She would answer the phone. The fog signal was run by electric motor, so all they had to do was go out and throw the switch. She was able to do that. Mr. Engel and I would switch over from ten o'clock at night to two o'clock in the morning, and then from two o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock, standing the rest of the watches.

Then during the day, rather than being just on the station, we would have to go out and service the buoys that were operated by acetylene gas. The gas cylinders had to be replaced occasionally. We had a couple of range lights; one was on North Island that burned a kerosene lamp. It was a five-day lamp; it had a reservoir on it and that had to be refilled continually, and keep the wicks trimmed so that they would give a good light.

The fog signal had to be taken care of. There was a bell on the number six beacon and a bell on number eight beacon. So there was a lot of boat work to be taken care of. There were only two men. We only got 30 days' leave there at Ballast Point after a year, but we couldn't leave the station except for going for groceries.

If we left the station we had to log it in the book the time we left and the time we returned. If we took more than two hours, that extra time was taken off of our annual leave. The same way on Sundays. We were allowed six hours off of the station and that was to be specified as church time, so it was pretty confining. But we were lucky to have the job. We were making \$100 a month now, and this was really great. We had our house furnished to us so we didn't have to worry about renting a home.

RW: But you had to buy your own food?

RF: We had to buy our own food. We went to a store just a short distance outside of the reservation. Ballast Point was on Fort Rosecrans Reservation so we had to pass through Marine sentinels at the main gate to get in and out of the station. The public wasn't really invited to come in there; it was really more or less isolated as far as the public was concerned.

RW: I noticed in the photographs that your home looked like a nice building, a large two-story building.

RF: They were very comfortable. There were two houses. We each had a house and they were two stories with three bedrooms upstairs; a living room, a dining room, and a big large kitchen downstairs.

RW: Did you get along with Mr. Engel pretty well?

RF: Mr. Engel was a very good man to get along with. He had two sons and a daughter. The daughter was a schoolteacher in town. The sons had already been gone on their own; they were older than the daughter. She later became an officer in the Navy during 1939, World War II.

RW: Some of the technical details I was curious about. On the lamp, was that a French lens?

RF: That's right. They were all made in France; all of these lenses that they used in the lighthouse service were made by them. As I said, it was just a light attendant station so we didn't have a big revolving lens like most of the lighthouses do; this was a fixed light. We had a green shade that fit around the 200-watt bulb. It would show as a green light because it was on the left-hand side of the channel coming in. That is just the regular maritime rules; the red on the right for turning, and the green on the left.

RW: So it was lit by an electric bulb?

RF: That's right, just a 200-watt bulb. The lens was built with the prisms and everything so it intensified the light and concentrated it all through the center part of the lens. We would have a string that we would put across there every night and focus that onto the filament of the light to make sure it was right in the center. During the day we had window shades that we would pull down off the lens to cover the windows up. We had a linen cloth that we put around the lens to keep the sunlight off of it because it would discolor the glass if the sun got on it too long.

RW: Where is the lens now?

RF: It is at the old Spanish Lighthouse up on top of Point Loma. Actually, it is in the visitors' center in the display area. There is a large first-order lens and then another one. Ours was considered the fifth-order lens because it was such a small light. Our main job was not to take care of the light station, but it was to see that all the buoys and beacons in the harbor were kept operating. A lot of times we would have to go out and work on a buoy that had been extinguished during rough weather.

RW: You say the light didn't rotate; it was just on all the time?

RF: It was just a fixed light, yes.

RW: About how high off the water was it?

RF: Oh, about ... It depended upon the tide, of course, but it was about 30 feet above ground.

RW: So it really was about 40 feet off the water line?

RF: I would think so, more or less.

RW: Why was it located there anyway?

RF: Because of the point, Ballast Point stuck out in the middle of the channel there. It was a natural kind of a I don't know how you would say it, but it had some effect on the way of the currents coming in and out of the bay. It kept the bay scoured out so nicely. When the tide was going out, or ebbing, there was about a six and a half knot an hour tide that ran down through the Point. In the old days before the lighthouse was even there, that was a whaling station in that corner. They used to come in there to bring the whales in and render them.

RW: On the back side?

RF: On the lee side, yes.

RW: It was called Ballast Point because, as I understand, the rocks were used and act as ballast for sailing ships leaving here.

RF: That is correct. When the ships came in from the east coast they brought in a lot of supplies to get the San Diego area organized. They had nothing to take out of here but tallow and hides from the cattle ranches, so they needed ballast for the ships to get back to the east coast again. So they would stop off of Ballast Point and pick up the cobblestones and put them in the hold of the ship to balance it. Because they were sailing ships, naturally they needed ballast to keep them from capsizing. When they got back to Boston they used the cobblestones for paving some of the streets that are still there.

RW: Do you think this is really a true story?

RF: I have no doubts about it. The fact that it was written in the book, TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST by Richard Henry Dana, evidently that is probably why the point got named Ballast Point. There had to be a reason for it.

RW: Did you see any artifacts or anything in those days that would indicate anything about when they rendered the whales?

RF: Yes. There used to be some debris in the coves there. We found some whale bones, some vertebrae from the whales back there, but we didn't pay much attention to it.

RW: I understand in Dana's book they would render the hides there. They would have hot pots and so forth to treat the hides.

RF: They had big vats where they used to melt the fat down and that is where they would get the whale oil.

RW: That was one thing, but then also later, according to Dana, they called them hide houses where they would treat the hides before they would store them on the ship.

RF: I didn't know that. I thought the ranchers when they killed their animals they would naturally do that themselves. I don't know. But that is how they would have to get the leather off the skins of the cattle.

RW: Did you ever see any evidence of this Fort Guisjarros, the Spanish fort?

RF: I have some knowledge of it, but like I said, I just didn't pay much attention to it. The kids used to go down and play on it all the time. They were digging there for awhile looking for artifacts, but I don't know if they found anything worthwhile. I have a photograph that was taken of the Point many, many years ago, and you can clearly see what was there. Would you like to see it? (Looking for the photograph)

RW: (Apparently he couldn't find it with his wife's help.) From looking through these papers here I understand that Mr. Engel had a daughter. What was her name?

RF: Norma Engel.

RW: Did she write a book on lighthouses?

RF: That is correct, THREE BEAMS OF LIGHT.

RW: So she lived out there, too, at the same time that you lived out there?

RF: That is correct. He (Engel) only stayed there a short time. In 1931 he retired and left the station. Then a man by the name of Mollering (sp?) came from Point Sur Light Station. I would have liked to have it, but they told me I was too young yet and that there were some older men that needed better jobs. Mr. Mollering came down. He had two children, a boy and a girl. It was his son that got me the job at Convair after I retired from the lighthouse service. He had grown up, gone to college and got an education. He was one of the VIPs (Very Important Person) of Convair.

RW: But in the meantime you were still working for the Commerce Department; you weren't working for the Coast Guard yet?

RF: Yes. In 1939 Roosevelt (President Franklin D.) merged the lighthouse service with the Coast Guard so all the lighthouse keepers that were young enough to pass the physicals were converted into the Coast Guard and given rates according to the wages that they were getting. After waiting awhile, although I had already been classified 1-A in the draft, I got a report from the draft board to come down to get assigned. I told them at the time I went down there that I was already in the Coast Guard, although I hadn't been signed up yet, that they had taken us over and were trying to decide what they were going to do with us. So I wound up as a third class coxswain. My \$100 a month was subsistence, deducted from that, what was left that was (what) my pay scale would have been and that qualified me to be a third class boatswains mate.

RW: Before we jump ahead, did any crazy things happen between when you came down here 1930 to 1939, like ships hitting on the beach or anything like that?

RF: There were always accidents. I mean a lot of fellows ... I can remember a number of times, and one time in particular, when there were these two fellows who had been out to sea fishing with their lady friends. They were over by the Coronado Hotel, and when they came back after dark, they didn't realize that the Zuniga jetty was out there. Because of its age, a lot of the rocks had been washed off so that at high tide it was partly submerged. They came across the jetty, not knowing it, and they tore the bottom out of their boat.

I had just been relieved from my duty and I was getting ready to go to bed and I heard these people yelling for help. I didn't pay too much attention to it because up at Fort Rosecrans they used to have parties at the clubhouse and there was always a lot of noise and laughter and things going on there. Again, I heard it some more, so I went out to see what was causing it, and it was coming from out at sea. I got my boat and took my son along with me because I couldn't find the man who was supposed to be on watch.

I found the woman first, she was in a life jacket. I picked her up and brought her into the cutter that was laying alongside of the dock. I told them to call the air station because she had told me that there were three more people out there, another couple and her friend. The Coast Guard cutter called the air station and they sent out a helicopter with floodlights.

In the meantime I had put her on the cutter and went back out again to look for her friend. I found him, but he was already unconscious. He had his wallet in his teeth, which was a good idea so that he wouldn't lose it. Ken took charge of the boat and I reached over the side and grabbed the guy and pulled him onto the boat with me and took him in. In the meantime a helicopter came down and was flying around, but fortunately these other two people had drifted on into the bay. There was a barge anchored off of the fuel depot there. The Naval Electronics Laboratory had some instruments aboard it. They got to the barge and climbed aboard it and they were able to call ashore from there to tell them that they were all right.

I got some kind of a notation from the commandant for my rescue action. I would have gotten a medal if I had jumped overboard, but just because I had pulled her aboard without jumping overboard, I just got a commendation for it. And then there were a couple of times. one marine at the fuel docks evidently was sitting on the edge of the dock while he was on guard duty and fell asleep. The next morning they missed him; they couldn't find out where he was. About five days later I was up on the ladder cleaning the lens, getting ready for inspection and I saw this guy come floating down the bay. He had his overcoat on and his pistol on him and he was dead. So he was floating upright. I went out and pulled him in. Then there were a couple of fishermen that I pulled in that had been drowned and washed ashore.

RW: Did they ever have any airplanes go into the water?

RF: During the war North Island was shared by the Army. The Army and Navy flyers used to compete with one another. After the war the Navy made a swap with the Army. They gave them Sunnyvale for the other half of North Island, so they were flying P-38s out of there. They had these young kids, 21, 22 years old, as pilots of them. They were wild and every once in a while one of those planes would go into the bay, but I never had anything to do with any of the rescuing of them because they were pretty well monitored. So as soon as they went down the military had rescue work going on right away.

RW: Ballast Point was strategically located. It was a navigational hazard for one thing, so that is why the light was there?

RF: That is correct.

RW: What's with the bell that they had on there? You had the light and you had the foghorn, but why the bell?

RF: originally, when Ballast Point was first organized the bell was the fog signal to warn the ships off the Point. It had a clockworks with a weight on it. The weight could be wound up and then it would operate the clockwork and would strike the bell every so many seconds. Later on after electricity was installed on the station, then they put the fog signal and they had a diaphragm foghorn that was operated by compressed air. So they closed the bottom half of the building that the bell was mounted on and put the fog signal equipment inside the building. The horn was put up on the platform alongside of the bell.

So the bell was kept there for all the years that the station was in operation. But it was used only in the case of an emergency if the power should happen to go off during the foggy weather. Then we would strike the bell with a cable every so many seconds to warn the ships until we could get the horn back in operation again. After they tore the station down the bell disappeared. Some man by the name of Oliphant found it on a trash pile over at North Island. He rescued it and mounted it in his yard.

RW: He still has it, then?

RF: That is correct. It is now in the works to bring the bell down to the waterfront to be incorporated into the Maritime Museum for display.

RW: Your son Ken is in charge of the museum now?

RF: Yes, he is the executive direction of the Maritime Museum Association.

RW: An interesting thing about the foghorn, didn't it kind of drive you up the wall to hear it blasting off?

RF: Surprisingly, the only time it would bother me was when it went off. If I was in bed asleep and the foghorn would stop I would wake up for fear that something had gone wrong with the machinery. But, no, I knew it was necessary and I guess you finally get used to that kind of a noise.

RW: When the war (World War II) started, wasn't there a net put across the channel?

RF: The submarine net first was put inside the bay out by the fuel depot. They found out that that was too far in, so finally they mounted it, yes, right in front of Ballast Point, from Ballast Point over to North Island. That was because it was the narrowest part of the channel. Otherwise, where it was put originally, it made too long a span. The net would be closed from six o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning.

That was another experience that I had after the war broke out. On December 7th (1941) when all of the lights of the city were extinguished and there was nothing showing, they sent me out on the 83-footer to extinguish the buoys out at sea. The boat would put me aboard a buoy and then drift away. Without any lights on it or anything, it was kind of frightening because I didn't know if they were going to be able to find me. I could imagine that there were Japanese submarines all around the place there. But I had to go out and put the lights out on the buoys, turn the gas supply off. At the whistle buoy I had to tie a gunnysack around the whistle so that it couldn't be heard. There was no way of cutting the sound out because it is operated by the motion of the waves. But I did extinguish the light on the whistle buoy; I muffled it by putting the gunnysack around it.

Did you ever know about those whistle buoys? There is a big long cylinder underneath the buoy. As it rolls up on a wave it would suck air up into the tube and when it came down between the waves, it would force the air up through the whistle. That is the way they would get the sound out of it. It wasn't mechanically made, it was all by nature itself. There was no machinery that operated it; it was just the motion of the waves that did the work.

RW: Was it a diaphragm-type of an affair?

RF: It had valves on it like the size of a tennis ball that when it went down it would compress the air under the tube and make it go up through the whistle rather than escape.

Tape 2, Side C:

RW: When the war started all lights were extinguished all over San Diego and you said the lighthouse and the buoys were out. That kind of didn't leave you anything to do, did it?

RF: Except for general upkeep of the station. We had to keep the station in operation, that is, if anything went wrong, we had to get it back in operating condition again. Every Friday morning we would try our fog signal out to be sure it was working. We would give it a half-hour test. No, there was nothing as far as the lighthouse was concerned; everything was secured.

RW: I came to San Diego in September, 1941, and I remember that in December-January we thought that we were going to be invaded, the Japs were right off our coast, there was a Japanese under every rock as a spy. Did you get that feeling down there at Ballast Point?

RF: When I had to go out and secure the lights on the buoys, yes, I did. I could just imagine that the submarines were all over that place because of the fact that that submarine was right on our front door, actually.

RW: The net went in right after Pearl Harbor?

RF: That is true, but they had it on the inside of the bay.

RW: Was there any indication to you that there was going to be a war?

RF: Not really, no. It was a surprise to everybody when all of a sudden we discovered that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We used to have a lumber company down here. Did you ever hear about the Benson Lumber Company and their log raft was coming down the bay? And did you hear about the submarine?

RW: Sure, sure, those huge rafts. No, I didn't hear about the submarine.

RF: They were having ships sunk off our coast and they couldn't find out where the submarines were coming from. The blimps were up there with their radar trying to locate it and they couldn't find that son-of-a-gun nowhere. But, at the same time, there happened to be a raft coming down from Oregon to the Benson Lumber Company. They finally discovered that the only place that submarine could be, (it was a one-man submarine) was underneath that darn raft. It was following the raft down the coast. It would come out from under the raft at night and torpedo these boats and then go back under the raft again.

The blimp radioed to the tug that was pulling the raft to take it out to sea and to abandon it. So after they got the boat and everything away, they sent depth charges down and destroyed the raft and also got the submarine that was doing all the damage. That was the last raft that was brought down here after that.

RW: Did you read about it, or did you hear it from other sources?

RF: Both ways, actually. I heard about it first before I saw it in the paper. Later on, after the war was over, a lot of that stuff was brought out to the public.

RW: I wouldn't have thought a one-man submarine would have that kind of range.

RF: I really don't know what the answer was, but this is what the story was. And, you know they couldn't get the people here on the west coast to be more cautious. Everybody was just trying to live his own life just the same. I can remember one time they were supposed to get a Jap off the coast of Huntington Beach. They were afraid that they were going to fire on the oil tanks up there. I can't remember just what was going on there. The Navy planes were going out and they actually had an alert up there, but nothing ever happened. Somebody said they fired a shot, but they missed the tanks. But nobody ever knows for sure whether they were just trying to get the people to settle down and be more war conscious.

But, no, we never were attacked. Fort Rosecrans installed some 19-inch rifles up on top of the hill. They fired a couple of rounds just to zero the guns in, but those were the only shells that were ever fired out of there. After that, everything was done by air. The coast artillery was becoming a thing of the past.

RW: You said something about Mr. Mollering coming in as head light keeper, too, after Mr. Engel left. So what happened to him? Did he retire out of there, or what?

RF: It says, "Mollering" there in the paper, but it is Mollering. He went up to get the light ready at sunset. We had to remove the cover off of the lens and open up the shades on the windows. He dropped the lens cover and he reached down to pick it up, but as he came up he bumped his head on the table underneath the lens. He complained about a headache. He was a heavyset man and everything he did was very exceeding for him. If he tightened a nut on a bolt he would tighten it up until it almost stripped the threads. I guess when he picked that cover up he just came up with such force that he bumped his head, and it destroyed something in there because he died a couple of days later from a cerebral hemorrhage on the station.

RW: About what year was that?

RF: I don't remember offhand. I would have to look up some of the history.

RW: Do you have an approximation?

RF: Our son was about two years old and he was born in 1936, so it had to be around 1938.

RW: Then who took over the lighthouse?

RF: I was temporarily in charge with an assistant that came down from Point Hueneme. His father was a lighthouse keeper up at Point Hueneme and he came down to be with me until this fellow from Table Bluff Lighthouse in Eureka (California) came down to take over. It was a fellow by the name of Pasonic (sp?). He was in the Army at Point Bonita (Bonilla?), and he got acquainted with the lighthouse keeper at Lion Point Lighthouse. He got attracted to his daughter, Minnie, and they eventually got married. His name was Stephen Pasonic. He just died last year at 106 years old. He was in a rest home up in Garden Grove for many years. He drove an automobile when he was 98 years old. He is buried up on top of the hill at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery with his wife.

RW: How long did he stay in charge until you took over?

RF: He retired in 1946, I believe.

RW: During the war years there were a lot of ships going in and out of the channel. Weren't there some crazy things happening, like groundings, and rammings?

RF: We had one incident there. A liberty ship was coming down the bay and it was heading right for Ballast Point. I kept watching it and watching it to wait for him to turn.

He didn't turn, so I went out and grabbed the bell and started ringing it in rapid succession to warn him of it. I don't remember now, but I figured to straighten his way out. But our son, whose bedroom was upstairs, said that he did come up on the beach. He could have, very well, but he could have

backed off very easily because it was deep water. It was 62 feet right in front of the station because of the current that washed through there. But that was the only real incident. of course, nothing was traveling in and out of the harbor after six o'clock at night. The submarine nets were closed then.

RW: Were there mines on the net?

RF: No.

RW: Was San Diego bay mined at all?

RF: Not to my knowledge. There may have been mine fields outside of the harbor, but nobody was aware of it. They had what they called a station ship, a sailing yacht, that used to anchor out by the whistle buoy on the outside of the harbor to stand guard for anything that might be coming in. Like tuna boats, and everything, if they didn't get inside the harbor before six o'clock at night, they had to stay out overnight until they could come in the next day when they opened the net up.

RW: So fishing wasn't shut down?

RF: Not entirely, no.

RW: I understand the fishermen were given the word to keep their eyes open.

RF: Well, when the war broke out all of our fleet was in Pearl Harbor. The only thing we had in the bay here were the tuna boats. The captains of them were reserve Naval officers, so they got a bunch of them with 50-caliber machine guns on their bows patrolling up and down the bay. But nothing of any size was here to protect our harbor anymore.

The Army came down with a bunch of 50-caliber machine guns and set them up on the beaches. But they had nothing except the old World War I guns that were at Fort Rosecrans, and the two guns that they had built on top of the hill. They never got a chance to use them at all; nothing ever got within danger of us.

RW: A pilot boat was moored alongside there. Did you know the harbor pilots?

RF: Yes.

RW: Who were the harbor pilots when you were there?

RF: I think Captain Johnson had already retired by that time. I could be mistaken.

RW: The old man?

RF: Well, the original one I knew was already dead, but then his son took over the pilot boat.

RW: Was Krog involved?

RF: Captain Harry Krog was in the harbor here. The Fort was closed to civilians and the fact that I didn't have to stand watches anymore because of the blackout, I proceeded to run the pilot boat for them whenever they had to go out to bring a boat in or to take a pilot off the boat when he got it out to sea.

RW: There was Captain Johnson; then there was Captain Krog. There must have been another one.

RF: I know there was a Captain Larsen; then Captain Pannoy (sp?) came later.

RW: Then my father-in-law, James Sorenson, was harbor pilot for a while. I don't know when he started; I know when he left.

RF: After I left the station I wasn't familiar with anybody anymore, or connected with them either.

RW: When did you leave the station?

RF: In 1957.

RW: You were chief by then, weren't you?

RF: That's right.

RW: Were you kind of sad to leave?

RF: I was, but the men that we were getting from the military weren't that dependable. Lots of times at night when they were standing watches, instead of being on duty, they would have their girl friends come down and see them. In fact, when I made that rescue, the man I said I couldn't find was on the 83-footer down in the galley having coffee rather than being out on watch where he should have been. So it was just things like that that I had enough time in to retire. I wouldn't have gained anymore by staying in any longer, so I finally left. But I did have 31 years of service altogether, because my National Guard time that I had earlier in my life all counted towards my military service.

RW: Did you completely retire, or did you go on to something else?

RF: I went to work for Convair in quality control on an electronics Atlas missile.

RW: That was a change, wasn't it?

RF: It was really good. Yeah, that was the first night that one of our neighbors took us out to dinner. That was the first time I ever had had to really go out and enjoy myself in the evening because we couldn't leave the station on account of our watches that we had to take care of. We went out and had dinner and we went down to Mission Valley and looked around to see all the lights. It was really a treat.

It is hard to understand the kind of a life we lived. But even when we were in the old lighthouse service, we couldn't throw a paintbrush away, or we couldn't throw anything away. We had a certain amount of equipment allotted to us and in order to get it replaced, we (had) to save the old one so that the inspector could see that it was worn enough to be replaced. It was things like that.

When I got to Ballast Point, in order to get a new light bulb, we had to save the brass screw on the old one to show that it was gone. But we had an advantage down here because the Navy ships that were anchored in the harbor, the kids would be hanging over the side painting the ship and when the bell would ring for chow, so rather than clean the paintbrushes, they would throw them overboard. So we picked up a lot of that stuff on our beach that would drift down there. So we always had plenty of stuff to qualify for replacements.

RW: You also picked up a few lobsters, too, didn't you, and abalone?

RF: Yeah, we had a trap on one of the beacons outside of the bay. The little one-man fishing boats used to anchor inside of the bay in the cove, the lee side of the Point. We used to give them water for consumption, to fill their tanks. We would give them any old paint that we had left over to paint their boats. So we were always kept in supply of fish. one little Greek fellow used to bring us short lobsters in.

A lot of things that we couldn't get from the Coast Guard or the lighthouse service because of finances, we had to bum them from the Navy. This would be another incentive. Like the palm trees that are on the Point there now, I got them for a sack of lobsters that I took down to the gardener. In return he gave me the palm trees that are now 17 feet high on the Point. They are now gradually getting to be destroyed.

Because all of the buildings have been torn down out there, there is nothing out on Ballast Point except the degaussing station and the barracks for the men on the 83-footer. There is no more lighthouse out there.

RW: Isn't there any light at all?

RF: There is a little electric light on the end of a catwalk and a horn out there that is all electrically operated.

RW: Isn't it still a navigational hazard?

RF: It still is a hazard, but there is a light on the dolphin in front of the Point.

RW: But it isn't magnified, is it?

RF: No. Well, you can see it. It is in a little lantern of some kind. When I drive down Harbor Drive in the evening I can look over there and see that light flashing. It is a white flashing light now rather than the green light. The green light was there because of the elevation of the tower and the background of the city behind it that was all in white lights. So they had to put a colored light up there in order to distinguish it from the white lights that were in the background. It was a fixed light.

RW: I think we have pretty well covered as much as we can on this.

RF: I wish I was a little bit more organized.

RW: I know you wrote an article in this publication, THE KEEPER'S LOG which is published in San Francisco.

RF: It is the Lighthouse Society. Some man who was a civil employee of the lighthouse service in San Francisco engaged in the navigation department, is trying to keep up the interest in the lighthouses in the front of the people's minds. So he started this establishment. They have a

lightship up there now that they have been refurbishing. I understand now that it is supposed to be over by Jack London Square in Oakland when it is completed.

RW: This is Volume V, Number 1, 1988.

RF: These things come out quarterly from San Francisco. I have joined the society and I have had the pleasure of going up there and meeting some of the people. It is a concern of a lot of the citizens that are not able to have much knowledge of the lighthouses, but they are interested in them and visit them. They have joined the society and they come from all over the United States to the meetings.

RW: It looks like a fascinating magazine. I am glad these things are being preserved, the history of them is being preserved like this. Mr. Franke, thank you very much for the Historical Society and the Maritime Museum.

RF: It is my pleasure, believe me. You are welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

SUPPLEMENTARY INTERVIEW

ROBERT WRIGHT: The following information was recorded on March 7, 1990, when I got additional information from Mr. Franke's son, Kenneth Franke.

RW: I understand that when you reported on Ballast Point, it was all sand and gravel and cobblestones, but apparently you got some dirt from somewhere and helped. Was this your idea?

RADFORD FRANKE: The Point was all cobblestones; there was hardly any dirt, just sand and the cobblestones. The Army had a stable down there adjacent to the lighthouse where they kept their mules stabled during the cavalry days. When this was all moved away, the ground was just empty with a few eucalyptus trees planted in there.

We wanted to be able to plant a lawn and make the place a little bit more perceptible. The keeper and I bought a truck for \$20. At that time they were building a highway to the Spanish Lighthouse on top of Point Loma so we got permission to get in line with the dump trucks up there and haul the dirt down to Ballast Point.

But first we had borrowed what they call a fresno, which was a scraper that was pulled by a couple of mules. During the day we would go up and borrow the mules and the scraper. We scooped a lot of the rocks and stuff over to the side of the beach so we would have a place to put the dirt in. In other words, instead of cobblestones showing, it was all soil. We were later on able to plant grass. We had a garden where we could raise our vegetables and flowers.

RW: It made it much more livable.

RF: That's correct. Even the eucalyptus trees, I mean in later years when I became the officer in charge there - I think I mentioned that before in my earlier statements - we had swapped a sack of lobsters at the training station with a gardener to get some palm trees in one-gallon cans. I removed as many eucalyptus trees off of the station as I thought was safe, because, ordinarily, you would have to have permission from headquarters before you remove anything like that. But I planted enough palm trees around there to make it presentable.

Then my next inspection of the station I presented it to the officer who was inspecting and showed him the change that we had made so that he gave me permission to remove the rest of the eucalyptus trees. Now the palm trees are all about 14 or 15 feet high. The buildings have all been vacated; they are torn down; there is nothing at the light station there at all anymore.

RW: Why was it torn down?

RF: The Navy had moved the submarine base down into the Fort Rosecrans area of which Ballast Point was a part. They wanted to take all of that area over. When they put the degaussing station out there they were on Coast Guard property. I guess they didn't particularly like to be ruled by the Coast Guard, so they are in the process now. The Coast Guard still has possession of the Point and the Navy only has permission to use it for the degaussing station. The Navy is trying to work a deal where they can get the whole Point itself. If they do, then they will build an officers' mess hall out there where they will have an open mess where the officers can go and have their dinners there and their entertainment.

RW: I assume there is still a light out there.

RF: There is a small light mounted on a dolphin on the edge of the channel. It is an automatic light and they also have a foghorn out there. The personnel in the degaussing station probably have control of the foghorn. It is only a small diaphragm horn. There is no more light station personnel out there. The Coast Guard still keeps a cutter out there. The Navy has torn down all of the Coast Guard buildings and they've built a barracks there for their personnel on the Coast Guard cutters that tie up at the dock.

RW: The next time I go by there I'll take a closer look so I can relate to it. But I remember seeing a picture of the house. Then there was a little doghouse that was just an exact duplication of the house. I thought that was kind of cute.

RF: That was made by one of the keepers before my time, in the early 1900s. There is a picture there that shows up the flagpole alongside of that doghouse. Because of all the cobblestones and no dirt there, the flagpole has props on the bottom side of it to help stabilize it because it wasn't solid enough in the rocks.

RW: Getting back to getting the dirt, as you mentioned, I kind of thought you would have gotten the dirt from down below, down by the Army base rather than up there on the road. I always thought there was a road up there, too.

RF: There was an old dirt road, but they were getting ready to pave that road to make it easier for the public to go out and visit the lighthouse. So they had a steam shovel up there that was hauling and lifting the dirt up into the trucks. This made it much easier as we would have had to shovel the dirt up into the truck otherwise. But this way they just dumped a load of that stuff into our truck. One shovelful was enough to fill the truck up.

RW: Was that about in the late 1930s that you did all of this?

RF: Yes, it was around the time that Ken was born, 1935-1936. The keeper there at that time was the one who relieved Mr. Engel who had retired in 1931. So it was sometime in between 1931 and maybe 1938.

RW: This Steve Pasonic retired from the Coast Guard in 1945 after an injury falling off a buoy.

RF: When Mr. Mollering died on the station from a cerebral hemorrhage, I was without a permanent keeper there for quite a while. They sent me a substitute, but I was running the station temporarily until a new keeper came down. I tried to become the officer in charge at that time, but they said I was too young and there were more people who were older than I who had seniority. So Mr. Pasonic came from Table Bluff Lighthouse in Eureka. Shortly after that when the Coast Guard took us over, he made chief and I worked my way up to First Class Boatswain's Mate.

I was back in New London, Connecticut going to school learning and getting a designation after my name as a navigation specialist so that they could make me a chief, also. While I was away Pasonic had gone out to work on a buoy one evening. He slipped and injured his back. After that he never felt right, so he finally retired. After he retired I was put in charge of the station. He lived to be 103 years old before he finally died. He lived up in Garden Grove (California) in the Los Angeles area. He is buried now up at Point Loma with his wife.

RW: I think we talked about that earlier. Also, there is another thing here about Ballast Point (a) buoy boat was condemned for Navy use in 1937, but kept on going.

RF: We had a little launch. Ballast Point wasn't actually a lighthouse. It was what they called a light attendant station. The size of the light on the Point was just a fixed light and had no characteristics to it. We were in charge of all of the buoys and beacons in the harbor and out at sea. We needed a boat to get out to attend to these things. This little launch was a two-cylinder gasoline engine and was getting pretty obsolete. They sent us a new boat. It was a 40-foot motor launch that had been used by the Navy for many years as a liberty boat. When they weren't using them, they left them tied between the old destroyers. They used them sort of like fenders between the ships so all of the ribs in the boat were broken.

Tape 2, Side D:

The lighthouse service got ahold of this boat and replaced all of the broken ribs with new oak ribs and put a crane on it, a-frame, with a hoisting engine and everything. They sent that down to us. It was a CG-37003D which was designated as a derrick boat. This way we could do more work than we did before. We could actually recharge some of the buoys that used acetylene gas. We could remove the old acetylene tanks out of the buoy and install new ones in. The boat had been used for a long time by the Navy.

After being reserviced and rebuilt, the lighthouse service had it until the Coast Guard took us over. Then when the Coast Guard took us over, we still continued to use it all during my time in the lighthouse service.

After I left, they finally retired it. I saw it operating in the yacht harbor for a while. Some civilian must have purchased it and used it for working the yacht buoys for a small charge. It probably has been destroyed by this time.

RW: So you had it for a good number of years. From what I understand in the previous time on this interview, electrical service came in in 1928, but apparently nothing for heating or cooking. Did you continue to use a coal stove?

RF: That is what I understand. Electricity had been installed in 1928; however, I didn't come to Ballast Point until 1930. It was already there, but we were still using coal for cooking and heating. While Mr. Mollering was there we finally got permission to ... No, I guess it was after Mr. Mollering had retired and Pasonic was there. If we would supply the gas line to the lighthouse, they would give us gas ranges and gas heating. I personally dug a ditch from Fort Rosecrans to Ballast Point, which is about four or five hundred yards. I can't remember where I even got the pipe from, but we had

enough pipe to bring the gas line clear down to Ballast Point. The Coast Guard bought us the gas ranges and floor furnaces. We installed all of this equipment ourselves. The first night that we turned the gas heaters on was quite an experience because the inside of the house, instead of being plastered, was all tongue and groove. We could hear these boards snapping and cracking because all of the moisture was being dried out of them. But it was quite an improvement.

During the first part of the war we had a barracks built out of a single garage out on the reservation there. The personnel that I had working with us, the enlisted men, had gas before we did. Even though it was in bottles, they were cooking and heating with gas and we were still using coal until the time we installed the gas line in there.

RW: I am sure it was warm and comfortable, but it still took a lot of work in getting the pipe in there. **RF:** We didn't mind; we enjoyed whatever we did on the station. We handled all of the maintenance work; everything was all done by the keepers. We understood that and we were happy to be able to do that kind of stuff. We had all kinds of knowledge that even helped during our retired time.

The first thing I did, when we bought this house was to install all copper pipe. I took all the old galvanized pipe out and installed all copper pipe. I reroofed the house. It was no problem at all.

RW: One of the things you apparently saw when you were there was this Marine Lieutenant Osipoff who apparently got dangled in midair May 15, 1941, and was rescued by Lieutenant W. W. Lowery and Chief Pilot McCants. Can you tell me what you saw?

RF: Yes, I can. I understand the story goes that they were practicing parachute jumping. The Marine group from North Island were practicing over Camp Kearny in parachute drop ping. Lieutenant Osipoff had somehow had his parachute fouled in the tail rigging of the airplane. He was being dragged behind the plane. They circled around past Ballast Point light station.

I happened to have a moving picture camera that we bought for our son when he was growing up (in order) to record some of his life. I had always used a certain kind of film, but this one time I had changed to another film in my camera which was too grainy. So the picture that I took was very hard to actually see that incident in the air. There was no way that they could have gotten this man out of that plane alive because if they had cut the rope to let him fall into the water, the fall would have killed him. They couldn't have landed over land.

So these two officers on North Island - I thought they were two Chiefs, but I understand one was a Lieutenant, the pilot. They took the plane without permission and flew it. It was an open cockpit plane. They flew up underneath the fellow who was dangling behind Osipoff. The man in the after cockpit grabbed him around the waist when they got close enough to him and with his knife he cut the shrouds of the parachute and saved the man. It was quite an incident.

They were concerned about the plane that was dragging him around as it was running out of gas and they didn't know what they were going to do, until these two fellows, without permission, took the plane off the field and went up and rescued the man. I understand afterwards they were courtmartialled, but I think it was just a matter of normal procedures - the fact that they took the plane without permission from their own commanding officers.

RW: Apparently, from what you are saying, that plane was a DC-3, as I understand it. Apparently it left the Kearny Mesa area and flew down here to North Island.

RF: While after the man was hung up, they were trying to find a way, they came down to try to show the people at North Island what their problem was. They figured out a way they could save the man.

RW: Do you have any idea what time of day it was?

RF: No, I have no idea. I imagine it was around the early morning hours, or it could have been in the afternoon. It has been a long time since.

RW: How did you become aware of the problem? Were you outside?

RF: I was just out of the station, on the grounds out there. I am always watching the planes flying off of North Island. This guy was circling around and it attracted my attention. So when I looked up and saw it, I ran in and got my moving picture camera, but to no avail because I didn't get what I had hoped to get.

RW: I am glad that it all worked out well. Going back before that, apparently you were on the station when they still were rum-running.

RF: That is correct. Yeah, before prohibition was done away with, the customs' officers used to come to Ballast Point and stand their watches at night and watch for the rum runners who were coming in and out of the harbor with their loads.

RW: Would they off-load from ships?

RF: I have no idea where they were coming from. The customs' officer only had one boat that they could combat with. It was one that they had seized from a rum-runner; there was nothing fast enough to catch their boats. The Coast Guard boats were nowhere fast enough to apprehend them, so the customs' officer had secured this one boat. They kept it at Ballast Point anchored in the cove behind the Point. They would come out in the evening as that was the only time the rum-running was active, after dark. They could run in and out of the harbor in the black of the night without lights showing.

RW: Did you actually see any of that?

RF: No, I never did. They never seized anybody while I was in contact with them.

RW: You were saying that your son's godfather was one of the customs' officers.

RF: That's right. We got very well acquainted with him and his wife. They had a young son about my own son, Ken's age.

RW: What was his name?

RF: Frank Britton and Madalyn Britton. He later was transferred down to Imperial Valley at El Centro. She was working for an inspection station for stuff coming across the border. She was working for a Chinese. She got very well acquainted with the guy and when he died, she took the business over. She ran it for a long time, but after Britton had retired he died of boredom, actually.

RW: So there really was rum-running activity, but you didn't see anything?

RF: That's right. They were smarter than we were because they were getting their stuff into the harbor and nobody could find them or catch them. There were all kinds of ways they could smuggle it in.

RW: They could land on any beach, even on the strand?

RF: That's correct. When I was on Ano Nuevo Island, Pidgeon Point was just six miles north of us. They had a derrick on that beach where they used to haul the supplies from the lighthouse tender. They even came in there and used the lighthouse equipment and threatened the lighthouse keepers if they did anything to apprehend them.

RW: Do you think we have covered the rum-running as much as possible?

RF: As much as I have any knowledge of it.

RW: The San Diego Yacht Club had their headquarters there originally.

RF: Before the San Diego Yacht Club was ever originated they used to meet in one of the keeper's quarters at Ballast Point Light Station.

RW: There was no Shelter Island in those days.

RF: Shelter Island was always there, but it was mud flats that were only visible at low tides. In fact, during the war the Navy had used Shelter Island for an ammunition dump. They kept a crew of men out there. They had a water tank that was on a pedestal above the waterline to supply the galley there with water.

Long after the war had ended all of this equipment stayed on the island. When a big storm came one year it washed this water tank off of the island and it wound up on our beach at Ballast Point. I salvaged it, took it apart, and worked it in our carpenter shop. I made myself a picnic table out of the redwood. It is out there in the patio right now. Shelter Island since then has been connected to the mainland and they have hauled in enough soil to raise it up quite a few feet up above the water level. It has quite a resort built out on it now.

RW: It seems to me you had good duty; you were there at a great time.

RF: I am very, very pleased. I don't know why I deserved it, but everywhere I went I made out real well. I enjoyed my work. The only time that discouraged me towards the end of it was some of the personnel that we were getting. The enlisted men wouldn't pay attention to the work like the lighthouse keepers did. In fact, one night I was getting ready for bed and I heard these people yelling for help. I mentioned it earlier in the program. That is just one of the ideas. The guy who was supposed to be on watch for fog and for anything that might be happening, was down in the galley of the cutter having coffee and wasn't paying attention to his duties.

RW: This is a continuation on the Ballast Point Lighthouse - from the woman's point of view. This is Marie Franke. What was it like from your point of view, Mrs. Franke?

MARIE FRANKE: I just took it for granted. For me it was civilized living. The station we were on first was a real lighthouse and Ballast Point was just like city living. We were about two and a half miles from the bus. I didn't drive, so I hiked it many a time. Outside of that, we had milk delivered and everything, so it was fine.

RW: Did you have groceries delivered, too?

MF: There was a little commissary up at the Army base that I would hike up to during the war. It wasn't open the year around, but during the war it was.

RW: Your son was born there?

MF: No, at the lighthouse. I was taking care of him and he was a live wire. We were thankful that he had a nice yard to play in. But in 18 months he discovered how he could climb over the fence at the corner, so we had to put up 'cowcatchers.' So when he came up he bumped his head and he couldn't get out of the yard anymore.

RW: He was born in 1936?

MF: Friday, the 13th.

RW: So that really kept you busy?

MF: That really kept me going. I spent an awful lot of time with him.

RW: Did you read, listen to the radio?

MF: Oh, yes. He sat on my lap and I read to him for years until he got into school. Then he was able to do it for himself.

RW: Those were also the Depression years; what was it like then?

MF: It went on just the same as we had always been going because we didn't have any extra money. Living on the ocean we could always go out and catch fish.

RW: And abalone?

MF: We had abalone at the other lighthouse, but down here the fishermen would bring us lobsters. Even I could go out and catch fish. It was no problem even though I never had had a fishing rod in my hand in my life. I had a big long string on a stick and threw it out and I could always bring in something to eat. We never worried about that.

RW: I understand you weren't so great on swimming?

MF: I can't swim a stroke to this day. I am deathly afraid of water and yet lived on it practically all my life.

RW: Do you have any reason for being afraid of it?

MF: When I was about two years old out at the beach at San Francisco I was running along on the edge and a big wave came in. I went into the wave instead of running away from it. They had to get somebody to bring me out. I don't know whether that affected me or not. But my sister is afraid of it, too, and she didn't have the same adventure that I had had. But I never could learn. I tried and I tried and there was just that fear in there.

RW: What kind of social life did you have?

MF: We had friends that came out. With the few hours we had off, we visited. I didn't drive until Ken was ready to go to high school. So I went and took lessons as I had to take him to the bus in the morning. He went in to St. Augustine High School. Then I got to go around a little bit after I learned to drive. But I was happy with the kind of life we had. There was never any going out at night or anything like that because we worked nights. Then after he retired, he worked nights again. I was just content to stay at home and read.

RW: I understand you had a coal stove at first.

MF: I cooked on coal up until 1947. It was maddening at times because if the draft wasn't right, the stove was as stubborn as could be. I was 41 years old when the war started. We had rainy, stormy nights and I couldn't get the Christmas bird cooked for love or money. It seemed to go with the times, you know. They were hectic times then.

RW: Did the war years change your lifestyle out there?

MF: Coming into the Army fort we had to stop at this guard and that guard. We didn't have the password all the time because we were separate from them. When they changed guard they were told to check everyone. Sometimes they would have to phone to see if we were able to come in or not. We could see our back door right at the side of our garage.

RW: You don't look Japanese to me. I know that when I was growing up here at that time you thought that there was a Japanese behind every bush.

MF: It was pretty hectic when the war started December 7th. It was panicky. As I say, I didn't drive and we had Ken. Dad just had come down that year to live with us, as a semi-invalid, and whether I was going to be sent off of Ballast Point or not, and how we would ever manage to pay rent and everything. It was terrible. But we survived. When Ken was a little older then in 1941 and playing with the Army was not the best place for a youngster, you know, to be around soldiers all the time ...

RW: Any different than sailors?

MF: We didn't know much about sailors either. There were so few of them out there. But it was the language they used. He would always come in and ask me (he had heard a new word), "Was it a pepper word?" "You tell me what the word was and I'll tell you whether it is a pepper word." When he was tiny our neighbors taught him how to swear.

RW: So these "pepper" words were naughty words?

MF: They were naughty words, but he would tell me. "If it is a pepper word we will never hear it again from you, or there will be more pepper." He said, "How would you know what a word meant? What does it say?" And I would explain what it was.

RW: I want to thank you, Mr. Frank, for all of your time and effort on this tape. You are historical.

RF: Sorry, we couldn't have told you more about it.

RW: This is fine. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW
