

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

WILLIAM WHOLEAN

April 23, 2002

Interviewed by Anne S. Doyle

This is an edited transcript by Anne Doyle of an oral history that is available in the QHS Archive Center. Anne Doyle's editorial comments are in *italics*.

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NOTE: This interview was completed using a tape recorder that, at times, did not record the voices clearly and made parts of the interview unintelligible.

Anne: Today is Tuesday, April the 23, in the year 2002. I'm speaking with Bill Wholean, now living in Westerly; Bill spent many years in his youth at Quonnie. His Dad and Mother *first* owned a home on the oceanfront at Quonnie. He will speak about his memories of his summers there.

Bill I'd just like to ask you, first, to say your full name and where and when you were born.

Bill: My name is William J. (for Joseph) Wholean, and I was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on 6 August 1928.

Anne: OK, can you just tell me how you came to Quonnie, how your parents *came to Quonnie*?

Bill: Well, of course I was very young at the time; but I was born in August, and I think I was down here that first year for part of the time. My parents bought a house in Quonochontaug on Central Beach, probably because of Tom **Spellacy**, who I don't think he was mayor of Hartford at the time; but he later became mayor of Hartford. He and my father practiced law together in Hartford. And Spellacy had "Red Top" (75 *Surfside Avenue*) which was two or three cottages down from us, actually quite a distance because there weren't that many cottages there then. But I think that's why we came to Quonochontaug; and, of course, the beaches there are so much better than anywhere else, certainly far better than Connecticut.

Anne: Did you, did your parents live near the Spellacy (*family in Hartford*)? Or did he just --he was practicing law with him?

Bill: You mean in Hartford?

Anne: Yes, in Hartford.

Bill: Well, both. My father practiced law with him at the time, and later he went out on his own. And, we lived not far from them; they were about four or five blocks away. I don't remember too much about being friendly with them as neighbors; but they weren't far away, I know that.

Anne: Did they have any children your age?

Bill: He—Tom Spellacy didn't; he had been married to Nellie Spellacy whom I only vaguely remember, and she died in the early thirties, I would say; and they had no children. Later on he married another lady, and I can't remember her first name right now; but they had a son whom they named Bourke Spellacy, and I think he became a lawyer himself later. He was younger than I, of course. I don't think they had any other children. And that [one] is because of the second wife.

Anne: Now you said your folks bought the home down in Quonnie; this was on Surfside Avenue. Now I must mention that this is the *Central Beach*.

Bill: That's the street. In those days we didn't have street signs, and we didn't even name the streets because we knew where everybody lived. It wasn't necessary. But it was the street right approximate to the ocean. (*Lot #*)

Anne: Yes.

Bill: They bought the house (*across the street from 120 Surfside*) -I don't know who they bought the house from. But it was, I think, a three-bedroom house, all on the second floor—[unintelligible].

Anne: And you want to tell me what the name of the house was?

Bill: It was "Rufwata" and that's important because of the spelling of it:

Anne: [laughing] yeah and you spell it how?

Bill: R-u-f- w-a-t-a. I thought that was the Indian spelling for rough water, but it was just – just --I guess the house came with that name.

Anne: I was going to ask you that.

Bill: Hmm. I- I don't know how it really got it.

Anne: OK.

Bill: I can remember a lot, playing on the beach, right in front of the house. All I had to do was go out the front, go around to the porch, and in fifteen feet I was down on the beach. And we had rocks –the rocks are still there in front of the beach (*house*); I knew each rock by name. There was a sofa rock and a tide rock and an elephant rock and so forth. So, I would play on the sand in the front of the beach (*house*), and then when we went up swimming, we'd go up east, toward East Beach; and there is a beautiful bathing beach up there, just beyond where "Spray Rock" and (Thorp's place) is now (*175 Surside Avenue*). I'm not sure who else is up there. But at that time there were a lot of cottages; this was of course in the early thirties. All along there-- not quite as nice as our cottage I would say. But they were nice cottages, and right on the waterfront, just like ours.

Anne: Now, did you have brothers and sisters?

Bill: I had one sister, Marian; she was born in 1932, so she was four years younger than I. She died I think at age 60 just a few years ago. . . But she of course wasn't on the scene that early. But later on, she and I, of course, would pal around together along with many other children from Quonochontaug.

Anne: Who were some of your friends down there?

Bill: Well, there was Chick Waterman and his sister Carol. They were Dr. Waterman's children. They lived up a couple of blocks over from us (*111 Ninigret Avenue*), further up near where there was a well. Used to go for well water up there, near the tennis courts. And at that time, not to digress too much, but the pipes were laid for water in the spring, right on the ground. Then in the fall, they would take them up and store them somewhere. At that time, they weren't underground at all. Later on my father was instrumental in getting a good well system in there. He got some outfit up in Ashaway, Aetna Engineering as I recall. And then they buried the pipes underground, but they still had to drain them. And I don't think people who live there now have any water during the winter. They have wells that have water. But at any rate, we hung around with the Watermans. Bill Saunders –he came from Toledo. I thought that was quite amazing. His grandparents owned a cottage; their house was down on the beach, too.

Anne: Is that the one right on the oceanfront too?

Bill: It was then, it was then; but now it's got five foot of {unintelligible} after the hurricane. Back then we would hang around with him, *and* there were the Sayers. I can't remember his first name (*Edmund*), the Sayers brother and sister. They really came on the scene later; in fact, after the war started.

Anne: Were they (*the Sayers*) also on Surfside (*Avenue*)?

Bill: No, they were up in –they had a pond (*Ninigret*), a house (*on an island*) up in Nini-is it Ninigret Pond where the airbase is?

Anne: Yes.

Bill: It's right in that pond (*on Governor's Island*). But they, they came on later on. The other children we played around with were mostly renters –Mary Lou Welch and her brother Tom Welch – a little younger than I; they would come and stay in “Quinona” (*120 Surfside Avenue*), which was Fellows' house at the time. I think it's still called “Quinona” (*71 Oceanview Avenue*). Well, it's a whole new cottage there now (*at 120 Surfside*). And there were the Donohue children, who lived in the house owned by the Donohues, down by Gustettters; I'm not sure –the trouble is I don't know the names of the cottages that are not there now or the people who are there now. But they were from Norwich or Baltic more precisely. Mr. Donahue owned and ran some woolen mills up there. There were other renters who came around; I can't remember all the names. Later on, as we got older, we hung around with Jean Sutherland (*married name Gerrish*). She was the youngest of the Sutherland children: there was Bob and Jack, who were older than we were. But Jean was a little younger than I but, I think, older than my sister.

Anne: Did you know she's returned to this area?

Bill: No.

Anne: Yeah, she has –

Bill: They don't have the house (“*JABOJE*” *at 75 Oceanview Avenue*) down there anymore?

Anne: Yes they do, but she's living year-round up in Wakefield.

Bill: Oh, I'll have to look her up too.

Anne: Yes!

Bill: That would be fun. Then later on, of course, we lived right back--after the hurricane, our house we moved it back (*to 71 Oceanview Avenue*)--right next to the Sutherland's house (*at 75 Oceanview Avenue*). I'm trying to remember any other children in that area.

Anne: What kinds of things, as a young child, *do* you remember doing?

Bill: Well, I'd go crabbing, almost every day, on the rocks right in front of the house. That was good because my mother and father—my father incidentally wasn't down during the week. He worked in Hartford so, my mother was down and my sister was there, and we had a maid most of the time we were there before the war started, and even part of the way into the war—so they could keep an eye on me. And I would spend a lot of time on the rocks, and of course, I could play in the sand there and if we went up swimming, we usually got some sort of adult supervision, if it wasn't my mother or parents or somebody, there would be somebody else up there, up at the beach which was about a quarter of a mile away from the house. So mostly it was just enjoying the place. There was, you know—fortunately, there was no TV at that time. I say fortunately because—

Anne: Probably no telephone either.

Bill: No. That was a real problem at times. I know when my father died, we had no phone; and it took us a while to get any help.

Anne: He died at Quonochontaug?

Bill: He died at Quonochontaug, yeah.

Anne: Oh he did?

Bill: Yeah, he died in the house on the red barn (*not sure what Bill is referring to here*)—

Anne: What year was that?

Bill: 19--1952.

Anne: Oh, when you were up on Oceanview Avenue?

Bill: Yeah, and he was just sitting there, slumped over and was dead. It wasn't sudden; he had had a heart attack nine months earlier and was ailing; but they finally sent him home from the hospital and we thought --he was not exactly getting better, and we didn't think he'd ever be able to resume his practice. But he seemed pretty good, and then all of a sudden that was it. I remember I drove all the way into town (Westerly) to get a phone that was working, and why I don't know exactly. We wanted to go to Tetlow's (*on Oceanview Ave.*) who had a phone nearby; the Barstows weren't home. So I drove to Brightman's. Somebody was on the phone. Of course, I was—I think I panicked a little too. I went in to Vars (*pharmacy*) where I finally got the phone and called the doctor that we knew. And the conversation was sort of stupid on my part; I called him and I said, "I think my father's dead." And he said, "What do you mean you think your father's dead?" I said "Well, he seemed dead when I left the house." But anyway, we made arrangements to get an ambulance down there; and we later had him moved back

to Ahearn's Funeral Home in Hartford. But in those days, it was tough without a phone if you had an emergency.

We had a fire district (*Central Beach*), of course, the key administrative thing over there. My father was moderator of the fire district for, as I remember, most of the thirties and forties. And then my mother took over when he died, for a little while after '52. Then we would have the meetings in different houses. We went to Howard Thorp's house sometimes. Sometimes they were in our house. There weren't that many people. There might be two dozen people at the most who'd *come to the meeting, and* we could fit them in the living room or somewhere; and now it's Thorp's old house, "Spray Rock", up on the --I don't think we ever went back to the pond house. And there were other houses we met in, although I don't remember which ones.

Anne: Do you, do you remember the Thorps, Mr. Thorp specifically, the old Mr. *Howard Thorp*?

Bill: Yes, very well, in fact, better than anyone else.

Anne: Well tell me about him!

Bill: He was a very striking man. He was --probably when I knew him he was in his fifties. He had gray hair, beautiful --white hair, lots of it; and it was very wavy. He always wore a straw hat; of course, it was the summertime. And I think he always - he seemed to always wear a jacket. Of course, in those days, men did; they wore ties and jackets and all. And he was a state senator. Ah I have no idea what party he was in but he always seemed to me to look like the person who should be a state senator or any kind of a senator for that matter. He looked very proper and all. He was *Neil Thorp's father (correction: Nelson Thorp's father)*, and was --this was the older Neil (*correction: Neil was Nelson's son*), who now I think is dead --and he had a son named Neil who now is a real estate agent and all --more than an agent; he's done very well. And there was a little girl too, that would be Nelson Thorp's, I mean Howard Thorp's granddaughter. I forget her name. She's probably around you know XXXXX ; I'm pretty sure there was a girl involved there.

But anyway, Howard Thorp-- the thing I remember most about him was in 1939 after the '38 hurricane. We were sitting on our front porch, my father and I and Howard Thorp--

Anne: On which front porch?

Bill: The front porch of "Rufwata", when it was moved back. We'd moved it back next to---it was between Barstow's and Sutherland's. And at the time the porch was open (if I could find these pictures I could show 'em to you). We were getting Harris Taylor, who did a lot of work around here; he helped us put it together, to

frame it in and all. But I remember Howard Thorp was on the porch talking to my father about the problems at the beach --there were still debris all over the place—in fact in front of our house (*when it was on the beachfront on Surfside Avenue*), right next to Trainor's house (what was that called? I can't remember the name of it but it was right in front of our house) —there was a big pile of debris in a pit, a gigantic pit. And we still hadn't cleaned up any of that yet.

Well at any rate, Howard Thorp was trying to get my father to take over all the mortgages that he got stuck with after the hurricane. People just gave up. They didn't pay their mortgages, and he was stuck with them. He was probably on the verge of bankruptcy. I know he was really despondent, and —the first time I ever saw a grown man cry.

Anne: Ohhhh.

Bill: He was really upset. He was trying to convince my father to take over the whole thing, and he said, "You're not-- for five thousand dollars?" And my father, who was a pretty successful lawyer and U.S. magistrate—well, five thousand dollars was a lot of money in 1939—and even at that my father's response was "No, this place will never come back."

And —the government wouldn't let anybody build right where our lot was (*on the oceanfront on Surfside*). We had left there because we couldn't build there. Nobody could build there. Wolf's house which had survived the hurricane oddly enough because —I thought it was odd because it was out sort of on a point--and so did the houses down on Morris Point; some of them survived. Spellacy's ("*Red Top*") survived, although two people were killed there. (*Editor's note: Not sure if this is true.*) Houses like *those*, that seemed like they were sticking out more in the wind and the waves, didn't get hurt as badly. But at any rate, there was nothing being built there. People were trying to move houses-- like the Vars' house, which had been on the front next to Saunders' and Thorps,' (*Editor's note: the Var's was next to Thorp's "Spray Rock not the Saunder's*) got pushed back into the pond; and it floated in the pond (*to the opposite shore*). Well, it was probably floating on the bottom of the pond! (*Editors's correction note: the Thorp's house was pushed back to Surfside Avenue and hung up on a telephone pole. The Saunder's cottage, "Bayberry Lodge", was washed into the marshes and the edge of Fresh Pond*).

Anne: Did you actually see how they moved some of these houses? **Bill:** Yes, I saw a little bit of ours; my father and men from Hartford would go down and did it mostly themselves, because it was hard to get help. The only one around -- **Anne:** So where did your—where did "Rufwata" actually land?

Bill: It landed --Well, first of all, "Rufwata" was a two-story house. It had a garage attached on the east end of it, towards the Blue Shutters. And you could go from the kitchen to the garage on the inside; it was a one-car garage. And what you

would do, *you* would come down that road by Barstow's (*Spray Street*) and just jog a little bit to the left and go right in our driveway. And I thought it was kind of funny, I guess I'd say, after the hurricane, the survivors down there would say that they thought there was a rather unusual line storm and our garage broke loose from the house and floated (*east*) down Surfside toward Thorp's and up there. And I thought that's kind of funny that they didn't really get alarmed and take off then. But apparently, they had been used to those kinds of storms. The water would come up high and they would--I guess—I know there was evidence of it around our house ("*Rufwata*"): even in the spring we'd see where some of the grass had been batted down, and we just thought: "The waves came up to the street, so what!"

And my father used to brag – we had a big stone- fieldstone fireplace in the house with a big deer's head on top—I thought that was fascinating.

Anne: Did that come with the house?

Bill: Oh yeah. Well, at least the stone fireplace did; my father was no hunter, and I don't think my grandfather was either. So, I think it must have come with the house. But my father would brag that that stone fireplace would hold the house down in the event of a line storm. That's what we used to call 'em. And they were severe storms; but after the hurricane, we couldn't find any of the fieldstone from the fireplace. Apparently, it had just disintegrated under the first floor, which must have gone out to sea, because we didn't find much of that. We did finally find our French doors back in the pit by Harris Taylor's house. In fact, they went into Harris Taylor's house when he built his house out of everybody else's house. (*The house Bill is referring to was built on 128 Oceanview Avenue.*)

Anne: When you say back in the pit ----

Bill: That pit was back by--near—

Anne: Back near Schwarz'? (*The Schwarz family, in later years, after the '38 Hurricane built a home at 140 Oceanview Avenue.*)

Bill: Schwarz' –That's it; yeah.

Anne: The pit right beside the Schwarz'?

Bill: Schwarz'; it would be to the west of the Schwarz'.

Anne: When you say "that pit," --was that his (*Harris Taylor's*) property there to begin with, or did he just buy it?

Bill: I don't know. I think a lot of people, you know--- I shouldn't say a lot: some people bought property in there for a song. Now he might have. Harris lived up

at the corner of 216 and 3 in Ashaway, . . . And he was sort of a handyman, a real nice guy; he was a bachelor and he had a funny little Boston Terrier, I think he'd call it; like a bulldog. And they were just inseparable, those two. But he would do all sorts of handiwork around, but he was also a builder: he helped build a lot of our house. Oh and rebuilt it.—

Anne: About your house—

Bill: We don't know what happened to the front of the first floor. We just found those doors and maybe other things. The interesting thing: the second floor --and it just sheared off right at the floor level—floated back into “Quinona”, the one behind us, which was Fellows's house, and it smashed into their front porch. So, when we came down there, when we got down – I think it was the weekend after the hurricane ---we couldn't come in in the regular way: there was debris across that road (*Spray Street*) from Barstow's and the next road back. As I recall we came down by Spellacy's house, by “Red Top”. (*Editor's note: the Congdon family owned “Red Top” at this time in Quonnie's history*) I don't think it was Spellacy's house then, but it was *still called* “Red Top”. Blackhalls are in it now, are they?

Anne: Yes.

Bill: Well then I'd like to know if the Blackhalls were from Hartford, because there was a very prominent family named Blackhall in Hartford, and I went to school with the kids.

At any rate, the most shocking thing was to come down there and see what's now West Beach Road: there was debris all over that, and a lot of those houses were damaged. But once we got to the *Stanton Sheffield* Farmhouse (600 West Beach Road), as we called Tuthill's, you could see – not much! There weren't houses there. There were just—like--matchsticks all over the place. (*The following information is a bit confusing.*) When we got to our place, which was I guess around the area where Smith's is, in that corner--- it was Smith's, across from “Quinona”, the gray house that's behind Wolfe's. Wolfe's is right on the ocean and then Smith's faces the street that's---it goes by Barstow's, heading toward the ocean, into Surfside. At any rate, we got there and it was hard to get through.

Anne: Were they, were there -- I was going to ask you:

Bill: [unintelligible] There were National Guardsmen around with rifles. We had to go to the --something-- around there just to get into Westerly. We even had trouble getting through Norwich, because of debris on the streets and all. But in Westerly we had to get a pass to get through National Guard lines, and they weren't letting people through even if you owned a house. But my father, because he was U.S. Commissioner and he knew a lot of policemen and things

like that, we got the pass to come down. And there were Guardsmen around with rifles, just walking around, mostly.

Anne: But you could get down West Beach Road, obviously.

Bill: We got down West Beach Road -- We normally would go to the left of the *Stanton Sheffield* Farmhouse as we came in to go to our place; and I think this time we went down to the right, toward Morris Point. I don't know why; there must have been something in the road.

Anne: Did anything stand out in your mind when you first saw all that?

Bill: Yeah: that there was nothing! What stood out was, the place was just about flat. There were a few houses up there, but nothing else. And the rest was just debris -- roofs of houses, things turned upside down, some cars --

Anne: Your father was with you?

Bill: My father and mother and sister; we were --the four of us went down together.

Anne: What was your mother and father's reaction? Do you remember that?

Bill: Well, I'm sure they were shocked. I don't remember; for instance, my mother wasn't crying exactly, but she was just constantly being shocked by things that weren't there. Or like, to see our house -- what was left of it, only the second floor-- backed into "Quinona" was really shocking, and it had really smashed up their porch. And then Trainer's house, which had been next to ours got pushed back almost into the place where it is now (*130 Surfside Avenue*). It got pushed across the road, and it was very fortuitous; --I guess they must have bought that property. The funny thing was our house was up against "Quinona" for some time; I know my father was getting upset because the Fellows --I think they owned it at that time--

Anne: I think they did--

Bill: They were trying to of course repair their house, and our house was smashed into theirs. So, they were after my father to get it out of there and make it go somewhere! So my father was trying to negotiate to buy the lot we moved it to, next to the Sutherlands' on *Oceanview Avenue*--I have trouble remembering their name--but we bought that piece of property, and the piece that was in front of ours, between Fellows' and Trainer's where they moved it to, and in front of Barstow's. We all bought that four ways, so each of us owned a quarter of the lot. Barstows (*living on the corner of Spray Street and Oceanview*), Fellows, we and Trainer owned that lot. I don't know that we actually cut it up into certain quarters, but we all owned it and we wanted it, because they didn't want anyone in between Fellows (*120 Surfside Avenue*) and Trainer (*130 Surfside Avenue*)

They wanted the open space. We and Barstows wanted the open space, and of course we still owned the lot that was on the shoreline, so this way we could see from our front porch right out to sea.

Anne: There was no thought of putting your house back on the shorefront? ---

Bill: Where it was? No; the government wouldn't allow it.

Anne: They wouldn't allow it?

Bill: No; then the lot was --First of all you'd be afraid to put it back, I think. Anyone in their right mind would not go back.

Anne: I wonder why they wouldn't allow it, because certainly other houses have been built since.

Bill: They did later on, but they wouldn't allow it early on, in say in the late '30s and early '40s. I think they just thought it was a disaster because the houses actually stretched -- you could see houses from there all the way up as far as you could see toward Point Judith. On the shoreline, there weren't as many. But there were houses on the other side of the street, once you got beyond the Blue Shutters there were houses up there, and they were gone. There was just, just nothing. You'd see an occasional phone pole, tilted over on the side, and things like that. And of course, there were wires all around; they must have been dead by the time we got there. But --I guess the government and the insurance companies and all just said, "No houses are going back there."

So, we kept that lot (*on Surfside Avenue*) so we would have an open space, and then later I think I told you we leased it to the army; in fact, I found the date that we leased it to them for two 105mm gun emplacements. One of them left them partially on Trainer's lot, too, because they were side by side. Why the army did that I don't know because a hit from an enemy submarine or ship would knock 'em both out. They should have spread it out. But they were close by anyway.

Anne: So, you actually leased it to the government.

Bill: For a dollar a year, we leased it to them. If I can just make a note here --Well, xxxx it was on May 30th, I have a note here (*Bill kept his own journal throughout the war*). May 30th, 1942. This of course was the first summer we were down here after the war started. The army had a machine gun nest on our old lot, and I think they were mostly 30-caliber machine guns. As I recall they were water-cooled. And, a 30 to 50 --would be air cooled. Anyway, the army had gone to my father, and they wanted to put a 105 mm howitzer there. So, Dad said OK. And by June 20th, they had the 105 mm gun emplacements on our lot.

Anne: Now were they there permanently?

Bill: No, they were *on* sand, sandbags. I think what they must have done is taken a bulldozer and bulldozed down a little bit, and dug it out, and then they . . . put the sandbags all around. In fact, my sister and I and some of the other kids would help them fill the sandbags. The soldiers did most of the work, but they would let us sew them. And you sew them with a wire: once they got them filled up, you'd bend them over and take a wire probably a foot and a half long and weave it through the top. That we could do. And then they would lift them into place, so that they would have sandbags that were probably six or eight feet high around the guns, when they were there. The guns weren't always there; they were up at Burlingame and—

Anne: How often did they bring them down *to the beach*?

Bill: You could never tell. There was no — they would come down and they would never shoot 'em there. I don't know where they shot 'em because if they were shot, every window on the beach would be broken. But they would wheel them down; and they came down, ready to shoot 'em. That was the amazing thing; we never knew whether — it was not thought of evacuating us I guess—

Anne: But they did actually practice, didn't they?

Bill: Not with those guns. They had 40 millimeters and machine guns they would fire, up at the Blue Shutters. . . . Now they may have fired the 105s up the beach a ways. I don't know where they shot them because with —if they went up-- that's a four-inch gun and that's a big gun. It could shoot 7 or 8 miles, and if they shot it out, it would hit Block Island. What they wanted to do of course was —I think they thought of an enemy invasion force, and people today don't realize how scared we were in those days. And we thought the Japs would even come, but they were working on the West coast. But there were German submarines out there. and they would wheel them (*guns*) down in the middle of the day (*from Burlingame*), in the morning or at night, any time. And the machine guns —they would leave nothing there. They had soldiers patrolling all the time, back and forth, especially at night.

Anne: Did you talk to the soldiers?

Bill: Oh yeah; they were — I don't know whether they were a Rhode Island National Guard outfit or what they were. But they were stationed up in Burlingame. And it was a coast artillery outfit. And coast artillery: later on in 1942, they changed it over to field artillery because coast artillery had just — time overtook it, and there was no such thing or any need for it as such. And these field pieces were all field artillery pieces. But anyway, that's what happened to the lot. And then— I think they left in 1944. They were only there '42 [*and '43*].

Anne: But how did you happen to have the notes? (*Bill wrote a diary during WWII about his observations around the Quonnie area, both land and sea.*)

Bill: I made some notes earlier, and I dug 'em out so I found them—

Anne: So you made them back then?

Bill: I had made notes--.

Anne: You were writing in a journal?

Bill: Yeah, a sort of a journal. See we were very security conscious in those days. Unfortunately, I didn't take any pictures of the gun emplacements or anything else that happened there, and we should have.

Like, for instance, both here and in Hartford, we had the blackout things on the windows. That was the first note I made in here when we came down in May of ['42]—May 29, --with some made-up blackout shades for the ocean-facing windows.

I don't know why we did that because in Hart-- there were probably much heavier shades, but I know what they were: they were black tar paper; that's what it was. But in Hartford we had to take all the shades – we don't have shades here, but you know how the light is on the edge of the windows. And all of our shades were – we had double shades anyway. So, they were lightproof. But the light could leak out the side, and in Hartford, everybody had to have their window shades so no light would leak out at all, and the air raid wardens would go around and check. For instance, streetlights had these little masks on them that would come down part way, and so that the light would just shine straight down. And automobile lights – If I could find the pictures, I would be able to show you another xxxxx with the top half of the automobile light blacked –all painted black.

Anne: The top half – so what would that, what would the effect be?

Bill: Well, the whole idea of it was to cut down the glare that came from even inland out to the coast, because the German submarines they told us about –it's probably true, because I've seen it later myself during wartime. But the glow from the shoreline, even back 70 miles, would give the subs a good background to fire against. For instance, submarine officers love a full moon, because they can spot the ship going down, turn them on the guns. So that moon—off go the torpedoes.

So that's what they would do even back as far as Hartford. And I guess they went even further inland; I don't know--as far as blacking out things. But they—by cutting down, the cities would just not give out that glow any more. Of course, you couldn't see too well, either, driving, when half your headlight was blacked out. And even the street lights were blacked out.

Anne: So you really didn't travel that much at night, I wouldn't think.

Bill: Well, first of all, we had gas rationing so people didn't—and in those days, like in, in Hartford, we had the trolleys and the buses and things like that, that you just didn't have to travel by car. And with gas rationing, it was pretty tough to get around anyway.

Anne: Was there any thought of your folks just not coming down to Quonnie anymore?

Bill: Yeah, there were many times we weren't sure; we weren't sure we were going to get down in May of '42 at all. And even in '43 because we xxxxxx. [In] '44 things were better in Europe; the Russians, I mean the Germans, were pretty much on the run. And there – actually there was more excitement down here in '44 and early '45 than there was later on—or earlier on.

Anne: You had a story about the Germans-- --

Bill: Oh yeah.

Anne: Remember? I wanted to hear that –

Bill: That's where I found the dates—xxxxx I'm surprised -- I didn't know that.

Anne: Oh wow!

Bill: Unfortunately we didn't have cameras; it was hard to get film. And we wouldn't take any pictures; we just knew we weren't supposed to take pictures, and I wish-- you know others I think cheated with –

Anne: Is this the original or are these your notes from your –

Bill: No, these are notes I dug up; it took me a little search and error to find them. ...Let's see, I've got down here I went sailing with Bill Saunders, almost tipped over twice –that's not really significant. Laughter from Anne. It would be nice to talk to these –I don't know who's alive or anything else. [Reading from notes:] "Two PT-boats off shore. On June 28, 1942, eight Germans were caught landing from a sub near here. We are told to be on the lookout for rubber boats." Strangely enough on June 29, 1943, a second lieutenant told my mother that spies were caught landing here. But I put it as a military secret. This is just the way I wrote it at the time. And we forgot about it, and we didn't know until it came out in the newspaper later on about this whole thing. And that's just come to the fore again later when they talk about these military tribunals for the Al-Qaida and that type.

And they caught these guys finally, they just shot them because they were spies; they weren't entitled to any protection under the Geneva Convention.

Anne: But didn't you hear some voices?

Bill: Oh yes --it was here -- See I didn't make a note that we heard the boats, but it was I'd say on probably the 28th of June of '43 that we were down on the beach in front of the house; of course, the house was then back of it, but around Wolfe's, between Wolfe's and --I mix things, the houses, up --in front of where we were "Quinona", in that area, and I think Chick Waterman was with us, and Saunders and maybe Beverly Tuthill, I'm not sure. But some of the kids, and we, heard a diesel engine offshore (which wasn't unusual) -- we would hear lots of diesels because you could hear the ships out there earlier, even in the daytime). [*But*] then we heard guttural voices, which we knew were Germans. And then we could hear splashing, and we thought holy smoke, the Germans are going to invade us. So, it was dark, and we weren't supposed to be out then, either. There was a curfew, and you just weren't allowed to be on the beach.

And there were --two soldiers would patrol back and forth, but I don't know how often. They had telephone lines strung, and they would ring in on the telephone when they'd hit the pole every so often. We didn't see them around. And if we saw them, we would have ducked, although they knew we were there. Sometimes we'd run into them and we'd just joke about it. We ran home. It must have been, oh it must have been fairly late at night, but in June the sun would be up late too; so it must have been say after 9:00, and we told my mother. And she first didn't believe us; in fact, I don't think she believed us until morning. But I said something like "the Germans are coming, and there's a ship out there and it's probably a submarine and all." So we couldn't --we didn't have a telephone. Barstow's was nearby --and they had a phone, but for some reason or other, whether we were afraid to go out or we didn't go --Barstows weren't home. Tetlow's was two houses down. They were the other side of Sutherlands'. They had a phone because he was a retired dentist from Westerly; and his sister, Miss Opie, Miss Opie lived with them. They had the Opie Drugstore in town, where Westerly Jewelry Store is now. So, they, I think they had business so they would have a phone. I think McGlones had a phone; they were further back. But at any rate, we said OK, in the morning we will get to a phone.

I know we didn't have breakfast; we were just getting up in the morning and a jeep pulled into the yard. And a lieutenant got out and a sergeant, and wanted to know if we had heard anything unusual the night before. And of course, I was just bubbling over with all this information I had! And they took it down, and that's when, that must have been June 29th when they said don't tell anyone about this. But they wanted to know who else was with us, and we know they went to the other kids. But nobody would talk about it, because we were so impressed with the importance of not letting this out. And I guess they were-- the police -- the soldiers were really worried too, because they didn't know how extensive this

was. They didn't land at Amagansett in Long Island, on the other side of Long Island, and then up in Maine, and somewhere else. So, whatever happened to the ones that landed here, I don't know, whether they got caught.

Anne: So, they were off a-- their ship or off their (*submarine*)—that had come to the surface—

Bill: Oh, it must have been a submarine; I can't picture --it must have come to the surface, and they would have to be on the surface because it's so shallow out there. It was only about 18 feet deep, and a submarine, even on the surface -- in those days they were fairly small subs. But that would draw probably 30 feet of water, and there wasn't that much water out there if they were that close.

Anne: Did they ever find them?

Bill: If they ever found those, I don't know about it. I'd love to go down, assuming a lot of that stuff is no longer classified, I'd love to go down and check. The trouble is, I don't even know the unit designation of that artillery outfit that was at Burlingame. I suspect it was a National Guard outfit because that's what happened: they mobilized all these Guard outfits and they would train here and then eventually go overseas. And they had to pull all these people out when they needed them for the invasion in Europe. And by that time the threat had gone down here. But I'm sure that anyone who had the time and the inclination could go down and go through the Army records at that time and see what it was.

Anne: Did you know about the lookout station that was on Route One there, on Post Road at the time?

Bill: Well, no, I don't remember—

Anne: Or the bunker, the bunker down in East Beach?

Bill: We knew about the bunker; that came later, and we didn't know what that was, whether it was an ammunition bunker or --we thought it was communications, though. Because of course, there were no wires leading above it; everything was underground. But we thought it was probably ammunition or wires because we knew they had mines out across from Block Island to Montauk on this side and then from Block Island to Point Judith on the other side. And they were submarine mines; they were down well below the surface because this used to be an assembly area. In fact, I've got a note here somewhere where there were many ships out in Block Island sound: right here, on July 1, of 1943, I have about 50 ships assembling in a convoy offshore. And the different --

Anne: Did you see them?

Bill: We could see them! Yeah, I would –I used to have a great time on the—and this of course was probably illegal, but no one was ever going to find it, I hope –I had a regular Navy log I would keep of ships I would see going north – well east and west out there. But I could recognize many of those ships.

Anne: Did you have binoculars?

Bill: Oh yeah, I had field glasses, and I would put down the time, and I would put down “Destroyer moving north” – actually it was east but I would put north because it seemed that way. But I would show which way they were going. I could never see submarines because they were so low in the water. Down here somewhere they had a cruiser and a destroyer, close offshore.

Anne: Oh my goodness!

Bill: But I was really fascinated with that; oh yeah, here (*referring to his logbook notes*): On June 30, 1942, a heavy cruiser and a destroyer passed close offshore. Now, close offshore was probably two or three miles. They couldn’t get in much closer with their draft. But –

Anne: Still it was in the Sound. I mean, you know –

Bill: Oh yeah. Well, see what they would do is gather up these ships – we didn’t have enough escort vessels to escort ships all around the east coast, separately-- so we would gather them into convoys; and then they would go from one big port [to] another one and pick up more ships. So the ones coming in here probably had ships coming in from New London and New York. They would come up from New York on the Sound if they could, because if they got offshore, they would—you know it was open season on ships, by the (*German*) submarines. So, they would get into that area so they would be safe for a day or two while they assembled; and of course, there would be always planes flying over them and –

Anne: So were these ships ready to be now sent over to—

Bill: They would go from here to --I think most of the men went up to Casco Bay –I think that’s the name of it –up in Maine. So, they would go up along the coast. They would hug the coast because see they could provide air cover.

Anne: When did we get involved with the war overseas? --What year was that ?

Bill: Well, December 7th, was when we were attacked.

Anne: Yeah; 194—

Bill: One.

Anne: Oh, 'forty-one.

Bill: 'Forty-one. And of course, we were involved much before that. In fact --I didn't make the notes here because it wasn't pertinent-- but we had the *Jacob Jones*, that was a sub that was sunk by a German submarine in 1940; the *Reuben James* was sunk—another one; [and] there were several of our destroyers sunk. Now you know we were very upset they were sinking our destroyers, but what were our destroyers doing to them that they would sink them? Our destroyers were helping the Brits. It was before the war started but Roosevelt had got us into this thing—and in a way, I think it was probably a good thing because otherwise, the Germans would have taken over Britain. So, I think we were doing a lot of fighting on our own, but I know we had troops in England, just like advisory troops. (Later on, they called them advisors in Vietnam.) But they were over there to learn how the war was going, with the anticipation we'd be in it sooner or later. But—of course, when we went into—we didn't go into Europe right off; we went into North Africa. Most of those troops went from Virginia, from Norfolk, and that area. And then—that was in '43. But all during '42 they were moving troops into England.

Anne: But these convoys that you were noticing: I mean, were these, was this for defending our own shores?

Bill: No, no; these were convoys going to England.

Anne: Oh, all right; I see.

Bill: They were tankers, they were freighters; they were bringing weapons and food for the Brits and to Murmansk. That "Murmansk run" was a deadly run--they would go over to Russia. And it wasn't so bad from here. See they would go from here to Maine, and that way they could provide air cover for 'em that far up, because the planes, like from here, would fly out and fly over the ocean and try to keep the submarines down. The longer you could keep a submarine down, the less effective it was. And there were destroyers – they even used yachts to escort the ships; big yachts, but they were some help. And they would go up to Maine and then go to Halifax, and that was probably the last port they would spend any time in.

It wasn't that they were needing fuel; but they would need to get more ships together. And the more ships they could get into a convoy, then they could have more escorts. And they would go up through Greenland and Iceland and that way. And once they got beyond Iceland, they were pretty much all alone. They--the escorts-- went with them, but then they were in range of German aircraft who would come out from Norway. See that's one reason why the Germans took Norway. So, they would bomb the daylight out of them between England and Iceland; and then those that had to go to Murmansk would go up that way, and they were even worse off. That was --there used to be talk about the "Murmansk

run". If you were a merchant seaman and you got the "Murmansk run", your chances of surviving were slight.

So that's what they would do; and of course, some convoys would go out from Norfolk, Virginia, and go across – this was later, after we had secured Africa. They'd go across into the Mediterranean. But they couldn't go up around the Bay of Biscay; they couldn't go into England from the South, from France, because the Germans controlled France. So, they could send bombers, and the subs of course were coming out of Bordeaux and all those pigpens over there.

Anne: So, at the time, how old were you?

Bill: I was--well, when the war started [in '41] I was [thirteen], ---- fifteen I guess.

Anne: So, were you just wrapped up in reading? – It sounds like you just know so much about it.

Bill: Well, everybody was. Well, you know it was everything, to all of us, especially to boys, because we knew we were going to be in it sooner or later. [In '45] I had a note there; I said "Well, this is my last summer as a civilian down here." It turned out it wasn't, because they dropped the bomb a few days later, and that got us off the hook for –well, I ended up in Korea instead, but it was a different war. But we really [*knew*] -- at that point, when we had won the war in Europe, they were moving all the troops back home for more training in how to fight the Japs. And we knew it was going to be terrible fighting the Japs, because they wouldn't surrender. I mean every battle we had with them--it was a fight to the end.

Anne: Now your father was not involved at all?

Bill: Well, he was in World War I; and he'd been wounded in World War I in Verdun. And [so] he was not directly involved, but he did hold a commission as a Major in Military Intelligence. And I don't know exactly why, but as a U.S. Magistrate he would [go] –I think I made a note here, where I went with him--I know I went to New London with him

[*To second side of tape*]

(*from notes*) "in '41, went with Dad to New London, where he arraigned four men who stole metal from the sub base. I met a commander in Naval Intelligence; we ate at the Mohican Hotel." I mean these were things that impressed a 13-year-old.

Anne: Yes, Sure!

Bill: But, we would go over to the sub base quite a bit. That's where ---he would meet with people over there, and I was never quite sure what he was doing. And he was [working] as a civilian, even though he held his army commission; but he would mainly get involved with the F.B.I., the police. He did –I remember-- he

arraigned a major German spy. I don't know what they finally did with him. I guess they probably executed him. But that was in Hartford where they caught him.

Anne: Now, you said you had conversations with some of the soldiers that were patrolling the beach?

Bill: Yeah, we would talk to them. Some of them we would get to know by name.

Anne: Did you have them in your homes?

Bill: No, no. –

Anne: Some people talked about that.

Bill: No, I don't -- well maybe they did somewhere, and maybe in the winter.

Anne: Oh that's probably what it was.

Bill: But these guys: for one thing they could not leave their post. They were on a patrol. They would come down; I guess they started up at the Blue Shutters, and that patrol would go from the Blue Shutters down to the breachway, in old Quonnie. And every so often they would hit the telephone pole and crank up the field phone and just say where they were. And of course, if something happened-

Anne: Where were those telephones? Do you remember?

Bill: They carried them on them. The field family carried them on them. And it's an electric – you crank it like--- I used them many days, later on, but you would just tie into contacts into the wire, and crank it up just like you would the old style— you wouldn't know –but the old-style crank telephone. You'd ring him up. And that would go back I'd assume to wherever their headquarters were –probably Burlingame. And they would just say “We're at post such and such,” and that's where they should be. Now if they didn't call in, then they would send some troops down to find out where they were. But you know if something happened to these guys--things were bad by then ---but they would call in periodically, so they couldn't leave the road. They would walk down along the road or the beach, but they couldn't go into your house or anything like that.

Now, if they were off duty, I suppose especially the full-time people down here would have them in.

Anne: I heard a lot about Mrs. Craig, who was in Blue Shutters, really befriended a lot of the (*soldiers*)

Bill: I'm sure she would have. Because she was--she was all alone up there, I think.

Anne: You remember her?

Bill: Yes. Yeah; she was kind of a fat lady, a very nice lady. And I do remember her. There might have been somebody else there, but she had this room –the Blue Shutters wasn't much bigger than this room –and she had a candy counter in it and whether she lived in back or upstairs, I'm not sure.

Anne: You also remember Mother Brindley?

Bill: Brindley. Yeah, vaguely but not as well. We wouldn't go down there as often because it was further for one thing. And of course, I remember Henry Brightman; we'd go up there; we'd buy gas up there and once in a while we would walk up there. The routine in the summer was --(before the war and during the war and to some extent after the war when we were older and we would just then go as teenagers) -- we would walk to the Blue Shutters and get candy and you could get a soda up there I think, as I recall—

Anne: Ice cream –

Bill: Yeah, we'd get ice cream and then we would walk back home. Or maybe the other night we'd go down to Eldridge's, down to the Bowling Alley we called it. And once in a while we'd go out West Beach Road; which we didn't call it that, but whatever it was called, [and up] to Brightman's. We didn't do that often because first of all, our parents didn't want us going that far; and there was a highway up there, which was not traveled anywhere near like the one now.

Incidentally, that highway was built in –

Anne: Started about 1940? –

Bill: Yeah, and it was built, that highway was really built; it was what they called a defense highway. And in the center was this concrete strip which would hold really heavy trucks. And on each side were tar strips which were very well-designed. And I found out later on, working with the police here in Westerly when they were tearing up Route One to re-do it, they said, "However they made this highway, they meant it to last." I said, "You should have left it alone, just repaved it." But it was used primarily for transportation from here to Providence; of course, it was the main road, from Florida right up to Maine.

Anne: I always thought it was because of the airbases that they did special (*construction*)

Bill: But the airbase came later. (*Editor: Questionable accuracy of this statement*). It was, I'm sure. That and Quonset. The Quonset [base] didn't open till 1942, I think. They started it earlier –

Anne: But that's when they re-did the Post Road, though; at least that's what I've been told.

Bill: I think the Post Road --

Anne: About 1940.

Bill: It was in 1940. I think it -- they did it first. I think the Post Road was done before Charlestown. (*Auxiliary Airbase*)

Anne: Oh yes.

Bill: --I was surprised at how late --they started Quonset in ---around 1940. But they foresaw some need for it. And of course, once the war started, then they realized it was much more important. And then Charlestown must have come after that. Probably in '41. But they were flying there in '42, I know that. And then of course Westerly became the auxiliary field.

But there --no, no I never remember getting friendly with any other soldiers. Where the Wilcox Inn is now, that was a BOQ, that was an officers' quarters. And they would live up there.

Anne: Were you aware of the-- some of the officers and soldiers staying in some of these places around here? Like over on East Beach, the old (*Buddington*) farmhouse had some, and down at the Zabels they had some --

Bill: No, I didn't. I only knew that they were up at Burlingame, and we never went up there.

[*Abrupt change of subject*]

Incidentally, you talk about the Clarke Farm --

Anne: Yes, Tom Clarke.

Bill: [unintelligible] and his wife was sort of a--I think she was kind of heavy.

Anne: Yes, I've heard about this!

Bill: I don't-- I don't really remember that much about them. But they were kind of friendly people. Their house was a disaster, the old one. Well, they didn't keep it up, and of course the people didn't have the money. These were farmers who really worked hard.

Anne: Did you actually go to the farm to get milk or whatever?

Bill: We would go up to the farm to get milk; this was the – it later became Hutchins' farm I think—something like that (*It was always East West Farm managed by the Hutchins' family.*)

Anne: The Hutchins lived on the corner (*west corner of West Beach and Post Road/Route One*), there, the other corner, on the other side (*opposite of Clarke farm*).

Bill: Yeah. Clarke's was across the street, across Route One. But we went up there and we'd get raw milk; this was the Clarkes' farm. We'd go up there and get milk.

Anne: Did you walk up? –

Bill: No, what we would try to do was get enough milk to last the week. And they would have delivery people who came through. There was a big red truck that came in, and it was a store. You could go in the truck. It was like a store inside. They had shelves. Instead of windows, they had shelves. And I know they had ice in there, so you could get refrigerated stuff. But I don't recall walking up to that farm to get groceries, because first of all, it was too far. And we didn't have cars during the week. My father would come down, usually on a Friday afternoon. We'd go in Saturday, into Westerly to shop. And, if we needed groceries during the week, there was this fellow –Indian Joe, we called him, came around in an old Model-T truck. Nice guy; he was a-- –

Anne: Was he really an Indian?

Bill: Oh yeah; I think he was an Indian. He had everything but the headdress.

Anne: Did everybody call him that?

Bill: Yeah –to his face! We just called him Joe, and Indian Joe; and in those days it wasn't – they didn't feel – I don't think they minded it. I mean he was making money off us for one thing, and he probably really needed the money. And I guess he had a farm up in back somewhere there. But everybody liked him, and there was never any problem with him. And the people who came in with the truck; I don't remember where they were from.

Anne: Do you know Mr. Munroe? Did you ever meet him? He delivered milk down there. I've talked to him.

Bill: Um, we got milk from –in fact, we've got a lot of bottles around here somewhere—what was the name of that dairy?

Anne: Consumer's.

Bill: Consumer's Dairy. Yeah. They would bring the Consumer's Dairy milk in. Yeah. They delivered the milk, and we had a –well when we had the house done right on the beach before we got a refrigerator, we had an ice box. And they would bring in the ice every so often. But they would deliver bread and milk. And it seems to me there was a laundry.

Anne: Yes.

Bill: Cotudit (?) – or something like that, a funny name. And the guy would come around with a laundry truck. I thought strange things – why would you need a laundry truck down here, but you did need something like that.

And early, on our garage door in both houses, the first house and the later one, there was a big sign that the police would put every –not a big sign, it was a sticker on the door –every fall. And it said, “Rhode Island State Police. This property is under the surveillance of the R.I.” – you know to keep people from breaking in –and I was always very impressed with that. It probably didn't keep anybody from breaking in; we never had any trouble.

Anne: I know we're kinda jumping around but, bringing your house, the upper story to where it is, how was that actually, physically done (*from Surfside to Oceanview Avenue*)?

Bill: Well, the way, the way it worked: my father and these other men-- I don't know how they learned to do this, they must have got somebody who knew how to move houses-- but they would get these big rollers and they would jack the house up and put it on the roller, and then push it somehow, I think by hand because you couldn't get cars in there, there were too many rocks or trucks, and probably push it by hand. Of course, they weren't moving it far, they had to get it out from “Quinona” (*back*) onto Surfside and then back in again on that lot, so they would –I know they had the jacks –

Anne: Did they use animals at all? 'Cause some people have talked about oxen.

Bill: Well, it must have been horses, yeah; they must have (*This needs to be verified*). Maybe they did. See, that was done during the winter, so I didn't come down.

Anne: Do you know where the Saunders' house ended up, before they put it on Ocean View where it was (*permanently located at 84 Oceanview Avenue*) –

Bill: Yeah, it ended up –

Anne: Somebody said near the pond.

Bill: Yeah; it was over toward the pond. Over around where Schwarz's is (*Schwarz's cottage was at 140 Oceanview but not until after the '38 Hurricane. Someone*

else owned the cottage "Sea Biscuit" during this time). That pond caught a lot of houses! But it ended up in there. I think the wind must have pushed everything toward the east. So, it was in there, and then they probably had to move it pretty far (*to 84 Oceanview Avenue*). Tetlow's, I think, ended up just about in front of where it is now (*87 Oceanview Avenue*). Sutherland's of course was always there.

Anne: Did you know the Van Osts?

Bill: Oh yeah. Dick Van Ost, was it? Yes; I remember them. I didn't know—they were older than I, I think. They were in there too (*correction: Tetlow's home on the oceanfront on Surfside did not end up in the pond, but was completely destroyed*)

Anne: (*The following paragraph is confusing.*) Their house was completely destroyed, wasn't it?

Bill: —I don't remember them after the hurricane, so maybe it was. But they were up in between Saunders' (*It was just west of Saunders*) and not far from Thorp's, I think. There were three or four houses right in a row there. Then on the back, there were the same houses that are still there (*now*) on the other side of Surfside; I'm trying to remember the names of the girls: Hazel—Hazel and—I can't remember the last names. They were in the house that was right behind—is "Spray Rock" Thorp's cottage.

Anne: Yes.

Bill: OK. What's Trainer's place? That was—Well, Thorp's (*not correct*) (*actually going in a westerly direction, Van Ost or Tetlow*), then Trainer—the one right next to us; that was a name something like—still has the same name. (*Bill was somewhat confused about all the names here*) (*Bill continued, in the next paragraph, about moving his house on Oceanview.*) I don't know—They did most of the moving during the winter. But I know they used a series of light rollers and jacks. And they got it into place. And then when we came down that spring of '39, we had no trellis under the house. Later we added that. But the house was up on these, like, cedar columns that were maybe 3 or 4 feet high and must have been almost a foot around. And then it stayed that way for a long time. Later on, we put cinder blocks under there. But we had it open underneath and a lot of the debris from the houses were stored under our porch, our own house, which was kind of dumb in a way 'cause if it ever caught fire—but we used it for firewood. It was my job to go under there and pull it out from under—

Anne: So, you had a fireplace?

Bill: Yeah, we had a fireplace.

Anne: That had to be constructed though (*The original was lost in the hurricane.*).

Bill: Well, what happened was, we built the -- we took the original, the four rooms that were upstairs—that was a bathroom, four rooms --yeah, I think there were four bedrooms upstairs, and a bathroom. And we just made them into the first floor again. Then we added a porch on the south side, facing the south or west side, facing Barstow's; and then a front porch facing the ocean. You remember that picture I showed you. — Then on the porch that faced Barstow's, we built a fireplace. So that the fireplace actually was-- the back wall of it was into the old house. And the front wall, where the fireplace was open, was facing the porch. Which was a sun porch; it was all—that porch was all windowed in. Later on, we windowed in the front porch; but that was just originally—when Thorp was on it (*the porch*) that day, it was open, and ... – I don't think we even had screens on it. You didn't want a porch down there without screens or windows on it with mosquitoes and all later on.

Anne: What was your story about when you came (*down to see your cottage*)? It did burn down. When did you sell it? Your sister owned it –

The following is Bill's story:

Bill: My sister sold it in the early '90's; I can't tell you when exactly. But I was on duty as a police reserve officer in Westerly that morning. I was doing --I can't remember when that was, but I was doing duty at the Central Baptist Church. So, I'd come off duty; and I was in uniform. I had the police radio on in my car. And I heard the call for Quonochontaug, Central Beach, and I thought -- of course, I didn't know the roads; that was still a problem then. But I thought I think I want to go over there and see what's burning. Because, of course, we still had our house. My mother and sister kept that house, and they didn't really do much to improve it. But we--we kept it that long, and we would go down there, too, for a while until we built on here (in Westerly). Then my sister got married -- somewhere in the xxxx—a late marriage, somewhere in the middle there. But at any rate, I heard the call; so, I was in uniform and carrying a gun and all. I didn't want to go over into another jurisdiction, Charlestown, in the uniform. Even though it was an emergency, it wasn't an emergency that I was following. So I went home --this was when we (*Bill and his wife*) lived in Shelter Harbor—I went home and quickly changed into some civilian clothes and went over. And I went down --[laugh-]-it was kind of funny and also stupid I think --on my part—I went down West Beach Road, and the first scene I saw was a fire truck running *up* West Beach Road towards Route One. And the firemen were on it, but everything seemed to be totally jumbled. There was a hose dangling off the back of it. And it was tearing along and cars were following it, and--I thought it was probably a brush fire—I thought Holy Smokes, I'm going the wrong way! Everybody else is evacuating, and I'm going into the fire.

But then I didn't see any more as I got down beyond Thomsen's place (283 West Beach Road) and all there, and I got down to the *Stanton-Sheffield* farmhouse and I could see some smoke over around where our cottage was. And I, I called it our cottage; it wasn't then, because that was after my sister had sold it to the – Quinns?

Anne: Quinns,

Bill: Yeah.

Anne: What was the cause of the fire that happened after it was sold?

Bill: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And so my sister of course had lost track of it. And I didn't go over there that much; I used to like to go over just to see what was going on, for a while. But the older I got and the further I got away from it, the less I did. But anyway, I went down there and I could see where the smoke was coming, where our cottage was, or somewhere in that area. And as I got closer, coming down by where Spring's house was, in that area where Kass's in that area, I thought "There's something wrong; I can't see our chimney." And then I decided it must be our house that was on fire. I say our chimney; it wasn't anymore. [Anne: Yes.] And I got closer and I could see the fire trucks down there; it was over by Saunders'. But that was close enough that I thought it was our house or Sutherlands' that was on fire. And I got close—and our house was gone!

And I thought—of course, this all happened very fast—I thought, "It must have blown up and whatever's burning is what's left." —And there was a big pit there; there was nothing. And I was sort of wandering around, and I went over to somebody, I don't know who it was, and I said, "What happened?" They said, "Well, you're looking in the wrong place; it's Saunders' house that's on fire. (So—well, they didn't say Saunders; they said some other name.) (*not sure what Bill meant here*) And there was a fire on the second floor of Saunders'. And what happened was -- this was in the summertime. Somebody had gone off and left an electric blanket, and it was folded over, and the electric blanket was—and it burned that bedroom. It wasn't a very severe fire. It was fascinating. That truck that was going up (*when we were first coming down to Quonochontaug on West Beach Road*) was going somewhere to get water, back on Route One. And they would bring this water back into this great big, like a pool that they had set up on the road. I never saw anything like it, like a great big swimming pool. And they would pour the water into it, and then other hoses would take the water out and squirt it on the fire.

Anne: But what happened to your house?

Bill: Well, our house – that was-- that took me a while to figure that out. I got interested in the fire. So I said to somebody, it might have been one of the Sutherlands or somebody, I said, oh –Where's "Rufwata"? And there was just

this hole. And they said, “Oh, well, they took it away.” And I said, “What do you mean they took it away?” Well, “Rufwata” was made out of asbestos. We had those asbestos shingles, which you know you really had to be very careful with. I guess what happened was, the Quinns decided to move “Quinona”, and that’s another thing: I couldn’t find “Quinona”, the Fellowses’ house. That wasn’t where it was supposed to be. It was midway on the way back to where –

Anne: You were very confused!—

Bill: Yeah. I was confused. It was on the way, where it—instead it wasn’t in front of Barstow’s, where it belonged. But it was part way back. I imagine they followed the same track we used to move our house back.

But anyway, there was this big hole, and “Quinona” was part way toward the hole. So, someone explained to me that the people who bought our lot and our house—and they had kept, they had owned it for a few years—because the mailbox was in front and it said Quinn and all—but somewhere along the line they demolished “Rufwata” and just took it away; and they dug a cellar, which I thought was rather amazing because none of the houses had cellars there—we always thought the water was right under us. But the cellar was quite deep, and I went over and looked down in it and I thought, “Gee, we could have had a cellar all this time.” Of course, it was out of the question. We at one time thought of buying that house (from the Quinns), you know, for my mother and moving into there full time. And then [*we thought*] “Oh, no; it would just take too much. “And it would have been, with the asbestos and all that. But it was a beautiful location (*71 Oceanview Avenue*). But at any rate, the hole was there; and they moved it back in and put it on top, and that’s the way you see it now. (*71 Oceanview Avenue*)

Anne: It’s been sold again.

Bill: Oh, it has?

Anne: Yes.

Bill: So the Quinns don’t own it anymore?

Anne: *Ellen* Frost owns it now.

Bill: Oh. Huh. That’s interesting. They must have put a septic tank field in, because we had a cesspool—

Anne: Yes that has to be xxx.

Bill: And that cesspool had to be pumped periodically.

Anne: Now, just reverting a little bit, do you remember the Eldridge bowling alley before and then after the hurricane?

Bill: Yeah, I remember it both times.

Anne: What happened to it during the hurricane?

Bill: It didn't. I don't know whether it was really damaged that much or not. In your book it says it was totally wiped out. (*Bill did not have the correct information about this.*)

Anne: Well, it was brought back; I know that.---

Bill: We would go down there bowling and they would have candy and all down there; and –

Anne: This is before the hurricane?

Bill: Before the hurricane, and even after the hurricane. If you wanted to really get a good score bowling, you rolled the ball into the gutter, and it would bounce out of the gutter and then knock down the pins. If you aimed it right down the alley, it would go in the gutter. I mean it was -- Well, what happened was, every winter the ocean would come in and it would warp the thing (*Not correct information: the hurricane caused the warping.*)—As far as the bowling alley goes, it was just a comedy; but it was fun. We'd horse around down there; it was sort of a gathering place for everybody. We didn't really mix much with anybody down at East Beach, *What I mean is* at Old Quonnie (*West Beach*)

Anne: West Beach.

Bill: West --well, we called it Old Quonnie then. And the thing I can remember most about it (*the Quonnie Casino bowling alley*), and this had to be after the war or during the war, we would go down there sometimes for Mass on Sunday. There would be Mass there or at the Grange up on Route One, or sometimes we'd go over to St. Clair or sometimes we'd go into Immaculate. But I was fascinated with Mass there Sunday, because first of all, candy was close by. The priest would set up the altar in front of us, a temporary altar; so you could look at the candy when you were supposed to be paying attention to Mass! And then the really neat thing was there were cows in the field to the west --to the east--of there; and a cow would come in and stick his head right through the window!

Anne: Oh, that's good!

Bill: There were no screens or anything. I thought it was wonderful; and, of course, all the other kids --we were teenagers by then -- we were quite sacrilegious I suppose

by paying more attention to the cows than anything else. But that was fun. I remember –

Anne: Were they Tom Clarke's cows or Hutchins cows? (*The Hutchins used to bring their cows down there from East West Farm for the season*)

Bill: I don't know. I never got that friendly with cows.

Anne: Did you know Dick Hutchins?

Bill: I knew him vaguely, when we-- this is the father, you mean?

Anne: Oh no; I was thinking of Dick the son.

Bill: No. There's a Hutchins I ran into in town here, not long ago or heard about him; I was going to ask him if they were related. But I never got around to it. I'm not sure where they are.

Anne: Dick is still living, right on West Beach Road.

Bill: Oh yeah? Right near that place where they were (*East West Farm*)?

Anne: He helped me a lot with the book.

The following is another "Bill" story about the DeMoranvilles:

Bill: Well, Reenee DeMoranville lived across the street there (*from East West Farms*), the one who married the Coastguardsman.

Anne: Oh yeah.

Bill: Is that the one –yeah.

Anne: Can we, can we hear that story, please?

Bill: Well, it's very confusing. We had this maid named Irene, and I don't remember her last name, but she—this was before the war, because the Coast Guard station was down there. Well, before the hurricane. And we brought her down (*to Quonochontaug*) as we did with our maids; we would bring them down from Hartford, and they would stay in the house with us. (*Bill is a bit confused with this.*) I don't know; something doesn't seem, seem to add up there, but I think – I know it was a Coastguardsman, unless he was from somewhere else. No, no Irene had to be before the war, and it must have been before the hurricane. Anyway, she was a real nice girl and she married Roland DeMoranville, who was the garbage collector. That's what we called him; I think he was a handyman in Quonochontaug, and he was a tall, gangly red-headed guy, nice guy and all. But

she married; after she met him one summer, she just stayed here. And we left her. And we stayed friends with them. They would – I don't think they lived in that house where the other Reenee lived. But anyway, somewhere along the line, the other Reenee came on the scene. This was after Irene was our maid. And she was married to a Coast Guardsman. Well, they switched spouses. And I, of course, I was too young to pay too much attention to that sort of thing. I know it was confusing, but my parents thought it was kind of funny. But our Irene went somewhere else.

Anne: She went with the Coast Guardsman, finally.

Bill: She went with the Coast Guardsman somewhere. And Roland took up with this other Reenee (*Irene*). So, Roland stayed here. And I guess – I don't know when he died. But the other Irene died only a few years ago. And that Doctor DeMoranville, a woman doctor, up in Hope Valley. I sometime am gonna ask her; I haven't met her yet, but I know she has an office near –in the same building that a doctor my wife goes to once in a while. I'm gonna ask her if she's some relation. I'm not quite sure how to put it to her, you know: "Are you Irene DeMoranville's....."

Anne: of Quonochontaug?

Bill: daughter.... of Quonochontaug" -- I don't want to get into too much detail because I don't know how much she knows about her parents' switching fathers or husbands. But no-one had any children at that time.

Anne: Did you get acquainted with the Coast Guardsmen over there?

Bill: No, I didn't. I was fascinated with the pictures in your book, there, of them down with a drill and a lifeboat drill and all. We never went down – of course that was gone in '38, so I was ten years old when the hurricane came. So we never went down there much. That would have been pretty far for me to go alone.

Anne: But your maids went down there! [laughter]

Bill: –Uh, apparently, apparently!

Anne: I've heard a lot of stories about these Coast Guardsmen down there.

Bill: Well, they were, they were something else—

Anne: --Hooking up with some of the young ladies down there –

Bill: I'm sure-- Well that was another problem we had with the National Guardsmen. My mother was, was always worried about that, and we thought that one of our

later maids was out there with a few of them a couple of times. But it was pretty hard to say. The Army was very strict on any fraternization like that. They could actually shoot ya in those days, if you got too involved with a woman! But—there were several maids *around Quonnie*. We had a maid. I'm trying to remember who else had a maid. I don't think Saunders had—yeah, they -- I think that the Watermans had a maid. There were some maids that would come up from Old Quonnie (*maids hired by the hotels and inns*) – not all the way down, but around the Quonochontaug Inn. And there were one or two others, but I don't remember where they were. But they would sort of fraternize among themselves. But once the war came, it was hard to get maids. And I think Yvette was our last one.

Anne: Oops! Back to the war –

Bill: June 22, 1942: I had soldiers let me sight and aim a 105 millimeter. That was the howitzer, which of course is as big as this room.

Anne: And that was right on your property.

Bill: Right on our property. That's what—and then [*reading from his notes*] on the 23rd, I have: All of us kids had a gun fight around the sandbags. We would use their gun pits to—of course, the guns weren't there, but we would –

Anne: Oh gosh.

Bill: And then on June 24th, (*looking at his notes*) I had infantry practicing at Blue Shutters. I don't remember that, but why they would—what they would do up there, I don't know. But mostly the Blue Shutters was used for anti-aircraft artillery firing. And I have to think about the Germans, eight Germans caught on the 28th. Heavy cruiser. [*reading from notes*] “On 7/21 of '42, plane practices machine-gunning in the ocean nearby, very loud. Planes practice.” They couldn't have been too nearby because they had a sleeve they would go out and shoot, way out. Now, they wouldn't shoot near Block Island, I'm sure. They must have shot perhaps in between Montauk and Block Island.

Anne: You talked about this sleeve, Bill; I don't understand –

Bill: It's a long sleeve, it's like a sleeve; we call it a sleeve in the military. Picture – the nearest thing I can think to it is a toilet-paper roll, the basic cardboard roll. But picture it made of cloth, canvas. At the end there would be, it would be very long. It would probably be five feet in diameter, maybe ten (the width). It would be thirty feet long. And at the end there would be clamps on it so that a plane could tow it. And the other end would be kept open so it would—you'd tow this long thing behind a plane. And they would shoot at the sleeve.

Anne: That was the practice.

Bill: It was practice. Well, hopefully they (*didn't*) hit the plane that was towing it.

Anne: And this was what they were practicing over in Blue Shutters, you're talking about – that would be a –

Bill: It would be a fly – usually they seemed to fly up the coast.

Anne: During the day?

Bill: Oh yeah, during the daytime. Now I don't recall – I have notes in here about gunfire at night, and I think they were firing heavier artillery pieces. Maybe these 105s. Now see there was no road down from the Blue Shutters, so the army trucks, even with a 4 x 4 and the big deuce and a halves, with all sorts of super drives, couldn't go in that sand. So, I don't know how they got down there, but they may have come up from the other end. I don't know what they did up at the Charlestown Breachway. But I have the notes in here somewhere that they were firing heavy guns up beyond the Blue Shutters. But –what was I saying about the –oh, the sleeve? What they would do is fly up from let's say- –they probably came from further down, but they would fly up – we could see 'em—coming up from Old Quonnie, and they would go north to the Blue Shutters. At the Blue Shutters they had these 40 millimeter guns set up, and they were movable, these guns; they were on big tri-pods—

Anne: Right on the beach?

Bill: They were right – they were up, not-- not close to the water; they were up in the parking lot for the Blue Shutters there. And as they got close enough, they would fire at the sleeves. You could see the rounds going off, and they would sometimes hit a sleeve; sometimes –

Anne: Did they know when they would hit it? I mean, would that be obvious?

Bill: You could –yeah, there would be spotters there with field glasses. The officers would be there, saying “OK train the gun a certain –“

Anne: Now you talked to me a little bit about the Fresh Pond Rock, the big rock that they had to blast.

Bill: That rock was there –

Anne: Tell me about – (*Is it*) your feeling that they wanted to blast it probably because it was in the line of fire?

Bill: Well, see we had machine-gun emplacements here, all along the beach. And probably some further back, but I don't know where they were. Naturally they didn't tell us and we didn't ask. But that gun, that rock would have been in-- the

field of fire was so thick, you couldn't put a bullet through it. You couldn't even put a 105 through it. So they wanted to get that down low because if the Germans got in here, there were a lot of other rocks they could hide behind; they could hide behind --not many you know; a half a dozen. But that's all you need is to get a little further on. That's probably one reason, and the other reason, it would interfere with some line of fire or sighting along the coast. It was the biggest thing out there, so they wanted that out. And I'm surprised they didn't blow it down lower, because they still left a little of it up. But they must have done it one winter, because we came back, and it was all a mess --

Anne: Yeah, I've been wanting to talk to somebody that actually saw it being blasted (refer to Carol Waterman's Oral History).

Bill: See the trouble is, so few people were down. I'm sure that --and if I ever get around to it--I'd love to go down and get through the archives, the Army records, to check out that field artillery group and see what they did, because there'd be a lot of stories in there.

Now, let's see; [in my notes] I got "2 PT boats on the 31st of July of '42, close offshore." Those weren't the ones we saw later on, you know. And, on 8/4, I have: "A machine gunner gave me a 30- caliber bullet." And he gave me the whole bullet, which he shouldn't have given me! They're only this big, you know. Actually, I could have taken it, but I knew what it was; and I knew what to do. (You could take it to my son [unintelligible] later on, with one of mine.)
????meaning And he whacked the end of it with a hammer just to see what would happen. Of course, it fired; and he got a piece of metal, which he's still got, in his thigh. [laughter] I said "you dumbbell, you could have been killed!"

Let's see, on August 5th, "Many planes fire machine guns--" That's not too-- This happened in Hartford. On May 4th, I've got down here, "B-24 crashes at xxx field in Hartford." Rensselaer Field was part of the Hamilton Standard -- and United Aircraft over there -- Ok, and I got "May 21st, many planes flying out of Charlestown xxx tests." Oh, and this is--oh wait a minute, I jumped to '44; I forgot I had to, I had to --I couldn't lay this out the way I wanted to. Though I did notice here in '44 the gun pits had been filled in, so they had pulled out by then.

Anne: Oh, that's interesting.

Anne: What did they -- Is there anything left there that would indicate that they were there?

Bill: No, because they were, it was just sandbags. Just sandbags. You know I suppose if you had a metal detector, you might dig down and find--well there wouldn't be any shells, because they didn't fire empty shells. Let's see now --'42 doesn't really go --[unintelligible comment from Anne and Bill] . June 14, I mean, July

14, 1943 – Chick, Marian my sister, Jean Sutherland and I went out in Chick’s boat and had a picnic on an island in Quonochontaug Pond. This was probably Bill’s Island, or something. They called ‘em that in those days.

Anne: And you weren’t supposed to be doing that, you don’t think?

Bill: I think -- No, it was all right , but she might not, you know, want to remember it, I don’t know! [laughter] How old was I then? [in] ‘43?

Anne: -- You weren’t that old!

Bill: 15—thir---14.

Anne: Old enough to get into a little trouble!

Bill: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don’t know; I thought I had Carol –the name—oh yeah-- No. Here, “Played with Chick Waterman; he has a thirteen and a half foot sailboat. Went for a ride in it on the 28th.” That was – I jumped –

Anne: This is at Quonnie Pond?

Bill: Yeah. That’s the xxx place. I would go out with Mr. Griffin, out in the boat. Uh -- Is that his name, Griffin? Yeah. He lived in the house –

Anne: That was Joann Thomsen’s uncle, I think. The Griffins –where she is now used to be the Griffins’. I think her –one of her aunts married a Griffin.

Bill: Yeah. Was he a teacher? I think he was a teacher. And he would, he and I would go fishing off the rocks. He was a nice guy. And then we would go out in his boat sometimes, out of the breachway. In those days you could row out. And then there was another fellow who lived in the house next to Watermans’, between Watermans’ and the next house down. Mc-something: McSweeney!

Anne: Sweeny. (*Editor’s note: Bill is not sure what this is about and is confused about names*)

Bill: Oh Sweeny? McSweeney? I don’t know. Uh, I thought I had something in here (*his notes*) about Carol Waterman. Now Carol would remember. Carol was probably 4 or 5 years younger than me. She was around like my sister’s age. Now –

Anne: She remembers things like –I remember her talking to me about the fishing and seining, the nets that they used to use for fishing.

Bill: We didn’t use nets much --

Anne: --Well No, [but] the fishermen used to have nets down on the beach and they used to pull them in.

Bill: Maybe they would— mostly they would use line, and you would throw it out. You wouldn't use the rod. That's how I – I would throw the line out. How about Billy Saunders? Is he around? Or is he deceased?

Anne: No, I have no idea about that. [unintelligible] But Jean Sutherland might know. She's around a lot because her daughter is helping me on the committee (*Quonochontaug Historical Society*).

Bill: Well, Jean might know, and then if you could find the –Donahues; they had the house next to Gustetter (*89 and 93 Surfside Avenue*). And they were from Norwich, or Baltic; now, I ran into her brother who was considerably younger than I, once in the Army. He was an Army lawyer, and the two of us got talking about something and I said, "Are you the Donahue that was from down in Quonochontaug?" And –he should have seen my name tag –but all of a sudden we realized we knew each other! And, I'm trying to think of anyone else who'll be down here. Now Julie Atwater, although she was after the war –she would come down to Smiths' house. And Smiths' was the one just below Larkins' and near – but she rented. And Welch – the Welches—I don't know where they are. They would rent "Quinona", from the Fellows. These people would rent all summer, see; so they would practically –And Billy Spring; if he were around, he'd probably remember something. He had that house with a car painted on the garage. (*On Oceanview Avenue between #17 and #29*)

Now Beverly Kass – was it Beverly? No Leslie Kass, who lived in –oh what was the name of that cottage –It was a Crepo cottage, I think.

Anne: Treasure House?

Bill: Treasure House (*45 Oceanview Avenue*). Now she might be around somewhere.

Anne: Well, I think that maybe you should hook up with Jean –xxx and xxx and Beverly. [laughter from both]

Bill: August 14, 1944 I was trying to learn the Finnish Polka at the Sea Breeze Inn. And I remember this –they were Finnish people, and they must have had some girls over here from Finland or something, who could barely speak English. And I remember she was chucking me under the chin, trying to get me to dance right. Which only made it worse! I couldn't dance right at all. [Anne-- Laughing] But it –we would go up there and it was a lot of fun.

Anne: But did you go more than once?

Bill: Oh yeah, we went up there quite a bit.

Anne: Is this on Friday nights? Is that when they had it?

Bill: Probably Friday nights, yeah. But did that – did they move that or burn it down or something

END OF INTERVIEW (Tape not operating correctly)

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