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WLBZ Radio, (January 01 1957) "Interview with Captain Farnsworth About Hurricane Warning Systems". *WLBZ Radio Station Records*. MS 608. Tape 8, part 1. Special Collections, Raymond H. Fogler Library, University of Maine.

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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Interview with Captain Walter Farnsworth about Hurricane Warning Systems

Date: Circa 1957

Recording number: Reel-to-reel Tape 8, part 1

Length of recording: 5:42

[Transcript begins]

Hunter: Well this is the hurricane season and there's been considerable attention focused on the hurricanes, so today we're going to take advantage of a guest who has dropped in here at the studios of WLBZ be easy to find out about the hurricane warning system. We're very happy to have as a guest here at the studios and offices of WLBZ Captain Walter L. Farnsworth of Jonesport and Captain Farnsworth was telling us about the early days of the hurricane warning system and even days before there was any such thing. We knew very much that you'd be interested in that story so we're going to ask him a few questions about it right now. Captain Farnsworth, now you've been a seaman all your life. Suppose you tell us how you got interested in forecasting hurricanes in the first place?

Farnsworth: I was a Reserve Officer in the United States Navy and I only had to get in action during war. I was at liberty in peace times and during this period between the first and second war, I was stationed in Galveston, Texas, for the New York Board of Marine Underwriters. Of course my company carried all the insurance on docks, ships, walls, and all floating equipment. At that time we were getting one or two reports from Washington pertaining to hurricanes that was traveling up the Gulf it was going to hit the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. And we would receive two reports a day from Washington. I'm not finding fault with the Weather Bureau. They did the best they could do and the equipment they had to work with, but the committee that I was chairman of decided that if we put more boats, put the Coast Guard out in the Gulf of Mexico, to pick up this data and transfer it over to, up to Washington that we would get more of a report on more facts than we was at the present time. Because the Washington press came out quoting the Weather Bureau saying that it was impossible for them to check these hurricanes intelligently because the lack of vessels in that area. So after two-three years trying to induce the Coast Guard to take this over, we decided we would have it legislated and we had it go through our Hurricane Patrol Bill. It went through the Ways and Means Committee and it went through the House of Representative and the Senators unanimously. But when it reached the President, the late President Roosevelt's desk, he vetoed the bill, so that we was all very down hearted, but we made it possible for me to have a private interview with the late President Roosevelt on the next fall in year of 37 and the Navy was present, the Coast Guard, Admiral Wishi was the head of the Coast Guard, the Weather Bureau, and our Texas Representatives which were our Congressman and two Senators and myself. And after one hour and ten minutes on my feet the president decided quickly he says it's too close to

hurricane season to have this legislative but I'll send out an executive order to the Admiral of the Coast Guard to put this program in action. Which he did.

Our program calls for Coast Guard vessels on the surface in a in a safe position pick up the force and direction of the wind on the hour and send this ashore so that we'd be able to know where it was going to hit the coast which was very, very satisfactory. But after they had it about a year, a year and a half, they took it over with the airplanes with the Navy and they put the planes perpendicular on the job. We had it horizontal, as you know, on the ocean and the planes has taken over from that time and up to the present time. They've done a wonderful, wonderful job and as for myself personally as an ex ship master and I've gone through four or five of these hurricanes, tropical hurricanes, and I faced tornadoes in the Indian Ocean, I think they're doing a wonderful job. But I did not know at that time when was down in the Gulf of Mexico, range in this hurricane to protect the people in that area and on the southern coast of United States, that after I retired for as a captain in 52 and come to Jonesport to stay the rest of my days in my old home that they send the hurricanes up here, but they're up here, and my project is still working and I feel very, very proud there through that, through our efforts, we can tell the people in New England when and where these storms are hitting.

Hunter: Thank you very much, Captain Farnsworth. You just heard from Captain Walter L Farnsworth, now of Jonesport, as he just told you, who way back a good many years ago became interested in the forecasting of hurricanes and so it is because of his pioneer work that today we have the hurricane forecasting system which now alerts us and gives us a chance to prepare for the hurricanes, if and when they come in our direction.

[Transcript ends]

For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

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