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Interview with
Charles Timlin
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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(Signature)
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Oral History Collection

Charles Timlin

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Charles Timlin for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 8, 1978, in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Timlin in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the fleet repair ship USS Vestal on December 7, 1941, during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Timlin, to begin this interview, would you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Timlin: Well, I was born in Fort Worth, Texas, on September 20, 1922. I went to R. L. Paschal High School and graduated. I graduated in 1940 and then joined the Navy on December 10, 1940.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service in December, 1940?

Mr. Timlin: Well, for several reasons. For one, I liked three good

meals a day, a place to stay, twenty-one dollars a month, and my clothes furnished. I grew up during the Depression, and all of those things were important to me. I had always wanted to join the Navy, anyway.

Marcello: It's very interesting that you mention that, because a great many people of your generation give economics as the reason for having entered the service. In other words, you weren't making a lot of money in the service, but there was a certain amount of security. And even as late as 1940, it was still pretty tough to get a job.

Timlin: That's right. With a high school education and no experience, it was practically impossible.

Marcello: Why did you decide upon the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches?

Timlin: I don't know. I just always liked the Navy. I'd seen sailors come in, and they were always having a big time. I loved the uniform, and they looked glamorous; and I knew they traveled, and that was the only way I was going to get to travel.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs at that time, that is, at the time when you entered the service?

Timlin: Practically none, really. I wasn't interested in world history, I mean, world events. I knew there was a war in Europe, but it didn't impress me very much. I didn't join the Navy to

fight for democracy. I just joined for a place to stay and for the adventure and travel.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Timlin: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need as part of the record?

Timlin: Well, not really. There is nothing that is historically valuable (chuckle). That was my first trip away from home. I joined on December 10th . . . but not really tough. It was tough, but the food was good and I didn't mind it.

Marcello: How long was boot camp at that time?

Timlin: At that time, it was six weeks.

Marcello: In other words, they had cut back on it considerably from what it had been.

Timlin: Yes. It had been--I don't know--twelve or sixteen weeks before that. They were gearing up. I didn't realize it but they were; they put us through pretty fast.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Timlin: Well, from boot camp we took tests, and my highest grade was in clerical and arithmetic and my lowest was mechanical; so the Navy in its wisdom sent me to boilermaker school at Dearborn, Michigan. I went for a month of academic training--through just regular school at Great Lakes--and then I went to Dearborn, Michigan, to the Ford plant there to boilermaker school for

three months. I came back to San Diego and then caught an old transport, the Wharton, to Pearl Harbor, where I went aboard the Vestal.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to boilermaker school?

Timlin: Well, really, I didn't fight the system. They had me convinced that whatever they did was all right, but I thought it was a little strange. But after I got there. . . Dearborn, Michigan, is only six miles from Detroit, and I liked the liberty. The people liked us--there wasn't that many sailors around. There were all kinds of girls up there, and they liked Navy uniforms, so, you know, it was all right.

Marcello: How would you rate that boilermaker school there in Dearborn? Was it excellent? Good? Fair? What can you say about the training?

Timlin: I think it was excellent. When we first went there, Ford wanted to pay us five extra dollars a day, because we were working in the plant itself; we were actually doing the job. I crawled around those great big old boilers that were three stories high and worked on them--did the work. And then it wasn't just all on-the-job training. We had so many hours a week of classroom training, and the instructors were great. It was a tough school, and the discipline was rough because the people they had in charge didn't want us to get too influenced by civilians; they

wanted us to remember we're in the Navy even though we were away. But it was an outstanding school.

Marcello: Did you come away from boilermaker school interested in that sort of work and so on?

Timlin: Well, (chuckle) yes, I did. I went aboard the Vestal, and the division officer took me down to the boiler room--I mean, the boiler shop--and he introduced me to the leading chief--Chief Roberts. He was about 6'2", and everybody else in there was 6'4" or 6'5" or something, weighing 200 pounds or more; and I walked in there at 135 or 140 pounds and 5'7". Then the division officer looked down at me, and he said, "Here's your new boilermaker striker, Bob." He looked down at me and said, "What makes you think you're a boilermaker?" I said, "Well, I went to school," which didn't impress him one iota (chuckle). But I managed to live that down with a lot of hard work. They had to grunt once, and I had to grunt three times; that was the only difference.

Marcello: After you got out of boilermaker school, did you then pick up the Vestal?

Timlin: Yes. After I got out of the boilermaker school I went back to San Diego, and we were in a holding division there for--oh, I don't know--a couple of weeks or so. Then I caught the Wharton, and then we went to Pearl, and then we picked up the Vestal. That's where I picked it up--Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Describe what the Vestal was like, because I think those repair ships are very, very interesting.

Timlin: Well, to start with, it was old. It was a converted coal collier, and it was commissioned in about 1906. The facilities weren't the greatest. We slept in the shop on cots. There was no air conditioning, of course. There was no intercom system like they have on modern ships. If they wanted to pass the word, "Chow down," or "General quarters," or whatever, a boatswain's mate came around and blew his pipe and hollered down whatever the word was that he wanted to pass. There was an old pressure fire room on there in the engine room. The fire room was pressured, and in the coolest spots it was maybe 140 degrees, and up above it was 160 degrees or so. So it wasn't the most comfortable place, but I didn't even think about that. You know, now it would kill me.

Marcello: I gather that those repair ships had all sorts of specialists aboard them.

Timlin: I'll tell you what . . . now I was in the boilermaker shop. All right, we had the boilermakers, and we bent our own tubes-- just none of this stuff where they were already bent in a factory. They had molders and a foundry; they had blacksmiths; they had welders; they had patternmakers; they had carpenters; they had sailmakers.

Marcello: They probably had an optical section, too, did they not?

- Timlin: Optical section, yes. They had a machine shop. I'm just trying to think of some other crafts that they had, but they had most anything . . . I can't think of anything that you needed to repair a ship that they didn't have.
- Marcello: A ship of this type was designed to make all sorts of small repairs and so on that the battleships and cruisers would need. Or could they make major repairs as well?
- Timlin: By major repairs, I'm talking about the fact that we could rebuild a whole condenser; we could make big parts for machinery; we could overhaul their main engines. Now hull work might have been something else, because they would have to go in the yards for that.
- Marcello: Normally, the Vestal would stay right there at Pearl Harbor, would it not, and the battleships and cruisers would come to it?
- Timlin: Yes. See, what would happen, they would come in and go alongside Battleship Row, and then we would pull alongside. We were anchored out. We would go alongside of them; they wouldn't go alongside of us. We even went out on fleet maneuvers with them. Why we were there, I have absolutely no idea (chuckle). But we went back to San Pedro for a couple of weeks, which was all right; it was the first time we had got back to the States. Yes, they would come in, and we would do whatever they needed to have done.

- Marcello: What was the chow like aboard the Vestal?
- Timlin: In those days I didn't know what bad chow was, you know. It was good to me. It wasn't outstanding. When I got to other places and when I hit the beach, why, I certainly went to a restaurant for a change. But it was pretty good.
- Marcello: All in all, how would you describe the morale aboard the Vestal and in the pre-Pearl Harbor Navy in general during that period?
- Timlin: Outstanding. They were there because they wanted to be there. They enjoyed the liberty, but, of course, they didn't think there was enough of it. They liked Pearl; they liked all of it. They liked the bars, the cathouses--the whole smear, you know.
- Marcello: I gather that athletics played a relatively important role in the life of the fleet during that pre-Pearl Harbor period.
- Timlin: Oh, it sure did! We had a ball team that we called the "Vestal Virgins," and the ball players, if they were on the deck force, weren't allowed to handle lines if a ship came alongside or if we came alongside, because they didn't want their fingers hurt. We had a guy named Finscraft; he was a blacksmith, a big, burly, son-of-a-gun. He was a champion wrestler. Then we had a second class boatswain's mate--I can't think of his name--and he was a boxer--real good.
- Marcello: These smokers were an especially favorite event at that time, were they not?

- Timlin: Yes. In fact, we had . . . what was it? I think it was an English ship that had been shot up . . . she didn't come alongside us--I forget which one it was--but we had some of their men come over, and we had smokers with them. They whipped us up; they were good. I can't remember what their ship was that had been shot up.
- Marcello: Was it the Warspite?
- Timlin: I can't remember. It came out of China, I suppose--somewhere.
- Marcello: What was the on-the-job training like that you received aboard the Vestal? Did those senior petty officers and so on seem willing to train you and learn you the ropes, so to speak?
- Timlin: Yes, they did. They didn't know a lot of psychology, "This is the way to do it, and this is the right way to do it, and you'd better do it that way." But they were patient enough because . . . you know, you make mistakes, especially when cutting tubes out of a boiler. You might put a hole in a tube sheet or rip it a little bit, so they would show you how to smooth it out, how to right your mistakes. But mostly, they'd show you how, and they'd say, "This is the way to do it." If you made a mistake, they wouldn't . . . as long as you were trying, they wouldn't bother you. You know, if they saw that you were lazy or something, why, they wouldn't put up with that.
- Marcello: I would assume that, given the fact that most of those ships were undermanned at that time, they were always glad to get a

new man and do their best to keep him.

Timlin: Well, they did. You didn't transfer around like later in the Navy, you know. If you got someplace, you stayed there. There were guys that had been on there for fifteen or twenty years; you didn't go anywhere else. A big part of them had been in the China Fleet, and this was as far back as they got and as far back as they wanted to get. They weren't interested in the States.

Marcello: So you did have some of those old Asiatic sailors aboard the Vestal.

Timlin: Quite a few.

Marcello: They were quite a bunch of characters, were they not?

Timlin: Well, yes. You could tell the Asiatic sailors, because every Saturday morning when they gave the shots for syphilis, they were all lined up up there. You know, you had to get a shot once a week for eighteen months, and if you missed one week, you had to start all over again. Some of them had been getting them for ten years. They couldn't give it to anyone else, but they still had it. So you knew who they were.

They loved to tell you about China, because that was heaven to them. They sent them all back. They didn't come back; they sent them back.

Marcello: I understand most of those people had a lot of tattoos, and some of them had gold earrings and things of this nature.

- Timlin: Well, the ones in Pearl didn't have the gold earrings--they took them out when they got there--but they had the tattoos; I mean, they were covered all over. That's what a sailor did--he got tattooed. That's what you were supposed to do, we thought. It took a long time to learn different (chuckle).
- Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the daily routine of the Vestal. Now you mentioned that even from time to time you would go on these fleet maneuvers. That, I assume, didn't occur very often.
- Timlin: I went on one before the war. We went out and I don't know what we did. All we did is wander around out there while the battleships shot, and then we finally went on to San Pedro.
- Marcello: I would assume that the Vestal was not very heavily armed.
- Timlin: No. Well, let's see. Aft we had a 5-inch .50-caliber, and forward I think we had one; and we had a couple of .50's and a couple of .30's, and that was about it. We weren't meant to fight anybody. We weren't fast enough.
- Marcello: Where was your battle station aboard the Vestal?
- Timlin: I was in a repair crew. We were down in a hold, and I had to sit down there and wait for somebody to call on me.
- Marcello: Now, as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, did your routine change any? Could you notice any change in your routine aboard the Vestal?

- Timlin: The only real routine that changed--that I had noticed--was that we had more general quarters, and we had them not during working hours but in the middle of the night and at odd hours.
- Marcello: I'm sure there was a great deal of bitching and griping when this sort of thing took place?
- Timlin: Oh, yes. We never thought about war. If there was, it wouldn't last two weeks, you know.
- Marcello: And especially since you were not a fighting ship, I'm sure it was pretty hard to see the value of those general quarters drills.
- Timlin: Yes, you know, all we did was fix stuff; and besides, we didn't have much to shoot, anyway.
- Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and again as conditions between the two countries continued to worsen, did you and your buddies in your bull sessions ever think about the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?
- Timlin: No, no one ever talked about it.
- Marcello: When you thought of an individual Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of an individual did you usually conjure up in your own mind?
- Timlin: I can't remember ever thinking about a Japanese. I know there were a few guys on there that had been to Japan on liberty and they loved it, but that was as much as I knew about Japan. Of course, in Honolulu you saw Japanese, but they were all . . . you

know, Japanese and Chinese was all the same to me. I didn't know any difference. Really, I didn't think of any difference.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your liberty routine aboard the Vestal. How did the liberty routine work there?

Timlin: Well, it was port and starboard--every other day. If you were below first class petty officer, your liberty was up at midnight; if you were first class or chief, then you could stay overnight.

Marcello: When would liberty normally commence?

Timlin: Well, on an ordinary working day, it would commence at about 1600--4:00 or 4:30. On Wednesday, it was called "Ropeyarn Sunday," and we'd get liberty at one o'clock. It was supposed to be an old Navy tradition; it was a day that you sewed the holes up in your socks and got your clothes squared away and things of this nature, but we usually went ashore. And then, of course, on Saturday--after Saturday morning inspection--then you could go ashore about twelve o'clock; and Sunday it was usually about twelve o'clock--after church.

Marcello: When you had port and starboard liberty, you also would not get the entire weekend off. In other words, one-half the crew would go on Saturday, and one-half would go on Sunday.

Timlin: That's right.

Marcello: What did you normally do when you went on liberty?

Timlin: I did what sailors do--they get stewed, screwed and tattooed, you know (chuckle). You went ashore and went and got something

to eat; you went to a bar and you drank; you went to a cathouse; and then you went back to a bar. That's about it. We didn't go swimming or things like that; I didn't even think about it.

Marcello: I understand that there were long lines for everything.

Timlin: Not before the war, no. In fact, there were no lines. That happened after the war when everyone came in.

Marcello: A lot of people like to say that if somebody were going to attack Pearl Harbor, the best time to have done so would have been on a Sunday morning. How do you feel about that? Do you feel that a Sunday morning was the best time?

Timlin: Sure, because that was the time where we didn't have reveille. They had reveille but you didn't have to get up; I mean, if you didn't want breakfast, you could just lay in your sack. You had from noon Saturday until midnight Sunday to get drunk, and you didn't feel like getting up. That was your big night to go ashore, you know. Port and starboard doesn't sound like much, but with that money we're making, we didn't go ashore but once or twice between paydays. So Sunday, sure, that was the day everybody relaxed.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us up to that weekend of December 7, 1941, so let's go into a little bit of detail and tell me about that weekend. Let's start with Saturday, December 6th, Do you remember what your routine was on that particular Saturday?

- Timlin: Well, I remember Friday, December 5th. That was the day we went alongside the Arizona, because she needed some boiler work and some condenser work. So we went alongside of her on Friday . . . we got paid on the fifth and the twentieth, and Friday was payday. Well, I didn't have liberty on Friday, but on Saturday I had liberty--the 6th--and I had a pocketful of money. So in order to go ashore--it was the first time I'd been aboard a battleship--I had to walk across the Arizona to get on the dock to go ashore. So that was my only time, and I had to come back that night. That was the only time I was really aboard a battleship.
- Marcello: That's kind of interesting that you mentioned that payday was on the fifth. That meant, of course, the people aboard the Vestal at least had a great deal of money on that weekend.
- Timlin: That's right. Well, the whole Navy got paid on the fifth and the twentieth, so they were all over there.
- Marcello: So again, that particular Sunday of December 7th would have probably been a good time to attack for that reason, also.
- Timlin: Because a lot of sailors only made liberty twice a month; we got paid twice a month--the fifth and the twentieth--and that's when they went ashore, you know, maybe one or two days later. But the rest of the time they didn't have any money to go ashore, so they just stayed aboard.
- Marcello: Do you recall what you did that particular Saturday, then, when

you went ashore?

Timlin: Yes, I got my first tattoo.

Marcello: Were you sober when you got it?

Timlin: Not very (chuckle). I wasn't too bad, but I had a few drinks to get my nerve up because I never had a tattoo before; and then when they started (chuckle), I felt like I needed some more to get over it.

But there is one thing that I never will forget, because I was reminded of it the next day. When I walked out of that tattoo shop, they had a sign up there: "Do Not Get This Tattoo In Salt Water." Well, the next day we were told to abandon ship, and that crossed my mind at that time. It was a dumb thing to think about, but I thought, "What about my tattoo?" (chuckle)

Anyway, that night I went ashore, and I drank and I ate, and I got tattooed and I visited the house, and I came back at midnight. At that time, I was on mess cooking in the chiefs' quarters, and so I had to get up real early the next morning to be ready in case one of those chiefs wanted breakfast, you know.

Marcello: Mess cooking meant that you would actually be serving meals and so on and so forth to tables of people.

Timlin: Yes. We didn't cook it . . . well, we did, say, on Sundays. We had a cook assigned down there, but what we would do, like, on

Sunday when the cook . . . he was a first class and he probably wasn't even back yet, so we would cook eggs and bacon--we could do that much. But they'd have a couple of guys down there to clean up and serve breakfast whenever they got up.

Marcello: What sort of shape were you in when you got back aboard the Vestal that night?

Timlin: Well, (chuckle) I wasn't very good. I don't remember . . . I know I came back across the Arizona, but I don't remember hitting the sack, really.

Marcello: Were you still tied up next to the Arizona?

Timlin: Oh, yes. We were alongside on Friday, and we hadn't gotten started yet.

Marcello: Okay, I think that probably brings us into Sunday morning of December 7th, and again what I want you to do is to go into as much detail as you can remember concerning your activities that day.

Timlin: Well, as I said, I got up early; I had to get up at 5:30-- after being out until midnight. I went down to the chiefs' quarters and started getting things ready--sweeping down and getting things ready for their breakfast whenever they decided to get up. I didn't do much of anything. After I got everything set up, I just drank coffee and sat around, and a few of them came wondering through--there was always some early

risers--and I fixed a few breakfasts. But nothing really went on too much until just before eight o'clock, when we started hearing all the noise. At first, I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it. Then we heard . . . well, a boatswain's mate was supposed to bring us to general quarters; but he came out hollering, "Quarters for Muster," instead of general quarters. He was all fouled up, and he didn't really know what happened.

Marcello: "Quarters for Muster" really meant that you were to go to your living spaces?

Timlin: Just go up on deck. We had certain places up on deck to go muster. Well, I didn't have to go do that because I was mess cooking, and the chiefs didn't have to, either. But then pretty soon we heard some big explosions, and so somebody come down and says, "By God, I think we're being attacked!" And so about that time a big ball of smoke came down the hatch in the chiefs' quarters, and then they called general quarters.

Marcello: This was just a ball of smoke that came down . . . no flames or anything like that?

Timlin: No, no flames or anything. It was just smoke. And so then they sounded general quarters: "Man your battle stations!" And so by then my heart was going about 900 miles per hour, and I ran out of there.

I got up topside and I looked over on the Arizona, and I saw planes coming in, and they were strafing. I heard this

boatswain's mate over there--I presume he was a boatswain's mate--yelling, "Hit the deck!" Well, I was aft and my general quarters station was all the way forward on the ship, so I went up the port side. By then there were explosions coming from the Arizona; they had been hit. It was blowing stuff over on our ship, and the only thing I remember seeing was small stores--clothes from small stores--and money, but I didn't stop to pick up any of it.

Marcello: And this was all being blown from the Arizona?

Timlin: Being blown from the Arizona over on us. I went forward and went to my general quarters station down below in a compartment, and we was supposed to wait there until we were needed. We just listened to the explosions.

One time they called us up . . . we had been hit aft, but the bomb went all the way through us. Then we were hit forward, but it hit in a bunch of steel that we had stored there, and so it exploded down there and caused a fire. Well, the fire was close to a magazine--ammunition magazine--and so they tried to cut in the sprinkler system from the topside. It had been so long since it had been used that it was rusted and it broke. So someone had to crawl down this little hatch, because there was another valve down below where we would try to open it up.

Well, they called us up there, and one guy went down. We had a line on him, and the smoke got him, and we had to

pull him back up. Another guy went down, and the smoke got him, and they had to pull him back up. I went down and just got it started, and then it started getting me, and then they pulled me back up. Finally, after about I don't how many trips--three or four guys--we finally got the darn thing open and got water to flood the magazine. It took that much because it hadn't been used.

Marcello: In the meantime, before all this happened, you were simply sitting down there in that compartment.

Timlin: That's right--imagining all sorts of things.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what was going through your mind down there while you were sitting there.

Timlin: I was scared I was going to die; that's what went through my mind. I didn't know what was happening, you know. And one guy come down and said, "My God! They're tearing up the whole place!" And then he left. We really didn't need him (chuckle), because I knew they were tearing up the whole place.

Marcello: What did it feel like when the Arizona blew? Since you were that close to the Arizona, you must have been able to feel the concussion and after effects.

Timlin: Yes, yes. That's when I thought I was dead, because when it finally did blow up, well, just the noise and the concussion rocked the whole ship. We thought, well, this was it, that we'd had it. But then it settled down, and then we had two

people that cut the lines from our ship, and we got underway then. One guy was this boxer I was telling you about. I can't think of his name. He had just gotten a summary court-martial, and they were supposed to send him to jail, and he was one of them. And there was a lieutenant junior grade who had been on shore patrol and had hit some guy with his hand, and they had given him a general court-martial and took so many points from him that, if it hadn't been for the war, he'd been j.g. still, I suppose. Anyway, they cut the lines, and then they held a line . . . we took about forty or fifty guys from the Arizona. They held a line from the Arizona to us, and these guys slid over before we got underway. And then we went up on Merry's Point.

Marcello: How long did it normally take a ship such as the Vestal to get underway, that is, under normal circumstances?

Timlin: Well, we set a record that morning, because I knew some friends down there in that fire room. Ordinarily, it takes about an hour-and-a-half to two hours, but we got it away in eight minutes. What was the name of that chief? He was a big fellow. They cut those burners in full blower on cold boilers, and they opened up those engines wide open. We were sinking, but we got up on Merry's Point before we went down.

Marcello: In other words, you actually beached the Vestal?

Timlin: Yes. We were sinking. The high altitude bomb that hit us . . .

that's what we were hit by. They weren't aiming at us, but they . . . and their torpedoes went under us. They weren't really after us. It went all the way through us aft, and we were taking on water, and we went up on Merry's Point.

Marcello: How far away was Merry's Point from where you were moored?

Timlin: I can't remember. We were at Battleship Row, and it was quite a ways.

Marcello: Did you come under any more fire while you were making way over to Merry's Point?

Timlin: No.

Marcello: Was this a deliberate move on the part of the people in command, that is, to move over toward Merry's Point?

Timlin: Yes. Well, you see, our commanding officer . . . when the Arizona blew--he was on the bridge--it blew him over the side. His name was Cassin Young. He was commander at that time, and he won a Medal of Honor that day and got promoted to captain. Then he went aboard the San Francisco and was killed when it went through the Jap fleet up at Guadalcanal. But when he was blown over the side, well, the "exec" took over and said, "Abandon ship!" He went berserk. He called down to us to abandon ship, and that's when I thought about my tattoo. I thought, "My God! I'm not supposed to get this in salt water!" Well, fortunately, we got up topside, and the commanding officer got back aboard, and he said, "We're

not abandoning ship; we're getting it underway and we're going!"

Marcello: Now while the ship is underway, is that when you were fooling around with those valves and trying to put out that fire?

Timlin: Before that.

Marcello: Did you contain that fire?

Timlin: Yes, flooded that compartment.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens when you go aground over at Merry's Point?

Timlin: Well, we just stayed there. In fact, we stayed there for several days because they didn't have room for us in dry dock.

Marcello: Did you do anything in the meantime, that is, in terms of making small repairs and so on on the ships that were in the harbor?

Timlin: Well, see, we had divers aboard ship, and we sent them down to put on a temporary patch . . . to help put on a temporary patch. We worked from the inside and the outside--both. We pumped it out, and then we put on a temporary patch--we did that. Then we sallied ship, and we got ourself off of Merry's Point. To sally ship is where everyone on the ship gets on the starboard side, and they say, "Sally!" and you run to the port, and you just rock the ship back and forth, and that will get it off.

Marcello: What were you personally doing in the aftermath of the attack?

Timlin: Well, after it was over and after we were up on the beach,

that night we had these planes come in from Midway. We shot them all down, of course. I say "we"; I meant everyone.

Marcello: Did you see that particular action?

Timlin: Yes! Well, I saw it start, and I was hiding behind some boxes up topside, and I found out they were full of ammunition after it was all over. Yes, I saw them.

Marcello: Describe that action.

Timlin: Well, the planes came over, and we thought they were Japanese, I suppose. And just everybody started firing. I mean, they were firing on the beach, they were firing on all the ships, and the whole sky was just lit up.

Marcello: With all those tracers, I suppose it looked like the Fourth of July.

Timlin: Yes! It was just like daylight. I was hiding behind these boxes. After we done that, then we had rumors that . . . oh, my God, let's see. Paratroopers were in the hills, and troops were landing at Fort Weaver--the Japanese were there.

So they sent a bunch of us dumb, frightened kids over there with guns that we didn't know which ends to point. They put us in a hole, and every time I'd stick my head up out of that hole, some other sailor would shoot at me, you know. They were shooting cows; they were shooting each other. No one was killed, fortunately.

Marcello: Where was Fort Weaver located?

Timlin: I don't really know (chuckle). We just went over in Honolulu there, but they said we were going to Fort Weaver--wherever Fort Weaver was. I don't have no idea.

Marcello: But you actually didn't go to Fort Weaver?

Timlin: No, we went right over on the beach on Honolulu.

Marcello: And did you remain there the rest of the night?

Timlin: Yes! Cold! Frightened!

Marcello: I'm sure there was all sorts of sporadic gun fire during the night.

Timlin: Well, every time . . . well, they didn't say, "Halt! Who goes there?" They started firing, and then they said, "Who goes there?" We weren't that well-trained; we had a little bit of this type thing in boot camp.

Marcello: What sort of weapons were you issued? Were they old Springfield '03 rifles?

Timlin: Yes.

Marcello: Did you squeeze off any rounds yourself?

Timlin: No. Every time I'd stick my head up, somebody would shoot at me; I didn't do anything . . . just cower (chuckle).

Marcello: I'm sure you didn't get very much sleep that night.

Timlin: Didn't get any.

Marcello: Had you ever gotten anything to eat that day?

Timlin: Yes, that afternoon we were all topside, and they brought out sandwiches and some apples and some oranges and stuff. And

about the time everybody sat down, some son-of-a-gun on the ship fired a .30-caliber machine gun, and there went all the food, you know. But I held on to my sandwich. I lost my apple and orange (chuckle). I don't know what he was doing. He was just fooling with it, and he didn't know what he was doing, I suppose.

Marcello: When did you get your first chance to observe all the damage that had been done? Now obviously on the 7th, your view of the situation was rather narrow in that you knew what you had to do, and you had your own little world in effect that you were living in. When was the first time you had a chance to observe the whole scene?

Timlin: Well, let's see. It wasn't the 7th. I suppose it was the next day, because we were back aboard ship and we had a lot of work to do--to clean up the ship.

Marcello: What sort of scene did you see before you?

Timlin: Well, I saw a harbor full of oil, wreckage . . . and the smell, I suppose . . . when the body is burned in oil, that smell stays with you the rest of your life. You can't describe it, but you can't forget it. We had some dead. I think it was about thirty, so we had to get them out--especially from the aft part which was all flooded.

Marcello: Did you personally have to take part in that operation?

Timlin: No, I didn't have to lift them out. I just had to help put them

in mattress covers. We had people working in the boats-- small boats--around the ship looking for bodies from around. All the oil and the smell . . . it looked like, "My God!" We've had a war that we had already lost!" I thought that was it. I didn't see how we could ever get out of that.

Marcello: So it did shake your confidence quite a bit afterwards?

Timlin: It sure did, yes. I thought, "Well, this is it! We've had it!" But then the carriers came in, and, you know, everybody just seemed to go to work.

Marcello: How was the morale at that point?

Timlin: Pretty low. But everybody was just . . . I don't know whether it was low or not. It was low but they were pissed; they were mad.

Marcello: Anger, I think, is the word that I've heard used quite a bit.

Timlin: They were mad, and they said, "They can't do this to us!" We thought we were the greatest Navy in the world. We thought we were better than the limeys. But they were mad, you know, "Let's get 'em!"

Marcello: I assume from that point on that you and the rest of the personnel aboard the Vestal were being kept pretty busy in making repairs and so on and so forth.

Timlin: Oh, yes. See, we had to wait. Because we weren't a combat ship, we had to wait our turn in dry dock. But in the meantime,

we patched, and we made do, and we furnished things, and we sent people over on other ships to work.

Marcello: Did you personally go around to some of these other ships?

Timlin: No. No, I wasn't that qualified, really. You know, they sent the real boilermakers. I was just a striker, I was still mess cooking, you know (chuckle). In the meantime, I had to help clean up oil and stuff after I got off mess cooking.

Marcello: I understand that oil was very thick and gelatinous.

Timlin: Yes, that bunker oil is just about . . . you know, it's thicker than molasses. We had to heat it to 180 degrees to get it to burn.

Marcello: Were there still fires the next day, or by that time had most of them been put out? I'm referring now to December 8th.

Timlin: No, I don't remember any fires the next day. The next day we had flare-ups about the two-man subs coming. Then you'd see a destroyer running across the harbor dropping depth charges.

Marcello: Were there all sorts of general quarters sounded during that aftermath?

Timlin: Yes, because of everything that had happened. And there were some two-man subs; they did get some of those. But then every time you would hear a depth charge, why, here you would go and you'd think, well, that they were back again. We had rumors that the Jap fleet was going to the West Coast, and we

sent ships out there to try to intercept it and all that. They never shot anything but whales.

Marcello: When was it that the Vestal finally got into dry dock?

Timlin: I'm not sure exactly, but I think it was about maybe a week or so . . . maybe two.

Marcello: And then after you got out of dry dock, did you remain right there at Pearl Harbor?

Timlin: We did for a while. Then we went to New Caledonia . . . Fiji Islands . . . New Hebrides.

Marcello: So you stayed with the Vestal quite a while then?

Timlin: Until 1944--February of '44.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Timlin, that's probably a good place to end this interview unless you have any other comments you'd like to add relative to the attack. Is there anything that we need to talk about that I haven't asked?

Timlin: No, I didn't even think I could remember as much as I did, really.

Marcello: Did you see any particular acts of heroism or anything of that nature that stands out in your mind?

Timlin: Well, when we went up on the bow, I saw this boatswain's mate holding that line while men from the Arizona was crawling out. There was a pharmacist's mate who was carrying sick people in while they were still strafing. I didn't see the "old man" get blown over the side or come back, either. When they said

to abandon ship, I saw this coxswain--third class boat-
swain's mate--hanging on the line that we were anchored to
or tied up to. He couldn't swim and he didn't want to go
down, and he couldn't get back up, and he was in a horrible
mess. They had boats out, and they finally got him off.
I don't remember any . . .or I don't know any heroes or
cowards (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, again, I want to thank you very much for having taken
time to participate. You said a lot of very interesting and
important things. I'm sure that the scholars will find your
comments most valuable when they use them to write about
Pearl Harbor.

Timlin: Well, I hope so.