

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
258

Interview with
John A. Murphy
December 6, 1974

Place of Interview: Anaheim, California
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: open
Approved: John A. Murphy
(Signature)
Date: Dec 6, 1974

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Oral History Collection

John Murphy

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Anaheim, California Date: December 6, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing John Murphy for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 6, 1974, in Anaheim, California. I am interviewing Mr. Murphy in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the repair ship USS Vestal on December 7, 1941, during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor.

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

Mr. Murphy: I was born in Oxnard, California. I graduated from high school in Moorpark, California.

Dr. Marcello: When were you born?

Mr. Murphy: In January, 1921. My occupation now is an electrician.

Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Murphy: September 16, 1939.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Murphy: Well, I graduated from high school in 1938. I had quit living at home, more or less. My parents had separated. I was an only child. I was old enough to go out on my own. I was seventeen when I graduated from high school. I wanted to become an electrician, but in 1938 jobs were very scarce. I was doing farm work for twenty-cents an hour whenever I could find it. Somebody suggested the CCC camps. Then other people said, "Oh, no, no. That wouldn't be the thing to do."

But I decided I wanted to join something. So I decided my first choice would be the Navy. So about the beginning of 1939, I went down to the recruiting office to join the Navy. It wasn't that simple. In 1939, they didn't seem to want anybody in the Navy.

Marcello: Why was this?

Murphy: I guess there was a lot of people like me, probably, out of work that wanted to join the Navy. They weren't expanding the Navy very much at that time, although I think maybe they had started. Anyhow, after a long wait and, I think, with Germany and Great Britain going to war,

suddenly I was called. I think Germany and Great Britain went to war in September. When I was called in, they rushed me through the training station.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Murphy: At San Diego.

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

Murphy: Well, they had things like "learn a trade, see the world," and that sounded better than what the others had to offer.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that economic factors played a role in your entering the Navy. You know, this is an explanation that a lot of individuals of your generation give for having entered the service--a matter of economics. Jobs were still scarce. In fact, the great depression really was still going on yet.

Murphy: That's probably the main reason most had joined.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast with world affairs at that particular time, that is, at the time that you entered the service?

Murphy: In 1939?

Marcello: Yes.

Murphy: I hadn't been too concerned with it, I don't think.

Marcello: In other words, it wasn't a matter of patriotism at that time that motivated your joining the service. It was more

economics, a chance for some travel, and a chance to learn a trade that influenced your decision.

Murphy: I wanted to learn a trade, and the thought of travel sounded good. But as far as being patriotic, that didn't enter into it at all.

Marcello: Okay, so where did you go after you left boot camp at San Diego?

Murphy: Well, I was only in boot camp . . . instead of the normal four months, I think I finished boot camp about November 11, of 1939, after going in on September 16. I went aboard a Navy tanker. I think it was the Kanawha--it's probably named after a river--and was transferred to the Vestal that was in San Pedro.

Marcello: In other words, you just boarded the Kanawha to take you to San Pedro?

Murphy: Instead of getting on the train, yes. I was very disappointed in the training station. They said there was a chance to go to electrician's school, but it seemed like when I took the examination I had a mental block. Maybe it was a case of being restless through all of that training or that it was such a different thing from coming right off of the farm, although I usually lived in the small towns. I probably didn't do very well on the test. Then they said I'd be given a choice of two ships. So I put down possibly Pensacola and one

other heavy cruiser. I thought that sounded good, "Get on a heavy cruiser." But instead I got the Vestal. Well, I thought I'd try to make the best of it.

Marcello: Describe what the Vestal looked like.

Murphy: Well, it didn't look like what you expected a repair ship to look, you know. It looked like an old cargo ship. I guess that's because it started out to be a collier--a ship that hauled coal--but somewhere, oh, maybe . . . it was built in 1908. Maybe, say, in 1912, '14, something like that, it was made into a Navy repair ship.

Marcello: Now was the Vestal designed to repair certain types of Navy ships, or could it repair any kind of Navy ship?

Murphy: It could repair any kind of Navy ship, but it seemed to be more basically assigned to battleships and cruisers at that time.

Marcello: Those repair ships are rather interesting ships to me. From what I've heard about them, they had a tremendously large number of skilled personnel aboard them.

Murphy: Yes, and that's one thing that I thought: "Well, that will give me a chance to become an electrician." But it wasn't that easy. I immediately let it be known that

I wanted to be an electrician. But, I guess, like anybody else, they put you in the deck force, or some became a fireman. They said, "That's fine. The first chance we get or have an opening, you'll become an electrician. The only thing is, you have to take your turn after those that have been to electrical school." Now after I holystoned the deck on Fridays and things like that . . .

Marcello: What's it called?

Murphy: Holystoning. Every Friday morning they would put sand and lime on the wood deck. Then you had sort of a brick with a hole in it for a handle. The handle stuck in the hole, and you rubbed that back and forth on the deck all morning long. Then you spent the rest of the afternoon washing all the sand and lime off.

Marcello: That's the way they . . .

Murphy: That's the way they cleaned the deck, yes.

Marcello: . . . cleaned the deck.

Murphy: And I suppose that, also, it gave us something to do, but I didn't think much of it at the time. I got a job as the captain's orderly, which on most ships was the Marine's job. But the Vestal didn't have any Marines so . . . and that gave me a chance, I think, to hear a little more what was going on, and they wanted a radio striker. That's like an apprentice radioman. I had a little interest in

radio, having a little interest in, you know, electricity. That's all. I didn't know anything about it, but I had an interest. I had taken a year's typing in high school. So I applied for that and I got it. Anything to get out of the deck force.

Marcello: In other words, you took your on-the-job training, then, aboard the USS Vestal.

Murphy: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what that training was like. Now when I say describe it, I'm referring to the quality of the training. Was it good? Poor? Excellent? How would you rate the training that you received aboard the Vestal?

Murphy: Well, what they did . . . in one way, I guess it was good. In another way it was poor because I don't think anybody worried about whether you became trained or not. If you didn't become trained, that was your tough luck. You stayed a seaman second class. But if you wanted to learn, it was there and you'd start getting a rating. Now the problem was, you had the course book, and you could study that and learn that and pass the test. But to learn the Morse code you had to have somebody take their time to send code to you because anything you listened to on the circuit, that was too fast and you couldn't get anything out of it. Now you would find men, though, that were

interested. Of course, a lot of them weren't. They spent eight hours that day working with phones on their head. They didn't want to fool around with someone else. Maybe they wanted to go out to Waikiki Beach. Well, at that time it was San Pedro.

Marcello: So in other words, you did become a radioman, then, aboard the USS Vestal.

Murphy: Yes.

Marcello: How would you rate the morale aboard the Vestal during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Murphy: I would say it was very good. All of the men seemed to be professional. Now that was their job. They weren't sitting around . . . oh, I suppose there was the normal griping. But they weren't saying, "Well, I'm going to get out in six months," or one thing or another. They just went about their business. It seemed like about half of them were . . . we called them "old China sailors." They'd spent a lot of time in China. They were very proficient--real good men.

Marcello: And I would assume the rated men aboard the Vestal had a great many years of experience, did they not? In other words, rank came very, very slowly.

Murphy: Right, very slow. I'd say the two first class in there might have had fifteen years. The chief, I don't remember how much time he had, but he was getting well along in years.

Marcello: What was the normal complement of men that the Vestal usually had?

Murphy: Well, in 1940, we had about fourteen or fifteen radiomen. Now the rest of the ship, I'd just guess at 500 men.

Marcello: And what were some of the types of specialists that were aboard the Vestal?

Murphy: Well, they had optical repair, watch repair (clocks), machinists, boilermakers, electricians. They could do just about anything, I guess, that a normal small city could accomplish, and maybe more than some.

Marcello: I gather that a ship like the Vestal even had a foundry aboard with molders and this sort of thing.

Murphy: Foundry, patternmakers, carpenters.

Marcello: When did you arrive in the Hawaiian Islands?

Murphy: We left San Pedro on April 1, 1940.

Marcello: In other words, you were there a little over a year and a half before the actual Japanese attack occurred at Pearl Harbor.

Murphy: Apparently, the whole . . . the fleet went on maneuvers, I guess, once a year. So we were going to Hawaii on maneuvers. Now we didn't go directly to Pearl Harbor. We went . . . the whole fleet went to Lahaina Roads, which is Lahaina, Maui. We were in there for a couple of days and then back out again. Of course, being at

that time seaman second class, I didn't know much about what was going on, but I was looking forward to going to Hawaii.

Marcello: Why were you looking forward to going to Hawaii?

Murphy: Well, it was some place I'd never been. I'd always heard about it. Of course, I had a little mixed feelings when we arrived in Lahaina. It looked like an old western town instead of the Hawaiian Islands. I walked down the road and here was a sign that said "WPA Project." That really . . . but I sort of enjoyed it. It was something new to see. Of course, we'd only be out there a couple of months, then back to San Pedro and back home.

Marcello: Now were these fleet maneuvers a routine matter? In other words, these weren't being conducted because of the worsening conditions in Europe or Asia or anything of that nature. These were annual fleet maneuvers.

Murphy: Yes, as far as we were concerned, it was an annual thing. Now this would be the first time that I was on it. They were still talking about when they'd been to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, last. I think everybody was sort of looking forward to leaving San Pedro except maybe the married men weren't.

But it didn't turn out quite that way. In fact, we went into Pearl Harbor, and I remember talking to one fellow off the Portland, I think, from Ventura. He sort of laughed at me and said, "You're going to be here two or three months and we're going back." I don't know just how it came about, but soon they passed the word that the fleet would be based there indefinitely. We weren't going back at all.

Marcello: In other words, I think this was Roosevelt's response to some of the things that the Japanese were doing in the Far East.

Murphy: Yes, and I don't know if the maneuvers were an easy way to get us out there. Maybe they wanted to test the Hawaiian defenses anyhow, and maybe that was part of it. But I wasn't in a position to know what was going on.

Marcello: Well, by this time, then, you were now based at Pearl Harbor. As I recall, after the Pacific Fleet was moved out to Pearl Harbor, it would conduct almost weekly exercises, is that correct? Can you describe what these . . . first of all, when did these exercises begin, and describe what they were like.

Murphy: Well, being on the Vestal, we really weren't involved in any exercises. We'd just go out occasionally. In

December, 1940, we came back to San Pedro and went up to San Francisco and then back out to Pearl. Maybe sometimes they'd say, "Well, we're going out to calibrate the compass." Now I didn't know what that meant or what it involved or anything. That's all we did. While we were in San Pedro, we used to go out and have gunnery practice. Now at that time I was in the deck force. But by the time we started out to Pearl, I was in the radio gang. I don't remember if we went out and had gunnery practice or not. We mainly did maintenance on the ships that came in there.

Marcello: I see. In other words, even when the fleet was going out on those weekly maneuvers, the Vestal would normally stay in port and simply meet the vessels when they came in and make whatever repairs were necessary at that time.

Murphy: Yes, we didn't go out with them. But there would be times we'd go out. Like on Memorial Day, 1941, the Vestal and the Medusa, which was another repair ship, went to Hilo. Now I think that was a common practice that the Navy would send a ship to a port, and they'd have open house or something of that sort. There were big headlines in the paper, and we sort of laughed about it. It said, "U. S. Warships Visiting Hilo."

Well, the Vestal only had four five-inch guns and one three-inch. You could hardly call that a warship.

Marcello: Well, by this time, of course, most of the Pacific Fleet was now at Pearl Harbor. I would assume that that harbor was a beehive of activity with ships coming and going all the time.

Murphy: Yes, it was. That's why right away we didn't think too much about being . . . you know, we didn't like being in Pearl Harbor. The town was so congested, and just everything was a congested mess. I think after December, 1940, we weren't allowed overnight liberty. Not that we ever stayed over night anyhow--most of us.

Marcello: Where did the Vestal usually tie up when it was at Pearl?

Murphy: I can't remember that we had a certain place to stay. We'd usually be over on some cruiser or battleship. I can't remember that we stayed just any particular place. Possibly we did, but I don't remember it as such.

Marcello: I'll obviously come back and talk about this a little bit later on when we get to December 7 itself because I think it probably would be important to know where the Vestal was at that time, and I'm sure that you do know. Like I said, we'll talk about that a little bit

later on. Now awhile ago you also had begun to talk about the liberty routine. I think this is perhaps a good place where we can expand upon that particular subject. What was the liberty routine like before December, 1940? You did mention that it changed around December of 1940. So what was it like before December of 1940? What sort of liberty would you get?

Murphy: Well, I guess we'd probably get every other weekend and every other day. I don't remember what time we could leave the ship. But we'd get on a motor launch that'd take us to Ten-Ten (1010) Dock or whatever it was. There we took a taxi cab which always went to the YMCA. From there, if you wanted, you could go down to Hotel Street. It didn't have hotels (chuckle). They might have been at one time, but they were, you might say, just houses of ill repute then, and bars. A lot of us liked to go out to Waikiki. It was a little cleaner . . . and, of course, it had bars, too. Sometimes we figured we'd want to indulge in a steak dinner or something, feel a little flush with money, although my base pay . . . when I made first class was sixty dollars a month. Prior to that--as a seaman second class--it was

thirty-six dollars a month. But we got along fine, I think, on that amount of money.

Marcello: Well, then you mentioned that beginning in December of 1940, the liberty routine changed. How did it change?

Murphy: Well, I don't remember a big change other than no overnight liberty. At that time I thought that there was just too many people to handle all night and that it was necessary to get them back where they knew where they were.

Marcello: When was payday?

Murphy: Gosh, I don't . . . all I can remember is that we got paid twice a month. I guess that's always how I remembered my serial number. I always had to put it on pay receipts. They didn't just hand out a check or hand out the money. I always made out money orders and sent some money home because I had more money than I really needed.

Marcello: That's interesting. Even in terms of the small amount of money that you were getting, you were still able to save money and send some home.

Murphy: I guess I still had a little bit . . . a few thoughts in mind about this depression that had gone on. I know I had bought a 1936 Ford. I'd traded in my 1932 Ford

Roadster and bought this 1936 Ford. The payments were eighteen dollars a month. My pay was at twenty-one dollars a month, so I immediately just let it go back. Somebody took over the payments. I thought, "Well, when I come back I'll have so much money I'll buy about a '38 Ford." When we finally got back in July, '44, I couldn't buy one at all.

Marcello: I would assume that on a weekend, especially after the Pacific Fleet relocated at Pearl Harbor, that the streets were overflowing with sailors.

Murphy: Just massive amounts of sailors.

Marcello: Well, for one thing, those ships were usually out all week, were they not, and would come in on the weekend?

Murphy: Yes.

Marcello: And I would assume those sailors were ready to raise a little hell on the weekend.

Murphy: Yes, and I've talked to men that were stationed there in the Army. They might mention some girlfriend they had or something. It seemed like we never had that opportunity to just . . . with streets full of sailors, you were lucky to get a girl to serve you a drink with you paying for it, let alone . . . or then they had . . . I guess they had these dime-a-dance places. But I never had an opportunity to get acquainted with any girls if I wanted to. We

always had the feeling of "Sailors and dogs, keep off the grass." I'm not sure but maybe the people that lived there gave us that impression.

Marcello: As relations between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, did you ever give much thought to the likelihood of the Hawaiian Islands ever being attacked?

Murphy: No, about . . . no, that never entered my mind at all. Now I know that we came back to San Pedro for ten days in September, 1941. Now they already had painted the Vestal a real dark blue that you'd call black instead of the original light gray. I think we had darkened ship both ways. So we had a feeling that there could be a war. When I came back home, I got home two or three times on overnight liberties during the ten days we were back. People would say, "Oh, you've been gone a long time. When are you coming back?" I'd say, "Well, it probably depends on the war." People back here said, "Well, what war? We don't know about any imminent war." But I guess we had that feeling.

Marcello: But nevertheless, even if war did come with Japan, did you feel that you would be relatively secure in the Hawaiian Islands?

Murphy: I had no feeling otherwise. I didn't seem to be worried about a war. No, I didn't really expect them to attack us.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that period, what sort of a person did you conjure up in your own mind?

Murphy: I don't think I really gave them too much thought.

Marcello: Had you ever been around very many Japanese, having come from the West Coast? There was a relatively large Japanese population in California.

Murphy: I just remembered them as mostly having these truck farms. They did all of the raising of strawberries and . . . where I lived there really weren't any. We had a large amount of farming going on, but it wasn't the type they seemed to enter into.

Marcello: Did you ever hear very much talk or scuttlebutt among your shipmates about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy?

Murphy: No, not too much.

Marcello: Okay, I think this more or less brings us up, then, to that period immediately prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. What I want you to do at this point is to describe in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941. In other words, I want you to describe your routine from the time you got up in the morning till the time you turned in that night. This is for Saturday, December 6, 1941.

Murphy: Well, that's strange. My mind just seems to be a blank as to what happened Saturday. Now Friday afternoon, I know, the Vestal got underway and went alongside the Arizona. Now I remember that very well. Then some things that might have taken place, I'm very uncertain about. Now one thing . . . now I might be mistaken. It could have been some other time that we gave the Arizona our radio guard. That means that on Saturday night they would be responsible for any messages that were going to come to us.

Marcello: And this is called a radio guard?

Murphy: The radio guard. Now we used to always do that for other ships. I don't remember it so much then, but more after the war. A small ship would come alongside of us. Maybe they'd want to repair their radio equipment, or maybe they just wanted a rest. So we would take their radio guard.

Marcello: This was more or less a type of common courtesy that various ships would engage in.

Murphy: Common courtesy, yes. Now if a priority message came in, their messenger would bring it over to us immediately. Otherwise, in the morning we'd get all the routine messages. With the type of communications the Navy had at that time--I should say the system--we didn't

communicate from one ship to another. That wasn't the principal way to do it. Radio Honolulu sent all the messages continually, and each ship copied all of it. By copying, I mean they took everything down with a typewriter. Then whatever message concerns your ship--whether for information or action--you wrote that up and routed it around to the officers that were concerned.

Now there's one matter that's so vague in my mind. Radio Honolulu was going to clean their transmitters, so radio San Diego was going to take over. We had a little trouble picking up radio San Diego, so we gave the Arizona our radio guard because they seemed to pick it up better. But that . . . I don't know. That's such a vague thing after all these years that that could have heppened some other time.

Marcello: Do you remember where you were tied up on that Saturday of December 6, 1941?

Murphy: Yes, we started . . . the Nevada was just north of us by herself. Then the Vestal was along . . . no, this alongside of . . . all the battleships were tied up alongside of Ford Island. Then the Vestal was tied alongside . . . the outboard side of the Arizona. Ford Island might say the inboard. I think we were headed in the opposite direction.

Marcello: But that's where you were on that Saturday, December 6, 1941. Do you recall whether or not you had liberty on that particular day?

Murphy: I don't think I did because I had the duty Sunday morning. So that would have meant I was on watch until midnight on Saturday. That was the normal way to do it.

Marcello: Then you would have probably turned in around midnight or shortly thereafter in order to be ready for your duty the next day.

Murphy: And I would have been ineligible for liberty because they had this four sections. Then two sections would be on duty, and two sections would be off.

Marcello: Normally speaking, when the sailors returned aboard the Vestal on a Saturday night after having been in downtown Honolulu, what sort of condition would they be in?

Murphy: I guess it would sort of depend on the person. I never remembered it as being any different than any other . . . in case of the Vestal. Now it might have been different on a ship that'd been out all week. But, see, we . . . well, we'd been out to sea shortly before that in November, which was a little unusual. I don't know why or what we were doing. But ordinarily, we didn't go out enough, I don't think, that Saturday would have been too much different than some other liberty night.

Would you have very many drunks coming back aboard that ship on a Saturday night?

Murphy: Not that I would notice.

Marcello: Did you notice anything particularly unusual on that particular Saturday night since, as you mentioned, you were on watch?

Murphy: No, I really didn't because on Saturday morning when I came on duty I did a very unusual thing. I was third class and just about to make second class. Now a fellow I went through training station with, and a very close friend, he didn't have a rate yet. So I told him that it'd probably be very quiet on Sunday morning--not much to do. If it was okay with the supervisor of the watch, I'd take his messenger job, and he could take my radio circuit and give him a little experience.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you had done an unusual thing on Saturday morning. You meant Sunday morning.

Murphy: Sunday morning. Sunday morning, yes. As I said, we came on watch right after morning chow.

Marcello: What time would this have been?

Murphy: Oh, maybe 7:30. We always came in time for the watch that we relieved to go to breakfast. What we . . . we would stand watches from . . . like, they would have been

on from midnight till breakfast. Then we would go on from breakfast till noon chow. Then the next watch would be on from noon chow till evening chow. Then it would be our turn to go on for eight hours until midnight.

Marcello: Okay, to pick up the story from this point, then, you were in the process of relieving the watch in radio check, I would assume.

Murphy: Yes, and I'm sure by 7:30 we were all . . . everybody that had been on watch was gone. We were in there.

Marcello: Okay, so pick up the story from that point.

Murphy: So I guess roughly ten or fifteen minutes till eight the weather report came in. So I, having the messengers job, took this clipboard with the weather report to the officer of the deck. I remember the officer of the deck was a chief warrant officer, a radio electrician. In other words, you might say he was my boss. Although there was a chief . . . I don't mean my immediate boss, but he was in charge of the radiomen, although he had a chief under him. While he was signing for his copy of the weather report, that's when the quartermaster and I saw these planes coming over the mountain.

Marcello: What sort of a day was this in terms of climate?

Murphy: Oh, I'd say normal.

Marcello: What is normal?

Murphy: Maybe a few clouds around, but no rain or nothing unusual that I noticed.

Marcello: Okay, so you see these planes coming over the mountain. Pick up the story from this point.

Murphy: Well, they were coming over the mountain and diving on Ford Island, but I guess we saw them coming from far enough away that the quartermaster remarked that they looked a little different.

Marcello: Was your immediate reaction that they were Navy planes on maneuvers?

Murphy: No, we thought of the Army. It was unusual that they'd be practicing on Sunday, but, well, we didn't know that much about the Army Air Force, and maybe they picked Sunday. Even after they dropped . . . what they did then was drop bombs on Ford Island. And we thought, well, that was really unusual that they'd be dropping live bombs to practice.

Marcello: Now how close were you to Ford Island? You mentioned that you were tied up alongside the Arizona.

Murphy: I don't know the exact distance, but I guess it just to be maybe rock-throwing distance because the battleships were tied up to big concrete pillars. These pillars were, I

guess, right . . . I don't know that they'd have a gangway over to the island side. I can't remember it that well.

Marcello: In other words, you were, however, very close to where these bombs were being dropped.

Murphy: Yes, real close. Then immediately after they dropped their bombs, we saw the rising sun on their wings. I think they started strafing. Then, of course, general quarters were sounded as soon as we saw the rising sun on their wings. I ran to the radio shack just as fast as I could because that was where I belonged.

Marcello: Now what seemed to be the initial reaction of the men when the alarm sounded. Would you describe it as one of panic? Confusion? Fear? Professionalism? How would you describe the initial reaction--your very first reaction?

Murphy: Now I think everything was very professional--no panic. Now myself, I felt a lot better after I heard guns start firing. Now it seemed like, "Now we'd better do something." Then I started hearing antiaircraft guns. But I guess they must have started right away because we got hit very soon afterwards.

Marcello: Well, of course, the battleships were one of the initial targets. Do you think it was a case that this bomb that hit you had been meant for one of the battleships?

Murphy: Oh, I'm sure it had.

Marcello: I'm not trying to take anything away from the importance of the Vestal, but you were certainly a secondary target on that day.

Murphy: I'm sure they didn't want to waste any bombs on the Vestal, for they had so many more important things to do.

Marcello: Now you were still tied up alongside the Arizona?

Murphy: Still tied up alongside the Arizona. I don't even remember in my own mind us getting hit, although we got hit by two bombs. All through the years I've heard them being described as fourteen or sixteen-inch shells, armor piercing shells, made into bombs.

Marcello: Where on the ship was it hit?

Murphy: One bomb hit aft and went through the carpenter shop and on and went right out bottom or the side of the ship underneath the waterline. Now the other bomb hit up in the mess hall. It went through the forecastle, the mess hall deck, went through near the post office-- that deck--and then hit in the steel storage. I guess that stopped it from going all the way through.

Marcello: That one probably exploded then.

Murphy: That one exploded and caused fires.

Marcello: Well, were you very close to where either one of these bombs hit?

Murphy: Not real close, maybe 150 feet. Of course, by that time I was in the radio room.

Marcello: How shortly after you first spotted the planes were you and the Arizona attacked?

Murphy: It seemed like immediately after we saw the planes that dropped the bombs on Ford Island. Now they might have strafed us because I remember a lot of strafing immediately after that. It sounded like a big chain being rattled on the deck. I remember . . . the more of the explosion I remembered was the Arizona blowing up rather than us getting hit.

Marcello: Oh, you might describe this, and I assume that it took place very shortly after the attack started, also.

Murphy: It seemed like very shortly.

Marcello: Describe what you remember from the Arizona blowing up.

Murphy: Well, it seemed like . . . one of the first things I remembered was . . . they passed the word to abandon ship. There was this big line of men going by the radio room.

Marcello: They passed the word to abandon the Vestal?

Murphy: They passed the word to abandon the Vestal.

Marcello: Was the Vestal hit that badly that it was in danger of sinking?

Murphy: Well, at the time I didn't know too much about what was going on, but since then I've found out that our captain

was blown over the side, and it was the executive officer that passed the word to abandon ship.

Marcello: Now I have two questions that come to mind at this point. First of all, I would assume that you were inside during most of the attack, that is, inside the radio room.

Murphy: All the time, yes.

Marcello: And secondly, were there very many officers aboard that ship at the time of the attack, or did most of them usually take off for shore?

Murphy: I couldn't remember too much on that.

Marcello: You did mention, however, that your captain and executive officer were aboard.

Murphy: The captain and executive officer were aboard, yes.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from this point. The order to abandon ship had been given. This apparently occurred after the bomb hits.

Marcello: Yes.

Marcello: Now had anything happened to the Arizona at this point yet.

Murphy: Yes, it had blown up.

Marcello: Okay, before we get to the abandoning of your ship, describe what you remember from the Arizona blowing up and how it affected the Vestal.

- Murphy: Well, the only thing I remembered about the Arizona blowing up, it seemed like there were awful fires that . . .
- Marcello: Did it jolt the Vestal or anything of this nature?
- Murphy: It must have jolted the Vestal. I noticed it more than the Vestal getting hit. Like I say, the captain got blown over the side, but he got back aboard and apparently gave the word to get underway, although one man can't get a ship underway.
- Marcello: Now what kept you from going down with the Arizona since you were tied beside the Arizona? Were you tied up to the Arizona or just beside the Arizona?
- Murphy: Tied up to it. Now it seems like I remember . . . now this is hearsay. Now so many things are hearsay. One of the radiomen jumped over the side to abandon ship, or was blown over. He got back aboard and helped cut the lines loose.

Also, there's always some amusing things, you know. One fellow--one radioman--said, "To hell with you guys! There goes my brother! I'm going with him!" He went to abandon ship. Now in my case, this fellow that I traded jobs with that morning, he got two life jackets and gave me one of them. Our thought was, "We'll just let it get deeper in the water. No concern to be running out of the radio shack and jumping over the side." There wasn't that . . . it didn't look like anything was going to happen that quick.

Marcello: Okay, the orders were given to abandon ship. I assume that you did abandon ship.

Murphy: No.

Marcello: You never did? Well, describe what happened or what you did then.

Murphy: Well, I didn't do anything. I just sat there in the radio room. I wasn't too happy about the whole situation, you know, I guess I was pretty upset.

Marcello: In other words, however, other people from the Vestal were abandoning ship.

Murphy: Yes, there were others that were. Now just how many, I don't know. But just that one time when this fellow saw his brother go by, it seemed like a lot of them.

Marcello: Did the Vestal suffer any damage as a result of the Arizona blowing up?

Murphy: Not really that I know about. It could have caused a little fire. I think . . . now my own impression was that most of the damage was caused by the two bombs that hit the Vestal.

Marcello: Okay, so describe what happened at this point. You were still aboard the ship. Some people were abandoning it, and others were remaining aboard.

Murphy: Yes, now just when they got the lines cut loose . . . anyhow, all of our radios went dead. I forgot to mention

that. When we got hit our power went off. So that probably made me feel worse. I mean I was really upset or scared or whatever you want to describe it, but not to the point that I was going to panic and jump over the side. I thought that was about the worst thing that ever happened.

I don't know how soon it was that somebody decided that we should get up power on the radios by getting batteries. We had six-volt batteries like you'd have in a car. They were just a little bit different but almost the same. We powered other things with those batteries. We had a direction finder that might have been powered with those batteries. I think we had a depth finder that they powered with the batteries. So we decided that we'd get a lot of those batteries together for power. We also had an emergency generator up on the radio transmitter room. Now it might have got started and gave us the power, but my own self, I wasn't too crazy about going up on top of that transmitter room and cranking that Kohler generator with all that bombs and strafing and all that going on. I belonged in the radio shack, so I just stayed there. When we were supposed to get these batteries, I tried to stay under cover as much as I could on the route to

take to get the batteries. I didn't want to expose myself to . . .

Marcello: While you were going to get those batteries, was the Vestal still under attack, or was the attack still going on, I should say?

Murphy: I just don't remember. I can't remember anything, you know. Like, some say, well, the first wave came and the second wave came, but I don't remember all of that. I just remember we got hit at the start, and that was . . .

Marcello: In other words, it just seemed like one continual attack to you.

Murphy: Yes, and I saw one torpedo plane later come down. It looked like it was going to land on the water and then launch a torpedo. Just from what I found out later, we got our lines cut loose--I think a tug even came along and helped us--and pulled away from the Arizona. But there wasn't an immediate thought that we were going to sink then. It ended up, I think, an hour and fifth minutes before we ran aground at Aiea Landing.

Marcello: You got over to Aiea Landing on your own power?

Murphy: On our own power.

Marcello: After the tug had gotten you away from the Arizona.

Murphy: Of course, I didn't have anything to do with that, so I don't know exactly how they did it, but I think we did that--went on our own power.

Marcello: What were you doing during this period when the Vestal had gotten underway?

Murphy: Well, maybe that was the time they were trying to get the batteries, but other than that I wasn't doing much of anything. We didn't have any power, so we couldn't do anything.

Marcello: Did you still remain in the radio shack?

Murphy: We still remained in the radio shack. But then we got power back up. Then I started . . . we got back on the circuit and started receiving, which later I thought to be phony messages. But then several years after that, I found out they weren't phony messages. They were just rumors. There was rumors like . . . well, one message said, "Paratroopers landing in Nuuanu Valley," They said they had on coveralls.

Marcello: Now where were they landing?

Murphy: Nuuanu. It described their coveralls they were wearing with the rising sun insignia on the back. Another message was, "Troops are landing at Barbers Point. P-40's are strafing them." Another message was, "Submarine sighted such-and-such position," you know, like latitude, longitude. Then another message would come, "Cancel my last message. Submarine was a sampan." Another rumor was that the water in Honolulu was poisoned.

Marcello: Did you believe all of these rumors?

Murphy: Well, they came right over Radio Honolulu--the Navy radio station--over what they called the "Fox Schedule." That was what we typed down on mimeograph paper.

Marcello: Why were these radio messages routed through Radio Honolulu?

Murphy: Well, I guess one idea was that that way ships didn't give their position away. They didn't answer back.

Marcello: In other words, as long as you are only receiving messages, your position can't be detected. But the minute you start sending messages, they can zero right in.

Murphy: They can zero in on it. Now there was no thought of worrying about our position being detected there in Pearl Harbor, but that was the system they had. So they just continued on with that system. If we wanted to send a message, say, to Mare Island repair base, we sent it visually to the shore station in Honolulu.

Marcello: You sent it visually by means of signal flags?

Murphy: The signalmen. Now that was another job--the signalmen. Now they were in the same division as the radiomen. We would write up the message on a message blank, put it in a little leather bucket, and sent up to the signal bridge and buzz them that they had a message. They would send

that message to the shore station. There, somebody in the shore station would cut a tape and put this tape in a coding machine. The coding machine would send Morse code. Of course, there was another . . . when you say coding, well, you might be referring to ciphering, which most of our messages were. They were all in cipher, five-letter groups and ten five-letter groups to a line. Like I say, we didn't take it upon ourselves to call anybody else on the radio.

Marcello: Getting back to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, how was it that the Vestal grounded itself over Aiea Landing?

Murphy: Why did it?

Marcello: Yes, how did it occur or why did it occur, either one.

Murphy: Well, it kept getting deeper in the water.

Marcello: I see. In other words, because of the bomb hits you were taking on water.

Murphy: Taking on water. And I guess they didn't ground it immediately until they found out how fast it was going down.

Marcello: Were you trying to clear the harbor--get out of the harbor?

Murphy: No, I don't think that was our intentions at all.

Marcello: Okay, so what happened, then, after the Vestal grounded itself over near Aiea Landing?

Murphy: Well, I might . . . when you say "clear the harbor," one other thought comes in there. Now while we were still alongside the Arizona, I saw the Nevada go by and later found it beached itself rather than block the channel.

Well, after . . . when we ran aground, one thing I remember is that we had a real bad list--leaned way over, very hard to run a typewriter. That was about all I remember, except during the night you could hear firing going on all night.

Marcello: After the Vestal grounded itself, did you still remain aboard the Vestal?

Murphy: Still remained aboard.

Marcello: I see. What did you do during this period? Were you still in the radio shack?

Murphy: Still in the radio shack, and I remember about two o'clock or three o'clock in the afternoon--still in the radio room--the cook brought us something to eat. But I didn't feel like eating. Now we were going to have creamed chicken that day, but they never got that far with it. They brought some of the boiled chicken. I believe the man from the . . . we called it the "gedunk" stand. That's where you got your soda and ice cream. He brought some

ice cream bars. That looked a little better than the chicken, but I just didn't feel like eating anyhow.

Marcello: Did you find that you had a powerful thirst? In other words, a great many people during the excitement of the day found that their throats became parched and dry, that they had an inordinate desire for water or some sort of liquid.

Murphy: No, I didn't. Maybe that's why the ice cream was better than the chicken. Now during the . . . of course, now this is not my memory, but I just talked to a fellow recently that I hadn't seen since November, 1942. He was in the radio room at the time of the attack. We had a chief radioman on there. I guess he had stomach troubles. He'd come in the radio room, take a big handful of soda, throw it in his mouth, and then go somewhere looking for water. So this friend of mine--his name was John Perta--he said that the chief radioman, Hurley, come running in the radio room, grabbed his mouthful of soda, and started for the mess hall to get his drink of water, and he grabbed hold of him and says, "You better not run out there. That's where the bomb went through." But he didn't pay any attention to him. He went out there anyway. I guess nothing happened. I guess he got his drink of water.

Marcello: Who was this man that was telling you this story?

- Murphy: Now this is John Perta. He was a third class radioman. I never expected to see him again after November, 1942, because he was from Utica, New York. It so happens now he lives in San Leandro, California.
- Marcello: So anyway, you were now beached over there . . . or had run aground over there near Aiea Point. What did you do from the time that you were grounded until that night when you said there was quite a bit of excitement?
- Murphy: It seemed like I stayed in the radio room all the time, just stayed there.
- Marcello: And I gather this is when you were getting all these rumors that were coming in.
- Murphy: Well, the rumors were like, say, two hours after the attack.
- Marcello: I gather, then, that the Vestal in no way played a part in the rescue efforts.
- Murphy: Well, I don't know if it was then or later that they sent a repair party to the Oklahoma. I didn't know about it at the time, but I think possibly they did. I'm not sure.
- Marcello: Okay, what is it that happened that night that particularly stands out in your mind?
- Murphy: Well, I guess anything that moved on the beach somebody shot at it.
- Marcello: You could hear this sporadic gunfire from the Vestal?

Murphy: Yes. Then later . . . I guess it was the next day that general quarters and explosions went off. I think they sighted, maybe, a midget submarine or thought they did. I know they dropped depth charges in the harbor, and that sort of shook us up again. It did me. I didn't have very good feelings about being beached and all of these troops landing.

Marcello: When was it that you had your first opportunity to look out and survey all of the damage that had been done in the harbor?

Murphy: I guess it was the next morning, although that didn't leave a great impression on my mind at the time. Maybe we thought we had enough problems of our own and didn't pay any attention to anybody else's.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there had been a funny incident that occurred during the attack. Can you think of any other funny incidents that occurred?

Murphy: No, that was about the only thing that I remembered.

Marcello: Do you recall any acts of individual heroism or bravery that seem to stick out in your mind?

Murphy: No, not really except for things, like I say, that one radioman that reportedly helped cut the lines loose. But I'm sure there were but not in our situation in the radio room.

Marcello: You mentioned, in response to a previous question, that you really didn't have any feelings one way or the other toward the Japanese. Did you now have feelings positively toward the Japanese.

Murphy: I think I did now.

Marcello: How would you describe those feelings?

Murphy: Well, I guess the more we did away with then, get the war over with . . . of course, even now, I can't remember then how my feelings were, although I know a few months later we got things like a "Japanese Hunting License."

Marcello: You're referring to that little certificate that I saw on display over at the motel.

Murphy: Yes, the one we had was just a little card. I had a little card. I think, possibly, I still have it. Just like a deer hunting license, only this was a Japanese hunting license.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you think we need to put in the record here with regard to what happened at Pearl Harbor? Is there anything that I haven't asked you?

Murphy: Well, a day or a few days later . . . well, we were aground right by the pier where they brought the bodies. That was kind of a sickening feeling to me. They'd tow them behind the motor launch and bring them to the pier where they had boxes.

Marcello: I would assume the surface of that harbor was simply a mess with all sorts of oil and debris and what have you.

Murphy: It was that way, it seemed to me like, the whole rest of the time we were in there. Whenever we'd go ashore, we'd sometimes get oil splattered on our uniform.

Marcello: You mean, like, this would be weeks and months afterwards?

Murphy: Months, months afterwards. One thing disappointed me. January 7 was going to be my twenty-first birthday, so months prior to that I thought I would go into Honolulu and have a big celebration on my twenty-first birthday. Well, I don't remember how long we weren't allowed to leave the Vestal, but I never got to celebrate it. We weren't allowed off the ship.

But I remember a menu that came out Christmas Day. It said, "USS Vestal Now On An Even Keel." So apparently by Christmas, they had the water pumped out and the Vestal upright.

Now a little while later--I don't know, months, a few weeks later--we went into dry dock. Then the Saratoga got hit out at sea. They brought her in, took us out of the dry dock, put her in, and then put us back in dry dock. I don't remember in what period of time that took place. But then I remember it was around August . . . between August 7 and August 15, that we left Pearl Harbor and headed for the South Pacific. That, you see, would be the end of the connection with Pearl Harbor.