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Interview with
WALLACE MIERS
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Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Wallace Miers

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello Date: November 15, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Wallace Miers for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 15, 1987, in Kenner, Louisiana. I am interviewing Mr. Miers in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the battleship USS Nevada during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Miers, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born--that kind of information.

Mr. Miers: I was born on June 22, 1919, in Crowley, Louisiana.

Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.

Miers: Well, I finished high school and one semester of college before I went into the service. I went to Southwestern Louisiana at the time, and then I decided, "Well, I might as well get into the Navy." Not that anything was happening at the time, but that's what I decided I wanted to go into. So I joined the Navy in 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service in 1940?

Miers: Well, I don't know. I guess I thought it was glamorous--the way they portrayed all these things--and I guess I just wanted to go and see the world. Like they always said, "See the world through a porthole," so I decided to get into the Navy. That's one reason why I got into the service.

Marcello: Did economics have any influence in your decision to join the Navy at that time?

Miers: No, not really. At least I thought my father was pretty well off because he owned quite a bit of property. So it wasn't that. It was just that I had the wanderlust. I wanted to go out and see what the world was like, and that was one way to do it.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Miers: At San Diego.

Marcello: At the time that you went through boot camp, how long did it last?

Miers: Six weeks, that's all.

Marcello: They had cut it back considerably over what it had been at one time, then, hadn't they?

Miers: Oh, yes, because it used to be, I think, ninety days--three months. I guess things were looking worse than it really was; I mean, they weren't telling people about it. But we just went in for six weeks, and from there they transferred us right to Hawaii. We didn't get a chance to come home on leave. Most of the time, when you finish boot camp, they let you go home for sixteen or twenty days, whatever it is. But this time they didn't do it. When we finished boot camp, they put us on a destroyer, and they brought us to Los Angeles--well, it was San Pedro--and put us on the carrier and sent us to Honolulu. That's when I got on the battleship *Nevada*.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of serving your Navy duty in the Hawaiian Islands at that time?

Miers: Oh, I thought it was great. You'd say, "Well, boy, here I am, way out here with all this beautiful weather." It was just lovely; I really enjoyed it.

We stayed there, I think, for two months, and from there we came back to the States and repaired the ship in Bremerton and stayed up there in Bremerton, I think, for three months.

Then we went back to the Hawaiian Islands and did maneuvers like we always did. You'd leave on Monday morning--pull out of port in Hawaii--go out to sea all week long, come in on Friday afternoon. You'd get liberty on Saturday and Sunday. So the Saturday before Pearl Harbor, we went ashore with two of our friends from the *Arizona*.

Marcello: Let me just stop you there for a minute because that's getting a little bit ahead of our story. You mentioned that you were assigned to the battleship *Nevada* once you got to Pearl Harbor. How did this assignment to the *Nevada* come about? Do you recall?

Miers: I don't know whether they just needed people to put on the battleship or any ship as far as that goes, but we just came from the boot camp right into the battleship *Nevada*.

Marcello: I was wondering if they simply lined you up and said, "Okay, this group goes to this ship, and this group goes to that ship," and so on.

Miers: No, I don't think so because I imagine that they were trying to raise the complement of the ship. They may have needed 200 or 300, so whatever came out of boot camp, well, they put on the ships that needed them. As far as them saying, "Well, you go to this one, and you go to this one," they may have done that, but I don't recall it if they did.

Marcello: I'm assuming that...well, let me not ask a leading question. What were your impressions of the *Nevada* when you first saw it? Here you were, a "boot" right out of San Diego.

Miers: Oh, I thought it was something great. I never expected to get on anything like the *Nevada* because it was so big. To me it was one of the biggest things that they'd ever had except for the carriers. We came over on the *Saratoga*. To me it was...oh, I don't know. It was just beautiful, in other words. But today you look at them, and it's one of the smaller ships that they have. They're not that big anymore. I really enjoyed it, and I thought it was something "out of this world," like the fellow says.

Marcello: When you went aboard the *Nevada*, to which particular division were you assigned?

Miers: On the Fourth Division.

Marcello: And what was the function of the Fourth Division?

Miers: Well, the Fourth Division...in fact, I think from Division One to Division Eight were all topside; I mean, they'd take care of washing the decks down and manning the big guns and different things like that.

Marcello: In other words, these were the deck divisions.

Miers: Yes, most of them were the deck divisions.

Marcello: Let me talk just a little bit about life in the deck division. Incidentally, I think that most of the "boots" that initially went aboard one of these ships were put in the deck division. Isn't that the case?

Miers: I would think so because most of them go into the deck division for maybe three or four months, and then from there, well, if you had something else that you wanted to do, like, an engineer or a signalman or anything like that, well, you could transfer into it. But I took the deck division and stayed in it, and then I got into gunner's mate striker. In other words, I was trying to be a gunner's mate, which didn't pan out the way I

thought it would. Then I finally had to go in as a boatswain's mate, in other words, afterwards.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about some of the functions that you would carry out in the deck division.

Miers: What you do in the deck division--at least that's what we were doing--you'd get up at 6:00 in the morning. The first thing you'd do, you'd wash down the whole deck of the ship in your section, and you'd clean it up and wipe it off. Then after you were finished with that, you'd go in and eat breakfast and rest until 8:00. Then after 8:00, well, then you'd go back to working--scraping paint and painting the different parts that were rusting. In other words, it was the general maintenance of the ship. Every day it was more or less the same thing--the same routine.

Marcello: Well, let me ask you about some of the specific functions that you would have had in the deck division. For instances, on all of the battleships, one of the things that was done was a process known as "holystoning" the deck. Did you ever get involved in holystoning the deck?

Miers: That's true. That's what it is. What you do is, you wet your deck down real well, and then you put sand on the deck. Then you take a stone like a brick--like, maybe four-by-six or maybe a little bigger or a little smaller, whichever it is--and it had a little indentation in it. You'd take a stick and put it in the middle, and then you'd rub it on the deck back and forth; and it would make the deck come out white, and it'd clean it off. But that was done every morning of the week--every morning. Every morning you'd do that--holystoning the deck.

Marcello: The reason I was asking you that is because, of course, that is a part of the Navy that is no longer in existence.

Miers: Yes, that's true.

Marcello: Those ships had teakwood decks at that time, didn't they?

Miers: Teakwood decks that was four inches thick and six inches wide. They'd come out...not, say, white, but it was a beautiful color. Like the fellow said, you could almost eat off the deck because it was so clean. But that was every morning, every morning, every morning that you would do it.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about what life was like in your quarters there in the Fourth Division. For instance, did you sleep in a hammock or in a bunk when you first went aboard?

Miers: At the time when I went in, the hammocks were discontinued. We had a bunk. In fact, when you left your training, you got a sea bag, a hammock, a mattress and a pillow, and you'd carry that with you. Whatever ship you were transferred to, you brought it with you. After we got to the ship, we had the bunks, and you put your mattress on the bunks. It was fairly nice; it wasn't too crowded. I'd say we were sleeping as much as four deep, which gave eighteen inches between bunks. It made it real nice. It wasn't all that bad.

Marcello: I'm assuming that the Nevada wasn't up to its wartime complement at that time, either, was it?

Miers: No, if I'm not mistaken, I think we had only 800-and-something crew members at the time, and I think the complement was 1,200 or 1,400 men. I don't know exactly what it was after the war because I wasn't on it afterwards.

Marcello: Since you were in the deck division when you first went aboard, did you have a stint of mess cooking?

Miers: No, that's one thing I missed out on. I never did get around to having a turn at mess cooking. From there I went right into the general upkeep of the ship and didn't have any mess cooking at all. Most of the time, the ones that had mess cooking liked it, and they just kept staying in the same group of them. Even in training station, I never did have mess cooking.

Marcello: Why would somebody like mess cooking aboard a ship like the *Nevada*?

Miers: Well, I would guess that maybe on the *Nevada*--well, I guess on most all the ships--once you finished your duty of mess cooking, you had the rest of the day off until the next meal. I say "the day off." What I mean is that from one meal to the next, you had your time off for yourself.

Marcello: Is it also not true that come payday, if a mess cook did a good job, it was a tradition many times to tip the mess cook.

Miers: That's true. In other words, if he did a good job...in fact, let's say he would bring the first meal--the food he brought out the first time--and then if he was really on the ball, when that was empty, he'd run right back to the kitchen and get

more. Then at the end of the month or every two weeks, well, they'd tip them. Each one would give him, say, fifty cents or a dollar or whatever it was at the time. It wasn't that much, but it was good money at the time. But the better you fed your crew, the more they would tip you.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Nevada?

Miers: It was fair. In fact, I thought it was real good. You'd have the same food. Like, every Thursday they had one food, and then on Friday they had something else. But every week they had the same kind of food. You'd get ham and stuff on a Sunday and maybe turkey on a Saturday. On Friday you'd have beans, and then they made bean soup on a Saturday for it. It would just continuously be mostly the same thing except on holidays, and then it was something special.

Marcello: What role or of what importance were sports and athletic activities in the life of that Navy before Pearl Harbor?

Miers: Well, like I say, I wasn't on the ship that long. It was boxing and wrestling at the time. Now whether they did any baseball and stuff, I don't

know because I wasn't on there long enough to know everything that was going on.

Marcello: Boxing was a big sport in the Navy at that time, wasn't it?

Miers: One of the great sports in the Navy at that time.

Marcello: Did you ever attend any of the so-called "smokers" where they held the boxing matches?

Miers: Yes, I think that once or twice in the Navy Yard or at the receiving station or whatever it is, we'd gone out a couple of times because the ship was in contention for the championship of the fleet. I don't think we ever achieved it, but we tried, anyway.

Marcello: We mentioned previously in the interview that you were in the deck division. At the same time, you also mentioned that you initially also wanted to strike for gunner's mate. Why was that? Why did you decide that you wanted to be a gunner's mate?

Miers: Well, I thought I wanted to be a gunner's mate because you didn't have all that much work. You didn't have to do all the cleaning up. Once you scrubbed the decks and stuff, then all you had to do was go up and take care of the guns and clean them off and wipe them off and keep those in shape.

That's one reason why I'd have liked to have gotten into it. You didn't have the general maintenance of the whole ship. All you had was just the guns that you were assigned to, which in this case was turret number four with big 14-inch guns.

Marcello: What was your initial function on turret number four?

Miers: Well, I think I was a powder handler at one time, if I'm right. That encompasses...when you're loading the big shell, you put the shell itself in, and then you put 400 pounds of powder behind the shell. You have to handle the powder and shove it in. Then, also, when they opened the gun, they usually wiped it with an asbestos cloth which you had around your arm so it wouldn't burn you. In other words, if they had any kind of fragments--it wouldn't set off the powder that you'd put on it. Every time that the gun was fired and you opened the breech, well, you'd wipe the breech. The breech was the part that you would wipe off so it wouldn't have any fragments of burning material on it.

Marcello: Were you striking for gunner's mate up until the time of Pearl Harbor, or had you changed before the attack occurred?

Miers: No, I was striking for it at the time of Pearl...well, I'd say maybe three months before, I was a gunner's mate striker, but I never did make it. Then from there they transferred us to another ship afterwards.

Marcello: So your battle station, then, at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack would have been at turret number four.

Miers: Yes. In fact, that's where it was whenever they had the attack and sounded General Quarters. That's where we had to go--each one to his battle station--and after it started, well, that's why I went up into the big turret.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the liberty routine that the Nevada had once it was out at Pearl Harbor on a more or less permanent basis. For instance, how were the liberty sections organized aboard the Nevada in that period before the attack?

Miers: Well, like I said, you'd come in on a Friday, and on Saturday morning they had two liberty sections. Half of the men on the starboard side would go, and then half of the men on the port side would go one day. The next day it was just the opposite--the

other half would go and the one that had had liberty before would stay aboard ship.

Marcello: So on a weekend, you would have one day off.

Miers: One day off and then you had to stay aboard the next day for general maintenance.

Marcello: If you had liberty, when did you have to be back aboard ship?

Miers: Well, at Pearl Harbor you had to be back at 12:00 that night.

Marcello: In other words, it was called the "Cinderella liberty." Is that correct?

Miers: Yes. We didn't have enough rooms, that is, hotel rooms, at the time to accommodate the fleet, so we had to be home at 12:00 every night.

Marcello: And I would assume most of you people wouldn't have had enough money to stay over even if there were rooms (chuckle).

Miers: That's true; that's true. I was making \$21 a month, and that wasn't too healthy.

Marcello: What would you personally do when you went on liberty?

Miers: Well, me and this other group of boys that we were with would usually go and walk down the beach around Diamond Head and stuff there, and you could

go into Fort DeRussy and walk around. They used to have a big park there where they had the animals, you know, like, sea turtles and different things. It was mostly just to kill time, in other words, just to get away from the ship and maybe walk around on the beach and see what was going on. Then sometimes we would rent a car for a day and ride around the island and just pass the time of day that way. But most of the time it was just walking on the beach--Waikiki Beach--and different places and visiting the pineapple plant and all this. It was mostly routine. Every time you'd go ashore, it was mostly the same thing.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of guys say that they would usually like to take a good meal in town just for something different from what you got on the ship. Was that your case, too?

Miers: Well, more or less it was. Then like we just mentioned, you wasn't making that much money, so you couldn't really have very much of a big meal except maybe a hamburger--stuff like that--or a hot dog, I mean, just something different than what you got on the ship. Mostly, it was just to get away

and meet friends from other ships that you knew and got together with.

Marcello: What opportunities were there in Honolulu during that period in terms of female companionship? After all, we're talking about a *bunch* of men on a small island, and I can't imagine there being that many females on that island.

Miers: Well, again, like I said, I wasn't in there long enough to be able to know any of the civilian population the way you could maybe find a girl and date and stuff. You'd either have to meet the "girl of the night" or something like that. That's the only thing maybe you could have companionship with for a while. Otherwise, I wasn't in the service long enough to be able to meet civilians and stuff like that.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned this a moment ago, and I want to pick up on it again because I think it's important. You had started to tell me about a normal training exercise in which the *Nevada* would engage prior to Pearl Harbor. You had mentioned, for instance, that you would go out on a Monday, and you would come in on a Friday.

Miers: Yes. Well, we'd do this. They had these tugboats that used to carry these...well, say, a float with a flag on it or a big sign that they would pull behind these tugboats, and you'd fire your big guns at it.

Marcello: This would occur when you cleared the harbor and were out at sea.

Miers: Right, yes, yes, yes. It might have been twenty-five, thirty, forty miles from Pearl Harbor. Then, also, sometimes they would take these airplanes and carry these socks behind them, and we'd shoot our antiaircraft guns at them. That was a regular routine every week; it was the same thing. You're either firing at the target with the big guns or your small 4-inch guns and antiaircraft guns.

Marcello: So the training was constant.

Miers: Constant, yes. Every day, every day, and every week until Friday. Then you would come in on a Friday.

Marcello: Normally, would the entire fleet be in on a Friday?

Miers: Yes.

Marcello: You mentioned antiaircraft practice a moment ago. What kind of antiaircraft armament did the *Nevada* have in that period before the attack?

Miers: Well, at that time we had the 4-inch guns. Broadsides, they'd call them. Then we had some 20-millimeters. Now how many they had, I don't know. Like I said, if you're not connected with it directly, you're not that interested in it.

Marcello: And I'm assuming they also had quite a few machine guns probably--.50-caliber machine guns.

Miers: Yes, .50-calibers and whatever smaller ones they had (these water-cooled jobs they had).

Marcello: I'm asking you some of these questions for a specific reason. If somebody were watching the movements of the fleet--that somebody being a Japanese agent--they wouldn't have had to have been too smart to pretty quickly figure out the routine of the fleet.

Miers: No, because it was the same thing every week and every day. In other words, if they were living around Pearl Harbor, up in Aiea and in these different parts, they were looking right down into the bowl, in other words. They could see the fleet leaving Monday morning and the fleet coming back on Friday afternoon.

Marcello: And really nobody could do anything about it. All you'd have to do is stand up there, and you could see it.

Miers: Yes, yes, yes. All you had to do was look out of your window, and you could see it because they were sitting up above on the cliffs. They could look right down into the bowl, in other words. Every battleship and destroyer would go out, like, say, every Monday morning and come back every Friday afternoon. And they usually docked in the same places. Each one tied up in the same place--the same quay or whatever you call it.

Marcello: And this was always over around Ford Island, isn't that correct?

Miers: Yes. They used to call it Battleship Row. I'd say we'd start from the stern. We were the last one, and then the *Arizona* and then the *Colorado* and then the other...I can't name them all, but some of them were docked or tied up side-by-side.

Marcello: I suspect that Battleship Row was a rather impressive sight when all those battleships were in on a weekend and tied up.

Miers: It was. It was something to see. It was fascinating and, I guess, daring, too, because, like you say,

the Japanese were looking right down on us. They could tell just exactly what you were doing, and there wasn't nothing you could do about it. I guess you had your hands tied, in other words.

Marcello: It's almost one of the things you have to tolerate in a democratic society. People can move around, and you can see things like that and so on.

Miers: Yes, and they could communicate with the Japanese. And we probably weren't paying any attention to them. They just lived here, and they were a part of America, so you took it for granted that they were faithful to us or something.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and obviously we want to go into this period in a great deal of detail. The *Nevada* must have come in on that Friday like it usually did.

Miers: Yes, sir. We came in on a Friday, and we were supposed to be taking off ammunition to add a half a caliber on your 14-inch guns. All the hatches were open; all the ammunition was being taken off, even for your antiaircraft guns. It was the same with all the rest of the ships. The *Arizona* was right ahead of us, and they had all their

ammunition doors open, and they were unloading ammunition onto the *Vestal*, which was tied up alongside the *Arizona*. Every ship in the fleet was taking off their large caliber ammunition, like, for their 14-inch guns putting on a half-caliber longer. What it would entail, I don't know. Maybe it might have been six or eight inches longer than the original one. But that's what we were doing at the time, was taking off all the ammunition. All the hatches and doors and everything--watertight doors--were open, and it just left you vulnerable. Well, at the time it was just a routine job. It was one of those things that you do.

Marcello: Well, normally when you were in, many of the hatches and watertight doors would be open, anyhow, but on this weekend were even more than usual open?

Miers: Everything was open. From topside all the way down to the ammunition room and the firerooms and everything else was all open. Like I say, we were taking off this ammunition, and I guess it would have been maybe a day or two later that we'd have to start loading larger caliber ammunition on it.

Marcello: Now this may be something outside your realm of knowledge, but I'll ask the question, anyway. When

the Nevada would come in--or any battleship would come in, for that matter--and tie up over there on Battleship Row, how many boilers would normally be lit?

Miers: Well, I don't think I would know that. I would say you would have one of them always lit, always prepared.

Marcello: You would need power and all that sort of thing.

Miers: Yes. But I would think you would always have one of them that was burning at all times because if you had an emergency where you'd have to get out, well, you'd have at least a little bit of steam to start. But how many was lit at that time or that they kept on line every weekend, I wouldn't know.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about that Saturday of December 6, 1941. Describe for me what your routine was on Saturday, December 6.

Miers: Well, on Saturday the 6th of December was the day that we got liberty--the port side. So I went ashore, and then I met two of my friends off of the Arizona. We went ashore, and then we was talking about, "Well, look, we won't be able to see one another tomorrow, on Sunday." But I said, "On Monday we can meet because we aren't going out of

port, I imagine, because we are taking off the ammunition." I said, "We can meet again on Monday and go out and do the town again--ride around the island or whatever we are going to do." But we stayed out all that day, and there wasn't nothing out of line in town that you could have said, "Well, there must be something going on with all the activity going." They didn't have anything that we could see.

I've got something behind my mind, and I don't know whether it's my imagination or what. But it looks like I've seen a newspaper that said Pearl Harbor would be attacked, but I would think maybe it was just behind my mind, and I didn't see the thing. But I still believe I saw it in the paper, and I'm not sure.

Marcello: What specifically did you do that day?

Miers: Well, I think that day we had rented a car and went around the island and stopped at different points at North Beach and went up to Aiea and in the Navy recreation center on the west side of the island. Then we came in about 4:00 in the afternoon, and then we stayed in town and ate a small meal (what kind of meal, I don't remember at the time). But

then we came back to the ship about 8:00 that evening.

Marcello: Did anything extraordinary happen that night aboard ship after you get back, or was it more or less a routine evening?

Miers: No, it was more or less a routine day; I mean, it was nothing out of the ordinary that would make you at least halfway believe there was something going on. You'd come in--check in--and do whatever you had to do--clean up or whatever. But there wasn't nothing to say, "Well, gee, tomorrow there's something going to happen" or something like that. It didn't show or nothing like that.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, and, of course, we want to go into this in a great deal of detail. What time did you go to bed that night? I should have asked you that question earlier.

Miers: Oh, I would say it might have been 9:00 or 10:00 that night. I went to bed and got up...

Marcello: And you had the duty the next morning. Is that correct?

Miers: Yes. So we got up the next morning at 6:00, scrubbed the decks, and did everything we were supposed to

do. Then we were just resting and went to breakfast. Then we were waiting for 8:00 to start work. In the meantime, I had bought a paper, and I went into the number four turret--the 14-inch turret--and I was reading the paper.

All of a sudden, I could hear some activity outside. I say activity; I mean, it looked like the ship was kind of rocking a little. So I got out of the turret and looked out, and then as I got out and looked to my left, I seen the *Oglala*--the minelayer--turning over on its side, which at the time I didn't know why. Then after a while, I just kept seeing these planes coming in.

That's when they sounded General Quarters, and I had to go back up into the turret. Then I didn't see anything else until we got underway. Then we were beached at Hospital Point. That's what they called it at the time.

Marcello: Now let's back up here a moment. First of all, what kind of day was it in terms of weather, climate, visibility, and things of that nature?

Miers: Oh, it was clear. As far as I can remember, it was just a clear day. It wasn't a hot day or a cold day. It was just a balmy day day, in other words.

Marcello: Would it have been a nice day for an air attack if one were going to have to make an attack?

Miers: I would think so, as far as the weather being clear and things like that.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese had great visibility.

Miers: Yes, they sure did. Like Hawaii is all the time, it was clear, and you could see for maybe miles and miles with no clouds and no nothing. It was just a clear day where everything looked like it just fell in line for what they wanted to do.

Marcello: Okay, you hear these planes, and perhaps you hear some of the thuds or noise of bombs and so on falling; and you come outside the turret, and you see what's going on. At this point, you have no idea that these are Japanese planes.

Miers: No, because there was no way...there weren't any of them over us at the time, you know, so that I could see the insignia or whatever it was on them and could tell what they were. Like I say, when I first got out, I happened to look up toward the decks, and the *Oglala* probably had just been hit and was just turning over on its side.

Marcello: The *Oglala* was up there near the dry dock where the *Pennsylvania* was. Isn't that correct?

Miers: I don't remember. It looks to me like it was by itself at the time. The *Pennsylvania* would have been further to the right. They were in the dry dock. They were along one of the docks that you come in to load and unload stuff. To me that's where it was tied up--at one of these docks.

Marcello: Okay, you hear General Quarters. How is General Quarters sounded? Do you recall that?

Miers: Well, I would like to say that it sounded excited, you know, like it was a lot of excitement in the sound of General Quarters. But I guess it might have been just the routine like it always was. In other words, when somebody's angry at you, they holler. You know, they're more pronounced on their words that they say or call. To me that's the way it sounded. It was kind of excited, and it got your blood to rolling or whatever you want to call it--your adrenaline.

Marcello: In other words, what you're saying in effect is that somebody cried out over the PA system, "General Quarters! General Quarters!" or something along those lines.

Miers: Yes. "We're being attacked! We're being attacked!"
Then that's when they sounded General Quarters with
the bugle.

Marcello: And they sounded it with a bugle.

Miers: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, so what do you do at that point?

Miers: Well, everybody went into their general quarters
station, and that's when I was in the gun turret.
I had to man the battle station that I had.

Marcello: When you go in the gun turret, whatever doors or
hatches are open are closed. Is that correct?

Miers: Oh, yes, yes. Immediately when General Quarters are
sounded, they close all hatches. Your topside
hatches and your hatches from compartment to
compartment and everything else are all closed.

Marcello: Now where do you get into that gun turret? I know
that some of the hatches are kind of underneath the
turret itself.

Miers: Well, this one here has an overhang--the turret has
an overhang--and they have a hatch underneath it,
and that's where most of us get in. Now you can
also come in from the inside, but being we're up
topside, we went into the hatch under the overhang.

Marcello: How many people were in that turret?

Miers: Oh...

Marcello: This is something that you'd have to estimate, of course.

Miers: I would say probably fifteen to sixteen in the immediate vicinity of the guns. How many were down to go in the shell room, I don't have any idea.

Marcello: Okay, how soon after you got in there was that hatch closed?

Miers: Oh, it seemed that maybe a minute or a minute-and-a-half after we were in there, it was all closed, and everybody was at their battle station.

Marcello: Very shortly thereafter, the *Nevada* takes a torpedo in its port bow, and the *Nevada* lists to port. Do you remember having any sensations or whatever when that torpedo hit?

Miers: Well, I felt...I felt this way after they cut the bow line and everything and we got underway. It felt like riding on a rough road. It looked like it was just bouncing on the water. I guess it wasn't, but that's what it felt like. Then they hit us with, I guess, two or three more bombs not too far behind one another; and it just looked like you were on a rough road, and it just kept bouncing up and down. But otherwise, it just felt normal, I

guess, getting underway and stuff like that except that kind of rough ride, in other words.

Marcello: I asked you a question a while ago, and I must confess that I knew the answer to it when I asked it. There was one boiler lit, and for some reason, right before the attack started, the person in charge--Ensign Taussig--had ordered a second boiler lit. Of course, all this enabled the *Nevada* to pick up some steam and at least to be able to move out of there. Now under normal circumstances, I think it took about two-and-a-half hours to get up steam and to do it "by the book."

Miers: Yes, enough steam and power to get underway.

Marcello: You eventually get underway. By the time you get over to Hospital Point, it seems to me you take a total of seven bombs altogether because pretty soon everybody in the Japanese Air Force seems to be concentrating on that one ship. Okay, describe for me what it felt like to be inside that turret, not being able to see what was taking place outside, and obviously at least feeling or knowing that you are being plastered.

Miers: Well, it would be kind of hard to describe. I know we were afraid, but, I mean, we didn't feel it at

the time. In other words, it was just like you were kind of numb. You knew something was happening because of all these bombs and torpedoes or whatever it was that was flying and hitting us, but you were just, I guess, in a daze. Then when they hollered, "Beach the ship," well, then you knew there was something wrong then. But it was after it was all over that you really got the fear: "Well, gee, maybe I could have gotten killed." "What's happening?" "Why did this go on?" But at the moment you don't feel scared. I guess you were too numb to really feel that there was something wrong.

Marcello: Do you talk inside the turret, or are most men keeping their thoughts to themselves?

Miers: From what I can recall, I don't think anybody was talking. I think they were more or less waiting maybe to hear some kind of orders to do this or do that. Like you said, people were just silent and, I guess, praying to themselves that everybody would be well or something. It's just one of those things that you just don't...I guess at the time you just don't stop and jabber with one another.

Marcello: I do know that when...well, you were pretty close to the Arizona, were you not?

Miers: We were tied right behind the *Arizona*. I would say maybe it was fifty or seventy-five feet ahead of us.

Marcello: You may not have known that it was the *Arizona*, but could you tell when that big explosion occurred?

Miers: Well, not really. We may have heard it, but we didn't know that it had blown and broke in half or broke apart. To me, we were just headed toward the open sea when we heard this great, big boom or whatever you want to call it. But we didn't know it was the *Arizona*. We maybe thought it might have been an ammunition lighter on the beach at Ford Island or something. But after we were beached, we could look back and see all this smoke and fire and everything else coming up; but, still again, you didn't know because you were too far forward to see if it was the *Arizona* or which ship it was that was burning as profuse as it was.

Marcello: Before the *Nevada* ever left, it had taken at least one torpedo and at least one bomb hit. In fact, it took it forty-five minutes, I think, to get underway even with what power it did have. You're trying to get out to sea, and, of course, the order

is given to forget that idea and instead beach it.

Could you tell that the *Nevada* had taken on a list?

Miers: No, not really. It didn't list to one side that much probably because the water equalized the tilt and stuff.

Marcello: In other words, they counterflooded, did they not?

Miers: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, so what I guess seemed like an eternity, you finally beached the *Nevada* over at Hospital Point like you pointed out a while ago. What happens then?

Miers: Well, everybody just stayed on the ship, and then after it looked like it cleared up--which looked like an eternity; it looked like it might have been eight, ten, twelve hours, which I don't think is that long--well, we began to take our wounded out and bring them up on deck to see how many persons we had lost.

Marcello: How long did you have to stand by, after the *Nevada* beached itself, before you came out of the turret?

Miers: Oh, I'd say it was maybe a couple of hours after we were beached that they let everybody come out. Whoever could walk or anything would just come out and help with what-ever they had to do. Like I say,

it looked like it could have been 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, or 3:00 in the afternoon, but I don't think it was that late. But it seemed like an eternity sitting in the turret with nothing to do and not knowing what was going on. You couldn't see anything, and you couldn't hear nothing. I guess more or less you was just in a daze and wondering what was going on.

Marcello: When you finally got out of the turret, was it still daylight, or was dusk approaching?

Miers: I don't really remember, but I would think it was still daylight--enough to be able to see what was going on--because from the bodies that we had on the stern of the ship, you could see them, you know. They were all covered, but you could still see enough to see that the bodies was all placed out on the deck. I would say that it could have been maybe 4:00 or 5:00, maybe a little later or maybe a little earlier. I don't really know.

Marcello: What kind of a scene did you see when you did come out of that turret? In other words, what sort of damage was still visible on the Nevada itself?

Miers: Well, from the point we were--being on the stern of the ship--you couldn't see too well the bow of

the ship, and that's where most all the hits came from, was on the bow of the ship. I would say the damage was from the number two turret forward and number...well, I want to say number three casemate. In other words, that's where we had our meals. They'd call them casemates or whatever. And from there forward was the only places that was hit. You could see things were kind of torn up and stuff, but we didn't know how bad it was hurt.

Marcello: Did you see fires or anything like that still burning on the *Nevada*?

Miers: No, no. Again, I didn't see it, but I don't think they ever had any fires that was burning, you know, like the *Arizona* or something.

Marcello: There are no raging fires or any fire out of control.

Miers: No, no, not from what I can remember. Now maybe they did have fires forward, and we couldn't see it. But I don't recall and I don't remember seeing anything, you know, whether it was burning profusely and people running here and there with their hoses and stuff. I don't think it was burning that bad.

Marcello: What was your specific assignment or responsibility once you came out of the turret?

Miers: Well, I don't guess anybody had really any assignments, saying, "Well, you do this, that, and the other." You just went out and maybe helped to carry some bodies from the forward part to the stern. There wasn't nobody saying, "Well, look, you have got to go here and do this; you have got to go there and do this." I don't remember anybody ever saying anything like that. It was more or less up to the individual to do what he wanted to do.

Marcello: And what were you specifically doing then?

Miers: Well, I'm just guessing, but I would think I was maybe helping these people pick up some of these bodies and carrying them up to the stern of the ship and maybe cleaning up some of the debris that was up forward. But otherwise, they didn't want too many people to be getting into one another's way because if they had gotten all 800-and-something boys to try to help, it would have been more harm than helpful. I guess that's why they would let them do as each one of them pleased or felt he had to do, anyway.

Marcello: At any time during that afternoon or early evening, did you obtain any firearms?

Miers: No, no. They wouldn't issue any firearms to anyone, except, I would say, maybe to the chief petty officers and officers. But as far as the crew--the general crew--I don't recall anybody having any firearms on them.

Marcello: What were the rumors going around as to what was going to happen next?

Miers: Well, the biggest rumor was that they had invaded the island, and they were coming ashore, and they was going to capture everything and kill this and kill that and stuff. They said there were more planes coming, and I guess it was just general scuttlebutt, in other words. Most of it, I guess...I don't know. It's not a scare tactic, but it was just people's own version of what was happening or going on.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that you probably believed most of those rumors, considering what took place that afternoon?

Miers: I would think so. I would think it was a safe bet that they had landed and were coming ashore through the cane fields because that's where we were

beached--right at the cane field. They'd say, "Well, just any minute they'll be coming out of the cane fields and boarding the ship," and stuff like that. It never did materialize, anyway.

Marcello: Did you have a chance to observe the scene back there at Pearl Harbor after the *Nevada* had beached itself?

Miers: Again, it's kind of fuzzy, but I noticed these small boats--motor whaleboats and motor launches and stuff--going back and forth from the beach to the different ships probably picking up sailors, including some of them that were in water, and then bringing them back ashore. But other than that, there wasn't much else going on except trying to retrieve some of the boys that was in the water and do whatever they could for them.

Marcello: Did you still see fires and smoke over there?

Miers: Oh, yes. I would say that went on all afternoon until the wee hours of the night. It was burning.

Marcello: Did you have a chance to reflect upon this and have any feelings about it at that time, that is, that afternoon or maybe even the next day?

Miers: Well, I would say that afternoon, no, not my own personal self. I still think we were more or less

in a daze and saying, "Well, this is not true. I don't think this could happen to us." Now the next day...well, in fact, that night at midnight, they took us off the ship and brought us up into the recreation center, and that's where they started to distribute us to different ships. But I would think until that next day, you were too stunned to realize really what happened, and you were still more or less in a daze and saying to yourself, "Now this is not true. I think this is just a bad dream or something. I'll wake up tomorrow, and there won't be nothing wrong." But the next day is when you really--I mean, I did--you really got scared, and your knees got shaky and wobbly. At the time you're not that scared because you don't have time to think of what's going on; but after it's all over, that's when all of the fear comes in, and you're hoping that you're dreaming all this stuff. I don't know. It is just hard to believe that it could happen--something like that.

Marcello: What kind of an appetite did you have that day?

Miers: I don't think we had any at all because I don't really believe we ate. Being that it happened at five minutes until eight, I don't think we ate all

that day. In fact, I know they weren't cooking because the kitchen was all messed up. If we did eat, I don't remember. Maybe we had sandwiches and stuff like that, but I don't remember if we did or not.

Marcello: How safe would it have been to walk around over there on the beach or in that cane field at night?

Miers: Oh, at night, no--no way. Because anything that moved, you had better be doggoned sure that you had somebody with you and holler out what you were doing. In fact, most of them were shooting and then asking questions afterwards.

Marcello: So you could hear gunfire all night.

Miers: All night long. I guess people...well, it was rumored that they had invaded the island and stuff, and I guess that anything that moved they'd shoot. Most of these people were the ones that was on the beach because they were the ones who got the guns to protect themselves on the beach. But as far as the ship, I don't think anybody on the ship had guns.

Marcello: That night a couple of unfortunate planes off the *Enterprise* tried to come in and land, and, of

course, virtually every gun in the harbor opened up on them. Do you remember that scene?

Miers: No, really, I don't. I guess maybe they did fire, but I don't remember. It could be that after everything was over, these planes were trying to come in, and they probably thought it was Japanese planes and opened up. But I don't remember.

Marcello: What did you do in those days immediately following the attack?

Miers: Well, like I say, they took us off the ship at 12:00 that night--off the *Nevada*--brought us into the recreation hall, and, like you said, they rounded you up and said, "Hey, this many goes on this ship, and this many goes on that one." I was transferred to the *Phoenix*. We stayed in the harbor that day--I'd say that was on a Monday--and then on Tuesday we left, and I never did go back to Pearl Harbor after that.

Marcello: So what happened to all of your personal gear and so on? Was that still back on the *Nevada*?

Miers: On the *Nevada*, yes. All that was lost. The only thing that I saved is what I had on my back, and that was it.

Marcello: When did you get new clothing and so on?

Miers: Well, (chuckle) we left San Francisco on the 12th of December, I think it was. From Honolulu we went on the *Phoenix* to San Francisco, and then from San Francisco we came back. We didn't go into port in Honolulu. Then we picked up a couple of troopships headed for Australia. We left on the 12th of December and got into Australia on the 12th of January, into Melbourne, with two troopships.

Marcello: When were you able to get word home to your folks that you were okay?

Miers: Well, I didn't. I had to wait until I got into Australia, where I could write a letter and send it to them. We weren't any place where we could call because they wouldn't let us go ashore.

Marcello: I do know in some cases, the Navy had distributed these little postcards to allow people to send those home to let their folks know that they were okay.

Miers: No, we didn't get any of those--not on the *Phoenix*, anyway. We had to write a personal letter, and that was all censored and cut out. But they finally got the word of where I was, I'd say, two or three months afterwards.

Marcello: Now how long did you remain aboard the *Phoenix*?

Miers: Until the war was over.

Marcello: You remained on it until the war was over?

Miers: Yes.

Marcello: What were some of the battles and actions that you participated in with the *Phoenix*? Mention a few of them.

Miers: Well, Guadalcanal. Mostly, we were on the outer perimeter. In other words, we were hoping to keep anybody from coming in. Mostly, what we served as was more of a picket ship. Well, they had Guadalcanal and Espirito Santo and then the one in the northern part of New Guinea (I can't think of the name now). If I'm not mistaken--I have a map at home--I think we were in twenty-seven different engagements and perimeter watching and stuff like that. From there we went all the way up into the Philippines.

Marcello: I have to ask you something about the activities in the Philippines because I do know that the *Phoenix* participated in the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Miers: Yes. In fact, we were one of the...not the first ship, because the battleships had gone in three or four days or a week ahead of time. But we went in on the initial invasion with this armada of ships-

-how many, I don't remember. We were one of the ships that went on the first landing.

Marcello: And correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't the *Phoenix* also in the Battle of the Surigao Strait?

Miers: Yes, yes.

Marcello: I have to ask you about that, Mr. Miers, for a very specific reason. That, of course, was the last time that there was a surface naval engagement where one of the enemies was caught crossing the "T." It'll probably never, ever happen again. Were you in that? You participated in that battle, did you not?

Miers: Yes.

Marcello: Describe that action.

Miers: Well, we left the bay--I don't remember what it is, the one in the Philippines--that night at 12:00 at night and headed for the Surigao Strait, but we didn't know where we were going because they didn't tell you. What we were doing...the PT boats went in first, and we were following alongside the shoreline so they couldn't pick us up with radar and stuff.

Marcello: In other words, the PT boats were harassing this Japanese force that was coming in.

Miers: Yes. At 12:00--if I'm not mistaken, it was about 12:00 that night--it was dark, and you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. All of a sudden, it looked like the whole world lit up, and that's where we caught them in the middle of the...coming down the shoot or the slot, in other words.

Marcello: How long did that firing last on the Japanese fleet coming in there?

Miers: Oh, I would say it lasted maybe two or three hours. The PT boats first started it, and when we got in at 12:00, well, then it lasted, I'd say, until 2:00, anyway.

Marcello: Were you actually involved in firing on those Japanese ships when they were crossing the "T?"

Miers: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: You guys must have been in front of the battleships.

Miers: Yes. Well, I mean, we had to because they have a farther range than we have. Like I say, we were following alongside the coastline where they couldn't pick us up, and then when the PT boats opened up on these ships, well, then that lit up the sky, and that's when everybody started firing. I don't know. They lost two or three battleships,

I think, or whatever it is, and we crippled a couple of carriers. I think that was one of the big turning points of the war. At least they say it was, anyway.

Marcello: And these were mostly the older battleships that took part in this?

Miers: Yes, yes. Well, that's all they had at the time. I don't think the new ones...I forget the names of them.

Marcello: Well, it would be the *Missouri* and the *Iowa* and *Wisconsin*.

Miers: Yes, but I don't think they were in commission. They weren't out there, anyway, at the time. Well, I can't right off think of the names of them--the ones that were in there. Then they had a lot of these light cruisers and heavy cruisers and destroyers. We didn't have any carriers in on this unless they were way out and then flew in--the planes and stuff.

Marcello: But this action took place at night, anyhow, did it not? So you probably would not have been using planes.

Miers: Yes. Well, like I say, it took place about 12:00 that night.

Marcello: I just had to ask you about that because it was the last time in history that something like that took place. Like you say, I guess the sky just lit up when all those battleships were blasting away. When did you finally get out of the Navy?

Miers: Oh, I didn't get out until January of 1946. When we came back from overseas, they told us, "Well, now you can get shore duty or some kind of duty in the States with tugboats and stuff like that. So naturally you'd put in for shore duty close to home. I put in for New Orleans on a tugboat, and what they did that night is just put me on the carrier, the *Princeton*, which was going right back out in the Pacific. I said, "Oh, my Lord! I don't want to go back up there! I just stayed up there all during the war!" But, anyway, they made the mistake of letting us go home for Christmas. They had a fellow at home...and you know how you are always griping and stuff like that. In the Navy they used to say that as long as you are griping, you're happy. But, anyway, he says, "Would you like to get out of the Navy?" I said, "I sure would. I don't know how I can do it," because I still had six months to go. He says, "I'll fix you up." I

didn't pay any attention to it, but I went back to the ship. About two or three days later, they called me down to the "exec's" office, and he said, "I see you want to get out of the service." I said, "Well, yes, I'd like to." He said, "Well, okay, if you'll sign here." So I signed up, and that was it. But I don't know. I would have probably stayed in the service, but we couldn't get any rates. I mean, in the Army I understand that they just say, "You're a sergeant today." In the Navy you have to compete with the whole fleet. If they have two openings, you've got to be one of the highest in the whole fleet to be able to get your rate. It just didn't work, so I just got out.

Marcello: What was your rank at the time that you got out?

Miers: Boatswain's mate second.

Marcello: And there would be a good possibility that in peacetime that they would have perhaps even knocked you back down lower. Isn't that correct?

Miers: Well, I was in the regulars. I wasn't in the reserves. They could have possibly put me down to third class or coxswain or whatever it is, but I doubt if they would. Anyway, it's a...I don't know. At the time I guess you just wanted to get out. Not

that you were tired of all this stuff, but you were so regimented that it just didn't make any sense anymore. So I just decided, "Well, I just might as well get out and come home and do the best I can at home."

Marcello: You know, there was one question I wanted to ask you earlier in the interview, and I'll ask it now. We talked about the routine aboard the *Nevada* during that period prior to the attack. Did that routine ever change any as one got close and closer to December 7 and as conditions between the two countries got worse?

Miers: No. You mean as far as going out?

Marcello: Your training exercises, yes--what you did on those exercises.

Miers: No, no, it looked like every time you'd go out, you'd do the same thing. Maybe you'd go out this week and fire at targets drawn by airplanes with antiaircraft guns. Maybe the next week you'd go out, and it was your big guns and your 4-inch guns on the sides that you would fire. Some weeks you'd go out, and you'd use both of them. One day you'd fire one of them, and then the next day you'd fire at the target or sock pulled by the airplane. But

it was this same routine every day, I guess, for three or four months. Well, in fact, when we came out of the Navy Yard in Bremerton and we got back from Honolulu, that's when your exercises started. Every day it was the same thing. You'd come in on a Friday afternoon and go out on a Monday morning. I guess that's the only way that you can get anybody, I guess, sharp enough or fit enough to do whatever he's supposed to do.

Marcello: Well, I thought I'd ask you that question before we closed this interview. Again, it's something I should have asked earlier, but I forgot to do so.

Well, Mr. Miers, that's all the questions I have. I want to thank you very much for having participated. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments most valuable.

Miers: Sometimes you just don't like to talk about all these things. I don't know why. It looks like sometimes you're trying to glorify yourself or something. Then you get choked up at times in saying stuff.

Marcello: Well, I don't think you glorified yourself. I think you told it pretty much like it was, and, of course, that's what we're interested in.

Miers: There's no use to try and glorify it because, I mean, there may be somebody else that was with you and say, "Well, hey, this boy's not right. He's wrong." But like the fellow said, "To each his own," I guess.

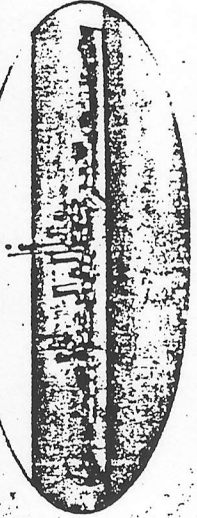
Marcello: Well, thank you very much for your time.

Miers: Well, I thank you.

[End of interview]

A P P E N D I X

U.S.S. PHOENIX



To all who come by these presents: Greetings

KNOW YE THAT

Yalmer M. ...

did serve on board

U.S.S. PHOENIX

with distinction to himself
and to the naval service

from *December 1944 to January 1946*

and is commended by his commanding officer

[Signature]
CAPT. U.S.N.

ENGAGEMENTS

- ① PEARL HARBOR 7 DEC 41
- ② GUADALCANAL 30 AUG-1 SEPT 42
- ③ CAPE BOJASTER LANDING 26-DEC 43
- ④ MADANG BOMBARDMENT 25-26 JAN 44
- ⑤ LOS NEGROS LANDING 29-FEB 44
- ⑥ SEADLER HARBOR BOMBTS. 4-MAR 44
- ⑦ HOLLANDIA LANDING 22-APRIL 44
- ⑧ SAWAR-WAKDE BOMBTS. 30-APRIL 44
- ⑨ SARAWAK-WAKDE LANDING 17-MAY 44
- ⑩ BIAK ISLAND LANDING 27-MAY 44
- ⑪ AIRCRAFT ACTIONS OFF BIAK 4, 5-JUNE 44
- ⑫ NOENFOOR ISLAND LANDING 2-JULY 44
- ⑬ CAPE SAKAPOR LANDING 30-JULY 44
- ⑭ MOROTAI ISLANDING 15-SEPT 44
- ⑮ LEXYI P.I. (TAGLOBAN) LANDING 20-OCT 44
- ⑯ BATTLE OF SURICAO STRAITS 25-OCT 44
- ⑰ AIRCRAFT ACTIONS LEXYI GULF 5-10 DEC 44
- ⑱ MINDORO OPERATIONS 12-17-DEC 44
- ⑳ LINGAYEN-SANTORIO-MASUBBU 1-31-JAN 45
- ㉑ CORREGIDOR-MARIVELES 13-17-FEB 45
- ㉒ ZAMBONGA MINDORO LG. 7-15-MAR 45
- ㉓ CEBU CITY, CEBU, LANDING 24-27-MAR 45
- ㉔ TARAOKAM, DUTCH BORNEO LG. 14-MAR-5-MAY 45
- ㉕ BRUNEI BAY, BR. BORNEO 5-19-JUNE 45
- ㉖ BALIKPAPAN, DL BORNEO 28-JUNE-10-JULY 45

