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Interview with
HENRY DE COLIGNY
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Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Henry de Coligny

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello Date: November 13, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Henry de Coligny for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 13, 1987, in Kenner, Louisiana. I'm interviewing Mr. de Coligny in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was at the Ford Island Naval Air Station during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. de Coligny, 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, your education--things of that nature.

Mr. de Coligny: I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Touro Infirmary, on November 6, 1916.

Dr. Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.

Mr. de Coligny: I'm a high school graduate, and I have one year of college credits.

Dr Marcello: When did you join the service?

de Coligny: I enlisted in 1938 upon my twenty-second birthday.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service at that time?

de Coligny: Well, my dad had been bugging me, and I had a job but I quit it, so I just figured, "Well, that's the best thing to do. Go into the service, learn something. As he said, "Go to school, make chief petty officer, make warrant officer, and retire. I did the first two, and I retired, but not from the Navy (chuckle).

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

de Coligny: Well, to me it's the cleanest branch of service. There was no slogging in the mud; my food was always hot and ready; my bunk was always there; and I could swim. I'd done a lot of sailing on the lake--on lake Ponchartrain--when I was a youngster, and I thought, "Well, what the heck. I'd go see what it was like, you know.

Marcello: What role did economics play--if any--in your decision to enter the service?

de Coligny: Well, in 1937, as I said, I was working, and I was working as a carpenter's helper on the nurse's home of the Charity Hospital of New Orleans. The grand total of allowed pay was twenty-five cents an hour for a third class helper. Generally, carpenters were making a dollar an hour. Things were not the best in our family, so I figured the Navy would be one place where I could earn a little money, and if they needed it,

why, I could send it home; if not, why, I could spend it or save it as I would normally do.

Marcello: Well, I thought I would bring up the subject of economics because it seems that for many of the people who went into the service during that time, economics did play a role in one way or another in the decision to go in.

de Coligny: Yes, it did. The service used to be like it is now. There's a waiting list now to go in for the fact that the economic situation is what it is.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

de Coligny: Norfolk, Virginia.

Marcello: And do you recall how long boot camp was at that time?

de Coligny: Let's see. We went into detention, and I think that was three weeks. I'm not sure; I don't recall exactly. I went in in November, and I was through. I think ninety days was the term or the time in boot camp. After we got out of detention, then we went into the barracks and did the normal routine training on the field, on the grinder, keeping ourselves scrubbed up, the area scrubbed up and the clothes. Boot camp was not the finest thing in the world, but we survived it. I think we learned something from it.

Marcello: The reason I asked you that is because last night I interviewed a gentleman who entered the service in mid-1941, and by that time they had cut down boot camp to six weeks. Was there anything eventful that

happened in boot camp, or was it simply the normal Navy boot camp for the time?

de Coligny: Well, as far as the Navy was concerned, to me it was a normal boot camp. Of course, being kind of nosey, I took some side trips. One of them was the naval air station, and there I learned how some of these aviators get along. They turned me upside down in a dive-bombing practice once, and that was the last time I went there. No more dive-bombers for me. I did take some PBY trips as super cargo, you might say, as far as New York and back. But other than that, it was pretty much normal. There was some hazing, but not much. Of course, after boot camp I went to service school for .boy, I tell you, I can't recall now the exact number of months that I was in service school, but I went through the machinist's school, and after that I had two weeks leave and then came back and shipped out.

Marcello: Where did you go to this service school?

de Coligny In Norfolk there. They were known as Class A Service Schools: electrical, machinist. At that time I don't think there was any electronics in sight yet. But it was the two schools that we had there that I can remember--machinist school and electrical school.

Marcello: Am I to assume that if one went to the machinist school, one would come out and would be striking in the direction of a machinist's mate or something along

those lines?

de Coligny: Exactly That was what that was. It was a preparatory school so that when you went aboard ship you weren't just absolutely stupid. I say this in all deference to those "deck apes, but you could put a mop or a swab in somebody's hand and say, "Clean it up, and that was it. But if they had a shaft to turn down or a hole to drill or something, you knew what to do. It was the same way with the electricians. They knew more than just to change a bulb or whatever. They could repair motors and things of that sort. It was a rather intense school, and we had some very good instructors.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how you would describe or rate that school in looking back on that period.

de Coligny: Well, when they say "Class A, Class A is number 1. Well, that's the way I look at it. We had some really dedicated chief petty officers who were machinist's mates, and if you made something wrong, they didn't fuss at you and give you seven kinds of hell; they said, "Now let's see where we made our mistake, and then they'd come back and show you. "Do this; set the thing this way. Then the product came out as you wanted it to. I learned quite a bit. As a matter of fact, it helped me in my later years when I left the service and went into the civilian end of trying to make a living.

Marcello: What rank would you have had when you came out of that service school? Do you recall?

de Coligny: Let's see now. I went in as a seaman recruit, and I was changed over to apprentice fireman. I stayed that until I satisfied the time period and also until my seniors or superiors thought that I was qualified. Then I went up to fireman second class. From fireman second class I went up. Well, I had to take an examination each time. Then I went to fireman third class. From fireman third class, the engineering branch was different. They went to a second class petty officer. Well, they were all that way; they all went to second class petty officer. Now they go to third class machinist's mate or third class boatswain's mate and then up to second class. But at that time, fireman first class was the same thing as a third class petty officer. The boatswain's mates were the third class. He was referred to as a coxswain. Although we didn't have the authority of a rated petty officer, we did draw the same pay.

Marcello: Okay, describe where you went when you left the service school at Norfolk.

de Coligny: Well, I was assigned to the USS Nitro for further transfer, further transfer being the West Coast. We went through the Panama Canal and up into San Diego, where I transferred to the USS Neosho. I don't remember her number, but she was a fleet oiler. I

think I was due to go to China, but I wangled a deal with another fellow. I said, "Hey, how would you like to go to China? I'd like to go where you're going. He said, "Okay So whether anything came of that or not, I don't know; and whether I am misremembering or not, I don't know. But my eventual destination was Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Why did you particularly want to go to the Hawaiian Islands?

de Coligny: Well, I had heard of them. My grandfather was a traveler. My grandfather was fluent in nine languages. He was a teacher. He had graduated from the University of Charlemagne in Paris many years back. He had worked for the Berlitz School of Languages as a teacher. In South America he was on the right side of the revolution and had become the owner of some plantations, and he had been appointed. .well, he had worked way up, and he was the colonel in charge of the artillery school in. .I think it was Peru. General Prado at the time was president, and that's why my father's middle name was Prado. He had then gotten on the wrong side of the revolution and during a battle had been badly wounded and had been piled up amongst the dead until this dog came and sniffed and raised enough cain until they came and hunted him out. Thereafter, he had a silver plate in his head. I don't know when he was born, but he died

in 1927 Just as a little side thing on that, he brought home two swords that he had retrieved, and I have them at home now. They are 450 years plus. They were brought over by Senor Pizarro and his conquistadores. I can remember them in my house ever since I was a little boy But now, since my parents and my grandparents are all gone, I have them where I live in Slidell.

But after transferring to the Nitro and from the Nitro to the Neosho, we sailed for the beautiful islands of Hawaii. I was put in the public works department, which took care of the carpenters, machinists, refrigeration--air conditioning we didn't know of at that time--and I was first then sent to work in the ice plant. There was a first class machinist's mate and a second class machinist's mate and me, who was at that time a fireman second class. I worked there, and then, of course, during that time tests were given, and I took three times the test for fireman first class. I passed it everytime, but I was in competition with the fleet, and the fleet got the rates first. I went out there in 1939, and I didn't get fireman first class until about the latter part of 1940. Only after December 7, 1941, having had completed the time, I was promoted to machinist's mate second class, but that's a little later on in the story.

Marcello: Promotion was very, very slow in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, was it not?

de Coligny: Yes, it was very slow. As I say, we were in competition with the fleet, and the fleet had priority on the rates for the fact that they had been doing the job for which they had been trained. Although I was doing the job, I was learning at the same time. I wasn't what you'd call an engine room fireman, so they got the jobs.

Marcello: I guess I don't quite understand what you mean when you say that you were in competition with the fleet. Now I realize that you had to take a fleetwide examination and all that sort of thing. What do you mean when you say that you were in competition with the fleet?

de Coligny: Well, any rates that came out, they first went to men in the fleet. In other words, if it was a fireman first class--no matter what I made--and if he passed with a reasonable grade and there was a vacancy, he got the vacancy. So the vacancies were mostly in the fleet.

Marcello: And the position you were in was not considered a part of the fleet?

de Coligny: Oh, no, no. That was considered preferred sea duty. I was on the ground, on land, on Ford Island, but that was preferred sea duty. So I was still having to fight the other sailors to get the rate.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about Ford Island. What particular kinds of jobs were you doing there at Ford?

de Coligny: Well, as I say, I was operating the ice plant--we had an ammonia ice plant--which made probably forty blocks of ice. I don't know whether they were. They may have been 300-pounds blocks of ice. When they were frozen, it was my job to pull them, dump them into the shoot, and they would go into the--I'm going to have problems now--the galley. They would use it for cooling. Of course, they had their refrigeration which also came off of the units that we were running. As well as making ice, we kept their cold storage cold. But they used the ice for .I guess some of it went to the medical department, and some of it went in the ice pitchers--ice water, you know.

I hate to admit it, but I messed up there. I went to a movie one night instead of being on the job, and the chief warrant machinist came by to check and found out I wasn't there. So I was transferred to the boat house.

Marcello: On the other hand, it doesn't really seem like it would have been the most glamorous job in the world to do what you were doing there at that ice plant.

de Coligny: No, it was boring. That's why I snuck off and went to the movies. We ran on a three-watch basis. The first class would have the day watch--he had the choice as he wanted--and the second class took the evening watch

or the mid-watch, whichever, you know The night watch went from six o'clock in the morning. That was what was called the sleeping watch. They had a cot which was fastened above, and we could drop it down on top of the ice tanks and sleep there. We'd keep an ear open for any strange noises from the machinery or anything like a phone call or something like that. So the day watch was split into two spaces, and, of course, every third week we'd swap around, and I'd get. .well, of course, I had the liberty to go ashore if I wanted to in the morning, but usually I was kind of tired. But at any rate, they moved around, and I had two people who were pretty good. They showed me what I should do and what I shouldn't do, and if something went wrong, I was to holler like hell, you know, call.

But after that, after I made the faux pas of going to see a movie that night, they transferred me down to the boat shack.

Marcello: And what exactly was your function once you got down to the boat shack?

de Coligny: Well, since I was a fireman, that made me a boat engineer. We had different types of boats. The smallest was about a twenty-four foot Chris-Craft, which was a one-man operation, and that one went out at night usually and turned on the lights on these various mooring buoys in the harbor so that the PBYs,

when they came down to make their touch-and-go landings and then fly off, knew where the obstacles were and consequently had no problems. Later on, the same fellow or somebody else in that same boat would go out and turn the lights off after the night flying was over. Then they had a thirty-six-foot motor launch, a forty-foot motor launch, a fifty-foot motor launch. We had crash boats. We had one. .I think it was a thirty-six-foot two-man boat. In other words, it had a coxswain and an engineer to handle the lines. That was a straight eight-cylinder Hall-Scott Defender engine. We had two others which were basically for the same duty, but they had a little covering over the wheel where the boat coxswain stood, and the engineer usually stood behind him. If there was a crash or if somebody was in trouble with a plane, we'd go on out there.

At times, when the Pan American Clipper couldn't get off for lack of wind activity--they had nothing to buoy him or pick them up--we went out and created turbulence ahead of them. They'd be sitting down there with their engines turning, and we'd get out in front of them and wave to the skipper, and off we'd go. He'd come behind us. What we were doing was creating a turbulence so they could get their lift. They got up pretty darn close behind us, and I'd signal the coxswain, and we'd veer off, and they'd go

on up over us. A number of times we had to do that.

We also used the various boats for different things. The fifty-foot motor launch and the forty-foot motor launch we used usually for liberty from Ford Island to. .I can't remember whether it was Landing B, C, or A--at the Navy Yard where buses from downtown or taxis would pick these sailors up and take them in. This was also where the officers--commanding officer, commander of Patrol Wing Two, Admiral Bellinger, a few other high-ranking officers--had their own private cars.

So I served my time in, I guess, each one of the types of craft we had. When we had duty, we usually would start off at eight o'clock in the morning, and we'd go around-the-clock, twenty-four hours, and we'd be off three or four days. We were off as far as running the boat, but we had machinery to work on and boats to clean. Just in general, being a fireman, why, you did whatever you were told because you had no rate, and everybody who had a rate was your boss. Sometimes it was fun, and sometimes it wasn't.

I can remember many times when they had a fresh pot of coffee--the boatswain's mates had a clique--and they had this great big aluminum pot in which they made the coffee, and they may give it a dash of cold water or a raw egg and settle the grounds. Each one had his own cup. Well, at that time I wasn't allowed

to have a cup because they kept them in this one locker. So I asked them, "Give me a shot of coffee. Well, you may not like this, but this is the truth. They'd say, "Sure, and they'd spit in the cup and hand it to me. Well, of course, I wasn't going to drink it. So I was smart. I went and spit back and gave it back to them, and that time I was thrown into the water. I guess I took a bath three or four times a week for that. I got to the point where they were making me make the coffee and not letting me have any. So I just took this aluminum pot, and I just threw it overboard. Of course, I went back in after it. The last time that happened, I was greased with axle grease and. .oh, I can't remember now what it was, but it was something I couldn't get off for a week. I mean, from head to toe they had me fixed up. But after that I'd say, "Can I have a cup of coffee?" "Yes, sure, have this cup. So I got along with them all right. I mean, you know, you have to stand up and let yourself be known. Otherwise, you're going to be the "boot" all the time. So I figured I wasn't going to be the boot. I didn't mind taking a bath, getting thrown in the water. But they all seemed to have big joke out of it. So that's the way it went, and it went that way from the time I was assigned down there until the day of you-know-what [December 7]

Of course, if you want me to, I can go into the

night of December 6. Well, I had been transferred. .no, I hadn't been transferred yet. But Louie Raiola was an aviation carpenter's mate (which they went out of style when they quit making wooden-framed airplanes and covering them with fabric) He was from Oakland, California. He and I were pretty good buddies, and he was the captain's driver, and I was the alternate engineer for the captain's gig. When the other fellow was on liberty, I was on call. So Saturday night, the 6th of December, we went down to the O.D. [Officer-of-the-Deck] to check out because we had to let him know so he could let the skipper know where we were.

Marcello: I'd really rather not get to that point yet, if it's okay I'm not ready for December 6 yet. I've got some other questions I want to ask you (chuckle)

de Coligny: Okay, fine.

Marcello: Let me back up and get some more background information here. Describe what your quarters were like here at Ford Island.

de Coligny: Well, the boathouse was constructed over the boat slips. In other words, we'd come down a set of steps, and we'd walk a ramp, and there were all our boats tied up and ready to go. The boats were always ready. When they were put back in the slips, they were fueled, the oil checked, and everything was ready to go. At a moment's notice, any of them could be taken

and put into service. We slept on double bunks, upper and lower. We had a full-height locker. I guess I'd say it was a six-foot-by-eighteen-inch-wide locker for all of our clothes. At the time, I had a seabag of clothes that were rolled and stopped. Now rolled and stopped, I don't know if you've ever heard that before or not. If you have it already, why, there is no point in my repeating it. But they were only for inspection, and they never were used. The rest of the things. I bought dungarees, and I bought whites over in Honolulu from the Service Locker Club. But it was comfortable. There was plenty of glass. We had the windows open, and there was mostly a breeze all the time. We had to go up to mess hall in the main barracks, which was a big concrete building, to get our meals. We had a truck to take us up and bring us back in shifts so that somebody would be there all the time to answer a phone or in case an alarm went, why, we were ready to go.

Marcello: How would you rate the food in the mess hall?

de Coligny: Good, oh, yes. We had good cooks. I can't ever say that I had a bad meal as long as I was in the Navy, which is another reason why I went Navy rather than Army. We did have a bad meal, but that comes later.

Marcello: As you look back, do you think that your quarters there at boat shack were preferable to those, say, in the large barracks on Ford Island?

de Coligny: Well, the group was small, and I did stay up there in the barracks--main barracks--when I was working in the ice plant. I slept on the lanai or porch. Oh, I guess there were fifty bunks all in a line with about two feet between each bunk, which gave you plenty of room. But there wasn't any privacy. We had more privacy when we were down in the boat shack. So although it was kind of far away from everything, why, we still had transportation. If we couldn't get a truck or something, it wasn't too far to walk. But we could always get a boat and go up and tie it up at the landing and go on up to the "geedunk" stand or whatever. It wasn't bad.

Marcello: How many people were there approximately at the boat shack?

de Coligny: Oh, my, I'd say between thirty and forty of all different rates. I was the lowest rated at fireman first class, and then they went on up to chief petty officer. We had the chief boatswain's mate who was in charge. His name was Fish. I can't think of his first name, but we used to call him "Fats" because he was a big, heavy-set guy. The chief boatswain's mate was in charge of the whole boat shed. Among our machinist's mates, we had first class and second class. Then we had firemen first; we had seamen first and seamen second. But some of them were not operating crew; some of them were repair people.

Occasionally, they would take a boat out for overhaul, clean the bottom, scrape it and paint it, do engine work while it was out. If it had a bent screw or a bent shaft or something like that, well, they had the repair crew there, which I was in for a little while but not long enough to really talk about it as being part of the crew. I was mostly in the operating end of running the boat as an engineer.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work for you there in the boat shack there at Ford Island?

de Coligny: Well, I guess it was about one in four. In other words, I had the duty one day, and then I was off four days. I could go on liberty after--what was it--1600 hours or something like that, and, of course, there was no restriction before the war on overnight liberty. So--as all good sailors--I had one [a girl] at every port.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what you did on liberty in Honolulu.

de Coligny: I'm not going to tell you what I did on liberty (laughter)!

Marcello: Well, let me come at it from this angle.

de Coligny: I had a few highballs, yes.

Marcello: What did you know about a Hotel and Canal Street?

de Coligny: Hotel and Canal Street?

Marcello: Yes.

de Coligny: I know that the Senate Hotel was on Hotel Street, and

places?"

Marcello: Plenty of times!

de Coligny: Oh, yes (laughter)!

Marcello: I understand there were all kinds of places on Hotel and Canal Streets where sailors could spend their money other than the houses of prostitution, which, of course, is what we're talking about.

de Coligny: Well, yes, sure.

Marcello: I guess there were all sorts of curio shops and everything down there.

de Coligny: Well, barber shops, bars. There was a big jewelry store on the corner of Hotel Street. I can't think of the name of it, but it was a monstrous big place.

Marcello: And what was the name of it?

de Coligny: Detor's, I think it was. It was right across from Spud Murphy's Locker Club, where I used to keep my civilian clothes.

Marcello: What significance does the Black Cat Cafe have for you?

de Coligny: Oh, my! The Black Cat Cafe was directly across from the YMCA. The YMCA was "pick-up alley. I could tell you a story unless you want to..

Marcello: Go ahead.

de Coligny: The language. I am going to try and make it. Well, there was one waitress in there, and she was a nice

girl. I think she outstood Dolly Parton. I was in there one night, and this young sailor came in, and he said, "Now how did you get them big boobs?" So she says, "You silly shit, I screwed for 'em! That I can remember, because one of the members of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association who recently joined--I'd say the last couple of years--is M.A. Blackmore. He was the first class machinist's mate in charge of the ice plant, and he was the kind of guy. Well, most of us were the kind of guys that went over, and nothing stopped us, you know.

Marcello: And what was his name?

de Coligny: M.A. Blackmore. He is a member of PHSA. Recently--I'd say in the last year or so--I saw his name. Of course, I haven't seen too many that I knew because I was kind of a loner. Louie and I made our liberties ashore. He had his girlfriend who worked out at the American Laundry out on Kalakala Avenue. There was another young lady in there, and we went double-dating, so to speak. But I don't know. I never really got close to people because you never knew when you were going to get transferred. I didn't get too close to people that were in the platoon I was in in boot camp. Some of them, I can remember the names, but I went my way and they went theirs. Of course, when we were on the drill field and then on the station, why, we were bunking in the same area, so you

had to become friends. Not that I was hard to get along with, but I just did not at that time have an outgoing personality. I said, "I've got some things to do, and I better do my own stuff."

So that's the way it was pretty much at the time, except. .well, that's years and years later when I put a ship in commission in 1943. Now I have friends that I've made in the service, and we go to a reunion every year. This last one was in Boise, Idaho, but I unfortunately couldn't make it. But we've been to Seattle and. .well, I have three more states to go to in the contiguous forty-eight before I can say I've been in all of them. That's North Dakota, Vermont, and Rhode Island. Since 1982 I've been doing that little bit. But that's diverging from what you'd like to know.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you did have the privilege of staying ashore overnight. Would you do this very often?

de Coligny: Would you believe that I could take a five-dollar bill, and I could go ashore on Saturday; and if I had the weekend liberty, I could spend Saturday and Sunday and come back with about fifty cents in my pocket. That was meals and a place to put my head. Of course, it didn't cost me anything for a place to put my head. However the meals were a different situation. I had a very nice lady friend. My wife better not hear about

this, but. (laughter) Of course, I wasn't married at the time, anyway

Marcello: What role did sports play in the activities of the pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

de Coligny: Well, they built Bloch Center over at the Navy Yard, and they used to have boxing matches over there which were really good boxing matches. They had fleet competition in whaleboat races. We had softball teams. There were tennis courts. I don't think football was a sport of any consequence at that time. As I say, those that I mentioned were quite frequently attended and were a lot of fun really

Marcello: You mentioned boxing. Boxing was very popular at that time in the service, was it not?

de Coligny: It was always popular in the service, yes, because to be a fleet champion, hey, you had it made. You didn't have any special duties. You stayed in training. Most of the athletes in college today have a special dormitory, and they have a special training table. It was the same thing pretty much with the boxers. It was mainly just for the boxers because they were the ones who had the most arduous physical tasks. Of course, the boys pulling the oars in the whaleboat races had a tough job. They had to be finely tuned and listen to the coxswain and the beat, but they weren't taking a physical beating like the boxers. And I see no reason to talk it down--preferential

treatment. They were the pride and joy of the fleet, so they got the good stuff.

Marcello: I understand those so-called "smokers" were very well attended by the personnel.

de Coligny: They were attended not only by personnel--officers and enlisted personnel--but wives also attended at the time. Since we had a great, big bunch of Navy wives over in the Navy housing area, they would come, too. There was plenty of smoke, believe me. Of course, I don't recall any alcoholic beverages allowed in the arena at the time, but outside there was a PX or a ship's store, if you will, whatever, and, of course, the chiefs had their club, so they could go and enjoy themselves before and after. But they were well-attended, yes, indeed. We had some pretty good boxers that came off of Ford Island. I can't think of the names. We had one little Mexican boy, and he was a scrapper. I don't think he lost any time he went over there or at least the times that I know I was over there. But, like I say, I had other things that were more important to me than spending my time over there at a smoker at Bloch Center.

Marcello: Okay, now this brings us up to that period right before the actual attack itself, Mr. de Coligny. Let me ask you this. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the two countries continued to deteriorate, could you--even in

your position--detect any changes occurring there around Ford Island? As an observer, did you detect any changes at all, or was it routine right up to the end?

de Coligny: None whatsoever. The Marine guard at the dock along with chief-of-the-watch wore .45s, but they had no ammunition. Those who walked post, as I recall, with a rifle may have had ammunition, but I don't think they ever had it on them at the time. When they hollered, "Halt, nobody knew whether they had ammunition or not, to be perfectly honest with you. If somebody hollered, "Halt, you stopped because if you didn't, they were going to stick you with that thing. I don't know whether they had ammunition or not. I really don't believe they did. There was no activity that I could say was prefacing that something was going to happen. Things went on as normal.

Marcello: In other words, all these things that you told me about the guards and so on were the kinds of things that were done ever since you'd been at Ford Island.

de Coligny: To my knowledge, yes. I know of one occurrence at the air station at North Island where a Marine guard told an officer he wasn't going somewhere because his orders said he wasn't about to step in that hangar. The officer said he was, and this Marine buck private said, "Sir, you do and I'm going to shoot you! The guy went and grabbed the door, and he shot him right

in the leg. They fined him a nickel, they made him private first class, and they shipped him out to Honolulu. So North Island had armed guards because at that time people from San Diego could come out in boats and all this, that, and the other and get on the beach and do some damage.

But it was kind of hard for somebody to get on Ford Island. It was completely surrounded by water. Pearl City was over here (gesture), and liberty boats and other things were traveling back and forth. They may have had ammunition. If I say "no, I'm conditioning myself to be called a storyteller. I did not know, myself, if they had ammunition or if they didn't. But I don't believe that they did. I don't think the chief did, anyway.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and let's talk about your activities on that weekend. More specifically, let's talk about that Saturday, first of all. Now you had started to tell me about a moment ago about when you and your friend Louie Raiola went to town. Pick up the story

de Coligny: We had to check out with the officer-of-the-deck there who was a Lieutenant Kane. He was an aviator, a pilot. I don't know what his first name was, although I did at the time. His duty was from 8:00 a.m. Saturday morning until 8:00 a.m. Sunday morning--twenty-four hours. Of course, he turned in and racked

out, and he had some sailors and Marines that took care of whatever business may come over unless it was an emergency telephone call or something of that sort.

So the commanding officer knew where his driver was, and since I was an alternate engineer in the gig, the other fellow had to stay aboard so he was available for the "Old Man. But I went out with him, and we checked out together.

We looked at him and said, "Mr. Kane, what's the matter? Is something wrong?" His reply was, "Well, I can't tell you what it is, but I just wish to God I didn't have duty tonight. Now that night, as I understand it, the Japanese consul or whoever he was in Honolulu at the time had a party, and the top brass--Army, Navy, Marine Corps, whatever--were invited with their wives to this party. They went to it without anybody knowing what was going on. But this lieutenant did evidently have some sort of a sneaky feeling somewhere.

But, anyway, after we had checked out, Louie and I got the boat and went across. Louie had a car, so .well, we both had one, but mine was in town. We drove on out to .oh, I don't know. I can't remember the name of the place, but I do remember the man's name. He was a Navy chief petty officer, and he was a pilot, E.F O'Donnell. We went out to his house. He and his wife had a house where they overlooked the

the ocean. We sat out there on the lanai and had a couple of "cold ones. We sat there for quite some time. E.F said, "You know, if I wasn't hung in for three more years in the Navy, I'd head right for China and go to the AVG [American Volunteer Group]. Well, the AVG was having their problems over there with the Japanese. Of course, the Chinese were the ones that were being beat on, and we didn't think anything of it. But I guess we stayed out there and shot the bull until about two o'clock in the morning.

We left to come back. Louie went up to the main barracks where he had his bunk, and I went on down to the boathouse and crawled in. As I said before, we had upper and lower bunks. Well, mine was the lower bunk, and I had a window that cantilevered out. It was open, and I went sound asleep. Of course, with the help of the beer we drunk, it was no wonder.

But the next thing I knew, hell broke lose, and everything was shaking so bad that I literally fell out of my bunk. I looked out to see what the hell was going on, and I threw on my gear and my clothes--just dungarees--and hauled down to get a boat.

Marcello: Now why did you do that? Why did you go down to get a boat?

de Coligny: Because that was my duty station.

Marcello: But had General Quarters sounded or anything?

de Coligny: It didn't take anything because I saw what was going

on out there. I knew something was hot because of the smoke. The Neosho, which I had come out to Honolulu, Hawaii, on, was tied up at the oil dock, and I saw this boy running across, and he cut her loose with a fire axe. He cut some of those lines so that she could get out without any damage. If she had blown up at the fuel dock, we'd have all been dead. He later got the Navy Cross for that, which I think he really deserved.

But looking out and seeing what was going on, we went to our duty station, and we waited for the chief to say what was what: "Take this boat, take this boat. I had three or four different coxswains in the different boats that I went in. We went out to pick up survivors.

Marcello: Now this happened immediately?

de Coligny: Immediately, yes. As soon as we get down below, we could see the ships. The Oklahoma was starting to settle a little bit this way (gesture), you know, port side down. We could see the smoke over at Ten Ten Dock. I watched the Shaw, which was in the dry dock and which was brought out from New Orleans, have her bow blown off. BOOM! One hit and that was it. And then, of course, the ships in the other big dry dock were the Cassin and the Downes and the Pennsylvania. They caught their share of flak. But it was just our running down there, and the chief saying, "Hey, you

take that boat and go start picking them up!

Marcello: In the meantime, what's going on at Ford Island? What kind of activity is taking place right there on Ford?

de Coligny: They had a machine gun on top of the administration building. As I recall, they were trying to shoot at the planes that were coming over. They had to send boats. .a couple of our boats had to go to West Loch, which was the ammunition storage. If the Marines had any, it didn't last them very long. It was just token, maybe two or three packs, of five rifle bullets for their Springfield or whatever.

Marcello: In the meantime, in fact, is it not true that Ford Island was one of the first installations hit there?

de Coligny: Ford Island was to my recollection devastated down there in the PBY section.

Marcello: Were you anywhere near the PBY section?

de Coligny: No, they were on the end of Ford Island toward the entrance of the channel going out to sea. We were, oh, I guess, a little more than halfway to the other end of the island. We were not quite to "officer's country, because the Oklahoma was directly behind us and moored outboard of the Maryland. She was outboard, and that's why she got hit so bad. We were actually in between the Oklahoma and the California. The California was at the quays almost in front of the big barracks, the main building. With the noise we knew just what the hell was going on, so we ran down

there and.

Marcello: So you are down at the boat shack, and you're initially standing by and manning your boats. From the time you got out of bed until you got down there, how much time had elapsed? You'd probably have to estimate that.

de Coligny: Well, time enough for me to. .I slept in my shorts. I had to put on my shoes and socks, dungarees, shirt and trousers. I didn't forget my white hat; I had to take that. So I guess it was. .oh, hell, I don't think it was more than five minutes. There's one thing I forgot. .I hadn't forgot it, and it's part of being down there. The chief said, "Go to the garage and get the truck. We had the truck over there. So I started to run to the garage, which was, I guess, about as far as the lower section of that building right there (gesture)

Marcello: You're talking about maybe a block-and-a-half?

de Coligny: At the most, yes. So I started running over there to get the truck. The next thing I know, here is TIK! TIK! TIK! TIK! This plane is coming behind me and firing a machine gun! Well, I think it was a .25-caliber--I'm not sure--but they were very light things because when the bullets hit the ground, they made little puffs. When he pulled up, he hit the roof of the garage, which was a monstrous big building, sheet metal building, and it looked like they ricocheted

off.

So I got the truck, brought it back down, and he got hold of one of these seamen and tells him to do something with it (I don't know what) Then he says, "Let's get these boats out of here and go pick up survivors. So we started out.

Marcello: Now which one of the boats are you in?

de Coligny: The first one was a forty-footer. Forty-footers had been designed. they are open boats, but they had made a canopy for them made out of metal pipe and then covered with canvas so that in traveling between the two landings, if it was raining, they wouldn't get wet. We had the fifty-footer with an aluminum fold-top on it.

So we went out and picked up a few people, and about that time I guess the Oklahoma had rolled over or was rolling over. We were pretty close to it, and as I recall, there were two people standing on it, both in whites. There was a sailor looking like he might have just come back from liberty because he had on his. .or he might have been in the group that were raising the flag--I don't know--just before colors because he had a neckerchief on. And there was a commander, full commander, in a white uniform. What his duty was, I don't know. But as it rolled over, they walked the bottom of it. We got over there with that boat, and they stepped in. The sailor, being

polite, said, "After you, sir. The commander told him, "Get in the boat! He was going to be the last one to leave the ship, which he was. They stepped from the ship--from the bottom of the ship--to the boat and never got their feet wet. We had about, I guess, half a dozen people in there besides them. Because some of them were hurt, we ran them back to the boat dock there. They had a truck, and they used the truck to carry them up to the first aid station in the main barracks.

Marcello: Let me break in here and ask you some questions at this point. When you initially get out into the water to begin this rescue work, describe for me what the surface of the water was like.

de Coligny: Fire and smoke. The tanks had been ruptured on some of the ships. It didn't come up to the boathouse and burn our dock or our landing area, and it did not come down as far as the California. The California was still fairly well afloat. But from the Oklahoma and from the West Virginia, I'm sure, the oil had come out. The West Virginia was on the outboard side of the second pair of tied-up battleships.

That stuff was on fire, and there was kids trying to swim to it--going down, coming back up, getting a breath of air, and then trying to find out where they could go. Of course, we went up as close as we could to them and grabbed them and picked them up by the

hair and dragged them into the boat. Of course, once we got them up, we picked them up by the arm, but that was the only way we could get to them, was by the head. Whether a fellow was dead or whether he was drowning or what, we retrieved the body and put him down in the boat. We picked up two or three like that. We went back, and, like I said, dumped our load of humanity and the bodies and went back out again.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Let me break in again. You mentioned the Oklahoma rolling over. Describe that scene as best you can.

de Coligny: I don't know how to describe it. I really don't. It was the most awe-inspiring, frightful thing that I have ever seen--a monstrous battleship, as big as it was, slowly capsizing, rolling over to port, this great, big mast and the gun turrets, everything, going underwater. It was something I never, never want to see again. I never want to see the Arizona go again, either. I have been interviewed twice by the local paper, and I had to cut that young lady short and say, "Look, there will be no more of this. I can't go anymore. I'd get all goosebumps, and I'd get all tight. So I kind of shut that off. I could have brought those papers. I could have brought you the Honolulu Star-Bulletin from December 7, but I didn't; it's at home.

There's something that we noticed afterwards. On

Saturday, December 6, this company was advertising silk. Now I've heard of shantung silk, but I had never heard of shantussia silk. Well, shantussia was at a price, and the price was the number of the quay to which she was moored. There were other names underneath. I don't remember what they had for the California or the West Virginia or something else, but it was to do with fabrics. But I can remember this shantussia silk written on there. I don't know whether it was in the Honolulu Advertiser or the Star-Bulletin. Of course, I also have the paper that came out Sunday morning.

Marcello: When did you actually see the Arizona blow? Was it on the second trip out, or did this all occur when you were out there initially?

de Coligny: I did not see the Arizona blow. I heard it.

Marcello: Can you describe what you heard?

de Coligny: Well, I have heard one other sound just about like it. I was underneath a 5-inch/.38 surface gun on a tanker which was firing without warning being passed, and I was deafened. That's exactly the way I felt--I was deafened. That's when the sky was nothing but smoke. The sailors came running off that thing--those that survived--naked, full of oil, some burned, some wounded, but naked. I think most of the fellows in the boat shed at the time that they were there gave a lot of their clothes away to clothe these fellows

because they came right through the enlisted men's quarters.

Marcello: In the second trip out, did you continue to do the same things you were doing in the first trip?

de Coligny: Yes. we went alongside the West Virginia, but there was nothing we could do there. She had settled. As a matter of fact, the officer-of-the-deck warned us away because I think there was a flag officer in the barge heading toward us. So we went on away.

But when I got back, I had been pulled off my boat and was told to "snipe" on this fifty-footer. Well, there was the boat coxswain and me to be the engineer. I can't remember his name, but at any rate we went out. The fifty-footer is a high boat. It's about that high (gesture) above the water, the gunwale is.

Marcello: About four feet maybe?

de Coligny: Well, I'd say two feet at least. We went out, and we picked up some people. We picked up this fellow who was. .he wasn't moving. He was just in the water.

Marcello: Just kind of bobbing in the water?

de Coligny: Yes. We picked him up, and we laid him across the thwart. The fifty-footer has thwarts running fore and aft. As we were coming back, I told the coxswain, "I'm going to see what I can do with this guy So I started giving him artificial respiration. The Shaffer prone pressure method was all we had at this

time. So I was giving this boy artificial respiration, and it felt like to me he was getting ready to, you know, come to. I had the junk cleared out of him. We pulled in, and I don't know whether it was the same commander that got off the Oklahoma or somebody else, but there was a full commander that said, "Get him out of the boat and get him in the truck!" I said, "Wait a minute! I've almost got him ready!" "Get him out! Get him out! That's an order!" So another fellow came down and got him, and he went, "Oooh!" and then he died. So I told this commander right then and there, "If I ever see your damned face again, I'm going to shoot it off! I'm going to blow you to hell, you son-of-a-bitch! And I would. If I saw him today, I would do that because I firmly believe that that young fellow could have been brought back to life. But you take an order, and you have to obey it.

Marcello: There was a lot of chaos and confusion, I'm sure.

de Coligny: Oh, my God, it was like a madhouse. Three times the people on the California tried to abandon ship, and I don't know whether it was a captain or a commander or who it was, but he was on the quay with a .45 in his hand, and he says, "The first S.O.B. who goes over the side is going to get shot. And they went back. Finally, they abandoned ship. At that time I was in a forty-footer with a metal. We didn't have a canvas

cover. These sailors jumped into the boat, and some of them straddled the pipe. I'm going to tell you something--it damn near killed them. I think it ruined them for life as far as making any children, if they survived. But in looking about, why they didn't go to the sub base, I don't know, because there were submarines over there. At Ten Ten Dock, which was called Ten Ten Dock because it was 1,010 feet long, was the Oklahoma, the Oglala (she was an old minelayer), and a couple of others. I think the San Francisco was there--I'm not sure--or the New Orleans, one. Things have gone out of my mind. I can't remember the names of the various ships that I can remember.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that there were many rescue boats in the water?

de Coligny: Well, those ships that had boats already launched in the water, I believe, did go out and pick up those they could. But the only ones I knew of were the boats from the Ford Island Naval Air Station--from the boathouse. There was a fifty-footer that left the Navy Yard dock and went over toward Pearl City loaded with sailors. I didn't see this, but somebody told me that that fifty-footer, which could carry 190 men--and I'm sure it was overloaded--was hit solid by a bomb and completely wiped out all those people. I couldn't say this for sure, but the word came out that

there was a fifty-footer going over there loaded to Pearl City to the mine fleet. They had minesweepers over there, and the USS Curtiss was over there, which was an aircraft tender I think she brought down a Japanese plane or two. But that was on the other side of the island, and I was pretty damned busy trying to do what I was doing.

Marcello: You indicated that those boats at Ford Island got into the water very shortly after the attack started. Am I to assume that the attack is actually going on while you guys are out there in the water?

de Coligny: Absolutely! They were coming on. I'll give you something that happened a little later on, for instance. We had gone to take a body .I think it was to Aiea Landing. They buried them up at Red Hill. I think that was right. It was contained in a piece of canvas with two two-by-fours. I think it came off the California. I can remember this coxswain's name. His name was Humphrey. He and I went up to the landing, and when I put the boat in reverse, he secured the stern line and then the bow line. So I let the engine run, and then I went forward and got the two pieces of two-by-four; and he was down by the engine, and he got the other two. I lifted and he got soused with body fluids. So we took it--and he called me a bunch of names--and we put the body right over there, and the pharmacist's mates or whoever it was came and

identified him and took him. They identified whoever it was. I'm sure they identified most all of them.

But going back, he stunk. So he said, "I'm going to take care of this. So with the stern line he tied his clothes in a knot--everything--and he got out, and he set the tiller steady, and I went ahead and dragged him. He went over the side and washed himself off and washed all of that stink off of his clothes, too.

When I looked around behind us to see how he was doing, I looked up and there was a. .I guess it was a Betty I don't know. That's what they called the bombers. Anyway, he let go a brace of five bombs that I could count coming down. I said, "Oh, my God, 'Humph, we're gone! And not a one of them exploded. They went more than a hundred or 150 yards behind us, and not a one of them exploded. Otherwise, we would have been dead. I don't think he was shooting at us. I think he was shooting at the Vestal, which was on the rocks after she left the side of the. .I think she was alongside the Arizona. The Nevada had already pulled out and got her hit and went on to what they called Hospital Point, across from the hospital. I don't remember now. But at any rate, they beached her to keep it from completely blocking the channel.

But we went out, and there were bits and pieces that we collected. Actually, what they did later on, they made a cowcatcher for this forty-foot motor

launch. Now on a railroad engine, you have a cowcatcher like this (gesture), but this was.

Marcello: Almost like a scoop.

de Coligny: It was a scoop made out of pipe with chicken wire and two lines so that if you caught something you could pull the line in and row it back into the boat. And we pulled in bits and pieces.

Marcello: Of bodies?

de Coligny: Of bodies. One that I can remember real well was a foot--the right foot--with a high-top black shoe. The tibia and the fibula were there, and the meat was packed down in the shoe top. On the inside of the heel, as we all had to do in boot camp, he had his initials stenciled. They identified from the initials, probably, who that leg belonged to. Evidently, he was just fresh out of boot camp because after you get in the fleet you didn't do that. You did it if you had a bag layout with rolled and stopped clothes, but that was the only reason. That leaves a lasting impression in my mind. It was floating just by the fact that the meat and the shoe were keeping it up. I reached down and picked it up and put it in the boat, and I looked at it. That was one of those things that kind of turned my stomach a little bit, not knowing. Well, I figured that the man had to be dead.

Marcello: How long were you on those rescue operations that day?

de Coligny: Oh, I guess we were on there for a couple or three hours. We made a sweep of every part. I'll come back to that one bad meal I had in the Navy

Marcello: Yes.

de Coligny: They brought a field kitchen down and fed us. We couldn't leave, so they brought a field kitchen down and fed us.

Marcello: Brought it down to the boat shack?

de Coligny: Brought it down to the boat shack and fed us that way. That night I didn't go back to sleep. I went back to my bunk and looked at my bunk. The one window was open, but the bottom pane had a hole about that big in it (gesture)

Marcello: About five inches diameter.

de Coligny: A piece of shrapnel or something had come through, and had I been laying in bed, it would have gutted me right across, which I thank the Lord for getting me out of there.

Marcello: What was the meal you had that day? Do you recall?

de Coligny: Oh, God, I don't know. It was something that was thrown together. It wasn't steak and potatoes, that's for damned sure.

Marcello: So you were, in essence, on that search and rescue activity virtually all day?

de Coligny: Well, up until noon, I'd say, or slightly thereafter when we came in for a meal. Most of it was taken care of by then. Some of the ships were having their own

burial parties. In other words, they were taking their own dead up to. I think they were doing this because they had their boats in the water. After all the activity and the Japanese had left, they went on up and did their own thing. Of course, they did call the air station by phone to say they'd need boat so-and-so and so-and-so. And we'd go, you know, and pick up whatever they had. Usually, we take it up to the landing, and they had the trucks and pharmacist's mates, and they were all picking up whatever we brought up and taking it up. But they were real conscientious. I'm sure that they identified most of those people. Of course, I don't know about the one that they got off one of the other ships. I don't know about the fellow that they got off of the California. He had no head, had no arms, had no legs. They had just the torso. I don't know if he had any scars or anything. The scars were marked in his records, so that was the only way they'd know. That's the way they do things.

Marcello: Was that one of the parts of a body that your group picked up, or is that something that you heard about?

de Coligny: You mean.

Marcello: This torso.

de Coligny: That's the one that I got my coxswain full of body fluids of what there was left, you know.

Marcello: Oh, okay, I see.

de Coligny: They carried him out, and, of course, the canvas kept the fluids and stuff from going through until I tilted him over, and then he got doused. Of course, he was unhappy with that (chuckle)

Marcello: What did you do from noon on then?

de Coligny: Well, we just stood by and watched whatever was happening. We actually were waiting. We didn't know whether they were going to come in by land and have an assault on us or come back again. We didn't know they had turned and gone.

Marcello: In the meantime, had you been armed in any way?

de Coligny: We had no weapons at all. None of us in the boat crew that I know of had any weapons, not even the chief. The Marines had their weapons, and that's about all I know of that could fire back. I don't think they trusted some of us with a weapon.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors you heard going around that afternoon and then later that evening?

de Coligny: Well, the rumor was that they withdrew, and they might come back. We, of course, had no way to protect ourselves. That night I slept in the engine repair shop. There was a double bunk in there, and I had a mattress down below me, and I stacked about ten of them above me. In case anything came through, it would have to go through those mattresses to get to me.

But rumors were rampant. I don't remember half

the stuff that was said, and I didn't believe some of it. I could look at them and say, "Hey, you're full of B.S. But I'll say this. I don't know where the chief went, but he and his favorite little boy took off. They probably went to the Luke Field side because we had a boathouse over there. They kept Captain Buckmaster's gig over there, and any visiting barge that needed cover for the night and wasn't being used, why, they housed it over there.

I can remember the little admiral who was on the Arizona. I had been over at the Luke Field boathouse for some reason or other--I don't know--and he took a walk--Admiral Kidd. He used to walk the island every morning--it was his constitutional--in shorts with his walking stick and one of these African hunter's hats, you know. He came by one morning. I said, "Good morning, Admiral. He said, "What have you got there?" Well, I had a five-gallon can of gasoline which I had siphoned from a motorboat, and I was going to put it in my car. He says, "I wouldn't do that again. I said, "Yes, sir. I forgot all about that five-gallon can of gasoline. He was a little, short, chunky fellow--very pleasant, though. I mean, you know, they can be condescending anytime they want to. But he wasn't the condescending type, to my way of thinking. It was always, "Good morning. "Good morning, Admiral. And he'd keep on going. He never

passed us by without that "Good morning. That was the last of him on Sunday morning. I don't know whether his body is still there or whether they recovered it or what, but I can remember him.

Marcello: That evening, a couple planes off of the carrier Enterprise came in and tried to land. Do you recall that incident?

de Coligny: They got the hell shot out of them. Yes, I do. They did not give their IFF recognition. One of them crashed and came down almost to the point of going off of Ford Island toward where the hospital ship was.

Marcello: Do you recall what you were doing when that took place?

de Coligny: Just standing around and listening to the noise.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

de Coligny: Well, all I saw was this plane coming in--no lights, no recognition sign that I could see--and over on the other side of the island, you'd hear this machine gun. They didn't have a 40-millimeter pom-pom gun at the time, but they fired what they had. I don't know if they fired 5-inch guns or not. The sky was kind of bright there for a little bit.

Marcello: I guess literally everything around there opened up, did it not?

de Coligny: Yes, everything but the hospital ship, and they didn't carry anything except syringes, so that's all they could fire with (chuckle) But I remember that

because two of our own planes were shot down. They did not give the recognition signal.

Marcello: Some people have said that if the situation had not been so tragic, the scenery was kind of pretty with all that fireworks going up.

de Coligny: Oh, yes. It could be described as that, yes, as a Fourth of July celebration.

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

de Coligny: Well, immediately overnight liberty was suspended, so the times I went ashore were few. I went to my usual haunts occasionally--the Senate Hotel, the Bronx Hotel--to go see a girlfriend I had. I'd go out to Waikiki and go to have a meal, and I'd see this girl that worked in the American Laundry and come on back, I'd be back by sundown, usually.

Marcello: What kind of duties were you carrying out there at Pearl in those days immediately following the attack? What were you doing?

de Coligny: Well, I operated in the boat crew, and then they assigned me to YSD-9, which was called the Marvianne. It was a self-propelled salvage vessel. I was one of two engineers, and we had to go over and retrieve a Japanese aircraft that had gone down in the harbor almost over at the sub base. So we went over there and dropped the hook, and the diver went down and hooked on the plane. I would say it was a torpedo bomber. It had three men in it. One of them was a

rear gunner, and there was a pilot, and in the middle was a torpedoman. I assume that's what it was. He used the flotation gear to send the guy up from the rear cockpit--the gunner--and the same thing for the man in the middle cockpit. But the pilot he could not retrieve. So with the lifting hook, they hauled the plane up and put it on the deck. I was surprised that these people were in civilian clothes. The pilot had a board--a clipboard--on his knee, and he had a map of Pearl Harbor and where the ships were doubled up, like the Oklahoma, the Maryland, the Tennessee, and then the other one or whatever. He had double red circles showing where they were tied up.

Marcello: So he had a map of Pearl.

de Coligny: He had a map of Pearl and where the ships were.

Marcello: Would that have been very hard to get, though?

de Coligny: Well, I don't know. The map of Pearl was world-wide.

Marcello: Obviously, they had agents and so on in the Hawaiian Islands, but something like that would not have been that hard to get hold of, I guess, if you had a half-competent agent working in the islands.

de Coligny: Well, I'm sure that they had maps of Pearl Harbor. I don't know whether the man at Pearl City was a Japanese spy or not. I had heard rumors that he had been apprehended. He had a radio--a shortwave radio--and he was giving information. Now anybody in Honolulu could have been doing the same thing, but

somebody--whoever it was, we'll never know--gave them the information that at this quay and that quay were two battleships tied up. That's why the newspaper knew on Saturday where the USS Arizona was. I don't remember numbers of the quays now, but they had them all around Ford Island. But that's the way he got them. The California was ahead of us and the Oklahoma behind us, and across was the ships at Ten Ten Dock and in the dry dock and in the floating dry dock. He had them all. And he had a wad of Yankee dollars like this--of American money (gesture).

Marcello: Enough to choke a horse.

de Coligny: Oh, my God, choke a big horse! In case he had been shot down over land and survived, he could have melted into the Japanese society there. He had money and could have gotten away with it.

Marcello: Getting back to the clipboard again, was this map kind of laminated, or was it paper?

de Coligny: As far as I know, it was just paper. The water had kind of curled it, but he had it strapped down on his leg and then a card on top of it. To tell you the truth, I didn't get that close to see it or to touch it, but I did see that they took it off of him and when they took the money out of his pocket. Then they took him up to bury him. Finally, they sent him over to Aiea Landing, I guess.

Marcello: What were your feelings relative to having to retrieve

this Japanese plane and those Japanese bodies?

de Coligny: Well, if I had been able to do it, if I'd had a gun, I'd have probably stood there and shot him a dozen or more times; or if I'd had a sword I'd have probably hacked on him, or an axe or anything. Well, words can't describe my feelings. I hated those sons-of-bitches with a purple passion.

I knew a fellow over on the Oklahoma. He was a molder. I have at home an ash tray made out of an aluminum propeller: "U.S.N.A.S.P.H.T.H. (Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii) Armstrong made this for me. He was a first class molder, and they shipped him over to the Oklahoma. On Saturday night he was in the Black Cat in his green suit drunker than anything. He got back to his ship, and where his berth was--his bunk--was probably where the first torpedo hit. He probably never knew a thing. I don't think he knew what happened. But I still have that at home.

Marcello: Did anybody try to get any souvenirs off that Japanese plane?

de Coligny: They couldn't very well do it because there were too many officers around. Now what happened later on, I don't know. But I'll say this. When they brought the pilot back down for us to take him over and bury him, he had on a pair of boots--not quite Wellington-style--and the tag inside said "Seika Nippon. They

were brown, a beautiful pair of boots. They had been water-logged. This one fellow says, "Hey, I'm going to get them boots. He tried and he tried, but he couldn't get them off. So he went to the tool locker. Now this might turn somebody's stomach, but at the time we didn't care. But he took a hacksaw and hacksawed those two feet off. We took the body over, and they wanted to know what happened to the feet. We said, "Hey, we don't know. They just gave us his body in the boat to bring it over. He tried to get the feet out, but he had to cut everything up to get it out. He soaked them in diesel fuel and kerosene and everything to get the stink and the oil and stuff out. Well, he finally had them to where they looked like they might be pretty good to try on, and they were too small. Talk about somebody who was mad! So he just heaved them out into the water: "To hell with them! But it kind of just turned my stomach a little bit watching him with that hacksaw and take those legs off just enough to get that boot off.

Marcello: So you were doing work similar to that, then, in the days and weeks following the attack at Pearl?

de Coligny: Yes. Well, we went back to our routine after that of handling liberty parties and taking them from the Naval air station to the Navy Yard landing and then bringing them back.

Marcello: How long did the smoke and fire continue there at

Pearl? How many days after the attack?

de Coligny: Oh, I don't know. I couldn't say. To be honest with you, I don't know. I think it was well into Monday that the ships were still smoldering. Those like the Shaw and the Cassin and the Downes were out of water. I'd lie if I said "this long" because I don't know. I can't remember.

Marcello: How long did you remain at Pearl Harbor before you left?

de Coligny: Well, I remained at Pearl Harbor until the night that I came back from a liberty in January and February of 1942. Somebody had trained the crane on the Marvyane with the hook inboard, which put a tilt to outboard. I crawled into my bunk, and I rolled out; and I crawled into my bunk, and I rolled out. I was stoned! I was loaded stoned, and I had never run the crane before.

So I got up in there, and I cranked that crane up. I started raising the boom, and as I was coming around, I trained it around and had the hook going up. What I failed to do was to stop the boom and then stop the hook. I was bringing it down and trying to put it in the cradle, and what happened is I somehow blocked the hook, and it bent the end of the crane. This Humphrey was one of the boatswain's mates who was skipper of this thing. The other one was Mike. .shoot, I can't think of Mike's last name. I

might later. At any rate he came up and said, "What the hell is the matter with you?" I said, "Well, the damned thing was this way, and I couldn't stay in my bunk!

So we rigged a cargo light, and we started to working on it. We didn't get two cents worth of work done when the officer-of-the-deck and about a half a dozen of Marines came streaming down. They didn't put us under arrest, but they made us put the light out.

Well, of course, I could go to sleep then. But two days later, I was on the transport to Midway. Of course, that was a month or so after Pearl Harbor, but, hey, we still didn't have any open lights at night, especially a cargo light which showed all over the whole area there. But that's one of the devils of drink.

Marcello: So they shipped you to Midway?

de Coligny: They shipped me to Midway And I enjoyed that.

Marcello: So you were there, then, when the Battle of Midway took place?

de Coligny: No, I wasn't.

Marcello: So you were out of there by then.

de Coligny: No, the Battle of Midway had come and gone.

Marcello: That was in June of 1942.

de Coligny: Then it must have been later. It must have been much later. I thought it was a month or two after Pearl Harbor. My time frame has kind of got a kink in it.

But, no, I went out there shortly afterwards because the barracks were still in shambles. The only thing that wasn't damaged was the powerhouse. The concrete walls, I think, were eight feet thick, and it had a double roof on it (eight feet and then a big air space and then eight feet more) But the hangar was ruined, and the garage had been destroyed. Some of the Marine country had been destroyed. They had an underground hospital there. Time just is one of those things that I can't give you minute-for-minute because, like I say, I thought it was January or February But it was after Midway.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you didn't remain on Midway too long?

de Coligny: Nine months. I came back to Pearl, was assigned to the USS Geronimo, which was a YTB, a yard tugboat. It was the only fire tug they had. Everytime there was a fire call, we had to get underway. I had made first class machinist by the time I'd left Midway. It was right after Pearl, after December 7, that they had a commendations or awards day or something like that. I was made second class petty officer and given a Navy commendation, which, I guess, just about everybody in the boat crew got.

After I left Midway, they put me on this tugboat to relieve this other first class who was going back somewhere else (I don't know) I was there a couple of

days, and I went down to see the man in charge, a warrant boatswain, and I said, "I want in a chit and go back to the States. He said, "What do you mean? You've only been here a week! Hell, you got. I said, "I've been out forty-four months, and I want to go home. Look at my record. So he looked at my record. The next day I was transferred to a receiving ship, and two days later I was on the Henderson headed back to the States. Then I put a new ship in commission.

Marcello: What was the ship you put in commission?

de Coligny: The USS Escambia--AO-80.

Marcello: The Escambia?

de Coligny: Named for the Escambia River in Florida. That's the crew that I have a reunion with every year. We were a floating service station, that's all we were. We carried black oil, 100-octane aviation gas, and whatever else we could to the ships that were in the task force. We'd be fueling a carrier on this side and a cruiser on this side, or a battleship and a destroyer.

Marcello: Where were you doing most of this work?

de Coligny: All out in the Pacific, yes. From the time I got onto the Escambia, we went out into the Pacific until after they signed the articles of surrender in Tokyo Bay on the Missouri. Then I was transferred off because they wanted to make somebody else chief, and by my going

that left the rate open. As a matter of fact, seven chiefs left the ship, so they made seven right quick.

Then I went back and went to Guam and was sent back to the States as part of what they called "Magic Carpet. This was an LST, and it had a thousand men on it. They had a bunk for every man, and it fed like a home. It looked good and tasted good. The first class--he made chief a little bit later on--was the second cook at the Waldorf Astoria. He knew how to do a meal. He put it on a tin plate, and it looked good. So after that I came back to the States and had sixty days R. and R. (rest and recuperation), stumbled, fell, and got married (chuckle) It will be forty-two years this year.

Then I was assigned to the USS Nevada. We took her out to Operation Crossroads, dropped the atomic bomb on her, and we finally had the dubious honor of seeing her sunk by the United States Navy. She was too radioactive. They brought her out from California. The Iowa, the Springfield--which I was on--and a heavy cruiser and a destroyer fired all day long and started a small fire on the bridge. So they had to send in to. I think it was the Marine base in El Toro for two torpedo bombers. One hit her on the port side forward, and the other one port side aft. The old girl rolled over, put her bow in the air, and went down to the bottom of the ocean.

Marcello: Now when was this? When did this take place?

de Coligny: In 1948. We had a midshipman cruise when I was on the Springfield.

Marcello: So did you remain in the Navy?

de Coligny: No. In 1948 I got out on September 9 after nine years, ten months, and some days. I got a little bit fed up of people trying to tell me how to do things. I knew how to run an engine room. I had an officer to come down...my watch officer had left. He was a lieutenant, and he was an ex-chief. We got along fine. He was the assistant engineering officer. They sent this goof, a lieutenant JG, as my watch officer. I was supposed to break him in and teach him what to do, but he was trying to tell me what to do.

One time when we got a slow bell--drop down to ten knots--we reduced our extraction steam. What we did, instead of taking steam off the turbines, we cut in live steam to the regulator, to the feed heater, and secured the extraction steam. Well, I went on it, and he says, "Don't do that. I'll tell you when!" I says, "I'm going to do it now. I know when to do it. So I went ahead and did it. He put me on report. I went up to the log room. The commander came down along with the engineering officer and my ex-watch officer. They ran the two yeomen out and asked for the story. The lieutenant told the story, that I did what I did against his orders. He said, "What have

you got to say, Chief?" I said, "Sir, I've been in this engine room now for a few months. I did what I was brought up to do, taught to do. I shifted from extraction steam to live steam in the feed heater. He said, "That's right, Chief. You go ahead back down on watch. And to him he said, "You, Mister, in your room for ten days. I never got him back again. Oh, yes, I did. I got him back for two or three days. The first time I went on watch with him: "How do you want your coffee?" He got my coffee and made it for me and creamed it and sugared it, and I never had a bit of trouble with him after that. But then they transferred him to another division in the ship. He'd been, I think, in every division that there was. I don't know if he couldn't cut the mustard or what, but he sure was a pain in my neck.

Marcello: So you got out of the Navy, then, in 1948?

de Coligny: Yes. My wife was at home with our youngster. Her home was in Pennsylvania, north of Pittsburgh, so I went over there. I went through refrigeration school. I had already been through it once, but I went through it because the Veterans Administration paid for schooling and gave me an allowance until I got a job, which as soon as I got out of school I had a job.

I stayed at that job until the guy made a big goof, and I said, "I'm going to get out of here. So I made arrangements through people here in New Orleans

to help me work for Public Service. I gave them twenty-eight years and retired in 1978.

Marcello: Okay, that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview, Mr. de Coligny I want to thank you very much for your time, you have said a lot of interesting and important things. I'm sure that scholars and students are going to find your comments most valuable when they get to see this interview.

de Coligny: Well, I hope that they do, I hope I've done something that you feel is worthwhile. I'm just sorry that my memory is not as good as it should be. I'm seventy-one, okay? I do this: I see somebody I know, and if I can't turn my head so they won't see me, I'll have to go through the alphabet to get their names. And this is people that I see fairly frequently I belong to the Masonic lodge, and some of the names I can't remember. So, I have to. "Who's this guy?" and I have to go all the way through the alphabet. For one of them, I got to look at this little tag on his shoulder. But some are people I've gone to school with! We had the fiftieth anniversary of our graduating class, and I couldn't tell you the names of some of those people. I got the whole list, but I couldn't put the name with the face. There is an awful change in fifty years, you know.

Marcello: Well, I think you have done a pretty good job of remembering the things that were important to you in

those days. Again, I thank you very much for your time.

de Coligny: Well, I'm glad you are here, and it's a chance for me to get some of this off my chest. The thing I want to get off my chest is that I'm sure that they knew, because Lieutenant Kane told us, "I wish I didn't have duty tonight. He couldn't tell us why, but the next morning I think we knew why I wish I had brought the paper that you could see it.

Marcello: What you are in essence saying is that higher authorities perhaps in Washington knew something about the coming attack?

de Coligny: I'm sure they did. Now Admiral Kimmel and General Short took the brunt of it. I don't think it was their fault because everytime they came back from maneuvers they would come in and give these seagoing people liberty. They couldn't give all of them weekend liberty unless they were in for two weekends. But I'll tell you something. That's a lot of work when they get out there at sea. When they go through training--firing, going through general quarters drills and things of that sort--it is tough. Whether it's a battle station or whether it's a damage repair station, they are sitting there getting ready to fire or waiting for a damage call to such-and-such sector of the ship. I'm sure that Admiral Kimmel and General Short did not know. I certainly didn't know. I had

no feeling of it. Nothing of impending doom showed itself. But that was it. It was there.

Marcello: Well, again, thank you very much.

de Coligny: Well, I'm happy to be able to do something that I hope the students at the university can enjoy.