

**THE ADMIRAL NIMITZ HISTORIC SITE -
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

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Soucy
**Interview with Lee Soucy
U. S. Navy, USS Utah Survivor, Pearl Harbor**

Soucy
Interview With Lee Soucy

Mr. Turkowsky:

Mr. Soucy: At that time I didn't speak English. I was born in the French area and I didn't learn English until I started school. So if I talk funny, you'll know why.

Mr. Turkowsky: You had siblings, brothers and sisters?

Mr. Soucy: I have a 92 year old sister alive. My 97 year old sister died last year, so the 92 year old and I are the only ones left.

Mr. Turkowsky: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Soucy: I went to school in Nashua, New Hampshire.

Mr. Turkowsky: When did you enlist in the military, and where?

Mr. Soucy: I enlisted in the Navy on December the 8th, 1937, in Boston, Massachusetts. My enlistment was up December 7th, 1941.

Mr. Turkowsky: Were there special reasons why you chose the Navy?

Mr. Soucy: I was a sucker for the posters. There was still the Depression on, and my father had died after a long illness and things financially weren't good. So I was intrigued by the posters, "Join the Navy and see the world." And then especially by "Earn while you learn." In the first couple of years I was in the Navy, I did nothing but go to school.

Mr. Turkowsky: Where was that school?

Mr. Soucy: I went to hospital corps school in San Diego, California. And then I went to medical laboratory technology school at the Naval hospital in San Diego, and then I went to medical field service. I was in the Navy, but I wasn't in uniform. The Marine Corps has no medical department, so we wore Marine uniforms with Navy insignia. It was the first time that sailors, our hospital corpsmen, had been issued Marine uniforms.

Mr. Turkowsky: You were camouflaged.

Mr. Soucy: No, camouflage hadn't been invented yet. No, we just had khakis.

Mr. Turkowsky: Do you have any special memories of World War II? I'm sure you do.

Mr. Soucy: When I got married in Hawaii, but that was later. Of course, none of us that were

there will ever forget anything. The trouble is, when you talk to little old men like me they start embellishing their stories. They add things. I'm the only guy that tells the truth all the time. But I am a part-time liar.

Starting with the Japanese attack, I happened to be looking out of a port hole, just looking, when the planes appeared before any bombs or torpedoes were dropped. The *Utah*, the ship I was on, was an old battleship that had been decommissioned, disarmed, they took all the guns out. And then in 1932 it was decommissioned as a bombing target for submarines and airplanes. We'd been bombed in the wrong place at the wrong time before. So when we saw those planes we just thought, it must be those crazy Marines, because Sunday morning, the Navy didn't maneuver in port. So when I saw the flames go up in the hangar the first thought that came to me, to most of us, was "Somebody put live bombs on there by mistake." I saw that big red cloud of flame, and then this huge cloud of black smoke, I felt the ship lurch. We were being torpedoed on the other side. We were torpedoed before the *Arizona*, before any of the battleships were hit.

Mr. Turkowsky: Were you off Ford Island?

Mr. Soucey: We were hooked up at Pier Eleven, just off Ford Island, which was called ??????. the other side of the island, three-quarters of a mile across, was the *Arizona*. And all the battleships were drawn up on one side, and the other side was reserved for carriers generally, but of course we were where a carrier was supposed to be.

I saw the cloud of smoke, I felt the ship lurch which was the first torpedo, and then almost immediately heard the bugle—we did everything by the bugle and the bosun's whistle because the bombing would knock all the electrical conduits out. They were already on the fantail, ready to hoist the colors, raise the flag. That's why they sounded General Quarters almost immediately.

I grabbed my first aid kit which was on the bulkhead and as I was running toward my battle station, which was below the armored deck on this ship, another torpedo hit. It knocked me in one direction and knocked my first aid kit in the other. I was dazed, I don't know if I was knocked out, they say if you get knocked out whether you're out three seconds or three minutes you don't relate. I know I got up dazed, and I ran down the ladders, there were already four or five guys there and they were saying "What the hell's going on? What kind of drill is this?" Because they were below decks, they didn't see anything, they just felt the ship lurching. Some of them thought we'd been rammed by another ship. Nobody knew what was going on.

I'd gone there not a minute, maybe two, and then again we got the bugle call and the bosun's whistle, and "Abandon ship," it was that quick. We sank almost—we hit bottom before any other ship. The first torpedoes that hit, I have a picture that's never been published, it shows two torpedoes, one hitting the *Utah* amidship and

another one seems to be between *Utah's* bow and ????'s stern. I guess the torpedo exploded against the beach.

Within ten minutes the ship had capsized and was on the bottom, where it still is. There's another thing. Everybody knows about the *Arizona*, and the *Arizona* Memorial, but not many people know about the *Utah*, and the *Utah* Memorial. The *Arizona* lost 977 men, and there's 960 or 970 left on it today. There's some that were removed. The *Utah* lost 57 men, aboard today. The *Arizona* is under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. But the *Utah* is in the waters of an active Naval base. You can't just walk over there. If you want to visit the *Utah* you have to get a special escort, a Navy escort, sometimes maybe a Marine. Since 9/11 the security is tight.

I was there last year in May, they had an opening, the premiere for the movie "Pearl Harbor," they could have had me as the big star, they took Ben Affleck instead. I guess there must not have been many survivors there, I guess they went to the Navy Public Affairs Office ahead of time. When we arrived, we were treated like princes. I took my whole family, nine of us. At the *Arizona* we had escort, food, everything, free passage. At noon the Navy sent a 15-passenger van and took my whole family back to the *Utah* Memorial and Chief Petty Officer Edmond escorted us from the shrine to the beach to all the places I'd been on Ford Island that day. It was really something that not one person in a million gets to do. Everywhere we went, we were really treated royally. The chief petty officer, the second class petty officer, and the third class petty officer were our escorts.

That evening, after spending the whole day at Pearl Harbor, four hours at the *Arizona*, four hours at the *Utah*, my two daughters got their heads together. We were waiting for the van back. I said "What are you girls whispering about?" They were talking in a low tone. My oldest daughter said "Daddy, Margaret and I were just talking"—Margaret is my younger daughter. "Margaret and I were just talking about all those stories you told us all your life. You told story after story, you never told the same story the same way twice. So we thought you were just a big bag of wind, but you must have been important, the way they're treating us. You must have really been a big shot."

My younger daughter looked up at me, she said "Daddy, was Admiral Nimitz really your assistant?" I thought that was pretty good.

My wife and I have been married 57 years. We started our trip to Hawaii, my daughters, one in New Mexico and one in Texas, got a conference call and they arranged—we were married in Hawaii. My wife was a lieutenant junior grade, she was a Navy nurse, and I was a chief petty officer when we were married. I made rank, I knew on our honeymoon. So they called this church to have us renew our vows. I said "I don't want to do that. That's corny. I don't want to go through that."

And she said, "You'd better." So we went to that church, that was the first day, the next day we went to Pearl Harbor. We started in that church. It was really an emotional thing, having our three children there. I have a picture of all of us standing there, my children and my granddaughter, my grandson-in-law, my grandson. It was really a moving experience.

Mr. Turkowsky: Back to your ship sinking, did you have time to put on life jackets?

Mr. Soucey: There was one side, their life jackets were kind of secured behind, on some peg of some kind, but on the side that I was on there was some officer just throwing life jackets off. I was an excellent swimmer, an excellent diver. I carried that life jacket, I looked at the beach, and the bombs and machine guns were going off, and I said "I'm going to get away from this ship as quick as I can." And I had this Mae West—when you were in the Navy, is that what they called that jacket? May West was pretty well endowed, you know, so that was the nickname for the life jackets. I thought, I'm not going to have the May West slow me down, so I threw it back and I swam—I told you, I was a good swimmer and a good diver and I kept thinking, when this ship sinks it'll suck me under. I didn't know the harbor was 45 feet deep it could have been 450 feet for all I knew, but my idea was I've got to get away from here.

We were loaded with ammunition. In addition to being a bombing target, we were the fleet anti-aircraft gunnery training ship. We'd take on the gunners from the different ships to learn how to use these new guns. Some books you'll read say the *Utah* was useless and had no guns—we had the best anti-aircraft guns in the world. No other ship at Pearl Harbor had—well, there were three ships that had five-inch 38s, which became the mainstay through all of World War II, to Korea. It was a super gun. There were two light cruisers and one destroyer that had eight-inch. The *Enterprise* had eight-inch, they were out at sea. But no ship had all the serious equipment, the range finders, the directional finders, we were the only one at that time that had it.

When we served as a bombing target, the five-inch guns were covered. We called them dog houses, steel structures. The machine guns were stowed below deck. Many, many books say the Japanese mistook the *Utah* for a carrier. A lot of them said she looked like a carrier because we had these timbers, they were two layers of six by 12 timbers to soften the impact of the bombs, they weren't live bombs. The timber did nothing to change the contours of the *Utah*. When they took the guns off, they still had the turrets, the superstructure, all that, was still there. And a lot of the books say from above she looked like a carrier. [looking at a picture] You can see the timbers here, the turrets are still there, where would you land an airplane? You couldn't land a kite on the *Utah*, but there's dozens of books out here that say it looked like a carrier, and the Japanese mistook it for a carrier.

I get pretty passionate and pretty upset about them saying it was a carrier. It didn't

look like a carrier in any form, shape, or fashion.

When we swam ashore—I started, when I got off the ship, I've got a medal here somewhere. You'll never see a medal like this. It's the only one. The Purple Fanny Medal. I was getting ready to dive off the ship the lines, those big lines holding 22 thousand pounds or whatever, they snapped so it threw me off balance and I ended up on the ship's side, on the bottom, sliding over barnacles. So I got deep scratches on my hands and my fanny. One time a couple of years ago I spoke to the Rotary Club and I told them that I was a hero but I was too modest to say it. I said "I saved a man's life, I should have gotten a Navy Cross and I got nothing." The way I saved the man's life was I had shoes on when we got to the beach and this other pharmacist's mate, Gordon Sumner, was barefooted. The beach was very rough, so he was walking like this, so I put one foot in about six inches of water and held out my hand and I helped him ashore. So I tell everybody I saved his life. If you ask him about it, he'd say "Oh yes, he saved my life." Because he was just crawling out.

We both sat on some rocks there trying to get our wind back, a chief came by. There were two ensigns, I think one might have been J.G. They could see the Red Cross ????? that I wore. I gave it to the Nimitz Museum, it's on display in the Bush Pavilion, I saw it yesterday. The medical insignia. They could see that and they said, "Corpsmen, come with us, on the double." That means immediately or sooner. When we jumped in the jeep they raced across the island, they said "There's a bunch of guys over in the officers' quarters. There's no medical supplies or medical services or anything." No one to attend to these guys. They were mostly—I guess they had been taken there by motor launch from the *Arizona*, mostly the *Oklahoma*, and the *West Virginia*. You've seen pictures, the oil caught on fire. If you're swimming through burning oil I don't think you would last very long. The oil was spreading faster than the fire, so all these guys who swam in were covered with oil. Their hair, their nose and eyes. They were a miserable looking mess.

A lot of them that we had were flash burns. When a bomb explodes, fire, they were burned from head to toe. There were some of them pretty bad. But most of them were men that had bullet wounds or maybe shrapnel, but they were covered with oil, so we couldn't—if you had to cut, you need to put an antiseptic on, and if it's covered with oil the antiseptic won't penetrate. So this officer came back and said "How you guys doing?" I said, "We need a solvent real bad to wash off this oil," because Pearl Harbor was like a sewer then, swimming in a sewer. Being medical, we were germ conscious. I said "We need something to wash off the oil. We could use some alcohol." He said, "Alcohol. Will whiskey do?"

Whiskey is alcohol, 90 proof, 80 proof, more than 50 percent, so before I could consult with this other pharmacist's mate about whether we could use whiskey to clean wounds, he took off, he came back and plunked half a case of Scotch at my feet and the other guy had an armful of bottles from the Officer's Club, gin, vodka,

whiskey, scotch, everything. We were using this liquor. We'd pour it on and wash off, and if you had to pour it on the head—head injuries are always, you figure they're more urgent than a regular wound. A bullet wound or anything, in order to use an antiseptic you've got to wash that oil off.

After we treated several, maybe it was an hour later, I think it was after the second wave. The Japanese planes came in two waves, about 30 or 40 minutes apart. I was walking around with a bottle of liquor, I don't know if it was gin or vodka, I know it was colorless. You know okolehao? Even the natives don't know what okolehao is anymore, but it was the distillate of the root—did you ever eat any poi when you were over there? Do you know what poi is? Tastes terrible, doesn't it. The okolehao I think is the distillate of whatever they make poi with, the root of some plant [taro].

I was walking along and there was this guy laying, all exhausted. He looked at me and said "Doc, could I have a dose of that medicine," referring to the alcohol. So I thought well, what the heck, I didn't know what else to do. So I gave him the bottle. He took a big swig and he no sooner got it down than out it came, right over one of my shoulders. Projectile vomiting goes out thick. And he vomited and retched for maybe four or five minutes. All that green stuff, and black—he had swallowed oil. So actually it was pretty good medicine because if it made him vomit, you needed to get that sea water out and especially the oil. After five minutes of retching he laid back and he kind of sat up and he said "Doc, I lost that medicine. Could you give me another dose?" I don't know if I gave him any more or not. It was a sad thing but there were such funny things.

Another time a little later I was walking around again. The Japanese pilots after they dropped their bombs and torpedoes, the fighters would come in and they were strafing anything that was moving. They were strafing outside the building where I was. The front of it was all glass, you could see out. This guy was lying there, I'm sure he died, he was torn open. He was lying there and I was on one knee talking to him because I didn't know what else to do for him, he was too bad for me to try to treat. This Japanese fighter plane was machine gunning the men in front of the building. It came real low, we thought it was going to crash into the building. I hadn't heard of kamikazes then, but that kind of what went through our mind. When people say, "Were you scared?" I wasn't scared—it wasn't because I was brave, it was because it was so unbelievable. The smart thing would have been for me to drag that guy out, put him behind the concrete wall. But you're both looking at this machine gunning, and finally he said "Open the door and let the sonofabitch in." His exact words. Here's a guy dying, and that's . . .

That day while we were there we ran out of supplies. I was the senior pharmacist's mate, by about one month, I'd got promoted to second class pharmacist's mate about a month before he did, so I was senior. He said, "Why don't you go to the naval dispensary and get some supplies?" I said, "Sumner, I have no sense of direction. I

get lost on the ship. You go." I thought that might have been a little bit of paradise because we all thought it was pretty safe to go across these buildings. He had to go out in the open, so when he came back with a box of supplies, I guess he commandeered a jeep or something, he came back and he said "Boy, I had a close call." I said "What?" He said, "A bomb fell in the lanai, the patio, while I was at the dispensary." I could tell he wasn't hurt, so I didn't pursue the matter. I just went on getting the equipment out.

That afternoon when we—they were building a ditch on Ford Island right where the *Utah* men landed, at shore line, or water line. It was maybe three or four feet wide and three, four, five feet deep. So it was a natural defensive trench. We eventually were told to report to the dispensary for reassignment. We were all medical corps. These other guys all reported to the admiral. They took us to the dispensary. We got there and in the patio he pointed to a big crater. He said "That's where the bomb fell that I told you about." I said, "Oh, where were you?" He pointed, he said "About there." I said "Ah, come on. If you'd been that close it would have killed you." He said "Oh, it didn't go off so I took off." It was a 500 pound bomb. I guess by the time we got there I'd heard that it had been removed by a demolition squad. Some books say it blew up and made damage, but it didn't blow up. Because if the 500 pound had exploded, all the windows would have been shattered.

Then the one thing that happened, you've heard about the *Enterprise*, it had been out looking for the Japanese fleet. So it was night, and Halsey didn't want the ship lit up to let these planes on so he told them to go to Ford Island to land. The carrier planes would land and take off from Ford Island a lot. It was about nine, or maybe a little after nine, I think, and I was down below decks drinking coffee with several guys. All of a sudden they started shooting and the sky lit up. Right across from us the *California* had been abandoned, torpedoed, the bow was kind of on the bottom but most of the ship was still up. So on all the ships that were damaged, if there was an area they could put machine guns, they had them. It seems the machine gunners who shot those six planes, five or six, one guy lived. They blew up. One guy landed and then he was killed by our own gunfire. They thought he was a Japanese.

I was down below decks and when the sky lit up, I could see through the port hole. There were two *Utah* sailors in line over to the right of me, and one of those armour piercing machine gun bullets went through one *Utah* sailor's hand and it hit the other guy in the chest and killed him instantly. Friendly fire. Friendly fire wasn't invented yesterday, it's been around ever since men started killing themselves to resolve their problems.

We stayed on the *Oregon* and I think around eleven o'clock we were sent to the hospital. That first night I remember, around midnight we got some mosquito nets and we went into one of the wards and made a dormitory. The next morning the chief came in about four o'clock, and "What's your name, what's your rank, what do

you do," and all that. So we were assigned according to what we had been doing, and of course I was a medical laboratory technologist, I was sent to the laboratory. So we got about four hours sleep that first night, and after that there were two nights when we got no sleep, we worked around the clock.

This one experience, I don't think you'll find this in a book. I think it was the second day that people, civilians, came to give blood. They had it on the radio, we are in urgent need of blood. They had a small blood bank at Queen's Hospital in Honolulu. One time I was walking by this good-looking girl, she'd just given a pint of blood for transfusion. She had kind of a little seersucker uniform and so what it was, she was a prostitute, the houses of joy. Those girls came in and they worked, they really worked. This girl had given a transfusion. I told this guy, "Boy, that's a good-looking babe. Who is she?" He said, "That's Dixie or Trixie." Now, you think I would know a prostitute, I don't know. My mother might be listening. Anyway, they worked as nurses' assistants and they really worked. Of course, they were protecting their business. They wanted to keep as many alive as they could.

I gave a transfusion, most of us did who were not injured. As compensation in those days, the Navy would give one ounce of whiskey if you gave a transfusion, an ounce of whiskey and a glass of water. That was our reward. I kept on working, and everybody else did the same thing.

There really never was any fear because it was so unbelievable. To this day I can't believe it. That they could come from 5,000 miles away undetected.

Mr. Turkowsky: I know it's the general attitude that everybody pitched in.

Mr. Soucey: Oh yes, there was no question. Even guys that had minor wounds, they were . . . After midnight I was at the hospital. We didn't have uniforms. All I had on was a skivvy shirt and shorts. That was the uniform of the day in port in those days. Most of the guys that had their regular uniforms on, the flash burns did not sear them. But the guys in shorts and skivvy shirts, the flames would go right through that. As I said, they were burned head to toe. Most of them, if they has socks on, they had maybe a short area around the ankles, the foot. I was on the first convoy that took the wounded, the men that needed, that would never recover, probably, and needed long-term care, were taken to the States. The first convoy left there about December 21st. We arrived in San Francisco on Christmas Day, three o'clock in the afternoon we docked.

Mr. Turkowsky: Was that a hospital ship?

Mr. Soucey: The ship I was on was the *President Coolidge*. It was a luxury liner. It was half way between the Philippines and Hawaii when the Japanese attacked. Of course, it came into Pearl Harbor with tourists that were already on there. We took over, the Navy,

for medical, like a hospital ship. The other ship in the convoy was the *General Scott*, which was an Army transport ship. We had a lot of wounded on that. This guy Sumner that I told you about was on the *General Scott*. I was on the *President Coolidge*. Coolidge or Wilson—oh my word, I quickly forget. One of the President Line's.

Then I was on the first convoy that came back to Pearl Harbor. We thought that when we got to Mare Island Naval Hospital, San Francisco, that we'd be issued new records, because we had no records, no clothes, nothing. They said no, you got to go back, medical personnel, we urgently need them in Hawaii.

Mr. Turkowsky: We'd like to hear about the rest of your Navy career.

Mr. Soucey: My naval career was pretty stable. When I was transferred to the Naval Hospital—all the pharmacist's mates from the battleships and cruisers and any ship that was damaged were transferred to the hospital. All of them were gone within a couple of months. I stayed there three years. Every time I came up for transfer there were reasons why—I got orders to go back to the fleet Marine corps. All the guys that were in the fleet Marine corps with me, most of them ended up on Guadalcanal, and most of them ended up dead. There were more Navy crosses awarded to Navy hospital corpsmen on Guadalcanal than Marines, or Army, or anybody.

Under the old Geneva Convention, medical personnel did not carry firearms, didn't have any guns. The red cross was supposed to protect us, that we couldn't shoot them so they wouldn't shoot us. But the Japanese did not abide by that, and they used that red cross for practice. I think a lot of them stopped wearing that red cross and they gave them guns if they wanted one. And the same way with the chaplains, they didn't have any guns, but they offered them. I don't know of any chaplain that opted to take a gun, but the Geneva Convention was not abided by.

I stayed at the hospital, that's where I met my wife. She was a nurse. We were married in Honolulu. We would get patients by the five, six hundred all in one, like after the battle over the Marshall Islands, and the Gilbert Islands, and Tarawa. We'd get shiploads. Some of them came by Army medical planes, if they weren't medical they were converted to one. I was kind of a listening post for guys, by then I'd been in the Navy four years. I think I mentioned, my enlistment was up December 7, 1941, that was Sunday, and on Monday the ship was supposed to leave, we were going to unload our timber that we had for bombing practice and then come back to the States. Because the bombing, even though they were practice bombs, the ship was not very waterproof, the deck. In a storm, you know how water can sweep across the deck of a ship. When that happened, we leaked like a sieve.

When they lost my records, I had accumulated \$480 on the books. I wanted to go to

medical school. Of course, I'd have to go to college. In those days \$480 was pretty good money, and then a 21-year-old's got a lot of guts. But I never did go to medical school because there was no—one time my hometown paper had an interview and I told them that my enlistment was up December 7, but I chose to stay in. But nobody even gave me a vote, you know, "Do you want to stay in or do you want to . . ." Nobody was asked if they wanted to stay in, you were in, you stayed in.

So I stayed at the Naval hospital at Pearl Harbor until April of 1945. I was married in January of '45. Then I started with the Marines, and I ended up at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. When I was transferred first I went to a malaria control school, and I was a warrant officer by then. I reported to Camp Lejeune as Assistant Malaria Control Officer. There was still some malaria, isolated cases, in the swamps in North Carolina. I don't think there's been a case reported for a long, long time, but 60 years ago there was some malaria.

My term was up December 11, and I had terminal leave. I'd used up two or three days, I had 30 days accumulated leave. Since I was in Hawaii you couldn't go anywhere, so I had 30 days paid leave. My actual discharge paper reads January 8, almost exactly eight years that I was in the Navy. My wife got out in, I think, November. She was pregnant. In the old Navy, nurses, if they got pregnant—well, they couldn't be married. If you got married, out you went as a Navy nurse. But if you got pregnant, I don't know, I guess they'd cut their heads off. That was a no-no. Things weren't as free then as they are now.

Mr. Turkowsky: In spite of all you've seen and been through, you seem to be in high spirits. What do you attribute that to?

Mr. Soucey: A lot of times I'll meet some young person, 20 years old, and he'll say something like "My grandfather was at Pearl Harbor, my grandfather was on this ship." It's like, "My grandfather's from Texas, do you know him?" There were a couple of million people. So anyway, they'll say "My grandfather was at Pearl Harbor, but he never talks about it." And I say, "How old is your grandfather?" And they'll say, "Oh, he died thirty, forty years ago." If you keep it all inside yourself you're going to get stomach troubles, you're going to get heart problems, you're going to die. So my advice, when I go to reunions and somebody sits in the corner and won't talk, I get him to talking he gets much better. There's a book called *Pearl Harbor Heroes*, it's a Marine bugler that was on the *West Virginia* when the Japanese dive-bombed her. **Senzi Abay???** was the pilot, he was supposed to be here. I think he's 86 now, and he's not in very good shape. I'm in much better shape than most of the others, when I go to reunions—last May, we have our reunions usually Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. I think they're going to meet in Laughlin, Nevada permanently because we can get rooms there for \$16, free tickets for meals, boy it's a deal. Ship's reunion.

The Pearl Harbor survivors, every five years they meet in Hawaii. The years in-between they meet in different places, like this year the reunion, the week of December 7th, we'll be in Houston. We'll have the royal tour of the *Lexington*, the CB 15. There is no *Lexington* with CB 2.

Saturday morning we had a big farewell breakfast, a lot of tablehopping and all that. I was talking to someone and this young guy, the son of a friend of mine that was on the *Utah*, came over and this guy was under the weather, he wasn't at the breakfast, but his wife who was 79, the son I think was 55, he came over to me and said "Lee, what are you on?" I said "What do you mean, what am I on?" He said, "Well, every time I see you you're always talking. If I come in in the morning you're already there yakking it up, you're flitting here and there, and if a girl comes within ten feet you either mash her on your knee or you're hugging her. How do you, where do you get your energy?"

The 79-year-old looked up at me and she said "Do you take Viagra?" So me, not to be put down by just a simple expression like that, I said "Honey, I don't take Viagra. I'm still on saltpeter."

I think attitude—it breaks my heart, like on December 7th in that week at Pearl Harbor I saw two or three guys that I thought I'd never see again. They've died since then. On the oxygen, some of them with a walker, some in wheelchairs. Somebody said the World War II veterans are dying, now the rate is 1500 a day.

(Side one ends, side two takes up—)

Mr. Soucey: . . . on the *Utah*. In the summer of '41 when we went into Bremerton to be refitted, that's when we took on these new guns and sophisticated equipment. They transferred a couple hundred of the old hands that had been on the *Utah* three, four, five years, and we took on a bunch of recruits. Just fresh out of boot camp, seamen second and all that. We had a lot of young people, I would say if you put everybody together I was one of the older ones, because I was 22, I had just turned my 22nd birthday. But I'm in better shape than most of the guys that were 17, 18 years old. They had heart attacks, they were diabetics, all kinds of problems.

Mr. Turkowsky: How did you enjoy Hawaii with your wife?

Mr. Soucey: I thought it was a very, I enjoyed it. During the war we got liberty every fourth day. At first we didn't get any liberty for two or three months. Then when we did, we'd get off at ten and have to be off the streets at four o'clock in the afternoon, because they had curfews at night. Then they extended it to five, to six, to seven, and eventually I think always, unless you had a place to stay, you still had to be off the streets before dark. So my wife and I, the first date we had, we went to church, I hadn't been to church for four years. We were going to Waikiki beach. We'd lay on the beach. Now if

you go to Waikiki it's rough to walk. Then we had the beach to ourselves, practically. So every fourth day we'd lay on Waikiki beach and we'd go to a place called **Long Ye Chai???**, which was a nice restaurant in Waikiki. We'd eat mostly there. We went together, and finally in January of 1945 we were married. I made warrant, she made lieutenant, and then she was transferred back to the States immediately.

I went to see the personnel officer, he was a lieutenant junior grade, I knew him when he was chief. I said, "I guess my records probably fell through the cracks." They had an article in the hospital newspaper. They had a doctor King and a nurse called Gibbons, Dixie or something, and me, I'd been there twice as long as those other two. They talked about the people that were **pineconers???** So I went over and I said, "I guess my records have fallen through the cracks. I want you to look for them. I'm ready to go back to the States." Because I'd been there much, much longer than anybody ever stayed in one place. So I was transferred to the Naval hospital in Charleston, Massachusetts, Boston harbor. My home was in New Hampshire, about 35 miles from there. I was there one week, then I was ordered to the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and that's where I course in malaria control.

As I said, I reported to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina on VJ day. I had my records, my orders, and I went to the personnel office, there was nobody in there. Finally a Marine sergeant came in and asked "Can I help you?" I said "I'm supposed to report here for duty." "Oh," he said, "there's nobody going to be here all day. You go to the officers' club, that's where everybody is." So I did, and some guy that was stationed there took me to the bachelor officers' quarters and I got a bunk out in the hall.

When the big bomb hit, the atomic bomb hit, I must have been at the medical center. They had a movie and it was hush-hush, only officers could go. As a warrant, I could pass as an officer, and I saw that bombing of Hiroshima. It was unbelievable, I couldn't believe such a thing. I think you mentioned 9/11 relating to this. There have been a lot of articles written about which will have the greater impact on history say, 50 or 100 years from now. A hundred years from now there will be nobody left alive that could remember 9/11 or December 7th, but it's a different ball game. In December it affected everybody. Back here in Texas when the terrorists attacked those buildings, that's a terrible thing. But it didn't affect you, did it? Didn't affect him, didn't affect me.

But December 7th affected everybody because, boy, that Monday morning, the men with any red blood in them were lined up to enlist in the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps. Nobody ran to the recruiting office on 9/11, because it didn't directly affect us. But that bomb, that's a bad thing. A lot of the people, like the Smithsonian, they try to downplay it, that we shouldn't have done that. But if those guys that said that had been prisoners of war, and they were living on a cup of rice every day, or every other day, and they were being tortured or being beat up for nothing, they wouldn't have wanted to wait another day, so the atomic bomb, to me,

saved not only many, many American lives, it saved millions of Japanese lives. Because if you go by how the Japanese fought to the death on Okinawa, Iwo Jima, and those islands, women throwing their babies over the cliff into the sea, they would have fought to the end. They would have lost millions and we would have lost maybe a million.

So to me, if you see pictures of Tokyo—we had wiped out Tokyo with fire bombs—to me it doesn't seem to make any difference whether you kill a hundred thousand people with a thousand bombs or kill them with one bomb. War is terrible, war is hard, and the object is you shouldn't go to war unless you want to win. You go to win. Of course, what's going on now, I don't want to be too political, but I'm opposed to attacking Iraq or anybody else unless we have some approval, some support or at least approval from other countries. Otherwise for centuries we'll be the world's naughty boy, the bullies. We've got the power and you do what we say or we're going to blow your head off. I don't believe in that. I believe in freedom for all nations.

But anyway, we've gotten off the subject. Do you want to know anything else?

Mr. Turkowsky: I guess with all everyone has been through, I guess there's some real celebrations at the end of the war in Honolulu and . . .

Mr. Soucey: Yes, but the end was not like the beginning. In the end, the celebrations were—it took a long time to bring all the sailors from all over the Pacific, all the soldiers from all over Europe, and so the World War II veterans, when they arrived home they were treated like heroes.

Mr. Turkowsky: And you were in the States when the war ended, right?

Mr. Soucey: I was at Camp Lejeune when that happened. It took me two or three days before I could finally sign in. Everybody was out celebrating. Of course, Korea was kind of—well, that wasn't a very popular war either, but Vietnam, those men, they were draftees, they didn't have any choice. I'm in the Japanese-American Friendship Group. Some of my contemporaries say "I'd never shake hands with those slant-eyed SOBs." They hate them. I don't want to die with hate in my heart. And the Japanese, there's a lot of them like that. In December I met these Japanese, especially girls, I like girls. They want friendship, too. You can't blame my grandchildren for what I did in the war, and the same way with the Japanese. We shouldn't hold the two or three generations—see, their culture was different than ours.

A Japanese once told me, the reason the Americans were treated so bad, the Japanese considered it a disgrace to give up, fight to the death, which a lot of them did. Even after the war, some held out in the Philippines two or three years after the war ended. You've seen these tattoos, used to be a popular sailor tattoo, a flag on a pole that says "Death before dishonor." Next to "Mother," a lot of them would have a

heart and "Mother" tattooed on their arm. Well, the Japanese thought that. To them, to surrender was a dishonor and they would fight to the death rather than be dishonored. There are other things in their culture that are different. But it's changing now, it's not the same. Dr. Goldstein who has written several books on Pearl Harbor had a program on Japanese culture. I went up to him and I said "Have you ever seen a Japanese couple kissing in public?" He said "No, I've seen them pretty friendly. Five years ago if you'd asked me that question, I'd say you're crazy, but they are becoming more like we are." We've adopted some of their things. Yesterday's enemy is now our friend. I believe we've got to try to get along with everybody.

Mr. Turkowsky: Where do you live now?

Mr. Soucey: I live in Plainview, Texas, 420 or 430 miles up the road here, on the left hand side. I can't drive more than about an hour without falling asleep at the wheel, and I did fall asleep at the wheel about two blocks from my house. So I swore an oath to my wife that I would never drive out of town again. I got some young guy to drive me over here, he's got some friends around the area. But to come by plane it would take me a day and a half. You can drive it in eight or nine hours, but if you fly it'll take you a day because I'm three hours from the nearest airport. I'm surprised that you land in Austin or San Antonio, there's no way to get down to Fredericksburg. You guys could rent a car, but I can't rent a car.

This symposium, I think that's wonderful. You're getting a lot of younger men as historians, and women, too.

Mr. Turkowsky: Did you get to see Admiral Nimitz at all when you were in Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Soucey: I drew blood on him for his annual physical. Did I tell you about Admiral Halsey? I drew blood on him, too. If you remember your history, the Battle of Midway, Halsey was the "Fighting Admiral." He was in the hospital when the Battle of Midway occurred. He had an allergy, he had hives. I got a call from sick officers' quarters, I had to go over there to draw some blood for some tests because they didn't know exactly why he broke out like that. So I took my needles and syringes, put on a plain gown and I knocked on the door. I went in with my tray of needles and syringes and bandages and alcohol. I got in there, he said "Now what!" very gruff. He was a good old guy but he'd been hounded by the doctors, the nurses. So I got in the door, he was going like this, his feet moving. His nickname was Bull Halsey. Here he is, his feet going like that. I said, "Oh, that's why they call him Bull." What he was doing, that's not why they called him Bull, he was scratching his feet. He itched all over. There was a movie I saw recently where Robert Mitchum is Admiral Halsey, and he's got this lotion in a neat line. He was splotted all over. Mitchum was clean shaved, but that's the thing that got me. I remember seeing him and he was all blotchy.

I got quite a reputation. When I went in there there was a nurse there. When he said "Now what!" I told him who I was and I said "Dr. Hutchin wants me to draw some blood on you so we can do some tests." He said, "OK." I said, "Would you sit in that chair, please?" It was an armchair. If you want to stick a needle, you want a good surface. So he hopped up on the bed. He was there in a rumpled pajama top. Robert Mitchum has got this freshly—the thing you remember, that brings it all to mind. Of course he was broad chested—he's not much bigger than I am, I think, but his chest was broader, he's a macho-looking guy. So he hopped up on the bed. I didn't move, I'd told him to sit in the chair. He looked and he said, "You want me in that chair?" I said, "Yes, sir. I believe it would be easier on both of us so I could hold your arm. It won't hurt me one way or the other, but it'd be easier on you."

Well, the nurse told a story that I told the admiral off. He was a good old boy, so after I took the needle out he said "You did that very well, son. How long have you been in the Navy?" I said "My enlistment expired December 7th." He kind of chuckled. "How long have you been here at the hospital?" I said, "I've been here ever since my ship was sunk." He said "Your ship was sunk? What ship?" I told him the *USS Utah*. He said "Oh, yes, we could have used her guns."

A lot of books say the *Utah* had no guns. Crazy. I want a program to straighten out history before I die.

Mr. Turkowsky: How about Admiral Nimitz? Was he as understanding?

Mr. Soucey: Admiral Halsey was kind of a gruff guy, good-natured, but at the time he was in misery. Admiral Nimitz was a very, he was everybody's grandfather, grandfatherly type, very soft-spoken. He wasn't sick when I drew blood on him, it was just a routine check. Maybe he had some minor ailment, I don't know. I drew blood on Admiral Halsey, Admiral Nimitz, Admiral ????? and Admiral Turner. In fact, I had a slide collection at one time of these admirals. I loaned it to somebody and I never got it back.

Mr. Turkowsky: Mr. Soucey, would you share some of your photographs?

Mr. Soucey: This is a picture of the *USS Utah*. I think it was either during World War I or right after. It shows her with all her mighty guns. At one time she was a dreadnought, she was one of the world's mightiest ships. In 1930 we had a treaty with the United States, England, Japan, Italy, all the naval powers, to reduce armaments. After World War I they wanted to reduce armaments. So they took the big guns off the *Utah*, but they left the turrets on. If you go to your library, you'll find dozens of books that say that the *Utah* was stripped. It never looked flat like an aircraft carrier. Many books and many articles say the Japanese mistook it for a carrier. There's no way that anybody with the visual acuity required to fly an airplane could possibly mistake that for a carrier. Some of them say that from above it did because of the

lumber. Well, here's a picture from above. It still doesn't look like a carrier. And then they talk about the protective timbers that we had to soften the impact of bombs because we were a bombing target made it look like a carrier. Nothing could make it look like a carrier.

This is the *Utah* in August of 1941 after she had put on new guns. We have four five-inch 25 antiaircraft guns. They were moved around. Then we got these new five-inch 48 guns. When we had all the sophisticated stereoscopic finders, of all the ships at Pearl Harbor, nobody was armed like the *Utah*. We were the best antiaircraft ship in the world, but a lot of these books say the *Utah* wouldn't have been engaged in combat anyway.

This is a picture of the *Utah* sinking, taken maybe five or ten minutes after the first torpedoes. I was looking out right here, the sick bay is over here. I was looking toward Ford Island and the torpedoes came on the port side. This is where I dived out.

This is the *Utah* Memorial today. Everybody knows about the *Arizona*, but they don't know about the *Utah* because the *Utah* has been in the waters of an active Naval base. You have to get special permission from the Public Affairs Office. Admiral Conway is charge of all the land forces, the Naval forces in the mid-Pacific. He's a real good guy. This streak right here, that's oil still coming out of the *Utah*. The *Utah* is 50, 60, 70 feet.

These are underwater pictures, they've never been published before, I got these from the National Park Service. These bubbles coming up, they're oil and then gas fermentation from deteriorating. I want to tell you about this book. The girl who wrote this book was six years old when they attacked Pearl Harbor, and she stood right here and she saw, it's about I think three quarters of a mile from the *Utah*. The torpedo planes that sank the *Utah* flew over her house and they were just barely above the rooftop because the torpedo planes had to come in low, otherwise the torpedoes would have gone—they were special torpedoes in the first place, but there was a limit and if they had been too high the torpedoes would have deep and they would have exploded on the ocean floor instead of on the *Utah*.

This map was taken from Dr. Goldstein's book and is a map that was given to Emperor Hirohito by Mitsuo Fuchido. He was the leader of the air attack on Pearl Harbor. He gave that to the Emperor. It's not exactly accurate. I tried to get his picture and I never heard from Dr. Goldstein, but then later I read in Time Magazine that his picture had sold to Forbes for two and a half million dollars, so that's why he didn't send me one.

I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

Mr. Turkowsky: We did, Mr. Soucey, and we are really grateful for the information you gave us. This

oral history interview is conducted by Frank Turkowsky and Jeff Lockwood was recording a video at the same time.

Transcribed by: Betty Paieda
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