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Interview with
LAWRENCE DIBB
UNITED STATES NAVY
USS MARYLAND

ORAL INTERVIEW

LAWRENCE DIBB

Today is Thursday, 7th of December, 2000, I'm interviewing Mr. Lawrence Dibb in Brackettville, California. The interviewer is Bruce Petty. Tell me when you were born and where.

MR. DIBB: I was born in 1923 in San Diego, California and I lived there until we moved up this way in 1960, but I am a California guy.

MR. PETTY: So you were in high school when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?

MR. DIBB: I'd already joined the navy. I had my parents' permission, they had to verify it. I joined the navy because a bunch of my buddies had.

MR. PETTY: This was before Pearl Harbor?

MR. DIBB: Yes. I'd already signed up for the navy. They said you go ahead and finish high school 'cause I would graduate in February of 1942. December the 8th, I got notice to report to naval training station, San Diego. About a week later, they moved us to Balboa Park because there was no room.

MR. PETTY: When did you report for duty actually?

MR. DIBB: On December the 8th or 9th.

MR. PETTY: Wow, that was pretty fast.

MR. DIBB: Yes. And within about a week and a half, we got our sea bags, got a whole bunch of shots, marched a couple of days, got into a routine, and then they moved us to Balboa Park. It was just a, there was nothing there, a few restrooms and didn't amount to nothing and hundreds and hundreds of guys were staked four high in exhibition hall. Then, we left there and went on a train.

MR. PETTY: How long did your boot camp last? Was it a rushed boot camp or did you have boot camp?

MR. DIBB: Basically there was no boot camp as it was known. All we got was just long enough to be issued our sea bags complete and our shots and that's about it. I never slept in a hammock one night but anyway you had to lash everything up in a hammock and you learned all that stuff. You did it in about two weeks. Then the rest of the time we were

waiting for transfer. Then they loaded us on a train and took us about four days to get to Seattle because they went on the inland route. They wouldn't stay on the coast because they was afraid trains would be hit by enemy fire, and so we went inland. You couldn't even see the tracks so I got no idea where we were at, just grass over the track. So, anyway, we got to Seattle and they marched us to the chief and that was December the 31st.

MR. PETTY: So the MARYLAND was up in Bremerton at that time?

MR. DIBB: At that time, yes. In fact, they just put some patches on her, enough to get her underway, and her and the PENNSYLVANIA left Pearl Harbor together.

MR. PETTY: The PENNSYLVANIA was in dry dock, I think.

MR. DIBB: Yes, it was. There was two ships ahead of her in the dry dock, two destroyers. They were completely destroyed. Anyway, the PENNSYLVANIA and the MARYLAND got to Bremerton and the COLORADO was in Bremerton. Basically that was what was left of the fleet between you and the Japanese. We left out of there out of dry dock somewhere around February or March and with a whole new crew basically because they had a short crew. They increased the crew for all the con turrets and everything to two where they only had one before.

MR. PETTY: What happened to the crew that was on the ship in Pearl?

MR. DIBB: They're still there, but they added to the crew. They increased our crew, I think the actual normal crew was like 1100 or something like that, and we went over 2,000. So we went there doing training and everything. The Japanese had landed on Kiskar and Attu and we went up there and did bombardment on the two islands, mainly for gunnery practice, etc.

MR. PETTY: You were up there with the HONOLULU, the cruiser?

MR. DIBB: I think the HONOLULU went up there later with a different task force. They were up there when they were actually going into an invasion, and I think that was sometime around, I'm not positive, I think it was sometime around Midway.

MR. PETTY: I think it was June of 1942.

MR. DIBB: You see, we were at Midway as a backup for the aircraft carriers.

MR. PETTY: So you went up there before the Japanese invaded?

MR. DIBB: No, they were up there and they knew us but it wasn't this great big, see that was a, what do you call a task force that they sent up there as a decoy? Midway was the main action, this other was a decoy.

MR. PETTY: What month was it that you went up there and fired on them?

MR. DIBB: I think it was in February or March.

MR. PETTY: What was your rating then? What department did they put you in?

MR. DIBB: I was in the carpenters mate. Let's start out, I was an apprentice seaman and the only way I got into the our division, which is a repair division, was the fact that I had done some carpenter work in school. They wanted to know what you could do and what you couldn't do. And then I was working as an automobile mechanic after school, apprentice. The first thing they wanted to know is does anybody want to shoot these Japs, step forward. Well, I knew, from being in San Diego, that I didn't want be in the deck crew if I could possibly get out of it. So we lost about 60 percent of these guys stepped forward right to land up on the gun crews. So, anyway, I got a compartment training job, mess attendant, and that's two-things I started out with. In the mess attendant, at that time, we had to run up to the galley, get the food, set the tables, get the tables off the overhead, set the tables down, first class sat at the head of the table, second class, third class, seaman 1st., seaman 2nd, and apprentice seaman. I don't think an apprentice seaman ever saw anything but the tail of a chicken, and that's a fact. First class got the choice of anything and then the tureen was passed to the next guy. When it got empty, then we railed. And each time we'd go up there, the cook would give you a little less, so you made more trips. So I sat mess, but I made more money sitting down than I made what the navy paid me.

MR. PETTY: How so?

MR. DIBB: Because 1st class, if you set a real good mess, he would put a real good tip in there, at the head of the table. And everybody had to match it, like if he put a dollar in, seaman had to give a dollar, an apprentice seaman who made \$21.00 a month had to put a dollar in. And I made more money setting mess than what the navy paid me. Because I got \$21.00 and I think they took \$3.00 for the first three months, and that paid for your sea bag. I think I got about \$18.00 for the month., and I think it was like \$9.00 each

payday I could draw, and that was it. That was supposed to cover all your personal stuff. So, anyway, the carpenter shop was on the port side and it was kind of in it's own box. It had expanded metal across it so we kind of had our own space, and then you have passageway in mid ship. Between the two turrets, one and two, was the ship-fitter shop. The ship-fitter shop and the carpenter shop were our division. The other side on the starboard side was the dental office and a couple of other offices outboard. I had to keep the passageway clean, and mess tables went on the overhead and then all your hammock stuff was clear to the outboard, and then you worked out of a sea bag. Later we had lockers, as you progressed up. That was a good locker and I made 3rd class. I never had to go for seaman 1st, I just jumped from seaman second to third-class carpenter's mate.

MR. PETTY: Nothing much else to say about the Aleutian thing?

MR. DIBB: The big thing I got out of it was the fact that I was fire watch, so that every time that fire drove the planes off, I had to be back there.

MR. PETTY: Catapulting?

MR. DIBB: So I had to be back there for pick up and anytime they were working on the planes. And they always shot them off, if we possibly could, before they fired the guns, because the guns would tear the planes up. The 16-inch guns compression would just collapse them

MR. PETTY: So you're back there involved in getting them on the catapult?

MR. DIBB: Well, we did everything. Actually my part, all I did was stand around and watch everything with fire extinguishers and hose. But being in that group and going up to the Aleutians, we were issued artic clothes. So we had this nice super jacket with a little bit of fur collar on it, and then we had arctic boots that we were allowed to wear. They had buckles on them, Boy, I was an old salt until I rated one of them and nobody else on the ship did.

MR. PETTY: Do you remember any of the SOC pilots?

MR. DIBB: There's one of them still goes to our reunions. We have a reunion every year. I thought they were the bravest, and I mean they did things that were unbelievable.

MR. PETTY: I just interviewed an SOC pilot over in Elton Grove.

MR. DIBB: Oh, did you?

MR. PETTY: Captain Leonard Pierce.

MR. DIBB: His last name is Flem. Anyway, I've got some pictures of where there's ??? spotting over Tarawa.

MR. PETTY: Did you lose any of the SOC pilots out there in the Aleutians?

MR. DIBB: No, not in the Aleutians. We didn't lose any but those guys flew regardless of what the weather was. It didn't make any difference, rough seas, seas running high. We'd make a slick for them and then they'd have to land and if they are a little slow getting in, boy, they had problems. The pilot just stayed in the sea. The radioman had to crawl out, reach back behind the canopy get a cable, go over to one wing get another cable, cross through the seat, get a cable off the other side. He's got three cables now, and then hook it onto the hook of the hoist, and all the time this guy is sitting on a slant down bouncing up and down. They earned their money.

MR. PETTY: Anything else memorable about that first cruise up to the Aleutians?

MR. DIBB: We practiced the guns fire, I mean that's pretty memorable. You don't forget that.

MR. PETTY: Where did you go from there?

MR. DIBB: After that we went back down to San Francisco, and we stayed in and out there for quite awhile, mainly on the coast because people didn't realize that there was nothing left. They didn't have much of a fleet to start with.

MR. PETTY: Let me go back a little back. When you were in San Diego, do you remember anything much about any talk or scares about some of the Nisse being spies or any Japanese spy network?

MR. DIBB: Yes, and they were. Regardless of what all these revisionists are saying, the Japanese had, see two of my best friends in school were Japanese. I can show you in our graduation book, their names are not even in there.

MR. PETTY: For what reason? Just because they're Japanese?

MR. DIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: Do you know what happened to them? Did they go to camps?

MR. DIBB: They all went to camp.

MR. PETTY: About 5,000 Nisse went into the U. S. military.

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes, 4.2 was one of the most famous, the highest decorated bunch, but the fact is all the coast was declared military zone. All they had to do was pack up and leave out of the military zone. They could go to Nevada, no sweat, and a lot of people did. But the ones that didn't move, they packed them up and moved them. I think they made a big mistake ever paying them people off.

MR. PETTY: You mean during the Reagon administration they passed that bill.

MR. DIBB: Yes, because number one, they were not citizens. The kids were.

MR. PETTY: There were some that had been here since...

MR. DIBB: No. All you have to do is look, there was never a Japanese before the war. If he was born here, yes, he was a citizen, but there was very few of them that had signed up and taken the oath of allegiance to the United States.

MR. PETTY: What happened to your friends from high school?

MR. DIBB: Their family couldn't even own property, most of them were leasing. These two friends that I had were a big family that raised vegetables down in Mission Valley which was San Diego River bed. I don't know what happened to them because like I told you, December the 8th I was on my way and I never saw them after that.

MR. PETTY: I was just reading something that they know from decoding diplomatic communications that the Japanese had set up spy networks among the Nisse living in here.

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes. In fact, down in San Diego we had big huge radio towers and they were there for years and years and that ground would not grow anything. I mean sage brush had to struggle and big ole rocks and boulders and adobe, I mean it was nothing. And yet there was farmers all the way around that, Japanese farmer. I can tell you thousands of other things that were down there.

MR. PETTY: So these were military radio towers?

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes.

MR. PETTY: And the Japanese had farms there even though they couldn't grow anything.

MR. DIBB: That's right, and they'd listen on the radio. They'd follow the radio deal through. In fact, they just took the towers down within the last five years.

MR. PETTY: What part of San Diego is this?

MR. DIBB: That was what we call east San Diego which was right on Fairmount Boulevard. I mean they were way out in the sticks. Now it's in the center of town. But at that time, these radio towers were way out in the sticks. They were huge towers that would send all information practically around the world. These things were big. In fact, when we were kids, we'd sneak in and try to climb them.

MR. PETTY: After the Aleutians you were up and down the coast for awhile?

MR. DIBB: Yes, and then we went to Pearl Harbor and that was after Midway. We went to Midway as backup and then back to Pearl.

MR. PETTY: You went from the west coast directly over to Midway.

MR. DIBB: Yes. We didn't do anything at Midway. We were just a backup force. I don't think the SARATOGA ever made it. Every time the SARATOGA leaves somewhere it would get a torpedo and have turn around and come back. That's a fact, she was a hard luck ship. Where we were probably the, I think we were actually the best ship, you know, as far as luck and everything 'cause man we had a lot of luck. We had a good crew, too.

MR. PETTY: You didn't do much at Midway?

MR. DIBB: Nothing. We were just the backup. And then we left Midway, back to San Francisco and then out to Pearl Harbor and then down to Fiji. We went down to Fiji to stop the Japanese invasion into the southern part of the Pacific.

MR. PETTY: Possibly New Guinea and Australia?

MR. DIBB: Yes, Australia. Then, we were always out we never had any contact. The first contact, the first real contact that we had after years, was at Tarawa.

MR. PETTY: That was in '43.

MR. DIBB: Yes. So we had a whole year that we just bummed around the Pacific, but the reason why is we didn't have any supplies. We didn't have any oil. We didn't have anything to get food to the guys. And every island that we went to, we'd have to take every single toothpick, every drop of gasoline, fuel, water, everything had to be transported to maintain the troops. Not only get them there but you have to have enough to get them back.

MR. PETTY: Were you refueling out of Fiji?

MR. DIBB: Yes. We'd carry enough fuel that we could fuel the destroyers too.

MR. PETTY: What do you remember about Tarawa?

MR. DIBB: Tarawa? Our ship knocked out the big guns on Tarawa, and that was before the invasion. And I'll tell you one thing, they can claim the air force does so much great work, they worked that island over. I mean you're talking about a little piece of island, and they dropped bombs on that thing till heck wouldn't have it. I don't think they ever killed one person on it. The bombs would hit there and blow up. These guys were all underground. In fact, we were throwing in 16-inch shells to the island and a lot of them were hitting the island and ricocheting off, it was that soft with palm trees and stuff.

MR. PETTY: Was that because you were in so close?

MR. DIBB: No, it's just that we were using bombardment shells. Later we shifted to armor-piercing and was able to open the island up by getting it up.

MR. PETTY: High trajectory?

MR. DIBB: Right.

MR. PETTY: But your first shells were high explosives and they were bouncing off.

MR. DIBB: A lot of them, a lot of them were doing the job they were supposed to do but actually I think the 5-inch probably did better than what the 16s did.

MR. PETTY: For what reason?

MR. DIBB: Due to the fact the five inch you could spot them and you could shoot. There was no high ground there. It was just like shooting on a pool table. And then another thing, too, you remember nobody has ever fought a war. They never did a landing. We did have like the Second Division Marines were on our ship. We carried the flag going into Tarawa.

MR. PETTY: The flag for who? Who was the admiral then?

MR. DIBB: Admiral Harry Hill was our admiral and then Gen Holland Smith. His master sergeant was one tough dude, and I got to know him pretty well. I don't remember his name. You know names, boy, that's sixty years ago.

MR. PETTY: But he was a master sergeant and he was the aide to General.

MR. DIBB: Yes, and he'd do the runner. He'd go and come back and report what they didn't get off radio, come back and give a report. He carried two forty-fives, a lot like

Patton. You know, these pictures of Patton, that's the way this guy looked.

MR. PETTY: The sergeant master?

MR. DIBB: Yes, practically all the fighting was over and we were sitting there talking with the sergeant and he says, "I don't think I'll be coming back." "What are you talking about?" He says, "I've just got that gut feeling."

MR. PETTY: Oh, he was going to go ashore?

MR. DIBB: Yes, he was constantly going ashore, back and forth and back and forth. And he said, "You know I just don't think I'll be coming back." And I said, "Why?" He said, "I think they're going to get me." I said, "It's all over. You told me that." He said, "Yep." So, anyway, he didn't come back.

MR. PETTY: He got killed?

MR. DIBB: Yes, and he knew before he made that trip over that he wasn't going to get back.

MR. PETTY: He knew the fighting was over and he was going over to take a message for Gen. Smith or something.

MR. DIBB: Yes, he was going back and forth as a runner.

MR. PETTY: Did you ever find out how he was killed?

MR. DIBB: I never did. The guys said a sniper got him. You know the guys I talked to because we had to put them all over the ship and they all kind of liked our group because...

MR. PETTY: You had to put all and then you said "they and put them on".

MR. DIBB: All the marines. In other words you've got two thousand men, now you're going to bring another 4 or 5 hundred marines on board. And these guys you just put them wherever you could and everybody accommodated them. In the carpenter shop, we had quite a bit of room compared to the rest of the ship, same with the ship fitter's shop, so we got to know quite a few of these guys. In fact, one of them brought me back a real nice Japanese rifle and gave it to me. I couldn't get it off the ship because when I got transferred off the ship it was in ??? Bremerton and couldn't take anything. Like I had a piece of shrapnel in my hand.

MR. PETTY: What else do you remember about this sergeant that was killed? Do

remember where he was from?

MR. DIBB: I got no idea where he was from. It's just like Bills where you meet him and say, "Okay, Bill," or whatever, Joe or whatever, and you get to talking. He made a pretty big impression on me.

MR. PETTY: How about Gen. Smith?

MR. DIBB: I never did get to talk to him but at least he was able to get around. You know, when I first went aboard ship, believe it or not, some of the guys could hardly get up a ladder.

MR. PETTY: Some of the officers?

MR. DIBB: Yes, and that changed.

MR. PETTY: They got rid of them?

MR. DIBB: Well, either that or retired them off, but you know that all the officers were young men, but before that, I guess at the start of the war, these guys on battleship, that was number one above carriers at that time.

MR. PETTY: Some of those guys had been around for a long time.

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes, forever. They were born in a hammock, I think. But anyway, I know that was one thing you knew, like the admiral would come aboard, you know he had a lot of gold but he was so old he needed it to hold him together.

MR. PETTY: He needed the gold to hold him together.

MR. DIBB: Yes (Laughter). At least them bands that went around their arms. We always figured they used that gold to keep the pieces from falling off.

MR. PETTY: Do you remember anyone in particular in that group?

MR. DIBB: Actual names of the admirals.?

MR. PETTY: Yes.

MR. DIBB: No, no names.

MR. PETTY: Dr. Tarrow?, what happened to him?

MR. DIBB: And then we went from Tarawa to our next engagement. We went from Tarawa to Apple Mama?, that's also a part of Tarawa, and we had one Japanese survivor that we picked up off Tarawa and picked up one and brought one back from Apple Mama. We had these two prisoners.

MR. PETTY: Do you remember anything about them?

MR. DIBB: They stripped them down to a pair of shorts and the shorts were probably size fifty, the biggest things that they could find so they had to use both hands to hold them up. We had our own prison on the ship.

MR. PETTY: The brig?.

MR. DIBB: Brig, yes. So the master of arms goes down and gets them and he had to take them clear to the forward head for them to relieve themselves. So they would march them through the crew's space and basically protect the Japanese, because these guys would have killed them. Everyone of the crew carried survival knives on their belt.

MR. PETTY: Do you remember anything else about the prisoners?

MR. DIBB: Nobody got to talk to them, and they all looked awful small. You know that's another thing, how can this little ole guy pull off something like that? You're thinking....,

MR. PETTY: Pull off something like what?

MR. DIBB: Well, like the attack on Pearl Harbor, little squirts, right?

MR. PETTY: Yeh.

MR. DIBB: And yet remember that when they're shooting at you, you're shooting back.

MR. PETTY: So what happened after that?

MR. DIBB: I never went to Kwajalein and that wasn't too bad. We, the navy, were beginning to learn but we put a lot of ammunition in the air, unbelievable.

MR. PETTY: Now did you take troops in that time, too?

MR. DIBB: Yes, we carried some but most of it observation and that kind of stuff. One night we were firing the 16-inch shells, every now and then one of the right wing, the copper part of the rifle, would come off and it made the weirdest sound.

MR. PETTY: You mean the copper band around the shell?

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes, after they fired it and it came off, it would (interviewee made sounds imitating this sound) and you knew it was going away but every body ducked. And then after they'd get through firing, we fired so often and so much, that you go up on deck and it looked like a hay farm with all that burnt powder just covered the decks.

MR. PETTY: A lot of unburned powder. Was that a fire hazard?

MR. DIBB: Well, it would have been if they ever caught on fire. That's the reason they had all those hosing down. Seemed like every time you did anything, you stopped and scrubbed deck.

MR. PETTY: Did you ever have any accidents? Did any of the guns malfunction?

MR. DIBB: No.

MR. PETTY: How was the crew? Any problems amongst the crew?

MR. DIBB: No. In fact they're very seldom. Every now and then a guy may fall down a hatch and break his nose or something but there wasn't too much problem with the crew. The longer we were together, like if there was any crew member that really didn't get along, he was gone. Like they would take maybe half of our crew, not half but the biggest part of the crew, and transfer them for new construction because they had already had experience firing guns, doing whatever. But the ones they transferred were not the good guys, you always kept the best for you, and you know you have a dividing point.

MR. PETTY: The dead wood, you mean?

MR. DIBB: Yes, and they were the ones that got transferred. We had some good gun crew boys. They were so good that, like when they'd shoot at targets, they told them they couldn't shoot at the targets 'cause about the first guy would knock the target out of the sky, so they had to shoot behind it.

MR. PETTY: So the anti-aircraft ?

MR. DIBB: And they were good. And all through the war, like all the bucks stayed on there we'd have five-inch 38s, twin mounts which gives you eight on each side. That's wrong. Clear through the war, you know Okinawa was the last engagement, up to that point at Okinawa, we had broadside 5-inch 51s and 5-inch 25 anti-aircraft guns, four on each side.

MR. PETTY: Not the 5-inch 38?

MR. DIBB: No. That was put on getting prepared for the landing in Japan. They were never used against the enemy.

MR. PETTY: What happened after that, after Kwajalein?

MR. DIBB: After Kwajalein, we went to Saipan. So we went to Saipan and we were on invasion where that island was where you were at...

MR. PETTY: ???

MR. DIBB: Yes, and that's where we took the torpedo.

MR. PETTY: Can you go back up to the time you got there and what was involved?

MR. DIBB: By our landing, there again, that island had been softened up, quote unquote, by the air force, navy, army, whatever. That bombardment does not do what they claim it does. You're still going to have to get down to final rifle to rifle. So, anyway, we went in and we did a softening up bombardment and then we stood by for spot fire. Put the marines on the beach.

MR. PETTY: Explain spot fire just for the reader and for me.

MR. DIBB: Well, what the marine would call into us and say, "Hill number so and so. We need support." So then we would shoot over them and we could go behind a hill. You could make a projectile where it could go, like a marines going up one side of the hill, we could bombard the opposite side of the hill by projection.

MR. PETTY: This spot fire, in other words, they wanted some fire support but first they wanted to see where your shells were going to land before you opened .

MR. DIBB: No, spot fire, like they called to put a shell into say that house across the street, we could do that.

MR. PETTY: Were you ever accused of hitting your own men?

MR. DIBB: Oh, I'm sure that happened but never that we knew of. I'm sure it happened. I mean that happens a lot.

MR. PETTY: Everybody I talk to who was in the front lines talks about losing people to friendly fire.

MR. DIBB: Yes, friendly fire will do it. It still happens. My boy tells about it all the time.

MR. PETTY: So you have a marine spotter and give him some coordinates.

MR. DIBB: Also our airplanes were doing some spotting, too, we always had them SOC2s.

MR. PETTY: How long were you in Saipan?

MR. DIBB: I don't think it was too long. You know time meant nothing.

MR. PETTY: Then you got hit by the Betty. Where were you at the time? Were you

below deck or what?

MR. DIBB: No, I was up there with this guy patient, you know what I was telling you. We were up on deck and it was just before the sun went down.

MR. PETTY: Before the sun went down?

MR. DIBB: Yes, just before the sun went down. We were laying there like this flat of our back on the deck and this plane goes over and says, "That wasn't one of our planes." He flew right across the bow of two or three cruisers, another battle ship, I don't know which one it was, and the torpedo missed the bow of the other ship.

MR. PETTY: Who was in the ship, do you remember?

MR. DIBB: I don't remember the name of them. I think it's a good chance it was PENNSYLVANIA or COLORADO because we operated with the older ships. I think it was either one of them. I don't remember even a picture of it, but, anyway, the thing hit in our bow and blew the whole bow off.

MR. PETTY: And where were you at the time? Very close?

MR. DIBB: Just above it.

MR. PETTY: You were on the deck above it?

MR. DIBB: Well, I was on the focsle and I can show you right where I was. That thing went in right about here and we were right about here.

MR. PETTY: Just a few hundred feet away, huh?

MR. DIBB: I don't think it was a hundred feet, could have been.

MR. PETTY: Now describe that to me. You're lying there and all this big explosion.

MR. DIBB: Yes, it was just a mess and my buddy was fishing. He had it tied to his toe with a wire, in fact it had to be quite a bit forward because he cleared the blister. They added a blister on the side of the ship, and he was laying there and I know he didn't stop to untie that string off his toe, so somebody got a fish hook in his butt. Now you know where it came from.

MR. PETTY: So you weren't hit with debris or burning gas?

MR. DIBB: No, thank goodness the gas never exploded. Why, I'll never know other than the fact that it was the MARYLAND, right?

MR. PETTY: Yeh, but you said two men were killed.

MR. DIBB: Yes, they were down below decks and they could have been in the boatswain locker because there was a hatch right between the two anchor chains and you go back and the boatswain locker was right there and their hatch were there and it blew the whole inside ??? of keel, huge hole. I was a diver, too, and so we had to go down. We were lacing the ship together like a shoe string with power velocity tools to hold the skin of the ship together.

MR. PETTY: Strips of metal, you mean?

MR. DIBB: Yes, the whole side of the ship. It tore that whole thing up. And then we laced the ship together.

MR. PETTY: You had strips of metal that you bolted them?

MR. DIBB: No, we used cable and blew the holes through what they call power velocity gun.

MR. PETTY: And that held the bow on until you got back?

MR. DIBB: It held the skin from breathing because every time that the ship would go down water and air would come up through the boatswain hatch which was no longer there and it looked like an old whale blowing steam.

MR. PETTY: They trained you as a diver while you were on the MARYLAND?

MR. DIBB: I trained as a diver. I did a lot of diving while I was in San Diego when I was a kid.

MR. PETTY: Oh, before you went in.

MR. DIBB: Not diving, but I trained as a diver and I was registered, what they called a second-class diver. I was qualified to use a hard hat. Most of our stuff we developed what we called, at that time, shallow water diving outfits was developed on the MARYLAND.

MR. PETTY: You developed it or you and others developed it?

MR. DIBB: Yes, we did it in carpenter shop and ship fitter shop. The chief gunner's mate on turret 3 and he got transferred right after that. But we made shallow-water diving outfit out of a gas mask and took the two hoses out of the side of the gas mask, hooked them on to a water valve, and then hooked it to an air tank up above and we used this one hose and you could regulate the air by turning a faucet on and off. We used that while we

were diving.

MR. PETTY: But most of your training was?

MR. DIBB: All aboard ship. In that thing I wrote, tells about how the training was really all the time and happened all the time. While standing watch, we had to learn where all the fire plugs were, and fire hoses, fire axes, stretchers, emergency equipment, all that stuff and had to be able to find it blindfolded because there could be no lights, could be nothing. So you learned it because they would come and pick you up and say, "Okay, we're going to compartment so and so, and you're going to open and close the valve and show me exactly how you do it." So you got to know where all this stuff was.

MR. PETTY: Your life depended on it, too.

MR. DIBB: You better believe it, and your life depended on the other guy doing his job. So if you didn't do your job right, somebody made sure you did. It was good training.

MR. PETTY: If they didn't, they got rid of you.

MR. DIBB: Real quick. Pretty good bunch of guys. In our Division, in fact, all the divisions were very few guys that really wanted to leave the ship. I don't think I ever knew of anybody that left the MARYLAND that didn't want to come back. It was that kind of a ship.

MR. PETTY: Comradery?

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes.

MR. PETTY: Do you remember the captain very well?

MR. DIBB: Captains, they changed every year or every year and a half, officers same way, biggest part of them. The good officers stayed. Like we had a commander Poole that was on there, he was 1st Lieutenant and he was kind of in charge of damage control and fire and rescue and that kind of stuff. Officer Poole stayed on quite awhile. I stayed 2nd class. I think I made 2nd class at Saipan.

MR. PETTY: You were 2nd class carpenter's mate?

MR. DIBB: Yes. Well, there was no rate at that time, like there's no carpenter's rate now. At that time there was no rate for damage control. Your carpenter's mate shifted or whatever.

MR. PETTY: So being a carpenter's mate, you were involved mostly in damage control

or in case you got bombed, you were involved in shoring up the bulkheads and stuff.

MR. DIBB: Yes. The only wood that I ever touched as carpenter's mate 1st class was after I got transferred off the MARYLAND. I was transferred to San Diego, by my choice, and I ended up out in Camp Elliott and they gave me a crew and said to build a ball park. Up until that time I hadn't touched any wood other than shoring stuff.

MR. PETTY: And that was practice for the most part, right?

MR. DIBB: And the biggest part of that was practice, yes.

MR. PETTY: So, what did you do in the carpenter shop most of the time?

MR. DIBB: We did all the welding.

MR. PETTY: So you learned how to be a welder, too?

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes, I was a welder, and then I told you I worked with automotives before I went in. Somebody got the wise idea that they would have this emergency gasoline pump and I had to maintain that. And every time they'd fire the 16-inch guns, they'd blow the gas tank apart, so I had to take the whole thing apart and repair the gas tank. A great big Chrysler engine, six-cylinder flat head and a big pump on the back. You could throw the suction thing over the side and use it as an emergency fire fighter. But it would never work because every time they'd fire a 16-inch gun, it's out of commission.

MR. PETTY: That's up near one of the turrets?

MR. DIBB: Yes, it was up on deck, and we had this thing they called a smoke machine, that made smoke. And they put that up in the bow ahead of the teakwood deck. It's a combination that was an engine. We had to maintain that, too, keep that running and practice making smoke.

MR. PETTY: So you never made it?

MR. DIBB: According to the officers, maybe it would help. We had this commander, he was up there hollering, "Make smoke! Make smoke!" So we go running out there and man you couldn't stand up on that deck if you had to.

MR. PETTY: What was the situation that he wanted you to make smoke?

MR. DIBB: Just what they call a training exercise or something and because we had the machines and they have to be used. There was never any kind of action that we got into that we ever had to make smoke. It was just one of them things. We couldn't get rid of

them machines so we finally was in Pearl Harbor one time, 1010 dock, that's where their great big crane hammer-head crane is. We talked the crane guy to lift them off and set them on the dock, and I'll bet they're still there sitting on that dock 60 years later.

MR. PETTY: So you probably weren't involved in Tinian or Guam?

MR. DIBB: No, we weren't at Tinian.

MR. PETTY: What happened after that?

MR. DIBB: After we got repaired, Saipan. We didn't get to go Iwo Jima, we missed it by about two days.

MR. PETTY: Were you in the Philippines?

MR. DIBB: Yes, Iwo Jima was after the Philippines. We went to Palalu after Saipan. From Saipan to Pellilu.

MR. PETTY: What do you recall about that?

MR. DIBB: There wasn't too much on Palalu other than the fact there, again, they got signs all over, "These guns were knocked out by the MARYLAND " on Tarawa, and Saipan ones got ??? there and then you go to Palalu it shows these block houses and it says, "These block houses were knocked out by the USS MARYLAND."

MR. PETTY: You mean the marines put signs up there?

MR. DIBB: Yes, or whoever, I don't know who did it. There again, there was support fire, there again the Palalu Islands were supposed to be secured and pretty well knocked down and not too much resistance. They lost an awful lot of personnel going into them islands. They claimed that they had been saturated, bombed, and they were saturated bomb, but they didn't do the job. And so they lost a lot of Marines. They claimed that they really didn't have to take them.

MR. PETTY: But that's after the fact. Was Admiral Oldendorf in charge of those?

MR. DIBB: I don't know if Oldendorf was on board at that time but he was on board going into, he was our head honcho at Leyte and Surigao Strait.

MR. PETTY: I want to hear about that 'cause you had some action there, right?

MR. DIBB: Yes. That was the last big guns, this one here. That was just a classic deal and I think it lasted about eleven minutes.

MR. PETTY: Where are we now, Surigao Straits?

MR. DIBB: Yes. Surigao Straits was early morning, real early morning, like 2 or 3 in the morning. We prepared for hours and hours ahead of time, but I think it lasted about eleven minutes maximum. It was all done by the old Pearl Harbor ships, the battleships.

Prior to that, they had torpedo boats make runs on the Japanese fleet coming up the Strait.

MR. PETTY: PT boats?

MR. DIBB: And out of all the PT boats and all the torpedoes they fired, not one hit any Japanese ship. So now then they come on up farther and then they send some destroyers in, our navy destroyers. There really was not too much damage done, and so they're coming up single file through the Straits. We're up in this thing coming across. It wasn't a bay but just a wider opening and the ships going back and forth this way.

MR. PETTY: It wasn't in the actual Straits, you were out in a more open area.

MR. DIBB: More open area. I'm sure it was a bay but I don't remember the name of it. When they opened fire it only lasted about eleven minutes. I don't know how many shells we put in the air but we sunk a Japanese battleship.

MR. PETTY: Do you remember the name? I know I read about it but I can't remember.

MR. DIBB: I can't remember the name.

MR. PETTY: And did they fire at you?

MR. DIBB: I'm sure that they did but they never hit anything. There was one thing about it, we did have a good radar system which they apparently didn't have. But at the start of the war, they had probably the best night fighters, 'cause we had lousy ones. I mean it was terrible. We lost a lot of cruisers and stuff. They operated at night. After we got through with that, we went back to Leyte as back up and protection for the landing forces. We took one of the first suicides there.

MR. PETTY: A kamikaze hit you?

MR. DIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: Tell me about that. Were you below deck?

MR. DIBB: I was below deck, but it hit between turret one and turret two and it skidded. It actually hit turret two and skidded off the side of the turret and down under turret one overhang. Now the safest part on the ship, what every body figures the safest part, is under the overhang of a turret between turret supports. All of that is armored. So the

ship fitter's shop is between the two turrets with the overhang over the top. This bomb went right through the middle of the ship fitter's shop, penetrated that deck, which is a regular normal deck, went down and hit on top of a hatch covering the third deck or basically the second deck. And that's an armored deck. And it put that hatch through its own hole. If that hatch had not been closed at that time, that would have been exactly the same hit that the ARIZONA took. It would have been in the magazine. If that hatch had not held, the bomb explodes upward from there, we'd have been history. That would have been the end of us. It would have been right in the magazine.

MR. PETTY: Isn't that close to where your station was or were you somewhere else?

MR. DIBB: My battle station was repair 4, but immediately as it hit, came over the loudspeaker, "We're dead and ten men go forward and report back, we can't get an answer from anybody up forward."

MR. PETTY: This was after the kamikaze hit?

MR. DIBB: Yes, after it hit. We were back between turret three and four in the aft section. So I took myself, my line tender, and ten men.

MR. PETTY: A line tender is if you were in...

MR. DIBB: I had an RBA, Rescue Breathing Apparatus. So we went up on the starboard side from the officers, below through the officers quarters, up on the quarter deck, forward on the starboard side and got up to turret one and two. Between them there's a ladder that went down to the ship fitter's shop. You could actually look down the hatch way into the ship fitter's shop. When we got there, there was probably six guys working around this ladder, and I couldn't get even, you know, there's no sense standing there just looking. So I went between the two turrets, walked right over where that bomb went through, and never saw the hole. I mean it was that dark and the hole I'll betcha wasn't eighteen inches, probably less than that.

MR. PETTY: In other words, you stepped across it not seeing it.

MR. DIBB: Apparently just missed it by sheer luck.

MR. PETTY: You could have fallen through it.

MR. DIBB: Yes, or broken a leg on it or something. Like I told you, carpenter shop is on the port side, all my buddies were in the carpenter shop and ship fitters shop. So I

figure if I get over to the port side I'll go through that port hatch and go down and into the carpenter shop. And so I did. I started down and my line tender wouldn't let the line go, he was a musician.

MR. PETTY: The line's a briefing?, you mean?

MR. DIBB: No, no, it's just a rope in case I got in trouble I give him a couple of yanks and then he'd pull me back.

MR. PETTY: How far away was he at that time?

MR. DIBB: He was right there. I said, "I'm going down and check out the carpenter's shop." He said, "Don't go down there."

MR. PETTY: Why didn't he want you to go down there?

MR. DIBB: I think he was just kind of spoofed out and shook up or something. So, anyway, I unhooked the line, you couldn't see any farther than the battle lantern. I had a battle lantern in my hand like this. You couldn't see nothing through smoke and fire and stuff. So anyway I went down that ladder and it went between the carpenters' shop and the ship fitters' shop into this passageway. I got to the bottom of that ladder, I went into the carpenters' shop. There was nobody in there, nothing, no damage to speak of. And then I walked out of there and shined my battle lantern over to where I could hear these guys. Shined my battle line over to look through the ship fitters' shop and the deck was something like this, just blown up. I said, uh o, we've got problems farther down. My purpose for being there was to report back to the main control what the damage was.

MR. PETTY: Damage control?

MR. DIBB: Yes, because they couldn't reach anybody or contact anybody out of repair one or repair two.

MR. PETTY: And that's where their stations were?

MR. DIBB: Right, that was 4s station, so I opened the hatchway that had, they've got a big square hatch and then a little round hatch that one person can go through. I opened that up and the ladder was still there so I thought I'll go down and check out, 'cause I had a buddy that was in sick bay, which was just forward of that area.

MR. PETTY: That hatch you were going to go through was going down to where?

MR. DIBB: The second deck. I was on the main deck, carpenter shop is on the main

deck, focsle, main deck, second deck. And the second deck, the deck you're standing on, is an armored deck at that point. So I got the first step, second step on that ladder we're there. You know how you can start down a ship's ladder and just slide, well, I started down this ladder and the third step wasn't there and just open space. I thought, boy I've bought the farm. I got the RBA on breathing right. It's supposed to last an hour, half hour maybe. I don't think I was down there ten minutes and it plugged just from over breathing. I popped that canister out and popped the other one back in because when I hit the deck I practically landed on top of a dead guy. That's the first guy I'd ever felt that was dead.

MR. PETTY: This was in the ???

MR. DIBB: Second deck.

MR. PETTY: But what was that compartment?

MR. DIBB: That was probably the radio division stayed on that deck, radio and electronics. That was their bumping deck and then just forward of it was sick bay. My point in going down there was because my buddy was in that area somewhere. I got down there and here I am, and I can't see nothing, can't feel nothing, and all the hammocks are smoking and all the bedding is smoke, no lights.

MR. PETTY: You lost your battle lantern?

MR. DIBB: No, I had it, so I crawl along the deck. I got over towards sick bay and all the lockers had fallen down off the bulkheads. I pulled them out of the way.

MR. PETTY: How many dead people were in that compartment?

MR. DIBB: That was the only one that I ran into at that point. That's all I can see, and then I got into the entrance to the sick bay and laying right in there which was the bad part was what they called the dispensary, just a section, and in there was a pharmacist's mate and you know that 'cause he's wearing a white uniform, everybody else wore dungarees. He was laying face down and I grabbed back of his head to turn his head over, it was like a bean bag. You ever felt a bean bag, that's what it felt like. So this guy had bought the farm. I went past him and got basically into sick bay itself, and in there just as I went through that hatch door a whole bunch of guys on the deck and one guy was sitting up but he was covered with a blanket. So I took the blanket off of him, and I shined my battle

lantern on him, and it was my buddy.

MR. PETTY: Do you remember his name?

MR. DIBB: Lou Berry. He'd been operated on for a cyst in his rectum the day before and they had him packed all with gauze and tissue and stuff. He had gotten all the guys out of their bunks into the shower room, wet down the blankets, and they were all covered with blankets. And he got shoes on them, told them to put their shoes on, get their blanket, and go to the shower room. They tried to get out the other side and they couldn't get out. They tried the port side and couldn't get out of there, by then they'd run out of gas. He was the only one that was sitting up, so I told him, "Can you walk out of here?" And he said, "No, I can't." I said, "Well, I can't carry you. He was one big guy. I got a stretcher off of the bulkhead and I threw it down and I said, "You get in a stretcher and I'll drag you out of here. You got to lay down." He said, "No, if I lay down I'm dying." I said, "You don't lay down, we're both going to die. We've got to get out of here." I had no idea how we were going to get out, 'cause the ladder I came down was missing.

MR. PETTY: Why did he think he would die if you laid him down?

MR. BIGG: That was just his idea. He said, "If I lay down I'm going to die."

MR. PETTY: But the other guys were still alive, too, right?

MR. BIGG: Yes. Anybody else? If you can get up and walk, come on. If you can't I'll get the help down. I can only take one out at a time. They were all moaning and groaning, so, anyway, I started to drag him out. All broken glass and it's a mess. This is just a funny thing that Happened, just inside that doorway is this big refrigerator I kept medicine in. The refrigerator door had blown open and so with the ship movement the door's going back and forth. Well, if I swung him around to get him through the passage way, it's one end of these guys was sitting there and they cussed or something. About that time that refrigerator door handle hit me in the back. I thought one of them guys had stabbed me. Then the RBA quit working so I just took the mask off and I said, "We've got to get out of here someway." So I got him through, past the pharmacist mate, into the next compartment. I knew that the ladder that I came down wasn't there and I'm ??? my legs, I can't see, and just at that time battle lanterns showed up on the other side. I

hollered at them. They apparently came down from the star board side.

MR. PETTY: Was this on the same day?

MR. BIGG: Yes.

MR. PETTY: And they found a hatch they could use?

MR. BIGG: Apparently they got a hatch they could come down, so I got help and we took them on up there.

MR. PETTY: So you got everybody out of there then? Lou Berry who is your buddy from where, the carpenter shop?

MR. BIBB: He was the ship's fitter, 1st class.

MR. PETTY: You never got into the ship fitter's compartment when the bomb went off?

MR. BIBB: There was nothing there?

MR. PETTY: No bodies or anything?

MR. BIBB; Well, yes, there was. We did that later.

MR. PETTY: Took them out later.

MR. BIBB: There wasn't any bodies left. There's a picture of me, I was sitting in the shop.

MR. PETTY: So you had to go in later and help bring out the body parts, is that what you mean?

MR. BIBB: Oh, yes. We had to do the clean up. I had this one guy that was a carpenter's mate, his name was Malley. He reached up and found this arm, I mean this was after we had transferred all of the bodies off and all the sick off and everything. We were cleaning up, this may have been three or four days afterwards, he comes carrying this arm and says what am I going to do with it. I said, Take it up and throw it over the side. The guy will never miss it." That's what he did.

MR. PETTY: These were people you knew and worked with, why would they make you go in?

MR. BIBB: That was part of your job.

MR. PETTY: I would think they would take somebody from another part of the ship?

MR. BIBB: No.

MR. PETTY: How did that affect you?

MR. BIBB: And on top of that, I think they all wanted to. I think it was just a matter of, well, just like Guy Lamond, you always cover your buddies back, and that's what they all did.

MR. PETTY: Well, how many people did you lose?

MR. BIBB: I think we lost, probably 30 or 40 dead.

MR. PETTY: Just from that one?

MR. BIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: Anybody from the carpenter's shop killed?

MR. BIBB: Yes, all of them were. Part of that whole box, water damage control people, like Zolar and Evans, both were turret captains. Turret one and Zolar was just going into the hatch going into the turret, the hatch was not closed when the plane went under, and he got badly burned. I talked to him before they took him off the ship, and he was still alive but he died on the way to the hospital ship. They put them on like an LST or smaller ships.

MR. PETTY: People in the turrets were killed, too?

MR. DIBB: Not in the turret, anybody that was in the turret was not, but Zolar was going up the hatch and he got caught in the hatch.

MR. PETTY: You said you went in the carpenter shop you didn't see anybody in there.

MR. DIBB: There was nobody in there. The reason why, the plane was coming in from the port side. So what do you do, you put the most armament between you and the plane. So they had all gone through the ship fitter's shop. Even the phone talkers got long enough cord that he could be sitting in the carpenter's shop, and if they're coming in on the port side, he can go over to the star board side.

MR. PETTY: So they were safe?

MR. DIBB: So they were all over there. A buddy of mine that was in repair 1, matter of fact, he was shell maker, Swede Jorgenson. He was standing there with a bunch of other guys, standing with the turret, 15 inches of armor right behind them, and knowing the plane's coming in, and we always, with the five inch, kind of sit up and listen. Then you hear the 40mm. and then you begin to roll your sleeves and look for your RBA, and get your hat on. And then when you hear the twenties, and you got everything primed.

because usually if the plane's ??? you're going to be pretty close to getting hit. So that's why everybody, like in the 20s I know that's why they all went around the other side.

MR. PETTY: And they were saved then?

MR. DIBB: Well, not really. That's where a lot of them got hurt. Swede got flash burns. He got Dave Bell and Erwin out and two guys I know that he got out of there. He opened the dogs off the thing and left the skin off of his hands on the dogs.

MR. PETTY: Because they were burned hands?

MR. DIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: So he was opening the hatch to get out and skin came off on the dogs.

MR. DIBB; On the dogs on the doorway. You know it is not a hatch but the whole door. When he opened that up then, it never broke water tightment you knew something was going on. When he opened that up they got crew in from farther back, brought them up to help work.

MR. PETTY: So he was burned and several others were burned.

MR. DIBB: Yes, I talked to him. He said they had a steam table out there and it was just before dinner or just after dinner and at the end of the steam table had all this hot water. You throw all your silverware in there, so this warm water and soap was in this thing and when it hit, it splashed hot warm and soap and covered him. He thought he was bleeding to death 'cause he couldn't see. He said, "I thought I was bleeding to death" and all it was was that soapy water. Dave Bell lives up at Clear Lake. He broke both of his feet and that's why Swede got him out of there and then Erwin, I talked to him. I was all over the ship, I knew everybody. All the guys that were wounded, sick bay's destroyed, they moved into junior officers' quarters and gave them all a junior officers' bunk, so they were all back there. So I went back with them and talked to everybody before they left the ship. Erwin was a little bit older than us guys, maybe three or four or five years, beginning to get a little bald headed on the front. And we used to kid him as a blond, so he'd comb his hair, split it in the middle and comb it and plaster it down on each side. He used more Vitalis on his head than what the other guys drank, but anyway, he said, "I'm burned, oh my hair." "Hey, you're all right, there's nothing wrong with you." Come to find out since these computers come out I ran across this name. His name was Bernard Irwin from New

York, Andyville, Long Island. I hadn't heard from him or tried to reach him and never heard from him after he left the ship. I ran across his name, so I phoned him. It was not him, it was his nephew that was named after him. I hate to make these kind of phone calls because usually the guy has died or something's gone wrong. So he said, "He's getting along real good." And I said, "Is there any way I can get in touch with him?" He said, "Well, he don't really like to talk about the war." I said, "Okay, I can buy that." But he says he's doing pretty good. And I said, "How did he come out?" He said, "Well, he apparently had a brain damage, either his head or something, and paralyzed one side and so he limps down to Mc Donald's a couple of times a day and has a hamburger." And I said, "Well, I'll send you all the stuff I've got, what the ship did and different things, and if you think that he wants it, fine, or if he wants to contact me, give me a call and get in touch with me. I haven't heard from him and then Lou Berry, when I went to the ship after Okinawa, I got transferred to San Diego. And then we got married on August 11th and on the 14th the bomb was dropped on

MR. PETTY: It was the 6th and the 9th.

MR. DIBB: It was the 6th and the 9th?

MR. PETTY: Sixth of August.

MR. DIBB: Well, anyway, it was right in that time, so it wasn't long after that. We'd just been married, and we had a little house in San Diego, luckily. I was sitting there, I told Tim, "You know what? That's the MARYLAND's guns firing." You know you could hear a boom, boom, and she said, "Ah, you're dreaming. That's the MARYLAND's Guns firing, I know it is. The next day they pulled into San Diego. I don't think I ever saw a battle ship ever pull into San Diego and on top of that it pulled in right into Broadway Pier. They were doing magic carpet bringing troops back from the Pacific. I went aboard ship then.

MR. PETTY: You were still in the navy?

MR. DIBB: Yes. So I went aboard ship and Lou Berry was on the ship that returned a lot of them guys and I got to see him. He said, "I thought I was dead and you showed up. I knew dang well I wasn't." What happened, they got him on a stretcher, this gauze I was telling you about got wrapped around my leg so every time I'd take a step, I'd pull a

couple more inches out of the incision he had.

MR. PETTY: Out of his foot?

MR. DIBB: Yes. He said "Uuuh." So all the whole time he was saying uuuh, I knew he was still alive. So I got to see him. I haven't been able to contact him since then, but I just have a feeling he stayed in but I haven't been able to find any way to get through to see if I can find him. Also, we've got a USS MARYLAND web page.

MR. PETTY: A lot of ships do.

MR. DIBB: The kid that does that is a grandson of one of the guys that was on the ship. The one that set up that page and the kid's just out of high school. So if you see the page, you can see the work he has done. He has a little help probably from an instructor or something but he has done a great job.

MR. PETTY: After the head ship was hit by a kamikaze, was it hit by any more?

MR. DIBB: No, we left there, we got rid of the dead and the wounded onto a LST or Personnel Carrier or something like that. The only way we could get them there, the only thing we had enough of a walk way that we carried on the ship was an ammunition loading ramp and with probably not much more than two twelve-inch boards together with a piece of sheet metal over it. So you can figure how slick that thing's going to be and the ship's going like this, up and down, up and down, we're carrying dead and wounded. You've got the guy in the stretcher, either a dead body or wounded, and you're walking across this thing. You can't really see where you're going and it's wet with body fluids and stuff. I almost ended up in the brink on one of them guys 'cause this guy, I don't know what it was, but part of the body was coming down covered with a bedspread from the officer's quarters, which we stole. Hey, you guys can do without your bedspread to cover these bodies. The ship was going up and I was in back and I was carrying that and things started going ??? so I let go with one hand to catch that whatever it was that was coming at me.

MR. PETTY: The body?

MR. DIBB: Yes, body part. So pretty near ended up in the brink, that was slick.

MR. PETTY: So you left the Philippines after that?

MR. DIBB: Yes, we left the Philippines, oh, it wasn't right away, but we did leave and

head back to Pearl Harbor. We figured we'd go to the States but, you know what, they repaired that ship at Saipan at Pearl Harbor and had the biggest part of that bow built when we got there, three sections. We figured they send destroyers to the United States. We're going to go back and we're going to have some shore duty. They repaired it in Pearl Harbor.

MR. PETTY: This was after Saipan. How about the Philippines?

MR. DIBB: In the Philippines, we ended up we stayed in Pearl Harbor. We did all the repair work. Not only did the yard do it, we had to work right along with them.

MR. PETTY: How about the Japanese pilot? Did they recover the body?

MR. DIBB: Yes, both of them.

MR. PETTY: Oh, there were two of them.

MR. DIBB: We got one later. We got one at Okinawa, too.

MR. PETTY: How about the one in the Philippines?

MR. DIBB: Yes, they recovered the body on him. It was transferred with the rest of the bodies and they had to mark as much as they could. There wasn't too much left of him, but he was in the plane. And the biggest part of the plane ended up underneath the turret. It was just a big mass of nothing. Another thing, too, it's kind of weird how everything works out. The mess attendant's shower room was forward with the crew but it was a separate room, all by itself. So the mess attendant had to go clear back out through that low officer's quarters, walk all the way forward through the crew's quarters to their shower room to take a shower. The reason I stayed second class, I turned down chief, I turned down ensign rate, I turned down carpenter's warrant officer's rate, because I was the only guy on the ship that didn't stand watch. I was in charge of fresh water hole for over two and a half years, and all I had to do was check the water for salt, take it down and have it analyzed every day, turn a report on how much water was on board, and turn the water on and off. If we ran short on water, we'd switch them over to salt water. The salt water was cold, it wasn't heated. We could heat the shower water. But the fresh water we watched pretty close. And I was the only guy on the ship who didn't have to stand a watch, except under general quarters.

MR. PETTY: You turned down promotions just so you wouldn't have to stand watch?

MR. DIBB: And then, also, I had all the gravy, everything was there for me because the baker, I got all the fresh bread I wanted, and everything. The mess attendants back in officer's country, they treated me like a king 'cause I kept the water on for them. I got all the fresh eggs I wanted. I got everything. The tailor, my laundry was all done for me.

MR. PETTY: Because you controlled the fresh water supply?

MR. DIBB: That's right. Not only was the laundry done, but it was pressed for me. This one mess attendant was coming down the port side right between the carpenter shop and the ship fitter shop, and he was going to make a turn at the turret. I never saw him, but he was way in there on the deck. They got him out pretty quick. (End of side 2 tape 1)

MR. PETTY: Where were we now? You were talking about?

MR. DIBB: I was talking about this big black guy, huge guy, well, anyway, I told you I had to stand watch in all different repair parts. They'd switch us around and I stood this one watch back in repair 3 and that was then what we call "Gook's Country." That's Filipinos and the blacks and they were separated from the rest of the crew and their job was mess attendant, basically. Then they would be ammunition handlers below deck. That was their business. This big guy came around and said, "You guys give me so much trouble. Get me in trouble all the time."

MR. PETTY: Now this is after the kamikaze hit?

MR. DIBB: Oh, no, this is before.

MR. PETTY: I don't understand you, you lost me.

MR. DIBB: Anyway, this guy was wounded and they moved him to the officers' quarters. Prior to this time, he'd told me, He was having trouble with young officers, and he says he's from the south and he's just giving me all kinds of trouble. I can't make that guy happy at all. Some time I'm just going to, I said, "Don't do nothing. You've got no chance of winning. The guy will eat you up. If you want to get even with him spit in his food, spit in his coffee, mix it up and hand it to him and say, now, I've got you, you buzzard." He felt better about it and I don't blame him. The guy was riding him, really on his case. When he got wounded, got flash burns bad, and they put him in this guy's bunk.

MR. PETTY: The southern officers'?

MR. DIBB: Yes, and that just tickled the tar out of me. He lay in there and I said, "Well,

how are you doing?" His black skin had peeled off and it was pink, and he says, "The doctor checked me over and he says not to worry. I'll end up being as black as I ever was." He was happy about that. The ammunition handling was on both sides on the third deck which was just above the boilers. And I mean it was hot down there, and the longer you were down there the tighter you were closed in. The black marks on the heels of your shoes would stick to the deck. These guys, mess attendants, would be working in there handling ammunition and the sweat would be that deep on them, just slicker than the devil on the decks. This went on for hours.

MR. PETTY: Did you ever hear the reaction from that southern officer when he found out?

MR. DIBB: No, he never found out this guy was spitting in his food.

MR. PETTY: But the fact that this black mess attendant.

MR. DIBB: I know that there was a lot of reaction from these guys. They actually lost their bunks for quite awhile. I don't remember if it was three or four days.

MR. PETTY: For this southern officer to lose his bunk to a black man.

MR. DIBB: That probably went right to the core on him. People don't understand that, in fact, my granddaughters still don't understand it. We never had that in California.

MR. PETTY: Don't understand what

MR. DIBB: Discretion against blacks?

MR. PETTY: Discrimination.

MR. DIBB: Yes. There was nothing like that in California. We had kids, like the Japanese and Chinese, and the only thing that we had was practically all of them were first generation. The kids' parents spoke their home language. The kids who were German and their parents spoke German. When they went home, in their home, they spoke foreign languages. The kids learned English at school and then they went home and taught their parents English. Like the Chinese, they'd go to an American school and then go to Chinese school. Japanese go to Japanese schools and American schools. But we never had anything against blacks, it didn't happen until after the war out here. And that's when actually they're the worst enemies.

MR. PETTY: Who's the worst enemies?

MR. DIBB: The blacks are their worst enemies. They won't buy from each other, they won't trust each other, and I tell my kids, all you've got to do is go down Oakland and check it out.

MR. PETTY: Well, let's do World War II now.

MR. DIBB: So we dropped them off and then we went back to Pearl and did repair from the suicide at Leyte. We left Surigao Straits and went back to Leyte and that's where we took the suicide. We went to Pearl Harbor and did the repair on it and missed going to Iwo Jima by two days, maybe even a day. Then Okinawa was the next big one.

MR. PETTY: So you stayed in Pearl until Okinawa?

MR. DIBB: Yes. I don't know when we went back to the States.

MR. PETTY: Didn't you get involved in some action in Okinawa?

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes. Probably the heaviest action that any ship ever went through was at Okinawa.

MR. PETTY: Let's hear about it.

MR. DIBB: We took suicide at Okinawa.

MR. PETTY: Give us the date and circumstances.

MR. DIBB: There again it was just the break of evening and I was right in the middle of it. I was sitting third deck aft just underneath turret 3. This kind of made my decision to leave the ship. I figured three times was too many times. I was sitting in third deck aft and you go through the five-inch firing, boom, boom, boom, 40mm and then the 20mm, you've got all your clothes back on RBA on and stuff, take the hip?, speaker comes on "Ten and ten men go aft."

MR. PETTY: You were aft then, right?

MR. DIBB: I was aft then.

MR. PETTY: And the kamikaze hit there?

MR. DIBB: Yes. So, just before being hit, I was reading "Our Navy" magazine and it showed a guy wearing a helmet 'Out of action' and all you can see is his toes sticking out, great big huge helmet, two little feet.

MR. PETTY: This is the cartoon?

MR. DIBB: And then 'In action', the same helmet sitting up here a little tiny peanut

sitting on top of his head. I was laughing over that. Took the suicide hit through the hatch that was up at the back deck. I grab the fire hose and we're fighting fire right now.

MR. PETTY: Where did the kamikaze hit?

MR. DIBB: It hit right on top of turret 3.

MR. PETTY: And you were under turret 3?

MR. DIBB: We were right underneath it. I'm fighting fire and the ammunition is going off, 20mm ammunition, because on top of turret 3 is four 20mm mounts and there is three men to a mount. That makes twelve and a couple of toppers?, I don't know the exact number of men that were on top of this turret, but it is not much bigger than this room.

MR. PETTY: And they were all killed?

MR. DIBB: All but one, and that one guy was coming down the ladder. I was fighting the fire, he was on fire, and I put the fire out. I started up the ladder and I said, "Is there anybody else up there that's alive?" He said, "I don't think so." I went up the ladder and there was nothing up there but just twisted bodies and whatever. This guy I put the fire out on goes to our reunions.

MR. PETTY: What's his name?

MR. DIBB: Justin David. Justin Dav id.

MR. PETTY: Is he Jewish?

MR. DIBB: No. He calls it Dav id. I thought it was like Louisiana Cajun or somewhere back in there. He came off that turret alive and them guys fired right until the plane hit. Four guns and he was firing his gun. It was probably stationed one gun here, two here, and another one in the back where the turret is a little bit wider. He was firing his gun right over the head of the other guy as the plane was coming in. It finally got to where they would announce, they quit the boatswain ??? and bugle to warn. You know, usually when they announce because the guys were all getting, like maybe 20 or 30 attacks a day, as a group of say six planes, four planes, ten planes, fifteen planes, just constantly coming in. We started out with destroyers as picket duty and we ended up with no destroyers. They just raised cain. One pilot, one plane took care of one ship.

MR. PETTY: Some of the destroyers got hit by four or five?

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes.

MR. PETTY: The Aaron Ward, was that one?

MR. DIBB: Yes, but also the same way with carriers. HANCOCK really got a beating out there. In fact, all the ships took a beating.

MR. PETTY: The MARYLAND got hit by only one kamikaze that time?

MR. DIBB: Yes, that time.

MR. PETTY: Then you came back?

MR. DIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: You said the ammunition was going off while you were fighting the fire. Anybody hurt from that?

MR. DIBB: Yes, we lost quite a few guys on that, too.

MR. PETTY: The fire fighters from the exploding ammunition, you mean?

MR. DIBB: Not that I know of any guys that were killed by that. You know how you're supposed to wash and all that stuff ahead of you, and you get a little excited and you get a little fire fighting, the fire got in front of us, behind us, over us, under us and everything, but we got out of it alright. Right up behind these turrets, where the gun mounts were on top of the turrets, was a big huge radar screen with big plastic points sticking out, great big huge screens, and they accounted for about everybody but a couple. They found one guy that was spread eagle stuck on the screen, so they had to send the surgeon up to cut him off of it.

MR. PETTY: He was dead.

MR. DIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: Nailed him to the spot.

MR. DIBB: Yes, they had to cut him off of the spikes.

MR. PETTY: Did anything happen after that or you retreated back?

MR. DIBB: We headed back, and I had my choice for shore duty. I'd already made 1st class. I didn't even take the exam, they just said, "Okay, you're first class." They knew I wasn't going to take the exam.

MR. PETTY: You refused to take it?

MR. DIBB: Cause I didn't want to lose what I had. The pay didn't make that much difference 'cause I made more money the other way as 2nd class than I'd ever make as 1st

class.

MR. PETTY: You made more money how?

MR. DIBB: Just by selling stuff. I could sell eggs, I'd get a whole case of eggs and I could sell them to anybody.

MR. PETTY: Because of all the dealing with the water, you'd get the stuff and then sell it and make money.

MR. DIBB: Sure, right. I didn't tell you about drilling for alcohol, did I?

MR. PETTY: Drilling?

MR. DIBB: On the ship, we did air testing, too. We'd test the compartments for water-tight integrity. When you're air testing, when you have to inside, you listen for air leaks. They had the sick bay supplies down this one shaft and we went into the medical storeroom. While we were in there testing, they had to have an officer there watching us because they had like whiskey, rye whiskey, bottles of it for medical purposes and then 180-proof alcohol in 5-gallon cans for swabbing people, but that stuff was 180 proof pure, not pink lady, Before they any added stuff to it to make it so you wouldn't drink it. This was sitting on the deck back in the corner and we knew where the stuff was stored. With the officer's watching you, there's no way you're going to get one of them cans. So the next day, we were below there, the next deck down, water checking, air-tight checking that one. And we got the idea we'd drill a hole up through the deck into the bottom of this can, and we'd get five gallons of alcohol. So that's what we did. We were catching it in everything you could think of, GI buckets filling them, and then trying to find something to put it in to keep it. Then the painter, we had a painter on our ship who was in charge of the paint locker, Pappy Hale, was an old man. Everybody called him "Pappy" because he came aboard ship as a choice because his son was a 1st class pharmacist's mate. So he wanted to be with his son, and he joined the navy as an old man and came aboard ship and he was a painter. He drew out enough alcohol to make shellac. We used to use shellac to make patterns and stuff in the carpenter shop, molding patterns and you'd have to shellac them. We drew out enough alcohol to shellac that ship a half dozen times. Anytime we were out of anything, Pappy would draw out alcohol, so we had all the alcohol we wanted. We could sell that, too. That was just duty.

MR. PETTY: Getting back, you said after that last kamikaze hit, that was when you made up your mind you wanted off the ship. So you requested shore duty?

MR. DIBB: I didn't request it, I had my choice. I either had to take chief, which couldn't stand up being a transfer, or take shore duty, and I took shore duty.

MR. PETTY: And that was when, right after Okinawa?

MR. DIBB: That was after the President died, too.

MR. PETTY: That was in April.

MR. DIBB: Also, it was after Europe had surrendered.

MR. PETTY: They surrendered in May.

MR. DIBB: I knew that they'd told us we were going back to get re-gunned for the invasion of Japan.

MR. PETTY: Re-gunned, you mean get new guns?

MR. DIBB: New guns. That's when they put the 5-inch 38s and I think they changed the right wing and stuff on the 16. We burned the lining out of a 16-inch gun a couple of times. The insert, the rifling, would slide out and then we'd have to have new guns put on.

MR. PETTY: You were in San Diego when the war ended?

MR. DIBB: Yes. With a transfer you could travel under your own orders and you paid for your own traveling expense. And you could go anywhere you wanted to, report in where ever you wanted to, so I took San Diego.

MR. PETTY: You actually got to pick where your shore duty was?

MR. DIBB: Wherever I wanted to go. I'd get thirty days leave and then report in to the nearest receiving ship. So that's how I ended up in San Diego at that time. Ted came out. I met her in high school. We're out of high school, we'd just met each other really at high school. I went to service and we wrote to each other back and forth. We've been married now 55 years. She went back home. She was from Georgia at that time, her home was Alabama, but she was from Georgia. She went to high school in San Diego and the reason why is because her aunt was married to a sailor and the sailor was out in the Philippines. They transferred all the Philippine people. They knew that the war was coming because they transferred all the families back and her aunt came back from the

Philippines and was working. So they had Ted come out to take of her two younger children, baby sit them and go to school, which she wanted to do anyway. So that's how I met her in high school.

MR. PETTY: Did her husband survive the war?

MR. DIBB: No, he was killed over there. I think the ship he was on was the JUNEAU.

MR. PETTY: Oh, then he was with the Sullivans?

MR. DIBB: I think it was with the Sullivan Brothers, I think that was the ship. But he was killed over there. Maybe it was one of my uncles that was killed on the JUNEAU. I don't remember. I'd have to look it up. I got all of that stuff on record.

MR. PETTY: When did you get out of the navy?

MR. DIBB: Right after that. I got one of the first discharges. I had enough points to get two guys out. You know they went by points, so many months of overseas.

MR. PETTY: What did you do in civilian life?

MR. DIBB: I went back to automotive field and I was not only a winner on the battleship MARYLAND, race car out there number one, we won the Riverside 500 with a midget. So we owned a garage business and race car. After that, I went to handling dogs and that's some of the pictures of my champions there. But we handled dogs, Ted and I are both licensed professional handlers and we traveled all over the western states in a motor home carried up to fifteen dogs in the back. (Blank space on tape)

MR. PETTY: Can you explain what a pattern maker was?

MR. DIBB: A pattern maker made out of wood, usually real soft white pine, all kinds of stuff used on the ship for molds. Then you'd turn it over to the blacksmith and he would heat the metal.

MR. PETTY: Would they make them like for machine parts, make the own parts on the ship?

MR. DIBB: Yes, we made a lot of our own parts for the ship. Usually that's what it was for. Pattern makers, you know, you've got so much shrinkage and this is kind of all figured out and laid out because the bigger the mass the more shrinkage you get out of it. To have it come out right, you've got to have material.

MR. PETTY: You have a sail maker. What do you use sail makers for?

MR. DIBB: Sail makers were ??? Actually they were good at macromay where they made curtains.

MR. PETTY: Decorative uses.

MR. DIBB: The canvas covers for the barrels of the guns, anything out of canvas and there's a lot of stuff. The sail maker is the one that had to sew the guy up.

MR. PETTY: The dead bodies in the bag, huh?

MR. DIBB: Yes. The burials at sea which we only had two. Everybody else we transferred. After I talked to you, I got a thing on the internet. A girl who's working for her uncle, and her uncle, I checked it out through my records and stuff, was a pharmacist's mate. He could have very easily been one of the pharmacists that was killed that I went past at that time.

MR. PETTY: You also mentioned that there were some old timers on the MARYLAND. Some people who have been there since the ship was commissioned, and you mention in your autobiography here Patton Hale, a painter?

MR. DIBB: No, he came aboard as an old man. Pappy Hale came aboard as an old man.

MR. PETTY: What do you mean by an old man, forty, fifty, sixty?

MR. DIBB: Well, his son was a 1st class pharmacist's mate and he would have to be probably through his first four years. You add sixteen and four is twenty and twenty-five, yes, I'd say forty to forty-five to be an old man.

MR. PETTY: So it was pretty loose in those days? You want to be with your son, they said okay. They made him a chief, you say?

MR. DIBB: No. He came aboard as 2nd class and then he made 1st class. His son made chief. Yes, Pappy Hale was probably one of the oldest on the ship.

MR. PETTY: And they both survived the war?

MR. DIBB: Yes, but his son was transferred, and I don't know. You know later on near the end of the war. His son made chief and was transferred but Pappy Hale stayed on the ship.

MR. PETTY: You mentioned some guy that had come aboard in 1921 when the MARYLAND had been commissioned.

MR. DIBB: Yes, Dave Davenport. He was a real good personal friend of mine. He was

about as wide as he was tall, and he could get away with murder.

MR. PETTY: He was a cook or something?

MR. DIBB: Yes. Dave Davenport was a cook. The way I got in good with him was 'cause I could sand all the butcher blocks and clean everything up for inspection. So he treated me pretty good. Then we got to talking and he couldn't write and couldn't read, so I'd write a lot of letters home to his one living, I think it was a sister, I'm not sure, I think it was a sister. So I'd write letters for him and he'd get a letter from them and he'd bring it down and I'd read it to me. That's one of the hardest things I ever did. His sister died and I got a letter and I had to read it to him.

MR. PETTY: How did he take that?

MR. DIBB: He was pretty shook up, that was all he had left.

MR. PETTY: You say he could get away with murder on the ship?

MR. DIBB: Oh, yes, because he was head cook and bottle washer. He never took an examination and I don't think cooks were ranked when I went in. I think that was just like a seaman. Seaman 1st you just did cooking. He made chief but he never took an examination or anything.

MR. PETTY: Just by experience.

MR. DIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: And he was on this ship right to the end of the war?

MR. DIBB: Yes.

MR. PETTY: I wonder what happened to him after they decommissioned?

MR. DIBB: I have no idea. Really, that's one part that I really regret. I made that decision and if I'd have waited one or two days, I probably would have retired off the ship.

MR. PETTY: Made what decision, to leave?

MR. DIBB: Yes, I had a choice to stay or leave, and I took shore duty.

MR. PETTY: But you said that to stay you would have taken a promotion and probably would have been a transfer.

MR. DIBB: It probably would have been a transfer anyway, so it wouldn't have made any difference.

MR. PETTY: Now you said you had an uncle on the JUNEAU?

MR. DIBB: Yes, that was my dad's sister's husband. Freddie Brown was his name.

MR. PETTY: What was his rank?

MR. DIBB: I think he was gunner's mate, but I wouldn't swear to it.

MR. PETTY: But you had four other brothers, they were all in the navy?

MR. DIBB: All but one, the youngest one was army, and he went in the army during the Korean war. He wasn't old enough for World War II.

MR. PETTY: One was a liberator crewman and the other?

MR. DIBB: My brother, that was next to me under me, Bob was on a destroyer minesweeper, I think it was the ADAMS.

MR. PETTY: There was the HOVEY?, the ZANE, the LONG.

MR. DIBB: I don't know why but ADAMS comes up. It was a destroyer minesweeper set up for that. He was in the bay sweeping the mines getting ready for an invasion of Japan before it happened. He was there and they were in that bay which was downwind from both the bomb drops.

MR. PETTY: Atomic bomb drops?

MR. DIBB: Yes. He went ashore and walked all through them places.

MR. PETTY: Nagasaki?

MR. DIBB: Yes and Hiroshima. Went ashore, walked through all of them saw everything just like it was, came home and told us about it. Then I wasn't out of the service but I was in San Diego.

MR. PETTY: On Kwajalein, you just mentioned that briefly. I was reading your autobiography and you said there was a destroyer that was close in offering fire support and they took a hit.

MR. DIBB: No, that was at Tarawa. It ran aground and they sent ??? and a few of the carpenters over there to patch the hole in it.

MR. PETTY: They hit a coral head or something?

MR. DIBB: No, it took a small arms hit like a five-inch gun or something.

MR. PETTY: That's not a small arms gun?

MR. DIBB: Yes, it is compared to the ????. It's just a little hole. The hole was about like

this but it was at the water line so it ran enough on the coral to get that out of the water. We went over there with power velocity tools and blew studs in because there's no way to weld or anything. They didn't have equipment to do that.

MR. PETTY: Were you fired on by the Japanese while you were doing that?

MR. DIBB: Well, they were still fighting, their guns were firing down like this into the ground and between us and here you've got your back to them.

MR. PETTY: Did any bullets hit around you from the Japanese?

MR. DIBB: Not that I'd know about it.

MR. PETTY: This I'm going to leave with you when I'm done to read over. This is not the final draft. We can expedite things by letting you look over. You said there were thousands of things you could tell me that would make you believe that there was a Japanese spy network on the west coast. You mentioned the radio towers. Can you think of anything else that made you think that?

MR. DIBB: There was a lot of, of course, now everybody knows it, but they covered it up. But you know what, like over in Pearl Harbor, they didn't intern any Japanese but they interned all the Germans, and they interned all of the Italians.

MR. PETTY: On Hawaii?

MR. DIBB: Yes, I don't know if they did it over here.

MR. PETTY: They did some over here, too.

MR. DIBB: They did it over there and they never mention that. The poor Japanese were interned.

MR. PETTY: But was there anything else about the Nisse population, at least in San Diego, that made you suspicious?

MR. DIBB: No, just like I told you, blacks and Japanese and Chinese, everybody had their own community.

MR. PETTY: Here's another thing. A lot of people when they're talking, they don't always talk the way they write. They might think of something and jump in the middle of a sentence.

MR. DIBB: I do and I keep adding stuff.

MR. PETTY: Your voice fades off at the end of the sentence and I don't always get the

last word. Like you were talking about that black steward and about how this ninety day wonder from the south was treating him. And then you said, "One of these days I'm going to" and then you faded out and I tried to fill it in "One of these days I'm going to get him" but I don't know if that was the last word. You said he was going to do something to that guy and you say "No, don't do anything. You have no chance of winning."

MR. DIBB: And then I told him, "If you want to get even with the guy, spit in his coffee or sweat."

MR. PETTY: I got that part but the steward said, "One of these days I'm going to", what did he say, I'm going to get even .

MR. DIBB: No, he isn't going to kill him, and he never came out and said anything like that.

MR. PETTY: Well, I'm trying to find out roughly what he might have said. Said I'm going to do something or I'm going to get mad or I'm, 'cause you just said I'm going to and then your voice faded out and I couldn't...

MR. DIBB: Well, he would say one of these days I'm going to get too upset to handle the situation or something. He never threatened the guy. It wasn't a case like that.

MR. PETTY: I'm going to get really upset with the guy. How's that?

MR. DIBB: Yes. And you know that guy used to try to get me in dice games. They were good dice players and they'd take and they'd grind the dice down and file it. I stood watch and when the master of arms was coming, when I called for something, they'd put everything away. What was the name of the book you wrote?

MR. PETTY: SAIPAN...

Transcribed January 9, 2006 by Eunice Gary