

## Bill Forte

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**Question:** Okay, and this is Bill Forte -- no Forte' or anything --

**Answer:** No, just Forte.

**Question:** Forte. Now did I hear you or were you joking when you said Italian in the background?

**Answer:** Yeah, my father and mother were both from Italy. So I'm a first generation Italian. Italian.

**Question:** Italian.

**Question:** Now you enlisted in the Navy when you were how old?

**Answer:** Sixteen.

**Question:** Sixteen. Now you had to be older than that to get into the Navy so how did you --

**Answer:** Seventeen. I went down to enlist, not getting along with my father and not doing well in school. Just a kind of a general screw up. And my father transferred around working on the railroad so I was in different high schools. Went from Ritzville to Sumner to Everett. And you realize when you get a little older when you move around and then try to get into athletic programs, if you're not with the group that was in the sports the year before, you just can't crack the team, you know. And it's a kind of a high school hierarchy. And you don't realize at the time. But I remember I went out for football at Everett High School and I was so far down the list and the group that I was practicing with that we didn't get a football to practice with, we used a helmet.

**Question:** You used a helmet.

**Answer:** We used a helmet for a football so that show you how we were about the fifth squad. But everybody gets a chance to play. And Jim Menace, the coach, kind of run that thing like Adolf Hitler -- that high school football program at Everett High School. He was the Czar and if he didn't know you, he didn't have time to find out who you were. But I was small, slight built, skinny, and of course high school athletics wasn't the whole thing, you know. But I was smoking, drinking, doing all the things that 16-year-olds were doing, just a kind of a general screw-up. My grades weren't all that great. I was just scooting by. And one year I flunked out in English in South Junior High School so I used to go to my first period there then ride a bicycle to Everett High School to start my classes at the high school. So just a kind of a general screw-up. And working at a Clipper Gas Station, pumping gas and making a few dollars, not much. So I thought about joining the Navy. They called up the National Guard in 1940 and Merc Vanderbilt, I remember, nice guy, was a superintendent. And they had a parade in town and he rode a big white horse leading the Guard, down through town. And you could almost smell that there was something in the air, you know, going on, the way Japan was buying up all the scrap metal and there was talk about war and, you know, nobody really knew but the people in Washington, D.C. knew. But there was -- there was something going on. So I went up to the Navy Recruiting Office with a guy named Rudy Schuster. We said let's join the Navy. Rudy was on about the same level with me when it come to high school and what have you. So we went to the Navy Recruiting Office and at that time they only got so many recruits for a Naval Station, see, for a recruiting station, because they weren't taking in a lot of sailors during peace time. New recruits. So the Everett station had four allocated and when we went up to inquire about enlistment, it was just about the end of the year and

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the guy says we have two openings left this year. So here's what you have to do. Go take a physical, fill this form out, take it home and have your parents sign it, because we were supposed to be 17. Well, I was born in 1924 - I put down 1923, which made me 17, I was actually 16. And I went back to the recruiter. I took it home, my father signed it and being from the old country he spoke very broken. He says what's this and I said well, I can't get a job and I'm having trouble in school so I'm going to join the Navy. So he thought it was a good idea just to get rid of me. And so he signed it. And I went up to the recruiting office and turned it in and Schuster did the same. Of course he also lied about his age, see. So we went in together, couple of 16-year-olds. And we took another physical. Then we went down to the Federal Building in Seattle, the old Federal Building, and went in there and got interviewed by an officer. And I remember there was a couple of chiefs in there that were in the recruiting detail. And so they looked us over and we had to -- we had to go one more physical, which at that age, you know, you just sail right through you know, cause you're pretty healthy. And this one officer said this guy looks pretty skinny. And I'm telling you -- my arms were about as big around as a silver dollar, see, cause I was tall and skinny. And he said, take this guy in the restroom, have him do ten pull-ups. So I went in the restroom and we opened the door and I got ahold of that thing and pulled and I'll tell you it was a strain, and I got to seven and this chief from recruiting, he says you got three more to go. So he got his hand around my waist and helped me do the other three, see. Well, he says, you're going to be a sailor now. So that's how I got in. I couldn't -- I couldn't do ten pull-ups. I just didn't have the strength, and I had, you know, hadn't worked out, I wasn't muscular. So I got in the Navy and they give us some vouchers to eat on the train and they loaded us on the train and headed us for San Diego. There was six of us altogether. And one guy was 18 years old. He was the oldest so he got to handle the vouchers. And he took us -- took charge of our group until we got to San Diego. And they met us with a bus and took us to -- over to the receiving station and we're now officially in boot camp. All the instructions, the guys with the billed caps, those were the chiefs, you have to salute them. And you don't offer any suggestions, you listen to all the suggestions. And you do what you're told. And we're now your mother and your father. Okay. And if you're going to end up crying, we won't have room for you. You're on probation here for 30 days and if you don't work out in that 30 days we're going to send you back where you came from. So at the regimentation, they handed you a bunch of clothes; you went through a line, nothing fit, shoes, nothing fit you, but that's what you had. That was your, that was your outfit. And I'll tell you, it was a real learning experience. So they lined us up, I'll never forget. They lined us all up, gave us all a rifle, and they were going to teach us how to march. And I'll tell you something. I've never, even to this day, seen any sailors that could march. But we marched. And in the morning when we'd get out there and the Marine Corps grinder was right next door to us. And we could hear those Marines out there -- they'd been out there an hour when we got out there. We got out at 6 o'clock; they'd been out there an hour. That's how -- that's why Marines know how to march. But I'll never forget lining up, and when we got through the first day, he says, this chief that was leading our outfit said any of you guys ever owned a rifle or a shotgun, fired a rifle or shotgun? Well, I had done that, you know, so I held up my hand. Okay, all you guys that held up your hand up there, you step out this way and the rest of you guys are dismissed, go back to the barracks, get ready for chow. You guys are familiar with weapons, he said, will stay here and clean these 150 rifles or whatever it was. And I'll tell you, that was my first lesson about volunteering. I don't think I ever volunteered after that because that was a real eye opener. But that boot camp was something. It was 90 days of -- of regimentation and teaching you about the Navy. And when you get out, ordinarily everybody got some leave to go home. But just before our group graduated, the group before us got their leave cancelled, they were going to go to duty stations. So we knew that when we graduated, there's a good chance we weren't going to get a leave to go home. And that happened. We -- see, the people in Washington, D.C. knew more than we did and people in the hierarchy -- so they knew something was up. So we got no leave to go home. It was right to duty station.

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My duty was get on a train and go to Norfolk, Virginia, then to Newport News, Virginia. And I'll tell you that train ride across the country was something. We left San Diego, went down through Texas to get to the East Coast. And it seemed like we spent days on sidings. You know this troop -- taking his sailors across the country was not a high priority train. So we'd sit there. One thing about it, they did feed us good. We got good treatment, we got good food. And they -- the porter would make up our bunks at night. And we got to Newport News and I was assigned to a destroyer, a World War I destroyer, The Barney. It was an old four-stack destroyer, surplus from World War I. They'd removed one of the stacks -- it was now a three stack destroyer. And we looked at that thing and I'm telling you something, it was a bucket of rust. I couldn't believe that the thing would even float. And we were assigned to that, and of course I was in the First Division, it was a deck division, all we did was work cleaning the deck and paint and scrape paint and do the menial chores on the ship. And we went to Boston, we picked up a convoy. I think if I remember right it was 242K was the convoy number, and headed for Murmansk, Russia. I didn't have any idea where Murmansk, Russia, didn't care. Got on that ship and, as I remember right, the food on that old three-stacker wasn't too bad. We had a pretty good cook. Sunday morning and Wednesday morning you got beans and cornbread. That was breakfast. The navy beans and cornbread and if you get enough of that catsup or red lead, put enough of that red lead to it and stir it up, you can handle it. Well, over the -- over the time I was six foot tall when I went in and about three years later I'm 6'5" and I'm starting to fill out a little bit. So whatever they were feeding me, that S on a shingle and the other stuff on a life raft and the beans and whatever, it served its purpose. Took the wrinkles out of your belly and started to put some weight on me and some height.

But I'm going to tell you something -- I was never so scared in my life. That North Atlantic in the wintertime shouldn't -- nobody should ever be subject to that. And in a World War I destroyer, I'm going to tell you something, I spent hours and hours with my arms around -- wrapped around a stanchion standing up because it was so rough you just rolling and rolling and up and down and you know, and we're only doing like seven or eight knots, just barely moving. And I just -- and about every fourth day we would take -- you'd kind of cut away from the convoy and run it up to about 15 or 16 knots and clean out the boilers, you know. And run it up and (laughs) and I'd hang on to that stanchion, this arm and then the other arm, and just get so sleepy I'd just fall right down to my knees, you know. But I knew that ship was going to roll over and I knew I was going to die; I wasn't a good swimmer. I can stay afloat, I can go a little distance. I made the 50 yards in boot camp swimming. And I just -- I just knew I was dead. I just, you know, I just couldn't handle it. And once in awhile, just from sheer exhaustion, I'd pass out for a couple hours, you know I'd go down on the bunk, lay down and go to sleep for a couple hours. But when I woke up, it was right up topside. You know. I was in an enclosed compartment, but I was right by a hatch where I could get out. And I was standing there hanging on. And you don't have much -- you don't have much for an assignment out there. It was so rough that the guys were taking -- the bakers and the cook made bean sandwiches. They put beans on bread and handed them out. Because they couldn't cook. They had those big, big battleship steamers, they called them, in the galley. They'd put the beans in there and anchor the lid down and pour the steam come and cook the beans because you couldn't keep nothing in the pots. Nothing on the stoves, you know, all the tables were back and forth, you know, across the -- had to anchor everything down, no place to sit. And we made it to Murmansk, Russia. I think it was 2-1/2 weeks, three weeks, 24 hours a day, out there steaming. And way up north over the top of England. And I remember the captain. One of the funny things the captain come on and said just before we got into Murmansk. He said we're going to land in Murmansk, Russia, and he said they have women working on the docks and I don't want any of my sailors fooling with them women. We're going to be -- you know, we're going to be taking on fuel and some supplies. And of course those merchant ships pulled in, they start unloading right away. Well, I'm going to tell you, if you ever seen any of those German -- or Russian women that were working on the

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docks, you had no desire to play around with them. They were four times as big as me, they had arms hanging down like this (gestures), you know. I'll tell you, they were -- there was absolutely no desire there whatsoever. So we headed back to the States, we stopped at Iceland and Greenland coming back. And went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, picked up another convoy. I don't remember the number of that convoy. But we went back on another trip to Russia, and I'll tell you, I was so miserable and scared the whole time. I was just virtually scared to death. I just knew I wasn't going to live through this. It was too much for me. I don't know how many times I just wished I was home arguing and fighting with my dad. I said boy, I made a serious mistake here in this Navy, serious mistake. It's not all like they painted it up to be, you know.

**Question:** And this is -- this is before you faced any war, right?

**Answer:** Yeah, the war hadn't started yet. This is all pre-war, yeah.

**Question:** Yeah, yeah.

**Answer:** So we picked up a convoy in Halifax, I think it was about 30 or 35 ships, and I tell you, they were some old tubs. You never seen anything like it in your life. And we headed for Murmansk again and it was the same rough ocean. It was no better or no worse. So we made the round trip again. And like I say, I'm not afraid to say I was scared, scared to death. Because I knew I just wasn't going to make it. It was just impossible. We were going to go to the bottom. So we finally made it back and we were in New York Harbor. And from everything I can find out we were going to get another convoy and head back out in the North Atlantic. So I went to a young officer, I don't remember his name. I think he was executive officer. And I told him, I said, I'm not going to make another trip to Russia. And he said well let me tell you something, young fellow, you're in the Navy now and you don't tell the Navy what you're going to do. The Navy will tell you what you're going to do. You signed up for four years and that will be the status for four years. We will tell you where you're going, when you're going, how you're going to get there, how much you'll get paid, we'll feed you and give you a bed to sleep in. That's going to be like that for four years so get used to it. And I said well, you can tell the shore patrol when they start looking for me I'll be in Everett, Washington. That's where I live and I'm not going to Russia. Period. I will be in Everett, Washington, you'll have no trouble finding me, that's where I'll be. All right. And I walked away from him. Two days later I get a call to report to the Captain Gilman. I go down there and I got orders to transfer to reassignment to Treasure Island in San Francisco Harbor. Was actually -- it was a receiving station on an island they called Goat Island. It was a connection between Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge. Little island just off Treasure Island. I went out there, took a train across the country again, and went out there and me and a guy named Forret and Ferguson and Sylvester, if I remember right, yeah, four of us, were assigned to the Battleship Pennsylvania at Pearl Harbor.

And I thought, boy, this has got to be different, now, going out in the Hawaiian Islands. Of course I knew nothing about the Hawaiian Islands. History wasn't my forte'. I knew nothing about the Hawaiian Islands. Territory -- they said we were going to Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii. That's what the shipping orders said. Out to the USS Pennsylvania. And I had no idea where in the hell it was. So they took us down and put us on a oiler, tanker, The Templeton. And we rode that thing for -- it seemed like forever. Maybe ten days. And we got out there and when we went into the harbor and went around all the battleships, I tell you, that was a sight. Now I'm in the Navy I want to be in, see. The big battle ships. And there was cruisers, destroyers, all kind of auxiliary around the harbor there and it was an impressive site and I was impressed. And we went aboard the Pennsylvania and of course our chief meets us there and starts -- you know, we got our seabags, this is everything we own, and our bunk, a hammock. So he showed us where we were going to stow, and he says now

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familiarize yourself, because nobody around here to show you around and it's a big ship, got 2200 men on it, and this is where you stow your stuff. There's a number up there, and if you look up here on this beam across there's a number here. Now, this -- there's a hook there and there's a hook over -- this is where you swing your hammock. And when you take it down in the morning, you roll it up, put your seabag in between in it, put it all in, and you stow it in here. Now you live out of this, see. We don't have no fancy quarters, you live out of this seabag and this is where you sleep. So you string your bunk up. I remember you have to stretch it tight so it don't sag, and it took me about a week to find out you don't do a lot of drinking at night because you'd be in and out of that bunk all night, see. And you've got to pull yourself up and swing into it and you've got a bunk on each side. There's just barely room for you to get in there and if you wake the other guy up, you're going to get a growl. So there's some things just for survival that you learn quick, see. After 5 o'clock you don't do a lot of drinking, see. So I was aboard the Pennsylvania just -- well, we went aboard on December the 4th, and you know what happened on December the 7th.

And I was assigned to the 6th Division which -- our working area was the boat deck, and from the main deck in the back and the quarterdeck was, you went up a ladder and that was the boat deck. The boats were stored up there, stacked inside one another, motor launch, 50-foot motor launch, 30-foot motor launch, whale boat, captain's gig and you know, so on and so forth. Then we -- they assigned us a battle station. Mine was right there on a three inch 50 anti-aircraft gun. And it had -- we had 14 inch guns, turrets, 14 inch, then we had five inch 51's, which were surface guns, stuck out the side. And if I remember right, the Marines manned those surface guns. They had no elevation, they were strictly for shooting out the side. And they were semi-fixed. You had to put in the shell, then the bag of powder. Like the turrets, the three inch was called fixed ammunition. It had the shell and projectile on top of the shell and I think I was the second loader. One guy sat there turning the thing that set the -- the height adjustment, where this thing was going to blow up. The projectile had two little deals on the nose of it that twisted like this so you would pick up that shell in your arm, stick it over in this, drop it down in this thing, and this guy was constantly turning it and pick up those, if they wanted it to explode at 3,000 feet, 3,500, 4,000, 5,000, whatever, and that thing had a crack you couldn't believe it. It was so sharp it -- it damaged your ears. Really hurt your hearing it was so sharp. But that was my battle station. I got a battle station and I got a place to hang my bag -- hammock, and a place to stow my seabag, and the rest of the time I walked around the ship in awe and I got assigned, I think he was a second class seaman that give us our duties, you know. But we started cleaning the deck -- the decks were bright when they washed them down with salt water and they bleached out nice and white. And you had to take this stone -- and holy stone the deck, the wooden deck, you know. And you had to chip paint and you were always painting. And I remember the day, two days before the attack, we did everything in whites. You wore white clothes. You had no dungarees on a battleship. That was reserved for destroyers. You had dress whites and undress whites. Most people have never seen dress whites. I was issued a set of dress whites. They're just like the undress whites but the collar was black with thin white stripes around it and then you had -- then the cuffs were black, and this was the dress whites. And they were pretty -- they looked pretty impressive. But when the war started they eliminated the dress whites and you just had the whites. But you had to go down in the bilges and clean the bilges. And you went down there just -- it was a big blister on the side of the ship to - I guess to stop torpedoes from puncturing a hole in the ship and going down. So they had these -- these blisters on the side, they called them. And as they found out at Pearl Harbor, they weren't very effective. Because most of the battleships that got hit -- you know, the torpedoes hit the blister and blew in and, you know, then they sank. But they said for two hours, you go down for two hours at a time. And those blisters sweat. So you got to take, I think it was 24 bolts off of this hole, set the plate aside. You had a bucket to put the bolts in, and you go down there and you work two hours and then you come out and you're done for the day, see, because there was no air down there. Well, while you're down there you're

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taking the water out and wiping the side off, see, where it sweat. And you did that in whites on a battleship. No dungarees, no work clothes. We did that in whites. And two days later, I was on the fan tail. The band was forming. I used to like to listen to the band play, and in Pearl Harbor you could hear it all over the whole harbor. And the Pennsylvania had been on the beach. They'd had a competition between the bands from all the battleships. Now this was something with the battleships. They all had boxing teams, they had baseball teams, basketball teams, they had bands. So just a few days before, before I got on the ship, they'd had a competition with the bands and the Pennsylvania had won the competition, their band, so I think for two months or one month, whatever it was, they played the National Anthem at -- sharply at 8 o'clock in the morning and all the ships in the harbor raised their flags. Everybody could hear it, see. So I gathered up on the fan tail to watch -- to listen to the music, the National Anthem. It was real impressive. I'd seen it the morning before and I was really impressed with it. And they had a big band. And it was military type band you know. And usually they'd play a number or two and get ready for the National Anthem, which they all faced the harbor, see. They would just gather around, play a couple little numbers, then they'd all face the harbor and play the National Anthem and everybody raised their colors, see. Ding-ding, ding-ding, ding-ding, ding-ding. Eight bells and all is well and the National Anthem, they'd strike it up. Just when they were getting ready to play the National Anthem, guess what happened. You hear all these planes coming over, (laughs) now that's it. The Japs are attacking, and nobody knew what the hell was going on. Now I just thought I was scared before that. Now I'm really scared. And when the ship gets hit I figured it's all over, it's all over. We're all going to die. And it was something. And just scared shitless. I don't -- I'm telling you. Fear like I'd never known fear. And there was two destroyers -- The Cassen and The Downes, in front of us on blocks. And we had been painting the ship, the side of the ship. Well, the Cassen and The Downes got knocked off their blocks, from the bombs and that. And The Pennsylvania took two hits. We lost nine sailors. Two of our big Samoan cooks got killed. And ah, we had to; fires started on one of the destroyers. And it was the fresh paint on the side of the ship was burning. So they figured the only way to solve this problem was flood the dry dock. So they flooded the dry dock. And that put out the fire, but I'm telling you it was a mess. It was an absolute mess. And I went to my battle station, out of sheer training, and there was nothing to fire. When you go into a dry dock they remove all your fuel and ammunition so there you are. We had, I think eight star shells in what they call the ready box, and they fired the star shells, for what reason I don't know. But, you know, you feel so damned defenseless. Here the guys are attacking you and you can't even shoot back, see. This became a sore spot in years later when -- when I joined the Pearl Harbor Survivors and I started telling stories about what they were doing, see. And Pearl Harbor. There's an application you fill out when you join the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. What were you doing at 7:55 on December the 7th, 1941? Territory of Hawaii time. And I wrote down on mine, shit in my skivvies. And every December the 7th, when we'd have our breakfast in Seattle when I first joined, they would read my application. Because nobody else put -- some guys needed another sheet. Well, I was at my battle station, I was doing this and that and blah, blah, shooting down Japs, and I could see the guy right in the cockpit of his plane and you know, they went on and just really made a story out of it. One Marine on there who will go nameless. And I got into loggerheads. He said he was on the ship and he was at his battle station. Well, his battle station was a surface gun. A five inch 51 surface gun that only shot this way and I think had probably 15 degrees elevation. He was shooting at Jap planes, and they had no ammunition, see. And so when he got through telling his story and, you know, and they read his application. I said that is the God-damndest bull-shit story I ever heard in my life. I said now that I'm a little more familiar with what's going on. I didn't know what was going on then, I was just a scared, you know, wet-nosed kid, see. I said, but I'm going to tell you something. You didn't have no ammunition. And that surface gun, you know, you were shooting up at the Japs up here? Not with that five-inch 51 you weren't. I said, now, you know, what's with the bullshit story. Who

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are you trying to impress? Now save that for your family, impress your family. But it don't impress me. I was on the ship with you the same day at the same time. And he told me, he says, I don't care if I ever speak to you again. I said well that's fine with me, and as long as we're in the Association together, he'd walk by me and never speak. We never spoke to each other again. But I didn't see what his point was in trying to, you know, who was he trying to convince. It would be fine -- it wouldn't convince a guy who was right there next to him. So anyway.

**Question:** Now you were how old now?

**Answer:** Seventeen.

**Question:** Seventeen. So you were 17. So in that hour or whatever, you became an old man pretty quick.

**Answer:** Well I grew up in a hurry. And that reminded me years later a guy says -- I stopped a kid who was getting in trouble and driving by my house like a maniac. And I told him I said, I said you don't realize this. But if you don't slow down, I got two girls. I was just freshly married living in Everett and the guy going down the street wide open. So I just went out and flagged him down. I says you don't realize this, but I'm going to arrest you and take you to jail if you don't slow down. The speed limit's 25 miles an hour. Are you a cop? I says no. But I own this property and I live here. And his father come back up with him later. And his father took the kid's side. He asked me, he says, weren't you ever a teenager? I said no. I didn't have any teenage years, I was fighting a war so this kid here can drive up the street 50 miles an hour. And I says he is going to jail if he continues. I will get the cops out here or I will bodily take him to jail. I got two young girls that run out on the street here playing, and if your kid ever hits one of them, he will never go to trial. Because I'm telling you, now, if you're on his side and it's all right with you for him to drive 50 or 60 miles an hour, that's fine and dandy. But you might get yours too. So I could hear that kid coming with pipes on his car and he'd get by my house and he'd just idle by, see. And then he'd give it gas -- so I gave him the point. And it reminded me, and I hadn't give it much thought before. But the guy said weren't you a teenager once. And I got to thinking about it. No, you know, that's a funny thing but I didn't have any teenage years. I was fighting a God-damn war. Like everybody else that was in there, you know, all the young guys. You know we missed that era in our life when we were teenagers and driving around fast and getting in trouble. We were in the God-damn service fighting a war so, you know, we were never teenagers, so to speak. Anyway we -- one thing that scared me terribly and I -- I stayed pretty much out of sight. They issued the Marines orders -- the Marines went down on the docks and they put them out on the beaches and they took a lot of guys off the ship that were in the landing party, they called it. With rifles, and put them down patrolling the beach because they were sure the Japs were going to come and land on the beach. Now I don't know what they would have done down there on that beach. But they sent guys down on the beach with rifles and no ammunition. The Marines were patrolling the dock and they told those Marines to shoot anything that moved. Well, now, everybody's as scared as I am. And if they weren't, they're lying. Because everybody was running scared. Some more scared than others. But when they told the Marines, those young guys that were gung-ho, to shoot anything that moved. Well, I wasn't the smartest guy in the world but I was smart enough, I'd better to stay down below deck. Or at least stay out of sight. So I did that. And we were busy, I'll tell you we were working like 12 hour days getting the ship cleaned up. And the first thing they did was bring paint -- everything went from white to navy blue. They were taking five gallon buckets of paint and dumping them on the deck and pushing them around with a squeegee. That's how they were painting. The order was immediately get rid of that -- immediately get rid of that white paint. So everything was blue. So we spent days like that.

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Then I got orders. There was about six of us. The only one I knew was this guy Foret. His name was spelled like my name, F-O-R-E-T, and he was a Louisiana Cajun. And boy, he -- there was no doubt telling where he was from when he opened his mouth. And everything was Yankee. I was a Yankee to him, see. They don't give up easy down there in the South. And anybody that wasn't from Louisiana was a Yankee. So him and I and four other guys who I don't remember their names now, six of us got transferred to the destroyer, Hammann, which was untouched that was in the harbor -- didn't get hit. That was going to go to sea. And they were beefing up their personnel, see. So I got transferred -- I had no -- I was new aboard the Pennsylvania, see. And my time aboard there, I think total time was two weeks. I went aboard there on the 4th, the attack was on the 7th, and two weeks later I'm assigned to the destroyer Hammann. The pharmacist mate, who was a big Filipino, looked at me and said I think you better -- better go over to the hospital because I think you've got malaria. So I said all right. So I went over to the hospital, and the guy looked at me and said -- he took some tests -- whatever they were I don't remember. And sent me back to the ship. Well the ship sailed. Well come to find -- and he give me these pills I was supposed to take. And come to find out I had yellow jaundice, I didn't have -- I had a liver infection, see. So they called the ship -- a message to the ship that I had yellow jaundice, and so the pharmacist mate started treating me accordingly and evidently it took care of it. So we were out and we got involved in that -- in that Midway engagement. We were -- we were cruising around there for probably six weeks, with the carriers, you know going through whatever maneuvers we were going through. I didn't know what the admirals on board were doing or the captain. Just doing my duty assigned a job on this destroyer. And we got involved in that Midway engagement and the Yorktown, CV-5 got hit pretty bad and they abandoned ship and then they went back aboard -- some of them. They were going to try to save the ship and the ship was burning bad and interior explosions. And we got orders to take the ship in tow and try to get it back to Pearl Harbor. And we were maneuvering around the ship and we got a line aboard the ship and we were trying to get in front of the carrier, which was dead in the water. We were floating around the bow and we had -- and we were going to try to hook a wire, cable, from The Yorktown to the back of our ship, then we were going to try and get the Portland, which was a cruiser that was right there with us, to get a line on board the ship -- we're going to try and save that Yorktown, get it to Pearl Harbor. And we got torpedoed. We got one torpedo mid-ship and the ship immediately broke in half. Absolutely in two pieces. We had picked up probably I would say at least 400 sailors out of the water from The Yorktown that had abandoned ship. And they'd swam over and they had cargo nets and they'd, you know, pick them up and pull them aboard, any way they could get them aboard. And the medical officer had them laid out on the fan tail. All you guys just stay right back here together, he wanted to look -- any of them that were burnt or hurt or whatever, he wanted to give them treatment, see. And I'll tell you when that ship -- when that torpedo hit, it was just boom. (gestures) Next thing I knew, in a split second, I'm in the water. Luckily we had to wear our life jackets all the time we were at battle stations. General quarters you wore your life jacket, see and your helmet. Well I had them both on. I shed that helmet -- but -- that's probably what saved my butt. So we were floating around in the water for a while and the depth charges went off when they got down where they were set up. And I'm going to tell you, that was something. Never felt anything like that. And it blew the salt water up my rear end, and split my guts. I was bleeding from the rectum for awhile. They were running ice water through me, if you can believe that. And I went aboard the cruiser -- The Portland, picked me up. And The Portland went to Pearl Harbor and had almost a thousand guys aboard that they'd plucked out of the water.

**Question:** Do you remember how long you were in the water? I mean were you conscious or --

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**Answer:** Oh, yeah, yea, I was conscious all the time. I would say I was probably in the water four hours, because The Portland didn't want to stop. What they -- how The Portland got us aboard. They put a cargo net out in the water and they'd drag it and the ship would turn and the cargo net would stay out here and go slower than the ship would turn and they'd tell you with a bull horn, you know, hook your arms in there. And when they'd get 20 guys or 25 guys, they'd put the crane over the side and pick the cargo net up, swing it over and drop you on the deck, see. And then put the cargo net back over.

**Question:** So they were just gill net fishing, basically.

**Answer:** Yeah So, yeah, then we got aboard and they'd look at you and you go over here and you go over here and if some guy was hurt or burned or you know, in bad shape, he would go over here and the medical people would get to him. So they took us to Pearl Harbor and I went to the sub base, the hospital at the submarine base at Pearl. And the doctors were looking at me. That's when they started the ice water treatment. They run that God-damn hose down me and what they were trying to do was get me to stop bleeding, see. And that didn't work. They uh, the doctor told me, he says, we're going to put you in surgery and we're going to see where you're bleeding from. And he said you're going to feel like you had a baby. So they gave me some stuff and opened up my rear end, you know. He says about the size of a watermelon. And they sewed up some gut and then sent me to the Naval Hospital in Bremerton. And I went in the Naval Hospital and that's where they operated. Went in and took some of my gut out and sewed some up and gave me the same watermelon treatment again. Which I'll agree does make you a little bit sore. And you eat -- you eat jello, and I'll tell you, even when you pass jello, you know, you feel like you're passing a cantaloupe, you know, your ass is so sore. (laughs)

Anyway, then I got assigned to the Coos Bay for new construction, that's what it was. My assignment out of the -- what they do is they transfer you -- they don't just put you in the hospital, you were transferred to the hospital. And on the back of my discharge it shows Naval Hospital, Bremerton, Washington. That's my station when I was in the hospital. Then I get re-assigned for the Lake Washington Shipyard, Howton, Washington, for new construction. So I got transferred over to Howton. They had a barracks there. It's right where the Seahawk training center is now. Howton is no longer Howton, it's part of Kirkland now, I guess. But the Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation, Lake Washington Shipyard. That was the official name. And I was there and we were practicing loading on a dummy five-inch mount and we were down working on the ship. Everyday while it was in construction we had -- we'd have an assignment. We'd have first class or, you know, chief or whatever, taking us around and doing things that would help the progress, help get us commissioned, you know, doing tasks. And I'm going to tell you something, that was -- that was -- you can't believe. They had a lot of women working on that ship, Rosie the Riveters, and you can't believe. And I'm going to tell you a story that would curl your hair. Any place there was a place to hide, there was somebody hid. And I'll tell you something.

**Question:** Doing a little of their own riveting, were they?

**Answer:** Yeah, when we got -- yeah, we did some riveting, all right. And I'll tell you something, and some guys, when we got commissioned and had to leave there, cried. It was so bad they cried, lost their happy home. And a couple of the guys actually fell in love, and I've got a picture at home of one guy that actually married one of those gals. He goes to the reunion occasionally. Married one of the gals that he worked -- that he met in the shipyard.

**Question:** That's a story that's not in the history books. They kind of left that part out.

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**Answer:** (laughs) Yeah, life everlasting. But anyway that was -- but some of the things that went on, you know, you're wondering how in the hell you ever won that war and how in the hell you ever got any ships built, you know.

But I was impressed -- the Half Moon Bay was being built right next to us. And we've got pictures -- I've got pictures at home of the ship being launched and being commissioned and being christened and it's kind of interesting. In the shipyard they've got a routine they follow. Now they get -- when the first piece of steel was laid for the Half Moon Bay, which was AVP-26, right next to us. They lay that first piece of steel right down in the bottom and they get a minister and a rabbi and I forget what the other one was, a priest. And they got five or six of these guys and the guy with the hard hat lays this piece of steel and then they have a ceremony -- a regular ceremony, and they tell me they do this for every ship they build in the Navy. They lay that first -- the guy brings it down with a crane, they sit it down there and these guys all say something to bless all the sailors that go to sea on this ship for a safe return, and they've got a regular routine they go through. And as soon as they get through everybody gets out of the way and they start building the ship. Kind of interesting. I wish in those days I'd taken more pictures, you know, than I did, but cameras weren't allowed. You weren't allowed -- all the pictures I got were all outlaw pictures. You weren't allowed to have a camera. Luckily we had one executive officer, name's Bill James who turned out to be a good friend of mine. Lives in Missouri. And attends all our reunions. That smuggled aboard an 8 millimeter camera, and he took some pictures out there in that jungle when we were on the beach with the natives, and Bill James is standing -- of course, big muscular guy with a knife in his teeth, you know, with all the natives standing alongside of him. But -- fortunately we got that. It -- there's no sound -- he didn't make any sound with it -- there's no sound track on it, but we got those pictures, you know, of us tending our PBYS.

Our duty on that seaplane tender was -- was called a combat seaplane tender. It was the theory of the Navy that we had to save the pilots at all costs, the pilots were more important than the airplane. Now the Japanese wanted to save the airplane and to hell with the pilot, see. Their thinking was exactly opposite of ours. We could make all kinds of airplanes, and we could turn them out, seven, eight, ten of them in a day, whatever, but we couldn't train pilots that fast. We had to save the pilots. Our duty -- and only duty -- was to go out in advance. We started up through the whole Solomon campaign, we went all through the Marianas campaign. We went onto Saipan for the initial landing. We were at Guadalcanal. We started Espiritu Santo. We got Rendova, Munda, island-hopping, right with them. Take some -- look like truck tires -- they were buoys, that we floated, with an anchor, put them down. There was a shackle on the top where the PBY's could anchor up to these and anchor to them, see. And they'd make a landing strip for these planes to land in, with markers, make sure there was nothing, shoals or rocks underneath there, water was deep enough. And these PBY's would land there, anchor, and we had two personnel boats, speed boats, big Chrysler engines in them. Go like hell and leave a wake behind them like hydroplanes. And we had two personnel boats tied to the boom and we had a crew -- a ready crew that when they sound the alarm, guys man the boats and the pilots and everybody, down into the boat, go out and get in the PBY. And we started a program called "The Dumbo Operation". And that was a code word that the pilots would use on the VHF when they got in trouble. They would scream, Dumbo, Dumbo, Dumbo, see. And that meant -- then they would say I am so and so miles or so and so from this island or the tip or this and that and we're going over here to land and I'm going to ditch, I'm shot up, my engine's out, I'm going to hit the water. Well, they'd go down and ditch and scream for the Dumbo and there we are, doing the only thing we're designed to do -- is set up a mobile seaplane base, Naval air station, and go out and rescue the pilot. And he had a little lifeboat, he'd get in his lifeboat, you know, whatever, and if he had flares with him, he would use those. And we would pick up the pilot, or we'd pick up the bomber crew, whatever. And the PBY's were stripped down, no armament on them at all, just as light as they could be, cause as fast as they could be, scoot down and rescue the pilot and pick him up out of the water. Bomber crews, might be six or seven guys on them. When we

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got in the Marianas, B-29's. Picked up a crew of a B-29 that ditched, see, coming back. But we sent PBY's out with them when they would take off and they would circle, maybe catch a flight that was coming in, come in with them, re-fuel, get another crew. But when the B-29's were flying out of Saipan and Tinian, we had PBY's in there all the time. And we had some doing anti-sub patrol. Saipan didn't have a harbor we could close off, see with torpedo nets, it was open. So constantly we had anti-sub patrol out all around that Saipan-Tinian area. Had planes in there constantly. Before one would land, one would take off to relieve him. Doing -- and night -- night flights, called them black cats -- black cats out patrolling at night. And they carried aerial torpedoes under their wings if -- or they carried depth charges -- torpedoes, or they carried bombs. And we had a lot aboard ship. And we had re-arming boats. We would take the re-arming boats out, if we had torpedoes. And we'd just winch them up, torpedoes underneath their wing, see, and the same with the bombs or whatever. And the ones at night, the black cats, usually had depth charges because they were looking for submarines, and the submarines always left, when the propellers turned it stirred up that phosphorus, and it looked just like a little neon light at night, see. And they'd look for that phosphorus. And then go in depth charge them. And we -- we were in on four landings, we shot down two planes, we sank one surface craft, and we rescued 121 pilots, and for that, pilots and bomber crews, for which Harry Truman and the Secretary of the Navy gave, us a Presidential Unit Citation, which we're pretty proud of. And we have our annual reunions every year and we go over this and go over this and go over this every year. But it was an interesting cruise. I really enjoyed that seaplane tender. I was on it from the time we put it in commission till we took it out of commission in Orange, Texas.

We come back after the war, we were in Japan, Tokyo. Went up to northern Honshu to a place called Ominato Cove, with orders from MacArthur to destroy all the seaplanes, all the implements of war. He had -- he had ships going out in lines destroyers and small craft to be scuttled out in the deep water. And we cleaned out their armory, brought all their rifles and pistols back to the ship, which the captain gave us each one, for souvenirs. And we took their seaplanes out, sunk them and destroyed everything, and that's fun. That's a fun part of it going in and destroying the Jap Air Force.

And come back through the Panama Canal, went to New Orleans, unloaded the fuel and ammunition, went around to Orange, Texas, and a tug pulled us up the Sabine River, which is the border between Louisiana and Texas, and Orange, Texas, and put us in fleet reserve up there. We de-commissioned the ship, took the commissioning pendant down on April the 30th, 1945. And the Coast Guard picked up the Coos Bay because it needed cutters. It took the Coos Bay, put it out in the North Atlantic as a weather station, and the Coast Guard had it for 19 years. That's what a durable ship it was. The Coast Guard had it 19 years. And the guys that come to the Coos Bay reunion that were on the Coos Bay, have nothing but good to say about it. It was just a beautiful ship. And we went in 1994 we didn't have a reunion. We decided we were going to have them every other year. So VPV 18, which was a -- one of the flight crews, they flew PBM's. PB5Y's, I think they were called. Two engine, gull wing seaplane. They invited us to join them in Los Vegas for their reunion because we weren't having one. So some of us went down and joined them for their reunion and they had nothing -- they said they went aboard the Coos Bay and they said the food was so good, the quarters was so good that they got transferred one time to another seaplane tender which shall remain nameless, and they said the food was lousy and the ship was dirty and they couldn't wait to get back on the Coos Bay again. So we had an excellent reputation and I'll tell you, everybody had a job to do and they did it. And as a result, we saved a hell of a lot of people's lives that can be thankful today for the Coos Bay and its crew. And there was no heroes. You know, the heroes are still out there. But uh, President read our history and decided it was worthy of the citation, which we're damn proud of. I'm proud of it, anyway.

**Question:** Let me hold for just a second. I'm going to switch tape here.