Lyle M. Pasket was born on 17 August 1927 in St. Paul, Minnesota. He graduated from high school in 1945 and immediately enlisted in the US Navy. After Basic Training, he was assigned in June to the heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35), then in San Francisco for repairs.

In mid-July, the *Indianapolis* left on a top secret mission, the transport from the US mainland to Tinian Island, in the South Pacific, of the first atomic bomb. After successfully completing this mission, the *Indianapolis* sailed for the Philippines; underway, just after midnight on 30 July 1945, the ship was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and sank in just twelve minutes. Lyle and almost nine hundred of the crew of more than 1100 survived the sinking, but due to communications problems naval search vessels were not dispatched to search for the crew. More than three days passed before an American aircrew sighted some survivors floating in the Pacific; by this time, more than five hundred sailors had succumbed to thirst, exhaustion, and shark attack. Lyle was one of just 317 men ultimately rescued from one of this country’s worst naval tragedies.

Lyle’s recovery took more than six months; he spent several weeks on Guam at a naval hospital, then was transferred to facilities at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Chicago. Physically healed, he was subsequently stationed to the Philippines, where he remained from 1946 until his discharge in 1948. Lyle joined the Naval Reserve after discharge and was called to serve during the Korean War.

After his Navy years, Lyle worked as a mechanic at Northwest Airlines in Minneapolis until his retirement in 1985. He and his wife resided in Bloomington, Minneapolis, from the 1950s to the 1970s, then in Eagan, Minnesota, where this interview was conducted.

Lyle devoted much of his time to sharing his *Indianapolis* experience, speaking at libraries, community centers, and schools. He remained active in the USS *Indianapolis* Survivors Organization until he passed away, in April 2006.
Heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis (CA-35), pictured off Mare Island Navy Yard, California, 10 July 1945, after her final overhaul and repair of combat damage.  
Source: Photograph from the Bureau of Ships Collection in the US National Archives.  
Photo #: 19-N-86911
Interview key:
S = Thomas Saylor
P = Lyle M. Pasket
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

S: It's 6 September 2001, and I'm happy to be here speaking with Lyle Pasket. First of all, Mr. Pasket, thanks very much for agreeing to sit to be interviewed.

P: Oh, you're welcome.

S: What I'd like to do is start with some general questions. For example, when were you born and where?

P: I was born seventeenth of August, 1927, in St. Paul, Minnesota, on the north end.

S: On the north side of St. Paul. Did you go to grade school and high school in St. Paul?

P: I went to grade school in (***), and I started high school in the north. Got started, then I went to work.

S: So where were you working between when you started high school and when you joined the Navy?

P: I was working for Northwest Airlines.

S: Over here in Minneapolis?

P: No, in St. Paul, at the modification center, down at the St. Paul airport.

S: One question I'd like to ask, is about 7 December 1941, and if you remember where you were when you heard the news?

P: I was at my buddy's house. He lived on North Dale Street. We were down there just talking about probably going to the movie that afternoon, and all of the sudden, I heard all about how the war had started up. I was amazed. I wasn't scared, but I was bewildered. I didn't think too much of it, too, in a way. Who knew about war in them days? Not at my age, I don't think. So I went home and talked to my mother and dad. We got to know what the war was then.

(A, 36)

S: Do you remember how your folks reacted?

Oral History Project: World War II Years, 1941-1946 – Lyle Pasket
Interview © 2001 by Thomas Saylor

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P: I can’t remember that much. *(pauses four seconds)* I don’t think they were too concerned. My dad was in the, worked for American (****) and Dairy which, they were under Army contract anyway. So, he was in Defense anyway, so didn’t have to get out and go someplace. They didn’t have to worry about me at that time, because what was I, thirteen?

S: Did you have any older brothers?

P: No. I had older sisters.

S: So, you it hadn’t impacted any family members right away. Between December of ’41 and when you actually joined the Navy, a number of years went by. Did you volunteer for the Navy?

P: Yes I did.

S: Had you received a draft notice?

P: No. I was seventeen. There were three of us sitting having coffee down in Snyder’s Drugstore on Roberts Street. We were waiting for the bus to take us to work at St. Paul Airport. We said, “Let’s go join the Navy.” So we all went and joined the Navy.

S: Just like that!?

P: Yes. I came home that night about 5 or 5:30 with papers for my dad to sign, or my mother. My dad was mad, oh boy! “If you want to kill yourself, go ahead!” So he signed the papers.

S: So he was more angry than worried about you?

P: He was angry the way I went about it, I guess. But he was worried, yes

S: What month was this, do you remember?

P: March 1945.

S: Why the Navy?

P: I always was Navy. I can remember when I was small, I always liked Navy. My dad had a buddy of his from World War I. He was Navy. I kind of gathered the way my Dad talked, that kind of instilled me into the Navy life.

*(A, 79)*

S: So all three of you went down, got your papers, signed up. How long was it before you shipped out, before you went to training camp?
P: I think four days.

S: Wow! Pretty fast! So it was sign now, and see you next week! Where did you go for training?

P: Great Lakes [Naval Training Center].

S: Down by Chicago, there. That’s a pretty big place.

P: It was a big base.

S: Was that a new part of the country for you?

P: Yes, because I had never been out of Minnesota. Well, I was, too, I beg your pardon. In 1943, I was in Portland, Oregon, for Northwest Airlines. I forgot that.

S: But you didn’t travel a lot before this time.

P: No.

S: In Basic Training, now you hit Basic Training in March of ’45. The Navy at that time was still segregated, right?

P: Yes.

S: Were you aware, in the part of the camp you were at, of blacks or other minorities around?

P: Blacks marching. Blacks had their own company and the whites had their own company. And the blacks could march! Boy, they could sing out the cadence, you know. We tried it, but we were all left foots! (laughs). Those boys could really sing it out.

S: Was there a lot of mingling between the blacks and the whites?

P: I can’t remember. Not in boot camp, I can’t remember.

S: But the actual training, the groups for training, were kept separate at that time?

P: Just about, yes.

S: It wasn’t long after that that the Navy desegregated.

P: Bu it was after the war.

S: After you were gone, for sure. After Great Lakes.
Was it the first time you had been away from home for a long period of time?

P: No, like I said, I did leave Minnesota in 1943, for about three months.

S: Ok, it was an extended period of time in Portland.

P: Right, I went to Portland, Oregon, to work for Northwest Airlines.

S: What kind of memories do you have of Basic Training: positive, negative or value neutral?

P: To tell you the truth, I can’t remember anything that would help me. Because we went through it so fast.

S: How long did it last, do you remember?

P: I don’t know. I’ve been trying to think. It wasn’t long. We were one of, I believe, companies behind us and us, we were... The war was winding down, they knew that, and they needed men over there. That’s why we had such short boot camp training. The only training I had was like tying knots, jumping off a swimming board, and fire fighting, then gunnery. That’s all Basic was. And march, march, march.

(A, 131)

S: So Basic Training went fast. Did you meet anyone in Basic Training that you sort of built up a friendship with?

P: Oh yes. There was (pauses three seconds) Dick Richardson. He got killed; he went aboard ship with me.

S: On the Indianapolis?

P: Yes. Another one, Doucette [Roland O. Doucette], he was from boot camp; he was aboard ship. That’s the only two I can remember. (pauses five seconds) Oh no, there’s Walter McFall. He was from boot camp, on board ship. He survived, but he passed away in ’86. I think that’s all there was.

S: So a couple of you, three, four that actually moved on to the same ship. Did you move right from Great Lakes to the Indianapolis, then?

P: No. I went to receiving barracks, because the ship was in dry dock. And I stayed in the receiving barracks until the ship came out of dry dock. Then I went aboard, the 21st of June.

S: So you knew you were going to this particular ship, and from what I read in Doug Stanton’s book, In Harm’s Way, the ship was scheduled to be in dry dock a little bit longer than it was.
P: Right, yes.

S: What did you know in the receiving barracks? How long were you expecting to be there?

P: Gosh, I couldn’t tell you. I have no idea or recollection of that.

(A, 157)

S: In any case, you were on board ship on June 21st. Well, we talked off the record a lot about the *Indianapolis*, and I guess at this point we’ll have to go back on the record. The ship has an infamous history. Maybe you could say a little bit about when you first got on the ship. What kind of impressions did this ship make?

P: That it was amazing big. Not coming from the farm boy, or anything like that, to see big cities. But that was an amazing hunk of metal right there.

S: How big was this ship?

P: 610 feet long, I believe. And sixty-five feet or sixty-seven feet across the beam at the widest point.

S: When you joined the ship, what was your particular job or station?

P: My job was aircraft. Storekeeper. It was right in here, off this little... *(points at a picture, at a location on ship)*. There were little offices where we kept our storage parts for the airplanes.

S: And you worked with the supply of the aircraft parts. How many aircraft were on the ship?

P: Two seaplanes. SC1s.

S: As you joined the ship, or became a seaman, did you have an idea, or a concept, of “the enemy,” in an abstract way?

P: No way.

S: Were you aware that you were doing something, doing the right thing for your country? What drove you at this point?

P: Patriotism. That was always instilled in me. I remember going to grade school, back in the ’30s. American Legions fellows coming from World War I, coming to school on Armistice Day, and talking to us kids about it. I had always known patriotism. I think at that time it drove everybody that was in service. Because they never had to worry about manpower or anything then.
S: Well, the Indianapolis didn’t stay in dry dock as long as it was supposed to. It had an interesting mission. Maybe you could say in a few words what the mission of the ship was now to be as it left harbor.

(A, 197)

P: We knew we were going to be in some mission, because when we went out of Mare Island for our shakedown cruise it only lasted about twelve hours. She did a little turn here, and a little turn there, fast and slow down, stuff that like. We did maneuvers. Then we went back to Hunter’s Point [Navy facility, near San Francisco], and then went back to Mare Island [another Navy facility, near San Francisco], and as soon as we got to Mare Island, they shoved us down to Hunter’s Point right away.

S: Was that to pick up supplies?

P: Right. We noticed, was it the next day? (pauses five seconds) Yes, I believe it was the next day that Army trucks came along, and unloaded some stuff, and that’s all I remember. Until after the war, we found out what it was.

S: What were they unloading?

P: The atomic bomb. Parts of it.

S: And this was then loaded on to the Indianapolis.

P: At Hunter’s Point.

S: How big was the thing they loaded on?

P: Well, I remember the atom itself was encased in a steel case about the size of a bowling ball. Two fellows had to carry that up like a coolie, in a box. There was a big crate, probably four feet by four feet by ten. That was lifted up and put in the hanger, and there were Marine guards standing guard over that all the time. But the ball itself that went up, we found out, that was up in the admiral’s cabin. Admiral wasn’t traveling with us at that time anyway. This Army major was in charge of it, so he was with it the whole time. He did come to us after the war and explain to us what we were carryin, because we did not know.

(A, 226)

S: After the fact he told you.

P: That’s right.

S: What kind of scuttlebutt was going around among the guys?
P: About that stuff we were carrying? Why the Marine guard and that? *(laughs)* It went from a small Jeep, to whiskey and cigars, cigarettes for MacArthur or admirals, and all that stuff.

S: It ran the gamut then. Everybody seemed to have a different angle. How about yourself? Did you pay much attention to that scuttlebutt?

P: I don’t think I did. You always got a couple in each division that like to pass that along, you know. You hear it so much that it’s just another day.

S: What was it like being a new sailor on board this ship?

P: Oh, it was kind of hard at first until you get used to what you’re doing, where you’re going, and where your quarters are, and what your battle station was, and stuff like that.

S: Anything specifically difficult for you, that made the adjustment tough?

P: The short cuts to get to your battle stations, if you were down in your quarters. Because they don’t give you a tour around the ship, you know.

S: You have to figure it out for yourself?

P: Just about.

S: I imagine that with a ship that size there must have been all kinds of corridors, and ladders, and everything else.

P: Yes. You always went aft on the port side and forward on the starboard side.

S: To keep the movement of the people...

P: ...people running.

S: So you have to know what side you’re coming up on, and which direction to move. Well, you left the harbor there, and made, as I recall, a very fast run to Pearl Harbor.

P: The record still stands today. Seventy-two hours.

S: How long would one normally expect for a cruise to Pearl Harbor?

P: We were doing about twenty-eight knots all the way. That’s nearly top speed. Top speed is thirty-two knots with that ship. They usually cruise around fifteen knots.

S: So you were almost maxed out at top speed.
P: If Irv was here, he could tell you how many gallons of fuel we burnt an hour. I think it was eleven thousand.

S: An hour? Wow! No use worrying about our cars, huh? (both laugh)
Now, on board ship, were you on duty for a certain number of hours?

P: Yes.

S: How many hours at a time?

P: You're on duty for eight, just about eight hours.

S: Out of twenty-four?

P: Out of twenty-four. Then you had to stand your watch yet on top of that, which was a four hour watch. Twelve hours on, twelve hours off.

S: What was your job like? This was a very short cruise, obviously. But when you were on the job, what did you do for eight hours?

P: Like I said, these were all new aircraft we got. They had a lot of cases of spare parts that we were inventorying, marking, stuff like that, and placing in designated areas. It was a detail job, kept you going eight hours a day. Wasn't rush or anything. Because, like I say, you might have the noon to four watch, or mid to four. When the ship was hit, I had the mid to four in the morning.

S: So you were just on watch?

P: Just got on top side. I slept right down in this area (points to location on the picture of the ship) on the port side. Second torpedo hit here (points to starboard location, mid-ship).

S: Ship was hit starboard, wasn't it?

P: Yes, that's right. Just the opposite from where I slept.

S: Now you mentioned about hours per day. That means you had twelve hours a day, so some time was sleeping, but you had some free time, too.

P: We had a little free time, yes.

S: What do guys typically do on ship when they're not on duty?

P: They had a gedunk stand, that's an ice cream, soda fountain. So that was open up a couple hours a day.

S: Good place to hang out?
P: Oh yes. You could have ice cream, and you bought your cigarettes, or soap, or stuff like that. There was a canteen.

S: Was that canteen open around the clock?

P: No, that's only open a couple hours a day.

S: Were there recreation areas? Or places on board where people like to hang out?

P: Just the galley. That's all.

S: Were there a number of galleys, or just one on the ship?

P: All I can tell you, I only saw one. Well, the officers had their mess up here.

S: Separate from the enlisted men. Was there much mixing between officers and enlisted men?

P: None. You see, this was a flagship.

S: What difference did that make?

(A, 297)

P: You had admirals aboard. You had to have long sleeves. You had to button your sleeves down instead of rolling them up. You had to have you cap on square, like a sailor.

S: So it creates a whole new kind of environment. Sounds like you were putting on the dog!

P: Yes, putting on the dog.

S: Now, the admiral was not on board when you left the harbor. So there was a little more relaxed atmosphere?

P: Oh, I would say yes.

S: But officers and enlisted men didn’t mix?

P: No, they didn’t mix much.

S: Was that by Navy design?

P: Maybe, yes. Officers over there (motions with hand to the left), chiefs over here (motions with hand to center), enlisted men here (motions with hand to the right).
S: You guys got to Pearl Harbor, and you didn’t spend much time there.

P: No. We were told that port side was going to liberty as soon as we got to Pearl, but they cancelled that right before we entered the harbor. We tied up and got fuel and supplies, and took off again right away, just about.

S: So you never left the ship at Pearl Harbor?

P: No. Well, I went aboard the… (pauses five seconds) I believe it was (pauses five seconds) the torpedo sheds. I don’t know what we were doing over there. There was a work party that had to go over there, and I was one of them, and I can’t for the love of me know what we went there for.

S: Was it a pretty brief trip though?

P: Yes, it was fast. It was over and back.

S: So the cargo that was stored on board when you left the States was still on board the ship. And you left Pearl Harbor, bound for where?

P: Tinian [in the Mariana Islands, South Pacific].

S: That’s a pretty good stretch, too.

P: Yes, that’s a pretty good stretch. I think that’s about (pauses five seconds) let me see (pauses five seconds) I think we left Pearl around the nineteenth, and it was just about eight days, seven or eight days.

S: Still making twenty-eight knots?

P: Yes, all the way.

S: Wow. You got to Tinian, delivered the cargo, these two things left the ship again. What was supposed to happen then, after you delivered the cargo?

(A, 326)

P: The captain had orders to go down to Guam, which I believe is south of Tinian, in the Marianas there, which was COMPAC—Commander of Navy, Pacific, Admiral Nimitz’s quarters, to get our sailing orders out of there. Which we did. I remember, after we dropped the bomb off, towards afternoon, we were sitting off the anchorage there, seeing all these B-29s [B-29 Superfortress four-engine bombers] take off. First time we had ever seen them. God, they were large. So we sat there for, for hours with the airplanes taking off like that.

S: So for hours they took off?
P: They were enormous. Then we went down, we took a day or so to get down to Guam. We tied up there, so then the captain got his orders out of there. He was told, we were going to join the Seventh Fleet for gunnery training, stuff like that. Anti-aircraft gunnery will take place on Tuesday. Now this was all on Saturday *(pauses five seconds)* that we’ll have gunnery in the Philippines on Tuesday. The captain asked for escort and they said, “You don’t need it, because it’s a cleaned out area. No information on submarines.” Now this is where the story goes haywire.

S: So it was supposed to take only three days, four days, to get down to your destination?

P: Right. Thursday, the day before we dropped the A-bomb, there was a submarine, the *Underhill*, was torpedoed in the very same area that we got hit in. But the Navy Intelligence wouldn’t release that information to us.

S: Why was that?

(A, 355)

P: Well, the Navy broke the Japanese code. This is all hearsay what I pick up, and what I read and stuff like that. The officer that was in charge of intelligence, he wouldn’t relay that message down to his sub officers on the bottom, because it was ultra secret. That’s one reason why. So, unbeknown to us, we went right into that area, and there we got it.

S: The ship was sailing to the Philippines, and a Japanese submarine torpedoed you. When exactly was the ship torpedoed?

P: The ship was torpedoed, I would say, maybe five after twelve midnight, on the 30th [30 July 1945].

S: It had just become the 30th. You had just taken your midnight watch?

P: I had just got on topside back here *(points at photo of ship)* when the first explosion hit here *(points at photo of ship)*. I understand it took about one hundred feet of the bow off.

S: Just took it off?

P: Just blew it off, bent it over, what. The second torpedo hit here *(points at photo of ship)*, and hit the magazine, and thirty-five thousand gallons of high-octane gasoline.

S: Was that for the airplanes, the high-octane gasoline?

P: Yes. And that’s what split the ship apart, just about.

S: The explosion of the aircraft fuel, okay.
P: And the munitions.

S: You were topside, almost by chance. Had it happened an hour before, you’d have been below decks.

P: Right.

S: The ship’s hit. Obviously it’s dark. What happens from the time the ship is hit to when it goes under the water?

(A, 374)

P: Well, with this off here (points on photo, at bow) and in the conditions we were in, the water-tight doors were all open. So were doing about twelve knots, I understand. So they couldn’t get the engines to stop. So she just threw herself right down like that.

S: Sucking up the water.

P: Sucking up the water, and as you’re going she was listing. The ship going on her side, on this side (points at photo of ship), we crawled on our hands and knees to the opposite side, and laid against the bulkhead back there, because we didn’t hear, “Abandon ship,” or nothing.

S: What was the atmosphere on the ship, from the time the torpedo hit, to when it sunk?

P: Screaming, confused.

S: Were people aware of what had happened?

P: No, we didn’t. Not back where we were, we weren’t aware of it. We knew something had hit us, but...

S: So you really couldn’t tell what had hit you.

P: No. But we kind of figured, the old timers kind of figured, it was torpedoes.

S: How did guys get off the ship, into the water?

P: Well, some guys just walked off. Like where I was, now, we crawled on our hands and knees while the ship was listing, because we didn’t hear, “Abandon ship,” and there was a lot of hollering. So we crawled on our hands and knees on the opposite side, and waited for the ship to (***) over. So then we jumped in the dark then, and took off.

S: Did you have a life preserver on?

P: A life jacket. A (**).
S: So you were on the port side; Indianapolis took the hits on the starboard side, and rolled to the starboard side.

P: Right.

S: So you crawled up to the top of, above water, the port side bulkhead.

P: Right.

S: What was going through your mind at that time?

(A, 400)

P: I was scared. I had never had an explosion go like that. We held our (**), but we couldn’t see out there, because it was pitch black. You had to hang around the old timers, because they know what to do. So that’s what we did, our gun captain, we stayed with him. Whatever he told us to do, we did.

S: What kind of advice was he passing in those few minutes?

P: Well, first of all, we thought we would abandon ship before the ship went on her side, but we didn’t hear it. So there were some officers back there trying to hold us back. But we crawled on our hands and knees on the opposite side. When the ship went on her side, we knew then we had to get off. A lot of them even crawled on the keel, the bottom of the ship, got hit by the screws and stuff like that. A lot of them got hit by the screws.

S: You’re in the water, and the ship, if I remember correctly, sinks very rapidly.

P: Twelve minutes. Twelve to fourteen minutes.

S: So from the time of the first explosion of torpedo, to the time to the time the ship, and therefore all light, disappears is twelve to fourteen minutes. And when you say black, how dark was it when the ship went under?

P: I could not see the bow.

S: Could you see something six feet away?

P: Yes, I think I could, if I remember right. We had our own tub, that gun tub. But to see anybody, oh, say ten feet up there... It was pitch dark. If you look forward, we couldn’t even see nothing. If you looked back aft, you could see the wake back there, because it’s florescent like.

S: Once you hit the water with your life vest on, what was the mood, or what was going on in the water?
P: Well, the first thing when I got in the water, the first thing I remember was telling myself, “Get out of here! Don’t get caught in the suction, get away.” So I did take off and I got about a block out. There was about seventy-five of us out there. So we all formed a circle.

(A, 428)

S: Did you feel the suction of the ship pulling you down?

P: No, but we heard the explosions afterward.

S: Under the water?

P: Yes. No, we were far enough away. No suction.

S: The seventy-five people in your group, approximately. I read in Doug Stanton’s book, In Harms’ Way, that there were a number of groups that built almost accidentally. Which of these groups were you in?

P: I wasn’t in none of those groups that was in the book.

S: Really?

P: No, I was in a different group. Like I said, there was only seventy-five of us. There was a chief in charge of us. You couldn’t tell a chief, or an officer, because everyone was black faced, stuff like that. But this chief took charge of us. Like I say, the first thing we did, we all prayed. The first thing we did, got together.

S: Was there a chaplain in your group?

P: No.

S: Did that feel like almost an automatic response among the guys, to pray about this?

P: Yes. I would say that was the first thing in everybody’s mind. Because we knew we were in trouble, but we didn’t think it would be this long. Because right away, the first thing that came out was, “We were supposed to be in the Philippines on Tuesday, so they’ll find us missing and they’ll come and get us by then.”

S: And as we know from the book, that wasn’t the case.

P: No.

S: Correct me if I’m wrong here in my description, there was a mix-up between messages sent and messages received, and who should pass on a message to whom, and the end result was that nobody knew that the Indianapolis was supposed to arrive.
P: Yes, it was. This young fellow, Scott Hunter, you heard about him? He’s the one that helped us exonerate the captain.

S: Yes, that’s right.

P: What a wonderful little fellow. He took it upon himself to write a lot of people. He got the name of the radioman at Philippine Islands, and that radioman, he received the SOS that night. He went and reported it to his commanding officer. His commanding officer said, “That’s just a hoax; don’t worry about it.”

S: So, it could have been known. Your position could have been known.

P: That’s right. If he took note of it, instead of... Oh, I don’t want to say. (pauses five seconds) They were in personal business; the wheels [slang for officers] were playing cards and stuff like that, and you know what goes on when you play cards.

S: Must leave you a little bitter.

P: It does, very much so. (pauses five seconds) To have eight hundred men die, on account of them. And I believe some of them sat on the court martial board [of Captain Charles McVay].

S: Of those same officers who could have...

P: And then charged.

S: Seemed like stacking the deck, if I could say so.

P: Yes it was.

S: Lyle, I didn’t ask you. What was the compliment of this ship when you left?

P: 1100 and... 1198, 1196

S: 1100-something. How many were pulled out of the water?

P: 317 were pulled out of the water. Two died in the hospital. That left us with 315.

S: So, in the space of a couple of days... and some were lost when the ship sank.

P: We figured about three hundred went down with the ship. Which means there’s still another four hundred or five hundred sharks got, and hallucinations and stuff like that.

S: That’s what I wanted to ask you about, that time in the water. You spent how many days in the water before you were picked up?
P: Five days. 107 hours.

S: 107 hours. And your original group of seventy-five...

P: I was alone.

S: When you were picked up?

P: I passed out on Wednesday. You see, from Monday to Tuesday, and Wednesday, like I said, we kept together. Well, let me go back to Monday. During the daytime, we found a floating net. So we unraveled it and put the wounded inside the net.

S: You had some wounded in your group?

P: Yes. Then those of us that weren’t, we stayed on the outside. Then in the supplies of the net, we found a can of malted milk tablets, so we all got in line and got one tablet.

S: What would malted milk tablets be doing in there?

P: They were rescue equipment. The water keg was busted. Malted milk, you know, is nourishment, stuff like that. I did have a malted milk tablet on Monday, and that was all I had to eat the rest of the week. So then we all got in line and got our tablet, then went back in a line again. Monday afternoon, the sharks, you heard someone scream real loud. The sharks were all around us then. So we started treading water, kicking. It seemed like the sharks were smart; they stayed outside the perimeter most of the time. Then when these fellows hallucinated and stuff like that, they thought they’d seen this and that over there, you know. We tried hauling back into a group, but that was taxing our strength. So we just had to let them go. They would never come back; but we could hear them scream and you know the sharks got them.

S: How long was it before you started to notice hallucinations?

P: We got them Monday afternoon.

S: So about a day and a half?

P: Yes.

S: What kind of signs or symptoms would let you know something was going on?

P: Some seemed to slip beneath the water. So they went down and where the scuttlebutt, the water fountain, was and thought they’d have a drink of fresh water. They’d come up and tell all the guys about it. A few of them went after the water, too. Well, after drinking a
lot of salt water, you’re dead in twelve hours at least, because your tongue swells up and you choke to death. The other hallucinations, some swam off, they said, because they had seen this island with Seabees [naval construction battalions] on, and the Seabees are drinking tomato juice and they wouldn’t let them come ashore. So they came back to get a few more and go back and kick the hell out of the Seabees. But they never returned either. I mean, it was just that way, going all the time. Well, I don’t think I slept up until Wednesday. I don’t remember nothing Wednesday night.

S: Wednesday going into Thursday?

P: Right.

S: By this time, the sharks had already been around your group.

P: Oh yes, a while. They were chewing up quite a bit. Like I say, I was with the group until then, and then I must have fell asleep, because when I came to, it was Thursday. Why I knew it was Thursday? Because I came to, I was alone, and I noticed airplanes flying around, then I knew. Oh, when I came to right away, about an hour after I came to, I came across another sailor, so we went together, and then we got the third guy. There was three of us then together, but both died on me within an hour and a half.

(A, 512)

S: In the water, then?

P: In the water.

S: When you were picked up, you were by yourself.

P: When they spotted me, they got the raft to me, and I swam over to it. I was a little hazy in the head, you know. God only knows how, it’s that’s one of my big questions, you know, “Why me?” How I ever got the strength to pull the cord, and that I did.

S: To inflate the raft, you mean?

P: Right. The raft came upside-down, so I had to climb on top of that, upside down. That’s hard to do, because there’s nothing to hang on to, to pull yourself up. But I did, I got up there. And then another raft, about four hours after that, near dusk. A raft with three fellows came along side mine. Then we right-sided my raft, and we went two and two then. Thursday night we did that, so we knew we were going to be saved sooner or later. But then we saw this search light up in the sky. That gave us a lot of hope and that. Then it started to pour rain. We never had rain as long as we were out there, I never hit a squall. And it just rained like the devil, so we put a tarp over our head that was in with the raft. That was our first drink of water we had in about four days.
S: I’m curious about how one comes to terms with things like the sharks in the water, because obviously you can’t get away from them.

P: No.

S: How does one deal with that?

(A, 529)

P: Well, I think I kept my cool just like a lot of them all did, until they hallucinated, got weak, got tired, drank water. I’d say that’s the only thing that saved us. I do, I really believe it. Not only that, but I believe the Lord helped us. Because we kept that going all the time. But no, I remember them swimming right off from me, and even underneath me, but they didn’t attack. But they did take a lot of fellows. (emotionally)

S: How much of that do you attribute to chance, ultimately?

P: I don’t think there’s any chance. I think the Lord knows what he wants with you done, and you’re going to have to complete it. I think my prayers and faith kept me going. But most of all, what really kept me going, was that my birthday is on my mother’s birthday.

S: The seventeenth of August?

P: And I said in the water, this would be a hell of a birthday present, getting a KIA [killed in action] telegram. I think that the faith of that and faith in the Lord brought me to my mother.

S: So it provided internal strength for you.

P: To this day, I still believe it.

S: Did you ever see any of those guys who were in your original group out of the water alive after you were picked up?

P: Oh yes, I’ve seen a few of them.

S: So you’re group perhaps drifted apart?

P: Yes, we drifted apart. The third day, like I said, a lot of us fell asleep then, and stuff like that. Let me see, Price, I think Price, I’ve seen Jamie Price here a couple weeks ago. Pappy Reeves, I’ve seen him back in the ’60s. I’ve seen a picture of (**), he’s alive yet. Yes, there’s a few of them around.

S: So there was some from your group. How many would you estimate from that original seventy-five were pulled out of the water alive?
P: That I couldn’t tell you.

S: Did you not know a lot of those guys?

P: No. You could be right here, right now, go in the water, dip your head in the water, and come up, and I wouldn’t even know you.

S: There was fuel and oil in the water, too.

P: Yes, the oil covered your head. And those of us in the water survived better than those that were in the raft.

S: Why is that?

P: Because the sun beat on them all day long, their whole body. The sun only beat on our heads and we were protected by the (***) But our bodies, when they lifted us out of the water, the skin just peeled right off of us.

S: What kind of effect did the salt water have on your skin?

P: Salt water ulcers. They're like a boil.

S: They fill with liquid?

P: A boil? Yes, just like a boil. They’re round spots; they were all over our bodies. We used to sit in the hospital and have a test tube, get it hot, press down and (makes popping noise) pop. That was our enjoyment.

(both laugh)

S: Once you were pulled out of the water, were you pulled out by a ship or a plane?

P: Like I said, it was early morning, and we’d seen this dark object coming towards with a search light on. All of the sudden we were, oh I would venture to say, from here to across the street, somebody swaying over to us, and leaning over the life raft. Because he didn’t know if we were Japanese or American.

S: Oh gosh.

P: In fact I met the gentlemen back in the States, Neil Kramer his name was, he’s the one, they said he was just getting off of duty, he was a fireman. He was walking up topside to get some fresh air, and he was walking by the quarterdeck, and the officer of the deck told him-

*End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.*
S: This is side B of the interview with Lyle Pasket, on 6 September 2001. Please continue, Mr. Pasket.

P: The officer of the deck told him to get a jacket on and swim out with a line to the rafts, because no one knew who we were, Japanese or what. So then he came up and pulled us to the ship. They asked if we could climb the ladder. “Sure, sure, sure,” we said. They had to come and get us. That’s when our skin started coming off. But about four hours before that, (pauses four seconds) three hours or four hours, that’s when they found the PBY [PBY5A Catalina seaplane, based at the island of Peleliu] laying in the water, Adrian Marks [lieutenant and Navy pilot], he picked up the first survivor. He landed in the water because he’s seen all the sharks attacking the men, the stragglers and stuff like that. So he landed in the water, against regulations, because he couldn’t bear to see what was going on. First person he picked up, that’s when they found it was the Indianapolis.

S: They didn’t know until then who these guys were?

P: Then ships were coming from all over. The Helms [US Navy destroyer], the Register [US Navy destroyer transport], the Ringness [US Navy destroyer transport], Doyle [Cecil J. Doyle, US Navy destroyer], well, there was about seven or eight destroyers came out.

S: How fast could those ships get there?

P: The first message... The person they picked up was about four o’clock Thursday afternoon (*** on the PBY flying boat. It took them about eight hours, about seven or eight hours to get out to us.

(B, 39)

S: They made pretty good speed. Once you’re out of the water and on the ship, what happened to you and the other guys?

P: Those fellows, what happened was, a crew member of the ship, he was assigned to us and he took us to his bunk, stripped us of our clothes, whatever clothes we had on. He gave us a hot bath, sponged us off. He gave us fresh clothes, and then they stood by us and offered water every so often, a whiskey glass full of water. I slept most of the time.

S: What ship were you picked up by?

P: I was picked up by the Ralph Talbot, DD-390 [US Navy destroyer]. Then I was transported, about two o’clock in the afternoon, I was transported to the Register. Because they picked up twenty-some survivors, and the Talbot picked up twenty-some survivors, so they combined us and that took us to Peleliu Island.

S: Where there medical facilities there?

P: Yes. There was a field hospital there.
S: When you got to the field hospital, where you with a number of other *Indianapolis* survivors?

P: They had all us survivors, had all of us had quarantined.

S: Quarantined?

P: Oh, yes. They wouldn’t let no strangers come and talk to us.

S: Why is that?

P: Well, it was hush-hush (*laughs*).

S: The whole incident, you mean?

P: Yes.

S: That seems to suggest that Navy brass knew even then that somebody had messed up, or that several people had.

P: Well, sure. As soon as the commodore in the Philippines heard about it, there was a radio man in the Philippines about it who heard the SOS. He sent out a seagoing tug right away. During the night when the commodore woke up, he heard about it. He called them back, he called the tugboat back.

S: Why did he call them back?

P: Because he thought it was a Japanese ruse. They only heard the SOS once.

S: Oh, because the ship sank so fast.

P: That’s right. Like I say, it was just a big mix-up of everything.

S: Quarantined together, it sounds like there was an opportunity for guys to talk among yourselves.

P: That’s right.

S: What were the topics of conversation there?

P: Well, as far as the life in the water, I don’t think we ever talked about it.

S: No kidding. Was that...?

P: No, we just couldn’t do it.
S: That’s because of the painful memories?

P: We were all wounded, one hundred percent wounded. Some could walk yet. I couldn’t.

S: Just from weakness, or from...?

P: From the water. My pants rubbed my skin right down to the bone, behind the knees. They, uh, just couldn’t talk about it. I don’t know why. I can’t even recollect talking about it.

S: What did guys talk about when you were sitting around?

P: Well, you weren’t sitting around. The guys that could walk went up to the recreation area, and got their little beer or coke or pop or whatever it was. Those of us that were in the ward were sleeping. We were attended to. The only others besides the nurses and corpsmen... we saw the admiral, he came through and presented us with the Purple Heart and all that. But we never saw any newspaper people.

S: Which admiral was that?

P: Admiral Spruance [a US naval commander in the Pacific].

(B, 109)

S: I find it interesting that you mentioned that in quarantine on Peleliu there was very little if any discussion about what happened after the ship went down. Once again, you attribute that to the fact the memories were simply too immediate, or too painful.

P: It wasn’t painful. I think we were just tired, physically and mentally down.

S: How long did you personally remain at Peleliu?

P: We only stayed there, gosh, what was it, a day and a half, two days. Then they put us aboard the hospital ship Tranquility and rushed us up to Guam then. Then we got to Guam, as a group. Then the ships that took the other survivors to the Philippines, you see, there’s some ships that belonged to the Philippine sea front there. Well, they had to go back to their own base, in the Philippines. So they flew them in from (*** to Guam, then, that way we were all together there.

S: This is about 315 that were still alive were all in one place again. Was there still a quarantine situation where you were not talking to people?

P: I kind of think there was, because I never saw any strangers come in. Never saw any strangers come in.
S: When people moved again, was it all again together?

P: Yes. When the war was over, then...

S: That’s right. You were there on VJ-Day.

P: …when the Bomb was dropped. When the Bomb was dropped, we were on Guam in the hospital. And on VJ-Day, that was on the 13th of August that we heard it over there, we were all together. We all got pretty much healed up, and about the 20th of August, they sent us up to submarine rest camp to fatten us up.

S: Where was that?

P: That was up in Guam some place, the same island. So all we did was lay around there, eat and drink. And eat ice cream!

S: How long were you there?

P: I’d say about a week. Then an aircraft carrier came down and picked all of us up, and that’s the picture you see (motions to photo of Indianapolis survivors on the deck of the aircraft carrier).

S: Of all of you standing on deck there. And that took you right back to the States, or to Pearl Harbor?

P: To San Diego, with a stop in Pearl. We picked up our clothing, which we never had. All we had was a pair of dungarees that we got from the destroyer fellows.

(B, 153)

S: Is that what you are wearing in that photo on board that aircraft carrier?

P: Yes. You can see that everybody’s got different things on.

S: They do. Whatever you picked up, or were given.

P: Whatever we were given. Then we got our blues [Navy uniform] out of Pearl. Then when we got to San Diego, they parade the heroes and all that stuff. To me, the heroes never made it back.

S: Almost three-fourths of the ship’s complement was lost.

P: They are the heroes. So they gave us a parade and then we got to the Camp Elliot [by San Diego], that’s the name of the reserve station, receiving station, I think. They told us, there’s your barracks over there, fellows. So we went in there and there was no bedding.
S: No bedding?

P: No bedding! So we went back to our officer in charge of us and told him that there was no bedding there. We better have something to sleep on. Oh, go take liberty, all you guys take liberty. So we took liberty, and slept, the first night in the States, I slept in a theater in San Diego.

S: I bet you didn’t expect that, did you?

P: No, but I didn’t want to go back to base, neither!

(both laugh)

S: To backtrack just a step, on VJ-Day, you were still on Guam, is that right?

P: On Guam, in the hospital.

S: How was the news received that the Japanese had surrendered?

P: Well, we heard about the atomic bomb being dropped, we knew that. But we didn’t know we carried it.

S: So you still didn’t know that you had brought it?

P: No, we still did not know. And then around the 12th or the 13th, no, around the 10th, we heard the second bomb was dropped. Then two days later, we heard the war was over. I was in Ward M, and we heard that they were giving free beer up on the tennis court up there, which was officers’ country [slang term for area restricted to officers, and thus off-limits to enlisted personnel]. So I got a wheelchair and I wheeled up there and got a case of beer for our guys. I’ll never forget the officer that was handing it out. He was round, red faced. God, he looked like a booze hound. He was half crocked. And he was handing it out. And then he asked me what ship I was on, and said, “Off the Indy.” “Oh, my god,” he says, “here.” So I got a case of beer, and I wheeled it back to the guys that couldn’t get out of bed. So that’s how we got our can of beer.

S: You wheeled up and got it, and wheeled it back to them.

P: I’ll never forget that.

S: How about the mood among the guys? How would you describe that, among the guys from the ship?

(B, 196)
P: I think they were pretty... happy. I don’t think anybody was sad. It didn’t hit us yet, let’s put it that way. It didn’t hit me right away. Coming home on the carrier, we played cards and shined shoes, stuff like that.

S: Kind of typical on board ship stuff.

P: Yes.

S: When, if ever, did your thoughts begin to change, to thinking more concretely about everything?

P: For what I went through, you mean?

S: Yes.

P: I let it go by the wayside all these years, until... Oh, I may have brought it up once and awhile, or something like that. But there were things in my mind that I still couldn’t comprehend. I still can’t. “Why me?” That’s the big question, “Why me?” I was a small kid, I was inexperienced, and stuff like that. Where did I get the strength from? I know. The Lord was with me, but (pauses three seconds) it’s one of those things. “Why?”

S: How did you eventually process that question?

P: I still haven’t processed that question yet. (pauses five seconds) To me, it’s a mystery yet. I have, when I was passed out, my hallucination, it’s in my mind, very vividly, but... There I was at the door of the good old Lord’s heaven. And I was walking on this path, going up to where the sunlight was and there was a white picket fence, a red barn over there, and this man sitting there milking a goat. He says, “Go back, you’re not wanted.” And you know—this is God’s truth, as I am sitting here—that’s when I came to, and two hours later I was rescued, spotted. Now, you’ll have to figure that out yourself. To me, the Lord did it. But I couldn’t talk, I still can’t talk about that without... (emotionally)

S: You mentioned a couple of times, before we started to tape here, that for decades really, it was something that you preferred not to talk about, and also not to think about?

P: You never stop thinking about it. You think every day about it. Things come up that remind you of it. I couldn’t, until Irv, Ted Erickson, and Gene Jensen [three other Indianapolis survivors], we all got together once a month and had lunch. We started letting loose, and stuff like that.

S: By letting loose, do you mean the memories that were caught up from the time the ship sunk to the time you were picked up?

P: Right.

S: How did it help to talk to other people that were there?
P: It was hard. Some things I couldn't tell them about. Some things I won't tell them about. I'll tell you, for thirty-five years, I've never seen... A rescue ship came for these guys [those still in the water], a guy got up, he said, “I'm going to go for one last swim before I get picked up.” He jumped overboard, off the raft, and never came back. For thirty-five years, I've thought, I've seen that, or I've read that, or I heard that. Until then, 1985, I met one of the guys that was in the raft. I said, “Bob, who was the other two guys? Homer Campbell, I know I met him. I met you. And the third guy, who was he?” He says, “I don't know. He was in the raft with you. Don't you remember? He wanted to go for one last swim, and you two went at it. You tried to hold him back.” Thomas, I didn't know if I was going to have a heart attack. I sat down, I said, “All these years I dreamt it. I've seen it. I've heard it. And here it was me.” Something then... I didn't want to hear it no more. That stuff comes up on you once in a while.

S: Dealing with those kinds of memories, must be something you never get over.

P: Yes. Guys stabbing each other, that happened out there.

S: That was in Doug Stanton’s book, too.

P: They went berserk, started stabbing. So there's only one way to stop it. You really had to. [Survivor testimony indicates that some sailors were killed by others] Seventeen years old, it's the first time seeing death like that.

S: That was one of the more difficult things that I read in the book. The sharks, in a sense, is something from outside that you have no control over. But then there's the interaction between the guys, who are suddenly because of the pressures of the water, and the heat, they...

P: The daytime was hot, the nighttime was cold. You would urinate at nighttime, and warm water, you wish you could hang on to that.

S: And you can't, because the night got pretty cold, didn't it?

P: Yes. The stars were nice and bright. Seen airplanes every day.

S: Ours, too, right?

P: Yes. In fact, one of ours, in fact a raft, they shot off flares. And this one Air Force plane, he landed at Guam, he says, “There's a big naval battle going on down there, at so-and-so.” That's where they stopped. If they had gone out to investigate...
S: Of course, it seems to bring up one of the great “what if?” questions. If any of these stories would have been taken more seriously, scores more guys would have been pulled out of the water alive, most likely.

When you got back to the states, San Diego, it’s August of 1945. You’ve been in the Navy for six months, maybe. You’ve got a lifetime of memories already. Where did you go from there?

(B, 290)

P: From there I went to Great Lakes Naval Hospital, until I got better. My legs were still not healed, and covered in sores and that. I stayed there... I was regular Navy, and as soon as I got okayed for service, I got on a troop train and headed out to San Francisco, and there I got on a troop ship, and we went to the Philippines. I was stationed in the Philippines for two years, until my enlistment was up.

S: How long were you at Great Lakes, until you went back?

P: Great Lakes? I was there from September [1945] to February [1946].

S: About six months then. Was it physical healing, your legs mostly?

P: Just about.

S: So February of ‘46, a lot of guys had been demobilized by now. Why was it that you weren’t demobilized?

P: I was regular Navy.

S: So you had an enlistment period.

P: That’s right, until ’48.

S: You were shipped to the Philippines, and you got there when, early 1946?

P: At Great Lakes, they gave me a questionnaire of where I wanted duty, Pacific or Atlantic, island or ship. I took “Atlantic, ship,” so I got Pacific, island!

S: *(laughs)* Is that Navy mentality?

P: That’s Navy mentality! *(both laugh)*

S: Makes you wonder why they asked you at all! *(laughs)* Just to find out what you don’t want, probably! So after you flushed that little piece of paper down the toilet, then you end up in the Philippines. What kind of duty were you doing over there?
P: I was on an air station, until they closed that down. They formed, you know, there was a lot of discharging going on, guys going back to the States as soon as their points were up, stuff like that. So they were sticking us all over. Then they formed a disposal unit. So I got in that. There was an advanced base supply depot on the islands, we had secured that, inventory and stuff like that. Then that closed down, the Philippine government took over that. Then I went to Subic Bay [naval base in the Philippines], and I was put on harbor patrol there. So I stayed there till July of ’48, and then came home.

S: About two years in the Philippines. When your enlistment was over, you were discharged?

P: I was discharged, came home, joined the Reserves.

S: And we know how that story turned out, don’t we? *(laughs)*

P: Yes.

S: So you mentioned that in June of ’50, you were called up right away, right?

P: Right.

S: How soon was it before you were actually in Korea?

P: We weren’t in Korea.

S: Oh, that’s right. You were in Alaska, I’m sorry. But you were actually in Alaska pretty quick.

P: Yes. Within two months or three months, I think, we were in Alaska, right away actually, because we got transitioned to new aircraft, training. So as soon as our training was up, we went up north.

S: You mentioned you were doing quite different duty.

P: I was a plane captain, or second mech [mechanic]. I did flying, went on patrol all the time. That was different than sea-going duty.

S: It sounds very different. It’s in the air, not on the water.

P: I changed my classification in between the Philippines and my discharge. When I joined the Reserves, I finally got what I wanted, and that was aircraft mechanic. That’s why I went back to work for Northwest Airlines, which I started in ’43.

**(B, 342)**

S: Right. So this is would hopefully fit together for you.
P: Isn't that nice? I remained with Northwest until I retired, twelve years ago, forty-six years, without military time.

S: Which they did for you, for your service, right?

P: Right.

S: What kinds of planes were you flying up there in Alaska?

P: We were flying P2Vs.

S: What kind of plane is that?

P: Neptune. The (***) turtle, that went around the world.

S: You were doing this regularly?

P: Routine flying, three-day patrols. We'd take off in Kodiak [Alaska] and we'd fly to the south side of the Aleutian chain, to Adak. While we’re coming this way, one is coming from Adak around to the International Date Line, and coming back the north side to Adak. And one was going from Adak to Kodiak. So there was planes in the air constantly.

S: What was the purpose of those?

P: ASW [anti-submarine warfare], keeping track of submarines, Russians. We had one patrol, it was a fifteen-hour patrol, that took us up to the Arctic Circle, and we jammed Russian radar.

S: Those are long flights.

P: Over ice, and stuff like that.

S: What was the crew on those, how many?

P: Nine.

S: Let me conclude here. When you were finally demobilized in 1948, when you were discharged, at that point you were a whole twenty-one years old, a lifetime behind you already. What was your initial reaction to being a civilian again?

P: I can't remember. I remember at home, I didn't know if I had a job or not. One of the fellows down there was a friend of mine, and he worked at Northwest. He said, “You got a job there, Duke [Mr. Pasket's nickname]. Go on down there.” So I went down there to see if I had it, and they had to take me back, he says. He said, “Fine, when you want to come
“Well, as soon as my leave is up. I’ve got a couple weeks left.” I think I took a month off before I went back to work.

S: You were on leave, but you were going to be discharged.

P: Yes.

S: How difficult for you was the readjustment? Was it pretty easy to slip out of your uniform and go right back to work?

P: *(pauses five seconds)* I don’t know. Gosh, that’s something. I can’t remember.

S: You weren’t actually a civilian very long before you were back in uniform. But you were with Northwest Airlines.

P: Right before I got called, that picture I showed you, where we cracked up *(Mr. Pasket points to a photo of an airplane accident, where he had been a crew member)*, that happened in April 1950, we were in a training flight down in Bermuda. We ran out of gas, got lost, and made a ditch.

S: What kind of an experience was that?

P: Well, I had my share *(laughs)*.

S: So you were in the water again.

P: In the water, swimming ashore, and got out.

S: So it was close to an island?

P: No, it was Lake Superior. Right off of Michigan, Benton Harbor.

S: So you were close enough to the shore to make it in.

P: About a block, block and a half.

S: Not what you needed, though. Having been a veteran of the war, what do you think the war meant for you personally back then, during the time you were in boot camp, posted on the *Indianapolis*, or after?

P: What the war meant to me?

S: Yes, was it...
P: After what I’d seen the Japanese did to our POWs... I was in Guam when they brought the first plane load in out of Japan, to Guam, to hospital. Thank God they dropped the Bomb.

S: Really?

P: Because those guys were so happy, because orders were, they were to be shot and killed right away. A lot of the soldiers couldn’t do it. But they came back, oh God, I don’t think they weighed one hundred pounds.

S: Really emaciated?

P: I tell you, they really suffered, those guys did.

(B, 396)

S: Guys who were POWs of the Japanese?

P: Yes. I’d seen that first shipment come in, and that was it.

S: How did that make you feel?

P: I was so happy we won the war, and it was over with.

S: When you reflect back on things now as an older man, fifty-five, fifty-six years after the fact, how do you think about the war now?

P: It was a necessity to get it done. I believe we never had the problem of patriotism, people showing their patriotism then than we have now. There is so much disrespect for it, I’ve really got to say that. But I do believe if war ever came, I think they’ll go to arms for it, the kids will.

S: So you’re fairly optimistic about what might happen if it were a difficult situation again?

P: I think the next war, if we ever have a war, it won’t be man to man no more. It’ll be rocket to rocket.

S: Kind of like what happened in the Gulf War [1990], or in Serbia [1999]. That’s a good point.

P: Let’s hope we don’t have one, that’s it.

S: Can I ask you if you have favorite personal memory about your time when you were an active duty sailor?
P: I did so much in the service. *(pauses eight seconds)* I can’t think of anything. I think the most memorable thing is coming home after the war was over, in ’45, on that aircraft carrier. I think that was the most memorable.

S: Actually seeing the States again.

P: Yes. I did get out to get a hair cut that night. Some of us did. We wanted a hot towel for our face, I’ll never forget, the barber wondering where the hell did we get all that stuff in our face and our head, it was all the oil coming out of our system.

S: The stuff you guys had ingested or something?

P: Yes.

S: Did it leak out?

P: No, the hot towels drew it out. He was amazed to see all that.

*(B, 427)*

S: You had of course washed with soap already. How did it come in to your skin? How long was it before that stuff was finally gone?

P: About a year, less than a year.

S: It took that long a time? And it took from the time you where in Great Lakes, about six months, it took a while for your skin to really heal up again. Think about it, that’s from four or five days in the salt water, and your body took that long to really heal up. And your story about your skin really isn’t that uncommon, from what I’ve read.

P: Just about everybody they picked up, no matter what ship it was they all stated that. When they lifted us out of the water, the skin just fell right off us. Just came off like sheets.

S: Did some guys have a worse time than others after they were picked up?

P: Yes, we had a couple guys that lost their mind. That went *(pauses five seconds)* mental.

S: So they never came back out of that.

P: They committed suicide, a couple of them did. One thing I can be thankful for, when I was at Great Lakes, this one doctor, he says, “Gosh, you look tired, you need a rest. Go home.” So I came home for the weekend, or something like that. Then I find out his brother was killed aboard ship and, after talking to him a couple of times, you finally got to asking, sit down in his office there, and I’ll never forget, he said, “Tell me all about it, would you?” I tried, you know, sitting there. And after a few more times sitting there, it started to come out a little bit. Then he had the corpsman come and sit down. I think that helped me a heck
of a lot. It did, very much so. Because I realized what happened then, you know. I didn’t keep it within me that tight. Lot of things I would tell right away, but a lot of things I wouldn’t... mention.

S: Sounds like, from what you said earlier, there are certain things that you’ll keep within you for all your days. Those are private things that you don’t spill.

P: I think it is, yes.

S: Do you think that is something a lot of guys would say, that there’s a level that you talk about, and there’s another level that you don’t?

P: I will talk to them about, but not to you.

S: So there’s maybe three levels: there’s one that you share with someone like me, who you just met.

P: And the next level would be, probably, another service man, or a Navy guy. Then our group, survivors.

S: And then the final level is Lyle Pasket.

P: That’s right.

S: That’s a very interesting way of looking at it. Is there anything else that you want to add that I didn’t ask about?

P: You asked me of everything I know of! (laughs)

S: Well, let me, on record, just say thank you very much for this interview

P: You’re welcome.

S: I enjoyed our time immensely.

P: You’re welcome, and I hope that it turns out for you good, and that people realize freedom isn’t cheap. (pauses four seconds) And the heroes are the ones that never came back.

**END OF INTERVIEW**