

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#293

WILFRED JOHN “BILL” LYSAGHT

USS *DOLPHIN*, SURVIVOR

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 7, 1998
BY JEFF PAPPAS**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Jeff Pappas (JP): The following oral history interview was conducted by Jeff Pappas for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 7, 1998 at one p.m. The person being interviewed is Bill Lysaght, who was aboard the submarine *Dolphin* on December 7, 1941. Bill, for the record, would you please state your full name and your place and date of birth?

Wilfred John “Bill” Lysaght (WL): My full name is Bill Lysaght. I was born in Detroit on September 13, 1924.

JP: Is Bill your full name or is it William?

WL: It's Wilfred.

JP: Wilfred?

WL: Yeah.

JP: You have a middle name?

WL: John.

JP: Okay. So you grew up in Detroit.

WL: Yes, I did.

JP: Tell me what it was like growing up in Detroit.

WL: Well, like any youngster, I got into a little mischief here and there but going back in those days, we had an old playing field where we played baseball and football. We made our own diamonds and things like that. And of course my father was just a mechanic and there was five of us and we [went], going to Catholic school, and when I went to elementary school, I helped the janitors sweep the rooms and do all the chores of getting our tuition paid for through school. I also worked in a grocery store, in a drug store as a soda jerk. My brother had a paper route, 250 customers, then I took it over. Then I when I went to high school, I was working—just down

from us was Goebel Brewery, and at that time they were hiring us, not in the brewery section, but I was loading trucks.

JP: Well, you're a jack-of-all-trades back then.

WL: Well, back at that time, you know, when you don't have a lot of money, and you're going to school.

JP: Let's go back a little bit and review. More specifically, you went to Catholic schools.

WL: Yes, I went to St. David's Elementary School. Then I went to St. Joe's Christian Brothers School.

JP: Was that for your middle school years or your high school years?

WL: That's the high school.

JP: Did you graduate from...

WL: Yes. And I went to Michigan State for two years.

JP: So you're a Spartan?

WL: Yes.

JP: Very good.

WL: And then I went to several community schools. I took up computer, with Hewitt [*Packard*]. And I took up business administration.

JP: Of course, this was after the war.

WL: Yes, this is all after the war.

JP: Okay, you went to Michigan State following your service...

WL: Yes. Mm-hm.

JP: ...in World War II.

WL: Right.

JP: Okay, let's go back. Before we get there...

WL: Okay.

JP: ...let's talk a little bit more about Detroit and the...

(Taping stops then resumes)

JP: In the nineteen—well, say the 1930's, as you were growing up, of course the depression...

WL: Right.

JP: ...had hit the country very hard.

WL: And my dad was only bringing home about forty dollars, forty-five dollars.

JP: Hmm, and he was a mechanic. Was he a an auto mechanic?

WL: [*Yes*], he was an automobile mechanic all his life. He worked for Mercury division, at the car sales. And then as we grew up, it got to be, you know, we were helping—especially my brother and I—we were helping with the family. We paid board, you know. And of course when I went to high school—but before I went there, I was just a regular young guy. If I found a stray dog, I'd bring him home. And when my dad would come home and put the car in the garage, (coughs) right away he said, "You got another dog in here!"

And I was, that's just what I did. And I got into mischief. A couple of times my ma sent me to the store to get fruit for our lunches and that. And behind us we had alleys and this guy behind us, he had a peach tree and I used to go pick the peaches and bring 'em home and keep the money. And you know, little things like that, nothing really bad. Except one time I was coming

home from school for lunch from St. David's and this lady had a peach tree. There was a vacant lot there and the tree branches were over the fence and I figured, you know, you can pick the peaches.

JP: I don't think you want to talk about too many youthful indiscretions, the fact that you became a police officer later in life!

WL: Yeah. That's right. That's only part of it. No, I never got in any trouble, just, you know, something like that.

JP: Let's go back. Let's talk about your mother and your father for a bit, just so we can get that on record. Your father's name and your mother's name.

WL: My mother's name was Matilda Lysaght.

JP: What was her maiden name?

WL: Malo, M-A-L-O. My father's name was Wilfred Michael Lysaght.

JP: Very good. Now of course the auto industry was quite a presence in Detroit in the nineteen...

WL: Back at that time, yeah.

JP: ...in the 1930's, so you basically grew up with the auto industry.

WL: That is correct.

JP: Is there anything outstanding in your memory about the auto industry in Detroit in the 1930's.

WL: No, except a lot of strikes here and there. That was the bad part.

JP: Was your dad a member of a union?

WL: No, never was.

JP: And he worked for Mercury at the time?

WL: Well, he worked for a Mercury dealer and then he was offered a mechanic job with Ridley Cleaners, back in those days, people had nine-by-twelve rugs in their home. And he was a mechanic, they had these big trucks. And they had quite a fleet. And it was a father and son, two fathers and two sons, two different families owned it. And of course, one of the fellows, [*Don*] Donaldson, and of course, the two sons didn't hit it off too well and it was getting kind of bad there. So my father, the one son's father [*were*] always real close, and he told his son, "Anything ever happens to me, you take care of Bill."

Well, when things got bad, my dad decided he'd like to get his own gas station. So with some of the money that they got, he signed a contract with Mobil Oil Company. And he had a gas station there. And then the war came on, he had a Shell service station and he couldn't get help. And he wanted his contract for three years, and they wanted him to stay open all night. And he just couldn't, you know, couldn't do it because there was no help. He would be doing it all himself.

JP: So at the Mobil, when he purchased, he was an independent owner of a Mobil franchise.

WL: Right, he was independent. Mm-hm.

JP: Even in the thirties. With your friends, you probably had many friends growing up. You played baseball and did a lot of athletic events.

WL: Played baseball, right.

JP: Were their folks, part of the auto industry?

WL: No, not too much. Most of the people that were involved [*were*] my parents' friends and one owned electrical facilities. Another was a roofer [*in the*] roofing business. My mother's brother worked for Packards. And let's see, her other brother—I really can't remember what he did.

JP: Well, it's okay. Tell me a little bit about Catholic schools back then in Detroit.

WL: Well, they were very strict when I went. We dressed with a shirt and tie to go into school. We went to mass every morning of course. A nun sat behind us and of course you don't talk in church and of course if you get caught whispering, she'll poke somebody in front of you and have you come sit next to her. And then we had catechism class from the priest. And then, oh, it was good. I was all right in school. I had a few little problems. One time I was sent to the closet and I tied all the sleeves...

JP: You were sent to the closet for discipline?

WL: Cloak room.

JP: Had disciplinary problems?

WL: No, I was talking. So she sent, me back to the closet. And while I was back there, I decided, well, I tied all the coat sleeves together. Well, when the kids went to get their coats on, she knew who did it.

JP: Well, I assume that you were the only one in the closet.

WL: Yes.

JP: (Chuckles)

WL: But anyways, that's, you know, just normal boy stuff.

JP: Anything strike you interesting about Catholic schools? Were you afraid of anything?

WL: No.

JP: Or were you...

WL: I was glad that now, thinking back, I went to a Catholic school. And I'm glad I was able to pay the tuition to help my father out at that time.

JP: Well, what was so outstanding about going to Catholic school for you, in retrospect?

WL: Well, we were brought up being Catholic, you know, to be more polite to your neighbors. There wasn't this sarcasm. I could go play baseball after supper for maybe an hour, but then I had to sit on the porch. We had restriction. We had to be in bed at nine o'clock. If we had schoolwork, it had to be done before [I] did anything.

JP: I assume these are rules imposed upon you by your parents.

WL: Yes.

JP: Yeah.

WL: And of course, I [and] my sister had to do the dishes and if a girlfriend come over, I'd con her into drying the dishes, so I could go play ball.

JP: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

WL: I had an older sister that died when she was twenty. And then I had a brother that was two years older than me. I have a sister living in Detroit and a brother, younger brother, living in Detroit.

JP: So how many total?

WL: Five.

JP: Five, five of you.

WL: Mm-hm.

JP: And they all attended Catholic schools?

WL: Yes.

JP: Even the sisters.

WL: Yes.

JP: Was there any talk...

WL: They went to Dominican High. My father's sister was a Dominican High nun. And then my cousin was a priest.

JP: Was there any talk back then about you going to college?

WL: No, not too much. Not at that time. No.

JP: Was it assumed that after Catholic schooling, after high school, that you would go into the work force?

WL: No. I was going to—oh, after high school?

JP: Mm-hm.

WL: No. My sister, older sister, was a secretary to an attorney downtown in Detroit. And of course, the navy recruiting station wasn't too far. And she met a sailor. And he came to the house several times and of course, I grew up on the Detroit River. Well, my grandpa had a flat and we lived upstairs. Grandpa and [*Grandma*] lived downstairs. [*As*] I grew up, I swam across the Detroit River I don't know how many different times.

JP: You could actually swim across the Detroit River...

WL: Yeah...

JP: ...in the 1930's?

WL: ...to the yacht club. And then of course, they would call the police. And the police would come and—this is some of the story. And [*where*] we'd swim across was, coal ships used to come in [*and bring the coal*] for the turbines, for our water, our city water. And our water was pretty clear back in those days. And the crew would throw coins off and we'd dive for 'em in the water.

JP: Now, was it illegal to swim the Detroit River back then?

WL: No, no. It was [*legal*] to swim, but not to go in the yacht club or anything.

JP: So Detroit had bought their water. Did they have a domestic water supply or did they purchase all their water?

WL: No. They had their own water. They had big turbines. They'd [*called*] it the Waterworks Park. But then they went into diesel, eliminating the coal factor and so forth.

JP: So you had known a sailor through your sister.

WL: Yes.

JP: And he would come up [*to the house.*] Was he courting your sister?

WL: Yes, they were dating off and on. And of course, I was in high school at this time, at St. Joe's.

JP: And you had some conversations with this sailor.

WL: Oh yeah.

JP: Tell me about some of those conversations, the stories that he told.`

WL: Well, he talked and told me about the navy. And of course, I was so enthused about it.

JP: How nice. He probably had some very interesting stories to tell you.

WL: Well, he was in the recruiting business, you know. Anyways, my grandpa had a cottage and he lived [*on Lake Huron.*] We'd go out there. When I first learned how to swim, I used to jump in that lake and my dad would catch me. My mom would be so afraid that something's going to happen. But I learned to swim really young.

JP: So you were attracted to swimming in water from very early.

WL: Very early, yes.

JP: So you had some conversations with this sailor friend. Did your sister end up marrying this sailor?

WL: No.

JP: No.

WL: No. That just was a generalized date, you know, here and there. And I don't think they really got too serious. Of course, I never really paid that much attention to it. I was getting more concerned about the other part of me going in the navy.

JP: Oh, by this time though, you hadn't yet decided, though, that you wanted to go in the navy. But he...

WL: It was getting pretty close.

JP: ...convinced you? Was he playing his recruiting role when he met you?

WL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. 'Cause he knew I was in [*my*] last year of high school. I was [*a*] senior.

JP: So you hadn't decided yet what you wanted to do by that time.

WL: Yeah.

JP: When did you decide to go into the navy?

WL: Six months [*before*] graduation. My [*mother*] and dad [*said*], "You're going to have to stay until you graduate."

So I graduate and right after I graduated, I joined the navy.

JP: Now what year is this?

WL: Thirty-eight.

JP: Nineteen thirty-eight. So you joined up in 1938. And then you went off for training, for recruit training.

WL: I went to Great Lakes, Illinois, Camp Dewey.

JP: Had you been thinking about any specific job or vocation in the navy that you wanted to do?

WL: No. When I first went in there, I was, you know, you're just a boot. They stick you to do everything. I was on security watch down on Lake Michigan. And it was in the wintertime. It was cold. They had signs all over for submarine men. And as soon I went, I went down to New London, Connecticut and [*and went through submarine training*].

JP: Submarines, that's quite a departure, though, from a ship to a sub. That was a decision that you, you had come to, that you had made.

WL: Yes.

JP: What was so attractive or impressive about submarine work?

WL: Well, I just was impressed to the fact that, I grew up [*by*] the water and, they really needed submarine men. There [*were*] pictures all over about that. And I just decided on my own that that's what I wanted to do.

JP: Did you ever hear any of these stories though, about some of the German U-boat's and the life that they had led up in the North Atlantic, fighting there, or...

WL: Yeah, we heard all kinds of stories about the Russian subs, you know. But the Germans, they really had the fleet of submarines. They were enormous subs. But it was rough, it wasn't easy going through sub school.

JP: What do you mean by that?

WL: Well, the training is real strict.

JP: Well, tell me about that. Tell me a little about the training.

WL: Well, you go through a very hectic pace, and of course they weed you out real fast. They put you in a tank, a chambered tank, and they check to see [*the*] pressure, [*in*] your eyes, if any blood comes through your nose or ears or anything, and they eliminate you right off the bat there. And then they check for claustrophobia.

JP: Before we get to New London tell me about the process about getting submarine duty there, or getting assigned to New London. Was that a competitive process?

WL: No, just in boot camp, you could sign right up, or you could sign up for any ship or anything that you really wanted to.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

WL: And I just picked [submarines because], they really [*needed men*]. There [*were*] some benefits to it because we heard that when you went out to sea, every time you dove you got extra hazard pay and things like that. Of course, we didn't get very much as a seaman.

JP: Right.

WL: But I worked up to be a coxswain before I left there.

JP: Very good. So you went off to New London and you trained at New London.

WL: Yeah.

JP: And this is, what, 1939 now?

WL: Yeah.

JP: And you were assigned to a submarine?

WL: Yup.

JP: Which submarine?

WL: Was on the *Trout*.

JP: On the *Trout*.

WL: USS *Trout*, [*the SS 202 out of New York.*]

JP: What kind of sub was that?

WL: It's about the same in features as the *Bowfin*, [*and*] the [*USS*] *Spadefish*, all about the same. We called them the sardine cans. Our bunks are very close, over torpedo forward or aft. Your bunks are canvas and they're on chains. And of course, during the day you just bring 'em up [*by*] the chains and it's very close quarters. You go to take a shower, you have to wet yourself down and soap. You get out and the next guy gets in. Then you go in and rinse off. And there's two heads in there. [*While at Pearl Harbor a few weeks ago I was asked by some Park Rangers to tour the Bowfin with them.*]

JP: Oh yeah?

WL: They [*had*] never been on a sub and in fact, John Brooks was one of 'em and some of his divers. And they really got a kick out of it, especially a young lady. She says, "What if more than one had to go to the head?"

I [*said*], "Well, that's the way it goes. The skipper has [*his own quarters and head.*]"

JP: Hm.

WL: "[*The crew's head is*] like a phone booth." I remember how phone booths used to be.

JP: You guys must have got very chummy down there as a crew.

WL: Yes, it's very close. And the first skipper we had, he was kind of [*quiet*].

JP: Remember his name?

WL: No, I was trying to think of it when I was talking to you. Off hand, I can't recall his. It was Donovan or...

JP: That's okay.

WL: [*It was Lieutenant Commander Frank W. Fenno, Jr.*]

JP: But this is on the USS *Trout*, though.

WL: After we're out at sea for a while, [*he*] kind of [*relaxed*]. And we went to Pearl, but then we had a [*training exercise*] that we were doing and I don't know if you want me to go on to it.

JP: Well, what I want right now is I want you to tell me a little bit about duty stations or details that you had been involved in on the *Trout*. What did you do? What [*were*] your responsibilities?

WL: Well, before I went there, I should have told you that I was sent to Washington D.C., to Bethesda Naval Base there.

JP: Mm-hm.

WL: And I was in OGU, outgoing unit, where you just sit and they give you all kinds of garbage details and everything else. And of course, there again, you had plastered signs, submarine men, submarine men. And that's where I decided I really wanted to go. But that's where they sent me and I got involved in the learning of torpedoes and learning about the fifty-millimeter guns. And of course the biggest thing is standing watch on the meters and gauges and everything like that.

JP: The gauges in the torpedo room?

WL: Yeah.

JP: Mm-hm. And also taught you about the fifty-millimeter gun that was on the...

WL: Yeah, the five-inch thirty-eight, we had on the deck.

JP: Just that one, a single.

WL: Yeah. And they had to [tampion] it and then of course, every time you surface, if you're going to use gun target, you had to remove that because of the water.

JP: What was your first impression about being undersea?

WL: Well, it was really very funny because I kept saying to myself, are they going to run into something? You're trying to figure it out. You can't see, [and] how are they going to know what's what. [But] you get used to it. At first, it's kind of a scary feeling.

JP: Did you make any lasting friends aboard the *Trout*?

WL: Yes, mm-hm.

JP: Remember their names?

WL: Uh, [Robert L. Garrison TM2] and I'm trying to think of the other fellow. [They both] got killed [when the] sub went down. Oh god. [Elbert King BM2], was his name. There [were] three of us that went to high school together, all joined the navy almost at the same time.

JP: And you all served on the *Trout*?

WL: No.

JP: No.

WL: No, we went different ways, but when we came back, two of us went in the police department.

JP: Oh, in Detroit.

WL: Yeah.

JP: Interesting. So now you're on the *Trout* and you're heading off.

WL: Yeah, out to sea.

JP: Where are you going now?

WL: We went to Pearl.

JP: Okay, on the *Trout*.

WL: On the *Trout*, mm-hm.

JP: So you made it to Pearl Harbor, when? What time of the year?

WL: It would be in the forties. It was probably October.

JP: Mm-hm.

WL: Somewhere in there.

JP: Before we get to Pearl, though, that's the first time that you had—that's a tremendous voyage from [*New York*] to Hawaii. You had gone through the Panama Canal.

WL: [*Yes*], we were out at sea for a while. But that's the first base that we headed toward.

JP: Did you ever get sick, ill?

WL: No.

JP: Seasickness?

WL: No, I never did. I'll be honest with you, I guess a lot of guys used to get sick just looking over the side or things that roll, you know. Submarine in rough sea will roll a little bit. But they always [*said to*] get a dill pickle and so I got a dill pickle.

JP: A dill pickle?

WL: Yeah.

JP: Was that the home remedy for seasickness?

WL: That's what they tell you, yeah. But you know, when you're down there for any length of time, you [*you have*] surface, because the batteries [*need to be charged*]. We carried mice, due to the battery fumes. A lot of guys used to just chew cigars for the moisture, because your mouth gets dry a lot and sometimes the air gets pretty thin. It depends how long [*you're underwater*].

JP: Did they allow smoking when you were below the...

WL: The smoking light is lit in certain areas, yeah.

JP: In certain areas?

WL: Mm-hm.

JP: So there were designated smoking areas...

WL: Yeah.

JP: ...on submarines.

WL: Yeah.

JP: Was that only when you were below the surface...

WL: Yeah.

JP: ...or when you were above the surface?

WL: No. On topside, you couldn't smoke, if you were on watch. [*War time was different.*]

JP: Did anything ever happen mechanically to the submarine when you were out at sea at that time?

WL: Oh, we had some battery trouble one night and we [*had to surface*], can't recall exactly what the problem was, but it was an electrical problem [*that involved the batteries*].

JP: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

WL: But it wasn't [*anything*] major.

JP: Now, were you carrying live torpedoes at this time?

WL: Oh yeah, mm-hm.

JP: How many torpedoes did the *Trout* hold?

WL: Six forward and four aft [*Note: The response relates to the number of torpedo tubes. There were 6 torpedo tubes forward and 4 torpedo tubes aft, the total torpedo capacity was 24 for the USS Trout*].

JP: Which are...?

WL: Well, that's the old type torpedoes.

JP: Mm-hm, and how many total torpedoes on board?

WL: Well, we carried sixteen total. [*Note: the total torpedo capacity was 24 for the USS Trout.*]

JP: How many hatches?

WL: Oh, we had four forward and four aft.

JP: Mm-hm, very good. So you made it off to Pearl Harbor in 1940. What was your impression of Pearl? You had now been a seasoned seaman. You had traveled the seas. You had gone through Panama, I assume?

WL: Yeah.

JP: You're off to Hawaii. You're from Detroit, Michigan, downtown Detroit and you see this fantastic place.

WL: All beach. No business places. All the way from down, where we docked to [COMSUBPAC], all the way to [the] Royal [Hawaiian] Hotel was strictly beach, nothing down there.

JP: Tell me about it. Tell me what you thought about it.

WL: Well, it was beautiful because I had never seen anything like that, you know. Of course, they had some trouble with [*some of the islanders-*] they called 'em the zoot suiters back in those days.

JP: What, I'm sorry, what?

WL: Zoot suiters.

JP: What are those?

WL: They carried the chains. Guys caused a lot of trouble with the fleet, you know, at Pearl.

JP: Were they civilians?

WL: Yeah.

JP: They caused trouble with the fleet.

WL: Hawaiians. [*While*] the [*sailors were*] on liberty, [*some*] of the Hawaiians would start fights or get involved with trying to steal things from [*the sailors*]. And they were called zoot suiters back in those days.

JP: Did you ever get in trouble with one of these guys?

WL: No, I tried to stay out of trouble in the navy.

JP: Yeah.

WL: That was my biggest worry, getting into trouble. You know, I didn't want to, get involved in [*any trouble*] in the military at all, and I really didn't. I have a good conduct medal anyway.

JP: Did you ever find a ball field in Hawaii, play some baseball or football?

WL: Oh yeah. We played baseball, but not too much. I'm getting to the fact that when I was [*at Hawaii, there was talk at the sub base*] about this new division with the OSS, which is the Office of Strategic Service.

JP: Mm-hm.

WL: And this was more of a CIA [*Central Intelligence Agency*] thing and they were looking for volunteers.

JP: Of course, the CIA being the Central Intelligence?

WL: Central Intelligence [*Agency*]. Well, Bill Donovan was just starting this OSS, the Office of Strategic Service.

JP: Who is Mr. Donovan?

WL: He was the general. Anyways, we went out, back out to sea on the *Trout* and when we came back, they were doing some kind of [*an*] underwater demolition training. And at that time, they needed a volunteer. First they tell you in the service, don't volunteer. And of course, I was a young—I wasn't seventeen when I went in. My folks had to sign for me. Anyways, I volunteered. We surfaced, got the raft out. I went with a frogman, that's what they were. And I was called the hold-down man. I stayed with the rubber raft while they did their demolition projects and so forth.

JP: Had you been trained in scuba diving?

WL: Yeah. So that's what I was getting at. So anyways, I was in the boat, just sitting there by myself out there. And of course, they had a certain time to come back there. And of course, the sub, as soon as they leave you, they submerge. And they were due to be back at a certain time.

JP: Now, how far off, how far from Pearl Harbor are you at this time?

WL: Oh gosh. Quite a ways.

JP: Do you know where you were?

WL: Not exactly.

JP: Okay.

WL: Maybe I would say we were a good day out or better than that.

JP: Mm-hm.

WL: But this was more of a training program, I assume, back at that time. And so I waited there. I was in this rubber raft by myself and finally the frogmen came back and got in. Right on time, the sub surfaced. We got back aboard. So that was when I really got enthused in the OSS, very much so. And then...

JP: Enthused, did you later get involved in this?

WL: Yes, mm-hm.

JP: Okay. But this is now, we're still in 1940 at this time?

WL: Yeah.

JP: Okay. Is there anything particularly outstanding about your service career between, let's say, 1940 and the attack at Pearl Harbor, 1941?

WL: No. I had become a boatswain mate, second class, at that time. I was transferred off the *Trout* and I was doing diving, [*attending*] frogman diving school. And I was learning demolition, [*with*] magnetic demolition explosive, and going to school [*for*] that. And finally after, I think it was pretty close to a couple months or so, they took us out for [*a*] training period.

JP: Is this, this time, now you're on the *Dolphin* at this time?

WL: Yeah.

JP: Okay. Tell me about the *Dolphin*. What kind of a ship is...

WL: *Dolphin* was pretty close to the *Trout*. And the skipper, [*Lieutenant John B. Griggs*], at that time, he was nice. But I wasn't ship's company. Okay. I mean, when you're ship's company, you're assigned to the ship.

JP: Mm-hm.

WL: And when I went aboard her, I was assigned with the special service, as an OSS frogman, underwater demolition man.

JP: Now, would this be considered what we call Navy SEALs?

WL: Yes, that's what they call 'em now. Of course, they [*have*] better equipment [*now*.]

JP: Excellent. We're going to stop there for a second and change the tape, then we'll pick up the story from there.

WL: Okay.

END OF TAPE #20

TAPE #21

JP: Let's continue with the story of your involvement with the Navy SEALs. Of course, today to become a SEAL is quite an experience. So much training...

WL: You want me to drop back from off the *Dolphin*, though?

JP: Well, no, let's just talk about your training as a SEAL. Did you go through a specific training course to become one?

WL: Oh yes.

JP: And tell me a little bit about that, how rigorous that happened to be.

WL: Well, they get you up at different hours during the night and of course, that old log carrying and you've probably seen it with the SEALs. I don't know. You carry it on your shoulders, a group of eight. They take you out in the water and they—it's just brutal. They ridicule you to a point that they want you to quit. That's how hard it was.

JP: How did you react to that sort of treatment?

WL: Well, you know, it didn't really bother me. The only thing that bothered me is that they yelled at you for no reasons at all. Just really nasty remarks.

I don't know if you've seen that movie with that young lady. I can't recall it, but anyways, that's a good showing of what they go through.

JP: Is this a popular film?

WL: Yes.

JP: Is it the *G.I. Jane* film?

WL: Yes, right.

JP: I hadn't seen it, but I know of it.

WL: If you ever have a chance, see it.

JP: Okay.

WL: And any ways [*when*] it's eating time, you could be out on the water, and if you miss your meal, you miss your meal. You don't eat. You know, they really stick it to you hard, like carrying that heavy rubber raft, the big one. That's heavy.

JP: Now, what were you trained to do, specifically?

WL: Our job, at that time was [*to train for*] different missions. We had trained to swim [*long distances into certain*] areas, and put magnetic [*limpet*] bombs, on the hulls of the ship, or blow up submarine nets, or blow up any kind of mines so our men could get in there. Our biggest thing was clearing the beaches for the troops. You gotta remember that the Japs were very bad back in those days. They buried their mines but [*we had*], for us to clear the barbed wire and clear the mines, and get the beaches clear so that our troops could land in there. We had to go in there at night and try to do this in the dark.

JP: I hope you're getting...

WL: Most of this in the dark.

JP: I hope you were getting hazardous pay for this.

WL: Yes. Yeah, well, that's another thing. I got my rank pay plus if we were overseas, you got hazard pay. And every time the sub dove, we got extra pay too.

JP: Did you assume a specific rank when you became a SEAL?

WL: Well, it's frogman.

JP: Okay.

WL: And you never became a SEAL. But I told you before, they, my daughter-in-law took me to the base and she was very proud of me, and she introduced me to one of the officers and [*he*] gave me a hat and the shirt and the pin.

JP: Excellent.

WL: In fact, I [*have*] one on my hat.

JP: All right. I'd like to see it afterwards.

WL: Yeah.

JP: So now you're a frogman.

WL: Yes.

JP: And you're on the *Dolphin*.

WL: Qualified diver. I'm a frogman that was aboard the *Dolphin*. And my purpose at that time was apparently for a mission [*that they were*] preparing. They never tell you anything. You're out at sea and the skipper will come over, or especially in my case, he'll approach me or the frogmen, [*tell us the mission*]. Not the specifics, 'til you're ready to go out the hatch. Then he tells you exactly what's going to [*happen*.]

JP: Do you remember any of the administrative offices that were involved with the frogman program in 1941?

WL: Oh, there was an office at Camp David, outside of Washington. The Pentagon had one. Pearl, at that time, had like a sub station, not [*anything*] big based on it. Most of [*my*] training was back in the States. After a while, [*we became*] frogmen.

JP: Okay.

WL: They were training out in the Potomac River and they were working out of Camp David. And at that time, the reason that they did it at the Potomac River, from what I found out, was they have a lot of whirlpools and a lot of swirls in there. And you gotta learn how to be able to swim through that stuff because when you're a frogman you're through all kinds of dangers of swimming. A lot of the times, you're swimming maybe two miles. Sub can't get in too close, so you're on your own.

JP: You must have seen some of the most remarkable aquatic life that the South Pacific had to offer.

WL: Well, yeah. I don't know exactly what you mean by that.

JP: Oh, fish or...

WL: Oh yeah. I saw eels as big as your leg!

JP: (Laughs)

WL: But you learn to swim with those, you know. But when you're in [*the water at night*], it's dark down there. [*But you notice it*] especially when you're [*on a*] mission.

JP: Well, if you want to talk about that, we can talk about that in a few minutes.

WL: Yeah.

JP: First, though, we need to, let's get to Pearl Harbor.

WL: Okay.

JP: Let's get to the attack. And...

WL: Well...

JP: ...what you were doing that day.

WL: You want me to start?

JP: Yeah.

WL: Okay. It was about 7:54. I'm pretty close. In relaxation on a base on a weekend, you know, everybody's in shorts. The ship was quiet. The skeleton crew that was aboard were, you know, sleeping in their bunks and so forth.

JP: Now, where was the *Dolphin* at this time? At the sub station?

WL: [*It was moored at the*] Southeast Loch, sub combat base. It was right at the point.

JP: Okay.

WL: And I came topside and when I got topside, it was beautiful. You know, it was really clear and I heard planes flying. But that's not unusual because we had the PBY base just down from the sub combat base. And then you had Hickam Field. And then there's always planes flying around. Then I heard the music—the navy band was playing on the after deck on the *Nevada* for color raising at that time. And these planes were coming in and I looked and I could see 'em. They were in three different waves. And I said, "Holy—," well, I can't remember the exact words I said. I [*said*] "Those are Japs!" I could see the pilot! That's how low he came.

And they came in over Battleship Row; torpedo planes and the bombers came in over [*the battleships.*] They came in three different waves. And of course, the fighter planes went over Hickam Field. And those planes, they just—I didn't know this 'til afterwards, but they just shot the field up, in a minute. But they came in so quick. [*I was*] just a young [*sailor.*] I was eighteen years old and I'm saying to myself, "Holy Christ, what the hell is happening?"

And all of a sudden I heard this big explosion. Of course that was the *Arizona*. And all hell, just broke out. And I was—I'm being real honest, I was scared.

JP: You're on deck right now of the *Dolphin*.

WL: I'm on topside, ready to go...

JP: What's going on? What's going on right now on the *Dolphin*?

WL: Nothing. I was the only one topside. I was [*just*] ready to leave. And of course nobody knew what was going on. You know, you hear a lot of noises, and nobody knew anything about an attack or anything like that.

And I didn't know exactly what to do. Real honest with you, I hear 'em and then all of a sudden I said to myself, "God, what's happening over there on Battleship Row?" I said, "My god, they're going to need some help."

So I got a hold of one of the other divers down [*below*] and we got our equipment out.

JP: Is this diver on ship?

WL: Yeah. Yeah. And I got a hold of a navy diver and I said to him, "John, we [*have*] to get a hold of small craft boat and get our equipment, get over there."

JP: Remember John's last name?

WL: No, I was trying to think of that when I was telling you. You know, I'm seventy-five years old.

JP: That's okay. We can fill that in later.

WL: But anyways, I said to him, "We better get our equipment. We gotta get over there. There's bound to be men hurt."

So we got hold of an officer who got permission for us to get a [*motor launch*]. And this was the hardest part for me. There [*were*] sailors all over in the bay, wounded, burnt from the explosion. And the fire and the smoke was just tremendous. I mean...

JP: Were you going anyplace specifically? Were you going to the *Arizona*?

WL: I was going over to the *Arizona*. We headed over there. We picked up the most badly injured ones, the burnt. And by the time we got over there, and by the time we got 'em on the dock, the magazine exploded on the *Arizona* and of course the rupture, the tanks ruptured. And the fire just went all over. And of course, the [*repair ship Vestal*] was just the other side of the *Arizona*. And of course, *Oklahoma*, she went down pretty fast.

The *Arizona* was leaning to the stern. We got into the water but the smoke—between the smoke and the flames, and trying to swim underneath the flames and that, to get over to the *Arizona* was the hardest part. You [*learned*] that [*as*] part of your training. And we banged on the side of the hull and we did not get any response whatsoever. And the smoke was getting so bad for our breathing [*and*] our lungs [*that we*] finally waved [*to each other*] and we got up topside.

And of course, with being on the starboard port leaning, we had a hard time. So we tried to get down the ventilation system and we couldn't get down there because with the explosion, it just damaged everything in that area on the sides. So we could not get down—we tried I don't know how many different spots. I mean, we were trying to work feverishly. We knew there were men down in there.

JP: Yeah.

WL: And you know, when you're young like that, you're trying to think, they must be in a panic down there, not knowing what's going on on topside. They probably heard the [*bombs that went down the smokestack and did the destruction below decks and they were trapped.*] [*Note: no bomb went down the smokestack, the major explosion was due to a bomb hit forward, which caused the forward magazines to explode.*]

So anyway, we spent quite a bit of time there and it finally got to a point after a number of hours, we just couldn't stand the smoke, it got so bad. So all I could think of is that we had to leave the men aboard the *Arizona*, in a tomb, which [*it*] would be. And of course, I felt bad. You usually want to help your fellow shipmate, and [*not*] knowing how many men were trapped down in there was [*terrible.*]

JP: Yeah.

WL: So throughout the rest of the day, most of my work was pulling sailors [*out of*] the water who [*had been blown into the water from the explosion and jumped from damaged ships and*] were hurt pretty bad and just helping all the way down the line.

JP: So you were in [*the water*] most of the day then.

WL: Yes, pretty close to it. And of course, before we moved off the *Arizona* [(*it sank quickly*)], the *Nevada* had taken a torpedo and she [*had*] started out towards the opening of the harbor. This was the second wave that came in at 8:30. [*The Jap bombers*] were looking for aircraft carriers, which we had none in the area. And they apparently saw the *Nevada* going out and of course she just beached at Hospital Point there.

JP: Right.

WL: And as far as the *Tennessee*, she got hit bad. The *West Virginia* was hit pretty bad [*also*].

JP: Well, let's go a little bit further that day. Later that day you had a chance to sit back and—or did you have a chance to sit back and think about what had happened?

WL: After the attack?

JP: Yeah.

WL: No way. [*We were*] just going constantly. In fact, [*we had*] hardly anything to eat most of the whole day. Nothing whatsoever. There was chaos. I mean, after the second wave—you know, they came in three different times. Second wave was 8:30[AM], first one was 7:55[AM]. And everybody was just [*in motion, manning their battle stations doing fire control and anything they could to help.*] [*On*] a couple of the cruisers the men were manning the guns. From what I could see in our area, where we were, it just was really bad. I mean there [*were*] bodies laying all over the dock. It just [*got*] very emotional.

JP: I know.

WL: I mean these were young kids like myself. And I thought we did the best we could. It went into late night and finally we were just beat out. And of course the next day, you know, it made a difference.

JP: Yeah.

WL: [*Men*] were finding bodies. They tried to get some of the bodies out of the *Arizona* and nothing could be done. Of course, as you know, probably later on, I think they got about 700 out.

JP: Yeah, there was I think about, well, 1177 had died.

WL: Yeah.

JP: There were over 2000 there, so.

WL: Well, they figured from what I understood, that the parents [*must have decided to*] leave 'em in there. It was a question [*I wondered about a*] number of times. Why didn't they get the bodies out? And I [*thought*], "Well, I guess they had talked, the navy had talked to the parents and they figured they just..."

And you know, I was there just about a month ago with my wife. Spent [*two*] weeks there and I spent a whole day [*at Pearl Harbor*], with John Brooks, one of the *Park Ranger*] divers. And he interviewed me also and he wanted to know if I wanted to go down with him at the time. We were so close, it was five o'clock already. We had spent all day there. I would have loved to do it but, I didn't.

JP: This was at the USS *Arizona* Memorial?

WL: Yes. But I couldn't stay [*at the memorial too long reading the names*]. And of course I don't want to be vicious, but when you see the Japanese there, it just kind of hurts me. And of course when I [*saw*] all the names there, I just got choked up real bad. But that's all I can remember as far as what I [*did*]. I thought I did the best I could at that time. We helped the injured. There were so many that were burnt so bad. A lot of 'em from the flames and the bombs and the torpedoes that got hit And I'm trying to think of the ship that was in dry dock. It took [*several bombs*].

JP: Was that the *Shaw*?

WL: I think it was the *Shaw*. I think you're right. Man, she just let go. But towards the end of [*our tour of the USS*] *Arizona* [*Memorial*], I just kind of stood for a bit and felt that here they are entombed [*here*]. There's nothing I can do to help 'em. And I said to myself, and I know it's probably, hard for you to believe, but I said, "I'll always love America."

JP: Well, I think...

WL: I'll always know that you're there. You know, it's pretty hard.

JP: Yeah.

WL: And I just hope that they realize in Washington what had happened, that we don't have to go through this again and lose so many young men. [*That*] we learned a lesson. I don't know if they'll ever learn that, but with our down cut on the ships and everything right now, gosh. I just hope we don't get caught with our pants down again.

JP: I think that's a wonderful way to finish this. I thank you for your time.

WL: I hope I helped. I don't know.

JP: You did. Thank you, Bill.

WL: Okay.

JP: Excellent. You did a good job.

END OF INTERVIEW