

Interviewee: Dertien, Don
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Dertien: I'm not a hero, no Purple Heart, no sunk ship ... we were just sprinkled with machine gun fire or "friendly fire," and there was a lot of boredom, a lot of terror, but ... so here I am.

Sellers: Okay, just a typical destroyer sailor. Let me ask you before we go any further if we have your permission to record this?

Dertien: You do.

Sellers: Tell me a little bit, if you will, as we get started, about where you were born and where you grew up. Let's get some background to get you into the war.

Dertien: Okay. I was born in Muskegon, Michigan and went to school there throughout the thirteen grades and then went to a couple of years at the junior college. My father died after my freshman year, stayed out a year and then there was another year at a place called Tri-State, down in Indiana. I played golf on the athletic teams. I was very small for my age; I was under 100 pounds when I entered the twelfth grade - my claim to fame, I guess. Then I heard an announcement when I was on the beach of Lake Michigan one Saturday afternoon in the middle of August that said ... well, I was listening to Sammy Kaye's orchestra.

Sellers: Ah, "Swing and Sway."

Dertien: With Sammy Kaye, and it says, "Get a commission in the Naval Reserve." So that was Saturday. On Monday I went to Grand Rapids, Michigan, thirty-five miles away, raised my right hand and signed up for a special program called V-7.

Sellers: Tell me what year this is, please.

Dertien: August of 1940.

Sellers: The V-7 program - was that one of the Navy programs that put you in college?

Dertien: No. They started out by having a four-year requirement. In other words, a college graduate. But they weren't getting enough ... they had only started it earlier that summer or late spring and they weren't getting enough so they lowered it to only two years of college requirement. It was an officer candidate sort of thing, where in those days you enlisted in the

Naval Reserve for this program and you were then, some month or so later, ordered to active duty on a ship for thirty days – and I might say without pay.

Sellers: What about with training? Did you get some training?

Dertien: That was aboard ship. We went right from civilian life to the ship for thirty days.

Sellers: Okay, so it was on the job?

Dertien: We were acting just like apprentice seaman, which we were - no pay. We were given transportation back and forth from Muskegon, Michigan, to New York, then got off the ship in Norfolk, having been to Panama, and Guantanamo Bay. The attrition was pretty tough ... for one thing or another, non-aptitude for the service, eyes mainly, people didn't like it and they resigned. I can understand why they didn't like it – absolutely no privacy, no place to really sit. From there I spent about a month and a half home, then was ordered to midshipman school at Northwestern University in Chicago. After three months there, we were ninety-day wonders and we were commissioned ensigns, USNR.

Sellers: This is still all before Pearl Harbor is attacked?

Dertien: All before Pearl Harbor. We got our commission on the 14th of March, 1941.

Sellers: Then what did they send you to do?

Dertien: Then we were given ten days leave and I went home to my girlfriend and my family. My family consisted of my foster mother, brothers and sisters. Then I went back to Chicago and met a friend there by the name of Jack Reidy, who was also in my class, who was a young lawyer from Harvard. We went to Long Beach on the train. An interesting thing on that train - we said, "Oh boy, it's going to be a nice train ride." We got on the train in the afternoon in Chicago, and as I remember, we entered Kansas about five o'clock in the afternoon or whatever and they said, "No more booze." And Santa Fe went right catty-corner across Kansas, and by the time they got through we were sound asleep. We arrived at Long Beach having been on leave. We were broke; we stayed at a hotel called the Wilton because we could sign for everything (not the Hilton). Then as soon as we got paid, we moved to the Pacific Coast Club because we had to pay two dollars apiece at the Wilton, and the Pacific Coast Club was only a dollar apiece. And it was very nice, but there were no girls there.

Sellers: And how many men altogether?

Dertien: There were several of us going to Pearl Harbor to pick up ships.

Sellers: Okay, so it wasn't like a battalion or a platoon or a unit or anything.

Dertien: No.

Sellers: So that was your destination - Pearl Harbor to pick up ships?

Dertien: Yeah.

Sellers: Well, take it from there.

Dertien: Okay. We finally got transportation and it was on the USS *Henderson*, a real old World War I transport. We, Jack Reidy and I, were the last ones on board, about five o'clock in the morning, and one of the first and only ... no, one other time, I got seasick. We were down about four or five decks and even though we were officers, we were four deep, and we hit the swells and I went on deck and heaved my cookies. That was the first and then next to the last time. We arrived at Pearl Harbor on a Sunday; it was around April 1st and it was raining - one of the few times I've ever seen rain in Pearl Harbor. On the contrary, we played golf at the country club, Oahu Country Club, and I'd never played golf there that it didn't rain.

Sellers: Where were you housed and what were your duties while you were there?

Dertien: I went to Pearl Harbor and reported aboard a ship called the USS *Farragut*, Destroyer #348. The *Farragut* was the first destroyer that had been built for about fifteen years. They were known as the "Goldplaters." Among other things, she took Roosevelt to Panama (not when I was on board). She was in the Navy yard because she had had a collision with another ship called the *Aylwin*, a ship in our division, and was getting repaired and reported aboard for duty. I was probably ... I guess they had eight other officers other than me when I reported on board.

Sellers: What was your assigned duty?

Dertien: My assigned duties was commissary officer, athletic officer, assistant communication officer, and stores officer.

Sellers: Almost anything they needed?

Dertien: I was "George."

Sellers: Did you stay there? Did you get underway? What happened?

Dertien: We finally left the Pearl Harbor navy yard, probably the middle of April, and had the typical training cruises out of Pearl Harbor until December 7th, except we went to San Diego for one week. It was strictly a joy wave to get people back to the States from being deployed to Hawaii. Hawaii is a great place, but the ratio of men to women was pretty terrible. After we got back from that joy wave in the summer of '41, we all bought cars, sometimes together, and then it was never lonely after that.

Sellers: Did you have any inkling of any war clouds while you were over in the Pacific

area?

Dertien: Two times. Not two times, but two different happenings. Our orders were such, or the program was such, we were supposed to do one year of active duty. So I reported to active duty ... my active duty started the 14th of March. I was to get out on the 14th of March in 1942. And so they treated us like that in that we were all almost always an assistant, never direct responsibility. We were always junior officers of the deck, junior officers of the watch, if you will, underway and in port. Then that changed. The commanding officer must have gotten a letter (perhaps all commanding officers did) that said (I've never seen this), "Hey, the war clouds are gathering. We got these reserve officers on board and like it or not, we're going to have to fight the war with them. You better train them and give them responsibilities." So after September, we were given responsibilities including ... sometime in October or November, we were made officers of the deck underway, which means we could stand a watch in port, too.

The second thing that happened ... about ten days before the 7th of December, there was an alert. We were at sea in a training status and there was a Japanese submarine spotted south of Lahaina Road, as I remember, Hawaii – over towards Maui. We looked and we were at general quarters and we thought it was the real thing. It was essentially terminated, and then they said, "That was an exercise." But for a while we thought it was the real thing, in late November of '41.

Sellers: Were the ships that you saw, do you think maybe they were Japanese ships that just weren't ready yet?

Dertien: No, we didn't see any ships. The alert was mostly for submarines, and since we didn't have any radar in those days ... one or two ships had radar, but they were air search radar, they weren't very good for surface search. You were kind of looking for Japanese ships but never found them.

Sellers: So this is November. Do you come back to the States on another excursion?

Dertien: Oh, we went back into Pearl Harbor, and I would guess we were in Pearl Harbor for about a week before December 7th happened.

Sellers: Where were you on the islands on December 7th?

Dertien: I was in the USS *Farragut* in Pearl Harbor.

Sellers: Tell me about that.

Dertien: Okay. I had the duty starting at noon on December 7th. My roommate had the duty and was to be relieved at noon by me, which means you're in charge of the ship. Captain and exec are ashore and half of the officers or more. Normally we would have been in Honolulu at the Moana Hotel Saturday night, but for no good reason we elected not to go there. We stayed at the officer's club at Pearl Harbor and there was a band concert at what we called the Block Arena. Block, I think, was the commander of the Pearl Harbor Naval Base or whatever it was

called in those days ... probably Com-14. There was the battle of the bands. All battleships had their own band, and there was a destroyer band, there was a cruiser band, I think ... probably if a group was a cruiser division, they had a band. There were probably a half a dozen bands and they played 1940s music and martial music. So we got through with that about eleven o'clock and went to the club and had another drink and then went back to the ship.

Sellers: Drinking seems to have been quite popular, then.

Dertien: Yes. Yeah, well we were sailors, I guess. We also were waiting for a boat, you know. So I went back to the ship, went to bed. About three or four o'clock in the morning, my roommate, who had the duty, was awakened and our chief engineer was in the motor whaleboat ... names will not be used here ... was in the motor whaleboat and he had to be helped out and put to bed. He was dead drunk. He turned out to be the commanding officer, the senior line officer on board, when the Japs hit just before eight o'clock on the 7th. So this is early in the morning of the 7th.

Sellers: And he's got one big hangover.

Dertien: So my roommate had been up part of the night there ... went back to bed. At five minutes of eight, the messenger came and said, "The *Utah* is on fire." To this day, on December 7th, either I call him or he calls me and we introduce it by: "Mr. Benham, the *Utah* is on fire." So we slipped on our bathrobes and we rushed out on deck and he called away the fire and rescue party - that's a small group of people that have pumps and axes and one thing or another to assist the other ship, actually go on board. And the *Utah* was not a battleship anymore, it was a target ship. She had been an old battleship. Well, as we were rushing onto the deck ... and he had no sooner got out of his ... "away the fire and rescue party," a Japanese airplane came over and we saw the meatball on its wing. He was real low, flew right over us. And then we knew it was something serious. We went to general quarters - general quarters battle stations. Now we have a skeleton crew on board, probably ... we were allowed to have two-thirds ashore but probably had about fifty percent on board. And I was standing my watches both on the bridge underway and up in control. By watches ... if we had condition 2, just short of general quarters, just short of battle stations, I would be up in the director. So the gunnery officer was ashore (that was his battle station), the assistant gunnery officer was on board but not yet up, and so I went up in the director and eventually opened fire. By eventually, it wasn't too long. We didn't have to break locks or anything, but we were very ineffective for anti-aircraft.

Sellers: How close were you moored to the ships that had been hit and the airfield?

Dertien: Okay, we were ... I'm trying to picture now. We were over towards Pearl City, where the Pan-Am flying boats landed. I'm picturing it, if I'm picturing right, northwest probably a mile and a half from the *Arizona*. We saw the *Arizona* go. We opened fire, and even though the *Farragut* claimed one airplane, we didn't hit an airplane. We might have hit it with some .30 calibers, but not to bring it down, and our five-inch guns were very ineffective and that's where I was. After about five or ten minutes, I was relieved by the assistant gunnery

officer. I went back to my ... I went up on the bridge then and I went back to ... and we were getting ready to get underway ... to my battle station which was the after-control. The commanding officer would be on the bridge at his battle station, the executive officer was supposed to be at an after-control station that had telephones, some engine order telegraphs, some rudders and a wheel, and he could control the ship in emergency. I was supposed to be his assistant. Well, in my twenty-three months aboard the *Farragut*, we'd never had to use that position. But it was right by an after-gun, right next to it. And when that after-gun goes off ... the number three gun, I should say - the after-gun is number four ... when that gun goes off, your eardrums get a good working over. I think that's when I started having hearing loss. I didn't realize until later years.

We got underway, fired every once a while. I was no longer in control. My good friend was up there in the director, and I was just kind of watching the action ... keeping up what was going on. I had some headset telephones on. Japanese planes would come over every once in a while. As we got underway, sometime probably ten minutes to nine, maybe quarter of, alongside of Ford Island where the Navy had an airstrip ... as we were getting kind of abreast of it, passing it on the left side, there was a ... the B-17s from the States, unarmed, were coming in, and the zeros were just peppering them with machine-gun fire. And we didn't know about the B-17s then. We knew they were B-17s. And every once in a while one of the zeros would peel off and give us a few rounds, but nothing serious. The guy alongside of me, another talker, was clipped on his left ear. I was right beside him, but it wasn't the ear near me [laughs]. And that's the only damage we had, just a little bit of machine-gun fire from the attacking Japanese airplane.

Sellers: Now you said you were underway. Where were you heading?

Dertien: We were heading out to sea to screen the battleships; we were assigned to the battleships. We were out there and we were establishing an anti-submarine patrol out at the entrance. As you know, there was a ... the ship alongside of us, called the *Monaghan*, earlier was the first ship underway because she had what we called the ready-duty. The rest of us were supposed to get underway, I'd say, under two hours notice. She was supposed to get underway on less than twenty minutes notice because she had steam to the throttles. So she was the first one underway and she was the one under Captain Burford, who ran a midget submarine aground opposite a ship called the *Curtis*, a seaplane tender. We went out, established a patrol, wondered why the battleships didn't come out. And as you know, the battleships didn't come out because they were either blown-up, turned over, sunk, or hemmed in. They were the inboard of another. They were all damaged. And when they didn't come out, that night we joined some cruisers as a screen for the cruisers, looking around of the Japanese fleets south of Oahu, south of Pearl Harbor. Fortunately, they were northwest of Pearl Harbor and going home. Because if we would have found them, they would have slaughtered us. We were up most of the night, of course, and we were tired. We came in the afternoon of the 8th.

Sellers: So you'd been out all day and all night, almost.

Dertien: Yeah. And all day and all night another day, and not much sleep. The first thing we saw was the *Nevada*. She was beached on the west side of the channel. We saw the bodies

on the fantail. They were still there. They weren't naked bodies; they were in sacks. That was a real eye-opener. We moored to a buoy and could have gone alongside anything, and the fuel barge came out. Then they had a lookout on an old cruiser called the *Baltimore*, not to be confused with the later *Baltimore*. It was a hulk. He spotted a Japanese midget submarine, so he thought. It turned out to be a swab handle; he thought it was a periscope. Because of that ... you know, water flows downhill? It's the same way with seniority. They said to a commander destroyer flotilla, "Nominate a ship to provide an officer, who must be a qualified officer of the deck, for patrol duty within the harbor." So we were the junior squadron and I was on the junior ship and I was the junior man who was a qualified officer on deck, so I lucked out and got the all-night patrol in a fifty-foot launch who had listening gear in it and a couple of depth charges. All night long, we would hear noises and we'd track them down and get close and we would find out it was a ship that was at a buoy or alongside the pier ... we could hear their pumps. And so one time we thought we had something, and this is not a very nice thing to say, now ... and we have lost our sense of humor, we've all been up for long hours. We'd say, "Well, this looks pretty good. But even if isn't, let's drop a couple." So we dropped a couple. Woke up the whole harbor. It was nothing.

Finally got off of that, went up aboard ship ... went back to the *Farragut* about six o'clock in the morning and probably got underway sometime that morning out to sea with a bunch of ships. Then for the next month or so, we were engaged in taking convoys or ships back to the mainland and back out, until about March, actually. One time we had about a twenty-ship convoy from San Francisco to Honolulu, Pearl Harbor area, that had a sailing ship. So it was very slow - five knot speed of advance. Now, it had engines in it, so that helped some, but that took us a long time to go from San Francisco to Honolulu ... probably about eighteen, twenty days. That was slow-going and it was monotonous. It was nice after the end of December to see lights on in the city again, like San Francisco. They had a brown-out, but there were a lot of lights there compared to Honolulu. Honolulu was completely black. Then after that we did some raids on central Pacific Islands. We were always a screening ship. We never did any shore bombardment there.

Finally, after the raids, the Japanese were coming down from the north, threatening Australia, and we had the Battle of the Coral Sea in May, early May, probably about the 7th of May. We were with the Australian ships. We had been detached from the carrier. There were four to six US destroyers, two or three Australian or New Zealand destroyers, the USS *Chicago* and a couple of other Australia or New Zealand cruisers. We were attacked by the Japanese torpedo bombers. We beat them off, splashed some. We probably splashed only one. They were looking for the bigger ships, but one of them ... there were about fifteen, twenty of them (airplanes). One of them picked us up and he dropped a torpedo. The guy who was the chief quartermaster said to the captain, "It's coming over here - you better go right." The captain went right and it went right down our port side. So that was a fortunate thing. The Japanese retreated, their airplanes spent. The next thing that happened, that same day, our B17s from Australia thought we were Japanese and they dropped bombs on us. Their marksmanship was not too good, but it was not a nice feeling to see those bombs getting closer and closer as they were raining down. Probably the closest they got was 100 yards or less or more, but it was not a very good feeling.

Sellers: You didn't know how close they were going to get as you were watching them.

Dertien: No. Didn't know when they were going to run out. Then we went into Brisbane. Brisbane is about twenty, twenty-five miles up the river. That's the only time in my naval career I've been welcomed from the housetops, because the Battle of the Coral Sea was the one that turned back the Japanese from Australia. To this day, the Battle of the Coral Sea is celebrated at all Australian embassies and in Australia as a very significant holiday.

Sellers: Is it really? I didn't know that.

Dertien: If you're in Washington, the veterans of the Coral Sea battle who are in Washington are always invited to the Australian embassy for a reception on, I think it's May 7th. We stayed in ... Brisbane was a nice place. The natives were friendly. Got underway from there and hung around the South Pacific because we were with the Australians. Then we were finally ... all the people in the South Pacific we saw were streaming toward the Central Pacific. We could follow on our code machine some of what was happening, but we had no idea that the US had broken the Japanese code and that the Japanese were going to invade Midway. Our concern was hey, everyone's leaving us! What's going to happen if the Japanese come towards us? Well, we didn't really know until the battle ... about the time it started we would get some reports that we could decode, and we realized that we weren't in the Battle of Midway; we were 2,000 or 3,000 miles away. So we were not in the Battle of Midway.

The next significant thing that happened was probably Guadalcanal. At that time we were assigned to the USS *Saratoga*, a big carrier, one of the few that we had then. The *Lexington* had been sunk; we had been with the *Lexington* for a while but then spun off with the Aussies for the Battle of Coral Sea. *Lexington* was the sister ship of the *Saratoga*. They were launching airplanes mostly, and we would once in a while be around Guadalcanal but mostly ... and I can't remember whether we fired any bullets at the beach at Guadalcanal ... I think so, but the shore bombardment day would come later. They landed troops on Guadalcanal. We had a few air raids. We, the *Farragut*, didn't shoot anything down then. Mostly the combat air patrol would get them. No one got hit in the *Saratoga* group. The airplanes missed or couldn't find their way, until about September I think Guadalcanal was in early August, and in September, near late September, the *Saratoga* took a torpedo. The *Saratoga* was a very unwieldy carrier; later carriers were much more maneuverable. Not maneuverable like a destroyer, but she took forever to turn. It was reported that there was a torpedo headed for the *Saratoga*, quite a while before that torpedo hit. Then the torpedo hit and we never did see the *Saratoga* change course or stop or speed up or anything. Maybe it was less time than what I can remember. But that put the *Saratoga* out of action.

After having spent sixty-one days at sea we went into a little place called Tonga Tabu - the Tonga Islands. They weren't much but it was better than being underway. We had a chance to get some ... we were fueling every three days underway to keep our tanks reasonably full.

Sellers: How was that accomplished?

Dertien: We practiced this in peacetime. But in peacetime, strange as it seems, we would

have a line which was ... abreast line which runs perpendicular to both ships, allegedly to keep the two ships from going too far apart. And then a spring line that leads to forward on you, back aft ... no, just the opposite, so he could pull you. That's how we practiced in peacetime. We realized we didn't need that breast line because if we got that far out it was going to break and probably kill someone. We found out later that our station keeping was good enough that we didn't need that other line. So we'd just steam alongside, throw lines or shoot lines over ... you know, small lines then bigger lines, then finally the cable to support the big hose that you put into your filling tank right on the main deck. That's how we did the whole war, and they're still doing it that way. We did it from tankers, oilers, we did it from carriers, we did it from cruisers. The ideal thing is go against the sea and the wind about thirty degrees on the bow and then steam at about twelve knots. Anything, if you do it downwind, you don't have as good of control of your ship. So most of the time they did it ideally - twelve knots into the sea and wind. But that's how we fueled, that's how we got groceries, that's how we got ammunition, and that's how we got spare parts.

Sellers: Wow. That was very efficient.

Dertien: Yeah. We got better at it as time went on. Okay, so after Guadalcanal we put into Tonga Tabu, and then we kind of every once in awhile would visit Guadalcanal area. Never got into any serious difficulties or saw any Japanese ships. Put into a place called Tulagi in Iron Bottom Bay. There was a cruiser there - I think it was the *St. Louis* - we used to call pier so-and-so, which was the *St. Louis*' number, because she was always there ... tongue-in-cheek. And finally got orders to go back to the States for overhaul. We arrived in late January and I got orders to go to new construction destroyer

Sellers: This is late January of '43?

Dertien: 1943. My orders read, "When relieved in February, go up to Puget Sound to the Bremerton naval shipyard and report to the prospective commanding officer for duty aboard the USS *Halford* DD-480. And I did. I wrote the commanding officer (we were told to do this) where we were, when we expected to report, and I reported near the end of March. My letter to him said, "Dear Captain, I'm going to report there about the 28th of March and I'm the 1st Lieutenant and Damage Control Officer, or I was on the USS *Farragut*. I'm interested in gunnery and I was in communications and didn't like it." When I reported on board, he said to me, "You are the gunnery officer." Every other ship had someone who had been an assistant gunnery officer or had been to gunnery officer's ordnance school, and the whole damn fleet except me had had gunnery training. And there I was. And let me tell you, madam, neither the captain or I were very proud of the job that I did for the first six months. Had he not needed me to be his representative when he was asleep or eating on the bridge when we were underway (I was one of three) he would have fired me, I just know it. But he didn't know what the alternative was. Also, the exec was on my side because if I would have gone off, been detached, he would have gone on the underway watch list. He didn't want to do that. But eventually ... first of all, we were still in the yard at Bremerton. I got married on the 6th of April to my childhood sweetheart of six and a half years, and we're still married after sixty-one years, and

the ship was commissioned on the 10th of April.

Sellers: Now, does this make you a plank-holder?

Dertien: Plank-holder is one who kind of puts it in commission and puts it out of commission, I think. Among other things, we flooded three magazines three different days - it makes people very unhappy when you do that. The buck stopped with me, of course, and it was the same gunner's mate each time. His name was Gunners mate Fay. He was also the ship's barber. Poor old Fay. And I saw him probably fifteen years ago and we swapped stories. I'm not so sure he can remember that. I could remember it very vividly. There was some other things where the hydraulic line let loose and it shorted out a control system and gun mounts. And then we started shooting. Well, I had an assistant gunnery officer who had been a chief fire patrolman on the *North Carolina* - Sydney Bruce Kelly, who was an ensign. Had a great fire control crew. When we started shooting, we were excellent. That got the old man right off my back. After that, he'd come up on the bridge, tell me stories, tell me about the troubles he was having with his wife - different relationship entirely, all because we started shooting. We were so good ... we had an airplane on board, one of two destroyers in the whole fleet that were built and had an airplane on board. It was not successful. It was an OS2U3, which is a floatplane with one pontoon and little struts, floats, on each wing, that we catapulted off. The catapult was amidships after the number two stack, and they had left out the number three gun - we had four and five, but no number three gun, and we didn't have one set of torpedo tubes. We had the catapult, if you can visualize that, up on the boat deck, one deck above the main deck. The catapult worked fine. The catapult belonged to the gunnery department, that was my department. Now I was not the catapult officer. I used to catapult them when my assistant, Sydney Bruce Kelly, was away at school. It was interesting, but

End Side A

Dertien:because the destroyer is pretty tender. It rocks a lot, very easily. Finally, we went into Pearl Harbor and Admiral Nimitz came on board. I think we had been ordered to take it off by then. He came on board; he had never seen this thing. Well, so we were told that he was a creature of FDR's thinking, who way back when had been Secretary of the Navy. In 1936, it was probably a pretty good idea. One destroyer per squadron would have an airplane on board because they were still fighting World War I. As one destroyer had its airplane and would spot gunfire for the whole squadron, he would provide an anti-submarine patrol ahead of the squadron. We didn't operate that way. Within the year after the war started, if there was going to be any action at all with enemy forces, battleships and cruisers tended to even launch their scout planes and put them on the beach before they went into action. So we got rid of it. Admiral Nimitz came on board. He just shook his head and said, "This has got to go."

So we went back to Mare Island in October of 1943, and had the airplane taken off. They put a new gun three on, they put another set of torpedo tubes on, put some 40-millimeters on. We went out to the Pacific. What did we do when we had the airplane? We were assigned to various raids in the Central Pacific, Wake Island, this one, that one. We were almost always assigned ... there would be the carrier and the cruisers and the destroyers with the carrier, and

then we would be detached to go with the oiler because we had this airplane. The airplane would provide anti-submarine patrol for the oiler and us. And the captain of the oiler, whoever he was, he used to just drive our aviator wild ... our aviator is still alive, incidentally ... just drive him wild and say, "Put depth charges on it, anti-submarine." Next thing he would say, "Put 100-pound bombs on it." Well, on a destroyer that's going back and forth and working with those kinds of weights and it's swinging back and forth, it's a real pain in the tail and a little dangerous. And our poor old aviator used to get up on deck and just shake his fist at that skipper of the oiler.

So we're back to being a normal destroyer again when we got out of the Mare Island naval shipyard with a full armament and no destroyer and no airplane and we went right to the South Pacific. We were based around Tulagi and would go up the slot in the Solomons looking for Japanese ships, looking for Japanese barges, barges that had troops on board or stores on board, provisions, ammo – and got some. Never did engage any Japanese destroyers. We did a fair amount of shore bombardment in the northern Solomons. Guadalcanal, of course, was all secure by then. This was right after Arleigh Burke had had his field day up there. We arrived right after that. And we took part in the invasion of Bougainville. We got fired at at Shortland Island and we fired back, but we finally turned tail when they were getting close to us. We were the flagship for an operation called Green Island. We had the Marine general on board, General Geiger, Roy Geiger. God, he was a great guy. He used to like to come up in the direct area and spin stories. To this day, there's a Camp Geiger around the Camp LeJeune. Then we went up the chain of islands to Rabaul and shelled a little bit. Then we went up south of Truk looking for Japanese ships ... never found any. But at Rabaul we got a couple of small merchantmen. (I got some notes here. I'm just talking kind of through my head, here).

While I was still on the *Farragut*, if I may digress a minute, we had an interesting thing happen to us. We were out off of Espirito Santo, which became a fairly big base, and the *Breese*, an old ... had been a four stack destroyer but now was an APD, a fast transport ... old destroyer transport ... used to land landing parties. Not parties, but ... behind the Japanese land and they would raise hell and then jump on board again and come back. Well, the captain of the *Breese* (B - R - E - E - S - E) misjudged going between ships in the column and he hit one of the cruisers. His bow was bent ninety degrees. Our captain was a damn good captain, but for some reason was having trouble getting a line over ... we were ordered to take the *Breese* in tow, and we asked the *Breese* if they wanted to put everyone on board - it was going to sink. The *Breese*'s captain says, "No, I think we can save her." So our captain, our ship, almost sunk the *Breese* when it went alongside, but didn't. Finally got a line over and we started to tow it stern first. But that big ninety degree bend in the bow, it was just like a giant rudder. We couldn't tow it straight. So, we sent our ship fitters over and cut part of the bow off and then we could tow it. I don't know what they did with the *Breese* after that - probably sunk it.

Now, we're back to the *Halford*. Okay, after the Solomons business, we went to Saipan. Saipan is now like June of 1944. We did a lot of bombardment in Saipan. The island right next to it, Tinian - later Tinian was our big airstrip for the B-29 because it was a flatter island than Saipan. Saipan was where the bulk of the Japanese forces were, though. Shortly after our invasion, the Japanese came out towards Saipan to challenge us. That was known as the Battle of the Philippine Sea. It's also known as the Turkey Shoot.

Sellers: Oh, the Marianna's Turkey Shoot?

Dertien: That's right. That's when the Japanese naval aviation was ... what wasn't knocked out at Midway was just decimated. And their carrier force ... they lost, I think, four carriers there. Just bad news. They lost four carriers at Midway and I think four carriers in the Turkey Shoot and they lost 300 or 400 well-trained naval aviators, never to be replaced. The airplanes would sometime come through ... that would come through our combat air patrol, they would get some of them. So we shot at them and we probably got one of them. But surface ships didn't get near as many Japanese planes as our combat air patrol. But by then our shells were a lot better. Along about ... oh, about the time that the *Halford* was commissioned in April of 1943, we got influence fuses on our anti-aircraft 5-inch shells. Before that, the 5-inch shells ... you put in the ammunition hoist and you raised it up and you fired it and you had engaged a lug on it and that turned the fuse to a generated time of burst. Depending how far the airplane was away and what direction it was going, it would tend to leave it ... it was supposed, theoretically, to burst right at the airplane. Well, if you were off by a tenth of a second, you missed them, and you frequently were off by a tenth of a second. But once we got these influence fuses ... it was kind of like a radar in there that when it got close to the enemy airplane, it went off. So starting in '43, and then really in '44 and '45, our anti-aircraft was so much better because of this influence fuses. Before that, it was just pitiful.

Saipan and Turkey Shoot ... and then we went down to Guam. We shore-bombarded again. And remember what I said about the water flowing downhill? While we were at Guam on the ... I guess it's the east coast, northeast coast ... the natives of Guam had a big sign on the back of a movie poster that said, "Natives of Guam want to be rescued." And we could see them on the beach. So the task force commander says to the destroyer commander, "Nominate some destroyer to help them out." Well, the destroyer commander gets the junior ship and that's us. The commanding officer says to me (I'm still the gunnery officer), "Hey, go ashore and help those people," or words to that effect. So, we took a motor whaleboat and a signalman and a radioman and a crew, and the chief gunner's mate and myself, by the name of Moller, and we got on the beach and surf was rolling and there was rocks there. Moller and I jumped off and conferred with the natives on the beach. They said, "There are more of us down the beach a half mile or so." So we said, "Where are the Japanese?" They pointed to the cliff about a half a mile away in the other direction. So I did a very foolish thing: instead of saying to them, "Go get your friends. When you come back down, we'll pick you up in this boat." But I didn't do that. I said to Moller, "Let's go." So we followed them down the beach, had our pistols at the ready the whole time, and then we got tired. We're not used to that. It was hot. We're not used to walking. Pretty soon our pistols are in our holster. Then we're thinking about, if those Japanese get us, those pistols aren't going to do any good anyway. And so we picked up the others and got them down and no Japanese. Now it's hard to get them on that little motor whaleboat. There's about fifteen of them ... as many as twenty, but fifteen of them, probably. One baby and the mother

Sellers: A real baby and mother?

Dertien: Like a baby that ... I don't know, probably a month or so old. There was some

wounded people. One guy had his shoulder just ripped, like he had been beaten with a sword, say. But what it was, it was our own airplanes. A bullet had just went right through ... just cut him open. And it was our own airplane. So how to get the baby on board? Well, Moller went aboard the boat, and I got as far out as I possibly could with the baby, stretching out. He's stretching the other way, and the boat going up and down. And I had to toss the baby probably about twelve inches but it seemed like further than that. And we got the baby and got it all said and done, went back to the ship, and I never said the captain, "What a dumb thing to do." And the captain didn't say to me, "What a dumb thing to do." He just congratulated us for being successful. But it was - it was stupid. After a while, a lot of shore bombardment at Guam. Then we went to the Palau Islands.

Sellers: Well, you're hitting just about everything there is out there.

Dertien: Yeah. At Anguar and Peleliu, a lot of shore bombardment. One thing that was interesting - at the northern Palau Islands, there's what we call Kossol Roads, where they used to keep some supply ships up there, one of which was an ammunition ship manned by Merchant Marine men.

Sellers: Okay, the American forces kept supply ships.

Dertien: Uh-huh. And we were short of ammunition and we went up there to load ammunition. We went alongside this ammunition ship and the captain says, "We cannot load you until eight o'clock tomorrow morning. It's in my union contract."

Sellers: This is Merchant Marine?

Dertien: And they're usually pretty damn good. So we talked about this and said, "Well, we need the ammo. Can we send our boatswain mate aboard to run the cranes and the hoists and all?" He thought for a minute and he finally said, "Okay." We did it ourselves. Our boatswain mates did a great job. Their crew not to my memory helped a damn bit. That angered all of us a little bit; it made us unhappy with the American Merchant Marine. Now I don't think that's typical of the American Merchant Marine. We just happened to get probably a very weak captain and a very strong union guy on that ship. It might've been the union guys says, "Captain, yeah, we'll do it, but you got to give us more money." The captain probably says, "I don't have it to give you. It's not in my authority." I don't know what happened but we had to do it ourselves.

From there we went to the Philippines and more shell bombardment around Leyte. Air attacks pretty much every day, every other day. Just never in force ... kind of isolated airplanes. Sometimes we'd shoot them down. I don't think we shot any down in the Philippines. In the whole war, I would say we probably got five or six airplanes. We would fish Japanese out of the water when they'd get shot down. Most of the time they didn't want to be rescued or would try to get away, but we'd get them.

Sellers: What did you do with them when you got them on board?

Dertien: We got them on board and then transferred them to a bigger ship. We had no place for them. We had them in the brig; for a short time we could put them in the brig. One time we had fished quite a few Japanese out of the water and we were sending them over to a bigger ship. And we were sending them over in a mail bag, which is about four feet long and round, and they fit very nicely because Japanese are not very tall anyway. We're sending them over there one at a time. The ships drifted apart a little bit, and I guess people weren't really minding their business, and the line holding this trolley with the mail bag on it got real tight. It didn't break, but when it got tight, the mail bag did a 360 degree, just like in a carnival, you know. That was too much for one of these prisoners – he just jumped off, and we could see him going between the ships and that was the end of him. Poor guy. But I guess it scared him.

Sellers: Do you think he drowned?

Dertien: Undoubtedly. We weren't near land or anything. Maybe someone else picked him up. So, so much for Leyte Gulf before the landing. Then they landed and a couple of days later we had the Battle of Surigao Strait. Now there's several Surigao Strait battles. One is where Halsey's fleet up north, north of San Bernardino Strait, up kind of abreast of Luzon, maybe even north of Luzon, chasing the Japanese. When Admiral Nimitz asked Admiral Halsey, "How about your cruisers and battleships? Are they guarding San Bernardino Strait?" Well, Halsey was out of position (he's been criticized for that, but he was a great admiral). He finally detached his cruisers and battleships, but by then the Japanese fleet had come through San Bernardino Strait and they're the ones that raised hell with our jeep carriers just off to the east of Leyte Gulf. Our destroyer escorts and destroyers assigned there made torpedo attacks on those big battleships and cruisers and got sunk frequently. The jeep carriers were almost annihilated. Finally the Japanese, when they had everything in their grasp, turned and went back through San Bernardino Strait.

The main battle, what we consider the main battle, was one that was fought in Surigao Strait itself. Leyte Gulf has an entrance and to the west of it is the island of Leyte. East of it is where the Surigao Strait starts and goes and then swings south of Leyte and then to the west. Well, we had the old battleships which had shore bombardment ammunition. We had very little anti-ship ammunition, armor piercing ammunition, battleship against battleship, they had piercing shells that will go down and penetrate. Halsey had the new ones, the new battleships. The old battleships ... we knew the Japs were coming and Admiral Olendorf had his battleships in a row like the top of a 'T' (if you can visualize the letter 'T') and the Japanese were coming up in single file up the strait, and that's known as crossing the T for time immemorial. For time immemorial, never get into a situation where you're coming up where only your forward guns can bear and the other fleet's got all their guns to bear on you.

I sat ... I'm now the executive officer, and I'm down in a place called CIC - Combat Information Center. I says, "There not going to come." They came, they came. Our cruisers and battleships opened fire. We joined two other ships – one was the *Robinson*. I have a friend who lives up in Titusville - he and I exchange memories of the *Robinson* and *Halford* every once in a while. We made a torpedo attack as well as about fifteen, twenty other destroyers. We fired five torpedoes and we claim one of them hit. It hit a Japanese battleship that later sunk. Then there were a few that got away and we were chasing them south. Then we heard about the jeep

carriers getting pounded about thirty miles away, maybe more. We turned around, but by that time the Japanese had given up on the jeep carriers and had turned tail, too. So we secured the airfield at Leyte, and MacArthur had returned. We secured the airfield, and the jeep carriers were banged up and some of the aviators had no place to land, so they landed at the airfield at Leyte. And the Army says, "Okay, you landed, but you got to get the hell out of here because we're having a big celebration because Major Bong, the Air Force ace, is coming in for the first landing." They got out of there and Major Bong came in a day or so later. You got to have some publicity, you know, and Major Bong was apparently a damn good aviator. But it was funny how they treated the jeep carrier aviators who needed that platform.

Getting back to the *Farragut*, I have a neighbor here who was at the Battle of Midway. He was a dive bomber on the *Yorktown*. He took off from the *Yorktown* and put his bomb into a Japanese carrier, came back and landed on the *Enterprise* because the *Yorktown* was out of action later - it got sunk. And he got the Navy Cross. Fine guy, and probably a hell of an aviator ... ended up with only one lung and died a little while ago.

Back to the *Halford*, from there we went to Ormoc Bay, the other side of Leyte, a couple of times. One of the times we went over there a like destroyer - a destroyer just like the *Halford* - had been sunk. As a result of her being sunk in fairly shallow water, she had her encoding machine that we figured the Japanese could get. So from there on, whenever we went to Ormoc Bay, we landed our coding machine; we learned our lesson.

From Leyte, the next landing was Mindoro, which is just kind of southwest of Luzon ... and that's the first time that I can remember that the Japanese employed kamikazes. They hit a couple ships going into Mindoro, and from there on there were kamikazes, but not in numbers until Okinawa. So Mindoro started the kamikazes as far as I was concerned. We did a little bombardment up there. The next one was Lingayen Gulf, which was the major landing other than Leyte for the Philippine operation. MacArthur had returned at Leyte, but he really returned at Lingayen Gulf where they launched just tons of people and material and then they skirted around there and went down into Manila, some 100 miles away, I suppose. At Lingayen Gulf, shore bombardment, and there was a little harbor there called San Fernando, as I remember. San Fernando had a few little merchant ships and we and another destroyer got them. Who that other destroyer was, I can't remember. By now, I'm not seeing any of the action. I'm down in ... not in the bowels of the ship, but where I don't see it - I'm sitting there by the radars and charts and all. So they got to tell me about it, but I'm getting a description. And they sunk the little ships.

From Lingayen Gulf ... and we were around Lingayen Gulf for about two weeks, I guess. We were then getting ready to go to Iwo Jima. We went to Saipan where they were assembling lots of troop transports, cargo ships, part of the Pacific Fleet. On the 14th of February, they had what we call a Red Alert. In the Red Alert, Japanese planes were coming in and we were told to make smoke. We had smoke generators; we could make it from our boilers, too, but we had smoke generators, two big cylinders. And we made smoke. They called off the alert and we were assigned a patrol station and word came down, "Give me the course to patrol stations so-and-so. We are in the clear; we're out of the smoke." So the captain cranked her up, headed for the patrol station ... he had no sooner cranked it up when he entered into a smoke where it had blended in with the horizon. Just inside there was a merchant ship with aviation gas. And we hit that sucker. We like to tell the story that we were hit by an anchored ship, but that one doesn't fly. Because of that, our bow was all smashed up. So we spent about two more weeks at Saipan

in a floating dry dock, getting repairs to our bow, and went back to the States. The captain had his relief on board when the collision took place. The relief was down in CIC where I was when it took place, and they were classmates at the Naval Academy - class of '34. The captain was being relieved, went back to the Bureau of Naval Personnel for duty. During a ten-day period, he was awarded a Navy Cross, a Silver Star, and a letter of reprimand. He was a great captain - name was Bob Hardy.

So we went from Saipan to Pearl Harbor to Mare Island and got a new bow, got some more armament, up-to-date armament, and went back out and arrived at Pearl Harbor about June, fooled around Pearl Harbor a little bit escorting ships out for target practice, and then I got my orders off to go to new construction. The *Halford* never participated in any more operations, because as you know, the war ended in the middle of August of '45. She was in the Aleutians, I think, when the war ended. I went back to new construction

Sellers: New construction in what port?

Dertien: Destroyer. I went from the destroyer # 480 to a new construction # 841 called the USS *Noa*. But I was disappointed - now I can get out of the Navy and have enough awards and enough service, and I have accumulated a wife, so I was instantly eligible to get out. So I got out.

Sellers: Where did you get out?

Dertien: I got out in Norfolk where we were assembling the crew for the *Noa* 841. I started back to school.

Sellers: Now this time you're going to use the GI Bill, right?

Dertien: Yeah.

Sellers: Before we do that, let me ask you just a couple of quick questions. You had gotten married - were you able to stay in contact letter-wise with your wife?

Dertien: Not really. We could get mail sometimes once a month, sometimes every three days. Sometime when you got mail, it might be three months old. It had gone from hell to breakfast, you know - all over. Because of this ... and we were not supposed to write about where we were or what you'd been doing. And there ain't much to write about when can't do that, so your wife criticizes you. But the mail delivery was always very spotty, but welcome. I can remember one time on the *Farragut*, a guy named Don Sleeper got two bags of *Boston Heralds*. There must have been seventy-five *Boston Heralds*. He put them all in order and read the oldest one first. And every once in a while he'd get a batch, *Boston Heralds*.

Sellers: Did he share them with the rest of you?

Dertien: Yeah, after he read them.

Sellers: Was the news, the way it was being reported in the *Herald*, anything like what you were actually experiencing?

Dertien: That I cannot remember at all, because they were usually old and they were more European-oriented than Pacific-oriented.

Sellers: When you went back to Norfolk, was your wife waiting for you there?

Dertien: Well, I got off the *Halford* and went back through Michigan. I was ordered to Norfolk, and I was ordered from Norfolk down to Key West. I was at Key West when the war stopped. I was down there with my perspective CO. And when he and I went back to Norfolk after our two weeks, why then Tish joined me in Norfolk.

Sellers: Do you remember hearing about the atomic bombs?

Dertien: Yeah.

Sellers: Were you in Key West at the time?

Dertien: Yeah.

Sellers: What was the atmosphere like down there when they learned about that?

Dertien: Pretty wonderful.

Sellers: Do any celebrating?

Dertien: It was hard for us to envision it, you know, but yeah, we felt good about this. We felt good. Finally they're going to do something. Then they didn't do anything for a week. Then finally the Japanese emperor says, "Okay. We give up."

Sellers: So you knew for sure then that it was all over?

Dertien: Yeah. But they did a funny thing in Key West. I don't know what they did in other places, but in Key West the base commander closed all the enlisted and officer's clubs on the base. We had to go out to town to celebrate or get a drink. They closed them about seven o'clock at night, not long after it was announced. I don't know how he feels now, but if I would have been the base commander, I would have tried to keep my people on the base. But there was a lot of trouble. There were some over-zealous people out in town that got into a little difficulty. There were about three or four of us who went out in town, and it was kind of anti-climactic. We bought a bottle, came back and had a couple of sips and we said, "Well, goodnight," and we separated; we went back to our rooms.

Sellers: Well, you'd been out there in the Pacific for almost six years.

Dertien: No, no.

Sellers: Well, if you went in in '40

Dertien: One.

Sellers: Oh, '41.

Dertien: '41 to '45.

Sellers: You went into service in '40 but you didn't get sent out there until '41. Well, that's still a long haul, to be in the middle of what's going on all that time. So you went back to school - where did you go?

Dertien: I went to a place called ... it's now Tri-State University. It was then Tri-State College. It was an engineering school.

Sellers: Back in Michigan?

Dertien: I was going to be a chemical engineer. But I worked as a draftsman. My father died and I got a job as a blueprint boy. That company did me a great favor - they made me a draftsman after a year or less as a blueprint boy. I was never a very good draftsman, but they allowed me to work as much as I wanted to - holidays, Saturdays and Sundays, late, Christmas vacations, thinking that I was going to come back and work for them. But they had so much business during the war, they were so successful without me ... they had a job for me, yes, but I didn't want to do that anymore. In those days, draftsman at this outfit - there were probably eight or ten of us - they wore little bibs so they didn't wear out their shirts and pants, they had gauntlets on so they didn't wear out their shirt. We had our own electric system - it was 25-cycles, so the lights blinked a little bit. They had shades on. I got to feeling they were a little funny.

But I didn't want to do that, so I got out and went back to school. Finally decided I missed the Navy. After about three weeks of that, I wrote a piece of paper and said I'd like to come back. I was one of the first ones out, but I was the first one back in. I was the guinea pig. I got a whole sheaf of papers in my record that says how I was given too much travel money because I should have only gone from Norfolk to Washington instead of to Muskegon, Michigan. So I was the guinea pig coming back. When I wrote to the Bureau of Naval Personnel, the guy, Joe Snyder, said, "You can have my job if you come back by the ..." I think he said the 8th of November. So I did. And I was a better sailor after that. Before that I griped. After that, it was on my terms now. I was no longer a captive.

Sellers: So it was better. And how long did you stay in the Navy?

Dertien: Twenty-eight years. I got out the end of December, 1968, down in Panama. I got a job with the Panama Canal company.

Sellers: What did you do down there?

Dertien: I was in charge of the canal. I was in charge of the operations of the canal. I had 3,500 employees.

Sellers: So all in all, the Navy was good for you?

Dertien: I loved it. But that's over with now. Great organization, I wouldn't trade my experiences, I'd do it all over again.

Sellers: Okay. Well, we're about to run out of tape, so let me ask you if we've had your permission to record this?

Dertien: Yes.

[End of Interview]