

Sea of reflection : a true survivor : [Interview with Florian Stamm, and family].

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Sea of Reflection

Florian M. Stamm

**A
True
Survivor**

Roots of Courage.

Approaching end of world war.

An Aging Battleship. It's voyages.

Night Sinking in a Vast Sea.

Loss, Grief.

Wait for Salvation, that nearly never came .

Triumphant survival.

Respect for a Captain.

Loyalty in Motion still, more than 30 years after Death.

Determination to Admonish Injustice.

Wait, spanning decades, for Absolution.

Salute !

To Honor, Victory.

A Half Century Late.

Fiction?

No. No way.

Believe in miracles?

If not, you should.

Hear the account.

And you will.

By Debra Blum

June 5, 2007
Interview with Florian Stamm at his home
Mount Horeb, WI

Present:

Interviewee: **Florian Stamm**, Mount Horeb, WI (originally Strongs Prairie, WI), *Indianapolis* battleship survivor of 1945 sinking, Seaman 1st Class (not 2nd class like the books say). And a very handsome man of 83 with a great smile and witty personality . And hardly a gray hair in his head. A Legend in his own time.

Mary Stamm, Florian's wife. A kind and lovely woman, gentle and warm. With quiet pride, fondly gazes at her husband. (Perry Evenson's daughter - yet another *Indy* coincidence. Deb took care of Perry at Pleasant View Nursing Home in Monroe, from Oct, 1980 to 1985).

Henrietta Gordon, Verona, WI. Cheerful and genuine, inherited traits from both parents. A sparkling personality full of happiness and pride. She is the daughter of a Marine, of the Greatest Generation. She brought us all together. A cosmetologist, she does Mary's hair and is Deb's first cousin.

Interviewer: **Deb Blum**, RN, Monroe, WI, No history degree, just a license to practice as a nurse ! Respectfully curious and interested in an era of courageous heroes of war, and the home front as well. Grateful for the opportunity these gracious people have offered, to learn about this man, his might, and of surviving the Greatest Tragedy in Naval history.

Tape 1 Side A

F.	Florian	D.	Deb
M.	Mary	H.	Henrietta

D. Florian, you're 83. Born on January 17, 1924 and raised in Adams County Wisconsin. Describe being raised, your family background.

F. [without hesitation] Hard working farmers.

[Deb's thoughts] Somehow I seemed to already know this - for sure the hard working part. Dedication and determination too, for no farm family is without these traits. In the pages that follow, you will discover, as I have, other traces of Florian's roots, that I am personally convinced, contributed to his survival of this incredible Journey.

F. Had to be hard working, because they had to scratch out a living in that sand.

D. Out of the sand up there, I remember that too ! And some clay maybe ?

F. Yes, clay and sand, but mostly sand.

[Deb's thoughts] This was our first connection. My grandparents, John and Luella Fahrney [my maiden name] owned a cottage 17 miles north of the Wisconsin Dells, on highway 13, toward Adams - Friendship WI. In Florians's neck of the woods. My grandma had flowers and a garden. I very much remember the type of land [soil] this was and Gramma's frustration with it !

D. And you had four brothers

F. Five boys and three girls.

D. So you came from a large family. All of your brothers, and you were in the service in WWII ...

F. Yes. We all came back alive !

D.your parents felt really fortunate.

F. [nodded, emotionally]

D. You told me your brother, Dan, you met in Pearl Harbor ...

F. He was in the Fourth Marine Division. I knew he was supposed to be there. I was walking down to the USO to look him up and I saw him walking down the street. [emotional]

[You hear Deb telling this on the tape, Florian had told me this just prior to taping.]

M. That's amazing. [fondly adding]

F. [then happily offers] And in Washington, DC. Just walking down the sidewalk. I wasn't looking for him.

D. What do you think, with ultimately what happened and the sinking of the ship, do you think there was a correlation from how you were raised and surviving the sinking of that ship ?

F. I have no idea.

D. Hard work. Good physical condition...

F. Yes. Was a lot better physically than I am now...by far. Or I wouldn't have lasted five minutes.

D. I bet, I can't imagine it.

H. Uh huh. [agreeing]

F. I was on a watch when the torpedoes hit. I swam off the ship.

D. Had the ship shifted to one side already ?

F. Yes. It was going down and it was going sideways, yes.

D. Were you on one end or the other of the ship ...

F. I was about mid way on the ship. The front end got blown off. And I never knew that.

D. Did you feel the hit...

F. Oh, yes, We felt the hit.

H. But had no idea that you would be going down.

F. No, no.

D. How quickly did you have a sense that it was going to go down...

F. I didn't figure it would go down that quick.
Somebody said "you better get a life jacket on". I said ... "why.... the ship aint going down ..." I got one on ! And it went down ! In about 12 minutes. That's what I figure, and that's what they said.

D. Did it seem like a short 12 minutes or did you You were probably doing a lot in that short period of time.

F. It was just a couple, few minutes. I don't know, I , it was a long time ago, I can't

really think of.....

Mary brought out a model of the ship.

D. You can probably point outnow where was your watch...

Florian is looking over a small model of the ship. He is pointing approximately mid ship. The model is quite small for him to see all the details...but he's reacquainting quite well... he holds the ship close in front of him looking straight down at it.

D. Did it knock you down ... the initial hit ?

F. No, I was sitting down. (pointing to the catapult) ... Those lift the planes out of the water...

D. And your watch started about midnight ? (Called Midwatch)

F. Yes, started at midnight.

D. And how long would your typical watch be ?

F. Four hours.

D. So you had just started your watch, just barely sat down.

F. Yes.

D. Did you feel a second hit ?

F. No. I didn't. They were close together. They'd just gone on continuous. The powder in the magazines was blowing up. And you couldn't really tell one from the other.

D. Some, not very many, thought there was a third hit.

F. Yes. I don't think so.

(Deb's thought) Probably some who thought they heard a third explosion, actually counted the powder in the magazines exploding, as a torpedo hit.

D. Did you ever know Dr. Lewis Haynes. ?

F. Yes.

D. I've read things that he's written or been asked. And also seen him on the discovery channel, telling about his experience. He seemed like such a nice, likeable guy. And I think he was one who thought there was a third blast.

F. Might have been.

D. It didn't sound like many of them thought that. Did you realize the ship had been torpedoed, actually. At the first of it.

F. Well, I tell, you I don't really know myself because we had never been hit by a torpedo before.

D. You hadn't. You had lived through the kamikaze hit, the suicide plane ...

F. But that was a bomb that went in through the decks of the ship and down in the oil. And blew a hole in the side of the ship.

D. Did the ship shift one way or did it go back and forth or just on it's side ...

F. The whole front end was blown off. So it went ahead and filled up with water. And it tipped over.

D. By the time you decided you had to swim off the ship, was it probably, maybe that moment you realized you had no choice here...the ship must be going down.

F. I went down, below, where I was. And I felt like the water was...I had to swim off. There was water up on the ship by that time.

D. I can't imagine that in 12 minutes...so quickly. Then you just had to come to the realization that she was going down.

F. I know. I couldn't go back. Ha Ha.

D. How soon was it once you swam off the ship, and you swam away from the ship I'm sure... how had the Navy prepared you to go into the sea ?

F. They said to jump off the high side. And if we had done that we'd have killed ourselves before we got to the water.

D. Really. So by hitting the port screw or...

F. Well, hitting the scaffolds from the latrines and stuff like that that's on the ship here sticking out...from the ship.

D. I've read where a couple of men did that...

F. Yeah..

D. And one survived it, and his teeth were driven up into his sinuses, but yet he survived...and had all this pain.

So they had told you to do that , but not a very wise piece of advice. Were you aware of the suction of the ship, that you could go down with the ship with the suction..

F. Yes, but it filled up with water so much there wasn't much suction. Some of the guys that went down with the ship kind of told us about how they "popped up".

D. Did you hear about that while you were in the water before the rescue came or did you hear about it years later...

- F. No. That was still surviving.
- D. ...they told that in the water yet...
- F. Yes.
- D. I imagine you were trying to swim away from the ship...
- F. Yea, I swam away and it was a good thing I did, because the crow's nest (pointing to the tower-like higher part of the ship...)
- D. Why is it called the crow's nest ? Is there something that sets in there or...
- F. It's the highest part on the ship. And I went off right down here... I was up here... and went out down here...right by the guns... (pointing to these areas on the model ship.)
- D. That time of night.....were there a lot of men on deck....
- F. Well, everybody was on watch, we just changed watch...right before that.
- D. A very small percentage of men would be on watch....
- F. Yes. There's only ... would be enough to man a gun, there's six to a gun
- D. So there were a lot of men that were below deck that time of night
- F. Oh, yea. All the flag personnel were below deck. I think they were still on it.
- D. So somehow, within 12 minutes, word got out to get off the ship or at least get a life jacket on
- F. But a lot of them didn't get off...
- D. Unfortunately....it's amazing as many got off the ship as they did to go into the water. Do you recall having contact with many men before the ship went down...when someone said get a life jacket ...
How soon was it do you think that you ran into other men or swam into them?
- F. Right away after I got off the ship. I had to take care of some of them, because I wasn't hurt. They were. I gave one guy a morphine surrette I don't know what happened to him ... probably died....
- D. So the injured men that you came across...burns mostly
- F. All burnt...terrible
- H. Where did you get the medical supplies to...
- F. It was on the survivors stuff. On the gear..

- D. In with the Kapok life...so there were a few things in there...
- F. I don't know if that stuff was in them or was on something...they had that.
- H. Maybe there were in that...in the life jackets because ...be prepared if something like this would happen...attached to the life jackets.
- F. Probably. I don't know where they got them.
- D. Do you remember having any other supplies...did you have a very small supply of food or water...
- F. Hah, we didn't have any water. We had some water, but it was _____water. I never drank any. I don't know how many people did.
- D. So your kapok jacket kept you, kept your head above water...
- F. Yes, yes.
- D. Did you have to tread water at all...
- F. No.
- D. Were you able to doze at all ...
- F. I suppose, I don't know.
- D. I read a lot of men...with the oil dumping, when the ship went down, a lot of men were covered with oil...I think the article I read said that you were too ...
- F. We all were. We all were.
- D. Did you swallow any of that...
- F. I suppose.
- D. I read where some men swallowed oil from the ship and some sea water....then got seriously ill from that. A lot of vomiting and diarrhea which, of course, dehydrated them even sooner. You were fortunate that you didn't have any of that ?
- F. I never got sick. No. I got banged up...when I went over the side of the ship...there's a gun shield. I think my leg scraped that when I went over.
- D. You could probably feel the salt water burning into that.
- F. Felt a lot of them. Both my legs. Salt water sores from the bottom up.
- D. Let's back up a little bit...were you drafted or did you enlist ?
- F. I enlisted.

D. And was it '42 ?

F. (looks to Mary)

M. ...still looking for it...

(everyone's looking for the date)

D. Why did you chose the Navy ?

F. I didn't. I chose the Marines.

D. Oh you did ! With your brother, Dan ?

F. No. Just because he was in there. But they said I was too small. Huh! He wasn't any bigger than I am.

D. Well they said Audie Murphy was too small too ! Little did they know, huh ! How did Orvin get in ?! (looking to Henrietta) ...Orvin...he must have been...about Florian's size, wasn't he ?

H. Yeah. Bigger build though...a little heavier....you've just been a peanut all your life Florian !

F. I only weighed 125#'s !

D.How tall are you ?

F. About 5'5".

H. Yeah, dad was about 5'7" and probably weighed 185#'s.

F. My brother, Dan, he was a little heavier than I was too...but you know when I went out to California one time to see him....when we were out (of the service). I needed a suit for where we were going...so he gave me one of his suits to put on and it fit !

H. So then why did they say you were too small for the Marines ?

F. I don't know. I guess they wanted something for the Navy.

D. So from there you decided on the Navy...

F. Yeah.

D. Where were you living ... where did you go to enlist ?

F. I was in Adams county then. I was working on the farm and they didn't need farm help in the winter. I was up there (meaning Adams county before moving to Mt. Horeb area) and I went to the draft board and signed up.

D. Did every county have a draft board ?

F. I suppose. I was rejected once.

D. From the Navy too ?

F. No, from the draft board. They wouldn't take me ! So I went back the second time.

D. Did they say why they wouldn't take you the first time ?.

F. [held out both arms and explained] I can't turn it over ... [he can turn his right hand over - palm down to palm up, but cannot do the same with his left.]

D. Oh, really.

F. they put me in 4F and then I went back to sign up again. And when they were looking at me, I held my hands like this ! [smiling proudly, held both arms out with both palms down]

D. You sly devil, you ! [we laughed] Oh, you're a fun guy !

H. In 1943, when he was 19. [Henrietta offered her finding of when Florian enlisted.]

D. OK. Since '43, but you'd probably been trying since 1942.

F. Yeah.

D. You went into the Navy, and you were 19 ... Damn good looking ... and 5'5" and 125#.

F. Yeah.

H. [offers to Deb] His [Florian's] son looks exactly like him. When I'm putting gas in some mornings in Mt. Horeb, I think its him.

D. Well I can see why ! Looking at you today, you've hardly a gray hair in your head, a very nice complexion ...

H. Its all that salt water !

D. I was thinking its all the golfing ! [all laughing]

M. Yeah, when we're together with his son, he'll say don't stand by me - they'll think I'm Dad ! [laughing again]

D. ... joined the Navy from Adams county. Where did they send you ?

- F. Great Lakes.
- D. ... fairly quickly after that ?
- F. Yeah, about, probably a week or two weeks.
- D. And you said 1943, do you remember what month ?
(they're looking again)
...you were well aware of war raging and ...
- F. That's were I went first when I had to go on ship was The Marianas.
- D. Was there a lot going on in the Pacific ...
- F. Yeah. There was.
- D. At that time was there ... in a comparison to the European Campaign vs. the Pacific, would you say they were both pretty heated about 1943, ...
- F. I tell you I don't know.
- D. How much awareness did you have ...
- F. We didn't have anything...
- D.Tell me when you joined the Navy, what ... you didn't join as Seaman 1st Class...
- F. I was an Apprentice.
- D. What are some of the first things they go over with you and teach you ?
- F. Well, the first thing they taught me was, ah, first night on the ship, my pea coat was swiped. Somebody took it. The next night, I swiped two of them !
(we're laughing)
That's what you learn !
(more laughing)
That's about the truth too. Just ask anybody, they learn to steal right quick.
- (Mary agrees)
- F. You didn't make a habit of it though.
- D. What would happen if somebody got caught doing that ?
- F. Nothing. But I wanted a coat because it was in the winter, it was cold.
- D. Well sure, and they were wool, weren't they ... Navy blue...
- F. Yes, yeah they were good coats ...

- D. Did you have some pretty nice sailor outfits ?
- F. Well, yeah.
- D. I can recall seeing some sailor outfits, all in the white, bell bottoms...
- F. Bell bottoms, you had to put on, you had to have it done.
- D. You had 'to have it done' ? What do you mean ?
- F. What they do is cut them and put some more material in. (he points to his lower leg and follows the outer seam from below the ankle up to his knee, demonstrating where they cut, then add a triangle of material to flare into a "bell bottom".
- D. What's the reason for bell bottoms ?
- F. I don't know. (he answers me, and wonders if I'm crazy for asking that)
- D. They didn't serve any purpose ...
- F. Not any service, that I could see ... they had to look better !
- D. They looked darn good, I thought !
- M. Sharp looking ! (Mary adds smiling happily)
- D. So, that type of a suit, was it a pullover with a tie in front and a squared off collar in back.
- F. Yes.
- D. What occasion, so to speak, would you be wearing that outfit ? On your everyday duties on the ship...
- F. Well, I had dress for the _____ whites, and dress whites ... about the only thing ...
- M. Didn't you wear dungarees....
- F. Oh yeah, we wore dungarees on ship.
- D. No particular reasons, days for wearing certain suits ...
- F. When you stood at attention, 'muster' in the morning, ... inspection ... we called it muster. And then you wore your dress blues or your dress whites. Otherwise you wore blue jeans.
- (As I type this, I guess I do remember my mom using the word, muster. She would 'muster up some breakfast for us' ...)

- D. You had to dress for morning inspection. This was before breakfast ?
- F. Yes.
- D. What time ? 0600 ?
- F. probably a difference ...because some of them were on watch. They couldn't be in their dress blues.
- D. . Could you wear your dress clothes to eat ...did you go eat breakfast from there?
- F. Yes. We had to change clothes ... put on dungarees...
- D. ... and what came next ?
- F. Went to work. Swab the deck. Ha Ha Ha Ha.
- D. Hands and knees ? Scrub buckets ? Toothbrushes ?
- F. Not there ... not there ... that was in the mess hall. You could eat off the floor. And they had an inspector come around when you got done ... that floor.... Everything ... if there's one spot of water on the floor anyplace, you'd have done the whole thing over again ! (start over)
- D. ... anything I've read about the Navy ships ... is about the immaculate, how clean ... the ships are ... you constantly worked at that. So it surprised me when I read, and tell me if you recall this ... you were at Mare Island for repairs from a kamikaze plane ... So you left Mare Island, CA ... headed for Tinian ... and you had the A Bomb on board ... you were sailing for Pearl Harbor ...
- And there were two fires on the ship. Do you recall that at all ? ... I read they were from shipyard workers ... had left some trash aboard ... And I thought ... how could that happen on an immaculate ship ...
- Let's go back ... you were in the southern end of the Okinawa Chain, ... in a safe, deep harbor that could hold 75 ships. This is backing up to where you were when the kamikaze plane hit ... 15 miles west of Naha where you must have been in harbor.
- F. I don't know...
- D. It was predawn, March 30. 1945, suicide plane hit the port side of the fantail. Nine men were killed ?
- F. Flag personnel ... Spruance was aboard...
- D. Admiral Spruance was aboard ? Here's another question then. The *Indianapolis* was his Flagship ? And what does that mean, his Flagship ?
- F. That was the ship he took ... going around different places.
- D. So, because an admiral is aboard, that ship he is on, is called *His Flagship* ?

- M. ... he's in charge of ... (Mary assists me in understanding)
- D. So does he have his own Flag that's flown ?
- F. Yes.
- D. When the suicide plane hit, where were you ?
- F. I was on watch.
- D. Do you recall seeing it come in ?
- F. Yes. It landed partly on the ship. Something _____ was on the wing, went through the ship, and the other one exploded out and about. At that time we were at general quarters ...
- D. At that time you would have been Seaman 1* Class, you would have taken your test ...
- F. I don't know if I had...
- D. On watch, you see a suicide plane coming in, what would your duty have been ?
- F. On a five inch gun ...my duty was ... and I top loaded five inch shells (gestures describing these as about two to three feet long and five inches around) ...loaded them on a pot loader. A pot loader is three holes for those shells to go in, nose first and we had to crank them in to set the fuse on them, and then they were fired.
- D. You would go and man that outfit and start in ...
- F. Yeah, I never had a chance to man it.
- D. It came in that fast ?
- F. Yes. Just one plane.
- D. ...as soon as you saw a plane and identified it as Japanese, you would assume it's a suicide plane ...
- F. Yes. They come down like this. (demonstrating practically straight down, and laughs)
- D. They must not have had any hesitance at all to do that ...
- F. No.
- H. (to Florian) No wonder you don't like to fly.
- D. How about sailing ... have you ever been back on a ship or a boat ...

F. Oh, yeah,

M. He had his own boat. And we've gone on a couple of the cruises ...

D. You have ! And did you hobnob with the Captain ... ? (laughing)

F. No I didn't !

M. Yes you did !

F. Oh yah ... (laughing, embarrassedly)

D. You probably could have told him all kinds of things !

F. I probably could of ! He always sat at our table.

D. Did you tell him that you were on the *Indianapolis* ?

F. I never told anybody.

D. You never told anybody ... just kept that to yourself ...

M. I never knew anything about it at all, until we got an invitation to the reunion... I said "What's this ?" I had no idea.

D. When did the reunions start ? Before McVay died ?

M. Yes.

D. And he died in '68.

M. 1960 was the first one.

F. I don't know. I went to two or three of them !

M. I thought you said you went to the first one in '65 ...

D. And how long have you two been married ?

M. Since '73. I've been to all of them since '75. That was the first one I went to ...

D. (to Mary) So you were wondering what this invitation was ...
(to Florian) What did you tell her ?

F. (innocently, but smiling sheepishly, he responded) My girlfriend !

H. (said sure of herself) I can hear him saying it ! That's the way I go to meet my girlfriend !

We all had a good laugh at this remark !!!

D. (to Florian, fondly) You character, you !

F. Yeah, to go through that, you gotta be a character.

D. ...you gotta have some character, a lot of strength in your character ...

H. (agreeing with Deb) Yes. You have to .

D. So you had to tell her !

F. **Yeah.**

D. Did he offer much at first ?

M. No. No, I found out a lot more at the reunions than from him there for a while. Now he talks about it a little more.

F. Well, that's something you don't care about talking about, I think.

H. Most WWII veterans don't.

D. Do you think it was partly because of how you were raised ...

F. No. they're all that way. All of them. They never said much about ... what they did.

D. Talking about the WW II vets ... do you think the WW I vets were that way too ?

F. I don't know.

M. Now, my dad was a WW I vet, and he, I always thought, talked about it too much . He dwelled on it. He would talk about it a lot ... he was in France, on the front lines. He saw a lot. My daughter interviewed him for school, so we've got all that typed up ... I'm glad she did that. I was not interested when I should have been ... but then the next generation was ...

H. Are we ever though ? I know I wish I would have asked Dad lots of questions.

F. His youngest grandson interviewed him (Florian) so we have a tape, but we haven't seen it yet.

D. Kerama Retto, island 50 miles west of the southern end of the Okinawa Chain, where you were hit by the kamikaze plane. The damage it did, divers put a temporary patch ...

F. Yeah, yeah they had undersea welders there.

D. This is another little thing there, I read about ... before you left for Mare Island for further repairs ... there were Marines aboard the ship ... Did the Navy often carry

Marines ?

F. They always ... probably always Marines on there. Our first one, that ran the reunion, was a Marine.

D. Was that McCoy. Giles McCoy ?

F. Yes. Giles McCoy.

D. He seems like a very outgoing person. Not that I know him ... I've seen him on TV. I think he was the first one that Hunter Scott notified too ?

F. Yes.

D. He wasn't too far north of Florida, was he ? From Pensacola, where Hunters lived.

F. I think Mississippi, he had a place there where he was a bone crusher !

D. He was a chiropractor ?

F. Yes.

D. OK. Evidently there were rumors, in this area where the divers were ... that Japanese would sneak onto the ships late at night and try to kill people that were on watch. And they were very sneaky. One night there was a Marine found with a bad gash in his head. And they never solved that. Do you remember that at all.

F. I know one night they were looking for somebody, I think people got carried away.

D. Maybe he had a fight with another sailor ...

F. ...never saw if some of those guys were **sane or insane** !

D. Maybe they stole each others pea coats !

F. They didn't need them out there !

D. Back to California ... to Mare Island and here's my question, that I brought up before: Were you one of the sailors (or Marines) that stormed the nearby town of Vallejo ... and you also had assistance from the Navy Shore Patrol - they were pretty understanding.

M. No one got you ... (Mary said to Florian fondly and happily).

H. I think so.

D. I think so too. He's quiet on that one ...

- D. Do you have any beer ? Do you like beer ? (to Florian) Wine ?
- M. Brandy. (we're laughing)
- D. July 12, 1945. Captain McVay got this unexpected order. The *Indy* was to be ready for sea in 4 days. Do you remember that ?
- F. I remember we had to have it ready, bring stores aboard. That's about all. Not much. Of course they were getting ready to hit the mainland, **in force** !
- D. So you assumed you would be going into Japan, or pretty darn close to it... What were you thinking about that ?
- F. Well, we didn't, we didn't know anything about that. They got that all ready ... well we knew ...
- D. Did you have a sense that you would make it, what was going to happen ?
- F. I never thought about that.
- H. You were just there to do a job and that's the way it was.
- D. You never really wondered 'how are we doing in this war ? Are we going to win this' ?
- F. No. I didn't have that to think about.
- D. Didn't you ever beat your chest and say 'we're taking them ! They're going down!
- F. (laughing) Somebody else worried about that !
- H. They didn't have time.
- F. Well, you just do your job.

12 July 1945

- D. Captain McVay receives order, *Indy* to be ready for sea in 4 days.
- F. I remember having to be ready right away, having to bring stores aboard. They were getting ready to hit the mainland - in full force .
- D. Japanese mainland ?
- F. Yeah.
- D. So, you knew you were going to go into Japan.
- F. Yeah.

D. What were you thinking about that?

F. Well we didn't. We didn't know anything about that. They got that already before...

D. No I mean...you were thinking you were going to storm the Japanese mainland....

F. Well we knew we were going to go in there definitely.

D. What were you feeling about that? Did you have a sense that you would make it or what was going to happen...?

F. I never thought about that.

D. You never did.

H. You were just there to do a job and that was the way it was.

D. So you never really wondered or thought "how are we doing in this war ? Are we going to win this war ? "

F. I didn't have that to think about.

D. So did beat your chest and say "we're taking them, they're going down ! "

F. Somebody else worried about that.

D. OK.

H. They didn't have time.

F. Well, you just do your job.

M. You didn't have to think about the politics of it.

H. And you had to remember these are young, young men.

D. Well, yeah, you guys should be worrying about what girl you're gonna get in your backseat.

(Mary laughs)

F. It was never on my mind either. (chuckle) It did not. I didn't even have a girlfriend when I left.

(Much laughter)

M. It didn't take you long after you got home though.

(Laughter)

D. You probably had a girl in every port though.

END OF TAPE 1
SIDE A

Tape shut off while we were laughing at some point, so unsure what we missed on tape, other than the start of describing Navy Attire.

Tape 1 Side B

D. We're back to the Navy attire. You had a white cap to go with your white outfit.

F. And with the blue uniform, it had a blue hat. You remember (looking to Mary) how that was... She was married to a sailor before me .

D. Oh, so she's got a thing for sailors too.

M "Yeah", agreeing.

F. And it was a bigger cap you know, I think it was just round.

D. Here's a burning question. Secret pockets in the hats ? Yes ?

F. (hesitation) No, I don't think so.

D. Its ok, you can tell me. (Laughter)

D. There had to have been. Secret pockets, in your hats. Or did you have secret pockets elsewhere... on your uniform.

F. Yeah, they did. (without hesitation) In the blue dress pants.

D. In the pants.

F. Yeah.

D. But not in the caps ?

F. No. Not that I know of.

D. Seriously ?

M. You read some place that they did ? (to Deb)

D. Well, I saw it on the RFD channel. (laughter) I sound like Gomer Pyle.

F. Some of these guys, they went out and got drunk and got in trouble, see. They got rolled.

D. Some of them, but not you.

F. No. And they cut their pockets out. Cut them with a knife. They cut their pockets right out of their pants.

M. To get the...

F. ...to get the money. It aint a pocket up here (pointing to his side abdomen) It's a watch pocket.

H. You know, like on a suit, a slit pocket, for a watch pocket.

D. So, did you get an issue watch ? A Navy issue ?

F. I didn't have a watch. I had a wrist watch.

F. But ah, these guys would go out and get drunk. And somebody else would get their pocket if they had any money in it.

Deb told the Navy blue hat info from the RFD channel...Florian still said no knowledge of these.

F. We had dog tags.

D. When you were rescued, did you still have them on ?

F. No.

D. So they somehow got over your head, or came off...

F. No, they were hanging on the bunk above me.

D. So you weren't even wearing them...

F. No.

D. You didn't have to wear them ?

F. Not out to sea.

D. Did you have two dog tags or one ?

F. I had two. I don't even know what the second one was for.

D. Notification, I think. One stayed with the body and the other one was for notification of you're killed or hurt.

F. I get it now. I never wore mine because I had incinerator duty...burn the trash. And a Mexican guy and I, we had that duty. I had a dog tag on and it got kind of hot ! It burnt me so I took it off and hung it on the bed above me.

D. OK. So the ship's got to get ready. No more shore leave. He's got tears in his eyes (joking). (laughter). Did you have a sense of secrecy ?

F. No.

D. So you felt that sense of urgency, but not more than any other time that you pulled out... Did you see the two boxes... there were two, right ? The A Bombs.

F. One was out on the quarter deck. (Looking at a model of the *Indy*) this isn't a very good picture, because there's a place to keep the plane, inside, in a hanger deck. (pointed to a plane on the model, mid ship, with a seemingly "chunk" out and the deck was lower in this "chunk" than the deck in front of or behind it (port bow). He then pointed to a plane "on the catapult." There's the deck up here, someplace.

D. And that's the quarter deck ?

F. No, This (model) is kind of mixed up.

D. OK. Now you've intrigued me to ask something else. I guess I only knew that ships with planes...there was a landing strip.

F. Well, that was their carrier. This here, that's what they used this hoist for (pointing to the catapult). Its to pick the planes up out of the water. These planes were *scout planes* for, and with, the ship. (pointed to guns) See these here were open turrets guns...this was an old ship.

D. That ship had really seen a lot hadn't it. Now, is the *Indy* the only ship that you were on, since you enlisted.

F. Yes, besides the one that brought me back. Now you see these screws on the ship ? (pointing to the bow area, below the water line)

D. Yes.

F. That suicide plane knocked two of them off. So they only had the two on the other side, to take us back to the United States.

D. So was that like being on the slow boat ? You were that much slower going back ?

F. Yes. We had beans for breakfast and beans for dinner and...(laughter)

M. They had a lot of wind !

F. That's the truth though. We didn't have any water. We had to take salt water bathes. That's all we had.

D. So that's why they're called Navy beans huh ?

F. Yup. We had Navy beans for breakfast every day. We never had water or nothing.

D. How could you stand it below deck ?

F. And no Beano...

M. And he still eats beans. I don't. (much laughter)

D. So do you remember the Sunday dinner the cooks made (the Sunday of the sinking) ?

Thinking....

D. They cooked up a special Sunday dinner...

F. They did ?

D. Yeah. You don't remember ?

F. No.

D. I think I read that it was a good chicken dinner.

F. I don't know.

D. When you sailed to Tinian, did you have any awareness or did you know that you made record breaking time ?

F. Yeah, they did tell us that. Cause we went from one island to the other at night.

D. I think it was something like 5,000 miles in less than 10 days.

F. I don't know.

D. OK. Trying to be in sequence was really hard, but now its fun as we talk about it, we get sidetracked and it doesn't make any difference. And here I thought it was a big deal. (Henrietta and Mary are laughing at me !)

D. OK. Its July 14th Saturday morning. The *Indy* went out for a trial run. Back in 24 hours at Mare Island. No Liberty For Anyone !

F. That's when the fire was !

D. That's when the fire was.

F. I think. Because I do remember they said there was a fire once.

D. You're right !

F. I don't remember what time.

D. It says as soon as the ship was tied up, Captain McVay was called to San Francisco and told to bring the *Indy* to Hunter's Point. I was thinking my notes said something more about the fire but they don't.

D. OK. Is that where they put the atomic bomb on ? Cause they had one big box.

(unsure what F. said)

There was a Marine on guard on that 24 hours a day.

D. One large piece guarded by a Marine detachment on the quarter deck. And then a smaller package was watched over by two Army Officers in their quarters.

F. It was welded down to the floor. That was a _____.

D. So you knew from the get go they were under heavy guard.....yes or no ?

F. No. they didn't say anything. We always had rum heads (laughter) aboard ship. Nobody knew who they were. Nobody knew anything ! The Captain did. That's all that had to know.

M. The Captain is the only one they had to tell.

F. He's responsible for the ship. As far as the Atomic Bomb, he didn't event know that.

D. That's what I've read too.

D. So going back to the *Indy* was to report to Hunter's Point.

F. That I wouldn't know. That was none of my business either.

D. Hunter's Point Navy Yard in San Francisco that afternoon, which was Saturday. It's interesting that all these years later, there's *Hunter Scott*.

M. Yeah, that is interesting.

D. How soon did you find out after the delivery, after the sinking, the two Army Officers that were guarding this package, the one that you said was welded down in the quarter deck, they were actually, well you thought they were a Major and a Captain. (Deb's error. Correction: quarter deck - welded down and guarded by Marine detachment. The smaller one in these officer's quarters under their observation).

F. I didn't know anything about that, at that time.

D. They were incognito. They were actually scientists.

F. I suppose.

That's what the one book said. They had come all the way from testing (formulating) it in Arizona (correction New Mexico) and they didn't even know until they got to Tinian, and then there were some kind of signals when they handed them over, that the testing had gone the way it was supposed to have (the Trinity Shot) so they (scientists) knew that everything was a go from there.

M. I hadn't seen that.

F. Did you see that when they tested that bomb ? New Mexico.

D. Yes. You mean like on the History Channel?

F. That's where I saw it.

D. Did you realize that these two guards were actually scientists ?

F. I never saw them.

D. So you didn't hear about it, even after words.

F. No.

D. Have you seen a lot of documentaries on TV about the *Indianapolis* ?

F. Not a lot of them. I know there's more.

M. We've got some of them taped.

F. I've got about ten of them, I suppose. One is out right now.

M. I don't know how many.

D. So, July 16th, Sunday, at 0830 you were on your way to Pearl Harbor from Mare Island (Correction: Hunter's Point). Yes ?

F. Did we have the bomb on then ? We were on our way out.

D. Yes. The question I was leading to was...you never had a feeling of despair or

doom or never have anything come over you that this trip isn't going to go right or something won't go right. You just always had the same....this is what we're doing, here we go...

F. Yeah. I can't remember everything that transpires, you know. But anyway, when we left the Pearl Harbor or the States, I don't think we stopped anywhere except where we unloaded the bomb. Tinian.

D. Did you stop at Pearl Harbor ? For fueling ?

F. We may have, I don't know.

D. This was your voyage before the ship sank. You left Mare Island (Hunter's Point), to Pearl Harbor to refuel, from there you went to Tinian, delivered the bomb,

F. Probably.

D. From there, you went to Guam. And when you left Guam, you were to go to Leyte Gulf. You were supposed to have a training mission...

F. Yeah. We were supposed to meet up with another ship. We never showed up.

D. So between Guam and Leyte...

F. Yes. In the Philippine Sea. You know more about that trip than I do ! You've done a good job !

[Thank You]

D. The Sailors were guessing what was in the big box.

F. Yeah.

D. Do you remember what some of the guesses were ?

F. Sure. A piano for... [laughter]

H. For entertainment ? [laughing]

D. For who ?

F. For the one at the base on the island. They said it was a piano.

H. So, if a big star came in they could play it to entertain you.

F. Well, the Marines didn't know. They just said something...you know.

D. Do you remember any of the other guesses ?

F. No,

D. Do you want me to tell you some of the guesses that I read in a book ?

F. What kind of book did you have ? (laughter)

D. This one, Ordeal By Sea. they say that this one is the most accurate account. I don't know whether it is or it isn't.

M. I'll have to read that one. I haven't read that one. Doug Stanton's are the one's that are the best. In Harm's Way.

D. Yes ?

F. Did you read the one where they said they rescued...pulled them out of the water ? Do you have that, Mary...

M. I know I've got it, I'll have to read that one again. Who's it by....?

D. Thomas Helm (Ordeal By Sea).

F. OK. What were they...some of the guesses...

D. OK. Here's a few :

It was a big box of soft mattresses for the Admirals and Generals. (Laughter)
One guess was that it was a new car for General MacArthur. (Laughing again)
One was it was full of cases of whiskey for the officers.

H. Couldn't you hear these 21 year olds saying things like that.

F. Yeah.

D. They probably even bet on their guesses.

F. Yeah.

D. Oh, I also read where they drank gallons of coffee while plotting and planning

M. And scheming...

D. To find out what was in the contents.

F. Never entered my mind to dig that deep. I guess I asked a Marine what he was guarding. I didn't know the Marine. I don't know which one, now, anymore, but, ... I says I guess a piano, sure.

M. (Laughing)

F. Captain _____. (Laughter) He didn't know... I didn't care either.

- D. So was Giles McCoy along to guard the A Bomb or was he just along...
- F. He was just...he was there. He was a Petty Officer.
- M. I counted. There were 39 Marines on it.
- F. Guard Duty. In fact, if somebody is in brig (ship's brig - located under the fantail) they have a Marine on it.
- D. Oh, I read about that too. I think it was Giles McCoy that delivered the prisoners on (to the) deck, and handed them over to ... I don't remember who ... and then they took their handcuffs off and gave them kapok jackets and...
- F. Sure...I saw them down in the brig. That 's the only time I ever saw them.
- D. What would one have to do to land in a brig on a ship ? Something pretty drastic....
- F. They were Japanese.
- D. Oh, they were Japanese prisoners. Well they never said (in the book). I thought it was ... you know ... keeping anonymity..
- F. Oh, that time when the ship went down ...there was ... that was guys from the ship.
- D. So, what would they have to do ... how drastic ... how badly would they have to behave...
- F. Not very much.
- D. Not very much ? And they'd throw you in the brig.
- F. Yeah.
- D. Really. Like stealing a pea coat ?
- F. Probably.
- D. Or stealing two pea coats ! (Laughing)
- F. If you stole one out there in the South Pacific ... there gonna kill ya ! (much laughing)
- D. Here's talking about the trip and how fast it was ... just another unbelievable fact about the *Indianapolis* that in just 10 days they crossed 5,000 miles of ocean, averaging 500 miles a day ... And as you entered the harbor at Tinian, do you remember what ... it says a real calm sea ...
- F. You know the night the ship went down, there was big _____swells, about

10 feet high.

H. Calm before the storm ...

F. Yup.

D. Describe Tinian.

F. Well, I'll tell you how much I saw of it. Through the sights on the gun.

D. That was it, huh. Do you recall the color of the water ? Was it that pretty blue, Caribbean blue.

F. Yeah. Some days. Some days it wasn't. We never got to shore ... in Tinian.

D. Did it look like a tropical island ?

F. [hesitance] Yeah, I suppose. By the time we saw it, the trees were all smashed, their grounds sticking out, stubs of trees sticking up.

D. [jokingly] And coconuts lined up on the beach, carved out that said "Orvin was hear" ! (Henrietta's dad, a Marine)

F. No, it was ... well because we shelled that place for three days before Marines went in.

D. You were there, on the *Indianapolis*, shelling. Shelling Tinian. So you had been there before.

F. Yah. All day and all night. Shot our shells at night, so we could see it.

D. So, did that about blow your eardrums out ? Standing next to it ...

F. You're supposed to have cotton in them or ear plugs.

D. But you didn't put them in.

F. No.

D. And your hearing is very good !

F. No, it isn't very good.

D. It is very good, I think.

F. If there was any other noise in here. I couldn't hear nothing.

D. So the Bomb is delivered ... it's Friday, July 27th. And you left that same afternoon. And set out for Guam ... for refueling, stores and ammunitions at [is it pronounced] Apra Harbor, at Guam ?

F. I don't know.

D. And that [stores, etc] through the day and night and you were ready to sail for Saturday morning. And McVay had lunch with Admiral Spruance ... so ... she still was his flagship ... or not at that time... and they just had lunch ?

F. I don't know. We got rid of him someplace along the line. (we laughed)

D. You unloaded him somewhere.

F. Yeah, but I don't know where. I don't.

D. Maybe he got off with the bomb. I know I read it somewhere, but I don't have it in these particular notes. OK. So the orders for the *Indy* were to proceed to Leyte for a two week training period. You said you were going to meet up with another ship ? (actually, he stayed at Guam after the damage from the kamikaze, never sailing back to the states for the repairs)

F. Yeah, I don't know

M. To meet up with the battleship *Idaho*, to begin gunnery training for the planned invasion of Japan.

D. Here's another little fact. Were you aware of or did you know the ship's dentist, Dr. Earl Henry ?

F. No.

D. It says that he had spent months building an exact replica of the *Indianapolis*.

F. Teeth and all huh. (laughing)

D. And it said down to the last detail, to the last *chock and scupper*. what is a chock and a scupper, on a ship ?

F. I wouldn't know.

D. You never saw it or heard about it (the model).

F. No.

D. The 28th of July (Saturday) , the *Indy* left Apra Harbor, Guam at 0910 hours. And you should've had a real simple, uneventful voyage to get to Leyte. And Captain McVay was *supposedly* given a *routine* warning that three submarine contacts had been reported within 200 miles of the ship's plotted course. He asked for an escort, but was told that no destroyer or destroyer escort was available. And the book said it made little difference, the *Indy* had been traveling unescorted for most of her career, so one more wouldn't matter. Combatant ships like the *Indy* were generally assumed to be capable of making their own way.

But from everything I've read, he was given nothing but routine orders or warnings. There was nothing significant. It was the routine to have a watchful eye and what have you, plus there was getting to be a feeling of How many islands had you guys taken in the Pacific ... and that the war was really drawing to a close - and that you would be attacking the Japanese mainland. By that point maybe there wasn't even the usual fear or apprehension of being torpedoed like earlier in the war ... do you think ?

F. Probably not. I don't know. Because all those _____ people high up in office knew what was going on. We didn't get to know. They didn't tell us anything.

D. Then I read where a radio message *was sent* from Guam, giving the ETA (11 - 11:30 am Tuesday, July 31st) and that six responsible officers in the foreword area *should* have made note of it. But with 100's of arrival and departure signals logged in a normal day, there simply wasn't enough time to make a detailed study of each report. Mostly because the *Indy* had been on a top secret mission, her name was deleted from most arrival and departure boards in the Philippine Sea.

F. Yeah, ya.

D. So that just added for the un-accounting for it. Now there were 1196 men on board to begin with.

F. Something like that. I was thinking there was 1200 something.

D. Which battles were you part of with the *Indy* ?
Guadal Canal ? "yes"
Coral Sea ? "yes"
Iwo Jima ? "yes"

And what ship was your dad on, Henrietta ?

H. I don't think I remember.

D. I don't remember either.

F. Was he in the *Turkey Shoot* ?

D. What was the *Turkey Shoot* ?

M. That was the Marianas.

H. Oh, the Marianas, yup.

D. So when you went to these islands to do battle, is that when you carried a lot of Marines then, because the Navy got them there or...

F. No ... we carried them all the time.

D. You carried them all the time ... it was just when you went to a battle, you had

many more of them on ...

F. They never went to battle. They had to have the Marines for ... if the officers went anyplace to see somebody or were called, they had to go with Marines. And the same way with the brig. If they had prisoners in the brig, the Marines guarded them.

D. So that's the responsibility of the Marines on a battleship and the *Indy* was a battleship.

F. "Yeah."

D. So, Henrietta, your dad would have been more on a carrier. (a Scout Sniper, 4th Marine Div.)

H. Yeah, a carrier.

F. Well that's a battleship. They had airplanes to fight the battle.

M. How long was your dad in ?

H. Same time.

D. Do you remember the flag raising ... at Iwo Jima ?

F. No.

D. Do you remember the horns of the ships and ...

F. I heard about it after I got out.

D. You were off shore at Iwo Jima ?

M. Yeah, during the taking of it.

D. During the taking of it. So you don't remember it (the flag raising).

F. No.

D. (to Henrietta) Now, your dad, he was offshore too ...

H. He was in one of those little boats. What are those little boats called ... in the water right there ... at the raising of the flag.

F. I don't know.

D. The boat that carried them to shore from the ship.

F. I don't know. _____ (motor weigh boat ?)

H. I suppose that's what they were called.

F. We had a couple ...

H. At the first raising of the flag.

M. She has a snapshot her dad took of that, in your pictures here.

H. This is a snapshot that had.

M. That's a close one to the famous one.

H. That's in dad's photo album that he has.

D. Sunday, July 30th Indy was quiet. Almost as in peacetime. The weather was overcast, the waves were choppy.

When you were swimming away from the ship, did you ever turn and see ... did you see the ship actually go down ?

F. Yes. I turned around to see, cause that crow's nest was getting pretty close to me.

D. I read where there were three predominate sounds within minutes of the sinking of the ship, from different clusters of men.

F. Yes.

D. Do you remember what they were ?

F. No.

D. Says 'men were calling out to each other'. Some people were wondering ... Am I alone ?

F. Ya, ya.

D. The wounded ...and then coughing and vomiting from the oil and salt water that they had swallowed.

F. Yeah, ya.

D. And then after you were in the water, there was a bulging canvas bag, do you know anything about that ... and it was full of extra kapok life jackets. There was a double supply delivered to the ship ... somehow. Another coincidence - miracle and it had bobbed up. So they got at it cause a lot of them didn't have any

M./H. ...didn't have any, yeah.

I looked up the meaning of kapok, thinking it was some sort of rescue gear / life jacket. The meaning is the stuffing or cushion - like bulk of the inside of the jacket.

D. Evidently they had ordered new kapok life jackets ... and when they didn't come timely enough, they called ... where is it ... inadvertently they delivered two stores of it.

F. Those kapok life jackets were only good for 78 hours or something like that ...

D. And somehow they lasted longer than that.

M. Sort of.

D. Sort of ? So after a couple of days did they seem to get waterlogged or ...

F. yeah, they kind of took you down. Mine took me down to my [pointed to his mouth area]. I could open my mouth and get a mouth full of water.

D. Oh, my gosh ...

F. I think somebody must have put me into a boat. I don't remember the last day. But I think somebody did. My life jacket was taking me down...

D. And by then, I'm sure there was no extra supply.

F. No, no.

D. So you said you remember Dr. Lewis Haynes...do you remember Dr. Modisher ? I think they said the day the ship went down, they had spent the day giving shots to everybody. You probably had one.

F. I don't remember.

M. You gave some shots, you said.

F. When they got off the ship. They were out there, you know.

D. Do you remember Father Thomas Conway ?

F. I don't know. What about him ?

D. He survived initially, but he wore himself down swimming to clusters of men and saying prayer with them. Trying to help everybody that he could and he wore himself out and died. And there were two sailors that did too.

By Tuesday, late Tuesday night, they started "Cowboy Duty". People swam around trying to break up fights and rounding up strays, bringing them back to the clusters ... there was Fr. Thomas Michael Conway, Ensign David Park and Seaman Garland Rich. These two sailors wore themselves out and they died too.

M. You always credit Louie DeBernardi (Boatswain's Mate 1* Class, with a big nose from Sacramento, CA.) for saving you by slapping you around when you wanted to drink the water.

F. Yeah, Louie DeBernardi ...

- H. You'd get delirious ?
- F. Yeah.
- M. (lovingly) Yeah, and he was just a little guy too.
- D. So, he was trying to reason with you and somehow got you to ...
- F. I don't know if he stopped me or not ! Ha Ha Ha.
- D. So you don't remember at that point. So you know about what day that was or what day you actually remember.
- F. I think it was probably the last day.

End of Side B, Tape 1

Next page for Tape 2

TAPE 2
SIDE A
(I THINK)

Florian Stamm
June 5, 2007
Mt. Horeb Residence of F. & M. Stamm

D. We're talking about the Survivors Reunion this year, July 5 - 8, 2007, the 62nd Anniversary Reunion. Mary is telling me about the oldest survivor - is 100 years old . His name is Tom Goff. Sailor ? Marine ?

M. Sailor.

D. Do you remember him ?

M. Oh, yeah. We talked to him at the last reunion. He's a little guy too.
Deb's thoughts and notes... [Thomas Guy Goff, S1c, according to Ordeal By Sea, by Thomas Helm. Shipfitter Third Class originating from Homerville, Ohio, according to Abandon Ship by Richard Newcomb.]

Let's do the math. Its 2007. The ship sank in 1945, or 62 years ago. This would have made him 38 while drifting in the sea ... I think ...

Back to the tape:

D. I read too, that there was no logic to the survivors ...where as you would think maybe a middle aged man wouldn't manage in the sea, like a younger man may be more physically fit. There was no logic to how or why or who survived. ... I think it was the set of circumstances that everybody had. Whether they were injured, how well hydrated they were when they went into the water ...

F. Yes, yes.

M. If they ate that chicken dinner ...

Laughing...

F. With me, I never got hurt. But some of them got hurt. Some of them inhaled a lot of smoke and stuff. [he offers gratefully]

D. Right, so some of them were compromised when they went into the water. And you said how many survivors left ?

F./M. 83 left,

F. There was 317 total to start.

D. I think I asked you this before. I'll ask it a little differently. Not about Vallejo !!!

Laughter.

D. Again, going back to surviving in the water. Lasting ... in the water. Do you think

there was anything with your upbringing ... was there any common denominator, common factor among the survivors that anybody can put a finger on ?

F. No. I knew how to swim. They made us swim in Great Lakes, in the pool. I made the test, I didn't have to take swimming lessons. A lot of them had to take swimming lessons. Some of them that were out in the water with us didn't even know how to swim. But that didn't make a difference.

H. That's what my dad said too.

F. They're ... not with my bringing up.

D. Hard work.

M. Yea, and responsibility, I bet.

D. And determination ... goes along with that .

F. Stubbornness.

D. Positive, optimistic person ?

F. Where's that... [to Mary]

Mary brings a little sign to the table

D. It says 'You can always tell a German, but you can't tell him much.'

Laughing ...

M. Couldn't tell him he wasn't gonna make it. He's gonna make it !

D. ... maybe that's part of your upbringing ' this is what you do, ' ! And when an obstacle comes along, you don't look at it that its an obstacle. You look at it as, ok, what am I gonna do to get over this ... this is the road I'm taking ...

F. Yes, yea.

H. My dad always said "can't wasn't in the vocabulary".

M. Yea.

H. "I can, I can." [her dad used to say]

F. Mine too. Ever since I was an electrician. Somebody would say "I can't do that ". "Don't say can't. Do it " ! That's what I had to do too. Sometimes I had to go home and sleep on it and go back the next day and do it.

D. See, he was meant to be a Marine from the get go ! What is it the Marines say? The difficult takes time. The impossible takes a little more time.

D. That first night, after you swam off the ship ... by dawn the next morning ... what had taken place that first night ?

F. Well, we got ... I suppose we grouped after a while, not right away. We had these floater nets. What they are is a big net with floaters about that big around. Strong sewn, and they'd float. You'd hang on to it. Keep together with a bunch of guys.

D. So you knew fairly quickly that you weren't the only survivor of the ship.

F. Oh, yah.

D. were there several of them [floater nets] ?

F. I wouldn't know. I know of one. That's one that I was hanging on ...

D. The cluster of men you were with. Twenty men ? Ten men ?

F. I couldn't say ...

D. Pretty big number ?

F. Quite a few. I don't know ...

M. ... you were picked up by the *Basset* ...

F. The *Basset*, yes. They went about and picked up wherever guys were ... they picked me up in a basket ...

M. The *Basset* picked up most of the - 148. And the *Doyle* picked up 94. And there were smaller amounts by other ships.

D. Where in ... the first ship to arrive ... do you know throughout Friday ... what cluster of men you were with ... were you one of the earliest to be rescued ...

F. No.

D. You weren't aware that you guys had been spotted in the water by Mr. Gwinn ?

M. Wilbur Gwinn. The Angel. (Mary had shown me his picture shortly after taking me into the *Indianapolis* room of their home and introduced me to his picture - calling him the Angel.)

F. No.

D. You weren't aware of the [other] plane that landed on the water ?

F. No.

D. You were pretty lucky that somebody pulled you aside .. And helped you ...

F. I think that somebody put me on a life boat.

D. What was your first realization ... your first memory ... where were you ... that you were consciously aware that you had been rescued ?

F. In the motor whale boat ... they pulled me aboard the ship ... and picked us up ... is when I came to.

D. Actually before you got on the *Basset* ...?

F. I don't remember any thing ... of that.

D. Did you regain consciousness on the *Basset* ?

F. ... when I was being pulled up out of the motor whale boat.
It was one of these ... nets ...

F. ... maybe it happened before that ... I don't know ...

D. Did you consciously absorb that ... that you'd been rescued ? Or kind of a vague ...

F. I was out of it. I remember the guy putting me in the shower ...

We found a picture in a book of a rescue basket being pulled up the side of, to be put into, a ship.

F. Yeah. Only it was a smaller one than that. And they pulled me out of the ... it was a smaller rescue ship. And they put me in one of those, because I couldn't stand up.

D. There was a lot of men that couldn't ...

F. They gave us a shower.

D. You remember the shower ...

F. Distillate. Like gasoline, only it isn't gasoline. Its distillate. That's what they run in the whale boats.

D. ... the shower ... they were helping you ... getting you cleaned off. They probably already realized that you had ulcers on your legs... You had some awareness in the water that you had these ulcers ?

F. Not in the water. I never thought about that.

D. Did you ever have any pain in the water ?

F. I don't think so. Still don't.

D. Did you have pain in the hospital ?

F. No.

D. Not on the golf course ?

M. Especially not on the golf course !

We're laughing a little again ...

F. No. I don't know when I really came to. I went to sleep. I think I slept for a couple days ... at least a day. Because it was early in the morning when I went in ... and when I woke up, it was starting to get daylight.

M. You said they asked you what you wanted to drink ...

F. Oh, yeah ... I said I wanted pear juice. (he said wryly) They brought it ! And that milk they had - a mechanical cow - aboard ship. Best milk I ever drank.

D. .. they probably really treated you like royalty.

F. In that one book it said that the guys that were on the ship didn't have any place to sleep. They had all the survivors in their beds.

D. I bet they didn't mind a bit !

M. No. Their stories are something too. They come to the reunions too, some of them. We have a couple books by Peter Wren - he was one of them, on the *Basset*.

D. I read too that they didn't realize that they were picking up the *Indy* survivors. They knew they were picking up survivors, but they had no idea - the *Indianapolis*. They were just shocked.

Thursday night ... rain came ... night before the rescue. Supposedly there was just a small rain ... tried to gather what they could for water ... sounded like wasn't too much, maybe just enough to keep going ... you say you don't recall that.

F. No.

D. And maybe it wasn't in your cluster of men.

[Henrietta asks me how to move this - my camera]

D. And I think it was late Thursday night, that suddenly there were real brilliant lights ... to the sky ... do you recall seeing that ?

F. No. I didn't see it. But these boats have search lights on them. They turn them on.

D. And I think a plane dropped a dye bomb ? I assume to color the water so it's be easier to spot in the water ?

F. Probably.

D. A metallic dye bomb, it was called. [found it in my notes]
So you weren't in a raft until you think someone pulled you in a raft ...

F. It seems like I must have been in a raft the last day that I was out there because ... the water was right up to here [pointing to his chin area]

D. Here's another question ... the *Ringness*, another ship that picked up survivors, what is a monkey fist ? It says a monkey fist was heaved from the ship over to the raft ... and then one of the men in the raft attached the monkey fist to pull the men in the raft. But the ship was still underway and it pulled the raft under. This was the raft Giles McCoy was on. He wasn't in your group of men ?

F. No.

D. So you probably don't recall the PBY plane, Adrian Marks, that landed the plane? [on the water]

F. No.

D. After ... the survivors ... boarded on the ships ... probably headed back to Guam or ... where did you go for recovery ?

[Sorry, side conversation going on too]

F. We went someplace first. Samar. We went someplace first ... to a regular hospital ... someplace and then they flew us to Samar. That was the last place.

D. And the first place was ...

F. I don't know.

D. Where is Samar ?

F. Philippines, isn't it ?

D. Once survivors were on the ships, the PBY plane had to be assessed. It was too damaged, so they salvaged what they could and then the Navy ships had to ...

F. Sunk it.

D. Do you remember that, hearing the [guns from the ship] ?

F. No, I just heard the guys talk about it.

Mary produced a map to show me where Samar was ...

M. Here's a picture that shows Leyte and Samar ... 550 miles from Leyte is where they were sent.

D. Some survivors went here, too.

M. Peleliu and Guam...

F. Sure that was one of the islands.

We are studying a map in a book showing the Philippine Sea area, showing Samar, Peleliu and Guam to mention a few countries. Also shows ships with their names where they picked up survivors.

D. The *(Cecil J.) Doyle*. The *Ringness*, The *Madison* and the *(Ralph) Talbot*. And you were picked up by the *Basset*

M. Where's the *Basset*?

We don't see it here. [in the book we are looking at].

D. These are survivor's signatures in the book here? ... What year was this signed? I wonder if Jimmie Kittoe ever went to reunions.

H. I'm thinking not.

D. I know that basically all Joan knew was that every year on the anniversary he would go on a drunk. He just couldn't take it.

M. He maybe wouldn't have been able to take the reunions then. They're very emotional.

D. I can't imagine. Have you seen the discovery program ...

F. I've got some.

We're discussing the rescue ships ...

D. So where the nurses on the *Basset* good looking?

F. I didn't see any.

D. You didn't? So you didn't even get showered ...

F. All I saw was guys. [said with disappointed tone] They took all my clothes off ...

D. Did your skin come [off] with it?

F. No, but I think a lot of them did.

D. Yes, I read where it did. Some with the canvas on the raft ...

F. ...my legs in back here [pointing to back of his calves, knees] were all bare.

F. When I went in the hospital, they got kind of hard, couldn't bend my legs. Nurses would give me hell ... they'd tell me "you've got to get up and go to the bathroom, or I'll get the pot." I said I'd already been there.

We laughed.

D. They didn't know you yet then !

F. They found me out though. I'd get up about 5:00 in the morning ... go to the bathroom ... the kitchen ... get some cold cereal and milk.

D. From the mechanical cow ?

F. Well, I suppose. I don't know. That was out in the sticks.

D. What was the first food or meal you asked for ?

F. I first had pear juice, that's the first thing I had to drink, besides I suppose some water. They wouldn't give me much. Just a little bit. I said all I want is some pear juice, I don't know why.

D. So you weren't kidding them, you were thirsty for pear juice.

M. Never heard of pear juice [chuckling].

H. He wanted, really a fresh pear, but he took the juice !

D. Did you ask for a thick steak ?

F. No. I probably never ...

M. Well, your throat was sore ... you couldn't eat because of your throat, too, for a while, didn't you say ?

F. Hah ?

M. Weren't you in the hospital with your tonsils ?

F. I got tonsillitis in the hospital. I couldn't eat.

D. The tonsillitis was or was not from all this time in the ocean ?

F. Yeah, I suppose. I mean, I don't know.

D. When you said you got it in the hospital, I didn't know if that was something...

F. Well, that's when I got so I couldn't eat anything. They put me in isolation, ... private room. ...I suppose they didn't know what I had.

D. Did you ever see a discovery program about the search for the *Indianapolis* ?

D. And there were five survivors that went along.

M. Yes. We know them.

F. Yes. We've got a tape of that. They made a tape of that journey.

D. But I don't think they found it.

F. Yeah. That was a long time ago.

M. They didn't find it. They laid a wreath as close as they thought it would be. You've got the little Styrofoam cup ... they brought you back ... (Mary says to Florian tenderly) ... it looks like a thimble.

F. About this high. About as big as my thumb.

D. An they said here sip on this ?

M. No, this was ... these guys that went to look for it. I suppose down in that vehicle that they sent down to look for it ... they took some down and they shrunk up to that size.

D. I wrote here 'skinny Florian had the tenacity to hang on ' ! Do you think your survival was mind or body ? Physically or psychologically or both ?

F. I wouldn't know.

H. Probably a combination of both.

F. I don't know.

D. What was the conversation the first couple days in the sea ?

F. There wasn't any.

(I didn't know what to say at first, I didn't expect that answer)

D. You didn't talk about ... a distress call was made ... or they'll be coming ... you must have felt pretty confident that somebody was going to come looking for you.

F. I don't know. I suppose. We'd talk about ... I don't know. I can't tell you because I don't remember. That's a long time ago.

D. Do you remember the first couple days seeing planes and ships in the distance?

F. Yah. Way up high.

D. Did you ever talk about what would you do after you were rescued ... in your positive thinking ? I'm gonna have a steak ... Giles is gonna have a bigger steak ?

F. I never worried about food. Or water.

D. You probably said I'll have a blonde. And Giles said I'll have a brunette. And then you said I'm having a blonde, and a brunette and a redhead !

Laughing.

D. (and you said) I'm going back to Vallejo California !

F. I think some people kind of lead you astray or something.

H. Its what she's read and seen on TV !

F. I never saw that.

D. Believe it or not, I have lots more. Maybe we can get together again. If you can take it.

How were you compensated by the Navy for what happened ? Your purple heart ?

F. I'm eating that. No.

M. ...he had to hitchhike back from California !

D. I read that ! Your dad (Henrietta's) did too !

F. What'd I get ? Thirty or forty dollars ? I had all my money spent that I had made before. They didn't give me much money ... I had to buy some clothes. Another guy and I were gonna hitchhike. He was from Michigan, and he didn't show up. So I started hitchhiking. Got out on the road. Got a ride. Rode with somebody ... two or three different rides a day ... and this one guy picked me up and he says 'where you headin'? and I said Wisconsin. ... well your going the wrong direction. I had gone right up the coast ! Nobody'd tell me. I didn't have a map. They didn't have no maps in the filling stations. So he says I'll let you off down here, you get on that road, take a right and go to Chicago. Sixty six goes right straight. You get on that. So I did... only 3 or 4 days ...

D. So did you have a sign that said ONLY WOMEN IN CONVERTIBLES, THAT ARE EXTREMELY GOOD LOOKING, CAN HAVE ME !

F. (without hesitation) I couldn't write that good !

Girls are laughing ...

D. ... one liners ... bull shitters ...

F. ... Second day on the road ...he was hitchhiking with me about two days ... one night we had a ride with a guy, and he dropped us off in the middle of nowhere. Not a car in sight. He got his flashlight out, hailed a car down. The guy didn't want to pick us up ... he says I'll take you a ways ... there's a nightclub ... I'll drop you off there ... you'll get a ride there. So he did.

D. He didn't want to get into a brawl with a couple Navy guys. He'd have competition for the women !

F. I doubt that !

We all laughed.

End of June 5th Interview !!!