

**William Edmund Lentsch**  
**Pfc. United States Marine Corps**  
1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division  
Aboard the *USS Vincennes (CA-44)*  
Battle of Midway  
Battle of Coral Sea  
Battle of Guadalcanal  
Pacific Theater in World War II

Also sitting in on the interview were Larry Webb, Bill's co-author,  
and Donna Kerner, a close friend.

Interviewed by Rick Appleton on September 19, 2013  
in Mr. Lentsch's home in San Diego, California  
Transcript by Violet Hutka  
Videography by Ace Hoffman  
Proofread by Kathy Roberts  
VMC Volunteers



*Bill Lentsch in 1944*

**Appleton:** This is a conversation with William Edmund Lentsch, and I'm Rick Appleton, a volunteer with the Veterans Museum and Memorial Center of San Diego. Today is Thursday, September 19, 2013, and this conversation is taking place in Mr. Lentsch's home as part of the Oral History Program of the Veterans Museum and Memorial Center of San Diego, and the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress.

For the record Mr. Lentsch served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in World War II in a Marine complement aboard the *USS Vincennes* which supported the Naval Task Force, which in turn launched the Doolittle Raid on Japan in April of 1942. Then the ship participated in the Battle of Midway in May and proceeded to support the Guadalcanal landings in July of 1942. As part of that operation the [*USS*] *Vincennes* was lost in the Battle of Savo Island on August 9, 1942.

Bill and I will no doubt be talking about the events leading up to that fateful day and how he survived the sinking of the ship, and how it affected his life after the war. So that leaves it all wide open.

So Bill, why don't we just start by your stating your name and the year you were born, and we'll go from there.



*Bill Lentsch during the interview on September 19, 2013*

**Lentsch:** My name is William Lentsch. I was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1922.

**Appleton:** And can you tell a little bit about your family and what it was like growing up.

**Lentsch:** I came from a very troubled home, and that's what caused me to run away from home. I ran away from home at 14 and hitchhiked my way down to Georgia, and it was a hard hitch because I didn't take any money with me. And I relied upon the generosity of the people who picked me up. Finally soakin' wet I was in Atlanta, Georgia, and I walked over to the bus station and set down out of the weather, and I was hungry. I hadn't eaten for two days, and this man came up to me and he said (laughing), "You look hungry."

I said, "I haven't eaten in two days."

He said, "Let me buy you a meal." So he took me to the counter and he brought me a meal. He said, "Where are you going?"

And I said, "Daytona Beach, Florida."

He said, "I'll buy your ticket."

So he bought my ticket and I took the bus. When I arrived at my uncle's home . . . he was an undertaker . . . and he had a funeral parlor, and he didn't recognize me 'cause he hadn't seen me ever. And finally when I told him who I was, he put me up for a couple of days and said, "You can't stay here. I've got a daughter your age and this isn't a healthy thing, so I'm gonna ship you to Valdosta, Georgia to my brother, who is now homesteading a large piece of land the government gave him."

So I was then 15 years old, and I went to a one room school house with twelve grades. I walked five miles to school and five miles home, and I did all of my work under a coal oil lamp, and I stayed there 'til I was 17.

**Appleton:** Did you feel afraid when you were on your own? Or you did you just felt that you could handle it?

**Lentsch:** No. I had to get away from what was going on. My father was a very violent man. He was of German accent and he spoke in German, highly jealous of my mother, and they constantly fought, and I just couldn't take it anymore. There was a divorce and so on, and so I just had to get away. But I spent three years with my uncle, then I asked him would he buy me a pair of shoes and a suit. I wanted to go home and go into the Service.

So he did, and he bought me a bus ticket to New Haven.

**Appleton:** Before you get to that, this relative in Valdosta, Georgia, there was a farm?

**Lentsch:** He was homesteading a hundred some odd acres that the government had given to him. He built a house and a barn, and they have a certain period of time that you had to homestead it before it became yours. That was back in the '30s.

**Appleton:** You kind of considered yourself a hired hand.

**Lentsch:** I did.

**Appleton:** What did you do as [the hired hand]?

**Lentsch:** I milked the cows. I split firewood. I hoed the yams and peanuts.

I slopped the hogs. I did all kinds of farm work for my uncle in return.

**Appleton:** Did you get paid?

**Lentsch:** No, I didn't receive any pay. My grandmother, who was 80-some odd years old at that time, she did the cooking and the cleaning. But we lived in a house that was put together by my uncle. He wasn't a carpenter. And we slept on feather pillows and straw beds, and it wasn't a lot of luxury. But it was a place that I could call home for a while.

I remember one night we heard one of our hogs squealing and my uncle got a shotgun, and we put on our boots up to our hips and went out. And here was an alligator that had come up out of the Sewanee River 'cause the Sewanee River was just behind his property. And the alligator had his teeth into a shank on the hog and he was squealing, and so he shot the alligator and pushed him back into the water.

The next day we were out trying to get the hog so we could slaughter him and make him into ham and bacon and whatever. And as we were walking through field he said, "Stop!" And I stopped. And he said, "You hear what I hear?" And we heard the rattling of a rattlesnake. It was over six feet long

**Appleton:** Oh, my.

**Lentsch:** . . . and it was coiled. And then he took the shotgun and killed it. I said, "I'll take it up and make a belt out of the skin."

He said, "No! They don't die until after sunset." So I didn't get to do that.

I made friends with a young man and his mother and dad lived. They were of another race, and my uncle was very unhappy with me because at that time in the '30s it wasn't a good relationship between these two races, and he warned me not to be friends with 'em. He said, "He's hired and help to slaughter hogs and do those things." And that was an unhappy time for me because I loved everybody. Everybody was my friend. And I was glad then to be able to get on the bus and go back home.

**Appleton:** Yes.

**Lentsch:** But it wasn't wonderful because when I arrived my mother had remarried my step-father, and I told her I wanted her to sign papers for me to go into the Navy. And she said, "No, not until you're eighteen."

And he looked at her and he said, "He's only gonna mope around here for a year. Sign the papers!"

So she signed them. She gave me money for train fare down to New York, and I went to the recruiting office to join the Navy.

*Bill was attracted to the Navy  
by recruiting posters like this one.*

*From Wikimedia by the National Archives and  
Records Administration, in the public domain*



- Appleton:** Now, when was this? When did this take place when you signed up?
- Lentsch:** This was in July of 1940.
- Appleton:** July of 1940.
- Voice:** Are you sure? Or '39?
- Lentsch:** That's when I went in the Marines in the '40.
- Appleton:** Yes. Before you go on, in school did you know anything about what was going on in Europe and Asia?
- Lentsch:** No, we had no war communication there. There was no electric. No radios. No nothing.
- Appleton:** So in school you didn't really know about what was going on.
- Lentsch:** We didn't have a clue what was going on in the world.
- Appleton:** Okay. Yes. So you didn't have any knowledge what was going on in Asia or Europe then because of school, and then you didn't have a newspaper, and didn't have a radio then. Is that right?

**Lentsch:** Didn't have anything at all.

**Appleton:** Yes. In the Depression, what was it like growing up in that period of time?

**Lentsch:** Well, my mother took in ironing. My father worked in a laundry, and he was working for five dollars a week. My mother got whatever they would give her for doin' the laundry. And we, as kids, if we wanted candy or anything, we'd go behind the markets and pick up Milk of Magnesia bottles and turn them in and get a nickel for them. And then that was our spendin' money. We'd go up to the city dump, the garbage dump, and we'd go through the garbage, that they used to throw it in for the hogs, and the hogs would eat the garbage. And we'd look for silverware from the different restaurants, and then we'd take the silverware back to the restaurants. And they'd buy it from us.

**Appleton:** Yes.

**Lentsch:** And that's how we, as kids, made money. But it was a difficult time. I had cardboard in my shoes 'cause they didn't have money to put leather on the bottom.

**Appleton:** Was there enough food on the table? I mean, did you have enough food?

**Lentsch:** My mother used to go to the countryside and pick dandelions and turnip greens, and we'd have those with maybe a small piece of salt pork. And those were many meals we had like that. I remember one Thanksgiving we didn't have anything to eat, and there come a knock at the door, and it was the church that we attended. And there was a big bag of groceries and a turkey. First time I had had solid food in months!

So we didn't eat much. We were on a diet so to speak, but we did the best we could because times were hard then.

**Appleton:** Yes. So joining the service was a way to get away from some of this.

**Lentsch:** I wanted to get away from all of it. I couldn't live with it. It just would eat away at me because my father was so strict. We couldn't read the newspaper on Sunday. We couldn't look at the funnies. He said, "Either you read the Bible or you don't read nothing!"

And he was a hard person. I remember him as a terrible, terrible person as a father. He threatened my mother so many times, and I had a sister and I had a brother. My sister was younger. My brother was older, but my brother was never home. He was always runnin' with a gang of car thieves, and he never was home.

The newspapers were pickin' up the story about my father threatening to kill my mother. And the kids at school, they were teasin' me, and I just couldn't handle it.

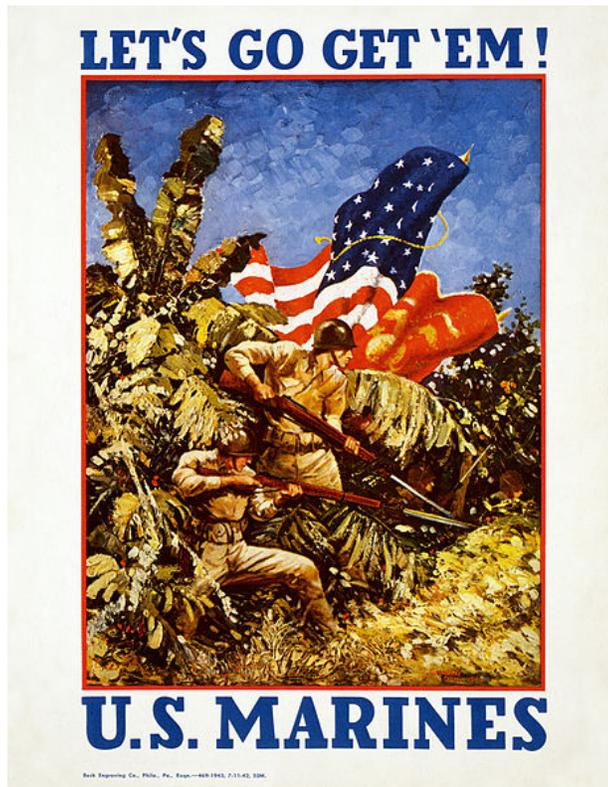
**Appleton:** Yes. So you joined in 1940 . . .

**Lentsch:** Well, I went to join the Navy and they said it was filled up. And how they did that, they measured my chest and they said it was the wrong size! So go next door.

So I said, "Remember, I don't wanna go in the Army!"

And they said, "No, this isn't the Army." And he measured my chest. He said "It's just right! Put up your right hand."

I put it up and he said, "Now, swear the oath," and I did. He says, "You're now in the Marines."



*Bill finally was able to enlist in the Marine Corps.*

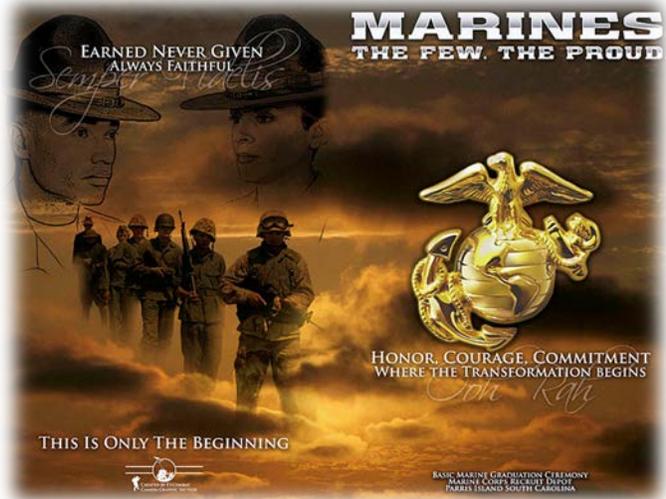
*From Wikimedia from the Library of Congress, in the public domain*

So that night we were taken to the hotel in New York, and the next day the Marine Corps truck came and took us to the train to Parris Island, South Carolina, to start my boot camp.

**Appleton:** What was boot camp training like?

*Marine Corps training at  
Parris Island, South Carolina*

*From Wikimedia, US Navy  
image in the public domain*



**Lentsch:** Well, it was difficult because we weathered a hurricane that had hit South Carolina, and the boats and seaweed had washed up onto the island. And it took us a week to get it all pushed back into the ocean. There were yachts. There were all kinds of boats all over the Parris Island boot camp.

And after we got the camp cleaned up we went to the rifle range . . . and I have a story. . . I don't know if you wanna hear it or not.



*The drill sergeant was tough.*

*From Wikimedia, US Marine  
Corps photograph in the public  
domain*

**Appleton:** Sure.

**Lentsch:** Well, when we went to the rifle range, we were told as recruits you don't gamble. You don't play cards. And the sergeant, he said, "I'm going to town tonight . . ." and he said, "If I hear of anybody playin' cards or gambling, when I come back . . ." he said, "they'll be punished."

As soon as his lights left the hill he went up, they broke out the cards; and they started gambling. And I was the look-out. And then when he came back, I screamed,

“The sergeant's coming!” They gathered up the money and the cards, and he came in. He looked around and he said, “You guys have been gambling. I know you have. I know you!” So he said “I'm gonna punish you!”

So he took us barefooted, naked down into the bay, and our feet got caught on all of the weeds and stuff that was on the shore, and mosquitoes were as thick as flies! And so the next morning when we woke up our feet were all chewed up, and our bodies looked like we had the mumps or the measles! We were just covered with red spots, and the lieutenant wanted to know what happened. Of course, we couldn't tell because if we did, we feared for our life! Finally he duck-waddled us for a half hour, an hour to teach us, that you gotta tell me who did this to you.

And finally I broke down, and I went to him in private and told him what happened. He said, “You'll have to be at his court martial. So I said, “I don't wanna get involved in this!”

He said, “You're in it.”

So I went to the court martial, and they reduced him from a sergeant to a corporal, shipped him to China as his punishment.

**Appleton:** Oh, my.

**Lentsch:** They asked me . . . they needed two men for Sea School, and I said, “Oh, that's wonderful 'cause I wanna be in the Navy!”

But I lacked about a quarter of an inch bein' tall enough, so they had me stretch a lot, and then they measured me and said I was okay. So I went to Norfolk, Virginia to a Sea School, and there I spent six to eight weeks learning how to use guns that we used on the ship.

While I was there I got into serious trouble, but I won't talk about it. But then they wanted 30 marines shipped to Panama, and I was one of them. But I didn't wanna go to Panama, so I put my rifle in the shop. You don't go anywhere in the Marine Corps without a rifle. So the 29 left without me, and I sit on my bunk, and I was playin' a harmonica, and the major came through, and he said, “What are you doing here? I shipped you out with the Panama group.”

I said, “I don't have a rifle.”

He said, “You did that deliberately! I know you did!” He said, “You're outta here as soon as I can ship you out!”

Two weeks later the [USS] *Vincennes* asked for two Marines. I was one of them that went aboard.

**Appleton:** And where did you need to go to catch up with the [USS] Vincennes? Where was the [USS] Vincennes?

**Lentsch:** She was in Norfolk, Virginia.

**Appleton:** Okay.

**Lentsch:** She had just come back from going to Cape Town, South Africa to bring the Lend Lease gold back.

*USS Vincennes in convoy  
returning from Cape Town  
in November 1941*

*From Wikimedia, U.S. Navy  
photograph in the  
public domain*



**Appleton:** Uh-hmm. Uh-mmm.

**Lentsch:** And we went then to the Panama Canal to Mare Island Navy Yard and had our camouflage put on the ship. And then we went to Hawaii, and, of course, the ship was in the Coral Sea Battle. Battle of Midway and Doolittle's plane's. . .



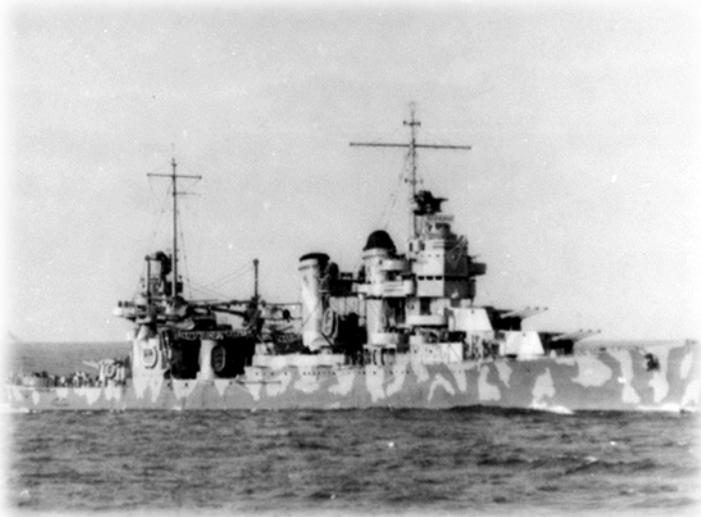
*USS Vincennes entering the  
Panama Canal on January 6,  
1938*

*From Wikimedia, U.S. Navy  
photograph in the public domain*

- Appleton:** Now, the ship had camouflage painting from Mare Island.
- Lentsch:** Yes.
- Appleton:** And what is . . . ?
- Lentsch:** We went to Hawaii.
- Appleton:** Okay. So you were already camouflage painted when you went to Hawaii.
- Lentsch:** Yes.
- Appleton:** What is camouflage painting ; what does [it] look like on a ship?
- Lentsch:** Oh, it's hard to explain. But it's sort of gray swirls all the way around against the light gray background. That's the way I could describe it.

*USS Vincennes is on the way to the Solomons for Battle of Guadalcanal, August of 1942. The camouflage paint was done at the Mare Island Shipyard before deployment into the Pacific.*

*From Wikimedia, US Navy photograph in the public domain*



- Appleton:** So you were assigned to a marine complement on the ship.
- Lentsch:** My job was hot shell-man.
- Appleton:** Hot shell-man. Okay.
- Lentsch:** I caught the casings that came out of the 5 inch guns, and I had an apron on and long-sleeved, asbestos gloves. As soon as they were ejected in battle I would throw them over the side, because if you let 'em stay on the deck, the turning of the gun would have got jammed. My job was to catch them, throw them overboard. But you know, in a position like that, you're open to the enemy because when the Kamikaze planes came in at Midway with their machine guns full blast, and then they get you in

position, and they drop their torpedo. And the machine gun bullets are bouncin' off the shield. But the shield was only so high, and you had to kinda keep your head down as they came at us.

But we had one of the finest captains, Captain Riefkohl, that I ever knew in my life 'cause he swung that ship left and right as the bombers dropped bombs, and as the planes came in to hit us. And, of course, the aircraft carrier was wounded when a Kamikaze plane went down the stack. But they later on towed it back to Hawaii.

**Appleton:** Was that in the Battle of Coral Sea?

**Lentsch:** No, that was the Battle of Midway.

**Appleton:** Midway when that particular situation happened. Well, when you're not in battle, what does a hot shell-man do?

**Lentsch:** As soon as a shell is ejected, we'd grab it in our arms and toss it overboard.

**Appleton:** Okay. But if you're not in a battle situation where the guns are firing . . .

**Lentsch:** Oh, yes!

**Appleton:** But during a battle, yes. But how about when you're not in contact with . . .

**Lentsch:** When we were not in battle, we were orderlies to the captain.

**Appleton:** Okay.

**Lentsch:** And the commander.

**Appleton:** Okay.

**Lentsch:** That was our job. To take care of the needs, if they had any. So we were always in our dress khakis to be available for the ship's captain.

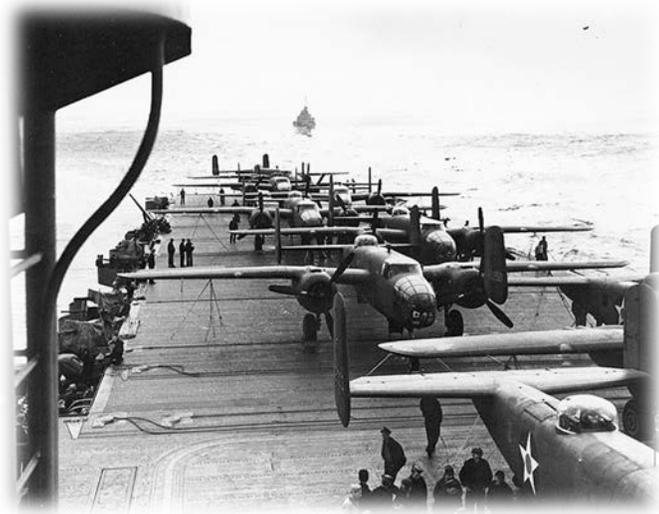
**Appleton:** Okay. Yes. In the Battle of Coral Sea . . . ?

**Lentsch:** I don't remember much about it. I do remember that they converted the aircraft carrier from a battleship, and they made it into a carrier. But I don't remember other than that much about the battle.

Jimmy Doolittle's planes . . . that was quite a deal. I am remembering we were off of the coast of San Francisco, and the captain made an announcement that we were goin'

on a secret mission. And anybody didn't wanna go, to let him know, and they would send us back to Hawaii. Nobody volunteered. We all stayed.

But it was scary because we went up to Alaska and then the Aleutians and then, of course, we turned towards Japan. And we had a couple of destroyers with us. And when we got about 75 miles from Japan, we saw the aircraft carrier. And on that aircraft carrier were the B-25 bombers.



*Bombers are ready for takeoff from the USS Hornet on their way to Japan, April 1942.*

*US Navy photograph in the public domain*

**Appleton:** Which carrier was that? Would that be the *USS Hornet*?

**Lentsch:** I believe it was. Yes.

**Appleton:** Okay. Alright.

**Lentsch:** And I wondered, when I was on my gun position . . . we could see the planes all warmin' up (Laughing) . . . how a B-25 could take off a carrier! But what they did was they had 'em tied down with a rope, and they got the engines revved up as **hard** as they could, and then they cut the rope, and they were able to take off.

So as they went one right after another, Doolittle flew over us and waved at us. We didn't know . . . and we had the radio on . . . on the ship's radio . . . and the announcer said, "American planes have bombed hospitals and schools! Beware!"

So as soon as the last plane left to bomb Tokyo, we hightailed it full throttle to go back to Hawaii! And I understand from later on, we had shot down one of their planes that was, you know, driving around, trying to protect the island . . . and they shot it out!

**Appleton:** Yes. Well, when you mentioned going to Hawaii a couple of times after the Battle of Midway, what did Pearl Harbor look like when you got there?

**Lentsch:** We arrived about two or three days after the bombing, and the

[USS] *Arizona*, of course, was smoking and sinking, and we saw that happen. But we weren't there during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**Appleton:** But was it just a mass of destroyed ships and . . .

**Lentsch:** Yes.

**Appleton:** . . . oil on the water, and all that?

**Lentsch:** Yes we saw all that. But there was nothin' we could do. It was too late.

**Appleton:** Yes.

**Lentsch:** It was over with.

**Appleton:** And the flames still were . . . a few of them were not yet put out.

**Lentsch:** So our next destination was Guadalcanal. We went to the Fiji Islands, and the natives and their villages along the coast . . . above the beach . . . they had all their cattle there . . . their sheep and goats and pigs, and what have you. So the service . . . the Marines moved them on the other side of the mountain where they wouldn't be injured, and we were gonna bombard the island in mock landings for the Marines. And the last night we were there they had so many pigs on spits over coals, and we had all kinds of fresh meat that they had left. The natives had left, and it was great.

So the next day we moved into the harbor at Guadalcanal, and the Japanese sent over high-altitude bombers. And then we were dodging the bombs as they were dropped, and we didn't get any sleep for two nights. And the third night they opened up the galley, and we had canned peaches and pears and hard tack 'cause the cooks all managed guns, too. And I was asked to go down and lie on my bunk and sleep a little bit.

And then, of course, general quarters sounded and . . .

*USS Vincennes  
bombarding  
Guadalcanal in  
August 7, 1942*

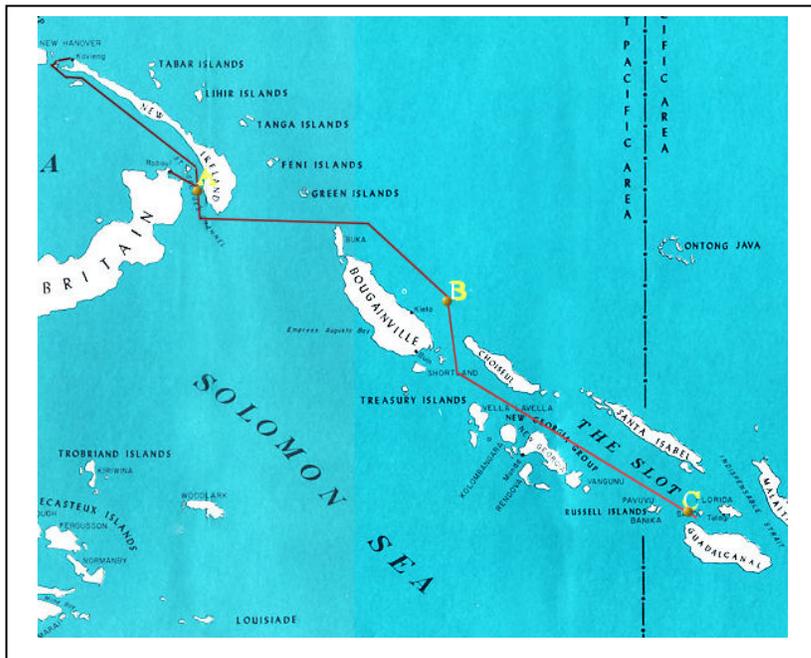
*From Wikimedia  
US Navy photo,  
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**Appleton:** That was in the middle of the night?

**Lentsch:** Yes. We had been bombarding the island at 5 o'clock the day before with star shells. And they would go up and light up the area and then drop the bombs on the area underneath them, 'cause the Japanese were all encased in caves all around the coastal area.

So what happened was . . . during the Battle of Midway there were several Marines and several sailors that were machine-gunned because when they came in, and they didn't have a chance to take them to the hospital. So they put 'em in the sick bay at our ship, and they shipped me down three decks to help push those shells up to the gun. They were kickin' the shell casings out into the water the best they could.



*Map of Guadalcanal battle area (lower right); Savo Island just north of Guadalcanal Island*

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And I wasn't down there very long, and the lights went out, and we had the battery lights going, and the first 16 inch shell came through and blew up, and knocked out a couple of sailors. But it was just above the water line where water began to seep in, and the sailors were knocked out, and I threw some water on 'em, and they revived them. And they hollered, "We'd better get outta here! The ship's gonna go down!"

I said, "I haven't heard general quarters yet," . . . that tells [us] to leave the ship. And they said, "Okay."

By that time a second shell came through and blew up, and blew me through the air and slammed me against the bulkhead. Well, they were half-way up the ladder when they saw that happen 'cause lockers came down, and bunks came down, and so they pulled the wreckage off me. Water was up to my nose. And they pulled me loose. My leg was in my chest cavity. And they pulled me over to the ladder, and the ship took three torpedoes. And you could feel it heave when they exploded.

So they left me on the ladder, and I crawled up three decks, pullin' myself up. When I got on the top deck, the ship was on a list of about 30-40 per cent list, burning from one end to the other. And I didn't have a life jacket on, and Phil Samuelson, who was a chaplain stryker, says, "Here, take mine!" So he put (laughing) his on me. He said, "Don't worry. They're right here in a cabinet. I can get another one."

So he put his on and slid me into the water, and I got machine-gunned across the arm. And while I was in the water (laughing) . . . so I played dead with my face down in the water until the lights went out.

**Appleton:** What time of day was this when you were in the water?

**Lentsch:** This was about 3 o'clock in the morning.

**Appleton:** About 3. Okay.

**Lentsch:** So I just moved around to keepin' the sharks away. And bumped into a lifeboat . . . a life raft, rather . . . and there was two or three sailors on it, and they pulled me into the life raft. And I saw my best buddy go . . . he went under. And one of the guys said to me, he says, "You know, you used to attend the Bible study on the ship, didn't you?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Then you believe in God."

I said, "Oh, Yes."

He said, "Well then, if there is a God, I don't believe it! Let it rain!" He said, "I'm starving for water because of the salt and all."

I said, "Come on, be reasonable! There's not a cloud in the sky! And it only rains down here in the monsoon season!"

"Ah," he says . . . "That's an excuse."

So I just in simple faith said, "Lord, let it rain!" And a big, black cloud come over, thunder and lightning, and the drops came down! I remember his mouth was open and it was just running down his face! And then it went away!

So the next morning the destroyers came alongside, and they put down the cargo nets, and they put the wounded in the nets and lifted them up on the deck of the destroyers. It was about 120 degrees and those decks were just burning. But they had no place else to put us.

**Appleton:** Describe your injuries. You said your leg was broken in several

places.

**Lentsch:** It was broken . . . the femur was broken and shattered. The knee was broken, and they didn't touch it. They took me to the hospital ship. They came alongside the [USS] *Solace*, and the doctor looked at it and they said, "Somebody botherin' you?" The doctor came to me and he said, "We don't have any equipment to take care of the problem, so tomorrow we'll put you on a troop transport that they've converted into a hospital ship."

*Bill's medical care  
began on the USS  
Solace.*

*From Wikimedia, US  
Navy photo in the  
public domain*



**Appleton:** Well, were you in pain during this time?

**Lentsch:** The pain was **beyond** pain. I really knew how bad it was to be in pain. But, of course, the leg was still up in my chest cavity.

**Appleton:** And you were able to pull yourself up that ladder in spite of all that?

**Lentsch:** All of that, yes.

**Appleton:** And get into the water and get hauled up on the life raft with all that pain.

**Lentsch:** All that with that pain, yes.

**Appleton:** Oh, my.

**Lentsch:** So when I woke up on the operating table, the doctor looked at me and he said, "You don't have any dog tags." Everything was blown off me. And he said, "You look familiar. Where were you born?"

And I told him, and he said, "Do you recognize me?"  
I said, "No."

He said, "I'm Dr. Groelich."

I said, "Dr. Groelich! You brought me into the world!"

And he said, "Yep. I can't take your leg. So he said, "What I'm gonna do is pull it out, and I'm gonna cut you open from the knee to the hip, and wire up all those little bones that I can wire up." And then he said, "I'm going to drill a hole in the top part of the leg, all the way through, and one below your knee and put in steel rods, and then put you in plaster paris. And it will give you the traction because when it dries it'll give you the traction." But he says, "I don't have any morphine or anything."

I said, "Doc, I got so much pain. Go to it."

So when he started drilling, I bit down on a tongue depressor and passed out. When I woke up, I was in plaster from my neck all the way to my feet . . . of course, cut out areas.

So they took me to Auckland, New Zealand Mobile Hospital, and then I stayed there two days. And the third night they came to me and said, "Don't say anything to anybody, but you're goin' home."

So they took me over to the converted cruise ship that was now converted into a troop ship, and took me aboard and put me in a bunk, close to a port hole. And that night we left for San Diego.

**Appleton:** Well, before you describe any further . . . what was it like down in the water? Were you afraid? Were you just terrified that what was happening?

**Lentsch:** No. It just seems like it was a time of knowing that there was a super power that was there to comfort me to get through it. I don't know how I got through it. I, of course, bein' only 19 years of age why, you know, I didn't know any better.

**Appleton:** And this was still at night most of the time?

**Lentsch:** Oh, Yes.

**Appleton:** And were there lots of shells and explosions around?

**Lentsch:** No, but I learned the next day that the [USS] *Quincy* was sunk and the [HMS] *Canberra* was sunk and the [HMS] *Astoria* . . . the cruiser was beached. It was pretty much burned out also. That's what I was told. . . [HMS] *Astoria*. The [USS] *Nashville* didn't get in it. It didn't come in until the next day. But they escaped destruction.

**Appleton:** Were the other sailors that were down in the water . . . were they shouting and yelling at each other? Or were they just . . .

**Lentsch:** No. It was all silence. One thing we did learn, whether it's true or not, the [USS] *North Carolina* battleship and the [USS] *George Washington* battleship were out at the other end of the island; and when the Japanese fleet came through, they took 'em out. But I don't know whether that's hearsay or whether that happened.

**Appleton:** Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. So you got on to a ship to come back to the United States from Auckland, New Zealand. Is that it?

**Lentsch:** Yes we'd seen a Japanese convoy go across the horizon. We cut our engines and lights, and drifted for the night for fear that they would see us. And the next day they were gone. And we got off at San Diego about three miles out, and we bumped into a Japanese submarine that had hearing devices that were listening to San Diego to see if they could pick up anything. One minute they'd seen us, they submerged. We didn't see them from then on.

We docked in San Diego, and they hadn't known we were coming because we had no radio communications. And so they moved all of the ambulatory patients into the nurse's quarters, and moved the nurse's quarters into hotels. So this is what they tell me. And they put me in a bed and the next day they took me to surgery, and took the cast off, and packed the incision with mite maggots and then wrapped it up so they could eat away all the dead flesh and what have you.

**Appleton:** Did they tell you they were doing that?

**Lentsch:** Yes.

**Appleton:** How did you feel about that?

**Lentsch:** It didn't bother me any. I said, "Do what you have to do. I wanna get well."

And the next day Joan Blondell and a couple of other actors came through, and they visited with us and talked pretty much about general things. And then *Life* magazine came through and took a picture of me. And I was in there six months, and then from there I had another surgery.

**Appleton:** Well, before you go on . . . in that picture you seem pretty cheerful.

**Lentsch:** Well, because they told me I was goin' home.

**Appleton:** (Laughing) Okay. Was the pain pretty much subsided by that time?

**Lentsch:** No, the war was still going . . .



Private W. E. Lentsch, 20, of New Haven, Conn.,  
was caught in compartment of sunk *Vincennes*.

*In August 1942 this photo of Bill appeared in LIFE magazine while he was recuperating at the Balboa Naval Hospital, San Diego.*

*From LIFE, August 1942.*

- Appleton:** No, I mean as far as your pain? Your leg pain.
- Lentsch:** Oh, Yes. They were givin' me morphine shots . . .
- Appleton:** So you were . . .
- Lentsch:** . . . and taking care of the pain.
- Appleton:** Okay. So the smile on your face was that you were goin' home.
- Lentsch:** Yes. And what they did was . . . I was on crutches, and they took two WAVES, the women Navy WAVES, and we got on a train and went to Brooklyn Naval Hospital. There they put me in traction in bed, and I lived in New Haven, so that wasn't very far from Brooklyn. And I had surgery again to take out some broken pieces of bone that was still in there. And I was in there for about six months.

And finally they decided that they'd let the VA take care of me. And they took me before the Board of Survey, and they said, "In 30 days you'll be a civilian, so prepare to leave."

And I said, "I'm not going anywhere."

And they said, "Yes, you are. You're done with the Marines."

And I said, "No, I'm not!"

And they said, "Well, we'll see about that."

So about two weeks later they called me in again. They said, "You got two weeks to leave. Here's your discharge papers, and there's a check for \$300 for mustering out. And if you're not out that gate on that certain day, we'll arrest you for being a civilian on government property."

**Appleton:** Now, did your parents or anybody in your family come down to visit you in Brooklyn?

**Lentsch:** No. They didn't know anything about it.

**Appleton:** Okay. Was their mail that went back and forth? Did you send letters?

**Lentsch:** No. I didn't let 'em know where I was. My mother got a letter from the government saying that I was lost in action. So they didn't know where I was, or who I was, or where I was going.

**Appleton:** And they weren't informed that you were back in San Diego and Brooklyn?

**Lentsch:** No. Until I got discharged and I called them on the phone and told them I was comin' home. And the next day I got on the train and then came home. And my mother fixed up a room for me, and they would take me to the VA Hospital for a check-up.

**Appleton:** Well, what was home-coming like? Your first day . . . what was that like?

**Lentsch:** First day home?

**Appleton:** Home, Yes. How were you greeted?

**Lentsch:** My mother was greatly relieved that I was alive 'cause the last she had heard I was missing in action.

**Appleton:** Okay. Before you get into that, your mother didn't know that you had not been lost? In fact you had just been injured and having been in the hospital until you got home that day then.

**Lentsch:** They didn't notify her at all.

**Appleton:** Oh, my.

**Lentsch:** It was quite a shock when I showed up.

**Appleton:** Yes.

**Lentsch:** But I met two ladies, young ladies. They were eighteen years old that came to visit me in my hospital, and one of 'em made me a proposition. She says, "If we get married, I'll take care of you; and you financially can take care of me." She had run away from home. She didn't wanna go back home and she didn't have a job that paid any money. She worked in a five and dime store. So we got married. And that was just a sister and brother-type marriage, and it was a horrible relationship for 33 years. But I don't know how much of the rest of it you want.

**Appleton:** Well, you told about being involved in the war bond drive.



*Wounded veterans were often featured in war bond drives.*

*From Wikimedia, US Navy photograph, in the public domain*

**Lentsch:** Oh, yes!

**Appleton:** How did that start? How did you get into that?

**Lentsch:** After we were married, I walked and took the bus over to General Electric Corporation. They had a big factory there in Bridgeport that made radars for the ships, and the first day I went she said, "We don't have anything for you." And I went five days in a row. On the fifth day a superintendent came down and he said, "I'm gonna put you on the assembly line on the end, and you check for burrs and rough edges and everything and make sure that they're ready to be shipped.

And then he says, "But there's conditions to this. That you'll be available to give war bond talks and blood plasma talks whenever we need you. It could be 3 o'clock in the morning for a shift, 'cause they had 24 hour shifts at the factory.

**Appleton,** And this would have been what? 1944 maybe? Roughly?

**Lentsch,** Uhh, let's see. I don't remember. It was probably before '43.

**Appleton:** But it was before the war was . . .

**Voice:** Before '43.

**Appleton:** But before '43?

**Lentsch:** Yes.

**Appleton:** Yes.

**Lentsch:** So I joined the G.E and many times they would call me at 2 o'clock in the morning and say, "Get in your uniform. There's a car waiting for you downstairs." And they'd take me to the . . .

**Appleton:** Now you had a uniform but you had been discharged.

**Lentsch:** Oh, yes. I was still wearing a uniform.

**Appleton:** But you could wear a uniform anyway.

**Lentsch:** At that time I guess you could wear it during the war . . . I don't know. I did mine. And then my superintendent came to me one day, and he said, "We're going to New York to Carnegie Hall."

*Carnegie Hall as it  
appears today*

*From Wikimedia by  
Rodney with permission  
under CCA 2.0 Generic  
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And I said, "What for?"

He said, "Well you'll find out when we get there."

So we went to Carnegie Hall and he put me in the front row. I was still on crutches and uniform, and a girl got up and she sang "My Bill." And after that there was

another singer that used to sing with Jimmy Dorsey or one of those orchestras, and she sang "My Bill. Can She Bake a Cherry Pie? Billy Boy."

I'm guessing what's going on here. So when they quit singing, the United States Treasurer got up on the platform, and he said, "Private Lentsch, would you come to the platform, please."

And two people came and carried me up there.

**Appleton:** Now that was [Henry] Morgenthau, right?

**Lentsch:** Carnegie Hall.

**Appleton:** I mean the Secretary of the Treasurer?

**Lentsch:** Morgenthau.

**Appleton:** [Henry] Morgenthau, Yes. Uh-hmm.

**Lentsch:** And so they handed me a citation for 'Call Beyond Duty' for selling over a million dollars in war bonds and hundreds of donations of blood and blood plasma.

**Appleton:** You must have done a lot of speaking then. (Laughing)

**Lentsch:** That was quite a deal.

**Appleton:** Well, where all did you speak then to bring the interest of war bonds and donating blood? Where did you go to make those presentations?

**Lentsch:** At the factory.

**Appleton:** Oh, only at the G.E factory or at all other places?

**Lentsch:** No, just that factory 'cause they had all of the shifts running full-time . . .

**Appleton:** Okay.

**Lentsch:** . . . so they'd have a group here, have a group over there, and I would speak to each one of these groups and talk about the sinking of the [USS] *Vincennes*.

**Appleton:** So it would stir them up to buy war bonds or donate plasma to the war effort. So I left Bridgeport and we went to her uncle's house in Dayton, Ohio. And I tried to find work. I was still on a cane, and they told me they didn't have anything for me.

But, discouraged one night I went downtown, and I'd sit on the stairs of the Post Office. And a little inner voice says, "Tomorrow why don't you go see the Postmaster. Maybe they can put you on as a clerk, sitting down and sorting mail." 'Cause they were short of help during the war.

So I went out and saw him, and he said, "Well, we can't hire you until you get a doctor's statement that we will not be responsible for your war injuries because you're under the Treasury Department, and the War Department is where you were wounded. So you have to have a doctor's statement . . . a waiver."

I called all the doctors in Dayton. None of 'em wanted to do it, so I went home and sat in my misery, so to speak. Finally I got a telephone call two weeks later. A doctor said, "I'm gonna retire. I'll sign those papers."

So he signed 'em, and I took 'em to the Post Office and they hired me temporarily. I didn't wanna be a clerk. I wanted to be a carrier. So the Postmaster said, "Well, you know, you have a lot of walking to do." He says, "Well, you got a cart you can push, and we store it in a box, and you can take it out, and you won't need your cane except goin' up and down stairs." So he said, "If you make it on the route, we'll let you stay on that route until you take the Civil Service exam and see if you could pass it."



*The type of mail cart Bill  
used in his rounds as a  
letter carrier for the Post Office*

*From Wikimedia by Doug Coldwell and Quinn  
Dombrowski by permission,  
CCA-SA 2.0 Generic License*

So I managed to do it. It strengthened my leg to where I could walk without the cane. I took the Civil Service exam and passed it and was assigned to a permanent route in the suburbs where I lived. And I carried mail for 18 years in Dayton . . . storms, the snow, the ice, everything.

And then I decided I wanna come to San Diego. So I contacted the Postmaster, and he said, "It's not up to me. It's up to find a trade, somebody that wants to go to Ohio and somebody that wants to come to California."

So they have what they call 'The Postal Record' where you can list where you wanna go and what you wanna do. And I got a reply from a young man who said, "I joined the Post Office after I got out of the service, but my home's in a place about 20 miles from Dayton."

So he wrote the Postmaster in Dayton, and I wrote the Postmaster in California, and they both agreed for the trade. So I came home and I told my spouse that I was leaving for California in thirty days. Get the stuff packed. She didn't wanna go, but she didn't have much choice 'cause they were waiting in thirty days for me to take a route here in San Diego.

**Appleton:** Well, before we talk about the California story . . . before we get into that part of the story, thinking back in your military service time, looking back on it, or maybe how you looked back on it then, did you achieve your goals in terms of being independent and getting away from all of that?

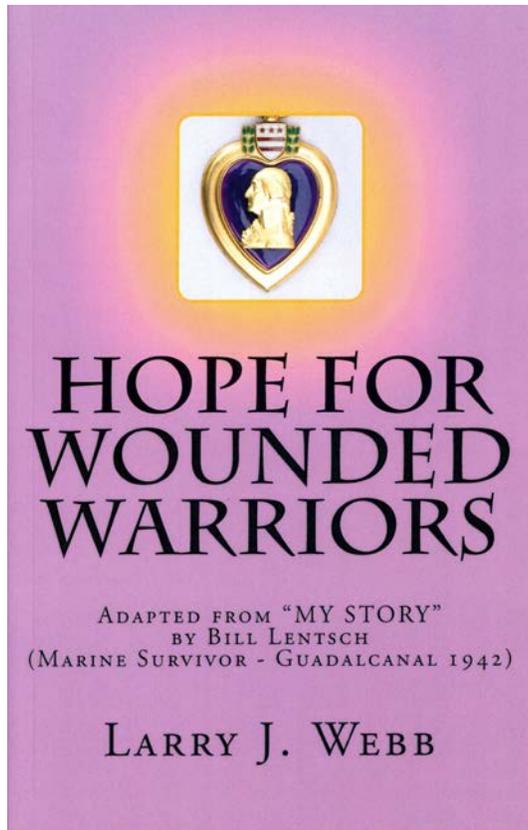
**Lentsch:** Oh, I just walked out of one situation into another. Because when I got married, it was a marriage of destruction not only for me personally, but for her, because if you read my book, she was a shoplifter, and she had affairs, and it was just a terrible relationship. That's all . . . like brother and sister and we argued continually.

**Appleton:** Oh, my.

**Lentsch:** And she kept me so deep in debt that I couldn't breathe. I had two jobs. I worked in the Post Office and working as a janitor nights, and I got very little sleep. Maybe two or three hours in between the jobs, and she kept charging and charging.

**Appleton:** That had to be tough. How about in your military experience, what did you learn from that experience that carried you on later in life?

**Lentsch:** Well, I personally don't believe that the government is doing as much as they should do for disabled veterans. I really feel that way. I know how I struggled and my pension was \$10 a month, and you can't even buy a meal for that in those days. And I just really feel that they ought to give some more consideration, considering all the disabled men. That's the cover on my book.



*Bill's story written by his friend  
Larry Webb*

*Image by permission of the author*

**Appleton:** Yes. How about the . . .

**Lentsch:** *Hope for the Wounded Warrior.* And I wanna reach out to the disabled because I'm one of them. I've been there. I've been through it, and I want the veterans to know that there is help from different organizations if they'll join. Like the VFW, Disabled Veterans, and so on and so forth.

**Appleton:** Did your experience give you a special sense of determination to succeed despite difficulties?

**Lentsch:** I think a lot of it has to do with the Lord and my call to ministry. I really believe that He had his hand on me all the way through it. And that's when He called me at 53 [years of age], and my new marriage and how all that took place and what He worked with me after that.

Even today, which is . . . I'm 91, and I'm still teaching in Bible Study and preaching in churches wherever they have me.

**Appleton:** Certainly your war injuries hadn't bothered your mind at all. You're just as sharp as ever.

**Lentsch:** It was God's direction.

**Appleton:** How about . . . you mentioned in your book, or in the book that Larry wrote with you, that you went to Bible College. When did you do that?

**Lentsch:** I went nights.

**Appleton:** Okay. You went nights and when did you do that?

**Lentsch:** When we lived in Dayton the Open Bible Church had a college at night; so when I got off the mail route, I'd go home and have dinner, and then I would go to college. For three years I went nights. It's a little miracle in that because I didn't have the money, and I told the dean of the college. I said, "I don't have any funds to go to college."

He said, "Well, if the Lord doesn't supply you with money, I'm gonna drop you from the rolls."

But after that for three years money came in.

**Appleton:** Was the G.I Bill money available to you?

**Lentsch:** Not at that time. It was to buy a house, and I used it twice.

**Appleton:** Okay. Yes.

**Lentsch:** I bought my house with their guarantee.

**Appleton:** Was that out here in California?

**Lentsch:** Oh, yes. The first house was in Upland. I had a G.I. loan. And then the second house was in Palm Springs, and I had a G.I. loan on that. So they did help me with the down-payment of houses.

**Appleton:** But educational expenses . . . you weren't able to do that?

**Lentsch:** No, I didn't ask for that.

**Appleton:** Okay. Okay. Yes. Well, so then you continued you career with the Post Office then in what . . . La Puente or West Covina, wherever that was, and did you stay with that for a long time?

**Lentsch:** Thirty years, and the reason I left is because the government said that anybody that has thirty years' service, postal service, could retire on full pension. They wanted to lower the employment rate. And so I went to 'em and said, "I've got 27 years, but I've got two years vacation and one year sick leave coming."

So they said, "Well, what we'll do is we'll consider your service time . . . three years towards your 30 years' service, and you qualified to retire."

And I'll tell you, their retirement was wonderful. I still get it and look forward to it every month. But I spent a total of 27 years, actual and then three years [military service time] added to it.

**Appleton:** Okay.

**Lentsch:** So I have no regrets because God called me to ministry as soon as I left the post office. I went into furniture sales for eight years, still studying, still getting ready to become a Nazarene Pastor. And that's quite a story in itself. I sold eight years for Wicks Furniture. I was always number one or number two in sales.

And then I left them and went to work as a general manager of another large furniture store. And when he found out that I had taken a church in Palm Springs, he changed my days off so I couldn't go to the church which was Wednesdays and Sundays. So he said, "You have to work those days." And I couldn't do it. So I quit. And that's what forced me into full time. They paid me \$50 a week to start.

We lived in a broken down trailer for a year, and then my wife got a job with Great Western [Savings and Loan]. That time it was Washington Mutual and now it's Chase. And got a beautiful job. We know it was a God-made job 'cause when I came to San Diego, the boss called her and said, "Would you come back, please."

I said, "I can't. I'm working now for Great Western in Sorrento Valley."

And they said, "Why?" He said, "Your job don't exist. We tried to fill it and ownership as managers, the job don't exist! And if you come back, you can fit into that job that was created for you." (Laughing) So we knew that God was in it and that he was directing this.

**Appleton:** So then you started a church in Palm Springs?

**Lentsch:** Yes. That was quite a story. I don't know if you want it or not.

**Appleton:** Well, just a little . . . some of it. Sure.

**Lentsch:** Well, I didn't wanna go to the desert. I didn't like the desert. I still don't. But I went. God called me to go down there, and I said, "No" and I received colitis, and they couldn't operate, and it was bleeding profusely, and I had to go on baby food. And I said to the Lord, "Well, I don't wanna go. My wife's got Bell's Palsy." That's where your face is freezed and she can't talk. And the Lord said, "Will you go?"

I said, "No."

So a third time he said, "I want you to go. I'm gonna show you something. Go in your study." And this was all speaking to my voice, into my mind, and I knelt down at my desk and I looked up, and a big screen come up. There was about . . . oh, several hundred smiling faces on the screen. Plus one who stood up in front and the voice on the left side said, "Do you recognize him?"

And I said, "Yes."

He said, "That's Fred Hahn. He just died last week."

And I said, "Well, what does that got to do with me?"

And the voice over here says, "He took your job. He took your health. He's taken everything. Why are you listening?"

And the voice over here says, "Rebuke him. Get him out of the way. Now will you go?"

So the next day I put the house up for sale, and the church got a U-Haul truck. That was your church [speaking to Larry Webb sitting in during the interview] and came up and loaded all our furniture and everything. And we moved into the broken down trailer 'til we could get a new house built. And we had made quite a bit of money on the sale of the house in Upland. A lady wanted it immediately. She didn't even have the down-payment, and she had to borrow it from her father. But she wanted it, and she wanted it at the price we put it at. So we made quite a bit of money on that house to be able to buy a house in Palm Springs.

And I worked in that church five years and built it from ten people to 133 people, built a new building, a new church building, and had a wonderful time there. And then I felt the impression to leave that church and go somewhere else. So I left it. My wife had a fit. She had a lot of friends after five years, and I took the broken down church in Clairemont here in San Diego. And there was only ten people. And within five years I had it up to 80, and I had help from Palm Springs. People came and mowed the lawn, and repaired windows, and scraped walls, and helped me rebuild that church and put it on its feet. It was doing great when I decided that go with an associate pastor in Peñasquitas . . . Chuck Smith . . . and I stayed with him a year-and-a-half, and then the Poway Church closed. And I talked the DS [district superintendent] into letting me reopen Poway.

I stayed in Poway seven years and rebuilt that work from nobody to 80 people. And then at 78 [years of age] the District thought it was time I quit. So they said, "We're gonna tear the church down."

And I said, "Well, I'm not ready."

And they said, "Well, we won't do it unless you give us permission because you are the pastor."

So I prayed about it for two weeks, and finally I said, "Well, I'm gonna, going on 79, and maybe I should give it up." So I did.

But after that they sold the land and I semi-retired from then. I've been preaching and teaching ever since.

**Appleton:** Okay. Well, looking back on your military career and your life after, do you have any regrets?

**Lentsch:** None what so ever. I wouldn't change anything the way it is.

**Appleton:** You almost lost your life in that ship sinking.

**Lentsch:** I know. But I had made up my mind that God is in control. If he wanted me to die, I would have died. And He's controlling my life today. (Laughing) That's all I can say is, I have no regrets. I wouldn't re-do my life. The way it is I'm happy with it. I'm happy with what I'm doing. He has given me strength at 91 to do whatever I wanna do. Go wherever I wanna go, and I feel great. I have a lot of pain in my back and my legs, my knees, but that's understandable for a 91 year old.

**Appleton:** Well, you're 91 years young, really.

**Lentsch:** Yes and I don't have any regrets. I'm happy with my life.

**Appleton:** Well, that's good. I don't know if there's anything else that you want to include.

**Lentsch:** I wanna say it's for people like Larry [Webb] and my delightful lady, Donna [Kerner]. I have Oscar Steel, who up until a few months ago took me to the doctor all the time. Now Donna's doin' it for me and I love my home. I love bein' here, and there are some people that aren't too happy I'm here, I'm sure. But I don't make it a habit of sayin' I'm a pastor, and this, and this, and this. But if they find out that I am, that's fine. They can either come to the [Bible] study or whatever they wanna do.

We started the study, a continuation from Peñasquitas, and when I went to Gateway for three months during the period of time when my wife passed away, I started a ministry there on Sunday and it's still going great. And we had six when we started here, and now we're running between ten and twelve up at the club house. I'm very happy with everything the way it is.

**Appleton:** It sounds like you're doing important things. Of course, those are more important, but you are also a Marine. And I understand that once a Marine, you're always a Marine.

**Lentsch:** (Laughing) That says it all.

**Appleton:** Well, it says part of it anyway. (Laughing) Maybe not everything, but you don't want to tell any other Marines that.

**Lentsch:** “*Semper Fidelis!*”

**Appleton:** There you go. There you go. Well, I want to thank you for doing this . . . for participating in this project, and sharing your military experiences, and your experiences after your military service. Your interview will be reviewed and you will receive your personal copy like this one here, and then copies will be placed in the Archives at the Veterans Museum in San Diego, and all of this, and perhaps the book as well will be in the Archives at the Library of Congress in the Veterans History Project, which is in the Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. And so the story will be in your voice, in your words, and it will be available for anyone that wants to read it.

So I want to thank you and to thank you for your service. You had very heroic service under very trying circumstances obviously. And for that I admire you.

**Lentsch:** I'm one of the few left. I don't think there's many of us left because of my age. I was just 17 when I went in the Marines, and I know that there were about 40 that met in [*USS*] *Vincennes*, Indiana when we went to honor the ship. And that was 25, 30 years ago. And I'm sure that they're gone by now 'cause they were all in their 20s and 30s.

**Appleton:** Yes.

**Lentsch:** So I'm one of the few veterans that's left of that particular war.

**Appleton:** Well, that's good. That is remarkable, and then it's certainly a testament to your spirit and your . . .

**Lentsch:** Well, had you waited a few years I might have not been here. My doctor said to me the other day . . . I had a physical, and he said, “If I'm as healthy at your age, when I'm at 91, you're gonna live to be over 100.”

**Appleton:** So be prepared for another ten or fifteen years.

**Lentsch:** Yes.

**Appleton:** Okay. Well, thank you very much and this will conclude our conversation.

**Bills' photo log appears on the following pages**



The following photographs from Bills' Photo Log illustrate experiences from different parts of his naval career and in his retirement. In 1940-41 before the beginning of World War II Bill traveled on several Goodwill and training tours while aboard the *USS Vincennes* (CA-44). Ports of call ranged from Boston to Hawaii to the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa. After the war his ship's name was assigned to a new *USS Vincennes* (CG-49) a Ticonderoga-class Aegis guided missile cruiser. When it docked in San Diego a few years ago, Bill and his friend, Robert, Cole, boarded it as honored guests. The last photos on the following pages chronicle that visit.



*Mayaguez, Dominican Republic*



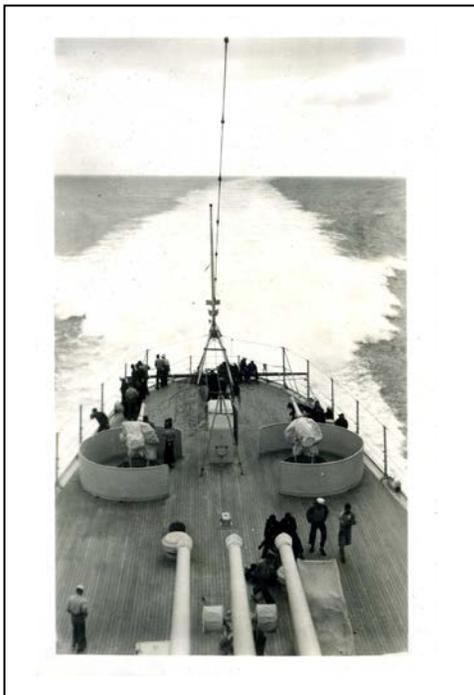


*Culebra Harbor, Puerto Rico with Navy ships, crews on shore leave*

←

*El Moro Castle, entrance to the bay at Santiago, Cuba*

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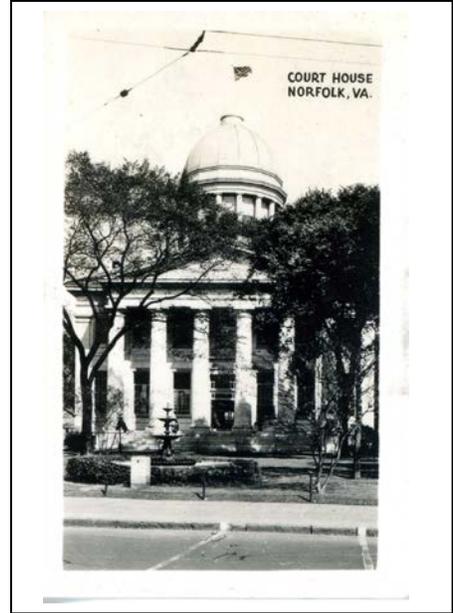


*Speed Run on the USS Vincennes (CA-44) while leaving Culebra, Puerto Rico*

←



*“Turn To” on the “Well Deck” of the Vincennes* ↑



*Sightseeing in Norfolk, Virginia* ↑



*Monument to World War I dead, Bermuda*

←

*Liberty on Front Street, Bermuda*

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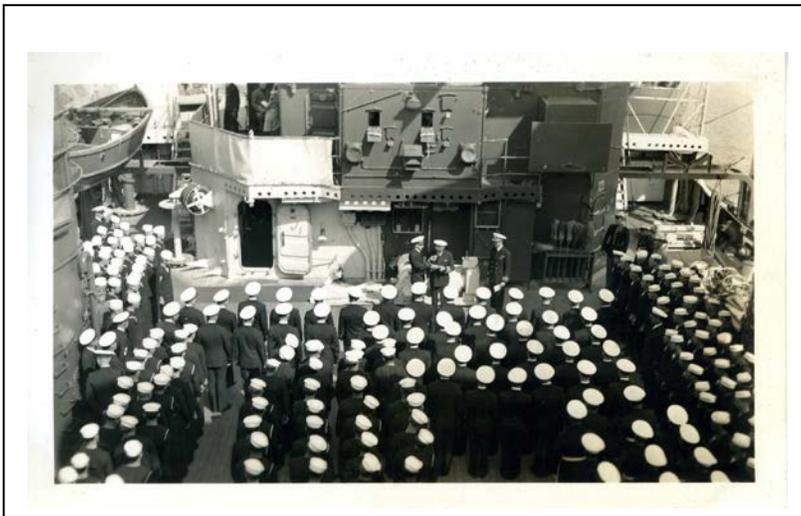


*Going ashore on  
liberty at St. George,  
Bermuda*

←

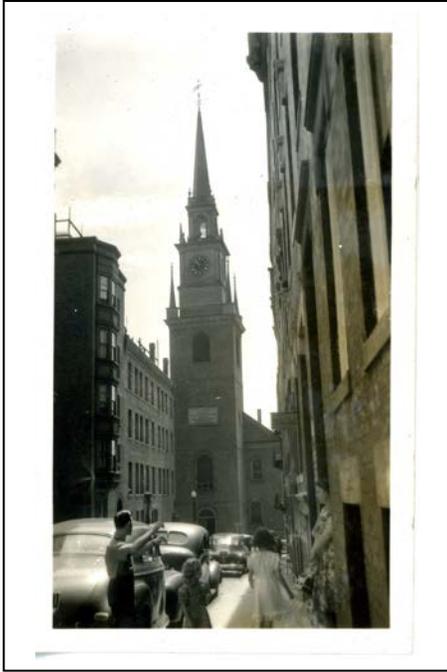
*Brooklyn Navy Yard  
with the USS North  
Carolina in the  
background*

→

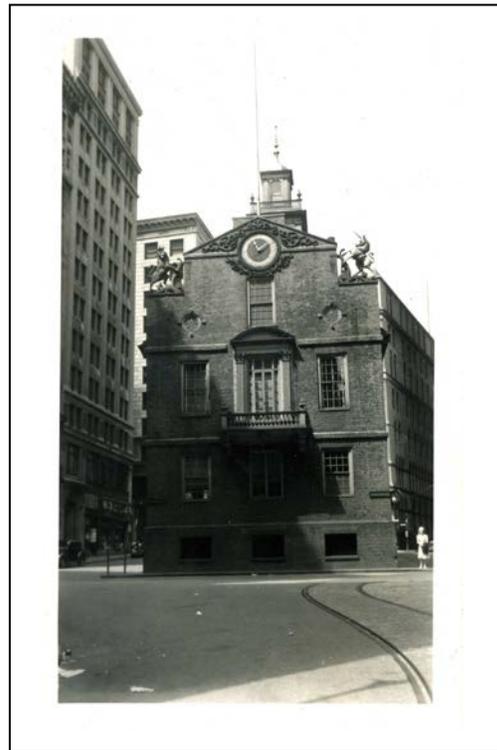


*Change of command  
aboard the USS  
Vincennes (CA-44)*

←



*Old North Church,  
Boston*



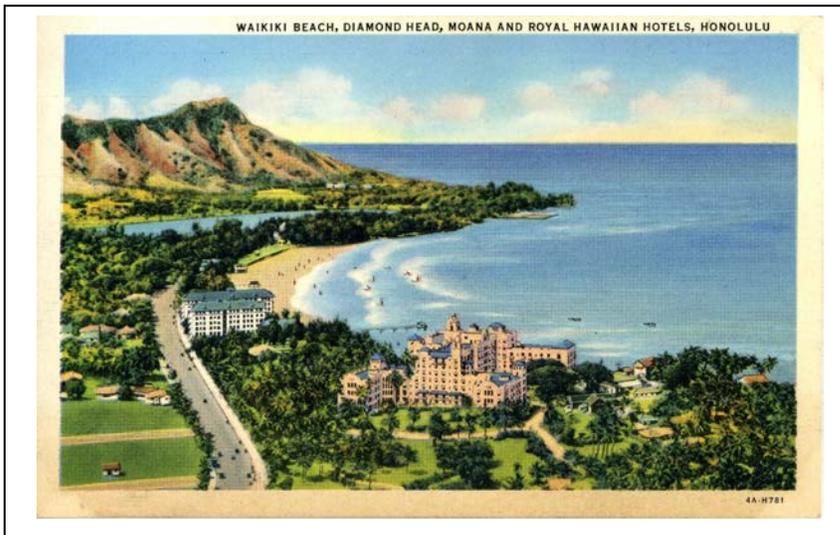
*The State House in Boston where the  
Declaration of Independence is read  
every year on July 4<sup>th</sup>*



*On liberty in Newport,  
Rhode Island*



*Cape of Good Hope  
from a distance,  
South Africa*



*A postcard view of  
Waikiki Beach, the  
Royal Hawaiian and  
the Moana Hotels*



*Bill toured the USS  
Vincennes (CG-49)  
which made a port  
call in San Diego  
in June of 2000.*





*Bill and his friend Robert Cole aboard the  
USS Vincennes (CG-49)*

←



*Bill aboard ship*

→



*Bill in the  
captain's chair*

←