

In Their Own Words Pearl Harbor

(A section of this work)

PEARL HARBOR NAVAL STATION

Headquarters U.S. Pacific Fleet

[First wave attacked at 7:55 a.m. Second wave attacked at 8:54 a.m.]

On this 'Day of Infamy' Pearl Harbor played host to some 103 primary vessels which included eight battleships, two heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, forty-three destroyers and four submarines. Nearly half the American Pacific Fleet was at Pearl Harbor. Major naval vessels not present, but in the eastern Pacific and part of the Pacific fleet were the battleship U.S.S. *Colorado* which was being refitted at Puget Sound, Washington and aircraft carriers U.S.S. *Lexington* off of Midway Island deployed to deliver aircraft to the island, the U.S.S. *Saratoga* in California for upgrades and the U.S.S. *Enterprise* steaming 150 miles west of O'ahu towards Pearl Harbor from Wake Island having delivered aircraft to the island. Before the attack the Japanese realized that the prized American carriers were no longer docked at Pearl Harbor. They had lost their chance to cripple the American carrier fleet.

With the U.S.S. *Lexington* were three cruisers and five destroyers. With the U.S.S. *Enterprise* were three cruisers and eight destroyers. Heavy weather had delayed the U.S.S. *Enterprise* task force which had been scheduled to arrive at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Task Force Three with the heavy cruiser U.S.S. *Indianapolis*, flagship for Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance, which left Pearl Harbor on December 5, were five destroyers near Johnson Island some 800 miles southwest of O'ahu. Before being sunk in 1945 the U.S.S. *Indianapolis* would deliver the atomic bomb to Tinian Island that was used to attack the military garrison city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

Jack C. Pettitt: On board the battleship West Virginia, Pearl Harbor. "It was Sunday and everybody was relaxed. If you didn't go ashore you laid in a bunk, you read, you wrote letters or whatever and if you didn't have the money to go ashore you stayed onboard and had a place to sleep and eat."

Journalist Blake Clark: "Its beginning, on a calm sunny Sunday morning in one of the most peaceful spots in the world, was a rumbling noise of what I thought was coast artillery practice, then this radio announcement..." (9)

07:50 a.m.

Enemy aircraft approach Pearl Harbor from the direction of Merry Point and Hickam Field.

Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Chief of Naval Operations: Pearl Harbor. "I knew right away that something terrible was going on, that this was not a casual raid by just a few stray planes. The sky was full of the enemy. [I saw the U.S.S.] *Arizona* lift out of the water, then sink back down – way down. My main thought was the fate of my ships – to see what had taken place and then strike back at the Japs." (4)

Lt. Commander Logan C. Ramsey, Patrol Wing Two: Ford Island. "Broadcast on all wavelengths and over all means of communication 'Air raid Pearl Harbor. This is no drill.'" (11)

Loudspeaker on the U.S.S. Oklahoma

"All hands man your battle stations. The enemy is attacking. This is no shit!"



U.S.S. *Oklahoma* before the attack on Pearl Harbor
(Official U.S. Navy Photo)

Storekeeper Jim Leavelle: On board a destroyer, Pearl Harbor. “I was on deck and a boatswain’s mate was standing beside me and we were looking across the harbor. He saw the first plane coming in. I didn’t notice it. He said, ‘Look at that plane. It’s got a red ball on the wing.’ He said they must have been using it for practice. But that was the plane that was sent in first. Then he dropped his bombs and went back. The Japanese would come over Ford Island and make a turn to the right because that’s where most of the action was, but we were on the other side. One came our direction. I don’t know how he got lost. He fired a few rounds, I guess at several of us, as it passed over.

We did have a good view of everything. A mile and a half at sea looks like 150 yards on the ground because you see a lot a lot further on the open sea. We saw some destroyers going out with big fires on the back end of them where they had got hit. The battleship [U.S.S.] *Nevada* was trying to get out of there, burning on each end, front and back, and had their guns going. They made a lot of wartime movies later on, but none could match what the scene looked like to us.” (2)



Enemy photo of Battleship Row on the southeast shore of Ford Island, Pearl Harbor.
(Photo: National Park Service)

Light Cruiser U.S.S. *Helena*'s log book

“At about 07:57 ½, a series of three heavy explosions felt nearby.”
“At about 07:58, ship rocked by violent explosions on starboard side.”



U.S.S. *Helena* imaged in 1940

[At 7:58 a torpedo passed under the U.S.S. *Oglala* and hit the U.S.S. *Helena*.]
[31 men were killed in action, and 66 were wounded during the attack on the U.S.S. *Helena*.]

Yeoman Edward F. Borucki: On board the light cruiser U.S.S. *Helena*, Pearl Harbor. “I was handing out the liberty cards to the off-duty watch in the engine room and the general alarm sounded, ‘Man your battle stations: Jap planes attacking. Break out service ammunition. This is no drill.’ I dashed to my battle station, forward battle dressing and damage control, secured the watertight doors that were knocked against the bulkhead and the wall. We found out it was a torpedo that hit just when I left. I was saved by thirty seconds. And thirty-three of my shipmates were killed in that vicinity.

Well, of course, we were underneath the second and first deck there and we couldn’t see what was going on there until the all clear sounded. So all we heard was the firing and the shrieking and the noise and all that. It was like being in a submarine or something. You can’t see what’s going on there – we had to carry out the wounded and the dead, and so we were all black and blue and the uniform of the day was shorts and undershirts, so the torpedo flash killed a lot of people and hurt a lot of my shipmates. My friends were members. Salvatore [J.] Albanese [F2/c] from Flushing, New York, he brought me a sandwich on Saturday, December 6, from the beach, a ham sandwich and the next day, he was dead.

We saw the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* burning and the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* was overturned. I thought some of my old buddies were on the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma*. One was transferred to the Philippines, and he suffered in the Bataan death march. And my brother joined the Navy the next day, and he was killed in North Atlantic in August ‘42. So my mother was a gold star mother. People don’t realize what gold star mothers are – that they lost their child in the service. I remember Father Murphy, our chaplain, taking care of the wounded and giving last rites and romping around there and it was – that scenery is nightmare. One of the – another survivor I interviewed at one other time said that, his quote was, ‘I’ve never been to hell, but I think Pearl Harbor was as close as I ever want to get.’

I was [Engineering Department] yeoman, I had to prepare the reports, the battle reports on the damage to the ship and what happened, and the whole forward engine room was completely destroyed, so we had to prepare a list of materials needed to cover the hold of the ship so – it took us a month to do that, then we limped back to California to get the new forward engine room and new equipment.” (18)

Felix Balodis: On board the light cruiser U.S.S. *Helena*, Pearl Harbor. “It was out at sea. We were already under way. So uh, I look around and I said, ‘Gee, everybody’s’ gone! What happened?’ I notice everybody

is in general quarters. My ship is quiet. So by the time I got down to my battle station was way up fore. I guess I would say I'm down here almost just forward of the hangar deck, so I had a lot of compartments to go through. And when I got down to my general quarters station nobody said anything. Nobody had even missed me. Mine was way down below in the ammunition handling room. Well down there I just snuck in, you know, like a little mouse. I didn't want to be noticed. I thought, hey, someone's going to court martial me for missing my battle station. So then I hear them saying, 'Break out service ammunition.' The gunner said, 'Well, should we load?' I said, 'No, don't load just hold. Hold back' And sort of a communication between the main central – I just passed it away.

Didn't even say that I saw the sub anymore; just dropped it. So then, after that, we secured. The word was passed that there was an enemy sub in the vicinity. And that's when I started to think it was an enemy sub. It was just a strike or nothing; I kept my mouth shut from then on. Then when we pulled in the Harbor, they put us alongside a 1010 dock. Well the – was supposed to take that place I understand, so we stayed there. I don't know what was the reason.

So the night before I remember a movie we had. It was 'Hold Back Till Dawn' or something about war pictures. Someone had to go to war and they didn't want to go and they're beating the drums and say, 'Well I'm patriotic now and they're attacking us, so I'm going to war.' And that was the movie night before. So that night I slept in a carpenters shop. I didn't go down to my compartment anymore. I didn't like it because it was too quiet and it was too far away from everything. I wanted to be near the action and so I stayed in the carpenters shop and I slept on a bench. So I wake up this morning and instead of going for morning breakfast, I figure well I'm going to sleep in this morning. So I slept in. I didn't go down to mess hall. I stayed on topside so I just, oh about a few minutes before 8:00, I got out at (the carpenter's shop was main deck); I just went out on the main deck and facing Ford Island I looked. And again I'm looking over the railing, just looking towards Ford Island, nice sunny day. And I just glance up and see one of the hangars going up in flames and gosh almighty, what are they doing? They making movies? I see a funny little plane flying. What are they making, movies? They're burning this old hangar down. Hmmm. Hesitating. Then all of a sudden the little plane made a turn, veered to the left and hit another hangar! Another hangar goes BOOF up into the air, in flames.

I said, 'God Almighty! Fire Rescue party.' So I'm going back and forth just like a bird just weaving. I didn't know what to do – run another shiny plane with a little red ball on it is going, flying right low. So then another bomb hit. It hit the PBY's on the pad, and when it hit the PBY's, hit on the pad, all that junk came up towards the ship. I said, 'This is it.' and I just ran towards the shop. As I enter the shop, just about in the shop, they hollered, 'General Quarters! All hands man battle stations: Japs attacking Ford Island!' I said, 'That's it.' so I ran out. All I had was my shoes, skivvies. Well, I grabbed my shoes; I don't know what happened, but I wound up right about library area, midships – then from main deck at my battle station, I had to go one deck below, go forward and through warrant 'officers country' into fore. My battle station at that time was transferred, changed, from magazine to anchor windlass way up forward; just forward anchor windlass – warrant officers country. So I'm going to the battle station. As I left my carpenters shop I just about hit midships by library.

Now just there was a ladder going down from main deck to the library area. And then going through a passage way, doorway. Another ladder would lead you down to mess deck, and right there was a trunk coming up from main engine room. Right on the deck was also engineering office. Well, I didn't even get through the deck. I just came up to this passage way leading to the next compartment from library when it got hit. I don't know how many men in front of me, I would say about 3 or 4, or maybe – I don't know; I just could see they were white men. I know the men looked in white, and all of a sudden 'whoov' the lights went out and an air blasted me somehow to jolt below, knocked me off my feet. And uh, I spun like a yo yo. Then the flames; I could see the flames come up, and I tried to get myself off and I scratched the deck. They said I even scratched that deck; the red deck was scratched with my fingernails. I tried to get away from the flames because I was spinning around on the deck. I couldn't move – the

vibration, and the flames coming up. So, I scratched the deck and I didn't even know it. There was a fellow by the name of Bernacki (??), he had his cleaning station and if someone scratched the deck – boy he really scratched it. I said that was I. I tried to get out of the flames. The ship was bouncing and I tried – the only thing, I got caught; my legs were caught in the flames. So my legs were burned. But I didn't even know I was burned until 12:00 that night. But when everything ceased, all the vibration, I looked and all of these men in front, they were all charcoal black. I said, 'What the heck these men. These are not mess attendants. They're supposed to be white. And they were mess attendants. I just totally lost my mind somehow. My thoughts went right back to my childhood, what I did or didn't do, and what not. The ship is blowing up. I said, 'This is it.' I didn't know what happened.

So somehow when I got myself woven together, instead of going forward, the lights went out, I couldn't go forward and I didn't have shoes on. I was barefooted. And they said, 'You cannot go bare footed on deck.' because they can become so hot that you can burn your feet. So I have no shoes. I lost my shoes. So uh, I go up on main deck, have to go up. I didn't know, I'm just going around in circles, dazed, where are we. So seeing the [U.S.S.] *Oglala*, I said, 'Well I'm going to have to go jump in between.' I said, 'What do I want to go jump in between the [U.S.S.] *Oglala* for. We're along side. I'm gonna go on board the [U.S.S.] *Oglala*. I didn't know what was going on. So I didn't go on the [U.S.S.] *Oglala*. I said, 'Hey, we're alongside the dock.' So I didn't go over to the [U.S.S.] *Oglala* then. I didn't know what to do anymore. I was just so confused. So I finally go on the other side of the ship alongside the dock, and there I see this one fellow named (he was at a bar where they called him 'Red') and he was burned. All his skivvies were burned off. Just all he had was burning. The seam of his skivvy shirt was still burning, and I see him. Fellows recognize him, but I couldn't recognize him. 'Say hi y Red' what – what. So he just mumbled something. So the fellow went off and pulled this here part of his left shoulder skivvy shirt that was burning yet.

And so finally I said I still have to go back to my battle station, but how am I going to get forward, because you had to go below decks and over. So finally, an officer came along with a flashlight and I followed him, led on through, and went to my battle station, which was up to anchor windlass, just forward up in back of after anchor windlass. So I got there and my partner was another carpenter's neighbor. He was a painter, a fellow by the name of Sandy Bake. And I said, 'Hi Sandy!' So he looked like an Indian. He slept in the paint shop. And when it hit, that bar whipped and knocked all the paint off and fell on top of his head. He looked like a Cherokee Indian, all black, red, red deck and whatnot on him – white. So I didn't even notice that he had a little cut on his head. A paint can fell on top of his head; hit him. So he's with me. And there we both were standing there next to each other and 'General Quarters!' Then after general quarters, 'Gas attack!' So we put the masks on to secure gas attack. 'Gas attack!' We didn't know what the hell to do. Well all we could hear on topside, we had .50 [caliber] machine guns. The Marines manned the .50-caliber machine guns. They were on wheels, so I could hear them, 'There's one!' 'Hey, we got one! We got one!' and pow pow pow, they're hittin' – boom, they're hittin'. We didn't know what was going on topside. All we could hear, 'We got one!'

So finally, I don't know what time it was, when the shooting secured, they told us pass the word down to our area to take soundings, if any water damage. I looked out – if anyone's been in hell, I said, 'This is hell!' All black smoke. I felt like we were in a hole – a black hole. The Pennsy [U.S.S. *Pennsylvania*] burning, the battleships burning, and something's burning over here around us, and all that black smoke right in the middle. I said, 'god almighty!' So I went back and I said, 'Sandy, you better go out there and take a look. We're in hell.' So Sandy comes back and that was it. We couldn't talk anymore. From there on, I can't remember what the hell I did that day – just – the day kept on going – just like a dream. All I remember, that evening, when evening meal came along, they had chili and beans, or bean something. And mess hall you couldn't eat so we ate wherever we could, and we ate topside. And no wash or whatever; you finish the bowl of beans you just gave the bowl to someone else. He went out and filled out the same bowl with his – didn't have no scullery or anything. That was that day." (18)

Seaman Second Class Francis Augustus Gingras: On board the light cruiser U.S.S. *Helena*, Pearl Harbor. “And I was just getting ready to go paint the anchor. They just said that – and I was wondering how the devil I was going to paint the anchor, ‘cause I hadn’t really been working on that job that much. Then all of a sudden, they passed the word, ‘All hands man your battle stations. Japanese planes attacking Ford Island.’ And I’ll always remember that expression. No question on that [over the loudspeaker]. I got topside. I mean, my berthing compartment was right next to the hatch going up to the main deck. [Note: Hangers were on fire on Ford Island] And, believe me now, when you’re [eighteen] you can scramble pretty fast. And I was up that ladder and up to my gun. That’s what we’d been trained for, get up there as fast as you can. And I was over on the starboard side and I could see the plane, I seen him drop the torpedo. Now I don’t remember the torpedo in the water, because I was running towards the [gun]. I know that this jackass was smiling when he went over the ship. A lot of my friends died on that ship. And I’ll always remember that [smile].

After the torpedo hit, then a couple bombs hit someplace, because the guy on [the trainer] side, he was just cut to pieces with shrapnel. And the guy standing [next] to me was hit. And the guy [to the left] was hit. And I didn’t get touched. But he was, they weren’t hit bad. But this guy had already been burned so bad that they finally sent him to the hospital.

Well, outside of the fact that the blast, which I didn’t really see because when I was running, when the ship jolted, I ran right into the bulkhead. And I was knocked cuckoo for a minute or two. Always remember that because the first class boatswain mate, name of Clinton was slapping me in the face, saying, ‘Are you hurt?’ I was hurt. I [did] – immediately, I jumped up and went over and a couple of people were then getting the gun cover off the 1.1 and we got the cover off. And as far as I know, we started shooting just as soon as we could get some ammunition. [We had ready ammunition at the gun.]

Not many people were in the engine room because there was no reason for it. People [were] burned and hurt because we’d had not had any damage control doors closed, which helped the ship. You know, the watertight doors and things like that, all the way up, were open. The blast came from the engine rooms [went] right up [through] all them doors and all them people in the living compartments just literally burned. But in my living compartment, about thirty people died, ‘cause the blast just come right up the hatch.

Well, the ship, no, as far as I know, from just looking at the pictures later, most of the damage control – which was very effective by the way – got everything closed enough so we didn’t sink very much at all. Had we taken another a torpedo or two, it might’ve been different, but we didn’t. ‘Cause by this time, they knew that we were in the wrong spot and the flagship was someplace else. We got hit probably the first simply because they were after the flagship and that’s where we were.

Well, a plane came, passed us and [the trainer was] dead. We can’t train the gun, yet. Couldn’t get him out. But the pointer elevated the gun and the plane went through those shells. And then he turned around, went down by Aiea landing and came back almost the same direction. And he went through those tracers again. By this time, he’s slumped over. And he crashed into the hospital.

Oh, as a matter of fact, my position, I seen everything. I seen the battleship [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* roll over. I seen it take at least two torpedoes. I seen the [U.S.S.] *California*, because it was closer to us, take three torpedoes. I watched the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blow up. I watched the destroyer [U.S.S.] *Shaw* blow up. I watched the [U.S.S.] *Nevada* on its way out the harbor, burning until it hit the beach.” (18)

Seaman First Class Will Brady: On board the light cruiser U.S.S. *Helena*, Pearl Harbor. “Oh, at that particular moment, I had just heard ‘em. When I looked up, I believe I was facing Ford Island, and I seen the explosions going on and the first I thought – I was thinking was that our planes must have goofed up and they were unloading some bombs by mistake. And of course, within a couple seconds I realized – seeing that red circle – I realized it was the Japs that was bombing Pearl Harbor. And, well, I guess it took

me a couple of seconds or maybe minutes before I realized that we was at war. And by then, GQ had sounded, which is general quarters. And people was started heading for their battle stations, and so did I. Mine was up in radar control, forward control, which handled the five-inch guns up forward. And by the time that the – I guess, before I even got there – I remember climbing up the ladders heading up there – the ship was hit. And, well, from then on, things happened so fast it was hard to remember exactly what went on, you know, at the particular moment.

It was hit by torpedoes and by then, the planes was in there and they started strafing us with machine gun and, you know, just a mess all over. Then you hear people hollering, they got hit and people was burnt and stuff like that.

I seen a couple guys get killed there and of course, well, we had so much excitement going on, and I was trying to get to my station all at the same time. And I remember this one plane come in and strafing us, and I don't know whether he was trying to shoot me or what, but he was shaking his fist at me. I can still see him up there, shaking his fist. I don't know whether he's shaking at me or shaking at the whole ship or what. And about that time, somebody shot him down. I don't know if it was our ship or one of the other ships next to us. And I know how good it made me feel to see him go down that day.

I don't know whether you call it confusion or where it was just so much going on that people were just kind of got mixed up what was what, because all the ammunition was locked up and the guns, turrets, was locked and people had to take a lot of things on themselves because there was still a lot of people off on liberty that hadn't come back. And I guess it was a little bit of confusion.

We – I went onto my station that way and my station is in radar control, which is, you know, and it swings around, picks up the control on the various objects it's going on. My job was down in the inside there, which I couldn't see outside, and they was setting the gun control, you know, destination and what not. And that was my job. So I didn't actually see too much that was going on until I...

Well, you just hear a lot of stuff going on and of course, you were concentrating so much on just what your job was, well, you kind of blanked out everything else, trying to do the very best you can. And of course, I had a set of earphones on where I could talk to the people down in the guns and I could get a little information on what they was saying and hearing what was going on. But more than anything else, I was trying to make sure that I did my job the best that I could. And – I think the dive bombers had come in and was strafing us at that time, about the same time that the torpedoes hit. And I hadn't got to my station yet when the torpedoes was dropped.

It's – was it the torpedo hit that you're talking about, what condition? The best I can recall, I believe we had two engine rooms knocked out and I know a lot of my friends got burnt from the explosion and the – 'cause all the hatches was open and I guess the flame come up through there because I went down below – I was up by then. And I know a lot of our guys that had already gotten burnt was taken to the hospital.

I suppose, just coming up from topside, the ship had listed quite badly to the starboard, I believe. And so it was some people went off the ship, but then they seen it wasn't and somebody said, 'Hey come on back,' and everybody started coming back in the station and we started in action. So probably it was only two or three minutes at the very most, if it was that long, before we really started in. Well, it's kind of hard to say exactly what because you get so, I guess, excited, built up, 'til you was thinking mainly of how we'd all stop this. We know we was in war, and we wanted to find out – at least I did – I wanted to know what's the best way to put an end to this. And why was it happening, you know. I guess that's the things that was in mind, 'cause at the moment I wasn't scared, I guess I was too excited to be scared and I really didn't get scared until they quit shooting, and then I realized, what the heck, I coulda got killed here! So basically, like I say, I wasn't scared until that happened." (18)

[After repairs light cruiser U.S.S. *Helena* returned to the Pacific war; was at Guadalcanal and was sunk during the Battle of Kula Gulf on July 6, 1943. She earned 6 World War II battle stars.]

Lt. (jg) Charles A. Flood: Pearl Harbor. “I picked up a pair of binoculars and looked them over – bombing technique, which was a glide-bombing. The planes over Ford Island were approaching in the same manner. [Yelling] Japanese planes bombing Ford Island.” (11)

Pharmacist’s Mate Sterling R. Cale [*Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart*]: Pearl Harbor. [Thinking to himself] “How come they’re bombing the battle wagons? We don’t train on Sunday! Must be some sort of National Guard or reserve activity – But then, as I was watching, a plane came by with the rising sun on the fuselage, and I said, ‘My god, those are Japanese planes!’” (13)

“Why are planes over at Battleship Row? That’s a lot of activity for Sunday. In four hours, I picked up about 45 people. Some were dead, some were badly burned; some were just tired. We would get them in a boat going by.” (19)

Ens. William W. Jones: Pearl Harbor. “All hands to General Quarters – break out service ammunition.” (11)

December 7, 1941,

07:58 a.m.: Radio report to all ships.

“AIR RAID, PEARL HARBOR. THIS IS NOT A DRILL!” (6)

Radioman Third Class Adolph Czerwenka: On board the battleship *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “The [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* was moored with six other battleships besides Ford Island – it was called Battleship Row. I was in the petty officer’s washroom that morning. I was stark naked, laundering uniforms. It was hot in there. The squawk box burst out with the order ‘Away all fire and rescue parties.’ I found out later the duty officer had seen an explosion on shore. He was dispatching help. Almost immediately, a torpedo hit the ship and general quarters sounded. I rushed to my battle station in the transmitter room – no shoes on, nothing. I didn’t have time to get to my locker; or to think. We tried to get the communications going and the radar turned on. It was brand new. Torpedoes were hitting the ship, and paint chips were spraying off the bulkheads. A radioman kept sweeping up the chips after each explosion – The ship began to list. Then the lights went out. All this only took about 30 minutes. The order came to abandon ship. I helped a couple of injured engineers up the companionway.” (1)



Enemy photo of Battleship Row during an early portion of the murderous assault.

(Photo: National Park Service)



From left repair ship U.S.S. *Vestal* (top) U.S.S. *Arizona* (bottom); U.S.S. *West Virginia* (top)
U.S.S. *Tennessee* (bottom) U.S.S. *Oklahoma* (top) U.S.S. *Maryland* (bottom)
Torpedo damage on U.S.S. *West Virginia* and U.S.S. *Oklahoma* caused spreading oil slicks.
(Photo: National Park Service)

[The first two torpedo hits on the U.S.S. *Oklahoma* came at 07:56. A third torpedo hit at 08:00. As the ship began to roll over two more torpedos hit the ship. As the men were abandoning the ship the Japanese strafed the men on the decks and in the water. Several crew members made it to the U.S.S. *Maryland* and continued the fight with her anti-aircraft batteries.]

[429 men were killed in action on the U.S.S. *Oklahoma* during the attack.]

Robert West: On board the battleship U.S.S. *Oklahoma*, Pearl Harbor. Tossing away his clarinet, West remarked, “Well, I won’t need that anymore. I had counted six hits (on the U.S.S. *Oklahoma*) and I said to the kid beside me. ‘One more and she’s going over.’ We got the seventh hit and she went.” (15)



Enemy photo of Ford Island shows torpedo hit on U.S.S. *Oklahoma* via flash of water rising hundreds of feet in the air. Pearl Harbor’s fuel storage tanks are visible on the top right of image which were completely missed by the enemy attackers.
(Photo: National Park Service)

Seaman Erwin Mitschek: On board the battleship U.S.S. *Oklahoma*, Pearl Harbor. “I proceeded to get dressed and just about that time, general quarters went. And I thanked the good lord that we had all these training missions every time we went on patrol. We had drill after drill after drill. So when the gong went off, I mean, it was just routine to head for your battle station. I was on the anti-aircraft battery, on the boat deck, starboard side. And we were down on main deck; then we had the casemate deck. We were casemate

guns, and I went up the ladder. As I was coming out of the hatch, the boats were tearing up the teak wood deck. Well, I knew right then and there, hey, this is no drill. I manned my station, took the folds out that was docked around the gun. Put my foams on, relayed the messages from the control officer. All of a sudden, he passed the word, 'Secure all guns and abandon ship.'

Well, from force of habit, I took my foams off, wrapped them up, coiled them and put them back in the box that was on the splitter ledge of the gun. Well, all I heard was; 'Range this, range that.' But we couldn't range anything, because all the munitions, ammunition was down below deck.

Then they came on the planes came on the port side, hit the ship there and of course we had blister ledges, which normally would be closed, but having come in, they aired 'em out, and they were open. Therefore, one of the torpedoes went through the blister ledge. It caused them to fill up and that's what caused it to sink. I secured my gun and I went down on the boat deck, and there was a two-inch Hawser between the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* and the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*. That's how we were tied up together. And I decided, well, hey, I gotta get off of here. So I started to climb hand over hand, you know, like Tarzan does.

Well, I got about halfway across and I stopped, took my shoes off. And as I turned around, there were five people behind me, doing the same thing. And I got within about, oh, it must have been about fifteen feet of the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*, and the fellow cut the line, on the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*. Well, he did that so that we, the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma*, wouldn't pull them along with us. But like I say, the man cut the line and I hit the water, and as I treaded my way back up out of the water, I heard, 'Ching, ching, ching,' above my head. And as my head did come above water, here's the Zero going off the other side.

I didn't see the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* until after I got over on Ford Island. They, we helped and then the attack stopped momentarily. So they told all the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* sailors to go over to Ford Island. They put a plank down, yeah. So there, I got called, the ambulance is coming by. And the guy says, 'Come on, help me.' So we went around and picked up people that had gotten wounded. And I just put one guy into the meat wagon, as we call 'em, closed the door, and there was a crash. Well, we got to the hospital; they had to pry the door open, because the shrapnel hit it. Here I was, inside, luckily I didn't get hit." (18)



Simultaneous torpedo hits on the U.S.S. *Oklahoma* and U.S.S. *West Virginia*, viewed from the west across Ford Island.

Carpenter's Mate Second Class Walter Staff: On board the battleship U.S.S. *Oklahoma*, Pearl Harbor. "And the first explosion, I thought, 'What in the hell are they firing the turrets in the harbor?' 'Cause the whole ship just rattled.

I was on the starboard side, and of course we were hit on the port side, see. So I was clear across it. I got, we got two hits before I got down to my station. Well, the ship kind of jumped out of the water, you know, and the whole thing shook. And like I said, I thought it was our turrets firing, 'cause that was about the same effect that the turrets – just like picking it up ten feet and dropping it back down. Well, you

were trained to go to your battle station and I went. I made it down in the far – forward air compressor room and then there was another little pump room; and I turned off the – it was the fresh water. So if you got a hit, you didn't have water, you know, leaking around. I come back out of my hole and there was five of us down in there. J. P. Centers, a machinist mate that took care of the forward air compressors – they used the compressed air to blow out the guns, you know. And by that time, you could see it was listing. And we got another hit and it knocked all the lights out, I mean just shattered them.

On that last hit, when it got black. I was a senior petty officer and one of the fellows had a cigarette lighter with him. And I says, 'Time to get the hell out of here,' and we started up the hatch and about that time, we were all five of us right together going up, just like a waterfall hit us. And we didn't know at the time, but that's about the time the ship turned over.

You were just going up this hatch, and you were just like in a waterfall. And there's only two of us come back out. The other three, evidently were panicked and drowned when they – and of course, you make for the top, you know. You expect to hit maybe an overhead or something, but we come out and – Yeah, they didn't come back, so we felt around and then it was Centers, my, the other petty officer. Pardon me. We didn't know where we were for – see, we thought we were two decks up. But we went up a deck and then the ship turned over, and then we went up another deck, so we're right back where we started.

You have no idea. In fact, when I got out, I thought it was still Sunday. You just lose all sense of time. Anyway, after we calmed down, which how long I don't know; hour, maybe, or whatever. I saw something shining on the bulkhead over there. I made my way over there and it was a phone on the bulkhead. The phone's upside down. It had a little luminous dial, you know, like your watch? And then we realized that we were upside down and where we were. And knowing where we were and underwater, we just were resigned to the fact, we thought the air would go bad and that would be that. It was a fairly large compartment for a ship. As you know, the ships were all what we would call rooms, and they're all watertight. Of course, it was fuel oil, the tanks had been roughed, you were covered with fuel oil and this water might have even been fresh water, because there was fresh water tanks in that area. You see, we didn't think to taste it or anything, but there was fuel in it, just black. This was one of the bigger compartments. They had two big air compressors in.

Well, the ship wasn't actually upside down. It was on a little angle, so you had a kind of a corner where you, we could hover on that corner and be out of water. But of course, you're all wet and cold and damp.

We could hear the [U.S.S.] *Maryland* was inboard and they had these new 1.1 guns, you know, pom-pom, 'Pom, pom, pom, pom.' We could hear them firing and that was evidently the second wave that came over. And we knew we were sunk, but we didn't, didn't know what was going on, really. You couldn't do anything. There was nothing to do. We didn't even think to tap.

We didn't really talk too much. You have a lot of thoughts and like I say, you don't know; you have no idea of time. We were resigned to the fact. We figured the air would just go bad and you'd just pass out. Well, looking back, it was a day or so later.

Well, like I say, you got no idea of time, but it must have been early Tuesday morning or late Monday night, we heard some tapping. So then it gave us new life. Then we didn't have anything to tap with. So we had to scrounge around. I found a little open end wrench with – we tapped. Neither one of us knew the code because we weren't signalmen. They were working their way to try to get us out. Oh yeah, you'd type twice, you know, 'Boom, boom,' and then they'd answer, 'Boom, boom.' Cause we, like I say, neither one of us knew the code.

It took 'em about an hour, talking to 'em later, to work their way down through the double bottoms. See, they couldn't just cut wildly in there. You had ammunition; you had fuel oil and everything else. And in fact, they cut into an apartment, a compartment that was cork lined. They were using torches

and by the time they got it cut open, the two guys had suffocated that were in there. So they used an air hammer. It took 'em about an hour to cut a whole big enough for a man to get out through the plate.

Well, they drilled a hole first. They had these tapered plugs so they could just plug the hole up, the test hole. And we were under quite a bit of water pressure, you know. You could hear the air going out. And that shot of light came down through, you know, just like a – we were under quite a bit of air pressure. Well, it was letting the water come up as the air pressure would go over. Clear up, crept over our necks.

Yes. The water is running out, like I say, the hull wasn't right flat. It was on an angle like that and it was leaking out below and we were in the high corner. And that, the rescue team left because they were afraid of getting flooded, and that was the worst feeling, 'cause you're that close and then – You could, you couldn't really understand 'em 'cause there was quite a hissing sound of the air going out. But they left, you know. And unbeknowing to us, they were going to come back on a little different route. And that's when we really felt the worst. 'Cause, I mean you're that close to getting out and then you see 'em leave.

In fact, this Centers was, tried to drown himself and I pulled him back up. And I says; 'We're not quite ready yet.' He was going to drown himself because we were to that point. I grabbed him and pulled him up. I said, 'Wait a minute, we're not through yet.' And then you could hear 'em tapping again. They came back in on a little different direction. I, like I say, you had no idea of time. It's been so long, probably maybe an hour, or whatever. I really couldn't say.

Yeah, this is Tuesday morning. And finally when we came out, he, Centers left. He hadn't, had enough and I sat there and talked to the rescue crew. One of the fellows was a first class ship fitter, William Stanley Thomas, and he really organized the rescue mission. He was going by the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* Sunday afternoon and he heard some tapping. See, there was about five hundred other people trapped in there, different compartments and stages of the game. He goes over to the sub base and gets some of our officers. He says, 'I think we can get some of our men out.' And of course, if it hadn't been such a disaster, you know, they could have got a lot of people out, but they weren't, you know. They had other things to worry about one ship with a few hundred men.

Well, it was a sickening scene when I came out and saw all the fleet on the bottom. The [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was smoldering and, and all the battle ships sitting on the bottom. We knew we were sunk. We had no idea that they had sunk the whole fleet. Oh, just like being born again. It was really great, 'cause like I say, we had, we'd given up before we'd even tapped, you know. We were resigned to the fact and then when there is more hope, why – like I say, when we came out of that and saw the whole fleet on the bottom, that was terrible. We had no idea how much – then announced Japanese air attack. See, I didn't see an airplane or anything because I was below decks the whole thing." (18)



Enemy image of Battleship Row on fire.

Ensign Adolph Henry Mortensen: On board the battleship U.S.S. *Oklahoma*, Pearl Harbor. “Well I woke up when Herb Romel, Ensign Herb Romel passed this word, ‘Air raid, air raid! Get moving. This is no drill!’ And he used the phrase, ‘no shit,’ in there. And which is a term you’d never use over a P.A. system. Not only that, I guess I was perhaps due to wake up anyway because I heard this. And here is a voice I recognized, Herb Romel, an ensign when usually a quartermaster would’ve come on the P.A. system.

Well I knew – I instantly knew that something was happening. And so I jumped out of bed and Maurie, he had the bottom bunk, and he and I got out of that bunk the same time. And I put on slippers. I had PJ bottoms on. You know, it’s hot in Pearl Harbor, even December. You only had one porthole in our stateroom. And I grabbed my billed hat and put it on and stepped out the door, in the passageway, and crossed over to the starboard side. And then, going aft into the JO (Junior Officers) wardroom and just as I came opposite the number one barbette the number one turret the first torpedo hit. And it lifted that ship up twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty – it’s hard to say how much it was raised up. It was just a big muffled boom and it jumped right up. And then it settled back slowly. And of course we knew; I knew that the day of infamy had begun. That wasn’t a term that I knew of then, but I – Walter [Lord] concocted that one or Franklin Roosevelt concocted that.

I continued aft, pass the stewards’ galley and slipped over the threshold into warrant officer country, which was always nice and clean, you know, painted. And I think we had four warrant officers, so there were four staterooms on that starboard side, and continued through that into second – no – boiler division, ‘B’ division living compartment. And that was the first one inside from warrant officer country. And there was a passageway maybe fifteen, twenty feet into that area in which there is, just seemed like a blank space. And then there is a big massive deck hatch through the armor-plated deck. And that thing is probably four feet by six feet with a ladder going down. And down I went and as I recall most everyone that was supposed to be at forward boiler control was there at the time. And I can remember now one person pulling the hatch down and dogging it.

But we didn’t get any orders. We didn’t get any orders at all. Even voice communication to the bridge was non-existent. You can talk to the bridge but if there’s nobody up there to answer, or they’re not answering, it didn’t do you any good. And the old sound-powered telephone that connected the bridge also and I guess one or two other stations wasn’t getting, doing any good either. And I can’t tell you just exactly when the torpedoes began to hit, but I would say that when I hit, when I came down through the hatch and hit the deck, the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth torpedoes hit and it just seemed to be a swarm. It was just one after the other.

The only torpedo that actually did something to the ship other than blast holes in it; was the very first torpedo, because evidently it had hit in a spot where it could and it had the force that it could lift the entire ship. But then as the swarm hit, you know, and the holes got bigger and bigger, this filled with water.

I think the list occurred the moment I started going down the ladder. It gets more severe and it didn’t go down to forty-five degrees, as you read in so many reports, because we were standing on the deck, not on the bulkhead.

It gradually went over to a particular point there and then it held itself and it stayed there. And you know, we didn’t say much to one another. There was nothing to say because we were waiting for instructions from the outside. In forward boiler control, there was not over five; four or five.

The, see, when I came into the, our second ‘B’ division living quarters, the mess tables were still set up. Mess benches were still there. Stuff was still on the tables. I didn’t know whether they’d finished breakfast or not and I assume they probably had. But all of those fellows, they were water tenders or firemen, or whatever, were down in the fire rooms. And I do remember one fellow, he did follow me down

the ladder and he was going down to one of the fire rooms and I can remember him spinning the handle, going into the air lock and spinning it shut, and I said to myself, I wonder what he's going to find down there. And you know, I told myself that there's no way you're going to light off these boilers. And what good would it do when you had a list of twenty degrees.'

She was going over. And there was a porthole – I saw the water come in on the port side, from both the bow and the stern, just about the same time, flood in. And then there was a little waterfall from one of the portholes that was still was open. And it made a little waterfall until the port went under the water. And she just kept on rotating and as it rotated and the water came in – you know, swimming in Hawaii is a wonderful thing, and the water is nice and warm. And I just, you know, not like taking a cold bath. And it was really comfortable to sit there or stand there and let the water come in and then I started treading water. And I, you know, I said to myself, I can't fight this. I can't do anything about it. I'm just going to let the water take me where it's going to take me.

And as I treaded water, I just briefly looked around to see what happened to Hittorff, and he was gone. And I looked for Goggin, and he was gone. And I found out later that neither of them could swim. And Goggin had been on board, I think, since 1917, when the ship went into commission. And he was a man in his, close to fifty, I would presume, and Hittorff, four years at the naval academy and still not being able to swim. That's incomprehensible to me. They disappeared.” (18)

Roland E. Burr: On board the battleship U.S.S. *Oklahoma*, Pearl Harbor. “We were scheduled – we came in that weekend and we were going to have an admiral's inspection by Captain Kidd, who was BATDIVTWO commander on the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. And I was in the captain's office that morning and I heard – oh, I guess it was about ten minutes to eight o'clock or quarter to eight. Why, I heard a lot of noise going on and I went out the door in the captain's office and I looked over at Ford Island and they had been bombed. And so I went back to where I was and I look out the porthole and there was this airplane coming in from [Merry] Point Landing and it came over there, why, I noticed it had a bomb underneath, which turned out to be a torpedo. And it [came] by – we were in the front ship and he turned that torpedo – we took the first one. And when he turned the wing up on the plane, why, I see that circle. And my first thought was, ‘What is Roosevelt doing?’ ‘Cause we had a good idea of it, so...

And they were negotiating in Washington, which we didn't know anything about that. But anyway, we took seven torpedoes that morning. And every time one torpedo would hit, it would jerk the ship. And I've been told by other people that we took more than that, but I counted 'em. And I'll verify it from the fellow, photographer who was on Ten-Ten dock, over by the shipyard. And he was taking pictures that morning. He was a first class photographer. And I asked him, I said, ‘How many torpedoes did the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* take?’ And he told me, ‘Seven.’

And that's what I counted. But later on, it shows the damage on the ship that there could possibly have been one or two more. And after we took these torpedoes – why I started off over the side, and climbing on the bottom of the ship over going toward the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*. The U.S.S. *Maryland* was tied up alongside of us and they had been to the states in the yard and they had some one-point-one Bofors, which is a very good anti-aircraft gun. But anyway I started over the side. Started going over toward the side and this lieutenant [came] by and he pulled his forty-five out and he [said], ‘Sonny, where you going?’ And I [said], ‘I'm not going anywhere.’ I turned around I went back. I didn't want to get shot.

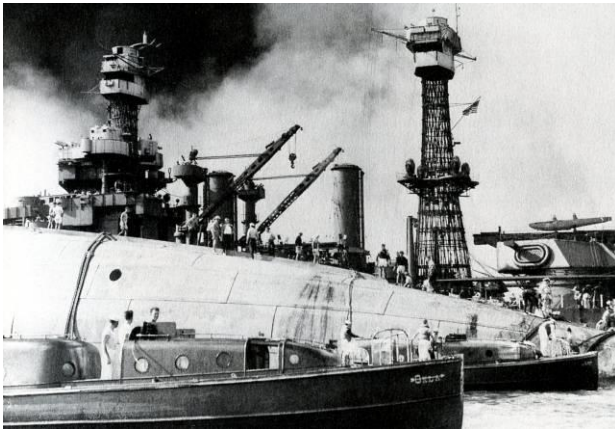
A little later, they had lines over. A little later, when I went up on the side, crawled up the line to the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*, he was ahead of me. So I never thought – but anyway, I went aboard the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*, and I was productive because I passed ammunition for these 1.1 guns. So take 'em up to the guns and fire it. And I spent all the battle up there.

And I'll tell you one little incident that scared me to death. I had seen the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* hit below. I'd seen it; I was looking right at it. And they were two ships behind us. So I – one of these boxes of ammunition went – where the line into from pulling it up and it went all the way down to – it [came] off

and went all the way down to the magazine. And my heart just about stopped because I could see us blowing to kingdom come, but it didn't happen. This was on the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*.

The [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* was rolling over. See, when [we] took those seven torpedoes, it opened up a hole, it took water in. We didn't have any – all the voids were open because they were having – ready for inspection. And so nothing to keep it from counter flooding. Normally, you could've counter flooded it and it would set down like the rest of 'em, but we had no way of doing that. So it just rolled over. It was forty-seven feet of water. I think it was about fifteen minutes, total when we settled on the bottom upside-down.

Well, I – people were right in the water with oil all over 'em and everything. I was fortunate. I don't know how I got across there without being full of oil. Of course, my uniform was ruined. But after the thing was over with on the [U.S.S.] *Maryland*, I went over to Ford Island. I walked over the lines from there over to Ford Island and I stayed there for that night. While I was at Ford Island, I slept on the mess decks, on the floor, the cement floor. And I don't know, it must have been one, two o'clock in the morning, they had some planes come in and I think off of a carrier and boy everybody was trigger happy. And they – I think they shot one or two of them down. But a guy [came] running across that mess decks and he planted his number twelve right on my stomach where I was." (18)



Workers cutting through the hull of the capsized U.S.S. *Oklahoma* to rescue trapped seamen.

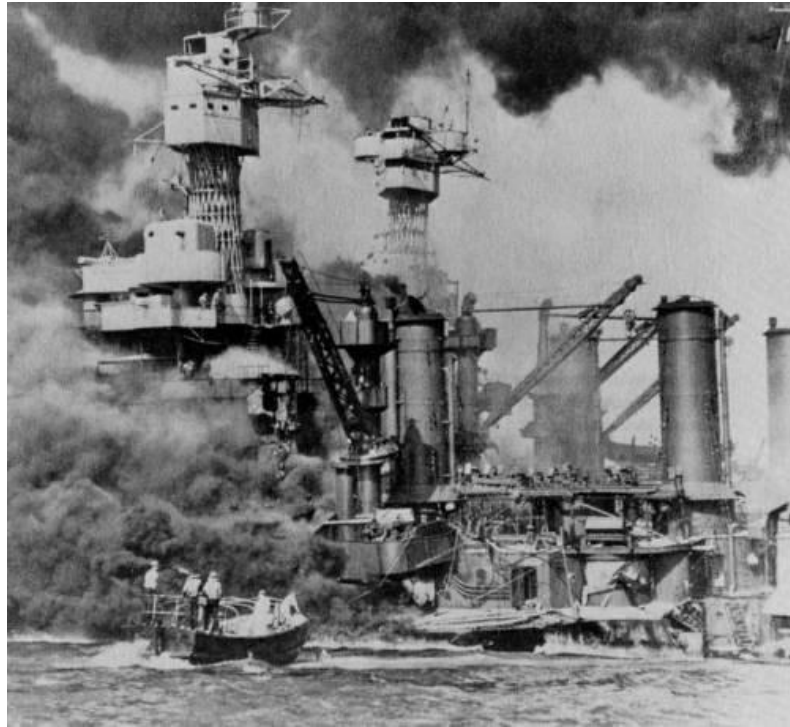
(Photo: National Archives and Records Administration)

Seaman Garlen W. Eslick: 07:55 a.m. On board the battleship U.S.S. *Oklahoma*, Pearl Harbor. "This boy just slumped over. Blood was all over everything. I still didn't know what had happened – I heard this thing roar over – the officer-of-the-deck came on and announced, 'Man your battle stations.'" (6)

Seaman Garlen W. Eslick: 09:30 a.m. Trapped on board the battleship U.S.S. *Oklahoma*, Pearl Harbor. "You did a little praying and thinking [about] things. You think about your family. I had a younger sister who was just a baby. I thought about my brothers and all my family. Would I ever see them again? But I never once – thought that I was going to die – I know I was in one heck of a predicament – I was hoping to get out. I knew what kind of situation I was in, and I came to the conclusion of what I was up against." (6)

Commander Charles Coe, Operations Officer, Intelligence: Ford Island. "The [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* was to me a sight beyond all belief. It was in fact the most awful thing I had ever seen. To watch this big battleship capsize and to see only her bottom sticking up out of the water like the back of a turtle and to realize that U.S. officers and men were still in there – well, I just couldn't believe it. It made me realize as nothing else that war had come to Hawaii." (11)

[The U.S.S. *Oklahoma* was decommissioned and sank while under tow on May 17, 1947.]
[The ship was awarded one World War II battle star.]



Fire-fighting effort to save the U.S.S. *West Virginia* as it sits on the bottom of Pearl Harbor.
In the background are the funnels of the U.S.S. *Tennessee*.
(Photo: National Park Service)

**[U.S.S. *West Virginia* was hit by at least two heavy bombs and seven
torpedoes before she settled in the water.]**
[106 men were killed in action during the air attack.]

Seaman Second Class Edmond Torkel Esping: On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “It was about eight o’clock. The church parties was on one end of the fantail and then up forward of it more was the swimming crew peoples. And the, he hadn’t blown the whistle on the showdown for it but they told me before, he says, ‘Just as soon as you can take that hose and go up to the fo’c’sle up there at the bow and water it down.’ Well, I was tugging on this damn hose, you know. You got about 150 feet of it to go because the boards, they dry out and then they split. And then you can’t the crap out of ‘em, and then they rot.

So I was pulling and all I had to do was one more pull, you know, I would be in business. But I happened to look west and there was two planes coming, and they were coming at an angle I couldn’t see their insignias. But I thought to myself, this don’t look right. What in the hell is them big round things underneath? They were really flying about this far off the water, four feet. Because I suppose then they could drop the torpedoes, see. But they were torpedoes, you know, and I’ll tell you, they wrecked a couple of hell of a holes. So I didn’t know what to do. Then I heard this, (shooting noises) and I thought, this ain’t no place for me! So I headed over to the big long sticking out that they tied the boats to; the boat boom. And I thought, well, if anything else, – oh well, just crawl under that. I don’t think anything should hurt me.

Well, I happened to look up and there was something coming down at me. And I thought, well, I’ll just sneak under there a little, sneak closer and about that time, zip goes the pants! Well, they didn’t draw

blood, but it sure made a mess of my trousers. So then from there, about that time, but when I seen them planes, I yelled real loud, 'Planes! Planes! Planes!' And all the activity what was being done stopped and they tore into the rest of it they had been trained for. And well, I don't know how many people on the back got shot, but I thought, well, I better get down in the water there and help them guys out because they had these big – last round lifesavers, or whatever you call 'em. But you know, the damn fools, they couldn't swim, you know. And what do they do, just like a bunch of sheep? The whole works goes in at once! And I told 'em, I says, 'Now, if you guys were smart, you'd grab each other and kind of help along and then grab that rope on that thing and pedal yourself ashore.'

Well now I don't know if they did or not. It was only about ten or twelve of 'em. And I thought, well I better get out of here. There was a couple of guys that had a hold of me and I tell you, if you ever had eagle claws, hoo, that hurt! I was in the water then. See, what I did, I got down on the armor belt and I jumped.

And doggone it, I hit it. I didn't feel so good. I chipped a hipbone there. Well anyhow, that's when I was trying to get 'em all together and in the meantime, I happened to look up along board ship there and there was a guy standing up there on the armor belt of the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* beating his head against the damn bulkhead, blood squirting out his ears. And I tell you know; you get kind of, funny feeling. And I thought, well, so I turned around, I looked at these guys and there was two of 'em that had grabbed me and I thought there's only one way to do this, so I took – oil running down, you know – I took a good deep breath and I made myself heavy. You can do that, you know. And down I slid.

Well, they didn't want to come down with me, so I thought, well, that's nice now. So then I got down for a ways and I thought this better be enough. So then I started swimming. I didn't know which direction I was going. Lo and behold if I didn't hit the damn [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* right square in the head. Oh! And it kind of dazed me a little bit. And I thought, well, we gotta keep moving. So I started swimming up and I got up to the bow and them two foul chains up there in front, to keep the logs and stuff away so they don't hit the after, I was standing there, hanging on to that, getting my breath. I was just getting to feel kind of happy and I thought – then I happened to look up the west and there was another goddamn plane coming! Well, I thought, this ain't no place for me so I hurry it up and I got past the bow there and trying to keep afloat, you know. And just about that time, ploop, ploop, ploop, ploop! If I'd been hanging on to them chains, I'd have been going headfirst that way!

So then the war was kind of dying down a little bit. I thought; well, maybe I better try and get ashore! So I started to swim for shore and in the meantime, the soldiers had took fire hoses, them three-inchers, you know, and throwed 'em over the side for us to get a hold of to get up – And that was some slippery junk with all that oil on. And if they'd have put water on 'em first, you know, that oil wouldn't have stuck so good.

Well, I tell you what, that line, the shore line on top of it, about that high. Well, you know, you stand there and I think you took three strokes before you moved a couple of inches, you know. And I finally got out of the water – moved a little bit on some of the dirt and all of that. And I got up to the top. I was all in. I didn't have much air left for nothing. So I looked around and I thought, well, boy, there is a good hiding place. It's that great big cactus patch there on Ford Island. And they told me afterwards that even a rabbit don't go in there. And I went in there just like a bullet, they said. Well, I tell you why I went so fast was because that plane that was up to my, he crashed right over there about fifty feet from me. After he had left the goddamn – this other fellow was a friend of mine and he says, 'There was a hole about ten inches about a diameter and it's about a foot deep,' machine gun bullets.

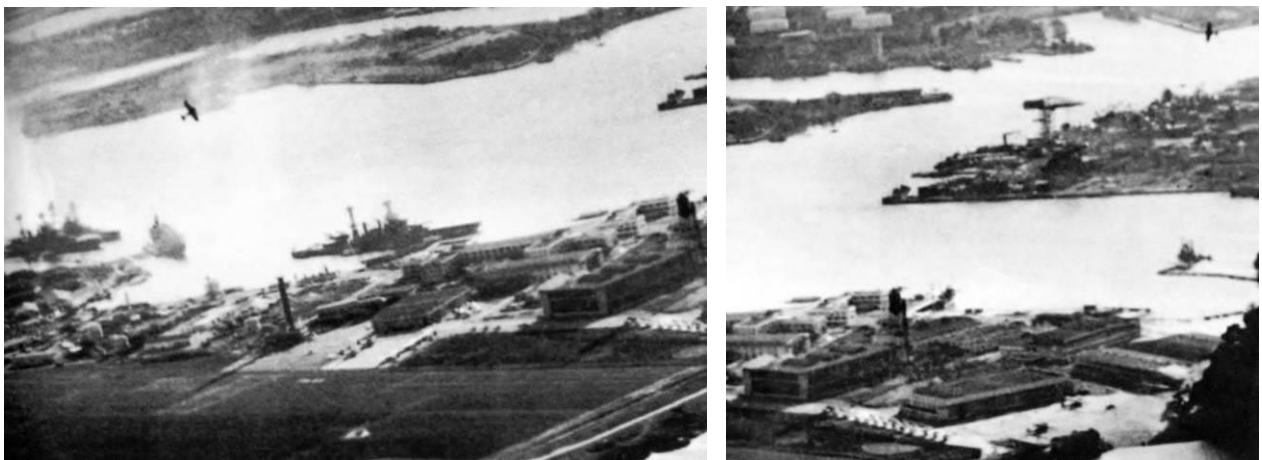
So evidently, they had hit him and he froze at the trigger. Well, then I imagine it was kind of sticky all right. But I was standing there, it was nice, oh, I felt so comfortable and all of a sudden, slash, slash, slash. Some of the sailors, they would come in there with machetes and was chopping the cactus off. And they brought a board in and they strapped me into it, 'cause they didn't want me dragging on the ground

and that damn cactus, oh, they were terrible! You see, it's the cactus from Texas and Wyo – not Wyoming – down there, another.” (18)



(Photo: National Archives and Records Administration)

Jack C. Petitt: On board the battleship U.S.S. West Virginia, Pearl Harbor. “Well all this was happening so quick. I run down the compartment. I was yanking guys out of the bunk; they thought I was nuts. And I looked and here comes a plane about eye level, it wasn’t high it was just about eye level, you shoot there. I’ll never forget the color of that airplane. It was coming down and was firing towards the [U.S.S.] *Utah*. You could hear the guns rattling off. The smoke coming from the wings and I thought that was a fully funny you know. I didn’t know what was going on, you know. And I come down and I don’t say nothing to the guys I was talking to. I knew there was something up, so I run around the other side and went up the ladder and I looked aft and the [U.S.S.] *Utah* was capsizing. And guys were walking on the bottom as she was turning. I run down to the forward fire room to help them light-off the boilers, but my duty station, my GQ station, battle station was back aft; the aft repair party. You had the forward repair party and the aft repair party.” (7)



Japanese planes fly over battleship row during first wave of attacks on Pearl Harbor
(Photos: National Archives and Records Administration)

Radioman Third Class Adolph Czerwenka: On board the battleship U.S.S. West Virginia, Pearl Harbor. “The [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blew up just as I got on deck. The explosion knocked me flat under the aft turret. There was oil and fire everywhere. I just sort of slid down the port deck and into the water. An empty motor launch drifted by. I climbed in and got the engine going. I picked up a couple of guys, a coxswain

and an engineer. They took the helm and the engine. We began fishing survivors from the water. We took them ashore and came back for more. Japanese torpedo planes were flying right over us, strafing and dropping more torpedoes. One pilot was so close I could see the big smile on his face. Boy was I angry! I switched to a whaleboat, and we picked up more survivors.” (1)

“The thing that impressed me most about the whole thing was that in the midst of all that surprise and confusion and destruction, everybody was just doing their jobs; what they’d been trained to do; me too. I sure didn’t like what I saw. But I didn’t have time to be afraid. There was too much to be done.” (1)



Messman Third Class Doris Miller ‘in action’ on the U.S.S. *West Virginia*.
Lieutenant Commander Doir C. Johnson remarked that Miller was
“blazing away as though he had fired one all his life.”

Messman Third Class Doris Miller: [*Navy Cross, Purple Heart*] On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “It wasn’t hard. I just pulled the trigger, and she worked fine. I think I got one of those Jap planes. They were diving pretty close to us.” (Miller continued firing until he ran out of ammunition.)

(Doris Miller survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but was killed in action nearly two years later when the U.S.S. *Liscome Bay* was sunk off the Gilbert Islands. On June 30, 1973 the destroyer escort U.S.S. *Doris Miller* (FF-1091) was commissioned in his honor and at this writing the newest American aircraft carrier, CVN 81, is being constructed and will be named after Doris Miller. A commemoration plaque honoring the naming of the aircraft carrier was unveiled at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in 2020.)

Bugler Sergeant Richard Fiske [*Purple Heart*]: On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “The next thing I remember was a hellacious loud noise, and a 50 foot wave came across the deck and washed us both to the other side of the ship. Six more torpedoes hit us. A bomb came down, and it hit the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee*. A large piece of shrapnel took out most of the captain’s stomach. We started carrying him down, and he was still giving orders until he died.” (4)

Lieutenant Commander John Harper: On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “Certain men banged and hammered on the port door from the trunk leading to central stating that there was water filling the trunk and wanted entrance into central. We asked how much water was in there and they stated that it was getting high. In as much as we still had communication and counter-flooding seemed to be taking effect, I refused to allow my men with me to open this door and directed the men outside to try to get through and around to the starboard side in order to enter through the starboard door which was not yet leaking water. At the same time, I directed II to attempt to open the armored hatch above the truck

in order to let these men escape. Repair II reported back that there was about three feet of water above the hatch and they were unable to open it. I believe that these men were lost, as I am quite certain that no further personnel entered central through the starboard door.” (5)



Rescuing seamen from the flaming waters of Pearl Harbor
(Photo: National Archives and Records Administration)

Gery H. Porter: On board the battleship U.S.S. West Virginia, Pearl Harbor. “I was washing dishes at the table. We had a pan and do the initial washing and after you get that done, you take them up to the scullery and they go through the sterilization process. But I heard probably the first bombs dropping over on the – I think it was Building Six on the island, on Ford Island. And passed it off as somebody’s doing a little practice or a little drill or something, and we all did. But we heard the first bombs drop. And it was a matter of maybe a minute or two, I suppose, at the outside, before our general alarm sounded. So I dropped everything and headed for my battle station. And the [engineering personnel] special detail – such as mess cooks and all – were assigned to the center motor room aboard ship, which was sort of a dead [head position]. We had nothing to do but just get there and stay out of the way. And so I took off in that direction, aft. I think I got about as far as the compartment behind us – which was the A division – and the first torpedo hit. And I always felt like I did a Donald Duck – my feet going; I wasn’t getting anywhere: knocked me off my feet. I got up and started running again. I guess I got another twenty or thirty feet and the second one hit. And I believe I got down in my battle station and secured the hatch before we got the next hits. But they kept coming. And ‘cause we didn’t know exactly what was going [on] except that we did, but it’s hard to convince yourself that it’s really happening and that was my impression – that it is, but it can’t be.

So we begin to list rather heavily. And as a matter of fact, I think the story is well-documented that had we not had a good first lieutenant aboard ship, who was the man in charge of damage control, and had he not taken the steps he had to counter flood in the double bottom, we would’ve capsized, same as the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* – this is well documented and I’ve read the story. He’s credited with it. And so I thought what we had done was probably list until we got over and hit the bottom and then leveled up. Truth of the matter was we were on the bottom, but we didn’t capsize because of his action.

But we had lost all light and telephone communication and we had some battle lanterns – that’s all the light we had. And somebody opened the hatch up above and told us to abandon ship. And I couldn’t tell you at this point – I won’t even try to guess how much time had passed because it was a lot of confusion. But it was during the first attack, so it could’ve been within twenty to thirty minutes, say, as a guess.

And so we did. We went up [the ladder] and the ship was flooding. We got up to third deck and the ship was already flooding on the third deck. And we got up on the quarterdeck [by going up a ladder through a provisions hatch.] Everyone closed the hatches behind them, yes. We went on up, got up on the quarter deck and I looked around and I saw what was happening and saw the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, 'cause it had already blown. And I just was, you know, bewildered. You can't believe this is actually happening.

But obviously it was and about that time there was some dive-bombers started coming right at us. We figured we'd better get out of the way of the machine gun fire or whatever was coming at us, so we ducked into the nearest doorway, which happened to be the ship's library. And it was just forward of the number three turret. And while we were in there, the ship took some more hits, at least two that I can remember. And I guess we stayed in there a good ten, fifteen minutes, until it got quiet. And apparently that was about the time the first wave was over. We stepped back out on the quarter deck, and what had been a fairly clean quarter deck when we went in was now a mess, one of our planes that had been sitting in the catapult on top of number three turret, was laying on the quarter deck burning. And we realized we'd been hit right there. I didn't know for maybe a year or two what it was. It was a 500-pound projectile with fins fitted on it. It was a direct hit on number three turret and didn't go off. And I guess we were within fifty or sixty feet of it. We might've been in the same position as the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* had it gone off. It actually hit in number three turret. And went through the top, I think, three or four inches of steel but did not go off.

Well, we waited 'til there was no more planes coming in our direction and it was fairly quiet. And as I say, we were told to leave the ship, so we left. We went across to the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee*, by way of the hawsers that had us tied together; the ships were side by side. And as a matter of fact, the [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* had settled to the bottom and wedged the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* in and it could not move until they could get the [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* out and – or move it a little bit some time later. But got aboard the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* and I thought, well, maybe I could do something aboard here, but they were telling us to go on over on Ford Island.

So the best way to do that was, I thought, by boat rather than to dive into the water, which had all the oil on it and a lot of debris which could be damaging or serious – could be the wrong thing to dive into. So several of us got a boat and rowed it over. We filled it up. We had, I don't know, maybe twenty in it. A small boat, it was a little whaleboat. And we got about all we could in it and rowed it over. And there were a number of other boats there.

And when we got on the island, there was [a] – I think it was a Marine pick-up truck came by and they told us to go over to the Marine barracks, check in over there. And – 'cause we were out in the open there. There was nothing – no way of protecting. I guess they figured get under some kind of protection if possible. So we did, we went over there and just about the time we got into the Marine barracks, the second wave came. And it kind of let up after a while and the Marines were out there and I'll give 'em credit. They broke into their ammunition locker, broke the lock to get in just so they could get ammo, 'cause they didn't have any [out]. And they were out there with their thirty-ought-sixes or forty-fives, anything they could get their hands on, trying to shoot the best they could. But then somehow they decided that we were – [I guess] they needed the space for the injured in the Marine barracks, and so they told the rest of us to report in over at the, I believe it was the Officers' club. And we started over there in the tail end of the second wave – came over in the strafing, so we ducked behind some concrete wainscoting in some new hangars that were being built. And waited 'til that was over, then we checked in on over at the officers' club. And that's where we mustered and they started giving us assignments. I ended up going back aboard the ship, [on a] bucket brigade, fighting fires the rest of the day." (18)

John Martini, USMC: On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. "Morning; about two, three minutes – I would say about, somewhere within about two minutes or so, while we were up there, while we were on the quarter deck. We were looking up in the sky and there were bombs. There were

planes flying down, like if they were – well, not like, if they were, and we assumed that they were doing target practice because out at sea, we had pulled the target, behind us probably, maybe a hundred yards or so, and the planes would dive bomb at it and practice dive bombing. And we watched them and we says; ‘Hey, what kind of emblems are those?’

You know, we couldn’t understand why are they doing this on a Sunday? That’s the first time; and then, in port. I mean, we didn’t realize and we discussed this among ourselves, which in the few seconds that we had. And then, across the bay we seen a ship afire, smoking. So the officer of the day was on the quarterdeck also, and he had the bugler sound fire and rescue.

We didn’t know if the explosions had come from the ship across the bay, because we seen the smoke there. And of course, all of this happened within about two minutes for us. And then, when they sounded the fire and rescue, we were getting ready. And then, we were going to drop what we had. We were going to go up to our casemates and get ready and whatever we had to do. And then, there was a call, belayed that call. And then, shortly, a few seconds after that, then we heard the familiar, ‘Da-da-da-da-da-da-da,’ that was the general quarters.

So we wanted to know what was going on. Well, and then we found out, when we got to our casemates, then we could hear our ship shudder and we were taking torpedoes. We could hear additional bombs and whatnot. And we were – I was facing the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee*, and so our gun crews facing Honolulu, they were able to bring up their powder and we already had six shells for, I think, for about – not the thick shells, the shells that could be used in the five-inchers, had them ready. All we had to do is bring up the ammunition.

And so we were firing at the torpedo planes and some landed short of Honolulu. So that’s where some of the bombs, shelling that had happened, had come from some of the ships that were firing, which was – they tried to get anything they could. And some got hit and some didn’t. Those were regular five-inch shells that you would use broadside against another ship.

You tried everything when you’re in this position, you’re not going to say, ‘Hey, that’s not an anti-aircraft gun,’ so they fired what they – you would throw rocks. If you had rocks, we would throw rocks at ‘em. One guy was throwing wrenches out of his tool kit.

Well, it was taken from the side where the water was at. We were on the opposite side, and I think there’s about 106 feet long. And we had blisters put on; they were put on before I got on. And they were on top of the additional, the armor; the sixteen-inch plate. And they were, I’d say about, maybe, four feet wide and this was used to carry additional fuel oil. And so we had the fuel oil. So it would go through, not only the one-inch plate, but then it also went through the armor – whether it went through the armor, or below the armor, we have no – I don’t have any idea at all. And of course, when the ship started sinking, then it would probably get up just above that armor plate, you see. And then it was going to start going, well then, even no matter where it was, you were up – well, the water, the ship was down below where the torpedo can get into, probably, the second deck. And once it got in there, I’m sure that it caused a lot of damage.

They – those were when we said, ‘General Quarters,’ well, the only thing we can think of them were the Japanese, because there was so much talk about what was going on between the Japanese and our country. We, because – when they said, ‘Hey, we can sink the Japanese navy within an hour and a half,’ why, that’s, you know, you have this. And of course, we read the paper and this was going back and forth, and we had the Honolulu paper and we’d read it, you know. And we had a good inkling. We – that’s when we figured we’re going to fight anyway. And that’s why we were out in a darkened ship, when I got aboard ship, and that was six months before Pearl Harbor. We already were practicing darkened ship at night, so you sail in the darkness, in complete darkness.

We had – we would put our table that we had; the mess tables. We had to keep them somewhere, so they sort of had like a long bar across, and they would kind of swing. And you would swing your tables, you would raise ‘em up, put ‘em up and that’s where your tables were. This way, during the day, you had

complete use of the deck. When you were going to eat, you took them down and leave it up when you were going to sleep. In the evening, and after you eat, well, you put 'em back up there. And I recall, because of the ship was leaning, because we were leaning back to the starboard side, why, some of those tables [started] falling. And of course, they were on the deck too and I recall hanging up, just like the five-inch, just holding my hands up there, and they're falling. And many things flashed through my mind. One of 'em was that: what's my mother going to say if I'm killed? That was my biggest concern. Things flashed through my mind when I was three and four years old, when I didn't think of it before. Hey, I used to rock on my mother's rocker. It was sort of like a large rocker and I used to like to rock and start from the middle of the room, and go up toward the window. Hey, I would keep going with the rocker. You would keep on moving.

Well, those things flashed through my mind. Why they flashed, I don't know; but this, plus the fright, the anxiety. Hey, you can't do nothing. You can't fire, you can't fight. There's nothing you can do. This is your battle station, that's where you have to stay. You can't fire your weapons 'cause you're enclosed, sort of. Because you're facing the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee*, the same thing as those fellows on the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* couldn't fire because they would be firing at us. You see? And we did fire anti-aircraft gun to the – they did get some ammunition from down below. However, they got it up and they did fire some anti-aircraft.

It started to keel and it started going because when it was – well, yes. It was back in the – hey, you can almost feel yourself. Hey, you're leaning against – or not leaning against – well, you're almost laying against the bulkhead. Not the water, we called it the bulkhead. And it was going that way, and then finally somehow it started to settle down. Come to find out later when we were abandoning ship the first time, come to find out that there was an officer's mess man, a sailor; that he was going to cut the hawsers, and that's what happened to the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma*. They cut the hawsers and then she turned. We were tied up to [U.S.S.] *Tennessee*, so this big Texan here, come to find out, this big Texan, about six-two, he come up there and I understand he whacked the ones or knocked them out and kept him from cutting those hawsers and we could have gone over. In the meantime, they went down below and opened up the seacocks, and we settled down for the bottom.

Well, we were down lower, as we had already hit the bottom, and the fellows from the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee*, they had, as you know, they have what they call these here big ropes, they call 'em bumpers, in between to kind of keep the ships from hitting each other; and so oil was already spreading out from the, wherever; from our bunkers, or from where – and not the bunkers' but from the tanks. Well, I call 'em bunkers. And so trying to get up, because we were down lower, the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* was still up there. She wasn't sinking. Then, there was oil on the ship, and I can see a – I never could find that hawser in school, that you would climb up in a gym? But that day, this was oily, so I climbed that up, even with the oil. And you know how hard you gotta grip. That's just like trying to hold onto a greased pig. So you can see what you can do when there's anxiety, or when they're fright, or when there's anger, danger, whatever you want to call it.

And then, as we were pulling up, then I can see these here powder cans that we had this unfixed ammunition, which the powder was in these cans. And as they were firing away, from up above, or wherever it was coming from, they were dropping the cans down below, and I can see those cans hitting some of the fellows on the head, on the shoulder. Hey, the fellows would go down, never seen 'em come up anymore. So but I was fortunate enough to not get hit when I come up, and then, hey, while we were there, another wave of planes come in. They said, 'Hey, everybody take cover.'

And I remember; I believe that they called it a paint locker. There was a locker, anyway, where they kept here to clean the decks. And I went in there with two other young Marines, they were brothers. Hey, and we stayed there, I don't know how long. I don't recall; five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes. And they said, 'All clear again,' so we come out. Come out there to, you know, survey what was going on. And

then I heard, ‘All [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* Marine, service personnel, come back to your ship, fight fires and help the wounded.’

So I went back again and then we were helping carry out some of the fellows and then I found some sheets up on the ammunition hoist that was up there, was up in case mate one, I think, that was up there. Hey, I started carrying it out to, you know, help the fellows. And in fact, well, as I come out the first time, carrying out, and he says, ‘Hey, duck for cover. Here comes the planes again.’

So I hid under with some of the other fellows, under turret number two. That was a sixteen-inch gun and Jap planes came by and you can just see the bullets, you know, going. I guess they were two by two. And as they hit the teakwood, they would just splinter it; you – probably the same way as you’ve seen done in the movies.

And so that was it. And that was – and then again, I’ve seen it later, when I was on the whaleboat, where they come flying again. And of course, we had a good coxswain on the whale boat and when you see them coming up ahead, he kind of swerved around just in time enough so that the plane couldn’t do that that fast. So we might have got hit again that way.” (18)

Demetrius John Vellis: On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “I was ashore and I had a room with another officer on my ship, at the Moana Hotel. Across the street they used to have cottages. We were in a cottage there. And we got a phone call in the morning from the girl that the other officer had been out with that night, saying, ‘I don’t know what’s happening,’ she says, ‘but they’re calling all officers [back to] all ships.’

We got to Pearl Harbor and they wouldn’t let us in with the car so we dropped the car and just ran down to the [Merry Point] Landing. And that’s when we saw the whole [group of sunk or burning] ships [in] the background. See, everything was very sickening to me. Seemed like it everything was sunk or burning or black smoke and it was a hard thing to take at that time.

But then we jumped in a boat and they were going to drop us off at our ship. They were taking everybody in there, drop ‘em off at [their] ships.

Halfway there, in the middle of the harbor, the second wave came in. And again they started picking on the big ships. I’ve always wondered, I wished I could be a painter ‘cause our bow hook, a young sailor, had a rifle, he was shooting at these planes and crying, big crocodile tears, I think. And it really expressed, I think, a feeling of all of us, the frustration we all felt. Anyway, another officer and I got him; put him down before he killed somebody with that gun. But I’ll never forget that.

Then I joined another ship in my squadron was just ready to leave and I got aboard that. And I forget the name of it; the [U.S.S.] *Hull* or [U.S.S.] *MacDonough*; but there were three skippers aboard there and lots of other officers on there. I think there were four torpedo officers. I was a torpedo officer on my ship, and so we were loaded when we went out.” (18)

Seaman First Class William Lefabvre: On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “Early that morning, we were getting ready to go to church, and I was in a print shop, which was down, I would say, even with the armor belt, on the starboard side, which was inboard, according to the attack, which I was very fortunate that it was. And we were waiting for coffee, as I said. And we heard this thump then the ship started to list immediately, and general quarters went. And almost simultaneously, ‘Abandon ship,’ went. Being that, naturally, just a seaman, we didn’t know really what was going on. And it was real, I wouldn’t say exciting, it was – we just didn’t know what was going on.

Well, when we got up to topside, but before I got up to topside, a Third Class Printer said to all of us in there, ‘Torpedoes; get the hell out of here!’ And that is still, in my mind, I never have forgot that. But I haven’t seen that Third Class Printer. I’d really love to find out how he knew they were torpedoes, ‘cause the rest of us were really in the fog until we got up to topside and saw all the things that were going on.

An awful mess: that's one way to put it, the only way that I could put it. And a sad thing to see, to see your whole battle line just setting there all full of smoke. And, oh, everybody firing, that had a gun, possibly was firing. And it was very, very scary and the next thing, you know, I knew, I was very, very shocked, like everybody else must have been. And the next thing I knew, I felt my feet being cold. And evidently, the blast from the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* must have just swept me right off the ship, into the bay. And that's where I landed. We saw her go up. As a matter of fact, we were trying to lock down our deck, because the ship was listed and we could hardly manage to walk, so we were sliding down. And don't ask me why, we went towards the water. That's something that will – I mean, normally, you'd think you'd go towards the ship that was inboard so that you have a little protection. But, I mean, you know, when your things are going like that, you just do what your mind tells you to do and we went towards the water.” (18)

Bugler Sergeant Richard Fiske [*Purple Heart*]: On board the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia*, Pearl Harbor. “I was aboard the U.S.S. *West Virginia*, just 50 feet from the bow of the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, and I had the 4 to 8 a.m. watch. I went up there, brushed my teeth, washed my face and got the sleepers out of my eyes. I blew reveille at 5:30. Because it was Sunday, we could sleep half an hour late. And then I sounded chow call at 6:30. I had just gotten permission to sound colors when we see all these planes, a flock of them, and they had torpedoes on them. And by the time you saw that red ball on their wings, those torpedoes hit. The force of the explosions blew Stanley Bokowski and me across the ship to the starboard side, 118 feet away, and away, and covered us with oil. It was the most hellish fireball. Then somebody hollered, ‘Abandon ship!’ And so a bunch of us went to the forward bow and dove off. And that's all I remember till we landed on Ford Island, about 40 yards away. I know I got there, because I was soaking wet, covered with oil. But why couldn't I remember the swim?” (4)

Joseph Messner: On board the U.S.S. *Avocet*, Pearl Harbor. “Back on the [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* sitting on the bottom; water on her decks; then airspaces below, setting on the bottom. After [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* settled you could hear banging, tang, tang, tang. Men with wrenches or hammers beating on the metal, trying to let people know they were trapped there. But they were below us, a section that was full of water and they were down, way down. If you have ever seen a battleship up close; especially when they're in dry dock, you can't believe how big they are. Below the water line it must be 6, 8, 10 stories below there. They have a band of armor – 18 inches thick. Japanese torpedoes cracked that open like it was egg shells and it penetrated the armor plate on the decks and exploded.” (12)

[The U.S.S. *West Virginia* was sent to the west coast of the United States for major repairs and returned to Pacific duty during September 1944. The ship saw action in the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa earning 5 World War II battle stars.]



Repair ship U.S.S. *Vestal* beached and listing

[U.S.S. *Vestal* was hit by 2 bombs during the attack.]

CWO Fred Hall: On board the repair ship U.S.S. *Vestal*, Pearl Harbor. “Goddamn it. I said sound General Quarters! Those are Jap planes up there.”

Jack E. Rininger: On board the repair ship U.S.S. *Vestal*, Pearl Harbor. “We were a repair ship and had various ships come along side and spend a few days along side of us. On the morning of the attack I was, we were tied up to the U.S.S. *Arizona*. I’m one deck down in the shop reading the *Honolulu Gazette* and the right hand column is talk about the negotiations going on in Washington in between Admiral Kurusu and Nomura and our Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Bear in mind I’m very, very concerned, I’m thinking about these things in the right hand column, right hand side.

You get the *Honolulu Gazette* December 7, 1941, that’s where you’ll find it. As I was reading this column the boatswain’s mate passed the word all hands to quarters. Now we don’t usually have quarters on Sunday morning, that day we did. I ran down to my quarter’s station and the reason I ran because the urgency in his voice told me that something was up. As I ran to my quarters station, went up the ladder, went around the fantail of the ship next of two or three .50-caliber anti-aircraft guns, tracer shells skipped off the deck both to my left and to my right. Now bear in mind between tracer shells there has to be a row of shells you don’t see. So when the tracer shells skipped across the deck on both sides of me I heard something go rrrrrrrrr. I glanced up, saw the plane peel, saw the red ball on the right wing. I knew the boatswain’s mate may have passed the wrong word; general quarters, not quarters where you fall in to receive the orders of the day.” (12)

“So my general quarter’s station I had to duck and dodge, I was on the topside next to the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* to get to the first hatch and go down in there where I was in the damage control party. As I went down [the] ladder, as I stepped to the left and right ladder a bomb came down the ladder; came through the hatch, tore the ladder off top of the hatch and went on down through the ship and blew a hole out of the bottom. Now I found out later, we were told that was a 16 inch armor piercing shell that the Japs were using because we were tied up to the battleship and battleship row and they had to use that type of weaponry in order to penetrate the thick decks on the battleships so whether it was an accident or on purpose, I don’t know, but anyway it went through our ship from top to bottom. That was the armor piercing shell so that was – I measured a while later; I took three steps from where I was to the hole in the deck where I was standing seconds before. So that was my second close-call of that morning. The other bomb hit up forward in the supply area where the steel was stored and stuff like that. It didn’t penetrate the bottom of the ship. However, when the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* – we were on fire on our starboard side, and when the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blew up it put the fires out on our starboard side so what killed fellows over there saved fellows on our ship.” (12)

[At 08:10 a bomb on the battleship U.S.S. *Arizona* went off blowing several crewmen off the U.S.S. *Vestal*.]

Jack E. Rininger: On board the repair ship U.S.S. *Vestal*, Pearl Harbor. “Our captain Cassin Young was on the quarter deck just above where I was at. As the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was blown up he was blown over the side. He swam back to the gang plank and – climbed the ladder. The executive ordered to abandon ship because we were going down and the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was pulling us down. There was just no way that we could battle any longer. But when he swam back aboard ship and climbed the ladder he gave orders to beach the ship and got us underway, got a tug along side, got us underway and got us into shallow water

before it went down. For that act Captain Cassin Young was one of the three live people to get the *Congressional Medal of Honor*.” (12)

Electrician’s Mate First Class Ralph Gooch: On board the repair ship U.S.S. Vestal. “Well, we’d had breakfast and as usual, why, we always, the kids gather out on the different parts of the ship and we happened to be out on the weld deck, which is about two-thirds from the stern of the ship, forward, and just to the back of where the mess halls are on that particular ship. And we were all looking out toward the submarine base, or out towards Aiea landing, which is a recreation landing, recreation place for all of the Navy people – have the new handball stuff like that. Then all of a sudden we seen these planes come in. And we were just plain astounded, we couldn’t believe, we’d never seen anything like it.

Well, we thought it was a stupid bunch of pilots having an odd day on Sunday. We couldn’t figure out what it was for a few minutes. We found out awful shortly. Okay, the first indication was when we seen the torpedoes go. We seen the Japanese planes come in, and the torpedoes, they dropped ‘em all. There was four torpedo planes coming, you know, in the Battleship Row, and they coming in fours. And they – They were coming right at us. And we seen the torpedoes let go. They were probably, I would say, the torpedoes was let go within somewhere between a quarter and a half a mile ashore. Then they just stayed water level and come right on in. And that first, the torpedoes was set awful low and they went underneath us, into the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*.

All I know is that when that first four planes come in, they started shooting with their, I guess, with their twenty millimeters, or something like that, and we were standing on a steel deck. And the bullets landed all over the place. I know I have fifteen to twenty splinters of steel in my legs, but I never got a direct hit. It’s kind of a tough situation to explain that. You see, what happened, the torpedo planes come in first, then the dive bombers come in behind that, and the dive bombers had those 1,500 pound bombs, so it was hard for us to actually say which one done what to the ship, whether it was the bombs or the torpedoes. Okay, what I’d done, my condition, condition two, was one of the conditions for battle, prior to going into actual combat. And a condition two, me being in the repair department, I went down into the electric shop and I turned the main blower off and I started to dog the big hatch down, this – it was about a six-foot hatch, that watertight compartment.

Close it and dog it down and I got all the dogs down but one. And that’s when we got hit and the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* got hit at the same time. Torpedoes and bombs, I don’t know what went into the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, but we took two 1,500 pound direct hits. One exploded on the other side of the bulkhead, directly from where I was standing, but we had a thick wall in the GSK, or general stores – that’s where we keep all the supplies – and it brought that bulkhead out to me at the same time the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blew up. When the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blew up, it burned all of my hair off – I was down three decks – burned all my hair off. My mustache got burnt off. Heat came right on down. Heat come right on down, because there was a large cargo hatch at the top, you know, at the upper deck. And that explosion was so severe that it came down there and that’s when I took off and went back up. I said, ‘Well, I got everything done but this, I’m going back up to my battle station.’ And when I went up to my battle station, there was only one guy there and the bomb that had exploded down below had went right through where my battle station was and there was no one there but one guy and he was dead. And about that time was when the executive officer gave orders to abandon ship. The reason he gave the orders was simply when the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blew up, it blew everybody in the topside on the [U.S.S.] *Vestal* and the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*; it blew ‘em overboard.

And Young, the executive officer, had to give orders to abandon ship. But what happened, the captain swam back underneath the burning oil, because the oil was on fire all the way around the battleship, all of Battleship Row. And he got back aboard, although he was severely burned and he reversed the order. Because he felt he could save the ship. And he reversed the order and there was a bunch of kids that was with me – the ones that we were talking about before – the ones that couldn’t swim in this burning oil. I

could not swim in burning oil, so I chose, I'm just not going to die and go and burn up, just not clear. But the miracle of all of it was when we – I don't know exact, I can't state for sure, but the only thing we could figure out, we were far below decks in the last, latter part of the ship. The forward part of the ship below decks [was] on fire and evidently that explosion from the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, the only way we could figure, it put our fires out.

But anyway, the captain come back and he reversed the order. And so, what he done, we grabbed – he told a group of us that was there to grab some fire axes because the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was going down faster than we were. And the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was going down straight and we were going down, we were going down straight also, but the problem was the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was going down twice as, three times as fast as we were. And our whole bottom was open in the rear, in the stern of the ship. So we were going down astern, but the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was going straight down and pulling us at an angle. And so we had to chop the lines between us and the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. So we chopped the line and a lot of us down there got knocked in the head, you know, and when them lines, when they snapped with those thousands of tons of steel, from that ship, when they snapped, and like a – well, I don't have to tell you what would happen with the power there is of a gosh-darned battleship when you have another ship alongside of it, when you cut those lines. So we cut the lines, we got the lines cut and then when that was done, we seen a lot of kids was free in the middle part of that [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. So the four, five of us there – I don't remember who they are at this time, it's been so many years – well, we threw lines over at the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* and they tied 'em on the gun tubs and they all started over-handing, and we pulled 'em off and we got 'em off the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. We must have saved probably twenty or thirty kids off of there. Well, we knew what was happening.

There's one thing I forgot to mention was when that first plane that was, that came in, well, the second – you know, there was four of 'em – and the second row, the one that come in that went over our ship, I seen the Japanese insignia and there was no question about it. But we had already a little bit warned that morning. You see, one of our lookouts, I mean, our quartermaster had the watch that morning, reported to our officer on deck that there was two Japanese sea planes overhead, with the Japanese insignia on them. And nobody paid any attention to 'em. So we were half prepared, the kids there, because we was very well acquainted with all of those young fellows and – but we were sort of prepared, we was sort of expecting something. We didn't know what.

Well, we jammed her into the ground and there was nothing we could do. We didn't know how intense it was going to be, we had no idea what to do so we were so close to land, they give us a – we took one of the motor launches and we all went ashore, a lot of us went ashore where the recreation landing and the Army was setting up pill boxes with the filling sandbags and a good lot of us from the ship was over there filling sandbags and helping the Army set up these gun tubs over there. In fact, it even got to the point, just to show it, I mean, I was over there so long, working, we was all trying to do something, that they had even sent a missing in action back to my folks, which I didn't even know about until about ten years ago. I missed a roll call. Mainly what we saw was you just looked back and you see everything on fire on the Battleship Row. You could see the [U.S.S.] *Nevada* hit up ahead of us. You could see the [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* and the [U.S.S.] *California*, and the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee*, and the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*; you could see 'em all. You seen the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* tip over, the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* going down, and all you could do is just thank god that you got out of there.” (18)

Carpenter's Mate Gene Huggins: On board the repair ship U.S.S. *Vestal*, Pearl Harbor. “We had just got a good pinochle game started down at the carpenter's shop and they ordered all hands to quarters and we was bitching, ‘This is Sunday, what they holding quarters for?’ So we went up on topside and it looked like they was having a swell mock battle going. But then, a plane banked and I saw those two big red dots and I said, ‘No, this ain't no mock battle.’”

So me and another carpenter's mate run back to our five-inch guns and tried to get the five-inch guns into action and the five-inch gun had a – the ammunition box had a padlock on it so we couldn't even open it. So we just stood there and watched them lay seven torpedoes into the [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* and [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* tied up behind us there until the plane came in and dropped this one torpedo and I followed it, and it was headed right for our fantail, so I followed it until it got about halfway, and I thought, 'I better get out of here.' So I went up and I was standing about three feet from where open carpenter's shop hatch, when this fourteen-inch armor piercing shell with fins on it went through the open carpenter's shop hatch, went through the ship, the shop, the boilermaker's shop and right on out the bottom of the ship, but never did go off.

And so I knew something had happened, so I run over and I was looking down the carpenter's shop hatch when that torpedo that I had seen coming toward us must have went underneath us and hit the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. So when – about that time, the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blew up from that torpedo – at least I figured it was a torpedo – and it knocked me down and the flames were shooting over on our ship and everything. And I just got up when the explosion, force of it, knocked us – there was a bunch of us that blew out into the water out there. And the first thing I did was kick my shoes off and head for dry land. That was over at Aiea over there and the whaleboat came by and picked us up and took us over to Aiea. And they tried to put us down in the building, in the basement of the recreation building over at Aiea. But me and another Carpenter's Mate said if we was going to see what got us, we wanted to see it. So we didn't go down below, we stood out there and watched it then. And that's when the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* finally blew all to pieces, when the – that fourteen-inch armor-piercing shell with fins on it must have hit the powder magazine and blew the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* all to pieces.

It was one heck of a mess! It just – I couldn't imagine that one bomb could do that much, one explosion could do that much damage because it just blew all to pieces, see. And the conning tower, the whole structure and everything just bent and doubled.

We didn't have the faintest idea what was going on. We thought it was – they was always having the mock battle before the war, you know, even though we had the dog fights. And we thought that's what it was until the plane came and I saw those two red dots. And then when we saw that the torpedo plane – we watched the torpedo plane, you could come right in, they'd come low, drop the torpedo and you could follow that torpedo right until it hit the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* and [U.S.S.] *West Virginia* tied up right in front of us there. And then the planes would bank, and they would come right over us, so if I had a slingshot, you could have hit them with a slingshot because you sat there and you could see the pilot with his goggles and everything. And we didn't have nothing to shoot with and nothing else.

I didn't have my watch on, but they say that the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* sank in nine minutes, but that wasn't from the start, it wasn't the first explosion, because it had to be for quite a while, because we stood back there and watched them lay those seven torpedoes, and I watched this other one. And it had to be at least fifteen minutes before I got blown over the side. I wasn't in the water but about fifteen minutes. Well, I would say it was about approximately two minutes before the whale boat came by and picked us up and took us over to the – we called it the Aiea recreation building. It was evidently not at Aiea, but it was across the channel from where the vessel was there.

Yeah, they were dropping – the dive bombers and the high altitude bombers were doing it. And then the whaleboat took us over to the rec[reation] building over there and then we stood there and watched the high altitude bombers and the dive bombers come in. And the [U.S.S.] *Nevada* got up steam then and she started up the channel. And when she got about halfway up the channel, the first five dive bombers that dove on her missed her completely, and then about the next six dive bombers took her right in the row, and she was bouncing in the water there. And you could see she was crippled pretty badly. So the guy around her; stuck her in the mud up there by the other end of Ford Island up there.

I watched the high altitude bombers and you could follow that doggone fourteen-inch armor-piercing shell with fins on it from the time they dropped it right until the time it hit whatever they was

aiming at. And the reason that we knew that it was a fourteen-inch armor-piercing shell with fins on it was because we got two of those hits on the [U.S.S.] *Vestal*. One of them went through the bottom of the ship; the other one went through the focsle, the mess deck and landed in the metal supply rack in GSK. And it exploded, and we found pieces of it and we could tell from the circumference that it was fourteen-inch and it had rifling on it, so we knew it was fourteen-inch armor-piercing with fins on it. So we kept that thing around the ship for a long time. All we could do was stand back there. If I had an orange, I could've hit the dog-gone planes when they come over. But we just stand back there and look, see.

Well, the rest of the day, they put us over at Aiea there and they gave us an Army machine gun to man and said, 'Now, don't shoot 'cause we ain't got no ammunition.' (18)

Edwin Dale Justice: On board the repair ship U.S.S. *Vestal*, Pearl Harbor. "She was a repair ship and they had all, well, everything that you would ever need to do to repair another ship or anything else – electrical, anything. We did it. And I wanted to put in my years there to learn something. I didn't plan on Pearl Harbor, though, so, anyway.

I had the four to eight Watch in the morning, from Sunday morning. And I was relieved of my watch, went down to where the guy that was to relieve me. And he was almost still asleep, but anyway, I gave him my pistol. Went up back on deck and I heard planes and I heard noises, booming noises. And I looked over to my right there and I saw these strange looking planes and I saw smoke coming up from the sea plane area of Ford Island. These planes had – their landing gear was down. And we didn't have any planes that flew around there that had landing gear that you didn't retract. And I saw things coming out of these planes. Then they looked rather lethal, I thought, and they were coming out. These were of course bombs.

And my brother, being in the battery locker on the [U.S.S.] *Vestal*, that's battery repair; and I ran back there. I was going to get a cup of coffee. Well, I didn't get my coffee. I told him that something was happening and I heard the Quartermaster say that, 'Hey, those are Japanese planes.'

Now they – I don't know whether they believed me or not, but they rang a fire drill. Quarterdeck rang fire drill. And well, that was no fire that was coming up, and I don't know why, but anyway, my brother and I were ammunition handlers for the anti-aircraft gun, and boy, we had a good one; three-inch anti-aircraft gun and the only one on the ship. And hell, we weren't a fighting ship. Well, okay, we had Lewis machine guns, left over from World War I, I think. But anyway, we went to our battle station, which was in the mess deck in the forward part of our ship, and of course, they had ready boxes at the anti-aircraft gun. And we didn't have to have ammunition at the moment. Anyway, on the way up through to our battle station, I was following another fellow and these darn planes were getting pretty close and the fellow in front of me, he got – there was a bullet hit the door to the mess area. And it splattered and hit him in his hands. And I was just behind him and I saw him pulling these that shrapnel out with his teeth.

Anyway got up there – nothing to do; and you could hear the strafers coming over; hear them hitting the deck above and the sides of the ship. And you know if you're busy, that's one thing. When you've got nothing to do, waiting for somebody to say, 'We want some ammunition on that gun.'

And in our location, see, we were not in line with the torpedo planes. They got the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* and the [U.S.S.] *West Virginia*, and those which were right in line.

They had tail gunners on those things and they would spray anything in sight. In fact, one of our casualties was killed by a tail gunner, one of those torpedo planes. He was ashore going to church. And no, I saw fighters coming by. They were strafing everything in sight. Of course, what got us was the high level bombers, same thing that hit the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. The magazine of the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* was the high level bombers. These were sixteen-inch naval projectiles, which they had modified 'em with fins and so, well, of course, the old [U.S.S.] *Vestal*, she wasn't important. But we were in the wrong place. And we got hit aft. The bomb went all the way through the ship and began to flood the aft part of the ship. And along about that time – I'm not sure if it was before or after – was when the same type bomb, I'm sure it was, came

through into the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* magazine. And that was quite a bit of noise there, went that thing went up. I was on the forward end of our ship.

[Did not see the explosion] but we sure heard it. I mean, it rocked the ship pretty bad. And of course, that's when it blew quite a few people from the ship over the side. And of course, there were a lot of flash burns from the fire. But our captain, [Commander Cassin] Young, was up. He went back there to see why the darn gun wouldn't work. Well, he shouldn't have been there either. But he got blown over the side. And then, somebody come – one of the officers – I'm not sure which one it was and it doesn't make any difference now – ordered abandon ship. And well, before that, there were other things that we had people off of the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* were down between the two ships and we had some of our people who rescued them.

And so anyway, when the – we were ordered to abandon ship and we had casualties. And they had taken most of 'em to the radio room. And everybody was either going over the side or I was headed for the stern, hoping to get into a motor launch. And then, I noticed these injured in the radio room, so I got another guy and I, and we carried a guy that I knew who had been hurt in the back – shot, shrapnel in the back – and we carried him. Heck, he weighed quite a bit more than I did. We carried him down, back to the quarterdeck and put him in the boat.

By that time, our captain had come back aboard and he countermanded the order to abandon ship. And so we went back to our battle stations and we had been alongside the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* for some few days. And normally, when you're in this condition, you don't have enough steam up to maneuver. You got enough to run a generator or alternator, and for the power and lights, but you don't have steam up to maneuver. So all of that time that had gone when they hit, and when we wanted to get out of there, we couldn't do it. So of course, they got steam up as fast as they could, but we'd have been right down there along with the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, except for a tug that came by, and I forgot which one it was. Threw a line to us and begin to pull us away. And now we were – we had our mooring lines over on the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, and she had already sunk. We had a coxswain name of Joe George. He has since passed away, I understand. He cut those lines to the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. Now, I don't know who cut the lines aft. Maybe they were burnt through, I don't know. But he cut the lines forward on our ship, which was aft to the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, and pulled us away. And I have read in the Pearl Harbor-gram, that the tug that pulled us away, the captain of the tug had just served on the [U.S.S.] *Vestal*. And he was quite disturbed when somebody chopped the [mooring lines], which – from his ship, from his tug to ours. And I understand he was disturbed and anyway...

There was a couple of things I wanted to say before. One of 'em was that the fires on the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*, of course they were – they had no power. They couldn't operate the anti-aircraft guns – not normally. So they tried to do it manually. And I know this 'cause I saw them. And they were firing their five-inch guns – at least once in a while. And the fire would spread so it was just about all around them. And I'm not sure whether it was my imagination – and I don't think it was – but I saw those gunners, fire all around 'em, trying to train those guns around and they were dying there. I mean, really. Now, I've tried to suppress that idea as much as I can because it bothered me quite a bit. And I don't even like to remember. Fifty-five years later, I don't like to even think of it, but to me, it happened. Now, those on the aft part of the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* were fortunate because they didn't get killed by concussion or lack of oxygen, or whatever. They may have gotten a lot of oil going over to Ford Island, or getting over to our ship, but they were fortunate. That is about the only ones that survived, of course.

Okay. We're getting pulled away. The captain is in command and now, of course, I was still looking for something to do and I couldn't find very much. Anyway, he decided to run the ship aground. And now we were down at the stern and headed for the nearest land there that we could beach the thing without going all the way down, was Aiea, over in that area. And that's where we ran it aground. And of course, otherwise, they were so concerned about the bulkheads aft from the water pressure, they would

fail, see. And if one of them did, then we had no chance of keeping afloat. But we got aground and saved her that way.

After that, I saw the last planes, Japanese planes. They checked the place, checked the harbor out. There was about four of them. Apparently, that's what I've heard later. They were checking to see the damage, probably photographing. And they took quite a few photographs and in fact, we've got reproductions of them all over the place now, right out here in the small stores place. And that was quite a relief to see them leave. Of course, we never knew whether it was coming back or not.

After that, of course, we – oh, we were still afire in the forward part. There was a big bomb came through, about twenty feet away from where we were; I was. And it hit a steel billet storage area. Now these were armor piercing bombs, and it took quite a bit to set 'em off. Anyway, they hit like pieces of ten feet long steel and that set the thing off, and of course it started a fire. And it went in three decks before it did that. But it started a fire and you can't – well, the smoke and dust and – I still – now, if she was supposed to have not been a coal collier. I mean, she was designed as one, but she wasn't supposed to have seen any duty as a coal collier. But they found coal in that area where that bomb came through that had been lodged in nooks and crannies there, so they claim at least. So anyway. And to get that fire out, we didn't have water we could use. We had no fire at all then. And those that were able, we went down to an area where they had CO-2 bottles, these big ninety-pound CO-2 bottles, which we used in welding and things like that. They had about, oh, I don't know, twenty-five or thirty of us, carrying those things up three decks, going forward to where the fire was; going down two decks and the fire fighters would open the valves on these things and throw 'em down a hatch. And we did that for quite a while, I guess until they had all the bottles used up. And those are heavy. Normally you would have some kind of conveyor to move 'em up on topside. We did it by hand and they wore the skin off our wrists. But anyway, you got the darn fire out anyway." (18)

Commander Cassin Young [*Medal of Honor, Purple Heart*]: On board the repair ship U.S.S. Vestal, Pearl Harbor. "Lads, we're getting this ship underway."

After action report: "Because of the unstable condition of the ship, being on fire in several places and the possibility of further attacks, it was decided to ground the ship."

[After repairs were completed the U.S.S. Vestal continued operations in the Pacific for the rest of the war. The ship was awarded 2 World War II battle stars.]



From left Battleships U.S.S. *West Virginia* and U.S.S. *Tennessee* on fire
with the U.S.S. *Arizona* on the right of the photo
(Photo: National Archives and Records Administration)

[U.S.S. *Tennessee* was hit by several bombs.]
[5 men were killed in action during the attack on the U.S.S. *Tennessee*.]

Gunner's Mate Wade Hawkins: On board the battleship U.S.S. *Tennessee*, Pearl Harbor. "I was a gun captain on a 5 inch. 25 anti-aircraft battery and we had 50 rounds of ammunition up and we started firing like everybody else. We were firing at everything that was flying. And we got credit for four, but who knows, the whole world was shooting." (8)

Electrical Mate Third Class David Jarvis: On board the battleship U.S.S. *Tennessee*, Pearl Harbor. "Well, at the time, well that day, I think it was a regular routine day on the Sunday. We didn't have any basic things to do. It was what they call a holiday routine. And I had just – well, a little later in the morning, I had breakfast and was setting at the mess table and all at once the alarm went off for general quarters. 'All hands man your stations!' I didn't hear. They always said they said, 'This is no drill,' but I don't remember hearing that. All I know was; 'Go to your battle station,' and I did, by the shortest possible route. Well that was the after engine room and I had to go about, well, I don't know, 150 feet aft and then down, let's see, two levels, to the engine room. And of course there's a lot of confusion and everybody going, but everybody was trying to get to that station there. So we went down and I think it was the guys on the sound-powered phones notified the bridge or whoever that we're on station.

So the next thing you know, they're closing in the watertight doors that you just went through. What they called Condition Zed, that's the ultimate watertight thing. Well, when you're in that condition, the only communication you have is through these sound-powered phones with the topside or whoever that's conducting 'em. And we couldn't find out anything. They was telling us that different ships were sunk, the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* blew up and we didn't believe it because the smoke and everything started coming down in the vents. Oh boy! That heavy oil smoke, you know. So we took turns going down in the bilges or below deck there, with rags soaking it up so we could keep clear. And finally they gave orders like we're getting under way. We couldn't figure that out. Well, later you find out different things. But anyway, we started the, fired up the generators and the main engine and the screws was turning and everything was – found out later that was to keep the fire away from the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. So the ship was all jumping or moving or something, pretty hairy! I don't know why I'm getting so emotional.

Then after a while, I guess they kept the engines running all day, to keep that fire back. Well, the stern of the [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* caught fire from the fuel and fire from the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. See, we're only – well, you've been out there, how close, probably wasn't twenty-five feet in distance. But I never got topside. I didn't really know what happened until about seven o'clock that evening that we finally got up, they let us go out, opened the watertight doors.

And about the time I got topside, these three planes off of the [U.S.S.] *Enterprise* came in over the harbor, I guess to find out what was going on: wrong time. They got shot down. And that was enough for me to head back down in the engine room. (18)

[After repairs the U.S.S. *Tennessee* saw action at the Aleutian Islands, Gilbert & Marshall Islands, Palau, Saipan, Guam, Leyte Gulf, Surigao Strait, and Iwo Jima.]
[The U.S.S. *Tennessee* was awarded 10 World War II battle stars.]



Oil on the water on fire as Admiral Barges and motor whale boats attempt to save lives and attack the fires.
(Photos: National Archives and Records Administration)

Ken Haney: On board a rescue boat from the light cruiser U.S.S. *Detroit*, Pearl Harbor. (Fire all around the small vessel) “We stayed as long as we could, but – the coxswain said we had to get out of there or we wouldn’t be able to save anybody. That was probably the worst moment for me.” (10)

[During the attack the U.S.S. *Detroit* suffered 1 wounded man.]

Fireman First Class Henry de Coligny: On board a fire boat, Pearl Harbor. “Whether a fellow was dead or whether he was drowning or what, we retrieved the body and put him down in the boat. We went back – and dumped our load of humanity and the bodies and went out again.” (11)

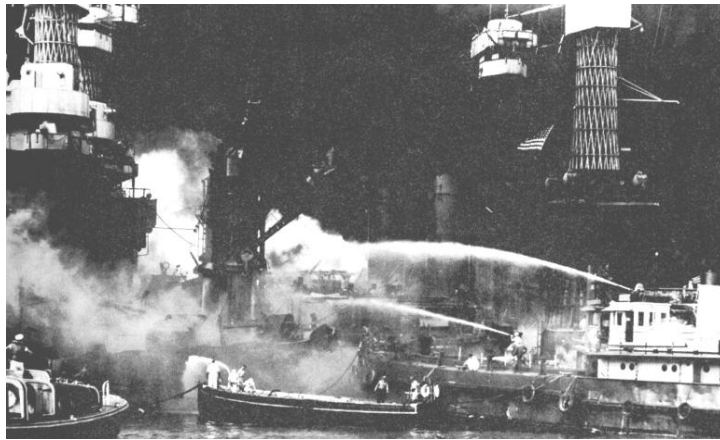


Commander Patrick N. L. Bellinger: Ford Island. “The accumulation of damage caused some ships to settle gradually to the bottom on an even keel and others to turn slowly on the side. I could see some of this happening from my window [on Ford Island]. It is impossible to describe the feeling of a Navy man watching while a ship receives death blows and sinks; for him death has just claimed a personal friend.” (11)



(Photos: National Archives and Records Administration)

Call into the Hawaii Medical Association Headquarters
 “Pearl Harbor! Ambulances! For god’s sake, hurry!”



Fireboats attack flames on the U.S.S. *West Virginia* under fire from attacking Japanese aircraft as the search for survivors continues.
 (Official U.S. Navy Photos)



Fire fighting continues



Small craft search for survivors at Pearl Harbor
(Photo: National Archives and Records Administration)

Lieutenant Commander James W. Baldwin: At boathouse, Pearl Harbor. “[The boat crews] behaved splendidly under – heavy machine gun fire, and much falling splinters, seemingly ignoring altogether either the presence of enemy planes, or their fire.” (11)

Pharmacist’s Mate Sterling R. Cale [*Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart*]: Pearl Harbor. “I only picked up 46 people. Some of those people were dead already. Some were badly burned, and I would try to pick them up and the skin would come right off their hands. Some of them were just tired because they were blown off the ship or jumped and had to get ashore.” (13)



U.S.S. *California* sinking in the mud at Battleship Row
(Photo: National Archives and Records Administration)

[At 08:03 her gun crews began to open fire on attacking Japanese aircraft.]

[U.S.S. *California* was hit by 2 torpedoes and 2 bombs.]

[98 men were killed in action and 61 were wounded during the attack on the U.S.S. *California*.]

Machinist's Mate First Class Robert Scott [posthumous *Medal of Honor, Purple Heart*]: On board the battleship U.S.S. California, Pearl Harbor. "As long as I can give these people air, I'm sticking [to my post]." (5)

Seaman First Class Woodrow Wilson Duffin: On board the battleship U.S.S. California, Pearl Harbor. "Well, on – I had been assigned to Captain [Harold C.] Train, whose chief of staff, [Vice] Admiral [William] Pye, gig as a signalman. And always on the mornings, we would always go over to Ford Island where we could get fresh water to wash the thing [boat] down and chamois it off, making it look sharp, you know and stuff. We just finished that operation and was on our way back to the [U.S.S.] *California*, which is only like 200 yards or 300, we heard these planes coming. And I was bow hooh along with Red Spiddohn. And he said, 'Flyboys out early this morning. You hear the drone of the aircraft.' And of course we were thinking – well, navy don't fly much on Sunday morning. Maybe it's the army. But anyhow, when you look at this coming down and they had a bomb range at the Ford Island where they had the big sandbar, where they dropped dummy bombs. And that first one hit and all hell broke loose. And the debris and stuff, 'Well, my god, that's not practice bombs! That's the real McCoy.' Then when we looked back, we could see the meatballs on their bows coming down. But oh Christ almighty, this is war!

So we gotta get to the ship and get to our battle stations. So from there we tied up to the boat boom, hit the boom down. And as I'm running forward, I know I got to go down to anti-aircraft ammunition handling, third deck forward. And I look across the ship as I'm going forward to the fo'c'sle deck to go head under, there was, I seen a Kate bomber coming down and still had a torpedo hanging on it. And it was close. Now, the pilot had his canopy closed, but the gunner sitting in the back had the windshields on his goggles and he was looking. And he had his little gun sticking out. My god, that mean-looking thing is a pretty plane, painted green with the big, red – Of course, as I went forward, before I got to the fo'c'sle deck to go under, to get to go down, I turned to look back to see what happened to that plane and he'd made a left. And when he did, I think it was from the tug to the [U.S.S.] *Maryland* and [U.S.S.] *Tennessee* or two of the cage masted battleship that had fifty-caliber machine guns up there, was a-shooting at him and that little guy in the back was shooting at them. And he went, of course, Ford Island.

Now, of course, that's the last thing I seen. And as I was running forward, I heard one of the five-inch go off right above, which they set on the deck right above us. And of course, that's all I seen. From then on, I'm down on the third deck and I remember taking the big torpedo headfirst: jarred us pretty good. Went along, we got another one. And then after that, I don't remember. I think where we were at; we were right under the armor deck of where the 2000-pound bomb came down. Probably the concussion knocked me. 'Cause I didn't come out of it until around eleven o'clock and the oil was coming in pretty bad then. And I know I can't get out forward, I have to go aft. And then of course, as I'm going back, there were several guys down. And I had oil all over me, crude. And I got in some guy's locker and got a towel and wiped part of it off. And then when I got aft of where I'm going to come up and I forget the location on that – it was in the armored deck there, but there's a hatch you could go up back aft and it was dogged down except one dog was loose. And I'm trying on it; I can't move 'em. But they got the loose one and I got to making an SOS with the code thing. And pretty soon I heard guys talking. I don't know who they were. And they said, 'There's somebody down there. Let's get this open.'

He said, 'Well, if we don't have no power, you have to manually open it.'

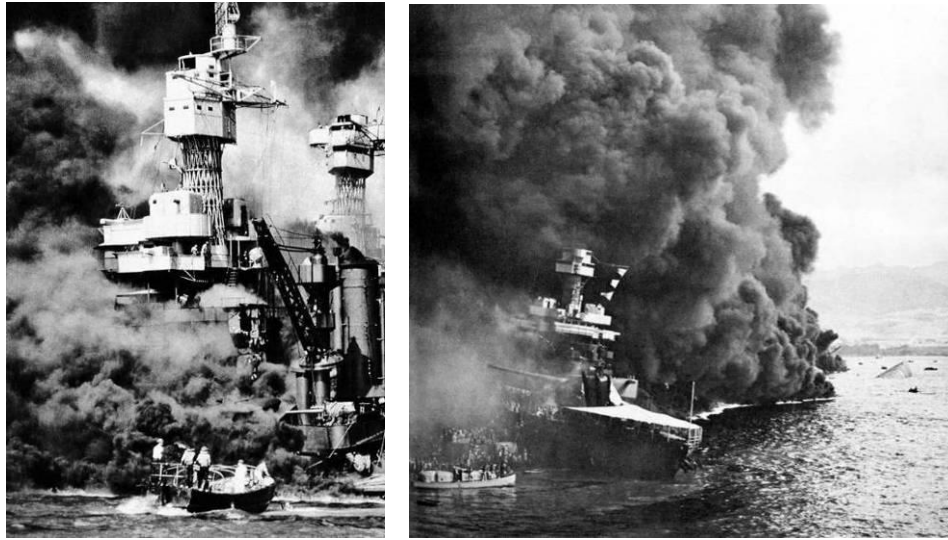
And of course, I was covered with crude. Had my arm stuck through one of the rungs of the ladder. And then of course, when they got me out on deck – I remember – don't know what time it was, but I know the sun was directly overhead. I'd been down there in the dark for a long time. Man, it was a bright sun. And they took me to hospital. And I spent about three or four days over there, getting fixed up a little bit. And before I left there, when I was ready to get out, there was a Japanese plane shot down right out by Hospital Point and I thought to myself – well, I'd been wanting to fly and took some lessons. I

remember going out to take a look at that plane, which they had fired up pretty good. Kind of ‘stenshe’ she was sitting cocked up like that a little bit. And in that cockpit, there was a little compartment to the right side that had a sack of rice in it, about that big around, about that long. And that fire on that had cooked enough that it opened the sack and part of it was rolling out. Now for a long time I couldn’t eat rice after that. But I made up my mind I didn’t want to fly after seeing what happened to that guy. Too rough.

So from there we went back to the – I got a boat, went back over to Ford Island, near the [U.S.S.] *California*, where she’d been abandoned. And found my crew and they’d made a – they got a fifty-caliber Browning [machine gun] off one of the PBYS and they’d got sandbags and they made a pit like thing is, oh, four, five foot deep and had that thing mounted in the middle. Had plenty ammo. That’s where they was staying. So that was tail end of that one.” (18)

Howard H. Juhl: On board the battleship U.S.S. *California*, Pearl Harbor. “Oh, anyway, my first deal I was sent up to – we have the emergency breathing apparatus. Well, very good except our – and they required a little can of oxygen, see, high-pressure oxygen. Well anyway, ours were all empty and so I was sent up forward to where they’d have the first torpedo head hit, and I was going – locker to try to see if they had any fresh torpedo, I mean fresh oxygen. Well, as I came up there, I heard, ‘Poison. Poison gas! Poison gas!’ And I had sort of suspected – and we had a bit of training about carbon monoxide and I suspected it, but I – Anyway, as I came through – this was in the forward part. I was in the aft ward part of the ship and I came through the hatch, was waiting, anyway, as I came to this hatch, a nice, big, husky individual came stumbling through and with sort of glassy eyes and then, klump, fell down. And but I only had my purpose there. I was to get some oxygen bottles. So it was the most comical thing. I suspected it was carbon monoxide, but I didn’t know. And the, I was there going through all these bottles of gas, oxygen bottles, trying to find one that was open: trying to hold my breath. And – And watching myself and so I couldn’t find any bottles. So anyway, I went back to where the air was a little bit better, see, in the aft ward part of the ship, because the torpedo had immediately hit – content of carbon monoxide. And so anyway, I wasn’t able to do anything there, but I was aware that there was something definitely, that the gasses were up there. And of course, needless to say, then they were permeated eventually all over. So the tremendous numbers of us that were – Yeah, carbon monoxide [caused by] the torpedo explosion up there.

Then the electricity went off within five to ten, fifteen minutes; there was no electricity and then all the emergency deal. And so I came back there and my leader of aft ward repair party then was counter flooding. And that was one of the few things that worked, the counter flooding was under hydraulic system that they would, the hydraulic system would open the valves to counter flood. And anyway, the story I heard later on is that John Barton was his name and anyway, he’d wanted to counter flood and our ensign, who was a reserve ensign, he was waiting from central control to give orders to counter flood. Well – I just said electricity went off right away, so it meant that we had to depend on sound-powered phones, which were very good in themselves. But if you depended on electricity, see, then you were complete. Anyway, the ensign refused to counter flood and the story I heard that this John Barton was ready to just take a wrench and bounce it off his head, because he was saying, ‘Now, do not counter flood!’ But we were listing and that was our purpose, was to counter flood and level off, to keep the ship level, from rolling over.” (18)



Small craft rescuing survivors near the U.S.S. *West Virginia* and the U.S.S. *California*.
(Photos: National Park Service)

Fire Controlman Second Class Steve J. Paycheck: On board the battleship U.S.S. *California*, Pearl Harbor. “Well, we were tied up at one of the keys, the two keys that normally would have been the U.S.S. *Enterprise* docking facilities. And I had just finished breakfast and I was drinking a second cup of coffee, and I looked – I was looking out the porthole, on the port side, which faced the direction that the Japanese came from. Well, we first noticed that there was something wrong when we heard explosions on Ford Island. And we thought, ‘Holy cow, what the heck’s happening over there,’ you know. And then they passed the word, ‘General quarters, general quarters.’ And everybody cussed. They says; ‘What the hell are we having a drill for on Sunday?’”

And just about then, I don’t remember whether the torpedo, one of the torpedoes, hit the [U.S.S.] *California* just before I went to my battle station, or right afterwards, but we got hit with a torpedo and the ship just up like this, two or three feet, and you knew there was something wrong. And they said, ‘We are under attack by the Japanese.’ Yeah, they said, ‘General quarters, general quarters. This is no drill. We are under attack.’”

I don’t remember, but it was so close, because we took more than one torpedo; and from describing the events with other members. For instance, in the Arizona, Phoenix area, the Pearl Harbor survivors chapter, there are five members who were on the U.S.S. *California*. And we all come to agreement that the torpedo hit either just before we went to general quarters, or just after. That is the first torpedo. And then, later on, we got, you know, either one or two more.

I had a real short distance to go from where I’d been drinking the cup of coffee. It was no more than say, a hundred feet at the most. I went right up out of the hatch and turret two was just at the top of the hatch, and there was a ladder put up there for me, so that I could get to my range finder station. I upped the ladder real quick like and I jumped into the range finder. And there were two of us. I was the operator and we had a trainer that moved the thing around. And I buttoned myself up in that darn thing, and it was like it was heavily armored. It had one-eighth of an inch steel plate around it. So after a few minutes, maybe three or four, or five minutes – and you know, you can’t see anything if you’re all buttoned up inside one of those little shells – I said, ‘What am I sitting here for?’”

So I opened up the doors and I had a sound powered telephone head set and I stood outside with my elbows up on top, and I was describing the action to the people who were about four or five decks below, you know, telling ‘em, ‘Well, the planes are coming in,’ and about that time, another torpedo hit us, and they said, ‘Holy cow!’ And even though they had emergency lights, they were battery operated emergency lights; they didn’t last very long, because we didn’t have the rechargeable type that you do now.

You know, they recharge them periodically and, you know – Oh they ran down, see. And here they're sitting in the dark. They had very little illumination. And about that time that they ship flooded; eventually there was about twenty-five or thirty feet of water above them. Well, somewhere, a seam leaked, and there they were, about fifteen or so people down there watching that water drip. And they didn't know – and I, you know, I told them, I said, 'Well, the, it looks like the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma*'s gonna turn over,' and then she did.

And then later on, when the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* got hit, I described that. And – Well, actually, my back was to it. And I heard this tremendous explosion, and I didn't quite know where it was coming from, until the – my fellow crewmen that was with me, he pointed. He says, 'Look, look, look!'

The Japanese had failed to take into account that ships sunk in the shallow waters of Pearl Harbor could be salvaged and repaired and their crews would mostly be away from their ships on a Sunday.

And there was a huge cloud of smoke and I didn't know it was the [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. I knew it was one of the battle ships. And I described that fully to the people down below, and later on, I found out, they said, 'Well, at first, we were scared.' And then, you know, because they couldn't see what was happening. And they knew that the ship was leaning, because just as soon as the torpedoes hit, well, the water flooded, starting flooding the lower part of the ship, and it got waterlogged on the port side. And as you know, the banks of the harbor, and thing like that, aren't straight up and down, they're at this angle. And we settled down to the bottom, then naturally we started leaning over. And they were sure that we were going to overturn.

Well, shortly after we went to general quarters and they just had a limited amount of anti-aircraft ammunition topside, which they used and fired against the planes. And then, due to the fact that we didn't have any power, because we were, we just had enough power coming from Ford Island by cable, to operate our basic electrical needs to operate the magazines and guns, and stuff like that, you gotta have a lot of power. Well, they couldn't hoist the ammunition up from the magazines by the conveyor belt, so they said, 'Everybody secure from whatever you're doing. Go down and help pass out five-inch ammunition up to the five-inch guns.' And I asked my division officer, Mr. Hall, I says; 'Does that include me?' And he says, 'No, Paycheck.' He says, 'You are flag range finder operator, so you take your orders from flag,' which is the admiral staff, you know. See, so I says; 'Okay.'

And sometime, I couldn't say exactly when we did take that bomb, but again, I didn't see it hit. But I felt it and later on, I saw the hole and the hole wasn't any more, where it went through the fo'c'sle deck, it wasn't maybe twenty, twenty-five feet from the turret. I talked to a couple of them later on, and they said, 'We kept looking at that water and we kept feeling the ship leaning further and further and further. And then, when you said the [U.S.S.] *Oklahoma* turned over, you know, we could just see ourselves entombed here, you know.' And it could have happened. But we had a good boson mate, or a – weren't boson. And he, right away, good damage control people, and they right away started trying to keep the ship from turning over. We, we ran, they ran all kind of cables and everything they could lay their hands on toward anything on, on Ford Island, to keep the thing from rolling over. They were successful.

Yeah, sometime after the attack started – I couldn't tell you the exact time – the [U.S.S.] *Nevada* got under way, and it went by, and not too far away from us. And being as I was on top of turret two there, well, I saw all the action, and when it went by, they were busy trying to fire at the planes and we fired sporadically, depending on how much ammunition we could get. I mean, we might have got off ten or twenty rounds per minute, you know, and fired 'em as fast as we could. And when the [U.S.S.] *Nevada* went by, well, we let out a cheer. And then we saw the Japanese concentrating on it, to stop it. And after – I didn't actually see it get hit, because it's awfully hard unless you, if the bombs explode top side. You know, when a bomb goes through the deck, it explodes two or three decks below; I mean you don't have too much visual knowledge of it. You might see the ship do this, or something like that. And we saw it headed for the, to ground it, so that it wouldn't block the harbor.

I mean, there was – especially after the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* got hit, there was so much smoke you couldn't see hardly anything. The one thing that I remember, I saw a lot of small boats from admirals' gigs, captains' gigs, and other small boats were rushing all over, rescuing people that had been either blown over the side, or jumped over the side, stuff like that. When that bomb hit, the one I just described, when that bomb hit, it exploded somewhere not very far away from one of our magazines, and naturally, there was some fire. And they were afraid that the, if they couldn't control the fire, that the ammunition would blow up and then we would have another [U.S.S.] *Arizona*. So we abandoned ship. Now, I jumped over the bow part, and jumped in the water.

And then I swam to Ford Island, which wasn't very far, and put my shoes back on, because I, for some reason or other, didn't want to get my shoes wet. I don't know why. I mean, those things that happen, you know, see. I actually tied my shoes together and put 'em around my neck and held on so when I jumped feet first, down and so, well, naturally, I went down below and my shoes got wet anyway. You know, see. So when I got on the island, I said, 'Now, I'll put my shoes on,' and I just ran like hell, because they, they said, 'Get away as far as you can from the ship in case it blows up.' Well, not too long afterwards, maybe ten, fifteen, twenty minutes afterwards, well, they passed the word again, that all crew members return to the ship, so I returned to the ship and helped in trying to keep the ship from turning over. I didn't have to go back to my battle station, because by then, the attack was over." (18)