

#236 BURNELL H. REED
USS *ARGONNE*, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON
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TRANSCRIBED BY:
CARA KIMURA
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(Background conversation)

Michael Stucky (MS): The following oral history interview was conducted by Michael Stucky, for the National Park Service, USS *ARIZONA* Memorial, at the Sheraton Waikiki, December 4, 1996, one p.m. The person being interviewed is Burnell Reed, who was on board the USS *ARGONNE* on December 7, 1941.

Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name, place of birth and birth date?

Burnell Reed (BR): Burnell Reed, born in Blue Earth Colony, Minnesota and -- what was the other one now?

MS: The birth date.

BR: Oh, 12-1-20.

MS: Okay.

BR: December 1, 1920.

MS: All right. And what was your hometown then in 1941?

BR: That was Mankato, Minnesota.

MS: Mankato.

BR: Yeah.

MS: All right, sir. What made you join the Navy and when did you join?

BR: Well, things were just getting pretty hot around, you know, and a buddy of mine, he says, "Let's join the Navy," and that's what we did.

We figured we wanted to get in and get some little time in before Hitler broke loose, you know. And so we just signed up and that was it.

MS: And it was tough economic times also?

BR: Oh yeah, it was plenty rough. Yeah.

MS: Pretty special to actually join the Navy, it was considered . . .

BR: Well, that was, yes, that was a good deal. Yeah.

MS: Well, that's great. And you went to basic training, where?

BR: Great Lakes.

MS: Great Lakes. How was boot camp?

BR: Well, it was a little touchy here and there, you know.

MS: Tough discipline?

BR: Yeah. Oh yeah, that was a pretty tough discipline they had.

MS: Did you feel that you were ready to get out and . . .

BR: Well, we figured that -- my buddy and I -- we figured that if something was going to happen, we wanted to be in on the ground floor, you know. And . . .

MS: How did you get from Great Lakes, then, to Hawaii? What was your little course of travel?

BR: Well, just I come over on the -- and that was, by the way, was we still had hammocks for sleeping. And no, that was just the ride over from the States over to Pearl.

MS: And what kind of ship was that?

BR: An oil tanker.

MS: You came from San Francisco, or San Pedro?

BR: No, San Pedro, California.

MS: Okay. And then, what ship did you join then?

BR: Then I was assigned to the *ARGONNE* right away when I . . . I don't even think I had a receiving station. I think I . . .

MS: They had plans for you.

BR: Yeah, I guess so.

MS: (Chuckles) And what was your job on the *ARGONNE*?

BR: Well, the first thing I got was mess cleaning job. That always went with it, you know. Everybody sort of chimed in mess cooking. I mean, the boots would, you know. And

MS: And then, what?

BR: Then

MS: You were a side cleaner, or . . . ?

BR: Oh yeah, and then, after side cleaning, why then, I -- in the Second Division, which was a deck division -- why, we started to do side cleaning. The water line, you know, we had to scrape it and they'd pump a little ballast here and there to get it to raise up a little bit. And that's what the -- well, all we did, you know, we

MS: Was that a tough job?

BR: Well, it was dirty and wet.

MS: And so, your battle station then was where?

BR: Was up on the -- what we called it . . . some deck we called it. It was right up next to sick bay, which was way up on topside. And

MS: And what was your job at the battle station?

BR: Well, just to fire the three-inch twenty-three [*caliber gun*] we had.

MS: I see.

BR: I had a missile handler -- not a missile handler, but a shell projectile. It was a shell like that and maybe that big around, and they'd shove them in. I mean the day of the attack, why, we run a lot of them through that old three-inch twenty-three [*caliber gun*]. Of course we were lucky, though. They had some high altitude bombers in the third charge that they put on, you know. And they had some --- oh, what's the matter with me? I can't think today.

MS: That's okay. Why don't we walk through the day? Let's start with the very first thing when you got up? Were you up early and had the duty?

BR: Yeah. We had breakfast and went over to the dockside where we were going to tie up the *ANTARES*. And then from there, well, then in the meantime, the Japs moved in and . . . then we . . .

MS: You were on the dock when the . . .

BR: Yeah, we were on the dock. I think we must have had almost six to eight men, I believe. And we were on the dock and but then, like you say, she never did come in. She was tied up at the city docks in Honolulu.

MS: Yeah.

BR: And but then, before we went back to our ship, why then, we had that incident with that torpedo bomber come in along side of the dock and went in. And he just had very little room to maneuver and he just took off, and away he went up in the air and . . .

MS: How close was he? How close did the plane come to you?

BR: Oh hell. He was from here to the wall over there, from the dock. He just come in right along side. Yeah, that's all the room he had.

MS: Did you see him actually drop a torpedo?

BR: Oh yeah, sure. It was plain as day, you know.

MS: You can't remember where the torpedo landed?

BR: Well, it went at the battle wagons, but which one, you couldn't hardly tell because they were popping off all over.

MS: Well, you were busy too, weren't you?

BR: Yeah. Yeah.

MS: Well now, you were on the dock, were you called back on to the ship, or did you just automatically . . .

BR: Well, we automatically went back to the ship. But we stirred around there a little bit and set down behind the piling, you know, when that first torpedo bomber came along. And we just set down behind. There was a big cast iron piling, you know, where they threw the lines around it. And -- but then after we got our heads together and started thinking, why, we headed back to the ship. And then, the torpedo bombers were coming in the slip of the sub base. And we had to cross right over, under 'em, you know, to get back to the ship.

MS: Well now, were the torpedo bombers the first planes that you saw, or did you see something else?

BR: No, the one that we saw first was a dive bomber that dropped on, hit the gasoline, that little gasoline storage, on Ford Island.

MS: So probably one of the very first aircraft . . .

BR: Yeah, yeah.

MS: And did you recognize them as Japanese immediately?

BR: Oh yes. He was sitting there and he had his goggles on, and had the white scarf around his neck, and that was trailing around, back behind him, you know. And it was quite a picture.

MS: So anybody think that this might have been another drill of some kind?

BR: Well, not after that first bomb went off. Then we knew what it was. Right up until that time, we had no idea. We never even noticed the red balls on the wings, you know. No, that . . .

MS: So things basically took you boys by surprise. Now, did you . . .

BR: Oh yes.

MS: . . . did you suspect there might be something up, some war with Japan coming?

BR: Well, I mean, the talk was in the papers and all over, you know, that they wanted to get us in the war there to help England, you know. And but that didn't always work out you know.

MS: What was the -- once you boys got everything together and got back on the ship, did you immediately go right to your battle stations?

BR: Yeah.

MS: How long do you think that took? Just a couple of minutes, or . . .

BR: Oh no. It took longer than that. You mean from the time we left the dock over there to get back to the ship?

MS: Yeah. Duck under those dive bombing attacks.

BR: Well, I suppose it took us five, six minutes to then bring fire across that slip, you know.

MS: So it didn't take you long to start opening fire?

BR: No, not when we got back up on the deck. We were -- the promenade deck is where we put the guns placement was.

MS: And you had the timed shells?

BR: Yeah, these fuses on it. You just set it to whatever so many seconds you wanted it to fire after you shot it up in the air, you know. So it would explode.

(Background conversation)

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

(Background conversation)

MS: Okay, now you were shooting up at the airplanes coming in and you're using a timed fuse. How close were your shots getting when they would explode?

BR: Well, we were -- I forget what (inaudible) or what the setting we had 'em on, but we had 'em cranked way down because the dive bombers and torpedo bombers were way down low, you know. And we really, really couldn't even fight or be too effective, you know, with it, because of the distance where the planes were flying, until just at the last, why, we had a little bit of chance because the high altitude bombers were coming in, and they were just dropping bombs. And they were up above the other planes, so we could drop bombs and we just . . .

MS: Okay, so, your high altitude bombers were a better target, do you feel that you -- did you get a score?

BR: Well, I don't know, but there's a seaman out there by the name of the Mapes that said that -- but his story always was that we shot down the first plane. And during the attack, what we shot down. But now, whether, you know, a lot of times you hear stories like that, you know.

MS: Sure.

BR: Some are true and some aren't, but how do you know if you don't.

MS: When you have 200 guns firing at once . . .

BR: Yeah, right. And there was 450 planes there. That was plenty to shoot at too.

MS: A lot of targets.

BR: Yeah.

MS: Did you have any fire coming -- I mean, did you have stripers or any bombs?

BR: Well, we were pretty lucky because we were at ten-ten dock and we had a big crane, a big wheel, with the big tripods and the crane up above, and it was setting right up at the bow of the ship, and way up above it. I mean, I suppose that whole thing was maybe 100 feet high. And that kept the plane, the dive bombers and stuff away from that, so we were pretty lucky that way.

MS: Yeah. So you don't feel like you received any fire in particular. You didn't have anybody hit . . .

BR: No, no, we had the -- well, what we had -- the hit was that this stray bullets, we had a few hits, but just probably six, eight, ten local hits, you know, that . . .

MS: Did you have anybody around you or was there anything unusual going on as far as, you know, the firing drills, or anybody there that wouldn't have been there normally? Did you have anybody else . . .

BR: No, everybody had their gun stations assigned to 'em and . . .

MS: Did you have help from the *MUGFORD* [DD-389]?

BR: Huh?

MS: Did you have help from the *MUGFORD*?

BR: Well, yeah. Oh yeah. The *MUGFORD*, they were firing, shooting and but then, after a while, when the -- well, it had been dried down, or slid up a lot, you know, when they called for them volunteers, and we went out and I think about sixteen, eighteen of us that went out on the *MUGFORD* then.

MS: So, you gave them help?

BR: Yeah, yeah.

MS: And when did you actually go out then?

BR: Well, it was during the third attack and that was about over with, you know. And they finally saw the -- figured that they could get the *MUGFORD* and maybe go look for the Japs. And there were several ships out there, and several other destroyers. I don't know which ones they were, but I'm sure glad we didn't find them because if we . . .

MS: Could have been a little bit rough, huh?

BR: Yeah, it could have been.

MS: So, when you went out of the harbor, and how long did you stay out?

BR: Well, that I can't -- that just slips my memory. I can't --- I know we were out overnight a couple nights, that I know because I remember the chow buckets sliding around the floor of the deck, you know. So I know there was a couple of days there that -- maybe more. You know, but I can't remember just how many days that was.

MS: Does it feel like sometimes where you think back to some of that, it's almost a blur, there was so much activity?

BR: Yeah, yeah. But then again, some of it, you remember everything, just like it happened yesterday.

MS: Yeah.

BR: Yeah.

MS: Is there any particular other things that -- any other sights or smells or experiences, anything else that, you know, brings this to mind. Anything else in particular?

BR: Well, I know one thing, I had my folks a little bit worried because I remember too about that. I remember like six, seven days that the -- well, what is that?

MS: It was something to do with your folks that . . .

BR: Oh yeah. Everybody filled out one of the little postcard or something, and everybody had to send them home. And then I was out to sea and I couldn't send one home. And right away, they got a little worried that I was deceased, you know.

MS: Yeah, "I'm okay and still alive."

BR: Yeah.

MS: Postcard, you know, there was a lot of those going out from Hawaii.

BR: Yeah.

MS: Well, I'm glad you were able to finally send one out.

BR: Oh yeah.

MS: When you got back, what -- did you go back to the *ARGONNE* then?

BR: Yeah.

MS: And then, what happened after that?

BR: Well, then we went to Fiji Islands. We took some advanced aircraft stuff down there. And then eventually, later on, we wound up in New Caledonia. And then we unloaded PT boats and we were just doing everything that somebody'd dream up that had to be done, you know, and -- which was all right too, because we never knew from one day to the next that what was going on, hardly, you know.

MS: Did you and your friend's feel like this was going to be a real long, hard war, or did you feel . . .

BR: Well, no, he wound up and went to Africa. But I got -- caught a cold or something and I was in sick bay for a week or ten days and they split us up, then they got -- I got dropped out of the company and went into the next one. And . . .

MS: Did you stay with the *ARGONNE* for quite some time or did you . . .

BR: Well, about two years, if I remember right.

MS: Oh, that's a long time.

BR: So . . .

MS: And then, did you transfer to another ship or did you go . . .

BR: No, I come back to the States on new construction, they called it. I don't know how they derived at that name, but they called it new construction. Maybe that was new ships coming out, or something, I don't know. But . . .

MS: Did you stay there for quite some time?

BR: No, after the two years I was there, why then, they sent me back and I had thirty days leave coming. And the skipper, or whoever it was, at Tiburon, California, north of San Francisco, they took my leave away and give eighteen guys to take down to Jacksonville, Florida, to take a wooden dry dock -- portable, you know, dry dock -- to tow it down there. And we get about three knots is all we could . . .

MS: Oh god, took you forever, didn't it?

BR: Yeah, oh god, yes. But they had little quarters built in the -- of course, they had the whole deck, you know, and then the sides, they had these cribs up for filling with water and stuff, you know. And but the -- that was quite a trip down there.

MS: I'll bet. Where did you end up at the close of the war?

BR: Well, I wound up -- I was waiting for discharge and decommissioning these ships, putting them in mothballs. They sent me up to Philadelphia to go to school up there. That's this kind of spray stuff that they'd spray all over and it's supposed to keep 'em from rusting and everything.

MS: So that's what you ended up doing . . .

BR: Yeah.

MS: . . . toward the end. And when did you leave the Navy?

BR: Oh, in -- let's see. Well, anyhow, it was a little shorter than six years, because I had some time off for whatever, I don't know.

MS: Good behavior? (Chuckles)

BR: Yeah.

MS: Well, that sounds like a pretty interesting six years. Now, what about since then? How long have you been involved with the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association?

BR: Well, I've belonged ever since we started the chapter at home in Mankato [Minnesota]. So I haven't held any state offices, but I did local, you know, offices and stuff. But . . .

MS: How many times have you gotten back to Hawaii and revisited?

BR: Well, if you figure the before, the first, December 7, if you figure that as a time, I've five times been back there.

MS: Great. Since we've now past fifty years and now we're on fifty-five years, it's a long amount of time . . .

BR: Yeah.

MS: . . . to think about all of this. Do you have any feelings or reactions to it now that maybe have evolved since then, or . . . ?

BR: No, I just don't have any bad feelings or anything, you know.

MS: You don't have any animosity or (inaudible) . . .

BR: No.

MS: . . . the Japanese or anything?

BR: No.

MS: Do you feel like that . . .

BR: I did probably felt a little bit that way during the war, but I mean, now I don't.

MS: Okay.

BR: You know.

MS: Kind of evolved?

BR: Yeah. Kind of tied with time erases some of the deals, you know.

MS: Do you feel that this is something that we should continue to do as far as trying to remember and commemorate?

BR: Oh, I think so too. I think so too. 'Cause you gotta have some history to recite for the kids hear. I suppose some, they . . .

MS: Well, let's suppose that it's several years from now, maybe 100 years from now and it's our great-great-great grandkids. What would you like them to remember or know, or think about?

BR: Well, I'd just like them to have something that he could pick up and read and . . .

MS: Able to kind of get the true story?

BR: Yeah, yeah.

MS: Well, that's part of what we were trying to do here today with you and many of the others and . . .

BR: Yeah.

MS: . . . kind enough to give us your time. Is there anything else? Any other thoughts or . . .

BR: No. When I get out of here, I'll think of something, probably.

MS: Well, then you can drop us a line. We'll add it in as an addendum.

BR: Yeah.

MS: Well, sir, thank you very much for your time.

BR: Okay.

MS: We really appreciate this and we'll be getting you a copy.

BR: Yeah.

MS: That's great.

END OF INTERVIEW