

#178 DON JONES: MARINE IN HOSPITAL

Don Jones (DJ): Will there be any chance of me seeing this film?

--: We'll give you a copy, in fact. We'll mail you a copy.

Chris Conybeare (CC): We'll send you a copy.

DJ: Beautiful, beautiful.

CC: Okay, you want me to slate this? You ready?

(Conversation off-mike)

CC: Oh, put my mike on. This is an oral history interview with Mr. Don Jones. It's December 4, 1986. We're at the Sheraton Waikiki in Honolulu. It's about 1:30 PM. Mr. Jones lives in Yucca Valley, California. My name is Chris Conybeare, and Mark Tanaka-Sanders is assisting me with the interview.

Mr. Jones, state your name and rank on December 7, 1941.

DJ: My name is Don S. Jones and I was a Corporal in the U.S. Marine Corps.

CC: Where were you stationed then?

DJ: I was stationed at the Marine Barracks and the Barracks Detachment is what they called that company, as they called it headquarters company now, but we were special, like supply department, and fire department, and the guard department. Those kinds of things.

CC: And how long had you been here in Hawaii at that time?

DJ: I came in the spring of 1940, so I'd been here about a year and eight or nine months.

CC: And how old were you?

DJ: I was twenty-two.

CC: What got you to join the Marine Corps? Where had hometown been and what . . .

DJ: When I was a small lad, we had a neighbor that had been in the Marine Corps in World War I, and he used to tell stories about the Marine Corps and I made up my mind I wanted to join the Marine Corps when I was a small lad, and as soon as I got to where I could, I did. I joined the Marine Corps from a small town in Kansas through a poster at the post office. And I filled out a form and sent it to Kansas City, Missouri and they sent it back and wanted a physical. So the old doctor in the neighborhood looked at me and said, "You're healthy."

So the next --- about a week or two later, I got a ticket to ride a Greyhound bus to Kansas City. And up to that time, I had never been in a town that had a street light in it. I was really a country boy.

CC: And the Marine Corps showed you the world, huh?

DJ: Oh boy, did they. I got on a train at Kansas City and rode it to San Diego, and I had never been on a train before. So that's where I got in the Marine Corps.

CC: And then, were you assigned to Hawaii right out of basic, or . . .

DJ: Oh no, I stayed at the Marine Corps base in San Diego for a year and maybe four or five months. I was in a parade platoon in San Diego, but we all had to be six feet tall and our platoon made up the football team for San Diego. And so I was in the parade platoon and played football and so forth.

CC: And you got orders for Hawaii?

DJ: Well, I put in to go to China because there had been a quite a few people that come back from China and with all the stories they told about the things you can do in China for a dollar, well, I thought I wanted to go to China. But halfway to Pearl Harbor, they decided they needed some more men at Pearl Harbor, and I was one of 'em and there was no way to change their minds. So I stayed at Pearl Harbor.

CC: They have a way of not having their minds changed.

DJ: That's right. (Chuckles)

CC: What, what were you doing that morning, on that Sunday morning, December 7? Where were you that morning?

DJ: All right, I'll have to tell you a little bit of a story coming up to this.

CC: All right.

DJ: I went to the hospital a few days before Pearl Harbor to have a cyst removed, which was right close to my rectum. And so the doctor took a good look at it and said, "Well, we're going to have to operate on you." He says, "As long as we're operating on you, you're going to have -- you have a hemorrhoid, son." He said, "You should have those removed, because they're going to give you problems sooner or later."

Well, okay. So we had our --- that was what I went into the hospital [*Pearl Harbor Naval Hospital*] for. And so the doctor and the corpsman were laughing about how much fun they were having cutting up this Marine. You know how the sailors are with the Marines.

CC: I do.

DJ: (Laughs) So they got --- they gave me a spinal so I was dead from the waist down, and they were all laughing at how they were cutting me up, and the doctor got through with that, and he says, "Well, is there anything else we can do this Marine?"

So one of the corps men said, "Doc, he's never been circumcised."

Oh my god. So the doc says, "Let's take a look at that."

So they turned me over and circumcised me. And that was the condition I was in about three days before Pearl Harbor.

So on the day of the raid, I was laying on my bunk, reading the Sunday paper and we heard these blasts, and we just thought they were blasting because they'd been building dry docks. And one of the guys run in and he said, "Hey, the Japs are attacking."

And somebody says, "Oh baloney," you know.

And somebody else says, "Hell, it's true! They're attacking!"

And we ran out and we could see the Jap planes with the sunrise on the wings, you know. And so we were standing up, watching the sky and a plane flew over and strafed us. And the dirt kicked up right beside us and one of the fellows says, "What's that?"

And somebody else said, "Well, dummy, they're shooting at us."

Oh my god, you know. So we decided we'd better close --- they were digging a sewer ditch, close behind the hospital. And so we got close to the ditch in case he came back. And boy, here in a little bit, here he came back. At least a plane came back. Now, we don't know whether it was the same one or not. And he was on fire and headed right for us. So somebody hollered, "Jump in the ditch," and we all jumped and slid in the ditch. And the plane landed on top of the ditch and slid right over us.

And when the plane was coming, we could look up and see the pilot was standing up in the plane trying to get out. And he, of course, went through the propeller, and the only thing that was left of him that was one piece was a leg. And one of the sailors come out of the ditch, they grabbed the leg and started beating it on the ground, and screaming, "I'll kill him! I'll kill him! I'll kill him!" And he finally stopped and looked at the leg, as if to say, "Well, this is kind of dumb," you know.

So he pulled the boot off and said, "Well, I think I got the first souvenir of the war."

And so he had the boot. And of course, when I jumped, I slid into the ditch. So when I came out, I was all bloody all over the front of myself. And to this day, I'm still picking up pieces of stitches from sliding into the ditch.

So that's my story of Pearl Harbor. I went back into the hospital, and the doctor took a look at me. You know, I told the doctor what happened. He took a look at me, he says, "Kid, you're walking. You can go back to duty."

So then he gave me --- he said, "Why don't you give all these fellows that are burnt a drink of water?"

So I went around for about an hour, giving all the guys that were burnt real bad, water. And of course, every bunk in the hospital was filled, and there was somebody under every bunk and there was somebody in all the passageways, and I was trying to give everybody a drink of water. And one of the real ironies was that one fellow recognized me, and it was so funny -- it wasn't funny but it was real sad -- but he says, "Aren't you from Kansas?"

I said, "Yeah. Where you from," 'cause I was asking them where they were from and one thing or another.

And he said, "Well, I'm from Durham, Kansas." He said, "You and I played basketball against each other in high school, and football, and track."

And his name was Hines and he had lived in Durham, and I'm sure he died -- I never did go back to Durham, Kansas to find out -- because he was burnt like a crisp. But he recognized me, and him and I ran the four-forty in high school, and I never did beat him. He beat me by a foot every time, but I just worked my heart out trying to beat him. (CC chuckles) Never did beat him. So . . .

CC: Small world.

DJ: It's a small world.

CC: What kinds of things would you talk about with the wounded? Did they have different stories to tell, or did they tell you anything about -- do you remember any of the things that you talked about with those guys?

DJ: Well, I usually asked 'em where they were from, or something like this, and I don't remember many stories. But I do know that I left, I had a little radio on a stand beside my bunk, and I left it there 'cause there was a fellow in my bunk, and I said, "I'll leave you my radio."

And I went back maybe three or four days later to get my radio, which I got. But there was hardly anybody in the hospital. They were almost all of 'em dead.

CC: How --- one thing, when the attack started, you were in a hospital bed. How were you dressed?

DJ: In my pajamas, in my hospital pajamas, with the white pajamas and the top.

CC: So you went to war in pajamas?

DJ: (Laughs) Yeah. I went back to duty, I spent the first night on top of the Marine barracks, and oh, three or four days later, a corpsmen and myself had a real good time with some tweezers and little scissors, trying to get the stitches out of both ends of me.

CC: How about before that? Just life in general. What kinds of things would you do when you had some time off, and what was it like here in Hawaii in those days?

DJ: Well, one of the big things was some of us were keeping track of the hit parade, every week. And I brought to this convention a list of the hit parades on each Saturday night, leading up to Pearl Harbor. And so we, down at the archives now, we got the ten top songs for Saturday night on December the sixth.

CC: What were they?

DJ: Let's see. They were "Jim," "Elmer's Tune," and I don't remember all of them all, but that was a couple of 'em.

CC: Yeah.

DJ: But, "Serenade in Blue" and "The Woodchopper's Ball." (CC chuckles) So that was some of 'em.

CC: And there was some good music and that kind of thing in the islands? You could . . .

DJ: Well, we thought it was, you know, it was beautiful music and we liked the music, and of course we liked Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, at that time, for competing as to who was the top singer. And one week, one of 'em would be the top singer, then the other would be the top singer.

And I was in the supply department where they picked up freight on the docks. It was my job, picking up freight on the docks. And I was real gung-ho about my job, I liked it and I was better at working than I was being a soldier. I finally found my niche, I found it in the Marine corps then because I didn't really like standing guard duty, but I was a good worker.

CC: What about -- getting back to the entertainment thing -- were there clubs you'd go to, or what kind of restaurants, or favorite hangouts or what?

DJ: Well, we did go on liberty -- we loved to dance. There was --- I haven't been able to find any of the fellows that I knew that were good friends of mine then. But we'd go downtown and dance.

And another fellow and I worked part time at Kau-Kau Korner, at the time. And his name was Moody. He'd work one night and I'd work the next night. And so we had a job. The two of us held down one job. We'd work about, I think, about six hours a night cooking hamburgers at the Kau-Kau Korner. And there was a dance hall close to that, and I don't remember what the name of it was now -- the Rendezvous, I think. And then we used to go over there and dance, and I loved to jitterbug. And I've got pictures of myself, they had a jitterbug contest at the Marine barracks, shortly before Pearl Harbor, and I won second place. (Chuckles)

CC: Who would you dance with? Who were the girls?

DJ: The girl I danced with -- I had a date to dance with a girl, and she didn't show up. So the girl I danced with, I'd never seen before or since. All I remember is her name was Ruth. And oh, we had a good time that night, but I never did see her again, or I don't remember seeing her before that.

CC: How about the clubs? Were they taxi dancers, or were you . . .

DJ: Well, we went to taxi dancers, once in a while, on payday, and we'd dance up a storm. We'd go right from dancing and one night I went to a taxi dance and danced with some little Oriental girl that she was just like on a spring or something, really bounced. And as I left, some big guy says, "Hey, that's him," and he pulled a knife. And boy, I run like a scared rabbit. He couldn't have caught me if he'd wanted to. But that was one experience I had at a taxi dance, and I don't know what I did to the girl or if I was the right guy or what. I didn't go back to find out. (Chuckles)

CC: Yeah, I don't blame you either. How did the war --- what else happened to you in the war? Did you . . .

DJ: Well, I stayed at Pearl Harbor for a year. In December of '42, I went home, went to Kansas and visit my folks. Then I reported for duty back at the Marine base in San Diego, and I was in the supply department at San Diego, and

stayed there for about a year and a half. And while I was there, I got married and my wife had a baby, and then I got shipped overseas and I went to Saipan.

And so I went to the Saipan operation, and I also went to Okinawa. And I'm really kind of a rare breed in a way, because I was among the very first troops that landed at Nagasaki, after the atomic bomb dropped. And I don't know of anybody else that has come close to seeing the war start and end.

We rode small boats into Nagasaki, went through mine fields. The boat would have to go in reverse and back up, and we'd take an oar and push a mine out of the way. And there must have been thousands of dead people floating in the bay, because as I understand it, they didn't have any way to bury 'em, so they dumped 'em out in the water. And there was hundreds and hundreds of bodies floating in the water, and they'd all be floating, it seemed like, face up, and all swelled up and green, and they looked like they were all grinning at you. And they was right by the boat.

CC: What was it like? What was that city like after the atomic bomb?

DJ: Well, if you would take Waikiki Beach and make it just about as smooth as the highway is out here, that's what downtown Nagasaki was like. The only thing that was standing in Nagasaki were round smoke stacks and round telephone poles. And the railroad station was still there, but it was underground.

Now, the first night we got ashore, I was a supply sergeant, I was in charge of the battalion supply. And so the whole battalion went up to some prisoner of war barracks, the first night we were there, but the supply and all the supply equipment and stuff stayed right on the edge of the bombed out area of Nagasaki. And I was left in charge of about twenty men, chief truck drivers and the supply crew -- maybe twenty-five of us. And so that's where we spent our first night.

And the colonel came and had a good talk with me before he left, and he said, "Sergeant, if anybody leaves your area tonight, I want you to put 'em on report, because nobody is supposed to leave the area."

Well, it seemed like about two or three blocks away from us, there was a geisha house. (Laughs) Anyway, so I posted two sentries and I laid on a, went to sleep on a bunk, on the top of a jeep, a hospital jeep -- it had four bunks on it. And I told the sentry, I said, "Now, you wake me up at twelve o'clock, and I'll relieve you and post a couple more sentries."

So he woke me up at twelve o'clock and he says, "I don't know why the hell I'm waking you up. You and me are the only ones here."

So that was --- so him and I stood watch the rest of the night. Of course, before the night was over, everybody else was back. And if I had put 'em on report, there wouldn't have been anybody to do any work, so we didn't put anybody on report.

The next morning, this other kid and I took a ride in a jeep, and we drove around through the bombed out area of Nagasaki. And as I remember, the radiator of the jeep boiled. And when we drove out of the area, it didn't boil any more. Some people say that would have been because of the radiation.

CC: Gee.

DJ: So maybe we had quite an exposure to radiation, but of course, at that time, we didn't know anything about radiation.

CC: Something that you did experience too that a lot of people didn't, you actually were stationed in Japan. What was it like actually living with the people that had at one point been the enemy? That --- what was that like for you?

DJ: Well, we were stationed there, I was stationed there for a year, and our job was to destroy armament. And of course, well, that morning that we drove around through Nagasaki, this other kid and I, we had two bandoleers of ammunition. Had a forty-five and a carbine. And so we saw people going down into the railroad station. The trains were running. So we thought, well, it'll be fun to walk through the railroad station. And we'd heard, we'd learned how to say, "Good morning," in Japanese, "Ohayo." So we'd walk to the railroad station and we said good morning to everybody, "Ohayo," and they all got up and stood and bowed to us, and we went on to the station. We thought, well, this is kind of fun. Let's go back and do it again.

There wasn't a soul left in the station. They disappeared, I'll tell you. (Chuckles) They didn't give us a chance to say it, 'cause they were scared. The Japs were all convinced we -- they told us later that the Japanese people were convinced that if the Marines landed, that we would kill 'em all. And that in order to be a Marine at that time, we either had to kill our father or our mother in cold blood, to have joined the Marine corps.

CC: The kind of propaganda . . .

DJ: Yeah, there was propaganda. And of course, the first thing we did was start feeding the kids, and the sick, and the hungry, and the lonesome. And so in just a few days, why, they were coming out of the caves and holding their hands out for something to eat, because they were hungry and cold, and

So living in Japan for a year was really quite an experience. It seemed to me like most of the Japanese people had lice, as one example. So I remember one time, we took --- it must have been about a week up there. The whole different community surrounded us, lined up, and we had these little crank thing that sprayed powder on 'em and the Japanese people would line up and they'd hold their shirts up and their arms up, and hold their pants open, and boy, we just sprayed the hell out of 'em.

CC: So did you get any information from them about how they perceived the war, or did you get to talk to any people or get to meet them, or did you get to . . .

DJ: Oh yeah.

CC: . . . exchange those kinds of . . .

DJ: We talked a little bit about it, but I don't remember saying too much about it. I remember one fellow that was partly an interpreter. He was in Nagasaki, and he told us about when the plane come over, with the atomic bomb on it. He said everybody looked up and said, "Ichi, ichi plane, ichi plane." Nobody --- everybody laughed. One bomb drops, everybody laughed, "Ha, ha, ha," then foom. Everybody covered up their face. And he said, "Sayonara," that was the end of all the Japanese people that were in the area.

CC: What --- forty-five years later, how do you . . .

(Conversation off-mike)

CC: Okay. We got a problem, or . . .

(Conversation off-mike. Taping stops, then resumes.)

CC: The forty-fifth anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and as you look back on it, how do you feel about it today?

DJ: Well, I feel it was quite an experience, and I don't really have any hatred towards the Japanese people. They were, like a lot of people that go to war, and we hated each other during the war, and I suppose they did. But I don't hate the Japanese people or anybody else. I think war is a terrible, terrible thing. And I think that the more that people like myself can convey to people how terrible it actually is -- I talk to my grandchildren, and they don't like to hear about it, and they don't, you know, they just don't really want to know about how terrible war can be. As an example, at Nagasaki, I saw a dog dropped down the street with a little baby's leg in its mouth. And this is pretty bad. And people just don't know and don't want to know, especially young people, what a terrible, terrible thing war is. And I certainly don't want to grow up on it, but I don't have any hatred towards anybody. I feel like I love everybody.

CC: Okay, thank you. It's a good place to stop.

END OF INTERVIEW