

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
#287

EDMUND RAYMOND BROOKS

USS *ARGONNE*, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 6, 1998
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

SEPTEMBER 2, 2001

USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Daniel Martinez (DM): ...start this all off. And I'll have a little introductory thing that I read. Okay?

Edmund Brooks (EB): Yeah, okay. I can hardly [*here*] you sometimes, because...

DM: Okay, do you want me to move forward?

EB: No, no. That's...

DM: How's that, a little better?

EB: That's a little better, yeah. That's fine.

DM: Okay. All right.

The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Martinez, historian for the National Park Service at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. The taping was done at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 6, 1998, at approximately three p.m. The person being interviewed is Edmund Brooks, who was on board the USS *Argonne* and assisted the USS *West Virginia*, on December 7, 1941. For the record, Ed or Edmund—how do you like to be called?

EB: Well, they call me, all through school they called me Eddie and where I worked as a longshoreman, on the waterfront, they called me Eddie. You take your pick. Call me Ed or Edmund, but...

DM: I'll call you Eddie.

EB: I answer whatever.

DM: Eddie, would you state for us your full name?

EB: My name is Edmund R. Brooks.

DM: And what's the "R" stand for?

EB: Raymond. My name is Edmund Raymond Brooks.

DM: Okay.

EB: To be exact.

DM: All right. And your place of birth?

EB: I was born October 11, 1918, San Pedro, California.

DM: Oh my gosh, you have longshoreman. I grew up in Torrance, California.

EB: Yeah. Did you really? Okay.

DM: Yeah. Okay. Let's go back to—you considered your hometown, were you raised in San Pedro then?

EB: That was my hometown, but I live in the city of Carson right now.

DM: Okay. And Brooks, what's your background?

EB: Well, my family background, Brooks, my father's father came from England.

DM: Okay.

EB: He came in on a sailing ship to Santa Barbara.

DM: Okay.

EB: And he was a sea captain and he came from Manchester, England and he met this half-breed CHEW-MASH girl in Santa Ynez, California. And he let the ship go back to England and he married her, he stayed. And all the Brooks persons came from Manchester and settled in Santa Barbara, to Montecito, California.

DM: Interesting family.

EB: Mm-hm. Well, I don't know them, but my father told me this.

DM: Okay. And when you grew up in San Pedro, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

EB: I had two sisters. One was—the two were twins to each other.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And I had a brother, Walt, who's older than I and a brother Frank.

DM: Okay, and where were you in the family? In the middle?

EB: I was the second.

DM: The second.

EB: Mm-hm.

DM: So, family of five.

EB: Family of five.

DM: And were your mother and father alive when you grew up?

EB: Yes. They...

DM: What'd your dad do for a living?

EB: My dad? He was a longshoreman and he fished lobsters back in the days when there were a lot of lobsters around there.

DM: Oh, I bet there were.

EB: Yeah, I had a lot of lobster when I was a kid to eat.

DM: That's pretty good eating. I was just wondering, did the depression affect your family?

EB: Well, sometimes, yes, I think because people always—I have a son who is six-foot-two, and they said, “How come you’re so small and he’s six-foot-two and so big?”

And so I said, “Well, you see, I grew up during the depression,” I made a joke out of this. I says, “My brother, Walt, you know, he’s bigger than I,” and I says, “he had a longer reach, so I had what was left over.”

DM: (Chuckles) Now, where did you go to grammar school?

EB: Fifteenth Street School, San Pedro, California.

DM: Is that still standing?

EB: Hm?

DM: Is that still standing?

EB: Yes.

DM: And high school?

EB: I went to—well, first of all, I went to Richard Henry Dana Junior High School.

DM: Oh, you went to junior high?

EB: Richard Henry Dana Junior High School.

DM: Okay.

EB: And then I graduated and then I went to the old San Pedro High School in San Pedro.

DM: Okay. And when you went to San Pedro High School...

EB: Yes?

DM: ...what was your favorite subjects? Did you have a favorite subject you liked in school?

EB: Well, first of all, I didn't finish my conversation about the high school.

DM: Okay.

EB: I graduated from the new high school in winter of '38.

DM: Mm-hm.

EB: And I was one of the senior class officers of the class. My subjects in school, I didn't do too well in some subjects, but my favorite subject was woodworking. I majored in cabinetmaking.

DM: Really?

EB: Yes and I invented me, one time, I still have it, a set of bunk beds and it's so unique the way it goes together, and people say, "Well, how come—what makes your bunk beds so different?"

I says, "The way it slips together."

DM: Is it without nails and all of that business?

EB: All wood, nothing. There's just the way—I still have it. And hopefully I'll get my grandkids or my son maybe and get a market. Who knows? I'll never do nothing with it. But it's a very unique piece of equipment. My mother says, "Eddie," she says, "why don't you make a bunk bed?"

I said, "I don't know what to do."

Well, finally, in the middle of the night, I got an idea. It came to me. Laying in bed, I said, "How am I going to put this thing together?" And I said, "Uh-oh."

So I start drawing. Now, I use a lot of mortise and tenon joints in there. And let me tell you, there's nothing in the world like it today. It's the only one.

DM: When you were in high school, did you play any sports?

EB: Well, I majored—I can do anything in school, you know. I was athletically all the way through. I could play football, baseball, you know. I worked out in gymnastics and I was able to tumble and things like that. And I worked out on the horizontal bars and rings, you name it, the parallel bars. But my main subject was boxing.

DM: Boxing?

EB: Mm-hm.

DM: Well, there was a few boxers that came out of San Pedro.

EB: Pardon?

DM: There was more than a few boxers that came out of San Pedro.

EB: Back in those days, a lot of kids tried boxing, but you know, there was only—later, people became real good at it, you know.

DM: Yeah.

EB: But I've got here, to show you this, this is from 1936, the year of the Olympics.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: There it is. There it is, right there.

DM: What's that?

EB: Boxing.

DM: You won the gold medal in boxing...

EB: Yes.

DM: ...when you were with the 251st Coast Artillery?

EB: [*E*] Battery 251st Coast Artillery, it was in Pearl Harbor, during the attack, that I served with them that morning. After I abandoned ship from the *West Virginia*, and I ran into them at the navy seaman barracks and I set up machine guns with them and helped them. I stayed there with Lieutenant Lyman until that night when all the ships, planes were coming in from the *Enterprise* that were shot down.

DM: I'll be darned. Well, we'll get back into that. That's amazing.

EB: Yeah.

DM: Let me ask you. I'll give you that back. How did you come to join the navy?

EB: Well, I grew up around the navy. As a kid, I sold papers, you know, down there at the depot. And my ship was the USS—later, my ship was the USS *Argonne* and I later was on that ship for duty.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And one of my friends that I, people that I sold papers to were still there.

DM: I'll be darned.

EB: And I was in high school, in junior high school when that was my ship for delivering papers.

DM: Okay.

EB: And since I grew up around the fleet and we used to go out to the Battleship Row and every weekend practically and visit, it was a common practice for all us kids to go out there just to be going, you know. Something to do.

DM: So, would you go out on a launch that would take you to the ship?

EB: We'd go out on a launch to any ship, the *Tennessee*, the *West Virginia* the "Wee-Vee", the *New Mexico*, the *New York*, *New Mexico*.

DM: Because the battle fleet was home ported at San Pedro.

EB: Yeah, the *West Virg[inia]* hm, *California*, *Nevada*.

DM: So what year did you join the navy?

EB: Well, when I first went in the navy.

DM: What year was that?

EB: That was May 16, 1939.

DM: Nineteen thirty-nine?

EB: Yes, May 16, 1939.

DM: And you enlisted there in San Pedro?

EB: I went—yes, I did and I was down in San Diego Naval Training Station.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: But I enlisted, I think, it was in Long Beach or in Los Angeles. I forget where it was at that time.

DM: Okay.

EB: And I was, went aboard, went to San Diego Naval Training Station, May 16, 1939. I think they took us from Los Angeles.

DM: Now, explain to me how you came involved with the 251st, California Artillery?

EB: Okay. Yeah, that's part of the depression years.

DM: Right.

EB: To join the National Guard, you know, kids were—we were all in high school. We joined the [*California*] National Guard because, you know, big deal, you're getting a dollar a week, you know. Big deal back in those days.

DM: Different National Guard today.

EB: Yes. And so I got to, we got to go to camp, the different camps at different times up at Ventura, California.

DM: All right.

EB: And San Luis Obispo.

DM: All right.

EB: And it was a fun thing, you know. So besides that, where the old San Pedro High School was, they had—it became the National Guard battery, you know, [*E*] Battery 251st Coastal Artillery.

DM: Right.

EB: That's where it was stationed. And so we had everything there at our convenience because the old high school. And then later, we went to the new high school, but the National Guard is just something I fell into and when I joined the navy, I got a discharge from there to go in the navy. And so that was the extent of that.

DM: Yeah. Now, when you joined the navy and you went down to boot camp, what was boot camp like?

EB: Well, boot camp was, it was something different. You know, something new to me, but it was—I liked it because everything was clean and regulated, you know. And we were down—I was in Company 39-12...

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: ...in San Diego Naval Training Station. When I first got down there, I was first looking for places to work out, to exercise, 'cause that's what I used to do all the time, you know.

DM: Right.

EB: Push-ups or whatever, you know.

DM: So you're in pretty good shape then, huh?

EB: Yes and I'm eighty years old right now and (thumps chest) it's still pretty hard.

DM: Yeah. Yeah, you look okay to me.

EB: But I got a lot of arthritis.

DM: With better...

EB: I got a lot of arthritis, though, see.

DM: Yeah? And so you get down there to get through sea school, boot camp is, you like it. It's—you get your training done. What do they do with you after you get out of boot camp?

EB: Well, after we get out of boot camp, we was able to put in for a ship.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And so I put in for the USS *Argonne*, because a friend of mine I grew up with in San Pedro, [*Melvin*] Tousseau

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: ...he was on the ship and I didn't get in—he got ahead of me because before I—while I was in high school, I was boxing amateur for Jim Jeffries' Burbank stable.

DM: Okay.

EB: And I was winning this fight and I had my—a guy broke my nose and I had 'em in the ring. I had to measure 'em off in my hand. I was just still learning, and he throws an overhand and breaks my nose and so Jim Jeffries stops the fight.

DM: The famous Jim Jeffries?

EB: Huh?

DM: The famous boxer Jim Jeffries?

EB: Yes. Yes. And so they threw the towel in the ring and I threw the towel out of the ring, because I wasn't hurt actually, you know, because we were last round. See, I was winning. And I had this guy measured off. And so anyway, so Jim Jeffries stopped the fight. They threw the towel back in the ring and stopped the fight.

DM: What weight class did you fight?

EB: I started out as a featherweight and I ended up a welterweight. And then we were up to Shriners Auditorium with Jim Jeffries up there and—after my nose healed—and I'm boxing up there. I won that bout. I think it was—I forgot what it was. Decision, I think it was. And so one of the most famous fight referees in the navy, Lieutenant Jack Kennedy, refereed that bout. And I'm so happy about that, you know.

DM: Jack Kennedy?

EB: Lieutenant Jack Kennedy, mm-hm. One of the foremost fight referees from the navy, Lieutenant Jack Kennedy. And what happened, with Jim Jeffries, I felt so bad about him, because you know, ten years before he fought Jack Johnson and Jack Johnson beat him, after he laid off for a long time, you

know. And he broke down. He was telling the story about how he lost to Jack Johnson, and here's this big, hulking man. He broke down, sobbed like a little kid, you know.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: I felt sorry for him.

DM: Right.

EB: Yeah.

DM: Now, this Jack Kennedy is not the famous going-to-be president Kennedy?

EB: No, no. No. But this Lieutenant Jack Kennedy was another,

DM: He was another guy, but he was a very famous referee in the navy.

EB: Navy referee. He was a fighting referee.

DM: Jack Kennedy didn't get in the war until later.

EB: Yes. He was well-known in the fleet.

DM: Tell me—you went to the *Argonne*. You became part of that crew.

EB: Yes.

DM: What year was that?

EB: That was in September, after we finished training station, let's see. That was about September '39.

DM: Okay. Now, you stayed on the *Argonne*, you said, for several years. When did—did you make a trip to Hawaii at any time during that time?

EB: Yes. Only—when we—here's how that happened. When I was first on the *Argonne*, you know, as a seaman second, you know. And then I put in for

shipfitting. And then, in April 1, 1940, the fleet left from Long Beach, from San Pedro.

DM: Right.

EB: There was battleships, heavy cruisers, light cruisers, destroyers, I mean...

DM: The bulk of the Pacific fleet?

EB: Everything, carriers, you name it, as far as you can see and see ships. And so we go to Hawaii. The first place we went to was Lahaina Roads.

DM: Right. Off Maui.

EB: Yes, on Maui, uh-huh. In the Territory of Hawaii at that time.

DM: Right.

EB: And so we went there and then later we ended up going into Pearl Harbor.

DM: Okay.

EB: But there was a few times we went back to the States, you know.

DM: Right.

EB: And came back to Hawaii again. And we'd have to go out and calibrate compass and whatever, and then come back to Hawaii. Went to Hilo, Hawaii and we just, you know.

DM: What'd you think of Hawaii?

EB: I loved it back then. It was different.

DM: Yeah.

EB: It was different. I joined—I worked out in boxing there at the YMCA and I worked out with that, hm—can't hardly remember the names of the places there that—Primo Beer Company.

DM: Okay.

EB: It was Primo Beer and I was boxing for them, the Primo Beer. And I wanted to win this here welterweight for the Primo—I forgot the name of the Hawaiian thing. I forgot what they called it now. And so my ship had went to Hilo that time and I missed the bouts, so I didn't get a bout. So the fellow who won there was Fred—I can't think of the name right now. But I know I wanted that title.

DM: You could've licked him?

EB: I think so.

DM: Yeah. What kind of ship was the *Argonne*?

EB: We were flagship of the Base Force.

DM: Right.

EB: We were fleet radio school.

DM: Right.

EB: We were fleet photography school.

DM: Right.

EB: And auxiliary repair.

DM: So you were a combination training ship...

EB: Yes.

DM: ...and repair ship?

EB: Yes. And small...

DM: How big was she?

EB: Oh, she was...

DM: Roughly.

EB: ...about 450-foot long.

DM: And a crew of?

EB: About 10,000 ton, approximately.

DM: And how many—what was the complement?

EB: Oh, it varied because we had people going and coming from different places, like from China and what have you. And for getting transferred.

DM: Yeah.

EB: And...

DM: About average, how many men were aboard.

EB: Oh, probably about 800, approximately.

DM: Pretty good-sized ship.

EB: Yeah, because we had a lot of complement going and coming, see. And it was a nice ship. It was just like being at home, you know.

DM: Right.

EB: And it was non-regulation. We had Admiral Halsey on her at one time.

DM: Right.

EB: And up in Guadalcanal, and Admiral Halsey was on the ship and it was a nice ship. I worked out there quite a bit, boxing.

DM: Yeah. Now, Halsey was on her during the war?

EB: Hm?

DM: Halsey was onboard her during the war?

EB: Yes, mm-hm.

DM: Now, leading up to the weekend, the fateful weekend of December 7, and in fact, this is fifty-seven years ago today, on Saturday, December 6, what were you doing? Did you get liberty that weekend?

EB: Well, on December the fifth, they had boxing bouts.

DM: Okay.

EB: And I was with the fellows from the *California*, and who I used to go and work out. Streeter is here today. He's here right now. [*Charles "Cotton"*] Streeter, from the *California*.

DM: Right.

EB: And I used to go work out with him all the time.

DM: Were you fighting that day?

EB: Huh?

DM: Were you going to fight that day?

EB: No, no. I was with the fellows from the *California*. They were boxing those, I think, from the *Tennessee*, I think, that [*Friday*]. So anyway, the next morning, I mean, I told the fellows from the *Arizona*, I'll come work out with you tomorrow—that's Friday.

DM: Right.

EB: So, Saturday I'm with the fellows from the *Arizona*, working out with them and a boy from San Pedro, Paul Neipp, he went to school with my brother. And he was mess cooking. And so this is where we worked out, in the mess hall. And so after workout, I had dinner with Paul Neipp and then comes the movies. They set up some chairs for me and we watched movies.

DM: This was on the *Argonne*, right?

EB: Hm?

DM: This was on the *Argonne*?

EB: No, on the *Arizona*.

DM: On the *Arizona*?

EB: On the *Arizona*.

DM: Okay.

EB: I was on the *Arizona*. That's where I went and worked out, on the *Arizona*.

DM: So the night of December 6, you were onboard the *Arizona*?

EB: Yes, then got a launch back to Ten-Ten dock.

DM: Yeah. And got back to your vessel.

EB: Yes. At Ten-Ten dock, USS *Argonne*.

DM: You wouldn't by any chance remember the movie that they played that night?

EB: Pardon?

DM: You wouldn't by any chance remember the movie they played that night, would you?

EB: No.

DM: Was it a comedy or western?

EB: I seen so many movies going and coming.

DM: So that particular night, you wouldn't remember.

EB: I forget what I saw.

DM: Well, now let's take you to—you went back to ship and hit your rack, I suppose.

EB: Yeah.

DM: And what time did you get up in the morning of December 7?

EB: Well, December 7, we got up and normally, you know, you don't sleep in. A lot of guys slept in. They had hangovers, you know, and so forth.

DM: So you'd get up at 0600?

EB: I got up, yes, I got up at reveille and got up and went to breakfast and after breakfast, I'm heading back to the shipfitter shop. And as I'm coming through the metal smith shop, Mr. Gray, who was a warrant machinist.

DM: Right.

EB: He says, "Close the ports, we're under attack by the Japs."

DM: What did you think about that?

EB: Hm?

DM: What did you think about that?

EB: Well, it surprised me. When I looked out the port and right in front of me was a torpedo plane dropping the torpedoes. And I said, “Uh-oh.”

I go topside and I see the high-flying, high level bombers dropping their eggs.

DM: Right.

EB: And those bombs, I thought they—at that time, I was new and I didn’t know much about what was happening. So one old-timer said, “Well, they’re going to go over towards the battleships.”

And they went over toward the battleships, Battleship Row, and it fell on the *Arizona* and I think on the *Vestal*, which was by the *Arizona*.

DM: Right.

EB: And so...

DM: Did you see that?

EB: Hm?

DM: Did you personally see that?

EB: I saw it, yes. Yes.

DM: So you witnessed the explosion of the *Arizona*?

EB: I witnessed some explosions. I didn’t know if it was from the *Arizona* or where it was. I just, you know, because I got a glimpse of it and then when I did, I went down below deck.

DM: Mm-hm.

EB: I went down below deck to get in some other clothes, you know, ‘cause I had shorts on, see.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And I got in to put on some dungarees.

DM: Right.

EB: And so as I'm down below, they call volunteers for fire and rescue party. Being a shipfitter, and fire and rescue had rescue breathing apparatus and so forth.

DM: Right.

EB: We...

(Taping stops, then resumes)

DM: So, Eddie, when you looked out and you saw Battleship Row being attacked, you knew this was the real McCoy?

EB: Planes were all over.

DM: Did you see—did you know who was doing this?

EB: I could tell. I saw the red meatball.

DM: What was your feelings at that moment? Disbelief, anger?

EB: I was mad.

DM: Fear?

EB: I was cussing. I was mad.

DM: Would you say that your cussing was rather creative?

EB: Well, let's—I didn't start cussing—when we left, when they called for fire and rescue party...

DM: Right.

EB: ...and we took with us our rescue breathing apparatus, Al Fryman, Leon Hall, John RO-MAN-CHUK and myself, and Mr. Fredericks, who was a warrant radioman, in charge.

DM: Now, what were you wearing? Did you have dungarees...

EB: I was wearing my dungaree pants.

DM: Dungaree shirt?

EB: And a chambray shirt and a t-shirt and that's the T-shirt you—is right there.

DM: Right. And...

EB: And a hat.

DM: And you were wearing your battle helmet?

EB: Yes.

DM: And a life vest?

EB: We didn't have any life jacket.

DM: But the other guys apparently were wearing life vests?

EB: We didn't have the life jacket when we first went over. I don't remember that.

DM: You picked 'em up somewhere then, right. 'Cause they're in the picture.

EB: Yeah.

DM: Okay. So you volunteer for this fire and rescue party.

EB: Yes.

DM: Did you have any idea that, you know, that was pretty dangerous to do?

EB: Well, it's a thing, you know, when you're young like that, you're real aggressive and you just...

DM: Think you're indestructible?

EB: Well, not that, just that I had to—somebody had to do it, you know, and since I was fire and rescue as a ship fitter, I volunteered with it and I went over there and we're in this motor whaleboat. And as we were leaving, as we went through the mess hall, I noticed people praying and they couldn't—nothing against that—and I saw people crying. And I remember one guy running—there was a boatswain mate running from one end of the ship to the other screaming. You know, everybody...

DM: What was he screaming?

EB: Huh? Yes.

DM: What was he screaming?

EB: He was afraid. He was just—it's a traumatic thing. You know, everybody reacts differently.

DM: Right.

EB: And see, we weren't in a war before. And all of a sudden, here comes all these planes. And they're bombing, they're diving and diving and diving. And bombs going off and I seen people crying. I seen 'em praying. And you know, and so when I got on the motor launch, we went—we got in the motor whale boat, and we're heading out past Ten-Ten dock, around the open stream, here comes these two planes. And they're diving and strafing us. They just got through dropping their loads. And that's when I start cussing. The one plane hit the water about a 100 feet from us and the other one is on fire, over the top of us. And I think that's the one that went over

towards Ford Island, possibly the one that hit the USS *Curtiss*, because it's right in line, see.

DM: Okay.

EB: And so our screw, they kind of damaged part of our launch.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And when we get over to the *Oklahoma*, Mr. Fredericks says get those oars out and row. We had to row partly to the *Oklahoma*...

DM: Okay.

EB: ...'cause the screw was fouling up and a fellow named Newbury, he dove over the side and tore the screw...

DM: What was it fouled up with?

EB: Some debris, I think, and...

DM: Okay.

EB: ...whatever it was. And I don't remember, but it was fouled up and I think we took some hits there. And then we got aboard the *West Virginia* and with our rescue breathing apparatus and acetylene bottles. And when we first hit the *West Virginia*, I remember we got the acetylene bottles on—because the *West Virginia* was already down, you know. The bow was down.

We get aboard the *West Virginia*, somebody up in the bridge yelled, "Take cover!"

And I heard those machine guns, that machine gun going off...

DM: There was strafing going on?

EB: Yes, and they just come over strafing the whole length of the ship there. I dove underneath the gun turret and I pushed some guys under there with me

at that time. My reflex action was pretty good, you know. And a bomb went off and I think it killed the skipper at that time.

DM: [*Captain*] Mervyn Bennion.

EB: Yes, 'cause I think it was probably this, yes. It was probably the skipper that yelled take cover.

DM: Okay.

EB: And then I remember bombs falling in between the *West Virginia* and *Tennessee* and the shell, and the water would go up and come down, you know, like...

DM: Big water geyser?

EB: Yes. And come down and so we get down, we go aboard, go down to the *West Virginia*, and we first get down there, I met people down there and they hand us this person with his eyes out.

DM: His eyes out?

EB: With his eyes out. The eyes were blown out from the concussion. And we took some blankets and four-cornered the blankets and lowered him in the *Solace* motor launch. And we went back down below and we're pulling it up from down below and placing it up on deck. With Lee Ebner—Lee Ebner, who was also on the *West Virginia*, he was the signal bridge. And in 1984, I got this letter from him and because I had a piece in the *Gram* [*Pearl Harbor – Gram*], looking for the person with his eyes out and Lee Ebner...

DM: He was the guy?

EB: Pardon?

DM: Lee Ebner was the guy?

EB: No.

DM: Oh, the other guy.

EB: Lee Ebner was a person who was doing the same thing that I was, but I got the letter from him after he answered my ad in the Gram [*Pearl Harbor - Gram*].

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: We'll stop right here.

END OF TAPE #08

TAPE #09

DM: ...about ready to start again. Eddie, this—can you name for me as many people as you remember that were part of this fire and rescue party that went out from the *Argonne*?

EB: The what?

DM: Could you name for me the men that you, as many as you can remember, who were part of the fire and rescue party that went out on the *Argonne*?

EB: I know 'em all. The fellows on the motor whale boat, I can remember Logan and Newbury.

DM: Right.

EB: And with us in the fire and rescue, there was myself, Al Fryman, from Seattle, Washington, Alfred Cletus FRY-MAN.

DM: Right.

EB: And Leon Hall, from Needville, Texas.

DM: Right.

EB: And John RO-MAN-CHUK and I forgot where he was from.

DM: Can you pick up...

EB: And Mr. Fredericks, who was in charge of us.

DM: Can you pick up that book that shows that picture so Dennis can kind of—I mean, just, you can lay it flat right in front of you.

EB: Yeah.

DM: Up like this. Just show it to us. Right, like that.

EB: Okay.

DM: Yeah, lift your hand just away there. Can you get that? Can you point to where you are in that picture?

EB: Yes. I'm in the t-shirt, sitting up. I'm not standing. I'm sitting up there, watching for survivors.

DM: Okay. Was that your mission that day? When they sent away fire and rescue, you were out there to try to save as many people as you could?

EB: That's right.

DM: Now, the boat that you're in, was that the original boat that you left the *Argonne* with?

EB: No.

DM: Okay. Where did that boat come from?

EB: This here, from the hospital ship *Solace*.

DM: Okay. So you're in a—and it looks like a fairly substantial boat there. The canvas awning is missing from it.

EB: Yes.

DM: And that's from the USS *Solace*?

EB: I think so.

DM: It appears you're picking up somebody out of the water there.

EB: That's Mr. Moore, from the *West Virginia*. [*On second thought - I don't believe this is Mr. Moore, that was the first person that we picked up and he was not burnt. John Latko, says he pulled in Mr. Moore. If so, it was after Mr. Fredericks made a return trip back to the USS West Virginia after we unloaded all of the men rescued. John Latko was not in this original photo made and taken by photographer Frank Foust of the USS Argonne, and not Clyde Daughtry, photographer.*]

DM: Okay. Well this picture shows the battleships *West Virginia* and *Tennessee* in the background right there, right in the middle of Battleship Row.

EB: This picture here, the fire, just before this, wasn't as heavy, then it started getting real heavy. And we—after they picked this man up here...

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: ...something traumatic happened.

DM: What's that?

EB: Well, there was another person there, probably this here, this picture doesn't show very good, but there's another person there and the one picture I have at home, it shows real good. Couple fellows there. I grabbed the boat hook away from Al Fryman. I shouldn't have never done that because Al Fryman was a six-foot guy, you know, six-foot-two. And I reached for this one poor guy and I missed him by that much. And they swung the launch around to kick the fire back, you know.

DM: Uh-huh, keep the oil...

EB: Yes and as I grabbed the boat hook from Al Fryman, there was just enough lost time there, maybe Al Fryman could've got him. But the fire swept over him and I can still hear that poor kid screaming and we lost him.

DM: Why did you grab the boat hook out of, trying to assist this...

EB: Because I was faster and I thought I could reach and get him, you know, had more agility. 'Cause Al was a big guy and he was slower. And so I grabbed the boat hook and I thought I could, you know, in a better position to reach him, but I just wasn't there. I just missed him. I couldn't reach out any further.

DM: And he died.

EB: And the guy died, yes. The fire came, swept right over him. I could hear that guy, poor guy screamed and he screamed and he went down. And so we picked up a lot of persons, though. We picked up about twenty, maybe twenty-five people, loaded the launch with four men.

DM: Wow. Now, when you picked up these people, did you take 'em back to the hospital ship *Solace*?

EB: No.

DM: Where did you take them?

EB: We went to the navy seaman barracks and dropped 'em off.

DM: Mm-hm.

EB: And a plane was strafing us. And everybody was diving for cover underneath the lumber piles in the trees. And Mr. Fredericks says, "Get those life jackets," and so some of us took the life jackets and threw 'em back in the launch.

DM: Right.

EB: I kind of got ahead of my story because there was something important I wanted to tell you about Al Fryman.

DM: Okay, go ahead.

EB: Okay. When we abandoned ship from the *West Virginia*—I got ahead of myself—when we were abandoning ship from the *West Virginia*, the men were loaded in the launch and fire was, they couldn't get the bow line loose. It was caught in the anchor chain.

DM: Okay.

EB: And so, since they couldn't get it loose, the fire was coming up the side, blackening the launch.

DM: Right.

EB: And so what happened, the guys were diving over the side to go to Ford Island.

DM: Right.

EB: All that was left in that launch was myself, Al Fryman, and Leon Hall, Mr. Fredericks, the guy with his eyes out and the boat's crew.

DM: Right.

EB: So what happened, Al Fryman, he was, he had his head about himself and so what he did, he grabbed the axe that they used for cutting the hawsers, you know.

DM: Right.

EB: And he grabbed the axe and he cut that line, the bow line, but by that time, everybody was out of the launch. John RO-MAN-CHUK, who was with us, he dove over the side and swam toward Ten-Ten dock. Last time I saw him, he was going up and down like a porpoise. So we go out here and we start picking men up.

DM: Right.

EB: We loaded this thing up just full. And took ‘em over to navy seamen barracks and then I don’t what happened to ‘em afterwards. I ran into my old National Guard outfit there.

DM: The old 251st?

EB: My old [E] Battery, 251st Coastal Artillery.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: First guy I run into was [*Carmen Dimassa*], from San Pedro. Played football, [*Carman Dimassa*], [*he*] played football. Nickname was “Nooksy.”

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And he had with him ammunition. He had a truck loaded with ammunition.

DM: Right.

EB: And machine gun equipment. And so I ran into my old National Guard outfit and I went up to the top, up on top the navy seamen barracks and helped them set up machineguns.

DM: Okay.

EB: And I was with Donald Head, who was—I graduated from high school with him—he was a sergeant. And we just put the tripod down and I put the carriage in there and I had the locking pin. I locked the gun in place with it and the last plane comes over and it was flying real low, about the height of the building, and so I swung the gun around. Donald Head says, “Eddie, give me that gun.” He said, “That’s mine.”

So I let Donald have it and anyway, I had this armor thirty-0- six Springfield loaded with armor-piercing ammunition, with black tips, you know. So

everybody's firing. Well, there was other guns firing throughout the harbor too.

DM: Sure.

EB: And shrapnel was flying all over. A piece of shrapnel come down. I was kneeling down firing and a piece of shrapnel come down and hit my heel there and I still have it. In fact, Cox television, they have it now. They're going to take some pictures of it.

And so this plane, I think it could've been the plane that landed on Niihau. You know, 'cause it was one of the last ones.

DM: Right.

EB: And it could've been—'cause that's when the fellow landed on Niihau, he commandeered the people on the island with a machine gun and then the Hawaiian killed him.

DM: Right.

EB: Killed him in the wall or something like that.

DM: Yeah, dashed his against the rocks.

EB: And so you probably know more about that than I do.

DM: Yeah.

EB: And so I stayed with my National Guard outfit that night and with Lieutenant Lyman of National Guard, who later became brigadier general and also an attorney at Long Beach.

DM: Right.

EB: And so I'm on the phone with him, with Mr. Lyman, and it said, "Friendly planes approaching. Do not open fire."

Here comes the planes from the *Enterprise*.

DM: Right.

EB: And who opened fire first was the guys from the sub base. They're the ones that opened fire first.

DM: Then everybody joined in, right?

EB: Then everybody joined in and then there was a great cone of fire.

DM: Yeah. They were our planes.

EB: Pardon?

DM: They were our planes.

EB: Oh yes, they were our planes and they hit some. I don't know how many. I forgot how many they hit. You probably know more about that too.

DM: Four of 'em.

EB: Four? That's what I thought it was, four. They were off the *Enterprise*. And besides that, these were not the only planes shot down. I think there were some B-17's, were they?

DM: They were shot up but not shot down.

EB: Shot up?

DM: Yeah, shot up.

EB: Okay, they were coming in from Camp Malakole?

DM: They were coming in from Hamilton Field. There was a B-18 that was shot up that was coming in from the Big Island. During the raid, the B-17's were coming in from Hamilton Field.

EB: Mm-hm.

DM: And they got shot up because they were shooting at anything in the sky.

EB: Mm-hm.

DM: It's hard to tell, differentiate, you know, what it was.

EB: Then I went out at sea one time—this was after, this was the end of the Pearl Harbor thing—but I was out at sea one time and we were at general quarters and here comes all these planes.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: Well, I don't go to my battle station. My battle station is five-inch fifty broadside. So I don't go there. I go up on the poop deck and I grab, I pull this guy off the machine gun, and Mr. Rheems says, "Get off of there."

I said, "No sir. You want me off of there, you have to knock me off."

And he says, "You know I can shoot you?"

"Yes sir," I said, "but I'm standing."

Well, I got in trouble. I got put on report for insubordination of Mr. Rheems. I got put on report for not going to my battle station, which is a five-inch fifty broadside. Asked me why I did it and [*Melvin*] Tousseau, who was a friend of mine, later became a policeman, he said, yes, I had been [*a*] machine gunner.

So they sent me back to Hawaii to fleet machine gun school, twenty millimeter, fleet machine gun school.

DM: Okay.

EB: And that's what happened there. And there was other things too in the war, but that wasn't Pearl Harbor though.

DM: Well, thinking about Pearl Harbor, what's to you the, personally, not in the big picture, but personally, what's it mean to you, Pearl Harbor and what should people learn from it?

EB: Well, we learned that—well, the one thing I learned that the Japanese were aggressive. They had to build up their land. There was a small area and they had to expand.

DM: Right.

EB: And long before Pearl Harbor, down on the waterfront in San Pedro, there was piles and piles of tin cans, about the size of [*a five gallon can.*]

DM: Right.

EB: About the size of five-gallon size, and they were being shipped to Japan. Japan was buying all our scrap metal. And so people asked me before, “Do you hate the Japanese?”

I said, “No, I don't hate 'em, but I don't trust 'em.”

Because since the war now, they've been down to South America...

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: ...shipload after shipload and all kinds of commerce down there and to Australia. In the steel mills, or iron, whatever it is, down in Australia. And they're still expanding and they need to keep expanding because that country is small and I still don't trust 'em.

DM: Because of the events of December 7?

EB: The Japanese people are very intelligent people. When I went to school in San Pedro to, I went to school along the, lived in Terminal Island and they were, some were good students and very intelligent. They all had good grades. This one girl, Mary Nakahara, her brother, Peter Nakahara, and he's an attorney up in San Jose. And Art Nakahara. Well, I came back from overseas, I ran into Mary Nakahara. And they say that there was no

Japanese spies. Well, I'll tell you, Mary Nakahara told me—she was a good student in school, well-respected.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: She says, “Eddie,” she says, “my father was a spy for Japan.” He had a radio transmitter over on 11th [Street] and Meyler [Street, San Pedro, California], I think it was. She says, “I turned my father in and he committed suicide.”

There you are. And that's the god's truth and Mary Nakahara, I know her very well. In fact, about a year ago, she called me on the phone and talked to me. [EB may be referring to Mary Nakahara, aka Yuri Kochiyama, a well-known civil rights activist. Her father, Seiichi Nakahara, although in ailing health was arrested by the FBI on December 7, 1941. He was returned to his home on January 20, 1942 and died twelve hours later, presumably because of his frail health. The Nakahara family was later interned in Jerome, Arkansas.] [With reference to the preceding note by the oral history transcriber EB adds the following “I'm only referring to what Mary Nakahara told me (this Mary was not a Civil Rights Activist)"]

DM: But I guess the question I'm trying to get...

EB: Okay, I'm sorry.

DM: No, that's okay. That's an interesting...

EB: I bring up a lot of subject matters that, you know, a lot of people don't know about the subject matters I like to talk about still.

DM: That's fine.

EB: Okay.

DM: I'm just wondering, when generations, you know, look at this tape in the future.

EB: Mm-hm.

DM: What do you want Americans or the world to remember about Pearl Harbor?

EB: To keep prepared, be prepared. To don't let their guard down.

DM: Which is kind of the legacy of the Pearl Harbor Survivors?

EB: Yes, yes, it is. Sure is, don't let your guard down and we're letting our guard down right now, more than a lot of people know. This man here, Frank Foust.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: Showing this picture. Frank Foust, he was with naval intelligence.

DM: Right.

EB: And when I was back in Louisville, Kentucky, I asked Frank Foust what he thought about our navy base being taken away, you know.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And Frank Foust here, he said, "I've been to China, to the interior of China with naval intelligence." And he says, "We're making a grave, grave mistake. We're letting our guard down too much."

DM: So when we let our guard down...

EB: Yes.

DM: ...and these things happens, men like Foust and others who—it's always been a warning, even through the Cold War years, to be prepared.

EB: Yes.

DM: And that is the legacy of Pearl Harbor, in your view.

EB: Sure. That's what it's all...

DM: Would that be correct?

EB: Yes. I forgot just how it was. Always be prepared.

DM: Uh-huh. And keep America alert?

EB: Yes. There you are, thank you. Keep America alert.

DM: Right.

EB: Be prepared.

DM: The one thing that's interesting about your story is that picture is one of the iconic photos of Pearl Harbor. It's one of the most famous of the Pearl Harbor photos.

EB: It is. It is. Like Peter Sarantopoulos [*was a Seaman First Class stationed aboard USS Argonne*], who was going to be taped.

DM: Right.

EB: When I told him about this picture I had, you know, and 'cause the last time I saw him was in Pearl Harbor 1976, you know.

DM: What did he say?

EB: And he said, "Well," he says, "I don't know," he says, "I kind of doubt it."

So when he saw the picture, he says, "Yes..."

DM: He doubted what?

EB: Well he doubted whether--well, you know, 'cause a lot of people make all kinds of remarks about pictures and this and that.

DM: Right, but never in 'em.

EB: But he wasn't sure exactly what I was talking about. But when he saw it, he says, "Yes, that's a very famous picture today."

DM: Yeah.

EB: Well, I went back to Louisville, Kentucky, they use this picture. And I says, "Why?"

Ben Begley, back there, who is our Pearl Harbor Survivor president now.

DM: Right.

EB: And I said, "Why'd you guys use this picture?"

And they said because it's the most famous picture—no, he said—that's not the word. They said it's the most photographed picture of World War II, reproduced.

DM: It's reproduced quite a bit. The interesting part of your interview today though is that you're able to identify everybody in that and there have been people have claimed that they are in that.

EB: Yes, yes.

DM: And do you want to set the record straight on this...

EB: Yes, yes.

DM: ...before we close this interview?

EB: Here is Bob Kronberger and myself, see. I grew up with Bob Kronberger.

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: Better?

EB: I grew up with...

DM: Hold on a second. Go ahead and speak.

EB: I grew up with Bob Kronberger in San Pedro High School. And my son, he came back from Hawaii a couple years ago and he had a video of the caption of that motor launch.

DM: Right.

EB: And there was a caption there towards Al Fryman and it said John Latko [*Pvt. John J. Latko, USMC, was stationed aboard the USS West Virginia*]. And I says, “Bob.”

My son says, “Dad, are you sure?”

“Bob, this guy’s wrong.” I said, “I know where I was at. He wasn’t even born then.”

So I got on the phone and I called Bob Kronberger. I said, “Bob, whose this guy John Latko?”

“Oh, he was on the *West Virginia*.”

I told him the story. He said, “Aw, that’s not him” He said, “He was on the ship.”

So I called John Latko and on his phone—I forgot which state he lived in. I said, “I understand you were in this launch and you pulled guys out of the water.”

“Yeah,” he says.

And so I said, “Well, I’m going to tell you, I was in that launch too.”

“You were?”

And I says, “Yeah.” I says, “Do you remember losing the guy in the water that the fire swept over?”

“No, I don’t remember that.”

I said, “Well, I’m going to tell you one thing, John. I hate to burst your bubble, but you weren’t in that launch. You may have been in some other launch, pulling guys out of the water, but you weren’t in that launch. That guy on the bow...”

He said, “Well, I was a marine.” He said, “The other guy up on there on the mid-ship is another marine.”

I says, “No, John.” I says, “That man up on the bow is Al Fryman.”

DM: Right. And we know the man in the water too, don’t we, he was rescuing.

EB: Yes. And...

DM: Who was that?

EB: Huh?

DM: Who was the man in the water that was...

EB: Moore, Moore, from the *West Virginia*.
[*Wrong – Not so – See Page 25 for correction.*]

DM: Right. Sailor from the *West Virginia*.

EB: And he died about two years ago.

DM: Right.

EB: And so, and I said, “The man standing...”

And he says, “Well, I was a marine,” he says, “the other fellow in the mid-ship is a marine.”

I says, “No, John. That is Mr. Fredericks, he was a warrant radio man off the USS *Argonne*,” and he was in charge of Sarantapoulas, Peter Sarantapoulas.

DM: Okay.

EB: And so he said, “Oh, no, no.”

I said, “Yes, John.” You know, I says. So I got to him, anyway.

DM: So, Eddie, I’m going to send you a picture and you’re going to be able to identify all those people and mark them for the park service?

EB: Yes.

DM: That’s great.

EB: Well, I just want this guy’s name off of there.

DM: Mm-hm.

EB: Because Al Fryman is not, is passed on, but what happened, Mr. Fredericks took us to the captain...

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: ...for commendation that morning.

DM: Right.

EB: You know, a few days later. And the captain said, “These men did no more than anybody else would’ve done under the circumstances.”

Well maybe so and maybe not.

DM: But you were under fire too.

EB: Yes and we went above and beyond the call of duty and we were called volunteer fire and rescue party. Now the captain was wrong and John Scott Stone, who wrote *Seven Days Had December*, and I know John Scott Stone, he says the captain was wrong, that we should have got a commendation that day. And so this is the way it is and I think we still should have. And if any commendation goes to Al Fryman, it should go to his daughter, who lives up in Seattle, Washington. And last time I heard, she was working for Boeing Aircraft in Seattle, Washington. And...

DM: So this is one of, I guess, Eddie, this is one of the untold stories. This story has never really been told right, until now.

EB: Well, a lot of my—in chapter one, where I live here in San Pedro, you know, I mean in Carson, California, in Gardena, all my friends know about it. Because over there in the military museum at Fort MacArthur, they've got the picture there and that there is a big picture in the *Times* paper...

DM: Right.

EB: ...in nineteen-something. And right after the war. And they all know out there. My wife and I were down in Costa Mesa somewhere, I forgot where it was, and they've got that picture. And my wife says, "There's your picture."

And people were coming around and asking me, "Is that you?"

And my wife says, "Yeah." And they were asking me to autograph.

DM: Sure.

EB: In fact, when I was in Louisville, Kentucky...

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: ...I'm coming back from Churchill Downs with some of my friends there and Chuck Christiansen and, what's his name, Frank Faust. I come through the lobby there and a lot of people around the registration desk and they're calling me. They says, "Eddie, get over here."

And people were having me sign my autograph on these little booklets.

DM: Uh-huh.

EB: And so they gave me about a dozen of 'em, you know the people did there.

DM: Right.

EB: Because my picture was there.

DM: I'll be darned.

EB: Yeah.

DM: We're going to close this interview, but one thing you said is you wrote a poem called *Bombs Away*. Do you have that?

EB: Yup. *Uno momento*. That's *Espanol* for one minute.

DM: Well, I understand that. (Chuckles)

EB: I'm part Spanish but I don't—my mother's people came from Spain, but I don't speak it. Okay.

DM: And you wrote this?

EB: Yes, I sure did.

DM: And when did you write it, before you say it.

EB: I started on December 7.

DM: Nineteen-forty-one?

EB: Yes. Called *Bombs Away*.

Eight bells and bombs away,

The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor today.
But from the mountains of Kentucky
And far out to our rugged shores
Will come our boys to join the battle
To protect our rugged shores.
So the Japs had better watch their step
When we get them on the run
For all the fire there is in hell
Won't help the rising sun.

By Edmund R. Brooks, December 7, 1941.

DM: Thank you, Mr. Brooks.

EB: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW