

#146 EDMUND R. CHAPPELL: SEAMAN ABOARD USS *MARYLAND*

Chris Conybeare (CC): Okay, this is an interview with Mr. Edmund R. Chappell, who lives at Lake Havasa?

Edmund Chappell (EC): Havasu.

CC: Arizona. And my name is Chris Conybeare, conducting the interview and Mark Tanaka-Sanders is assisting. And it's about 10:30 on December 2, 1986.

Mr. Chappell, what was your name and rank on December 7, 1941?

EC: My name was Edmund R. Chappell, I was a Seaman Second Class aboard the USS *MARYLAND*, battleship BB46.

CC: And how did you happen to be in Hawaii at that particular day. Had the *MARYLAND* been in port for long, or how did you get here?

EC: Yes, we were on maneuvers prior to December 7 and we came into port along with the other ships prior to December 7.

CC: Do you remember when you came into port?

EC: Not exactly, no. It was around the first of December, I believe.

CC: So you had just gotten back into port?

EC: Yes.

CC: Had you been to Hawaii before that?

EC: No.

CC: Where were your -- where were you based, where was the *MARYLAND* based before you came to . . .

EC: Well, when I went aboard the *MARYLAND*, it was in Bremerton, Washington, in dry dock in August of '41. And I was assigned to the Second Division, eventually assigned to mess cooking duty.

CC: That's an important job, I was in that.

EC: Oh, that was a very important job. (Chuckles)

CC: I was in the Navy myself. I always appreciated those folks. So actually that was your first time to Hawaii, was in December of '41.

EC: Right.

CC: Had you had much experience in Hawaii at all? Had you been off the ship at all for . . .

EC: Oh, we'd been ashore, yes, up and down the beaches. And as a seventeen-year old kid, we were not permitted in bars in those days, so naturally we were confined to the beach area.

CC: That was your main recreation?

EC: That was our recreation.

CC: What was -- on December 7, your job was cooking, or . . .

EC: Yes, I was mess cooking then. And if I may define mess cooking in those days it was each mess cook was assigned to twenty men, ten men each table. And you would go up to the galley and get the prepared food and serve these twenty men. And you were responsible for the dishes, the silverware, etc. And if any were broken, then that was deducted from your pay number. So it was very important to us who were making twenty-one dollars a month to keep very good track of our dishes so that none were broken.

CC: And that morning you were -- what time would you get up to start this routine?

EC: As I recall, I think we had to get up probably five o'clock or thereabouts in preparation for the breakfast meal. And we had to go to the galley and bring coffee down prior to the main breakfast which entailed setting up tables and so forth.

CC: When did you first realize you were under attack? How did that realization happen? What happened?

EC: We had just finished breakfast and we were hurrying up to get our dishes and table put away because we were -- I was assigned to a rowboat race that day. I think we were racing against the *OKLAHOMA* and the *CALIFORNIA*, as I recall. And sports in those days was quite, oh how shall I say, quite important to all the crews. And as we were putting our dishes away and the tables, someone aboard topside of the *MARYLAND* hollered that the Army was dropping sandbags, practicing. So of course, we all ran on topside to observe this. And about that time a torpedo plane had apparently dropped a torpedo across the harbor and was pulling out of his dive and as he went over us, he strafed. He was so close that I saw the pilot very vividly and had I had a rock, I could perhaps hit him with it. But as he went over us, he strafed us and I can still recall the deck being gypped up alongside of us and we all made a dive for this hatch to get back down where we came from. And about that time, general quarters sounded.

CC: What did the plane look like? Do you remember what color it was, what markings it had?

EC: It seems to me it was silver, it had the rising sun underneath each wing and, oh, I don't recall. I couldn't describe the plane, that type of plane. But as I remember, it was a torpedo plane.

CC: And did you make it down that hatch?

EC: Oh yes. About fifty of us all together.

CC: What happened next?

EC: Well, general quarters were sounded and my battle station at that time was in the lower handling room of a 16-inch turret, in turret two. And we were there a short while and they decided they did not need us down there and we were a short crew because a lot of them were on liberty. So they brought us up out

of the turret and we were assigned to the five-inch thirty-eight anti-aircraft guns. And I was handling ammunition on one of these five-inch thirty-eight's.

CC: And is that what you did through the -- what, how long did the attack . . .

EC: Oh, for turret -- for both attacks, I was assigned there.

CC: Did you have any success? Did you hit anything?

EC: Not that I recall. We made a lot of noise.

CC: What -- when you first realized this was going on, when you tried to make that dive for that hatch, what kinds of thought were going through your head? What were you thinking?

EC: Well, I probably thought that this seventeen-year old kid would never get back to Colorado. I thought this was the end.

CC: And . . .

EC: As I've said many times, I was seventeen going on eighty.

CC: That day.

EC: Yes.

CC: Right after the attack, what kinds of things, what happened to the ship? Maybe you should explain what happened. You took a bad hit or something.

EC: Yes, we got hit in the -- we had a bomb in the bow and I think it killed six men up in that area. And as I recall when that bomb exploded, it sort of lifted that whole ship up in the air and just shook it violently, and then dropped it suddenly. And it's an experience that one would never forget!

And I did not see the OKLAHOMA capsize, to our left side, but the word was passed that it had capsized. And I heard the Arizona explode and consequently sank.

CC: But you were inside the gun turret, so you couldn't . . .

EC: No, not at that time. We were not inside the gun turret. We were outside, handling ammunition on the five thirty-eight's.

CC: So you actually could observe some of the things that were going on. Did you see any ships under way, or any of those kinds of things?

EC: No, no. We didn't have time to watch that.

CC: You just had to concentrate on . . .

EC: Right.

CC: . . . passing ammunition.

EC: Mm hm.

CC: After the attack subsided, what kinds of duties did you end up doing?

EC: Well, I went back down to my division. We were all told to go back to our divisions and we would be assigned from there on. And all my dishes were broken all to pieces, and that was my biggest worry at that time. My thought was then, "How the hell am I going to pay for all these dishes on twenty-one dollars a month?" Well, naturally, I didn't have to.

CC: Those are the kinds of things, though, that you find sort of incongru-- you can't quite make the shift from.

EC: Right.

CC: Right.

EC: That was one of my biggest worries. I was not injured and I didn't have that worry, but there were a lot of injuries on the ship and some fatalities.

CC: And you got involved then with some of the salvage operation with the *OKLAHOMA*, is that right?

EC: Yes, the next day -- well, I might back up. That night we were assigned rifles to guard the perimeter of the ship, at arm's length, because we had had word that the Japanese had landed in Diamond Head and were probably going to board the ships. So sometime during the night we were assigned with loaded rifles to surround the ship. And I was assigned on the starboard side, next to the *OKLAHOMA* for, it seemed like an eternity then. And we could hear those aboard the *OKLAHOMA* that were entrapped, we could hear them tapping on the hull and letting us know that they were there. And there were many survivors who were being pulled out of the water at that time, out of the oil, burning oil. The next morning, I was assigned to a working party to go on the *OKLAHOMA*, on the side to assist the yard workmen in cutting holes in the bottom of it to retrieve some of the wounded survivors from the *OKLAHOMA*.

CC: Did you get -- were you successful?

EC: We were successful and I don't know how many we did retrieve who were not injured and there were some who had been injured severely. And strange coincidence, I had met a fellow off the *OKLAHOMA* which Life magazine had done a story on, some many years ago. A fellow by the name of Bob West. And at that time he lived in West Cavena, California. I looked him up and asked him if he remembered what time he was pulled out of the bottom of the *OKLAHOMA*, and he says, "I remember exactly because they were sounding 'Revelie.'" No, I'm sorry, it was sounding "Taps." (Pauses)

CC: That's alright, go ahead.

EC: Raising the flag, that's right. Okay. I'm kind of vivid here.

CC: Yeah, that's okay. Just relax.

EC: Anyhow, he said, "I remember distinctly because they were sounding this bugle call."

And I said, "Well, I was one of the workmen that helped pull you out of there."

So I've lost contact with him since then and it was quite an occasion.

CC: Weren't there some real problems with rescuing people through the hull because when you'd open up a hole, the water would enter, and things like -- how did that work?

EC: Well, as I recall, when the yard workmen were using acetylene torches to cut through the bottom of the hull, their oxygen was so depleted in the hull, that before we could get the plate out, a lot of them had expired because they were -- lack of oxygen there. As far as water gushing out, I don't recall any water coming out of the holes. Because most of the places we had were watertight on the bottom of the ship.

CC: So you didn't have to use -- instead of acetylene, you had to go to mechanical means, or

EC: I don't recall what happened. It's been so long ago, that's all I can recall.

CC: How about the next week, what kinds of things did they have you doing with your own ship? I mean, did the ship -- did all hands turn to trying to get her ready for sea again, or what happened?

EC: Yes, they -- well, we were trapped in there. We could not get out because of the *OKLAHOMA* to our side. We had a dock ahead of us, as I recall, and we were next to Ford Island. And to our stern was the *WEST VIRGINIA* and *TENNESSEE*, and behind that was the *ARIZONA*. So we couldn't get out at that point. So they brought aboard the yard workmen and we began patching up our bow and our destination was to go to Bremerton, Washington to get this thing repaired.

CC: Do you remember how long it took to get under way?

EC: I think it took us about a week because we had very rough seas going back. And I think we arrived on New Year's Day of '42.

CC: (Aside) Do you want to stop, change tapes?

--: Yes.

CC: Okay, we gotta change tapes.

END OF VIDEOTAPE ONE

BEGIN VIDEOTAPE TWO

CC: Maybe you could just share that. What kinds of things did you, a seventeen-year old sailor, what kinds of things did you do for recreation, the short time you were in Hawaii, before the attack?

EC: Well, as I said before, sports was quite prevalent then and I was in the boxing team, the rowboat team and that was our main thing, our sports. Competition was very keen and that's about all there was to it. As far as going into bars, we were -- naturally, being seventeen, you were prohibited from going to any of the bars. Thank God. (Chuckles)

CC: Might have gotten into some trouble.

EC: Probably.

CC: So you said that you guys chipped in and rented a place over here, when was that?

EC: I'm sorry?

CC: You say you chipped in with some others and you rented a . . .

EC: Yeah, we rented a little place somewhere on Waikiki Beach for, I think it was twenty-one dollars a month for a period of two or three months while we were here.

CC: Gee, I wish we could get those rates today.

EC: Yeah. (Chuckles) Yeah. Or even own the property.

CC: Yeah. Forty-five years ago this event happened. Has it been a major part of your life all this time and how do you feel about it, if you look back. Do you change the way you think about it as you look back over a longer period of time?

EC: Well, it's an experience I don't think I'd ever want to go through again. It was very frightening. I still do have nightmares and dreams about it sometimes. But I was assigned here.

I might add at that point, your question, I had an occasion to meet Mitsuo Fuchida. He was the captain who led the attack on Pearl several times -- to give you a little history on him, he was considered to be ace pilot in Japan before the war and he was selected to lead the attack, and he survived. And after he got out of the service, he studied -- he transferred from Buddhism to Christianity and he was a Protestant minister in Spokane, Washington and traveled the country quite extensively. And I met him in California, where I was working as a policeman, several times. And he's a very interesting person to talk to.

He, for the information of records, and it's common knowledge, in 1966 he appeared here at our twenty-fifth reunion and wanted to join our association. At that time he was an ordained minister. And naturally he was denied because he did not have all the qualifications to join our Pearl Harbor survivors' association. In lieu of that, he donated to us a bible which -- being national storekeeper -- I have in my custody, on display at all national conventions. And I think this is one of our prized possessions that we have in our artifacts.

He quotes, in the bible, he quotes in the -- oh, what should I say? In the . . .

CC: In the inscription.

EC: In his inscription, he quotes a chapter of Luke, which pertains to forgiveness. And as he said in his lectures that he gave, that he was doing his job as we were doing our job. And there was no animosity toward him. As a matter of fact, he was a very interesting, delightful person to talk to. He has since deceased in the summer, I think, of '76.

CC: So, it's interesting how a period of time and things like that can bring one's enemies together and you can actually have some respect for each other.

EC: Oh, yes, I'm sure. I was here in '71 at the convention and being storekeeper, I didn't have time to spend much time aboard the *ARIZONA*. But I went back the next day with three or four other survivors, and there was a travel group of Japanese there. And it was amazing, very enlightening. They were younger people and all of them had tears in their eyes regarding this. So I don't think there's any animosity now. Perhaps some survivors hold animosity, but this is not our motto. We do not try to -- if anybody does have animosity towards the Japanese, we try to discourage this sort of thing.

CC: Basically here to celebrate the fact that you survived and to think about those who didn't.

EC: Yes, that's true.

CC: Do you -- what things do you think, maybe, should be emphasize more about the attack on Pearl Harbor or the way we look at history? Do you think there's things that we need to know today that maybe young folks aren't learning?

EC: Well, I'm a retired policeman and I have seen the bad side of a lot of people. And a lot of these people who do get into trouble have never been in the service and don't care what happens to the country. These sort of people who are in this position make you very bitter toward those people. But then again, on the other hand, when you go to a military base and see a graduation services ceremony of the younger groups, it enlightens you quite a bit. So I think it balances out.

CC: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW