

#238 EDWARD F. BORUCKI
USS *HELENA*, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 4, 1996

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, on December 4, 1994 at 3:30 p.m. The person being interviewed . . .

Edward Borucki (EB): Nineteen ninety-six.

MS: What did I say?

EB: Four.

MS: Four? See, I -- six. You better keep me sharp.

--: We'll keep an eye on you.

MS: What's the proper pronunciation . . .

EB: Borucki, Borucki.

MS: Borucki.

EB: Yeah.

MS: Okay, this is Ed Borucki, who was on board the USS *HELENA*, on December 7, 1941. Well, got that one right. Now, just for our record, could you please state your full name, where you were born and date of your birth?

EB: Edward F. Borucki was born in Holyoke, Massachusetts on November 20, 1920.

MS: And what was hometown in 1941?

EB: Holyoke, Massachusetts.

MS: So the same, okay. Very good. What made you join the Navy, Ed?

EB: Adventure and see the world.

MS: Okay. When was this?

EB: I joined July 31, 1940.

MS: Okay. Did the economics of the world have a lot to do with you getting into or . . .

EB: It was probably economics. I was in a civilian conservation corps before that -- thirty dollars a month -- and I worked at the Springfield Armory, making GE-RAND rifles for thirty-five cents an hour and decided to join the Navy for future career.

MS: That's a story in its own right, the Springfield Armory.

EB: Yeah, the Army museum there is very nice.

MS: Yes.

EB: Have you ever been there?

MS: Yes, it's beautiful. Good staff.

EB: One of my former students was curator there years ago and he's died since, yeah.

MS: Very good. Well, there's a lot of circles, a lot of spin-off here. That's great. So, where did you take your basic?

EB: At Newport, Rhode Island Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island.

MS: How long was that?

EB: Eight weeks.

MS: Eight weeks. And what was your first assignment when you finally got out?

EB: I got on the USS *HELENA* for -- A to M went down to the USS *HELENA* how many others went to the USS *OKLAHOMA*.

MS: Okay. So that was your first assignment and you stayed with that through the seventh.

EB: Through the seventh and beyond, yeah.

MS: Yeah. And did you join the *HELENA* here or elsewhere?

EB: No, in San Pedro, California in October, 1940.

MS: Okay. And then you came over on her and did maneuvers and how did you like the duty here in Hawaii?

EB: Oh, it was pretty good duty. It's a nice and warm climate, being away from the snow and the ice.

MS: Yeah. Did you get some good liberties?

EB: Yes, we had pretty good liberties.

MS: When you came over, did you have any favorite places that you liked to go or . . .

EB: Well, there was a big -- of course, YMCA was a popular place there and so that was one of the popular places and Waikiki Beach.

MS: Ever hear of the Black Cat?

EB: Yes, I heard of the Black Cat. (Chuckles)

MS: That was a favorite hangout.

EB: Yeah, that's right.

MS: Well, in -- before things started to get really heated up here in October and November, did you folks start feeling like war with Japan was going to come soon, or did you feel like it was going to happen no matter what?

EB: No, there was no feeling in that. Nobody said they'd ever attack us, it would be a complete surprise.

MS: So, really, December 7 was truly a surprise for you?

EB: Indeed, yeah.

MS: Some of your buddies.

EB: Right, yeah.

MS: And the *HELENA* was . . .

EB: Was at dock ten-ten. We replaced the *PENNSYLVANIA*, which went into dry dock and that's why we were hit. They thought the *HELENA* was a battleship, *PENNSYLVANIA*.

MS: So, unfortunately, you guys had a little mis-identity there and . . .

EB: Yeah.

MS: . . . and was a target. Now, let's start the day from the time that you were up and about. Were you on duty, or were you in . . .

EB: Well, December 6, I was duty yeoman aboard a ship there. I prepared a plan of the day for December 7 and then we had to scrub all bags and secure watertight doors, and all that. And the movie on December 6, the eve of Pearl Harbor, was "Hold Back the Dawn," with Olivia DeHavilland and Charles Boyer and Paul Goddard.

MS: What a good movie. (Chuckles)

EB: It was a significance in "Hold Back the Dawn."

MS: Yeah. Yeah. Very poignant. Do you remember what time you were up and about that morning? Was it right at general quarters, or . . .

EB: I was up and about. I was handing out the liberty cards to the off-duty watch in the engine room and the general alarm sounded, "Man your battle stations. Jap planes attacking. Break out service ammunition. This is no drill."

I dashed to my battle station, forward battle dressing and damage control, secured the watertight doors that were knocked against the bulkhead and the wall. We found out it was a torpedo that hit just when I left. I was saved by thirty seconds. And thirty-three of my shipmates were killed in that vicinity.

MS: You guys were hit really early on?

EB: Yes, at 7:59 a.m., yeah.

MS: And so, right after you took that first torpedo, what was the sequence of events. Do you remember what happened next?

EB: Well, of course, we were underneath the second and first deck there and we couldn't see what was going on there until the all clear sounded. So all we heard was the firing and the shrieking and the noise and all that.

MS: That would have been awfully tough thing to not see what's happening.

EB: That's right. It was like being in a submarine or something. You can't see what's going on there.

MS: Yeah. So your main job was in damage control?

EB: Yes, for battle station, yeah.

MS: And what was the main job of -- considering you had damage and there was things going on about you, what was the procedure? What was your main job?

EB: Well, of course, we had to carry out the wounded and the dead, and so we were all black and blue and the uniform of the day was shorts and undershirts, so the torpedo flash killed a lot of people and hurt a lot of my shipmates.

MS: Some of your friends.

EB: My friends were members. Salvatore [J.] Albanese [F2/c] from Flushing, New York, he brought me a sandwich on Saturday, December 6, from the beach, a ham sandwich and the next day, he was dead.

MS: So do you -- when you had the all clear occurred, it was after the last of the planes . . .

EB: Yeah (mumbles).

MS: . . . and when you came up on deck . . .

EB: We saw the *ARIZONA* burning and the *OKLAHOMA* was overturned. I thought some of my old buddies were on the *OKLAHOMA*. One was transferred to the Philippines, and he suffered in the Bataan death march. And my brother joined the Navy the next day, and he was killed in North Atlantic in August '42. So my mother was a gold star mother. People don't realize what gold star mothers are -- that they lost their child in the service.

MS: At this point, when you remember back to that day, is there any one particular thing that sticks out or is it kind of a jumble of events . . .

EB: I remember Father Murphy, our chaplain, taking care of the wounded and giving last rites and romping around there and it was -- that scenery is nightmare.

MS: One of the -- another survivor I interviewed at one other time said that, his quote was, "I've never been to hell, but I think Pearl Harbor was as close as I ever want to get."

EB: Indeed.

MS: Feels pretty accurate to you.

EB: Right, yes.

MS: When the whole thing was over and they weren't returning, what was your job? What did they assign you to do for the rest of the day?

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

MS: And *HELENA* was completely repaired in -- where? Was it Bremerton or San Pedro?

EB: San Pedro -- San . . . ?

MS: San Francisco?

EB: Above San Francisco -- what's the name? Mare Island Navy Yard.

MS: Oh, okay.

EB: Mare Island Navy Yard, that's where it was.

MS: I see. How long did that take?

EB: That took, oh -- let's see, July -- about almost a year, I think.

MS: Almost a year. What did --- were you with the ship at that time . . .

EB: No, I was transferred later on to the seaplane tender *ROCKAWAY*, but when the *HELENA* was sunk July 6, 1943, I read my obituary in my local paper. They thought I was still on it when it was sunk on July 6, 1943, in the Battle of Kula Gulf.

MS: That was kind of a shocker, to read your obituary.

EB: Yeah.

MS: Did you have to make some quick phone calls or write some quick letters?

EB: Yeah, indeed, I did. Yeah.

MS: And where were you when that was going on again?

EB: I was at Bremerton, Washington (mumbles).

MS: And then, where did you go from Bremerton?

EB: And then we served in the Panama Canal with the submarines. We went to the North Atlantic and I wound up in Manila and thank god for the atomic bomb or I wouldn't be here, save for the landings in Japan.

MS: You folks were staging, getting ready for . . .

EB: Yeah, invasion of Japan.

MS: Yeah. You obviously had a lot of very sharp memories about this and a lot of experiences that you can probably close your eyes and almost like a videotape, relive it. But now we've got fifty-five years behind us. Now, do you have any reflections or anything that when you look back at that time, is there anything else that really just kind of hits you?

EB: Well, I have five sons with me here and I'm gonna show 'em what happened. They're going to be on the *ARIZONA* Memorial on December 7 and two of 'em are gonna present wreaths there and it's just a shock when you think of it, fifty-five years ago, lost all my shipmates and friends. And five years ago, we had a big group and half of 'em cut down since that last five years. And I'm seventy-six years old, how much more time we have to have people remember Pearl Harbor, and we don't have people to do that because now eighty percent of the people live there, are unaware of it. We try to keep it alive, "Remember Pearl Harbor," don't let it happen again.

MS: Is that the lesson, personally, that you feel is important as a . . .

EB: Yes, it is important that you keep prepared on. After you lose a brother and thirty-three shipmates and go through hell like that, yeah. When do they ever learn?

MS: At this point, of course, during the war, I'm sure you had pretty significant feelings, but at this point, what's your feeling toward the Japanese after . . .

EB: I think we're catering to the Japanese and we should be more strict to them and not let them get all the trade here and (mumbles) all the money while we pay for the fleet to protect them and I think they should carry the load, a bigger share of the load instead of us having to pay all those expenses for protecting them.

MS: Would you be afraid of them building too much military again?

EB: No, I don't think so. I think they learned their lesson from that. They wouldn't do that.

MS: You were mentioning -- you said, "Thank god for the atomic bomb." Do you feel that winning the war and with the bomb and all the ending of that, do you feel that there was a vengeance factor for the United States, then, after Pearl Harbor . . .

(Background conversation)

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

(Background conversation)

MS: The song, "Remember Pearl Harbor," meant a lot to those of you who were in the war and there was a lot of spirit in the United States. With the ending of the war, and the things like the atomic bomb, the fire bombings, the very heavy offensive that the . . .

(Taping interrupted, resumes)

(Background conversation)

MS: Do you feel that the United States was able to achieve or avenge Pearl Harbor with the ending of the war?

EB: Yes, they avenged Pearl Harbor and they became the number one nation in the world, the strongest nation in the world, as a result of the war and everybody looked up to them after that.

MS: So do you think that America is remembering and is learning a lesson?

EB: Sometimes I wonder because many people forget that I asked them to remember 2,403 Americans killed while they're attending football games or Christmas shopping, take a minute to reflect on all the Americans we lost fifty-five years ago.

MS: The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association has been around for quite some time. When did you join?

EB: Have --- we call ourselves the Pearl Harbor Attack Veterans. It's a different group and we were organized in 1957 in Boston, Massachusetts. We got our charter there. Our first meeting was in Holyoke, Massachusetts, 1956, at the fifteenth anniversary and we've been meeting every year since in New York, Worcester, Boston, Providence -- all over there. And every five years we come to Hawaii for the ceremonies. We don't like the name "survivors" because it was 100,000 survivors and 2,403 killed, that doesn't sound like survivors to me.

MS: Good point. Very good point. Well, at this point -- and I know our time is getting a little short here for you -- is there anything else that you'd like to try to relate to us now?

EB: I'd like to see that America keeps strong and be alert. Just remember Pearl Harbor, but I think they're wasting money on the B-2 bombers and the submarines that there's no need for now, and we should concentrate on education, the buildings and schools, and the teachers, and our children are falling behind as a thirty-year high school teacher, I regret that this is what's happening now. All that money is going to defense and wasted when it could be used for education and help progress in America.

MS: Education is one of the keys, isn't it?

EB: Yes, it is.

MS: On both sides of the ocean.

EB: Right.

MS: Yeah. Well, thank you very much, Ed . . .

EB: You're welcome, Michael.

MS: . . . for sharing this time with us.

EB: I'm glad we could do it.

MS: And thank you for fifty-five years ago and helping to keep us free.

EB: Thank you.

MS: Appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW