

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#377

EDWARD THOMAS ROBERTSON

64th COAST ARTILLERY AA RGT. , FORT SHAFTER

INTERVIEWED ON

DECEMBER 5, 2001

BY JERRY GREENE AND COMMANDER JUDITH LAFLEUR

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Jerry Greene (JG): Okay. The following oral history interview was conducted by Jerry Greene for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Ala Moana Hotel, on December 5, 2001 at 8:40 a.m. The person being interviewed is Edward Thomas Robertson, who was a staff sergeant [assigned to the 64th Coast Artillery Anti-Aircraft Regiment] at Fort Shafter on December 7, 1941.

Ed, thanks for being here this morning. I have a number of questions I'd like to relate to you. For the record, can you please state your full name, place of birth and birth date?

Edward Robertson (ER): My name is Edward Thomas Robertson. Birth date, 8-14-21. Birthplace, Baltimore, Maryland.

JG: What did you consider your hometown in 1941?

ER: Baltimore, Maryland.

JG: What were your parents' names?

ER: Helen FOLTS, father, Henry Alexander Robertson.

JG: How many brothers and sisters did you have or do you have?

ER: I had at that time one brother and three sisters. At this time I have three sisters.

JG: Where did you go to high school?

ER: I went to Patterson Park Senior High in Baltimore.

JG: Where and why did you enlist?

ER: Frankly, it was the product of the depression era and I had to leave because there was no work available at my age and in order to have one less mouth to feed, I decided to use the military and make it my place of employment.
(Chuckles)

JG: Ed, can you tell us something about your military background, before you came to Hawaii?

ER: Yeah. I had, at fourteen years of age to the age of seventeen, I had two years in Maryland 29th Division Infantry, National Guard. So I had a little bit of experience with the army prior to going in, in 1938, as a regular. I came to Hawaii in 1938 and served at Fort Shafter. In 1941, just prior to the war, I was scheduled to go home, waiting for a ship to come in. We used army transports at that time. And the ship was late getting in. Consequently, the harbor was bombed. Prior to the harbor being bombed, I must say that the army tried to do its job. It went on a full alert on December 1. And we stayed on the alert until December the sixth. I was attached to 64th Anti-aircraft Division, Harbor Defense. Our gun and placements and etcetera, radar, which we were very good at, and we were very well versed in it. And we were very well equipped for that period of time. It was specifically around the Pearl Harbor area.

JG: So you'd been trained in radar?

ER: Absolutely.

JG: Before coming to Hawaii?

ER: No, no. Not before coming to Hawaii. Radar didn't come out until after I was here several years. We received what they call 268 sets were humongous radar sets. Not as compatible as the 588 that they used on the morning, the signal corps used in picking up the planes coming in and they failed to—they were huge things. [*Note: The type of radar in use on Oahu on December 7 1941, was the SCR-270-B.*]

JG: Can we back up just a minute and maybe we can get a sense of what training activities that you participated in before coming to Hawaii.

ER: Well, prior to coming to Hawaii, are you speaking of the service now?

JG: Yes.

ER: I was attached—I mean not attached, but stationed in Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, near Alcatraz, for several months. Prior to that in Long Island Sound, I was at Fort McDowell. I was stationed there for several months and then I came to Hawaii. I spent total amount of time in the Pacific, about eight years, about eight years. And by the way, I never came home. We never had such a thing as a tour of duty. And when I did come home, my mother said to me, “Ed, where have you been for the past eight years? I’ve been calling you for supper!” (Chuckles)

JG: Ed, what were some of the, what were the circumstances that brought you to Hawaii and when exactly did you arrive here?

ER: I arrived here June, I think June the fourteenth, 1938. And the reason I selected Hawaii was that I picked the Philippines, but being an artilleryman—that’s what I liked—they wouldn’t accept me in the Philippines. You had to have at least two hitches in to go to Corregidor, where the big artillery was, and that’s where I wanted to go. So consequently I was sent back to the Hawaiian Islands, so I decided to stay there. And stayed at Fort Shafter, actually, until the war started and I went south I don’t know how many times. My service consisted of the Phoenix Islands, where we went and _____ a ship and stayed there for four months. Kwajalein and Enewetak, each time back to Hawaii. And then from there, down to the Admiralty Islands and New Guinea. The invasion of the Philippines, I served in Leyte, Mindanao, and Luzon. And then from there to Okinawa. In Okinawa, I had so many points they sent me home. By the way, I was attached to the 6th Marine Division in Okinawa. And the funny part of it is, someone asked me, “Why as an army man were you attached to the Marine Division?”

My answer was, “Someone had to show ‘em where to go.”

It’s a joke. (Chuckles) But what I really was, was an artillery electrician, to begin with. And the morning of December the seventh, after eating, I drove an army motorcycle in order to get to the positions, to make repairs to the radars, gun units and searchlights. And I got there very fast, me having a motorcycle.

Fort Shafter, being the headquarters of the Hawaiian Department, had lost contact with Hickam Field. They knew that there were flights of B-17s coming in, so they sent me to the control tower at Hickam Field, prior to the bombing. And I went down there and walked into, got into the control tower and I got the information, and when I came out, all hell broke loose. And I left there as soon as possible and made a left-hand turn, and I was going to go, not heading—the opposite way of Honolulu, to the back of Fort Shafter. I made a left-hand turn, which was almost a mistake, and I went in front of Pearl Harbor, approximately where the visitors' center is today, but it was nothing there at that time but a small beach, probably twenty feet long, deep that is. And I had to get off the motorcycle because of the planes coming out of Battleship Row, dropping their bombs, also had their machine guns running. And they were peppering the beach, so in order to stay alive, I had to get off the motorcycle and lay in a prone position. And while I was there, I looked out, I saw the *Oklahoma* capsize. And there was a ship alongside the *Arizona*, I believe it was called the *Vestal*. I didn't know what the name was in that day, at the time. And it was on fire, like the *Arizona* was. It was berthed on the outside of the *Arizona*. It was called the *Vestal* and it was a battleship tender, which I later found out. And the crew, I understand, couldn't, understood that they couldn't get up topside because of the teak decks were on fire. And then the *Arizona* had a magazine explode with such force that it extinguished the fire on the *Vestal*, and then she was able to, the crew was able to come up, cut the hawsers and get underway. They had steam up.

And sixty years ago is a long time to remember, but I think it made one wide circle and headed for the beach where I was laying down. And it ran aground, and the reason it run aground, I didn't know at the time was that it had taken a 1000-pound bomb at the stern that went completely through the ship, down the bottom and failed to explode. It was intended for the *Arizona* and not the *Vestal*.

And when they hit the beach, the crew was in such a state, they left it. The just left the ship completely and basically most of 'em went off the stern end, where the water was deeper. And what I found out was the majority of 'em couldn't swim. I couldn't understand that. And I was only 127 pounds at the time, but I was a good swimmer. I boxed and I was also on the swimming team. So I took off my side arms and I went in the water and

helped a few of 'em get in. And I knew I had to get back with the information, because time was running out.

So as I left, I went to the back way—not the back way really, but to get into the main gate of Fort Shafter. I went, was going headed for a town called Kalihi, I mean Waipahu. And there's a hillside, a plane flew over my head, was a Japanese plane, his engine smoking. And he pancaked right on the hillside. My first instinct was get to hugger. And I tried to, but it didn't work. He jumped out of the cockpit and he was armed. And I reached for my forty-five, it was gone. I left it on the beach, helping the people from the *Vestal*, and I didn't put it back on. The output _____ this guy didn't shoot. He could have, but he didn't.

So I ran back to the motorcycle. I had a forty-five caliber, old Thompson machine gun on there. So I gave him fifty rounds, but he was all gone, long gone. And then I went back to Fort Shafter, and when I got into Fort Shafter, I found out how lucky I was that I went to Pearl Harbor. They had hit the barracks and they killed one man and maimed about eight of them. Very possible I could have been in that section of the barracks at the time. And that's what I intend to do as soon as we go to Punchbowl [*National Cemetery*], is to see Arthur Favreau, a friend of mine, also fellow boxer. He had no family. Each time I visited—like I say, I've been here about seven times—and I could never find his gravesite because he was one of the first ones died. But the army buries their dead where they drop, and later on they'll pick 'em up and put 'em in, and that's exactly what happened to him. So in the process, he got lost. And I know it's Department of Parks or whatever, somehow got my name and asked me if I knew how he died. And I told 'em, but I didn't know the gravesite, I couldn't find it. So they gave me the gravesite number and I went up there, and it was an eerie feeling, because, like I say...maybe I shouldn't do this.

JG: It's fine.

ER: But anyway, on the grave was a large bunch of red anthuriums and several flower leis. Him having no family, it told me that he did have a family, he had the army. And somebody remembered. So that's the extent of what I did that day. What I did that night is another story.

JG: Well, I want to ask you about that night, but I want to ask you too, in the days or weeks preceding Pearl Harbor, if you have any sense of what the mood among your colleagues at Fort Shafter was, regarding the state of relations between Japan and the U.S.? Did the enlisted men consider those sorts of things? What was the feeling about an impending attack at Hawaii, at Pearl Harbor?

ER: I think we were very well versed. I'm talking about the army. When we went on that alert, we were called two o'clock in the morning. Everything was done by a bugle in those days. And our packs were already made up at the end of the barracks. Rifles were locked and we fell out of barracks on Battery Street and the commanding officer informed us that, in these words, that we were on the verge of war with Japan and we were not to converse with anyone. And that was about the extent of it. And we went on alert. We took our unit. We had fixed positions around Pearl Harbor, but we had to take the equipment there. And we immediately took out our guns and set up along our perimeter at Pearl Harbor.

And then on December the sixth, for some unknown reason, then we were issued live ammunition, which never, to my experience, we never done before. They had never done before.

And so we knew full well that we were on the verge of something happening. As far as the air attack on Pearl Harbor, very simple. If you'd stayed over there as many years as I'd been there, you seen what was going on. The handwriting was on the wall. They could do it with the carriers. We knew that. We had carriers. They could do the same thing as we did. I think the initial shock was is that we didn't expect it. But it wore off pretty quick. Wore off pretty quick. But what baffles me is that on the day of December 6, the day before, they called off the alert, but at the same time, when we went on the alert, the army went on the alert, the navy never did. They never went on alert. Consequently, had the navy adhered to what the army had done, or were told to do, I think the ships would have been out to sea and could've been a lot saved there. But that didn't happen. And I did hear some rumor that the Congress wouldn't appropriate the money for the oil for the ships, to get 'em out. Although I do know that the *Arizona*, I believe, took over a million gallons of fuel.

But the only thing I can offer to that degree is—and this I do know—is that the army and the navy never did get along. And this prevails in all countries, not necessarily this country. Japan had the same problem. Everybody was fighting for power. And I think that that had a lot to do with it. There weren't, wasn't enough conversation between the two to realize that this was pending. But had they have done that, they would've been put to sea, and they wouldn't have been back on December the seventh, 'cause they would not have made it back in one day. And it's a shame that that happened. I think not simply because I'm army, but I think [*Lieutenant*] General Short got a raw deal. I met 'em all, the whole family. Short and Kimmel both. And I don't—somebody has to be guilty of something. In this country today, something happens, nobody's guilty. If they are guilty, they're exonerated a little while later. And consequently, nobody's responsible. Good showing of that is the Marines in Beirut. They shouldn't have never been in a hotel for a barracks. They should've been out with pup tents, scattered around, deployed. But that didn't happen. And it goes on and on and on. But nobody seems to want to put an end to it, but it should be. Somebody should be held accountable for it. But I do think that General Short did get the wrong end of the stick because he did try. He did try. He may have been guilty of calling it off on December the sixth, but then at the same token, what about the navy? Who was responsible for that? I believe the exonerated. Like I say, I met the whole family on both of 'em, ten years ago, and I've met Admiral Kimmel's sons since then, in Annapolis.

And it's a shame. It's a shame that they have to be that way, or had to be that way, but somebody's got to be responsible for it.

JG: Ed, you mentioned that your C.O. had indicated that war with Japan was imminent. When did, approximately when did he tell you that?

ER: That was on, I believe, December 1, because we went on for six days, on the alert. And like I say, in those days, they blew the bugle. That was an alert to get out. And when we fell out, it was the exact words, 'cause we were all stunned. And ammunition, live ammunition was issued right away. And his exact words were that we were on the verge of war with Japan. We were being issued live ammunition and not to converse with anyone. That was the main thing, say nothing to no one. And then when December the sixth,

bingo, it happened, December the seventh was when it happened. But the sixth, we were called off. Took all the equipment back to Fort Shafter.

What we did do, we left skeleton crews out there at those positions, because the radars, see, they were interconnected. The guns, searchlights, and the radar were all connected. And when we would lower in on north star and when we synchronized everything, when the radar picked up a target. We just threw the switch and then everything came into unison and they were all on target—searchlights, radars, the guns, everything. And that's the way we functioned.

But we were very well versed on it and we were very well equipped. In my opinion, we had a good standing army there. We really did. We were very well trained, very well trained. A lot of garrison, true, a lot of garrison, but still very well trained. You don't make a good soldier unless you're a good garrison soldier. That's first. You gotta take orders. It doesn't have to be beat into you, but you can learn to take orders.

JG: Do you have any memories, other memories of the day, December 7, things that happened to you or little things that happened to you, or some of your colleagues, that you'd care to relate, other than the ones that you've already told us about?

ER: On December 7?

JG: Yes.

ER: Well, the night of December 7, I took a position operating artillery radio overlooking Pearl, near about right near Battleship Row. And the ships were still burning like mad. I got an order to commence firing that we had picked up a target and we were to commence firing, which we did. What we did, we shot down a B-17. And then this was identified through the searchlights that went on and but it was too late, they had already fired. And the same person that gave the order to fire came on the radio and said, "You fools! You fools! You shot down one of our own planes."

[Note: On the night of December 7th no B-17 bombers were shot down. However on that night four F4F Wildcat fighters from the USS Enterprise were shot down by friendly fire over Pearl Harbor.]

And this was the chaos that, you know, that we were going through, but you followed orders and you did it. The things that happened during that period, well, I was on my motorcycle most of the time, and I had to travel at night. So I got a call, something wasn't operating. The radar, or whatever, I had to go there and do it. And believe me, it was regular kamikaze acts. You'd get shot at all the way! (Chuckles) I had spokes shot out of my bicycle!

And I rode along from Pearl one time and I met a Marine. I saw the object laying in the road and as I said there was no headlights on motorcycle. None at all. And I seen this object laying in the road near Pearl City. And I walked up to it—it was about, I think, two days after the war started. I took my rifle and I hit it, and it was a Marine laying there. He'd shot himself in the stomach, accidentally. And he was still alive, but barely. And I asked him what had happened. He said, "I did it."

And I said, "Well, there's no one here. The only thing I can do is get you on the bicycle and take you up to the hospital. I could to take you to Tripler General [*Hospital.*]"

I knew about that, the army hospital. Big hospital. And he said, "No." He said, "Blow this whistle," he had a whistle around his neck.

So I blew the whistle and out of the _____ bushes came all these Marines. And the officer, I have to say—maybe I shouldn't say it—but they had been drinking. And I told the officer, I said, "I can take him to the hospital. It'd be hard for me tot him on the motorcycle, but I would take him."

He said, "No, you go ahead. You go. You keep going where you're going." He said, "We'll take care of him."

I said, "But you don't have any way to get him anyplace."

He said, "I told you to go." He said, "We'll take care of him."

So I left and I think the man died probably. But that was one occasion, one thing that happened.

One comical thing—wasn't funny at the time, but I was going through Honolulu, hell bent for _____ and happened to see a pretty Japanese girl on the other side of the street. When I looked again, there was a car stopped in front of me and I hit it. (Laughs) Bounced back about ten feet, hit the throttle and then climbed on top the car. (Laughs) And that's when I found out you got to keep your eyes on the road! (Laughs) Ah well.

JG: Can you tell us something of what happened here during the days immediately following the attack? In particular, what were the things that you were involved in?

ER: Oh, specifically, I wasn't involved specifically in this, but I do know this to be true. Like I say, I was stationed at Fort Shafter and I only went back when I had to. I was never stationed there any longer. And what had happened, that next day, there was a line of Japanese civilians a mile long, and they had been building the tunnel at the end of what's called Likelike Highway now, that goes over the North Shore, through Nuuanu, Pali. Prior to that, we only had the one tunnel going through there and the one road that was built out, and that was closed only to military during the war. But this tunnel was being built and they were in there a good way, and it was being built in Fort Shafter in Kalihi Valley, driven through. And like I say, it goes, Likelike Highway goes into it. And they came up, hundreds of 'em. I believe that they thought there's a Japanese population, civilians, women, children. I think some of 'em expected to be shot. From what I understand, the personnel station at Fort Shafter took 'em into the tunnel, took care of their needs, fed 'em and took care of everything that they needed. And I later heard they were well taken care of. We had, all the food that we had, we gave to the kids. We sent back and gave to the kids. The army cut back to two meals a day in order to help out, you know, putting it in. And two meals a day was what the army lived on for the next four years, if you could call it that. Prior to that we ate very good. This was before the war started. But we were limited to two meals a day.

There was a lot that was going on there. Hard to remember, sixty years ago. (Chuckles) But the military personnel seemed to get along very good with the population. Except one occasion where during the bombing there were rumors that the water was poisoned and the infantry came down out of Schofield Barracks and they immediately went into Honolulu and cleaned

shelves off of all the bottled liquids that they could get. That's the only bad incident that I ever can remember of them doing. But we normally treat people pretty good.

I felt so good last night. The lei that was given me here. I got on an elevator and there was a Japanese family on there, beautiful little girl. So I gave her my lei. And she reached around and grabbed me by the legs and squeezed me real tight. And the father gave me the Japanese bow, you know. But it made me feel good, real good. But we did get along with the people very well. And we were taught that. We taught that in the Philippines, never to take anything. Give but never take. And anything else that I can...

JG: How did your family and your loved ones find out about your whereabouts and condition after the attack?

ER: I wrote immediately, as soon as I could possibly do it. But at that time, communications were very thin and far between. I had to do that, to tell 'em that I was okay. And I was. Like I say, I had my ears blowed out, but that's all. In the army, you had to have a leg blown off or something like that in order to get sent away where, you know. I had a bayonet put in this leg in the Philippines. I treated that myself. Jumped in the wrong hole. My fault. (Chuckles)

What did my people think of it? I guess they were worried. I guess they were worried. My sister today—I used to send Hawaiian Christmas cards from here with the "Merry Christmas," in Hawaiian on it. And today, some sixty-five years later, she still puts that postcard in the window for people to see. Well, it's getting faded out now after all these years, but she does it every year. Like her ritual.

But like I say, I never went home. We never had such a thing as a tour of duty. That was unheard of. I never heard of that until Vietnam or Korea. But I never heard of a tour of duty. Each time I came back to Hawaii to be sent out again, I probably got lost and I probably got mixed up with, say, people. What they had done, they thinned out the regular army and when they brought over the troops from the States who were drafted, they would take one, two, or three regulars and put them in with about 300 drafted troops, to help out with the, you know, helping them understand what was

going on. And that's exactly what I did. Each time I come back to Hawaii after a campaign, I was sent to Red Hill for quarantine for two weeks and then immediately sent into another unit to go out. Good example of that was the last one I was in. I was attached to the 6th Marine Division in Okinawa. And I think I told you that someone asked me, "What was the army doing in with the Marines?"

And my answer to that was, "Somebody has to show 'em where to go!"

So, but they're good people.

JG: What were some of the—we gotta change? Okay. He's got to change the...

ER: Okay.

JG: ...tape. But I'm going to ask you about some of the...

END OF TAPE #1

TAPE #2

JG: I think we're all set. Okay. Ed, can you give me a sense of some of the activities you were involved in operation-wise in the weeks after Pearl Harbor? You've mentioned a few of them already, but go ahead and elaborate, if you would.

ER: Well, I was sent down with 300 troops to, about two months after the bombing, to carve out an air base, or take this island, because at that particular time, planes could only fly, say, 2500 to 3000 max[imum] miles and they were out of fuel.

So they needed a base between here and Fiji and Samoa, rather Hawaii, Samoa and Fiji, to get down to Australia. You had to have the jumping off points. They picked an island called Canton in the Phoenix group. And we went there and we were on a civilian ship and no escort. There was no escort to be had. The Japanese, at that time, to my knowledge, was 300 miles away at the Gilbert Islands. And we got to the island—excuse me—

and two submarines surfaced, never fired on us. And captain run the ship aground. It was a coral atoll about twenty-nine miles around, being about 300 yards at the most in width. And one opening, it was an atoll that had sunk below the sea. And where the lava would come out, that was the entrance to the lagoon. The lagoon being twenty-nine miles around, held a lot of water. When it was low tide in the ocean, it was high tide in the lagoon. And when he brought the ship in, he did it off the mouth of the lagoon. It was probably 3000, 4000, 5000 feet of water on our stern and he hung it up real good and ruptured the tanks, fuel tanks. And I think it killed most of the people in the engine room. The ironic part about it was that night he shot himself. And it left us there. So there was a consulate there. There was one place, a British consulate _____ . The only other thing on this island that I can recall was a coral monument with a bronze plaque on it, and it said, "Dedicated to Captain [*Edwin C. Musick*] and the crew of the lost *Samoan Clipper*."

[Note: The President Taylor went aground at Canton Island on February 14, 1942. The ship was under the command of Captain A.W. Aitken, there was no loss of life due to the grounding, and Capt. Aitken did not take his own life due to the loss of his ship.]

And that was all that was on this island. We fished to eat and we didn't eat much. Water was at a premium. It never rained. The temperature was about 130 degrees every day, being four degrees below the equator. Clothes fell off your back. Then finally after about four months, we got out of there and came back to Hawaii.

Judith Lafleur (JL): How did you get out?

ER: They picked us up in a ship. [*This ship that took us off Canton Island and returned us to Hawaii, was an Army Inter-Island steamer, I believe was the [USAT] Royal [T] Frank. We ran out of water on the way back to Hawaii*]

And we [*had to stop at*] Palmyra Island. We had to beg for water too. Water was very hard to get. And it's amazing how long you can go without. We carried two canteens. That helped to save us. And eventually, what had happened, we cut the condensers off the ship and were able to make water. Now, the consulate, they had a thing there that they could make water. So they gave us what they could and we managed. We managed.

JG: Ed, can you (clears throat)—excuse me. (Coughs) When were you discharged?

ER: What was I discharged?

JG: When were you discharged?

ER: I was discharged—well, I got my orders in Okinawa. I think I was there three months. That would have been—let's see—May of 1945. And I actually got out June 14, 1945. And I had a lot of points. The Marine lieutenant who came and got me, we were taking the city, I believe, Naha. I think that was called Naha. And it was an unusual thing happened there. He came and he told me, he said, "Sergeant Robertson," he says, "get your gear. You're going home."

Well, after all these years, you know, it goes through this ear and out the other, which later on told me that I was beginning to like what I was doing and that was a bad thing. So he came back the second time, an hour later, and he said, "I told you, get down to Yontan airstrip," he said, "somebody will take you there in a jeep."

So they took me there, Yontan airstrip and I threw my bag on the ground and I waited and waited. A plane was supposed to pick me up and take me to Luzon. And then from there to Guam. And I waited and waited, plane never came in. Finally one did show up and he didn't take me. So then a hospital plane came in and called my name and I jumped aboard. And this really gets me. You're so close to home, you know, so close to going and then this happens. As we're taking off the airfield, one of the crewmembers came back and said—and I was the only passenger on board, by the way. Why, I don't know. But it was a good thing that we took off when we did. And he said to me, "You won't believe this," he said, "but when we're taking off," he said, "they're landing airborne troops, Japanese airborne troops are taking the airstrip back."

So we got airborne and got up about, I think they traveled about 9,000 feet and there was only two portholes in this plane. And he came back again and he said, "You want to see the last of the war?"

I said, "Okay."

So he said, "Come on up here."

I looked out the porthole and laying off the port side, right on the inboard side of the wing was this Japanese Zero. And you know, you could look at him, you could almost talk to him. But he wasn't smiling. And I don't know, I got kind of sick in the stomach. You know, you're that close to getting home and then this happens.

So I go back and I sit down. They come back a little while later. He said, "We're okay," he says, "he chickened out."

He was out of ammunition and he was deciding whether he was going to bump us. They had a thing they used to bump us, with the prop, you know, real easy and disable the plane, and not go down themselves.

I seen a lot of kamikazes, by the way. And there's one that I have to bring up. I don't think anybody ever brought it up. In the battle of Pearl Harbor, I noticed there were kamikazes there. There were planes—I was in such a good position that I could see 'em go in and not come out. And they were kamikazes. I think that close.

In the Philippines, I saw many, many there. As a matter of fact, when I went into Okinawa, they hit our ship and we were on deck when it happened. And they hit it with such a force that they severed these huge masts that they used for loading, you know. And in this particular instance, there was a sailor up in the crows nest and he severed the mast when he hit it and down came the boom, or the mast, and when it hit the deck, everything was on fire, the cage around the crows nest just collapsed. It was like a barbecue. That poor man was in there and, you know, on fire. But I seen many on there.

And I saw the [USS] *Honolulu* [CL-48] get hit in (chuckles)—somebody said _____ . But I could've been.

In the battle of Leyte, the first invasion of the Philippines, I got off of, I was getting ready to go off on about the sixth wave. And I was on the USS *Bolivar* [APA-34], which was a Coast Guard [*manned*] vessel. It was brand

new. It was APA assault transport. And I was getting ready to go over the side and they had already converted it to a secondary hospital ship. And they were bringing the wounded on board. And I'm getting ready to go off to go down the ladder and over the loudspeaker comes, "Sergeant Robertson, hold fourteen men. Seven on the aft gun, seven on the fore gun pass ammunition."

So they're telling me, Robertson, you're not going to get off this boat until night, which is bad. So we did it. And I went up on the forward gun and I was looking out over the *hacienda* and lo and behold, here comes this single Japanese plane. He came so low, we couldn't fire at him without hitting the other ships. He just flew in as gently as can be, dropped a torpedo and hit the ship. I never knew—it was a cruiser. I knew that. But I never knew the name of it. It was the [USS] *Honolulu*. And in about maybe fifteen minutes, she took on about a thirty-degree list, like this. And from what I understand, they took it ashore and put it in five foot of water under the keel. If it did sink, it would, you know, lay there. But they patched it up and sent it back. And in the Survivors' Organization, we have about five people there you know. Yeah. [*Approximately 5 who served on the USS Honolulu.*]

But I did get ashore that night and I landed in a Catholic cemetery, in a huge hole. And I said to myself, "Get in the first hole that you find and stay there," because I have to find my outfit. You gotta find your outfit. But I ain't gonna do it at nighttime. I'm not going to do it at nighttime, unless you get shot.

So I stayed in the hole and all around me were these crypts that were that high. Because of the low elevation of the graveyard to the ocean, they buried the dead above the ground. So—and this I'll never forget—was a sixteen-inch shell. That's the closest I ever got to one of those. It had landed. It looked like a rocket ship. (Chuckles) It looked like somebody welded two ash cans together. And it was laying alongside of me all night long, and I said, "I wonder if this thing's going to go off!"

But it didn't. But what happened was there was a slight lull and I got up out of the hole and it was quite a deep hole. And I crawled up and I looked around me and lo and behold, here's the end of these crypts starting to move like this. Well, I don't believe in ghosts. I don't. And they had pulled the

bodies out and they got inside. It was a turkey shoot for me. It was a turkey shoot. And there was other ones there that did the same thing. But I did, I fell asleep after that. I couldn't go any more so I just fell asleep. When I woke up, it was a group of Filipinos looking at me, you know. I don't know, they must have thought I was dead. (Laughs)

JL: I just have a question. You were talking about the incident at Pearl Harbor, and you talk about a Japanese plane flying into the hillside...*[ships at Battleship Row.]*

[Note: ER states " I later found this to be true when one of the Jap pilots signaled his fellow wing man that he did not have enough fuel to get back to his carrier so he dove his aircraft into the ships (I picked this info from the wing man who was interviewed on TV).]

ER: Yeah.

JL: ...and getting out and not shooting at you.

ER: Never shot, no.

JL: And then you, did you ever find out who that was or ...

ER: Never.

JL: ...did he just disappear?

ER: No, what happened, it happened and it was forgotten about, left it. There was one thing I did do though, which was a little out of the ordinary, and I gave it to my sister. The plane apparently had, you know, the wings had folded. And when he took off up into the cane patch, I just pulled out my bayonet and I cut out a swatch of that wing, which is canvas. It was canvas. The fuselage was aluminum, but the wings were fabric. And I gave that to my sister today. And it had—the paint was peeling off of it. At that time, you know, they had the silver paint on it and then the dull silver paint on the top of that. But that was about it.

Now the sailor that got off from the two-man submarine on the North Shore, he was picked up by the army. The army took him into Fort Shafter. Like I say, I never came back to stay in Fort Shafter once I left, but word gets around. And they told me that—‘cause I pulled guard up there many times. And they say that he would make up his bed in the guardhouse and sleep under it. He was afraid that they would kill him. But that never happened actually.

JL: (Inaudible)

JG: Is there anything else that we didn't cover that you'd like to speak to, relative to the events of December 7?

ER: Relative to that? No, with the exception that they were bombed again. Honolulu was bombed again. And I think with a little bit of foresight, I could have, anybody could have seen why they did it. They launched a—you ever hear of it? Have you ever heard of it? May I ask you that question? Have you ever heard of it?

This plane was launched in March of 1942, from a submarine off Waikiki. And it carried one bomb. I don't know what the weight of it was. I think what they were trying to do, the navy had taken over the Pink Palace, or the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. Used it for submarine sailors. It was exclusively for them. And I think what it was trying to do was to hit that hotel. If he could've done that, he would've disabled a couple of boats. But he dropped a bomb past that into Honolulu, not too far from here.

But most people forget that. Either that, or they never heard of it before. But that's how—and I think it was March 1942.

JG: Well, Ed, we're about out of time and appreciate very much your being with us this morning to relate your memories.

ER: Well, thank you.

JG: Thanks a lot.

END OF INTERVIEW