

Floyd Jenkins #36 and Leo Hovde #37
December 8, 1984

Q: Now were both of you gentlemen aboard the [USS] *Rigel*, say, quite a long time before the attack?

A:(Leo Hovde) I'd been there approximately six months.

A1:(Floyd Jenkins) I caught in Bremerton in May of 1941 and we left Bremerton in July of 1941 and went to Pearl; tied up alongside the old coal docks there. What had happened, we had gone up to Bremerton for a partial overhaul and then when they went to Pearl it was to finish up the overhaul converting her to an actual repair ship. So when we moved around from the coal dock, we moved around to 1010 dock then and that's where we were sitting when the attack come off.

Q: Oh you were at 1010 dock?

A1: Yes, we was moored right ahead of the hammerhead crane there. The *Ramapo* was aft of us and we was at the forward end of the dock. We had the rigs torn off. We had the boilers torn out, and we never even had a pea shooter going that day did we? Nothing... not a weapon. In other words we was under going almost a complete overhaul at Pearl Harbor Navy Yard. Of course, the old boilers had been on it since it had been built in 1918. They built that ship in 72 days and then... it was a merchant ship, the Navy took it over, I don't know, sometime, and it was tied up down at the DES [Destroyer] base in San Diego and old Capt. McCanlis(??) used it as an office and everything. So when they broke her away from them, brought her up to Bremerton, they done some work up there but then they sent her to Pearl to finish up and that's why we were sitting there. We was getting ready to put in new high pressure steam boilers and to bring the rest of the machinery aboard and everything to finish the conversion.

Q: What was your job... your regular duty aboard the *Rigel*?

A1: In the medical department... in the Sick Bay.

A: I was attached to the dental department.

A1: He was on the dental department. I was at this particular time I was the O.R... I was working operating room. And we actually did not have any battle dressing stations set up per say, at this particular time. So when they realized that this was an actual attack, part of the Corpsmen stayed up in the main Sick Bay, part of us went down to the deck below, which was a deck above of where our storeroom was. So we could pass up the necessary equipment and everything to set up a battle dressing station in this area. So I was working down there and Leo was up in the...

A: I was in the Main Sick Bay; me and one other guy, another H.A. Duce (?), that's old Bob Bailey. (laughter)

Q: What was the first indication that either of you had that morning that there was something out of the ordinary going on?

A: I had just gotten out of bed. I was sleeping in the dental office on the 01 level of the *Rigel*, about midships, and I had to report to Sick Bay for duty to feed the patients. And I got dressed in my uniform, stepped out on the 01 level. This low flying aircraft suddenly tilted and banked apparently after a torpedo launch. And that's when I seen the meatballs, that's when I headed to the Sick Bay.

A1: Myself, I had been on "liberty" the night before. I was with three fellahs off the *West Virginia*. One of them I'd gone through boot camp with, so I knew him. And needless to say, I'm sure you've heard this before, the liquor was flowing like water out there the night before. But they had overnight "liberty" so they were staying in the "Y". Well, I had to be back aboard ship by midnight, my "liberty" was up. So I had gotten up the next morning and I was getting ready to shave and shower, and get ready to go back to shore, because I had to go to go ashore at 8:00. I didn't have the duty, he did. Anyway, I heard the noises, the explosions, and everything and I thought it was, you know, a drill. So I stuck my head out the porthole just in time to see the *Oklahoma* take a couple of torpedoes in the side. And about that time the *Argonne*, which was laying over from us there got some guns in action. And this one gunner hit a plane, and as the plane nosed up I could see the Rising Sun on the wings and I realized then that this was no drill. So about that time they started passing the word, you know, that General Quarters, this is no drill. We're under actual attack. About that time [Leo] Hovde came down. Well then I went on down below then, to set up the auxiliary battle dressing station.

Q: What happened to the *Oklahoma* once those torpedoes struck her? What did you see?

A1: Well, you see, I looked over just in time to see a couple of torpedoes going in, and about that time, why they said hey it's an attack. Well, I realized that then, when I was saw this other, the other indication. So of course, I pulled my head back in out of that porthole and went down and got busy. And it was probably about, oh I would say, between 2 and 3:00 in the afternoon before I could get up to get up on deck to see anything. And that was the first indication that I had of the actual destruction.

Q: What was the sight that greeted your eyes?

A1: Holy cow! Looked over and saw the *Oklahoma* on its side, the *Arizona* burning, the *West Virginia* burning, the *California* setting on the bottom, the *Nevada* beached out there. It was one hell of a sight to say the least, because actually, I knew some of the fellahs on the *Arizona*. Cause in 1940, when I was transferred from Hospital Corps School to Bremerton, I rode the *Arizona* up and I was aboard it, oh, for a couple of months, six weeks to two months, in route going up to Bremerton. And some of

the fellahs that had gone through boot camp was aboard the Arizona. So when I saw that, I realized that probably they wasn't alive. And sure enough, it turned out they wasn't; they had been killed. And the actual bomb or shell that hit the Arizona hit I guess around #1 gun turret. Well the Sick Bay, the Medical Sick Bay was right below that and it just wiped them out. That's why all medical personnel was killed on the Arizona. And where of course, I'd slept, and done duty on it when I was riding it up.

Q: What about you Mr. Hovde. When did you get up on deck?

A: I never left the Sick Bay like I said, I had the duty. Bailey and I stayed there and we were watching most of that through the porthole.

Q: What did you see?

A: Oh, violent explosions and planes. Nineteen years old, and curious, and scared to death. The level of the portholes are such that the *Oglala* was moored on the other side of 1010, docked on the outboard side, I assume it was the *Oglala*. But we treated one patient off of there. We got one patient that morning... flash burns... and he was from the *Oglala*. But that blocked most of the view from the portholes in the Sick Bay.

Q: Well, tell me what went on with the *Oglala* that you could see?

A: Nothing... that I could see. Looking from a porthole, the view is restricted to say the least. Apparently the torpedo missed her and passed underneath and exploded against the dock. And the resulting concussion and blast sank her or turned her over, and it was there that this young Sailor got hurt that we treated.

Q: Did you see the *Oglala* um...

A: About that time everybody was running around screaming. There was no PA system. Like Jenks said we were under overhaul. No PA system, so the word was being passed by somebody sticking their head over the hatch and yelling down the #1 hatch, "Everybody below! Everybody topside! Everybody below!" and they couldn't make up their mind!

Q: Sounds like a pretty confused type of situation.

A: (laughter) That's the reason Bailey and I didn't... We had the duty, and at first we obeyed the orders. We went down below, down to the double bottoms; all the way to the bottom of the holes. Then they yelled, "Everybody topside!" so Bailey and I went back up. Finally Bailey says, "What the hell are we doing this for! This is Sick Bay, let's just stay here." That's what we did. We sat there. I remember feeling very safe because I got this steel deck over my head. And Bailey was watching incoming strafing aircraft through the porthole he had his head in. And I distinctly remember telling him two or three times, "Bailey,

you're going to get your damn head shot off!" (laughter) He didn't but that's one of the main things I remember is that dumb clown looking out the porthole watching these incoming planes.

A1: We took a bomb hit forward of the ship. It didn't hit the ship per say. But we had a motor whaleboat that was tied up just forward of the bow. The engineer had already got into the boat and had the motor started. The Bow Hook and the Coxswain was coming down the piling; they looked up and this plane was just above mast height. The guy dropped a bomb. The engineer of course, jumped out in the water. The Bow Hook and the Coxswain swung around behind the pilings and the bomb hit the aft part of the whaleboat; tore the rudder off and everything. So the bomb was a delayed action I guess, because it didn't explode until it got to the bottom and the engineer was in the water. Well they brought him, the Bow Hook and the Coxswain jumped in the water and pulled him out and brought him up to the battle dressing station.

Q: What sort of shape was he in?

A1: We thought he had bought the course. He was spitting blood and everything; across his chest we thought was crushed. So we sent him to the hospital and a week later here he come walking back aboard ship. And needless to say we was all quite surprised because we figured well he'd had it because...

Q: Lucky man.

A1: He was very lucky.

A: I wonder, you know that burn case off the *Oglala*, we treated him with tannic acid jelly, which you know in those days was the accepted treatment for burns. Since then over the years, been around the medical department, it was the worse thing we could have done for him. Reduction of scars after tannic acid jelly is horrific. Now they recommend ice water and sterile Vaseline but this poor sailor, we treated him with tannic acid jelly.

A1: Well, you had nothing else, you didn't know any better.

A: That was the accepted method of treatment in those days. Bailey and I were (unclear) nothing else available. We were by ourselves and we couldn't get into it. We were only H.A.Deuces and they wouldn't let us get into it.

A1: We had another hit aft. They dropped another bomb and we had these big hawsers of course, wire hawsers holding us to the dock and the bomb hit one of these hawsers and exploded. I could put that 159 shrapnel holes in the fantail of the thing. We had a couple of guys hit. They brought them down and of course we bandaged them up and sent them back up. Somebody told me later, I couldn't remember, was one of the guys killed on that hit?

A: No.

A1: I thought it was just a couple of them that....

A: The only patient I ever saw like I said, I was attached to the dental department. I was down there that day just... I think it was you and Dr. Powell, took that piece of shrapnel out of that guys head, about the size of a pea. Apparently it had penetrated the skin and bounced off the skull and come back. So we just nicked the skin and the piece of shrapnel came right out.

A1: But I think really, the thing that I remember, remember the hammerhead crane, the Navy Yard workers abandoned that thing, and they called for volunteers to man it, and some of our men went up and manned that thing and was lifting those PT boats out in the water? Remember that?

A: No. I remember worrying about somebody saying that the *Ramapo* was going to (unclear)

A1: This *Ramapo* was carrying ammunition and high-test gasoline. They got behind us and it was a little weird.

A: Now I was thinking what if that hammerhead crane gets hit and falls on top of the *Rigel*, now that was a possibility that entered my mind but I don't know...

A1: Well there was PT boats that they had on the dock, at the end of it. As I understand, Holmes and some of the men manned this thing and was lifting the PT boats out in the water. As they was lifting this one off, this kid got a .50-caliber going and shot one of the planes down, as he was lifting this PT boat over in the water.

Q: Moving target from a moving mount.

A1: (laughter) Yeah, that's about it.

A: Sure was something for the Japanese intelligence though in the book, "At Dawn We Slept" there was a sketch by one of the bomber pilots that flew that strike and shows the hits, severe damage, and minor damage inflicted on the fleet. The *Rigel* is marked as 'serious damage', and the reason was, she wasn't hit, but we were dismantled. They had torn us apart to rebuild the bridge. So I can understand why a fighter pilot would think well here's a major damaged ship. We were damaged, but not by them. That thing is marked in that book as 'major damage'. (laughter) And it shows the two bomb hits also. The guy, they took two bomb hits, one fore, and one aft. They was near misses.

A1: Actually, our job involved primarily rescue. We sent all of our boats our and everything to pick men up off the *Oklahoma* and the *Arizona*, and you know, out of the water. That was our primary mission I think. It's all we could do.

A: There was nothing to fight with. There was no guns or anything else.

Q: They were bringing the men back to the *Rigel* for you to treat?

A1: No. No...they...course they were taking them to the beach and offloading to go back for more.

A: Most of them went to the *Solace*, or to hospitals.

A1: Those that wasn't hit, they just off-loaded them there on the dock and went back for more. In fact, actually, on that Monday night I went over on the *Oklahoma*. We worked most of the night and all day long and so I remembered that we had a Corpsman over there named Dolan. You remember Dolan of course.

A: Yep.

A1: And I reminded the Chief that Dolan had been over on the *Oklahoma* all Monday, all during the day and asked him was he going to send a relief over, and he said, "Yeah." he said, "You." So you know, somebody had to go so I said, "O.K. but be sure and send me relief over at midnight." They had a midnight boat, relief crews coming over at midnight. He assured me that he would and you might know, he didn't. The relief boat came over and there was no Corpsman on it so I was stuck.

Q: Well, tell me what you did, Mr. Jenkins, over on the *Oklahoma*?

A1: Well, this is what I'm getting to. About 2:00, well we heard tappings, oh probably about 12:30, and so the Navy Yard workmen by this time they quit using the cutting torches of course. They was using these diamond dipped drills, and boy they was peeling through that steel like it was butter. And when they'd get one of the drill bits dull they just toss it over in the water. And you know, those things are pretty expensive but it didn't matter.

Q: Under the circumstances...

A1: Under the circumstances. So we cut, they cut through the double hull and we got the last two men out about 2:00 in the morning and so I put them in the motor launch. And of course they had these white blankets so all they had on was a pair of scivvys. So we started out taking them to the *Solace*, the hospital ship. They asked me what time it was. I said, "It's Tuesday morning about 2:00." And they couldn't believe it! They thought that really, the time compression really showed up there because they thought it was about 4:00 in the afternoon on a Sunday. And here it was 2:00 in the morning, Tuesday morning. The interesting part is, we rounded the point where the *Arizona* was. They had a minesweeper I think, or a tug type minesweeper tied up at the fantail at the *Arizona*. And this sentry shot at us. Well I just stiffened up and slid to the bottom of the boat. One of these guys said, "What's the matter doc. That's a good clean death." They didn't even bat a eye out of it. So we took them on over to the *Solace* and of course took them aboard and checked them in and everything, and got a cup of hot coffee and a cigarette(?) and back to the *Oklahoma*. So about 9:00 Tuesday morning, here come a boat over and still no Corpsman. So I abandoned ship. I left.

I got back aboard ship. I was mad, needless to say. So the doc, I saw Dr. Cowan first thing. I told him.

Q: What was the doctors name?

A1: Cowan... J.S. Cowan... Dr. Cowan.

Q: How is that spelled?

A1: C-O-W-A-N. And so Dr. Cowan says, "Well go on up and take a shower and go to bed and sleep as long as you need to." So I went on up and was getting a shower. Here come Leo with a Coke heavily laced with brandy, compliments of Dr. Cowan. And so I drank that and had my hot shower and I went back and hit the sack then. And boy I was out, what, about twelve hours.

A: Yeah you were out for quite a while.

A1: I was... I mean I had it. So me and my Chief never did get along after that needless to say. There was little love lost there. (laughter) So I guess I had the...

A: I think you were... that's when that... it was Dr. Cowan and myself took that piece of shrapnel out of that kid. You were asleep, I remember that.

A1: It may have been. Anyway, uh...

A: What we did was just nick the skin and pop that little piece of shrapnel out.

A1: Now I forgot what I was going to say. Oh, I guess that the two fellahs that we took off the *Oklahoma* that night was the last two that was rescued as far as I know. I remember that I made some notes after I was back aboard ship. I think one of them was a Shipfitter 2nd Classman and the other one was a Carpenters Mate, 2nd Class, that uh, we took off. And that's the last two that I know of that we rescued. Because when I came back, why, they could get no more soundings the rest of the night. So the next morning they figured, well we've got all of them that we're going to get out of there. Because after all, this was 48 hours later, by that time. Let's see... Monday... Yeah 48 hours. And uh, I know that was the end of mine. I didn't go back over there. And that's about all the recollections I have of the immediate proceedings up to date.

about...

A: Considering... Considering it was a non combat vessel with nothing to work with, it was interesting. But uh, like I say, when I stepped out of the dental office on the 01 level, the first thing I'd seen was that plane bank up and those big red balls. And that's when I headed to the Sick Bay which was forward. I didn't stop to look at anything else. There wasn't much to see at that time, smoke and flames was about all you could see really.

A1: You know I was telling you about the...

A: You didn't stop to look anyway. No time for sightseeing.

A1: Yeah, I was telling you about when I was looking out the porthole and I saw the Argon shoot this plane that banked up. I remember I wrote down, that was the plane that when it banked and circled back around, it was the one that hit the Naval Hospital, but...

Q: That was the one that crashed through...?

A1: MMHMMM. I wrote this down so it must have been, cause I had it written down in some notes that the plane I saw, when it banked up and it peeled off, and it was hit why it came back around and crashed into the hospital..

Q: Whatever happened to your notes?

A1: I got them down in my...I've got a book... my wife.... I spent 30 years in the Navy, and at my retirement party my wife presented me with a book that she had, of memoirs of the day I entered the Navy until the day I retired.

Q: You know, I'd like to get a copy of those notes. If you can send me a copy.

A1: I've got them. I've got them right here with me. They're just a few things that I jotted down. I don't know why I done it. I never did figure out where she got them from (laughter). I couldn't figure out where she got half the stuff that's in that book really.

Q: I'd be...

A1: In fact, I'll go down and get the book and bring it back up I wanted to get through here and then you can look at it.

Q: Yeah, I'd like to see that.

A1: In fact I got some... I wrote her a letter. I was with the 5th Marine Division later on at Iwo Jima, and she's even got a.... Do you remember the ... you've heard of the 'V-mail' deals? I was sitting there in a foxhole writing her a V-mail deal (laughter) She's got that thing in there.

A: You know, speaking of that, it's odd because the last time I was with mother over on the west coast, that's been over 20 years ago now, one of the things she showed me - remember that little postcard that they gave us? You wrote to your folks and you checked, 'I am injured.' 'I am well.' and she still had this stupid postcard for that many years. (laughter) I suppose she's still got it. But I remember them passing those out and said everybody fill them out, and they mailed them for us. And she's still got it, 'I am well.' What the hell else was on there?... just for a joke was, 'I am killed.' (laughter)

A1: Yeah, I know my folks later on told me when I came back to the states that I was reported dead and everything else you know, at the home town. They was calling them and everything else. So until they got the mail back through, why they was quite worried about it, since the newspaper called and told them that I was listed as being killed and everything. It turned out I wasn't thank God. In fact I'm still here, evidently (laughter)

A: They were getting some pretty good information to have somebodies name in that mess.

A1: Oh gosh yeah. But that's about all that I could think of for right now.

A: Yeah, our part was really rather insignificant. In fact, the *Rigel*... you mention the USS *Rigel* and people say, "What kind of disease is that?" (laughter) No, but we didn't do anything. We didn't have anything to do anything with for that matter.

A1: Well, except for them people that we rescued and things like this...

A: Oh fire and rescue. We did fire and rescue which was normal. That poor clown off the *Oglala*, I think he was just wandering down the dock or gangway to watch, dragged him and sent him up to us in the Sick Bay. But I think he was delirious when he was wandering down the dock, wherever that explosion was.

A1: You know, I talked to a fellow off the *Oglala*, back in Sacramento, one of those state ... California State Conventions, and he said, "You know the thing that I remember about that day?" He said, "After we came off the *Oglala*," he wasn't hurt or anything, but he came over to *Rigel* to eat dinner that evening, and he said, "Man, that was the best food I had had, and boy did it ever taste good." But we had a commissary department aboard that ship that was outstanding. I think it was one of the best feed ships out there. But uh... that's what a lot of the fellows that come aboard, for some reason you know, they always remember the galley that we had... the food that we had. And uh... we had a Chief Commissary Steward on there that was just an outstanding man. He would go out and get fresh vegetables and fresh fruit and he bought an old Chevrolet pickup out there just to go scouting for food and different things.

Q: It's funny how when you ask people what they remember about their ship, you know the... well one thing you get most often was 'Oh she was a good feeder' or 'food was lousy'. People, can't remember a bomb that blew up you know, ten feet from them but they can sure remember that food.

A1: That's the number one...

A: To most sailors that's the way a ship is remembered; how she fed them. I'm like you, everywhere over the years that I spent in the Navy, the 20 some years, someone mention a ship and they say 'Oh she's a bum feeder' or 'a good feeder' and from there on

out there you go. And no matter what kind of ship it is from submarine to battleship, they're all alike.

A1: I'll tell you the ship that was a good feeder, the morale was usually up. If it was a bum feeder, morale was down. It was a very good indicator of how the food was aboard ship was to how the morale was. It was a very significant part in the morale aspect of it.

Q: O.K. well, thank you very much.

A and A1 (jointly return thanks)