

#166 GEORGE HOGAN: USS *LEXINGTON*

(Conversation off-mike)

**Bart Fredo (BF):** Okay, I'm going to slate this. The following interview is with George Hogan and it was conducted on December 3, 1986 in Honolulu. And it's about four o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Hogan lives here in Honolulu. And the interview was conducted by me, Bart Fredo, and also in the room is Mark Tanaka-Sanders, who is with the National Park Service.

Mr. Hogan let me briefly start you off by asking you to tell us your name and where you were from back in 1941.

**George Hogan (GH):** My name is George Hogan and I'm originally from San Leandro, California.

BF: What branch of the service were you in and what was your rank, back in '41?

GH: I was in the Navy and at the time of the attack, I was a Fireman Third Class.

BF: And you were stationed aboard which ship?

GH: I was aboard the USS *LEXINGTON*, one of the fleet carriers here.

BF: Now, the *LEXINGTON* and some of the other carriers of the fleet were at sea the day of the attack. Tell us a little bit about that. How far out at sea were you?

GH: Well, we were about, I would say, 700 miles west of here in the direction of Midway.

BF: Going in which direction, back to Pearl?

GH: No, we were heading for Midway. We were taking Marine fighter planes as replacements, reinforcements, to Midway Island.

BF: And you got word of the attack that morning?

GH: We went to general quarters at about 8:30 and, well, after we were general quarters, then they passed the word that hostilities had started and there was an air raid going on at that moment at Pearl Harbor.

BF: They announced this over the ship's loudspeaker?

GH: Oh, after we, . . . yeah. The, well, for the reason, it was to tell us it wasn't a drill GQ, it was the real thing.

BF: Did they tell you very much, initially, about what had happened?

GH: Not really. I imagine the command knew but as far as we knew, there had been considerable damage and there had been some serious damage and some heavy casualties, but the full extent wasn't known. No. Not to the general crew, I'm sure.

BF: What other ships were traveling with the *LEXINGTON*?

GH: We were with the heavy cruiser *CHICAGO*, *PORTLAND*, *ASTORIA*, and five destroyers. There was nine of us.

BF: But the *LEXINGTON* was the only carrier in this particular task force?

GH: The only carrier in our task group.

BF: What happened next? Did the ship turn around and head back towards Pearl?

GH: No, we stayed out and from subsequent results, I'm sure that we had orders to stay out and search, try to find the Japanese, but we didn't find them. We looked for the biggest part of the next week and didn't find any trace.

BF: So you diverted from your cruise to Wake to look for . . .

GH: No, we were to Midway.

BF: . . . the Japanese fleet. I'm sorry, Midweek, Midway, excuse me.

GH: Yeah. And I'm not sure at this time yet whether we actually launched those Marine fighter planes to reinforce Midway or not. I was an engineer so I wasn't on the flight deck, so I didn't really know. Anyway, we stayed out for the following week on kind of a hopeless search, as it turns out now.

BF: Never saw anything?

GH: Never saw anything.

BF: Turned around and came back to Pearl Harbor when?

GH: They ordered us back into Pearl on the fourteenth. So we came back into Pearl Harbor the following Sunday morning.

BF: Describe what you saw.

GH: Well, the . . . what we saw was not what we expected. I mean, we expected to see something, but not as bad as it was. And the only strong impression that I still retain today is as we were coming in, they had the crew at quarters on the flight deck, which was usual. And usually when 3,000 men are at quarters, there's a little bit of jostling and horseplay. And the thing that I still remember is the silence. (Clears throat) There wasn't a sound. And that sticks with me.

BF: When you went by Battleship Row and you saw all this devastation, was there conversation among the men on the deck?

GH: Not really. Not really. Maybe just somebody standing next to you, but no big demonstration. There wasn't any outpouring of rage, just, you know, shock.

BF: What kind of activity was going on that day when you came in?

GH: There was all kinds of salvage work starting and there was numerous small boats still operating in the harbor. And the harbor was full of oil, so that was another thing I remember, the extent of the oil spilled in the harbor. Of course, the fires were all out, but . . . and it was just, we just -- it was this total damage. It was just hard to imagine that was the fleet.

BF: Did you have an opportunity to talk to anybody who had lived through the attack?

GH: No, because as soon as we got out of Fox-nine, which was our pier, on the backside of Ford Island, they started organizing working parties and everybody that wasn't on watch was on a store's party or working party of some kind. And small boats, or the fifty-foot boats going over to the supply dock.

BF: What did you do?

GH: I worked up until way late in the morning, after midnight. It was a working party on a fifty-foot launch that was running back and forth between the ship and the supply base.

BF: Supply your own ship?

GH: Supplying us, yeah. We didn't engage any in the salvage work at all. No, we had all we could handle.

BF: How long did the *LEXINGTON* stay in port?

GH: As near as I can recall, it was probably -- it was very short. It was probably forty-eight hours or less.

BF: And then how did it go?

GH: And then we went out on patrol again.

BF: Do you remember for how long?

GH: No, I don't. But I know we never went anyplace very far from Pearl, I mean any great distance, until early February, we made a long range . . .

BF: Of '42?

GH: In '42. We made a long range patrol and hit-and-run over to the Solomons. And that was about the first time that we really strayed far, a great distance, from Pearl.

BF: Am I right, the ship was in and out of Pearl a lot during the December of '41 and throughout '42?

GH: Yeah. Yeah. We made fairly short patrols, as I recall -- and it's getting kind of long time ago -- but I don't recall ever us being out for any great length of time until we made the patrol in February, when we went to the Solomons.

BF: Because you were in and out, you were away for part of the time when repairs were being made. Each time you came back, did you notice a marked improvement in the situation?

GH: No. I don't suppose, maybe we weren't looking for it. But I never noticed anything really, you know, advancing that fast. The harbor was clearing up fairly well, you know, the oil seemed to be working it's way out or being cleaned up. But as far as the ships, they still looked pretty bad.

BF: It looked as bad in . . .

GH: That was my impression, yeah, that, you know, you just had the feeling they're never going to get this straightened out.

BF: When you were in port, did you have occasion to go ashore?

GH: Oh yeah, yeah. We were free to go ashore later on, when we'd come back in off patrol and . . . but like I said, I didn't go to town too often, because there wasn't too much to do when you got in town. And so our gang used to make a lot of our liberties right there at the enlisted men's beer hall, which, as I remember, was about where Bloch Arena is now, down by [*Merry Point*].

BF: So you didn't really go very far.

GH: So we really didn't go far. The only time I can really remember going into town was we had an opportunity to make phone calls. We had to go to the phone company building in Honolulu and make an application to make a phone call through our parents or wives or whatever. And that was almost a day's process right there. You had to be interviewed and they told you what you could say and what you couldn't say. You don't talk about this, you don't talk about weather, you know. So all you could really say was, "I'm still alive. How are you?"

BF: So martial law did affect your life and it affected . . .

GH: It did, yeah.

BF: . . . with your liberty.

GH: Yeah.

BF: Did you have an opportunity to know any civilians during that period?

GH: No, not in Honolulu.

BF: So, basically, the people you knew were other Navy men?

GH: Yeah, people off other ships, my own ship.

BF: Eventually, just very briefly, summarize your war activities after Pearl Harbor.

GH: Oh, after . . .

BF: The attack.

GH: You mean like to the end of the war?

BF: Yeah, but very briefly summarize.

GH: Oh, yeah, briefly. Well, we, like I said, we had less than five months and May we went into the Coral Sea and we were sunk there.

BF: Were you aboard?

GH: Yeah. And then we were taken back to San Diego, the survivors. And then we were sent to different ships over the fleet. I was sent to an escort

carrier, at Seattle, wound up in the Atlantic fleet and we patrolled the mid-Atlantic for submarines all of '43. At the end of '43, I was transferred off to a light fleet carrier in Philadelphia. And as soon as we went on commission, then we came back out to the Pacific, then I spent the last seventeen months on this light carrier.

BF: Did you come through unscathed?

GH: I never got a scratch.

BF: Even when you were sunk with the *LEXINGTON* in the Coral Sea?

GH: Yeah. The only thing I got was some rope burns on my hands from sliding too fast down the rope. But no injuries.

(Conversation off-mike.)

BF: Yes, yes, good point to stop. Is there anything else . . .

(Taping stops, then restarts)

BF: Did someone come in wanting to let us know something?

--: No, no, I got the message here.

(Conversation off-mike.)

BF: A lot of people who went through World War II, particularly people who went through the attack on Pearl Harbor, still hold some bad feelings about Japanese, Japan.

GH: Mm-hm.

BF: Where do you come down on that?

GH: I don't have any at all, really, actually.

BF: Did you ever?

GH: No, because I was born and raised in California. I lived in a town that had more than just a few Japanese people. I went to school with a lot of Japanese kids, so I never developed any feelings that way about them. I mean they were just guys I went to school with. And during the war, I didn't have too much patience with them, but after the war, I figured it's done. And then after the war, I went back to the Mainland, I worked with a lot of Japanese when I used to work for an oil company, and I worked with a lot of Japanese-Americans. And I just can't feel that way.

BF: Do you ever talk to other veterans, particularly survivors of Pearl Harbor and hear the negative feelings they have?

GH: Oh sure. We run into people all the time down at the Memorial that still of 'em are very bitter. Some of them are very negative and they just can't understand why I don't want to strangle -- I never get into it. I never argue with them, I just tell them I don't feel that way and let it go at that.

BF: You are a volunteer at the memorial. Has there been any interesting things that have happened to you?

GH: Nothing extremely unusual. One thing that surprised me, I mean, you know, is everybody figures there's no hope for the younger generation, that they don't give a damn about anything. But down there, I'm surprised that the young people that are interested, you know, they want to, they come up and they've got some questions they want answered and they express great interest.

BF: I would think that while you've been out there, you might have run into some survivors who've come back. Has that happened to you?

GH: I have never met an *ARIZONA* survivor myself.

BF: Or Pearl Harbor?

GH: Oh, lots of Pearl Harbor survivors, yeah. Yeah, we get them frequently.

BF: How do they react?

GH: Some of them are very much in control and some of them get -- nobody really breaks, and they don't really break down, but some of them are a little moved emotionally. It's easy to tell. And some more than others, but they all feel it, I'm sure. It's evident.

BF: Do they talk?

GH: They'll talk, yeah, most of them. There's one point, it'll point out where their ship was and . . .

BF: Does it seem to help that they verbalize?

GH: It seems like they want to talk about it, because, you know, nobody's pushing 'em and they come up and volunteer. But some of 'em just seem -- and then I've talked to several in the last three or two years that I've been here that it's been the first time they've been back since, and they seem to be glad that they're there.

BF: Have you had any Japanese visitors? Either war veterans or civilians?

GH: Personally, I've never met any ex-Japanese servicemen. They have been there, but I have never met, I've always been off when they were there. I never came in contact with them. But there are Japanese civilians, tourists that come down, that were, probably, well, they were in Japan, I'm sure, at the time. And they, for the biggest point, they don't talk too much.

BF: Can you tell how the older Japanese visitors are reacting?

GH: It's very hard. They're very quiet. And they're very reserved and it's kind of like almost reverent.

BF: More so than the average American visitor?

GH: The average, yeah. There are more Japanese that come down there that act like they're in church than there are American people that do.

BF: Do the young Japanese seem to act the same way as the older Japanese?

GH: For the biggest part, yeah. In my opinion, the Japanese are very good tourists down there, I mean in the sense that they are respectful, quiet and it seems like that they're . . .

BF: They know where they are.

GH: . . . reflecting on what happened. I always think that maybe they feel the same way I did when I went to Hiroshima. I certainly didn't feel like doing a big cheer when I was there. I don't apologize for what happened, it had to be done, but I don't think it was something to go and get exultant over it. And I think they probably feel the same way.

BF: He's very good. That's excellent. You know, that's the kind of stuff there would make it good . . .

END OF INTERVIEW