

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#419

GEORGE H. KAHANU, SR.

PEARL HARBOR NAVY YARD CIVILIAN, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON

DECEMBER 6, 2001

BY KAREN BYRNE AND ART GOMEZ

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Karen Byrne (KB): This is oral history number 419. The following oral history interview was conducted by Karen Byrne and Art Gomez of the National Park Service, for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, on December 6, 2001 at 5:50 p.m. The person being interviewed is George Kahanu, who was a welder at the naval shipyard on December 7, 1941. For the record, would you please state your full name, place of birth and birth date?

George Kahanu (GK): Full name, George Hawae Kahanu. Born in October 10, 1917 and...

KB: Place of birth.

GK: Place of birth, Kalihi, Honolulu, Oahu.

KB: And what did you consider your hometown in 1941?

GK: My hometown was Honolulu, Oahu.

KB: And what were your parents' names?

GK: My dad was George Kealoha Kahanu and my mother was Florence Kahanu.

KB: Okay. And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

GK: Hmm. Three, four sisters and three brothers.

KB: Okay. Where did you go to high school?

GK: Kamehameha School for Boys.

KB: And I know at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor you were actually working as a civilian welder, so could you tell us a little bit about how you came to be working in that position, what kind of training you had and how you came to be a welder?

GK: Okay. In the school that I went to, Kamehameha School for Boys, they had a program both academic and vocational and about the tenth grade you had

to select subject that you thought you'd be interested in. And the program consisted of the first three months rotating from, we had subjects that were specified that you had to take and then electives. And you had to take carpentry, electrician and then one elective and I selected to take welding because I thought it would be an interesting trade. And so the last two years of schooling, we had a program that, what they call vocational training, and you would go out and work in a particular shop, any shop, whatever it was, for two weeks and then you'd come back in school for two weeks. So when you went out to work in the shops, wherever it was, you'd work with qualified mechanics, real journeymen, I mean people who knew the business. And that way you got to be, you know, you picked up the experience, not from so much books, but from actually learning from these people who, you know, you assisted or helped working.

So I did that for two years then when I graduated I went and I worked at that time what was known as the Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company. And this was a commercial company that provided transportation between islands. And they had like the *Humuula*, the *Hawaii*, the *Waialeale* and the *Hualalai*, four ships sailing. And two of them were combination ships. At

that time, they would go to the outside islands, these two, *Humuula* and *Hawaii*, and they would load with cattle. They were cattle boats. And then they also had spaces for passengers. So these two boats did that, hauling cattle, and then they had two ships that had cargo space and they carried like vegetables from the outside islands—cabbage, tomatoes or whatever—and they would sail every evening from Honolulu and go to the outside islands. So this was the way of commuting between islands. And I worked there until a couple of years from—I graduated in 1937 and I worked from there for about a year.

And about that time, the American Bureau of Shipping came in with new regulations for compartmentation of the ships. You had to make the ships watertight, so we had a lot of jobs installing these watertight bulkheads and things. And then shortly after that, the employees decided to go on strike to get more money and the company said, Stanley Kennedy, the owner says, “Hey, I’m losing money already so I’ll shut down,” and he shut the company down.

So from there, because of that, I went to work for E. E. Black, contractor, who was one of the big contractors in Honolulu in those days. And I worked for him until just prior to September of 1940.

And then I had a friend call me, this guy used to work with me and he, Clarence, told me, "George, you know, you want a new job? Come down to Pearl Harbor. Come down and work for Pacific Bridge," because at that time, the navy had let contracts out to build two new dry docks in Pearl Harbor.

Dry dock number two, which was going to be thousand feet long and dry dock number three, which was going to be one about 497 feet. And the smaller one was for submarines and destroyers. The big one was for carriers and battlewagon.

So I came down, actually I came to the shipyard to work for Pacific Bridge. And at that time, if you were a welder, you'd have to be certified.

KB: And was it fairly rigorous to be certified?

GK: Right. You know, you had to pass this welding test and that was welding samples. And if you passed it then it meant you qualified and a difference in pay like from non-qualified, you get dollar an hour and you do tacking work. But if you were qualified, it was like dollar and a quarter an hour. So you know, it made sense to be a certified welder.

KB: Extra twenty-five cents an hour if you're certified.

GK: Twenty-five cents an hour, right.

KB: Right.

GK: And at that time, the Pacific Bridge, they were working all hours. You wanted all overtime hours...

KB: Right.

GK: ...beside the forty hours. So...

KB: So how did they decide that you were certified?

GK: Well, it would be, they'd take the samples. You welded like a piece of, two pieces of plate, six by six, and one side of it was V-ed out and then they set up in an overhead position and then you'd have to weld in an overhead position, which was the most difficult for welding overhead. And then after you were through, they'd take it and they'd cut strips out of it, maybe three strips, and then they'd put it in a press and they press it into a U shape. And if the weld held and didn't crack or show any porosity, then you'd have passed. It'd have to be bent, 180 degrees right around. And you had to do two samples. And so if you passed both place, sample welds, you'd be certified.

KB: And you became certified in 1940?

GK: Right, uh-huh.

KB: Right.

GK: So I became a certified welder. But the person was named by the name of _____, he liked the welding that I did. So before I got through, he went in the shop and called the shop master and told him, “Hey, this guy, he’s a pretty good welder.”

So the shop master, Duncan Ellis, came out and he tells me, “George, you want to work for shipyard? How about coming to the shipyard?”

And so I asked him, “Well, what’s in it?”

He said, “Well, you got job for life,” you know, “you’ll be here, you can retire.”

Said, “How about the pay?”

Well, that’s another story because at that time you had three classifications.

You had a third class welder, \$1.06 an hour and a second class made \$1.12.

And then a first class, you made \$1.18. Didn't make sense to me, right. I'd start \$1.06 versus \$1.25. I said, "No, I think I want to go Pacific Bridge."

Said, "Yeah," he says, "but let me tell you something. You see, that job going to last maybe two or three years and when it's over, you have to come back and see me for a job." Said, "And you know what? I'm not going to hire you."

So I mean, you know, I didn't need too much shoving to make up my mind, right. I figured well, two years versus lifetime. I think I better take the lifetime job. So I decided to work for the shipyard.

KB: That's how you came to be in the shipyard.

GK: I never went back to Pacific Bridge any more. I started, actually I started September 16 of 1940 in the shipyard.

KB: In the shipyard.

GK: Yeah. So...

KB: So were you...

GK: Now, at that time, Duncan Ellis told me, "What else have you done in your experience?"

So I told him, I had worked in the shipyard in town and for a construction company. And I was a certified welder in the state. So he says, "Well, you could be either a welder or a ship fitter."

And I thought, well, I knew I could become a first class welder in no time, but a ship fitter might have taken me a little bit longer, so I decided to be a welder.

So, like I say, I started as a welder in the shipyard, September 16 of 1940. I remember that day vividly.

KB: Your anniversary.

Art Gomez (AG): Can I ask you just a technical question? Were you using acetylene at that time?

GK: Well, I tell you, both. You see, when I went in, I was qualified. Now, in the shipyard, in the categories for welders, you had burner, acetylene-oxygen burner and you had a welder, gas welder, and you did gas welding. Then you had a welder, electric welder that did nothing but welding, electric welding. And then you had a combination welder who was qualified to do all four. So when I went in, I was qualified to do all four. Because as a welder, for example, you might be assigned to the machine shop, and machine shop, when they machine things, maybe the machinist would cut too deep and they would send it over to the welder to have it rebuilt, so you have to weld it, weld it up and then they'd recut it again, you know. So if they made mistakes, it was the welder who repaired by welding. So if you ask me about oxygen-acetylene welding, at that time, they had oxygen-acetylene. We already had oxy-acetylene welding. We call it oxygen and acetylene welding and plus the electric.

AG: And what about the actual technique for welding? Did it vary from civilian shipyards to military shipyards?

GK: Not really. The actually, qualification, passing the test, 'cause you know different welders, when you first weld you have a technique of—some people weave it, some people drag it, you know. If you're working overhead, then you kind of building up and down, up and down, up and down. And so the technique that the welder develops, it depends on the individual really on how he manipulates that rod around. And so in a lot of cases, if you hold a fine bead, you keep the air from getting to the metal, the hot metal, and you reduce the porosity in the welding and even to where you have some cracks in the welding. So you know, the individual develops his own technique pretty much. But again the, really the qualification or the requirement is passing that sample test to become, you know, certified.

KB: Certified.

GK: And the navy was very critical about, you know, doing a hundred percent welding job. Yeah. Maybe I should explain about the welding rod, no? _____, I'll talk about it.

KB: Okay. So you were working in the shipyard still in 1941, just before the attack?

GK: Yeah.

KB: And what you were telling me earlier about some of your specific, the ships that you were working on at that time, maybe you can tell us about that.

GK: Yeah, well, prior to the seventh of December, I had been working on the *San Francisco*. We were welding down the foundation for gun mounts and these two cruisers came in the shipyard, the *St. Louis* and *Honolulu*, two light cruisers. And they came in the shipyard and they were berthed at Baker-21. The *Honolulu* was inboard, next to the dock, and then the *St. Louis* was outboard, tied next to her. They were side by side in the—and we were reassigned on our job to go over and weld and work on these two ships. And

the job that we had to do basically was to weld rivets in the main battery gun mounts. And if you know rivets, the outside face is countersunk and flush, but the inside you have the rivet head. So what we had to do was go in there and weld all these rivets, rim the rivets. But before starting the job, I told the chief in the compartment, in the turret, that we had to get some interference moved and the chief says, “Well, I tell you, let me tell you, you’re not going to move anything that couldn’t be reinstalled and on the line, back in service in eight hours.”

So now the question is, why eight hours? Why not four? Why not twelve hours? He said, “Well, we have been tracking, the navy now, has been tracking the Japanese fleet over this past several weeks,” and whatever. And he said, “You know, if we get the word that we’re being attacked, we got to get that equipment back in a hurry to get under way.”

So I says, “Okay,” that made sense because I’m not in the turret if we’re under fire. You guys are. So whatever you take out, right, _____ . If you don’t take it out, then that’s the chance you take. You take, you’re in the turret, not me.

So you know, we had this. But when we finished our job—and we had to do it in a week’s time—came in Monday, we finished on Saturday and then we were reassigned to come in for Sunday work. Our Sunday was supposed to be like a day when you weren’t supposed to work hard because, you know, you’ve done your share during the week, you really put out and all of that and now you’re coming in on assist work.

So that day, Sunday, December 7, we, about ten of us came into work. And usually we started five to seven we get a whistle, two whistles blow, “Bloooo, blooo,” and that’s to get ready, you know, get ready to go to work. And five to seven, the supervisor in charge, the senior man, comes out and he says, “Well, you guys, you can rest a little bit because you can’t get the welding rods. It’s locked, secured.”

And the welder boss had gone home to get the welding keys because he had forgotten the keys at home. So we’re sitting there and we’re talking stories, you know, about the football game Saturday night and this is Sunday and

what happened. And then we heard all this bombing going on, “Boom, boom, boom!”

And it was coming from the direction of Hickam Field. And so you know, we thought, wow, something’s happening. And it continued a little bit more so we thought, hey, we better go out and look around, see what’s happening. So we walked towards the back end of the shop and out the side door and when we went out, we looked and Hickam Field was on fire! You know, black smoke and shrapnel flying. And seemed like maybe three, four seconds and then here comes this torpedo bomber, right over the signal tower. And you could see it as plain as could be. The pilot had rolled the canopy back and there he was, you know, like looking around and looking at us, the guys, or whatever. And he went on down past the supply building and the admiral’s quarters, Alii Road, and then down by the submarine channel and I guess couple hundred feet from the Battleship Row, he dropped his torpedo and you could see the splash. Well, actually he was up high a couple hundred feet and then came down to about maybe fifty feet and dropped the torpedo, so you could see the splash.

And we're watching it and a couple of seconds later, boom, against the battleship. We didn't know what battleship it was at that time but we knew it had hit the ship. And you know, you get to the point where you're watching all of this going on and you just, you know, you just can't believe it. And then this dive-bomber comes over from sub base and he comes and it looks like he's headed for the *St. Louis* and *Honolulu*. And by then the gun crews on these two ships I think were firing, so after that pilot dropped his bomb, he veered off, which is a good thing because he was starting to strafe and we were right in line because we were right there at almost the bow of the two ships. And when all those bullets started to fly, it brought us to life, boy I'll tell you! We all came to life. And we all ran for the side of the building to get in the door and the door had shut!

KB: You were locked out.

GK: So we hit the building and we fall flat on our face and we, and pretty soon the plane's over. And we got in the building so my buddy says to me, "George, what are we going to do?"

I said, "You know what, I want to go upstairs. I want to see what's going on out there."

He said, "I'm with you. Let's go."

So we went up topside and we could see the *Oklahoma* out there rolling over. And you know, ten minutes time it appeared like ten minutes she was over, on the port side. So I tell my friend, I says, "Ey Charlie, we go down, you know, this thing went over too fast. A lot of people going to be killed out there."

So we went down and went in to see W. Frears and told him, you know, we were just up there watching this battleship roll over, roll over so fast a lot of people out there got killed or, you know, getting killed.

And he said, "Well, the procedure here is that if they need help, the shipyard commander will call us. If not the shipyard commander, then probably be the production officer, captain. And if not him, maybe the planning officer.

So, okay, so you guys stand by if we need help, you know, get your equipment, whatever.”

And then after a while he says—we went out in the shop and, “Oh, you guys go back there and stand by that fire extinguisher, just in case they come back and they attack the shops.”

So about ten of us, we walk back, different stations and then he came out and he says, “You guys go back to the supply building—it’s around the back end and around the corner— and draw out helmets, wartime, World War II helmets,” you know, army helmets. “You get army helmets and draw out a gas mask.”

KB: These were World War I army helmets and gas masks you were getting?

GK: Yes! (Laughs)

KB: Okay.

GK: Yeah, we were getting, you know, and so we did that. And I'm thinking, man, this is serious because, you know, for that, for us workers to use that, you know, they must be expecting, you know. And I'm thinking, well, you know, I know how to fire a rifle. I was in Kamehameha School and we went through—well, Kamehameha Schools had the military program. We were a military school. I mean military uniform and the whole bit so I wasn't afraid to handle a gun and whatever military requirements. But we never issued a gun. We just issued our helmet and a gas mask.

So we came back in the shop and after the shop got the word that they were going to need some people out there. And we were told that the guy who was going out there would be the supervisor was this person we called Lefty, Julia DeCastro. Yeah, he was our shop hero. And he was a supervisor, _____ . So he selected different people because, you know, not anybody can go out there. So he selected a handful or whatever, six, twelve people. And then we says, "We want to volunteer too."

He said, “No. I only need two burners,” because the burners can cut the plate out, cut the hull plate and then the other people were going out with the chisels that they need with the chipping gun.

So you chip and caulker, you have a chipping gun and this darn thing weighs about twenty pounds and you have a chisel, a round-nose chisel, or V chisel, or even a flat-nose chisel. And get your equipment and I guess maybe about ten o’clock they were ready to go out to the ship. We found out it was the *Oklahoma*. But you see when you got pneumatic guns, pneumatic equipment, you need a lot of compressed air. So it’s not easy at that time to get compressed air out there on the job so what they had to do was first collect the equipment, compressed air machinery. And I think the first equipment that went out there was the diving bunch from Shop 72 because they, the divers, have compressed air. And eventually they loaded a barge with compressors and took them out there.

But meantime, after—well, actually after this crew had left and gone out to the *Oklahoma*, we were told, okay, seemed like all the emergency people needed for any work out on Battleship Row, they had taken care of. The

navy didn't seem to need any more workers out there, so you people go back on your original assignment.

So I went back to the *St. Louis*, where I was working on before, the *St. Louis* and the *Honolulu*. Did I say *St. Louis*? I meant the *San Francisco*.

KB: *San Francisco*.

GK: *San Francisco*, not the *St. Louis*.

KB: All right.

GK: To weld gun mounts and gun mounts at that time were being welded way up on the bridge, or back of the bridge. And it used to take us about maybe a week, week and a half, they come out with this gun ring and you set it down. It has to be level, parallel with the gun director and the people who do that are the machinists, ordnance machinists, or even the design engineers would come out and set the gun ring for level, you know. And then after they do that then the ship fitter would scribe, because on the deck is not perfectly

flat. You got irregularities. And then you have to cut the ring to suit the irregularity so that when you set it down on the deck to be welded, it's perfect, you get a perfect seal. And it used to take us like when they do that and then they machine it and all of that, take us maybe about a week before we get ready to mount the gun.

But that day, when they brought the rings out, what they did then, after they constructed it in Shop 11, it went over to Shop 31, inside machinist, and they would skim the top, make it perfectly level. And then it came back on the ship. And when they did then we had the engineers level it off and everything and then we'd _____, cut it to suit the deck. And then after that we'd weld it down.

Now that took us maybe six hours to do that. And then, you know, it seemed like in no time the guns were ready to be mounted and we used to drill holes to mount. Forget drilling the holes, weld the sucker down, you know. And that's what we did, you know.

So instead of having one welder on each mount, then you'd have three guys on there, three guys welding. So you'd weld your segment, the other guy is welding his segment. And one-third of the time, you're done. So it would take us one shift and we'd have this gun mounted, ready to be fired!

And you know shipyard welding work, it takes a lot of trades and a lot of coordination of work so you can imagine there's times when you're standing by, you know, waiting for this guy to get ready, waiting for that material and that type of thing. But that day, now ordinarily, when a ship comes into dry dock, I mean the shipyard to be, on a regular overhaul, they unload all the fuel. First they go to fuel dock, take off all the fuel. They go to the ordnance depot, remove all the ammo. And then they come in the shipyard, now the ship's empty. And when they do that, and if they have fuel on board in certain areas, they say, "The smoking lamp is out. No hot work."

But that day, if you had nothing to do, we were working from the *San Francisco* across to the *New Orleans* to get ammunition! Now we civilians were carrying ammo from that ship, *New Orleans*, over to *San Francisco* and up to the gun mounts, and these were the five-inch gun mounts.

Because at that time, the guns that we mounted had no ammo then. You know, they were still to be brought out.

But we had five-inch at the gun mounts ready to fire and they did fire when these planes came over. So...

AG: Let me just start, I need a clarification. So you're doing this work between the first wave and the second wave?

GK: It could have been later than that, maybe about the second and the third wave? Somewhere around there, yeah.

AG: So you were actually between the first...

GK: Yeah.

AG: ...wave...

GK: Yeah.

AG: ...are able to mount guns...

GK: Yeah.

AG: ...on the *San Francisco*...

GK: Yeah, yeah.

AG: ...and they are able to actually fire those guns?

GK: Yeah, right, yeah.

AG: But they haven't been leveled. They really...

GK: No, no. They had been. See...

AG: They had.

GK: We had leveled it off and welded the ring down, hundred percent, and then mounted the guns and the guns weren't actually ready to fire because we had, for those guns, anti-aircraft guns, the 1.1 and forty millimeter, they had no ammunition because it had to come from the ammunition depot. But for the five-inch guns, we were able to go across the dock and get the five-inch shells from the *New Orleans* and we carried the shells over to the *San Francisco*.

KB: We're swapping out tapes, so when he starts up the new tape, let's get that on the second tape, the timing. Yeah.

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

(Conversation off-mike)

GK: So I told you about the hot work. Now that is, you know, like complete violations of safety regulations but now, you know, we're not talking about peacetime, we're talking now like, you know, hey, there's action going on. You've got to get with it, you know. And so not only us but all the other trades who weren't doing anything, you know. So as a consequence, when our lunchtime came around, the navy called us down to have sandwich, coffee and they fed us. So...

KB: When you were eating lunch, were you hearing all kinds of news coming in from Battleship Row? Did you hear about the conditions down there?

GK: Well, not at that time, because we're busy working. However, it came about, well, we had to, we worked and they, we were told now when it got dark, sundown, you guys go back to the shop because we can't be welding outside. There is blackout now and if you did any welding, you light up the whole sky, right. So you guys go back in the shop and work, 'cause a lot of work in the shops.

So when I went back in the shop, I saw my friend, this tall, lanky redhead. He was a burner. He's good friend of mine. We used to work on big jobs together. "Hey, Red! I thought you went out to the *Oklahoma*?"

And he started to tear a little bit. I said, "What's the problem?"

He said, "You know, I went out there and they laid out the hole," and the standard manhole, access hole, you lay out, it's eighteen by twenty-three inches, kind of oval like. He said, "After they laid out the hole and they told me to cut," now you can imagine, underneath these guys are pounding, you know. They were anxious to get out. He said, "So I did. I burned."

I would say it probably took him about half an hour or one hour to—because the plate's pretty thick. Now you're talking about the bottom of the battleship. And he said, "When I cut it, finished, and then they lifted the plate out," he said, "those guys in there were all dead."

So you know, he said, "I killed those guys."

I said, “Hey boy, you know, you’re not responsible. They told you do it and you did what you were told.”

He said, “But still yet, you know, I’m the guy.”

So as a result, they sent him back to the shop. And...

AG: What did he mean by that he killed them?

GK: Well, what happened. You see, when you’re burning, especially heavy plate, there’s a lot of slag forming on the bottom side, see. And he said, what he did, by doing that, and you can imagine now, in the hull of the ship now, there’s an air bubble maybe. The water had come in, you know, and the water builds up pressure. And now you’re in a pressure bottle, bubble. And so when this guy burned, you have some oxygen that’s left in there, you know, _____ oxygen and pretty soon he’s burning, slag coming through, hot slag and you can imagine burning their oxygen too. Taking oxygen along with it, see. So that these guys were asphyxiated, right. No oxygen in the _____ and they died.

AG: And they couldn't cut through...

GK: Yeah. So...

AG: How thick was that plate, George?

GK: I would say it would have been at least half-inch, maybe three-quarter inch thick, you know, being the bottom plating. So what they had to do then, see the difference in time it took to cut this hole out, that meant that no more burning work and it all had to be with chipping guns, cutting steel with steel. So by the time when they got all set up and everything, that might have been about two o'clock in the afternoon and they started to make the process easier for cutting, you drill holes. You go and you drill holes maybe every half an inch apart, you know. Now you're drilling right through, right? You're drilling, drilling. And then the chipper comes behind and he cuts the segment between which is relatively easy compared to only chipping because, I tell you, being a chipper and a caulker, in my opinion, is about as hard a work physically as you can get. Now you can imagine these guys are

down on their hands and knees and their working this gun and trying to chip it. When they started, the first group that saved was saved about eight o'clock the next day. So you can imagine, from the time they started until they finally got these people out, was like, what, eight, sixteen, maybe twenty hours of chipping. And you know, you have the military officers there, everybody is concerned about, you know, getting these people out so talk about pressure. Not only trying to get the thing done in a hurry but all these guys are on your back about, you know. And a chipper under best of conditions, if he's standing up and doing the job, that's easy, but now he's down on his hands and knees and the shell of the ship is slippery. And he's, you know, skidding all over, trying to get a good feel for it, you know. That's tough.

AG: Weren't they taking fire at that time too?

GK: Yes, yeah.

AG: ...strafing?

GK: And what do you call, and the smoke, burning, all the burning of the oil and all _____. You know, and _____, you know.
Well...

AG: Wouldn't there be a chance that the tanks, the acetylene tanks could, if it would, explode?

GK: Well, that was one of the reasons why they stopped burning because, you know, some of the compartments that they worked on was free of fumes and, you know. But if you hit a compartment that had fumes in it and they said that some of the compartments had the insulation on the bulkhead, you know, on the overhead, and you're burning through insulation, burning through paint. That all caused noxious gases, you know, so that that would contribute to, you know, people being, well, not having enough air to breathe, not enough oxygen. But when you do it with the chipping gun, then you know, you're not affecting whatever air or whatever is in the compartment. It remains the same.

KB: 'Cause this is just a hand-powered tool.

GK: Yeah.

KB: Right.

GK: You're just using a hand-powered tools...

KB: Right.

GK: ...and that's the compressed air. In fact, compressed air going down in there provides breathing, you know, something to breath. Additional breathing, you know, air. So...

AG: So the trade-off is it's safer but it takes longer.

KB: Longer.

GK: It takes longer. Very much longer. Like I said, when Red had cut that first patch, it took maybe at the most one hour. Now, by chipping, they started

when they did and when they finally rescued anybody, that was like the next day.

KB: At eight.

GK: You know. And they did the bulk of the people that were saved, eventually there was about, what, thirty-one and most of them were saved by the eighth of December. And I think the last person was saved about 2:30 on the ninth, 2:30 in the morning, you know, midnight, past midnight, 2:30 in the morning, when they got the last man out. So that was real tedious work and tedious and hard and I...

KB: So as far as you know, the last people that anybody rescued came out on December 9?

GK: Yeah.

KB: And did they think, at the time, that there were still other people alive trapped in the ship? Could they still hear tapping?

GK: Yeah, what I understand, what the navy did, they posted a watch on the topside, on the side of the ship, to hear, you know, for any more tapping if they would. And they were like, you know, maybe a week, you know, hoping. But you know, if you're only going to live so long on that. Let's face it, you know, the moment you breathe all the air, whatever is in there, that's it. You got no more. So...

AG: Were there other ships that had capsized that were worked on besides the *Oklahoma* that you know of?

GK: Well, there was the *Utah* had capsized too. But the civilians did not go out on *Utah*. What they did, they had military people go out to the *Utah* and I understand they rescued some people by using the torch. Now you talk about being lucky, eh? They did it without any problem. We, in our efforts, failed. I mean, you know. The difference between the two, I often wondered what happened, you know. But I think on the *Utah*, they probably had a great, big compartment that the people, person was in, so that they had a lot of air in that versus with this guy, Red did, probably was in a

cofferdam. And a cofferdam is narrow, you know, and not all that much space in terms of, you know, total volume. So I think that had a lot to do with it.

KB: So very little oxygen.

GK: Yeah.

KB: Right.

GK: Very little in there, you know,

KB: Right.

GK: Uh-huh.

AG: George, before we move on to that night, I'm wondering about the second attack whereby they actually did hit the dry dock and the *Shaw* was exploded and other ships. Were you anywhere near that?

GK: No, no. I, maybe I need to say something about that part of it. My shop was near the repair basin that's on the other end of the shipyard. And that's where we were confined to that area and very little action actually took part in that, you know, in our area. The area that had vision or whatever it was and access to whatever's going on was the Ten-Ten Dock, in the dry dock area. And those people on that shop, Thirty-one and Fifty-six, and those people on that side, they saw everything going on. We saw, from where we were, looking out, Battleship Row. You know, but we were not, except for that crew going out there, our work was confined to the repair basin. But like you said, the *Shaw*. The *Shaw* was on the floating dry dock and, you know, she was attacked and then the bow eventually blew off. And then the *Cassin* and *Downes* in dry dock number one with the *Pennsylvania*, and the shipyard people, Shop 56, and the riggers, did a lot about manning the fire hose to keep, you know, water on the depth charges that they had on these two destroyers and fight the whatever fire was going on, you know. So they were, they did their share, you know.

AG: To your knowledge, were there civilian casualties on that side of the...

GK: No, I don't think, I think we came away from the December 7, if anything, I think we had very little casualties. I don't think we had any casualties, 'cause it wasn't in the shipyard, it wasn't published. You know, usually the word goes around, "Hey, so-and-so got killed," or whatever. But we were fortunate in that respect in that...

KB: That nobody working out on the ships was hurt either.

GK: That's right. Yeah, yeah. Although I was told later that we had one person, because when we were in the shop, I wasn't aware of the fact that other people had come to work that day. So you know, if they went out, they went on their own and we were on our own so I couldn't vouch for, you know, people getting killed and stuff like that. But...

KB: So once it got dark, they sent you inside to work...

GK: Oh yeah, yeah.

KB: ...because of the blackout.

GK: Yeah.

KB: So what were you doing inside?

GK: Well, again, we had plates to butt because, you know, plates come in a certain size and you have to maybe make up larger plates, especially splinter shields, you know, for guns. You put up a plate that's maybe about five feet high, around this gun to keep shrapnel from, you know, hitting the gun crew and the gun foundations and so much to be done. You're making foundations, not only for the gun mounts, but like electronics equipment or machinery base for different pumps and we did a lot of foundation work for the other shops and that type of thing. But there was no end to the amount of work that, you know, we had to do, in that respect, yeah.

KB: And how long did you continue doing that?

GK: Well, I tell you, we worked that night, the first night, 'til midnight. And then, and you know, after six o'clock that evening, usually we take a break. We have a lunch at noon and then you eat about six o'clock, if you're working two shifts. But six o'clock came around and the word was the water's been poisoned in the shipyard and there's no food in the shipyard. So, you know, so by midnight when we went home, you know, we were pretty hungry. But, okay you guys, you go home and you come back tomorrow morning. Okay.

AG: Were the civilian workers expecting another attack?

GK: I think even the military was expecting another attack because like I said, we had to draw out, you know, those helmets and gas masks and I'm thinking, well, on the job we probably wouldn't need it, but in the shop, you would need it, you know, because. And 'cause that night, anything that was flying, guys were shooting at it. They were trigger-happy. So all night long, boom, boom, you're hearing this, you know, from all over the shipyard, guns firing. But again, I think they really expected another, you know, attack.

AG: And what about your families? What were you thinking while you knew you had to stay there, you knew you had to work? Did you have any contact with your families? Did anyone know what, if Honolulu had been hit?

GK: Well, see that morning, December 7, our procedure in the shipyard, we worked in certain areas with pool, carpool, and you go to work. You know, you pick up maybe three or four boys and then you go to work. That morning, my wife drove me and Johnny Santos, Charlie Bailey and another guy, Pat Lederer, into work, all the way to Pearl Harbor. And when she dropped me, I said, “_____, you know, be sure you’re here 3:30, quarter to we get through work.”

So off she went. That day, I was so busy, I never had any thoughts about calling her. I don’t think we could’ve called because I think everything on the phone was censored. I think they totally blacked out. But anyway, so midnight, this friend of mine, Pat Lederer, and I, we lived in the same area, in Kaimuki, behind Pearl Harbor. So I got with Pat. I says, “Pat, we gotta go home.”

“Yeah, how we going home?”

I said, “Well, we go out to the main gate and there must be army vehicles, marine vehicles going to Kaneohe, so we should be able to hike a ride back into town.”

“Okay, good idea.”

So we walked all the way from the shipyard out to the main gate and we talked to the sentry, “You know, we’d like to get a ride to town.”

We showed ‘em our badge, you know, we’re Pearl Harbor workers, and if you stop a military truck or whatever, we can hitch a ride. “Yeah, okay.”

So along comes a big army truck. So he asked the army truck driver, “These guys want to go to town. You’re going to town?”

He said, “Well, I’ll pass near town.”

So okay, but the driver says, “You know what? Two of you, okay, one of you go on the right side, on the right fender, and one of you on the left fender.”

“What for? It’s dark, you know.”

And I’m thinking we could hit something and there I am, I’m going to be dead. I said, “What for?”

He said, “Well, I can’t turn my lights on, total blackout.” He said, “So if you go there, you can see when I’m going too far right and this guy can see when I’m going too far left and you can tell me right, left or straight ahead.”

So this is what we did! We did that all the way into town and not going very fast. He could go, you know, fast then if we’re going straight then he’d pick up speed. You know, if he was going like, “Ey, you’re going too far on the right! You know, how about little more left?” you know, and we’re going down.

And finally he got to Liliha Street, where we turn off. He said, “Hey you guys, I’m going to have to turn off, drop you guys off here.”

“Okay, thank you!”

So we got off and we’re like maybe half a mile from the _____, Pat and I said, “You know what, we’re going to have to continue on to home, so what’s the next step?”

“Well, let’s go down the police station. We’re half a mile from police station. There must be activity down there and maybe *kaukau*.”

“Good idea.”

So we went down the police station and there’s people running all over the officers, you know. And we went to the desk sergeant. “Sergeant?”

“Yeah?”

“How about some sandwiches, coffee?”

“What the hell is the matter with you guys? We get barely enough to eat ourselves! We’re going to give you something?”

We said, “Eh, you know, we bust our *okole* down in the shipyard. We were working shipyard! Tired, you know.”

“Oh, okay. Here, have a sandwich,” so we had a sandwich.

And then after we ate, we told ‘em, “You know, we got a problem.”

“So what now?”

“Oh, we live out Kaimuki. We want a ride home.”

He said, “Well, you guys hang around, the next beat officer give you a ride.”

“Okay, good.”

So we hung around, you know, watching all these guys running around and everything. So finally he said, “Okay, you guys got a ride. Louie is going out that area.”

So we went out with this officer, got in his car. And from the business section to the police station is only about one, two, about three blocks. So we got out and we got out there, we got on the main road, going down two blocks. “Halt! Who goes there?”

“Police officer!”

“Let me see your badge.”

So he’s got to show the guard, you know, the sentry the badge. “Okay, continue.”

We hit this Bishop Street and King and there's another guy. So after the police officer identified himself, the guy says, "You know, there's a light on in this building here and the word is no lights."

The guy said, the police officer said, "Yes, I go the word on the radio. There's a light on in that building." So he tells us, "You guys wait here, I go take care of that light."

"Okay."

So he went out. Ten minutes later he comes back. Before that, we hear shots firing, "Pow, pow, pow!"

And he comes back. We said, "What happened?"

He said, "Oh, I had to shoot the light out." (Chuckles)

Now this is the bank, security light! You know, and we thought, well, you know, big deal. Everybody's going haywire, you know, trigger-happy. But

anyway, so we got on and beyond that, every block we hit light. There's a sentry on every block and these guys, now, sentries, are young kids. They had taken these kids, some of them out of military high school, like our school, Kamehameha, and they had posted these guys, you know. All the important town area. So every, just about every block we hit, "Stop, identify yourself," you know, and so on.

But we finally got up to Kaimuki. And this guy says, "Well, I gotta go off to St. Louis Heights. So you guys make it?"

"Oh, no problem."

By then we were about maybe one mile from home so we thought, great, big deal, so you know, we're home now, just about. So where we lived, Pat lived one side of the park. Kaimuki we have a big park and Pat was on one side, I was on the opposite side. And we left and I said, "I'll pick you up in the morning."

"Yeah, okay."

We get regular drivers pick us up. So when I got home, I knock on the door.

The wife came, she opened the door, she says, "Wow, you're home!"

I said, "So what, I'm home?"

She says, "I thought everybody was killed out there at Pearl Harbor!"

I said, "Well, not everybody."

You know, I'm home, I'm alive. So by then it's like two o'clock in the morning, you know. And just had enough time to seem like, you know, I took a bath and got in clean clothes and whatever. My wife is making me something to eat. Got through with that eating. I couldn't eat very much, you know, all the excitement and everything. I figured I need sleep, I got in bed and pretty soon time to get up and go back to work!

But the shipyard people made a contribution. I mean I think we did a lot to, you know, get in. And you know, in times during the war where we open up

a compartment and you smell, you know, you know how human bodies smell when they're—'cause whenever that happened, we notify the ship people and they would notify the medical people and they would come up, you know, come out and clean. Clean whatever, you know, was in there. Because some of those accidents happening out there, if you were in a compartment and the explosion happened and hit your area and to keep water from going all over the ship, they close the watertight door. And you're in there. Too bad. So that's the way it was.

KB: So when you went back to work in the shipyard on the eighth, how many days did you continue to go back and had welding to do all day?

GK: We did that. In fact, when we did that, we went into, well we soon found out that you couldn't work sixteen hours a day too long. You know, a man gets tired. If you're working, if you're goofing off, that's something else, but if you're really putting out, doing your best to get the job done, it becomes tiring. You can only go so much. So they cut back from sixteen to twelve hours. We're working seven days a week. Now you're talking how many days, full-time, seven days a week. And we went from twelve hours

and then eventually down to ten hours. And ten hours long enough, but you know, that's the way it was.

And everybody, you know, working and see, prior to the war, in 1939, the navy let out a contract for the dry docks. And also they updated all the shops. Beautiful. So when December 7 happened, we were like we were ready in terms of equipment. And what they did on top of that, we had a boatload of civilian workers brought in on the SS *Washington*, from the East Coast. And they came in to the shipyard and they joined our crews. And you know, now we're getting additional workers in the shipyard. We got this beautiful building and now we're getting the additional workers that we need.

KB: Okay.

AG: Did the navy compensate you in pay? Was there an increase?

GK: We had the regular pay and, like I said, we started with \$1.06 an hour and then was \$1.12 and \$1.18, and that was the pay we got. We got, you know,

and plus overtime. If you worked overtime beyond forty hours, time and a half.

KB: Time and a half.

GK: Yeah, uh-huh.

KB: I think we're running out of time. Is there anything else you want to tell us about? Did you make it down later on to Battleship Row or anything else you want to tell us about your memories of the attack?

GK: Well, I tell you, December 7, right after that, the—you see, then the navy had to decide, you know, priorities. Which ships, what jobs going to be done first, right. It made sense. You know, you want to get ships out of there, out of the shipyard in a hurry. So the first ship they got out was the *Pennsylvania*. You know, she was in dry dock, but you know she was able to repair her and she was in the yard a little bit and she was gone. I think she went out to join the fleet.

And then after that, they brought in the *Helena*. *Helena* went into dry dock number two and number two wasn't even completed yet, but the back half, they had a caisson and they had, the back half was ready. But the front half wasn't done, but that was enough to get a ship in. So the *Helena* came in to dry dock number two with hull damage and we worked on her. The *Honolulu*, with that bomb that exploded that _____ hit the dock and exploded in the bottom of the bay, all that explosion caused the plate to buckle and caused an _____. So the *Honolulu* came into dry dock number one. So we had to work on it.

Now when you have ship repair, you know the ship has shape, right. You have to get what they call the book of offsets. The book gives you the location, the width of the ship, the length, the shape. And what you have to do with this, we have the MO-LOFF upstairs in Shop 11. Up the top deck was this deck the whole width and length of the building. And you can lay out the whole ship, the body of the ship on this. And from there, you take templates. Now when a ship comes in and you know, okay, damage is between frame sixty-nine and eight-nine, then they lay out that section and now we know what the section is supposed to be like.

So then they would take templates. They would take shape templates, you know, because the frames, mainframes, bulkhead, and then the side plating and all that templates you make and then it goes down to what we call in the shop, the layout section. And the layout would take the plates out and they lay out all the templates on the plate. And then it's trimmed, cut to suit, and then they mark all the stations, "This is frame forty-nine. This is bulkhead sixty-two," or whatever, and transfers frame, whatever. Transfers frame and longitudinals and all the parts are identified.

KB: Right. It's a lot of specialized work to repair.

GK: A lot of specialized work in repair.

KB: Right. And do you, can you remember how many ships total you think you repaired from the attack?

GK: From the attack, by the end of, say, I think it was in Janu—or about June, July, about August of '42, the ships that were Battleship Row and those that others out there were all repaired.

KB: All repaired.

GK: Either permanently or temporarily.

KB: Temporarily.

GK: And in those that we had to, in ships that were going, maybe, back to Mare Island or Bremerton for final updating for wartime conditions, you know, adding on guns and all of that, they would go out. And those that we thought—now, the determination was made by the planning department, the design engineers and those guys and now, you know, they were communicating with the navy department, CINCPAC fleet, all this, you know, big navy people. And they're deciding what ship's going where and what yard, navy yard, and that type of thing. And we did all the repairs...

KB: All the...

GK: ...to these ships, you see. And we had these ships. And that's why I say, you know, there's a feeling we did a lot to get those ships out.

KB: Right.

GK: In fact, there were times when navy brass would come through the shop and they look at what we were doing and they were totally amazed. So this guy, they would say, "You know, you people are the heroes. You got a job for life, don't have to worry."

KB: (Laughs) Just like they told you!

GK: Well, you know, war can't go on forever.

KB: Right.

GK: It's got to end someday!

AG: I just want to ask one question, bringing you up to date, today.

GK: Yeah, yeah.

AG: Have you ever talked to anybody on the *Oklahoma* that you know was saved through that...

GK: You know, even if they were saved or workers, you mean...

AG: The ones that were saved...

KB: Sailors.

GK: No, I...

AG: ...have you ever met one?

GK: No, I often wanted to do that, you know, be able to say, look, you know, and shake hands with them and tell 'em, you know, because they were part of the team and we saved their lives. When I say we, the shop effort, you know, the whole people.

KB: Right.

GK: But I never had that opportunity.

KB: Well, maybe you will this week.

GK: Oh yeah, I hope so.

KB: Maybe so. All right.

AG: Great.

KB: That was fascinating!

AG: Absolutely great.

KB: Yes, thank you so much.

AG: The *Oklahoma* is having its own reunion...

GK: Yeah.

AG: ...within this bigger reunion. You really need to contact whoever the head of that chapter is. It would be wonderful if you could meet somebody that...

GK: No, you know, one thing I didn't mention, when the *Tennessee* was brought into the shipyard and we had to repair the Number Three turret deck. It had taken a bomb hit and the bomb went right through. And what we had to do is put a plate, cover the hole, and then weld around it. But on the forward end of the *Tennessee*, she had some damage forward too. And you know, there was a crew of people working up there, so I...

END OF INTERVIEW