

#198 GLEN NICHOLS: *USS RALEIGH*

John Martini (JM) (?): . . . is December 4, 1991. This is an oral history video interview with Mr. Glen Nichols. Mr. Nichols was aboard the *USS RALEIGH*, CL-7, in Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941. He was a Seaman First Class, a gun pointer on a three-inch gun. He was nineteen at that time. We are doing this oral history taping in conjunction with the United States National Park Service, *USS ARIZONA* Memorial and television station KHET, in Honolulu. And thanks for coming and doing the interview.

Glen Nichols (GN): You're welcome.

JM: Great.

GN: Pleasure to be here.

JM: Great. I'd like to start off by asking how you got into the Navy and when?

GN: I enlisted in the Navy August 22, 1940. I graduated from the Pasadena school system in Pasadena, California. In 1937, my family lived in San Pedro, California and I became quite aware of the Navy's existence. And as a student at that time, in the tenth grade, I went to school with chiefs' sons, and personnel and the guys that were in the service at the time, their fathers were in the service, I mean. And I can remember going down and watching the fleet. They had football teams, baseball teams and going down to watching them and talking Navy. So I was quite up on it, I felt, about the Navy. And I originally wanted to go in the Navy and to become a mechanic, because I was mechanically oriented. And things changed, so I finally ended up, after leaving the *RALEIGH*, I became, well, I was a Fire Controlman. I became a Fire Controlman after the war started aboard the *RALEIGH*.

JM: And when did you join the *RALEIGH*, in Honolulu?

GN: I was on --- well, I went through boot camp in San Diego. And I have another story that goes along with this, concerning my brother-in-law, but let's just say that this sailor and this other guy, and myself and several others, were put aboard the *OKLAHOMA*, in Long Beach. And we went out, it was quite exciting because in those days, you know, everything is new to you. Now to boot camp and as a sailor, and all of a sudden, they said, "Hey, we're going to sea. We're going to put you guys down below somewhere."

So they put us down below, I believe, around the galley somewhere and they went off, when they went off to sea. The next thing you know, you feel these vibrations and they're shooting their guns, large guns. And so they went out for target practice, and we were out there a day or so and came back. And anyway, we left, finally left for Pearl Harbor and we arrived over here, in Pearl Harbor, on December 6, 1940, a year and a day before the attack. And we were transferred, about a hundred of us, were transferred to the *RALEIGH*. And the *RALEIGH* was a flotilla leader, I believe, flotilla two. It had an admiral aboard. And we were transferred to that. I believe fifty us remained aboard the *RALEIGH*, and the other fifty were scattered among the destroyers.

Well, this particular guy I told you about, he got transferred to the *RALEIGH* with me. And as years went on, we became shipmates and friends, and so forth. And the first time we went home, I took him home and I had two sisters. And he had his eye on my older sister, but that didn't work and my younger

sister was too young, so through the correspondence a few years later, anyway, they ended becoming married. And today, my brother-in-law and my sister, my brother-in-law lives down the road from me, about five miles where I live, which is on Lummi Island, Washington. So it's quite a story here.

JM: So it goes back.

GN: It does, yeah.

JM: Yeah. Getting aboard the *RALEIGH*, white cruisers?

GN: White cruisers.

JM: Was that good duty?

GN: I liked it. I liked it. Of course, everything is new. And as a seaman, of course, in those days, we chipped paint and all that. Somewhere along the line, I guess, someone recognized that here's a guy that might be pretty good to maybe help the captain out. So I was assigned to the captain's gig. And that was excellent duty because you worked for the captain. You were his servant, so to speak. And when he said, "Go," you went. You always stood by and --- we slept aboard this craft. And part of Pearl Harbor, during the time I was assigned, probably six or eight months, I served him. And we tied up to one of the booms, the boat boom there. It was inside towards Ford Island. That's where we tied up there, kind of isolated from the, you know, the other, the port side, which was the seaward side, more or less. And it was very good duty. We slept aboard.

JM: So you didn't have a regular berth? You actually had quarters on that gig?

GN: Yeah, we stayed on the ship and then when we into the Navy yard at some point and time, before Pearl Harbor, they took what they called strip ship. They took all the boat skins off and all that business. And so they had no boat skin for the captain's gig. And so we were in charge --- we used our boats when the ships was in and I don't remember how many times the ship went out from the time we got out of the yard until Pearl Harbor, until the attack started. But the ship did go out several times, and in doing that, they took our extra boats and they had to tie 'em up over at Aiea, the little landing they had there.

And so we were tied up over there and you were out of the Navy base. You were on your own, more or less. And so, our crew was in charge, our gig crew was in charge of all our boats, which was mainly three or four other boats. And other ships had done the same thing, and the deal was that one of the boat crews of whatever ships were out there, took turns going in Saturday morning. Every Saturday morning you had to report to one of the tenders for inspection. So that boat crew stood inspection for everybody else. Now, the rest of the crews that were over there supposed to be on their boats, could have been anywhere on the island, whatever. So it was kind of a free thing, very choice duty.

JM: In the months coming up to December 7, there was a lot of drills going on. [Rear Admiral] Kimmel was exercising the fleet a lot on patrol. And do you remember a lot of anti-submarine practice?

GN: What I remember, and I've always said this to other people, I don't know how the rest of my shipmates felt about it. And they --- you finally realized this at the time that the attack started, and we'll get into that in a moment,

here, I suppose. But the thing is, that I can remember that our Captain -- Simmons was his name -- and he drilled us to death for everything. It was everything. General quarters, fire drill, man overboard, you name it. And of course, we had aircraft on board with the catapults and all. All kinds of drills, all the time. And I don't know if it was from the -- if it was him personally doing it, or it came from high command. But when you go back, and you realize how quick we reacted at the time of the attack, you can say that it paid off. It really did. That was my first feelings about that.

JM: When --- do you remember how you spent December 6? What did you do the day and the night before the attack?

GN: Probably because we were board our captain's gig, more than likely we took the captain over to the movie at the sub base, or something like that. Or maybe --- or the Pearl City Yacht Club, which he frequented both places quite a bit. And he had guests aboard at various times, and things like that. He was a very good captain. We loved him very much.

JM: What were you doing the next morning?

GN: On the seventh?

JM: Yeah.

GN: Well, I'd finished --- prior to the attack, I had gotten up -- I don't remember what time it was -- but I had finished my breakfast and I was just cleaning my tray off, almost, what was it, after the mid-shifts and all of a sudden, I was knocked on my can, so to speak. Knocked off my feet. And of course, below decks, you say, well, it must have been an internal explosion, or something to cause this. But you don't question that because you're --- I felt that we were trained. This is what I spoke about, that training, excessive training. Because I felt that while everybody ran for their battle stations, and as you know, you go forward on the port, on the starboard side, and aft on the port side. So that was the routine. Everybody was running as fast as they could to their battle stations. And so I ran for my battle station.

JM: Is that --- as soon as you felt the impact and you went flying?

GN: As soon as I got on my feet, I was up and off.

JM: Did --- had they sounded general quarters yet, or did they . . .

GN: I don't remember. We might not have had time to do that, because we were hit with a torpedo right away. That's what the explosion was.

JM: That was one of the ones that hit right in the mid-ship?

GN: Well, it didn't hit mid-ship, forward of mid-ships.

JM: Forward of mid-ships?

GN: Yeah. We had four fire rooms, two fire, had two fire rooms in the engine rooms, two fire rooms and an engine room and it hit about on the frame between the number two fire room and the number one engine room. They were both flooded.

JM: Did you have boilers up at that time or were you cold . . .

GN: Not in that area, I don't believe. I think it was the number two and four, or something. I wasn't below deck, but I think it was the others, either boiler room two or four was up. And of course, the number one, I don't believe the number one was damaged, so that could have been up too. But I know at some point in time, they did transfer. They had to transfer back and forth. I've read all the reports, so I'm aware of those.

JM: When you started to, you know, head for your battle station, at that time, what was training takes over. Do you remember any other thoughts that you had?

GN: No, except just to get there. Just to get to your battle station. You were trained for that.

JM: Did you know who, what was happening? Did you have any visuals on any planes, or anything like that?

GN: I suppose. I can't remember, but I suppose as soon as my body came up, let's say, to the outside surface and you hear all this noise and aircraft flying around, I suppose that by that time, I recognize the Japanese were attacking us, whatever.

JM: How'd you know it was the Japanese?

GN: Well, I think that we were able to, either somebody yelled or I can't remember. Someone either yelled or we saw the planes.

JM: Had you been trained in aircraft recognition or anything?

GN: Yes. Yes. We were.

JM: So you knew the . . .

GN: Oh yeah. And then only the red symbol, but the type of planes and so forth, at that time. Yeah. The old Betty bombers, the Zeroes and whatever.

JM: What happened when you got to your anti-aircraft gun?

GN: Well, as I, well, I didn't --- my gun was --- we had seven three-inch anti-aircraft guns aboard the *RALEIGH*. And six of them, three on each side of the ship, were about, were placed about mid-ships. My gun was number seven on the stern, right above what we call a turret, on the mount, three-inch surface gun mount. And our gun tub was right above that one, forward and above that. That was the three-inch.

The other guns were covered with canopies on each side of the ship. From the superstructure out to the guard rail supports, they were covered in canvas. And so they had to literally cut the canvas down to free their guns, because the guns were underneath and the ready boxes were underneath the canvas.

JM: Just for clarification, the canvases, those were sunscreens right?

GN: They were sunscreens, yes, to shade you from the sun. And they had to cut theirs down, literally, from the ropes that was going around the extensions and so forth, to release this canvas, but they cut them the wrong way. They cut 'em from the outside, so when they fell, they fell down against the guns and the ready boxes. Conversely, ours was on the stern, and all we had to do is take

the covers off the breach, take the Tompkin -- which is the part that goes in the end of the barrel -- and take the sight covers off and away you go. You're ready to go.

And so we were cross-trained, on our gun mount, speaking just for my own gun crew, now. We were cross-trained so that any time, actually two people could fire the gun. You might not be too accurately, but you could fire the gun, meaning that you had to train, turn the gun this way -- and the Army calls it an azimuth -- this way. One guy looking through a teles[cope] cross hairs, and the scope, and the other guy was the pointer, and that was my job, the pointer. Also, on my, on the pointer's side here, you had like a pistol grip as part of the handle, and that was where the key was, where you fired the gun. And when somebody told you, whoever it was back there, "It's loaded." Of course, you felt that by vibrations and so forth. Then you would ready, aim, fire, bang. Where you go, if you're on target.

JM: And you were the gun pointer?

GN: I was the pointer. I was the guy that fired it, right.

JM: How fast did you get some rounds off?

GN: Well, let me go back a little bit before this. Prior to the attack, we were at sea and we had -- the first time since I was aboard ship -- that we had an ammunition working party at night. And all ready boxes, including fifty caliber machine guns, which we had aboard, and all the others were, and the ready boxes with the three-inches were loaded, ready to go. Of course, they were locked. Someone, a gunner's mate or someone, had a key. And so as I said, we were trained to fire as soon as we had two or more people on the guns. So the thing is, you yell, more than likely, "I'll take the cover, you get this," and whatever. The first guy who's there, you know, if two or three show up at the same time. And so it's a kind of a sequence that you prepare your gun to fire. So we automatically knew that, took that responsibility.

And I suppose, while I was taking the covers off, 'cause I didn't do it, somebody else broke the lock on the ammo box, opened it up and I don't even know if they set the fuse on there or not. And you probably heard that many of the shells from the anti-aircraft guns fell into Honolulu. Well, maybe some of our gun shells did, but I'm sure that some of the fuses were set. You know, I have no way of really knowing.

JM: Didn't you have to stick it into a fuse setting mechanism?

GN: No, we turned these, ours by hand.

JM: By hand.

GN: There was a cap on it, you just took it off. If I remember right, you just turn it for so many seconds, or whatever it was. I don't remember that part, but it just turned. You just turn it by hand and then you load it in the breach, it cools the breach, and bang, away you go. And it happens just like that. So we fired, I think, it was about a hundred and ninety-six rounds out of ours, something like that, which is quite a few rounds.

And during the time, during some of the attacks, I don't know what it was, but we had our gun pointed off the port quarter, going probably up and over the top of the Ford Island's seaplane base hangar, or something like that, in that

direction. And firing at something over there. And we had to --- the gun was loaded, and about that time that I fired at something way out there, this dive bomber or whatever he was, came across the stern, and I blew his tail off, by accident, you might say. We were firing at something beyond that, but . . .

JM: He flew into your fire?

GN: His plane met our shell, and it did him wrong, because he went over into the drink. And that was it. But I don't know what happened to him, you know, I was busy. So you know. So we fired at as many targets as we could, as quick as we could.

JM: So there were planes going, it seems in every direction?

GN: Yeah, they came in waves, as you know.

JM: Right.

GN: And then the second time, see, we first got hit by this torpedo and this second hit, we got. And I heard that we got, we were machine gunned, which didn't, I didn't see any in my area, but some of the other areas, they told me, we were told, I was told they that were machine gunned. But the thing that I was concerned about was my own ship, I mean my own area, my own gun, and so forth, and hitting what we could.

And so when they got around to the --- when the Japanese dive bombers took their turn, which is several minutes or so later, not knowing the time, but we were pointing it off the port, off the starboard. I said to the other --- off the starboard side, we were pointing. And they were circling probably above, above the, and over, maybe about where the sub base was, way up in the air there in the clouds and smoke and so forth. And you could see the formation and it looked like they were coming in our direction, so we were training our gun on that, because they were the only planes around to shoot at. And we were training our guns in that direction, then all of a sudden, I'm looking through this scope, waiting for the guy to get in within our range, you might say, and here I see, you can imagine, the guy in there says, "I'm on target," and he pulls a lever and there goes the bomb.

And so, I'm seeing these bombs as they're dropping towards our area, and some of them could have been towards the battleships or whatever. But it seemed to me like two or three were dropped in our area and whistling through what I call the rigging, and hitting in the water. But one hit above the gun tub above us. There was another gun tub above us, but it winged that and it deflected it down through the stanchion of the ready box that was where we had our ammunition stored. At that time, I don't know how many rounds we had in there. I presume there was some in there. But it went down -- I believe, it was seven, counting the decks and bulkheads -- went down about seven decks and bulkheads. This one guy threw it -- with us today -- it went through his bunk. And so, anyway, it went through the outside of the ship, and then it went down so far, I don't know if it hit the mud or something, but then it blew back up. And it had a hole, maybe about two and a half inches, two and a half feet in diameter or something like that. And then mud and water come screaming up this hole, just back right up and flooded with all this junk.

And I can remember, it filled my telescope thing. I had my one eye end in full of water, so I had to clean that out, and dry it out more or less, so I could see, so that we could continue firing.

JM: When you went into that situation like that, you said there were flights coming overhead, to actually pick your target, was each gun crew pretty much individual to pick its targets?

GN: Oh yeah, it's ready, aim, fire. You know, you lose your, you lose --- we had lost communications right away, between our fire control. This is all hand, in those days, an old ship commissioned in 1924. And so you didn't have the automatic things that some of the destroyers even had, or battleships had in that, you know, at that time. And so ours was all hand crank business, and we were more or less on our own, independent. I don't know what happened up front with the other three guns on each side. They might have had some specific control, but it was find an enemy, and shoot at it.

JM: You were on the stern. The next ship in line from you going along Ford Island would have been *TANGIER*?

GN: No, the *UTAH*.

JM: The *UTAH*. Did you see the *UTAH*?

GN: Yes, I saw it. I saw it, it roll over and that was a real tragic --- you must remember that my attitude at the time was profanity out loud with tears out of my eyes, to think that somebody, some other persons could do this to us, or me, or whatever, see. And that was my attitude during this whole time. I had, literally, had to take undershirt or skivvies and tear 'em, and put for like cotton in your ears. Several of our guys ended up with bad ears because they were right there. The three-inch, fifty, I believe, it was fifty-caliber, the three-inch fifty caliber has a tremendous crack to it and it's very much similar to the army aircraft seventy-five. It has a tremendous crack to it. And so a lot of guys ended up --- I was lucky because I think this saved my ears a little bit. I have pretty good ears.

But your question was?

JM: My question was when the --- you saw the *UTAH* go over?

GN: Yes. Right, okay, yes. We saw, and they had what looked like loose timbers on top, because it was a target ship, and we saw it roll over. And all of us on the stern, of course. And I'm associated with several of the survivors of that ship, because of, I live in the Washington area and several of those guys are in the chapter, one of the chapters I belong to. And in fact, my ship's reunion in 1990, we held, our association held it with them. And they had a wonderful time with these guys.

But this one guy, on the *UTAH*, he was one of the guys that went hand and hand over the Hawasers. You seen pictures of the Hawasers they were stretching as it's rolling over? I don't know if you see the guys in that picture or not, but he's, several of them, that's the only way they could escape without being hit by these timbers and so forth, that were falling on the side also that was, you might well remember.

JM: Did that strike you as anything even more out of the ordinary than you were already going through, having an entire ship capsize, you know, only a few dozen yards from you?

GN: I think you catch your breath, so to speak, that, "Oh my god." You know, or whatever, you know. And you're right there and you see that. Of course, it's probably much different if you were aboard. But to see that, and you feel for people. You know that there's people inside, there has to be. And I can't explain much beyond that, but it's tragic, a tragic thing to see. That you can see the people being hit by some of these timbers that did go on the side, you know, and jumped over the side and the next thing you know, here's a timber on top of 'em. Because some of them did go the opposite way from which way it rolled.

JM: Did you . . .

GN: So and then, later on, (knocking) we hear this. And I don't know if any of you heard the story or not, but we sent a crew back with the cutting torches, about five or six guys went back on the *UTAH*. They were directed to go back there with a cutting torch, and some people say, well, they pulled one guy up, but no, as far as I know, they pulled two. They pulled out this guy by the name of Jack, Jack Vasson is his name. And he is --- he came to our first reunion that we had, our *RALEIGH* reunion in 1984, and he came to our 1990 reunion. So I have met Jack and talked to him and so forth. And he will tell you, and the other witnesses will tell you that he was down in the boiler room or someplace. He thought a boiler room or he thought a boiler blew up. And as they cut him out, he comes out of there with his flashlight and his wrench. And saying, "Oh, the boiler blew up," on the contrary.

And then there was another guy that followed up. And this is according to Jack, when I talked to him.

JM: Do you have any specific memory of the *ARIZONA* blowing up?

GN: Well, we certainly saw it.

JM: Mm-hm.

GN: Yes. And of course, at the time, we didn't know it was the *ARIZONA*. It was something that blew up in that direction, you know. We knew that the battleships were over there and something like that, you think probably as a sailor, well, that was a magazine that went up. It's such a tremendous explosion. It had to be a magazine and you probably think at the time -- excuse me -- probably think, well, how could they penetrate a magazine? How could a bomb or anything penetrate a magazine? A battleship is supposed to be the thing, you know, and how could a bomb or anything get down to do that? And I think that's the things that you think about, you know. There's this tremendous explosion. How could it happen to a battleship? Well, it did. And here you have all the smoke and the flames that you can see and so forth.

JM: What's stand out most in your memory of everything that was going on around you, during that, during the morning and the full day?

GN: Well, I think some of the things are the way that we had teamwork of my shipmates. And the other thing is trying to visualize the strength that it took of our shipmates to unload two fifty-ton helicop-- or launchers, for aircraft, catapults. I believe they were fifty tons, on each side. And then some torpedo tubes and anything with that, that could be thrown over the side, to throw that over the side without having steam power to do it.

JM: They actually got the catapults . . .

GN: This is what I understand. Lifting them off and throwing them over the side. Because, you see, we were not only trying to survive as individuals, we were trying to save our ships, like most sailors would do. And we had that large hole in us. Well, after we got into dry dock, you know, they said, "Oh yeah, we got hit by a torpedo and we almost rolled over," and all that business. And then you see the hole and you -- this makes you more frightened, because if I remember right, you could almost drive one of those big semi trucks through it. And here we were, seen pictures of it, of the ship, we have the main deck that has portholes on it and the water was this high from the portholes, so we were down and it was only forty-five feet of water there and we drew about twenty-four feet, something like that. So we were almost on the bottom.

JM: When the attack ended, you probably didn't know that it was all over at approximately ten AM, did you stay on battle stations?

GN: We were on battle stations clear up into the evening. I smoked at that time, a three pack of cigarettes in that one day. The most I ever smoked.

JM: Do you remember that night, when the . . .

GN: It seems to me like we shot our own planes down, so the word, so the story goes. Some of the --- it was a night firing and I said earlier that I fired, we fired off the port quarter. It would be over the starboard quarter, which would be over towards Ford Island, over the hangar and near the hangars of the seaplane hangars there at Ford Island. And I believe it was in that direction that we fired our guns at night. Yeah, we weren't alone, we fired. Everyone fired. It looked like -- I don't know how to describe it. Just a tremendous amount of firepower there. Everybody was gun happy, you know trigger happy, and whatever.

JM: No one had spread the word that we might have some planes coming in from our own side?

GN: Not that I know of. See, we didn't have any communications at all. We were severed by this torpedo hit. And I can't say about the bomb hit, but I believe it was specifically by the torpedo hit. We were severed from communications from our main fire control area, ourselves.

JM: Oh yeah.

GN: So it was all by voice or whatever.

JM: Those ENTERPRISE planes that came in, when they got shot down, how does that make you feel after this time? Is that just something that happened, or . . .

GN: Well, what happened in Desert Shield? How many guys did we kill there? That's war. You know, and of course, this is an immediate war. You know, more significant, I think, than maybe other types of war, so to speak. It hurts. It hurts any time you hurt a fellow citizen or soldier, or service person. And at the time, you don't know for sure. And they probably don't know for sure, you know, if it's on a one on one basis, it's you or him, you know. And you might say, it's this case, too.

JM: What was going through your head that, emotionally, after the attack, when you knew what had happened? What were your emotions doing?

GN: Probably I still had a few tears in my eyes. I remember. So disappointed. I think we were, I think basically we were disappointed that the powers to be would let this happen to us. You know, we were ready to go, here we are, trapped in Pearl Harbor, so to speak, and I think a lot of us hoped that we had been at sea and we could have gone after the people that attacked us, and yet we were damaged and had no chance to do it whatsoever. And that's very disappointing. And it's just like if you belong to a task force, let's say, for example, and you know that they're going into battle somewhere, and all of a sudden, you get orders to go back to the Navy yard for a repair or something, and you can't be a part of that group to get back to your enemy and so forth, you have a -- it's very disappointing. We went through that a couple times.

JM: Were you . . .

GN: Elsewhere. We were disappointed in the fact that we couldn't go do our part.

JM: Were you personally mad too?

GN: I think so. I think so. You know. You're there, you know . . .

JM: Yeah. How'd you feel about the Japanese that day?

GN: Wasn't too happy with 'em. You know, not too happy. I don't know, my attitude might be different than some. I went to school with a bunch of these Japanese. You know, mixed people. I have some very good friends that were Japanese, but that didn't make me what somebody might say Japanese lover. And the thing I can't understand is what happened afterwards, the torture of our prisoners and things like that, you know. It's when you take the --- it goes beyond Pearl Harbor, because it's what happened thereafter. I had some good buddies that were in the death march and all that stuff, you know, that I met later on and so forth. I become acquainted with them and you hear all these stories and so forth. So it's not good. It's not good.

JM: How do you feel about Japanese today.

GN: I wouldn't buy a Japanese car. I don't own one.

JM: Last question, this is a technical detail. Did you see the encounter between the Japanese mini-sub that surfaced and the destroyer that was going after it?

GN: Well, no, we were inside the port. That was outside. I believe the word was passed that there were submarines inside and we needed sharp lookouts for that. And of course, I believe our surface guns, the few of them that could bear, if someone was, you know, right out. Remember, Pearl City was to our west, northwest, I believe it was. And so in that area, we could conceivably shoot if our, because our ship was rolled, turned in that and rolled in that direction.,

JM: What about --- we've got one minute left. This tape is going to be used by researchers in the future. Any one specific thing of a personal nature of what you want to, you'd like to leave for researchers, what you've experienced, what you felt?

GN: Well, somehow I would like to say like our motto of the Pearl Harbor Survivors, "Let's keep America alert." And I just gave a speech recently, a Veterans' Day speech, to a high school. And I said, "Our adversaries are in bad trouble." I says, "But folks, while the good times are always here, we must remember or think about who's got their finger on the key for the atomic powers and so forth that's scattered throughout the world. Thirty thousand atomic weapons that those other countries have. Whereas today, people think, well it's all over. Let's do away with the Navy and the Army, and it's peace. No way. Carry a big stick."

JM: Thank you.

GN: Thank you very much. I really enjoyed it very much. Thank you. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW