

#172 HOWARD TROST: USS *ANTARES*

(Interrupted conversation)

Chris Conybeare (CC): This is an oral history with Mr. Howard Trost. It's December 4, 1986. We're at the Sheraton Waikiki in Honolulu. It's approximately 9:15 AM. Mr. Trost lives at Lake Tahoe, California and my name is Chris Conybeare. I'm being assisted in the interview by Dan Martinez.

Mr. Trost, could you state your name and rank on December 7, 1941?

Howard Trost (HT): Well, my name is Howard Trost and I was storekeeper second class aboard the *ANTARES* on December 7, 1941.

CC: Before we get to the actual events of that day, how did you happen to be here in Hawaii in the first place?

HT: Well, you want to start from the time . . .

CC: Just a --- yeah . . .

HT: . . . I entered the Navy?

CC: . . . Navy, yeah, leaving home and getting into the Navy.

HT: Well, I was one of the aviation type enthusiasts as a young kid and I wanted to get into the Air Force. Matter of fact, I almost went up to Canada to get into the British Air Force and on the day that Hitler invaded Poland, which was September 1, 1939, I walked into the Army Air Force service. I wanted to join the Air Force. And I was only a high school graduate, and they were not taking high school graduates at the time, so I walked across the street and joined the Navy. And they promised me that if I spent a year and a half with the fleet, why, I would get called for Navy flight duty, okay.

So I went to boot camp at Great Lakes. I joined the Navy in October '39, and graduated about twentieth of December. And then, we took a train from Great Lakes, up to San Pedro and by the time my name came around in the selection of vessels, "T" being way down on the far end, I had the choice of the *ARGONNE* or the *ANTARES*, and I heard the *ANTARES* was a supply ship and the *ARGONNE* was a flagship. So I didn't want to get involved with the flag, so I took the *ANTARES*.

So I got on board her on the first of January, 1940. And about three months after being on board her, why, we had gone up to Mayer Island and I was asked if I could type. And me and my buddy both just out of high school says, "Yeah, we can type."

So I got a chance to go into the storekeeper game, off the deck. So that's how I got to be a storekeeper.

CC: When did the ship get signed over to Hawaii? When did you come over to Hawaii?

HT: My first trip to Hawaii was around Easter, 1941. We came over. We were loaded down with supplies. And all they had out here at that particular time was what they call the Hawaiian detachment, which consisted of light cruisers and four-stack cans, and that was about it. But we brought supplies out here.

Then we went back to Mayer Island and came back out here in a series of trips. Once we were out here, we went to Johnson Island, Canton, well, Palmyra, French Frigate Shoals, Midway, carrying Army engineers, equipment and supplies and so forth. So --- and then, various trips back to the States, to get supplies. And then when the fleet came out here in '41, why then we were permanently stationed out here with the rest of 'em.

CC: Where were you and what were you doing when the attack started? Do you remember how you first knew something was going on?

HT: Well, I had had the mid-watch at that particular night and to give a little history on that, why, we had been out to Canton Island, we left Honolulu on Halloween night. And we went out to Canton Island with a whole bunch of army gear and we were out there about, almost three weeks. And on our way back, why, we were diverted to Johnson or Palmyra -- and I don't really remember which, I'd have to look at my notes -- to pick up an empty oil barge to bring back to Honolulu. Well, we got, picked up the barge and we were about six hours out and we were told to go back because they had given us the wrong one. Now, if we would have arrived as scheduled, we would have been in Honolulu Harbor, or in Pearl Harbor on the afternoon of the sixth, and we would have been berthed right opposite the *ARIZONA*, okay.

So as a result of this delay, we didn't get to Pearl, or offshore off of Pearl, until about three o'clock in the morning. So I had had the mid-watch -- I mean, sort of a history as to why I was so sleepy. And when the first depth charges went off, I knew it wasn't any part of the ship, and I come out like a shot and ran up to topside and that's when I saw the *WARD* and the *PBY* dropping depth charges and the *WARD* throwing the shells at the sub, which is, well, almost you could hit it with a baseball bat. It was between us and this oil barge that we were just disengaging to give over to a tug to bring into the harbor.

CC: You could actually observe the submarine?

HT: Yeah. It looked like a fifty-five gallon -- just the conning tower portion of it.

CC: And what was going on out there?

HT: Well, the water -- I don't know what the distance could be -- the *WARD* was firing on it. She fired about six shells on it, from what I remember. I remember the *PBY* making a pass and dropping three or four depth charges on it.

CC: What did --- did you realize the significance of this, or what did you think about all this?

HT: Well, not at that time. It's like, what the hell's going on? You know, what's this all about? And of course, we were at a war, if you want to call it, war alert in, or in Honolulu, as early as September. We were in blackout regulations. We were docking ship at sea. We were literally at war, under wartime conditions then. And you know, just --- what was going on? You know, you just, because there were no other vessels around, other than the *WARD* and ourselves, or I didn't see any. The *WARD* was the offshore patrol.

CC: Now, after this incident that you observed, you went ahead and had chow, or what happened then?

HT: After that, why, chow went down around quarter after seven, 7:30, and we all ate chow. And I was the commissary storekeeper at this particular time. Now, we'd been out to sea, well, from Halloween night until the seventh, and my job was to get chow onboard the ship. Okay, and one of my first duties was put the supply officer troops, get on the beach and get some chow. You know, go down to the supply docks and so forth, because we thought we were going to go into Pearl.

And so I was all dressed up in whites about, oh, 7:30, 7:40, something like that. And I went out the number three hatch, and I was standing around with the guys, you know, shooting the breeze and so forth. And I come back to why I joined the Navy again. And I hadn't heard from the bureau there, but I was still interested in getting into Navy Air Corps. And I was standing there and one guy said to me, he says, "Hey, Trost, what are those airplanes coming in over Diamond Head?"

I took a look and I says -- well, you couldn't see really, then, what they were. I said, "Well, silhouettes, they're not American." That's the first thing I said. I don't know what they are.

But just about that time, about three went over the top of us and we said, "Heck, they're the Japanese."

CC: Did you know what that meant at the time?

HT: Not at that time. Not at that time. I just said they're Japanese and we all sort of looked at each other and about that time, all the bombing started, you know, shortly afterwards. All the bombing started in Pearl.

CC: What kinds of things did you see? You said the bombing started. What did it look like to you?

HT: Well, just a mass of airplanes flying around. A lot of smoke and fire, that's about it.

CC: Any feelings that you remember at the time? Did it . . .

HT: No, not that I can remember, other than, again, "What the heck's happening? What's going on?" And so forth.

But it was shortly after that, maybe after the first pass, why, a couple planes came by and strafed us and chewed up -- we had wood superstructure -- and chewed up the superstructure a little bit. And then, a couple bombs were dropped inadvertently or otherwise, pretty close on hand and the skipper was doing a lot of corkscrewing.

CC: Did you return fire? Did your ship have any way of firing them?

HT: Yeah. We didn't have any armament other than a couple small arms and some, what they call, Lewis guns from World War I. And having been on the ship's rifle team, me and a buddy were told to get those Lewis guns and fire back. Well, there's no tracers at all in those things and he and I, behind the gunwales, we were firing. Whether or not we hit any planes, I have no idea. We finally ran out of ammunition, that was it.

CC: Did you have something you want to add?

(Conversation off-mike.)

CC: Okay, we'll change tapes.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

HT: . . . to Pearl Harbor.

(Conversation off-mike.)

HT: Well, I tell you what, I, I tried to sit down and write some of this stuff, you know, I couldn't even write. I was so nervous or so upset, I could not write. And I knew that a point in time, this was going to become important, your feelings or psychological or otherwise. And I could not write it down. I tried to do it later on and I couldn't do it.

CC: Okay, let's go back to that. You had breakfast that morning, right. What were you talking about with the other guys after you saw this?

HT: Well, we were talking about -- we knew then it was a midget submarine, but we had no idea it was Japanese because there was no markings on it. And our concern is what is that thing doing around by us although the strain was between us and the Japanese at the time. And I guess it was just like, "Who are they and what are they doing there? And how come they're following us in," because they were right -- it was between us and the barge [*HDS-2*], so you know they had to be following us. And we don't know how long. They could've followed us all the way from Palmyra or Johnson.

CC: And what happened with the barge? You said that you . . .

HT: Well, we detached the barge and I forget the name of the tug that took it. Now, that barge took it into Pearl.

CC: And what happened to your ship?

HT: And we were told, or advised, or directed not to enter the channel at all. And we steamed between Pearl Harbor and Honolulu Harbor real close on the shore, because I had heard conversation with some fellows that in case we got torpedoed or struck, or bombed, that the old man was going to run around the reef so we wouldn't get sunk. But we entered Honolulu Harbor about, I think, around 11:30 and tied up [*to Pier 5A*] right alongside of Aloha Tower [*which is 3 piers south of the Aloha Tower*].

CC: So you basically steamed along shore during the attack?

HT: Right, back and forth. Then we saw all the cans and whatever, cruisers, came out at the time, and couple times we didn't know whether we were going to get blown out of the water because they didn't know who we were either. And you know, they came pretty close to us a couple times. And the guns were down, they were level, I assume, because they didn't have any idea who we were at the time.

CC: When the attack was over, what kinds of things did you -- what kind of activity took place then?

HT: Well, if you're talking about us arriving, berthing at the tower, I still had a primary duty to get chow aboard ship. And I got permission to go on the beach with a couple people and I went to the closest stores that I could find

along the waterfront there and got them to deliver some chow. I commandeered a milk truck and told him to go down for the ship and I forget what else, but I finally got chow on board ship.

CC: Did you have any problems? I mean, were people suspicious, or were there

HT: No. I just told them, "In the name of the United States Navy, this vehicle will go down to that ship," and I got the chow out of the store and told him to put it in the truck and take it down to the ship. And then later on, why, the Navy yard did bring over some food and our mail, and a few other things.

So, we'd been out to sea for almost sixty days, okay. And we had an extra complement of these army engineers. We were out of fuel, we had no fresh water, and we had been eating few beans and rice.

CC: Channel fever was probably rampant.

HT: Yeah. We were sort of desperate.

CC: What --- so if all this hadn't happened, would you expect to go ashore that day and enjoy some liberty, or

HT: Oh yeah, sure. After I'd done my job of getting chow on board, then we would have gone on liberty, sure.

CC: What kinds of things did you do on liberty in those days? What was the usual routine for you, or did you have one?

HT: Well, I didn't have a routine, but -- again, I was on the police, rifle, pistol and rifle squad of the ship and I did a lot of shooting at the police pistol range. I did a lot of bowling with a number of people. And we played a lot of baseball at Pearl, and basketball, and in between ships and so forth. Then you had your normal duties, but met all the guys at the Y one way or the other.

CC: What about --- you mentioned a place called the Black Cat. What was that?

HT: Well, that was a restaurant across

CC: What was it now? What was it called?

HT: It was a restaurant, yeah, across the street from the "New Y," as we called it. And it was a pretty good place to eat. It was, catered to a lot of the military and mainly, I guess, you might say, the Navy people. And it was a good place, reasonable chow and fast food, and we enjoyed it. Cheap.

CC: What kinds of things would you eat there? What could you get there you couldn't get?

HT: Well, one of the best meals we used to get up there was veal cutlets. That was -- seemed to be something that was a specialty of the house. But I can remember getting pancakes for like ten cents, you get a big stack of pancakes and all the coffee you could drink.

But we used to go to a bowling alley and I can't recall where it is. But they used to have some pretty good meals out there too, down towards Waikiki here someplace.

CC: Now, young sailors sometimes were in search of young women. Were there any activities with girls with you guys?

HT: Well, you're not going to indict me. (Chuckles) No, I, frankly, I never engaged in that activity, although I seen long lines along River Street.

CC: Yeah. There was a lot -- there was some of that there.

HT: Yeah, there was quite a few of them down there.

CC: What --- well, forty-five years later, you've obviously been interested in this because you've kept records and notes and things like that.

HT: Right.

CC: How did this event sort of affect your life? Was it . . .

HT: Well, I still have a hard time buying a Japanese car. I don't -- I haven't bought a Japanese car. I have a hard time buying some Japanese products. I really do. However, let me say this, I put six years in the Navy and -- how should I say? I started working for the Army and as a result of some of my work with the Army I became a ammo-nuclear weapons missile specialist. But I did get a job in Japan and I worked for army activity in Japan for three years. And we thoroughly enjoyed it. And I found the Japanese people most pleasant, most very nice and many of the people that worked for me knew I was a Pearl Harbor survivor, and there was never, on my part, any hard feelings or anything like that. I got along very good with them and had some very, very good friends who were Japanese. So I . . .

CC: Had any of them been on the other side?

HT: Yes. There were some older people who had been in the Japanese military of some form or another, but I never got to talk to 'em because, most of the time, these people were not able to speak English. You had the Japanese that worked very close to me were bilingual, and they were usually young people who had learned American languages.

CC: I think I'm going to go back to something else. The reason you got into this -- did the Navy ever make good and get you in touch with a airplane?

HT: Well, let me tell you a long story. I'll make it real short. I finally got orders to take a light physical and the test aboard the *HORNET* -- we were out at Guadalcanal at the time -- which I did. Okay. Me and a whole bunch of other guys, okay. So, guess what? The *HORNET* goes up the next thing, gets sunk at Iron Bottom Sound, see, and all our records went down. Oh my god, that's the end of that.

So a month later, I got permission to take another set of exams. I took that aboard the *WASP*. And guess what? She went up and all our records went down.

So about a month later, we're down in Noumea, loading up and my buddy, the yeoman, come over. He says, "Hey Trost, I got another set of orders for you.

You gotta take the exam aboard ILL-UH-NOO, which is a shore station, which I did. Okay, now we're talking October, November.

So I said, "Well, okay."

In February, the list came out and I was thirty-third on the list to be called back to the States for flight duty. So we're cruising, we're going up, you know, to all the islands and so forth. And finally a message comes in and says that they needed a chief storekeeper for new construction back at Oakland. Well, I was a first class, ready to be promoted to chief. Okay, so the deal was that I would go back to the States because the old man says, "I know I'm going to lose you to aviation, and I can kill two birds with one stone, because the minute you get on board the [GENERAL LEROY] ELTINGE [AP-154], why, you'll be promoted to chief."

Well, that was all right with me, having been four years, four and a half years out at sea. You know, that was fine with me. So I got back to T.I. [Treasure Island] and my, was able to, oh, hang around through various subterfuges and so I wouldn't have to go aboard the ELTINGE, because I knew these flight orders were coming through sooner or later.

Well, the day I was ordered to go aboard the ELTINGE, and I actually was - - the car was there to pick me up, this yeoman comes flying out and he says, "Hey Trost, look what I got for you."

I had my flight orders. So I reported into San Francisco, and because the fleet sailors -- what they call the fleet sailors -- if we'd been out at school for like two or three or four years, we had to go to what they call an academic refresher unit. So I went to Cal-Poly for six months, from October '44 to March of '45, with a whole bunch of fellows from the fleet. And then I was transferred to University of Iowa, pre-flight school, and I spent another six months and the war ended.

CC: Never made it.

HT: We were given an option. We had three options. We could've stayed in, go out, or go back to the fleet. And I had hurt my back and went to talk to the flight surgeon. And he told me -- and this is, we were just getting into jets then -- he says I'd never be able to flight a jet with my back. And my enlistment was up October the tenth. And this is, like, September. And I says, well -- I had just been married -- I says, "I think we're going to go out and leave the Navy."

So I had \$25,000 education and never flew an airplane.

CC: So the Navy takes some times, sometimes takes a while to make good on its promises, but they tried hard.

HT: They tried hard, yeah. They tried hard. Two of my buddies at Iowa finally did get their wings and one became a commander, and I don't know what the other one did, but they flew during the Korean War. I was asked to come back into the Navy for the Korean War but I had had another job and I didn't want to come back.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

CC: . . . conversation here -- now is that the phone?

END OF INTERVIEW