

#212 JOHN HAVERTY: NAVAL HOSPITAL

John Martini (JM): Today is December 5, 1991. It's 1400 hours. This is an oral history interview with John Haverty. On December 7, 1941, John was an Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class, assigned to USS *LOUISVILLE*, but he was a patient at the Hospital Point, Naval Hospital in Pearl Harbor. He was twenty-four years of age on that day. My name is John Martini of the National Park Service and this tape is being produced jointly with the National Park Service and television station KHET in Honolulu.

Well, good afternoon, John.

John Haverty (JH): Hi.

JM: Hi. Thanks for coming.

JH: It's a pleasure to be here.

JM: All right. How'd you get into the Navy? When did you join up?

JH: I joined the Navy in 1935. I was trying to find some work to do and what I was doing was making too much work and too little pay, and I needed to get ahead, so I joined -- everybody told me what the Navy was like, so I thought I'd join and try. And so I went in as soon as I was old enough, and by the time my first cruise was over, I found that the war clouds was around, I said, "Ain't no sense in getting out now because it's going to be right back in," so I stuck around.

JM: Where did you sign up at and go through your basic?

JH: Norfolk, Virginia.

JM: Yeah?

JH: Nineteen thirty-five.

JM: Where did they send you to, for your basic training, to be a Seaman?

JH: Well, you went through three months of recruit training, then right there we had what they call Group A schools, which starts you off along a certain line, which I was going into aviation ordnance and gunner's mate. And then, as soon as you finish that, they put us on a train, come cross country, in time to catch the Pacific fleet just a week before the 1936 maneuvers.

JM: What was your first ship?

JH: Saint --- USS *SAN FRANCISCO*, a wonderful ship. It was a brand new ship, good crew and it was just like a home. The morale on that ship was about as high as anywhere I've ever seen, and I stayed on it for four years and a half.

JM: A lot of ships had nicknames, did *SAN FRANCISCO* have one?

JH: No, it didn't. I don't know why. At that time, we just didn't have a nickname, but I was in the aviation gang, so we didn't stay aboard all the time. We was on and off, but it was home. It was a good, high morale ship.

JM: You know, being in the aviation gang, you were taking care of the seaplanes and the observation . . .

JH: We had four seaplanes on board used for scouting and observation. Observation was they spot for gunfire and also use them for searching. And I was a tail gunner, and before I left the ship, I was a parachute rigger, so I had kind of multiple jobs.

JM: So you were both then. You were both on the aircrew, as well as the mechanic, take care of the planes?

JH: Right, right. I was a pretty good tail gunner.

JM: What, how'd you like catapult rides?

JH: Oh, they're something to live through, sixty feet at sixty miles an hour. (Chuckles) Yeah, I'll tell you what's more exhilarating than that, is what they call cast recovery, where they pick you up while the ship is still moving, and make a big turn, make a slick spot on the water, and they're towing a sled along side. You hit that slick spot and taxi up real quickly, and get on that sled, which they have a cargo net behind it. And that'll tow you along the ship, just where being under the crane, so they hook onto that then the radio man or gunner jumps up and hooks on, horse and sling, onto the crane, and then they lift you out of the water. And that has life, wind lines attached to it, to steer you, or steady it down and they bring it across the catapult and put on cloak lines so it can set you down on the -- latch it down. It's a thrill.

JM: So you were there four and a half years, but 1940 you got off?

JH: In September 1940, I went to the *LOUISVILLE*, because they needed a parachute rigger and they were going to South America for four months, independent cruising, showing the flag in east coast to South America. We went down there the first of September and we stayed down there 'til January, 1941. We come back by way of Simon's Town, South Africa, where we picked up about four and a half million dollars worth of gold, and hauled up to New York. A little episode on that trip was that as we was coming around the coast of West Africa, we hit a storm. One man got washed overboard and we couldn't see him. All we could see was the albatross diving on him. We backed the ship up and picked him up. The motor --- the whaleboat couldn't find him. Then we ran the ship up along side the whaleboat and picked it up.

JM: So you actually picked him up right up from the ship.

JH: Yeah, we picked him up by throwing a rope over to him and he tied himself on and we pulled him up the side of the ship.

JM: How long was the *LOUISVILLE* operating out of Pearl Harbor?

JH: Well, we come out of New York, we get the ship modified and put more bunks in it and a lot of other things, and welded up all the portholes. And then we come on out, then we went here back to the coast for a while, with the *CHESTER* and had [an] amphibious landing at San Clemente Island. Then we come back, got here, about the last of September. We hadn't been here that long.

JM: Nineteen forty?

JH: And then, I think it was the last of September . . .

JM: Nineteen forty?

JH: Two, or '41.

JM: Forty-one.

JH: No, it was the last, first of November, they sent it on escort duty out to the Philippines and back, and that's where it was when the war started. It was in Solomon Islands area, escorting an army transport and a civilian ship. But I went to hospital the twentieth of October and was operated on the twenty-third of October, where they took a piece of shinbone out of my right leg and spliced my left arm.

JM: What --- yeah, you could go back to that. What had happened?

JH: Well, in 1939, I had fallen from a scaffolding -- scaffolding broke my fall threw it and broke my left forearm. And one bone healed and the other didn't. So my ship's doctor said if we go over to Pearl Harbor they would splice it for me, and I took him up on it. And that's why I was over there.

JM: How long --- on December 7, how long had you been recuperating?

JH: Since the twenty-third of October.

JM: Long repair.

JH: Yeah, but I still couldn't walk.

JM: Yeah?

JH: 'Cause they --- when they chiseled the bone on my right leg, it broke the tibia and I couldn't carry any weight on it. So that's why I was still in the wheelchair.

JM: What did they do for you when you were in the hospital, besides the medical care, I mean. It's a long time to be confined in a hospital.

JH: Just give me routine maintenance, dressing 'cause everything was open, and you had to take care of that and being as how I couldn't get out, they just left the wounds covered, but not casted. So I just laid in bed.

JM: Did you read or anything?

JH: Oh yeah, sure. After four days -- first four days, you don't do anything, 'cause you hurt too bad. And boy that was rough. And then after that, it's just routine. It's just time to cure, that's it.

JM: Did you get cabin fever in the hospital for that long?

JH: No, I don't think so.

JM: Were you . . .

JH: I'm pretty easy-going. I can get along with that kind of stuff, not too bad.

JM: Did they get you in a wheelchair, or anything?

JH: Well, as soon as I got in a wheelchair, I could push myself with my left foot and steer with my right hand, and I got up pretty good. And that's what I was doing the morning of the attack. I was in a wheelchair.

JM: Yeah. How did the morning start, right before the attack?

JH: (Clears throat) Well, I got up about six o'clock, freshened up and got my wheelchair and rolled back into the washroom, got a shave and face washed and I had breakfast. Sitting there waiting for them to bring food and sick call, but we had already eaten. So I was waiting for the doctors to come around, make the eight o'clock sick call.

And then we heard the first plane come down, we thought the army was practicing, as they had been doing. And we heard an explosion. That kind of shook us up, we didn't know what it was. Right behind it was a second one. Then another explosion. One patient says, "The guy must have hit the ground, must have crashed!"

I said, "No, I heard him flying after the explosion."

He said, "He must have hit the ground, because look at the fire on Ford Island."

Well, from where I was, I had to raise up and look through the lanai at the south end of Ford Island, and sure enough, they had a big fire going. And just about then a machine gun went off. And this is just a matter of minutes. And when that machine gun fire lit off, I said, "Whoa, something's wrong." But we still didn't know what.

And then a plane come over, a strafing one, and pulled up where we could see the insignia on it. I said, "My gosh, that's a Japanese airplane. We're under attack."

And then the guy says, "It can't be. They can't be this far out!"

I said, "I don't care what you said, that is a Japanese airplane and we are under attack."

But by that time, they were mixing it up. Everybody was firing.

JM: Had you been trained in the aircraft identification, or anything to recognize the planes or the Hanamaru?

JH: Not -- a little bit, but not near enough.

JM: How'd you know it was a Japanese plane?

JH: Big red balls on the wing tips.

JM: That much you knew?

JH: Oh man, no mistaking that.

JM: Were they going close by the hospital?

JH: Well, not too close, see, they were hitting Ford Island and pulling up about -- it was just within an eighth of a mile of where we were. And there was no doubt about what they were.

JM: And we were answering 'em back pretty fast?

JH: We were firing back in less than two minutes. Even Commander Fuchida himself said, "Gee, I don't see how you guys could fire back so quickly."

But he didn't know we had fifty percent manned on that guns. And one sailor up on the *MARYLAND*, got up on the fighting top to write letters and get his Christmas mail done, and when the first bomb fell, he looked up and saw the plane and recognized it, and he immediately went to work. He jerked that canvas cover off of the machine gun and slapped the can of ammunition on it and went to work. He was less than two minutes. And the five-inch guns were firing in less than five minutes.

JM: For those of us that weren't there, can you -- and I know you've told this story a lot -- can you kind of put it in a word picture? What did it look like out that window? What was the sound like?

JH: Really, from the window or the lanai, where I was looking through, you couldn't see too much because of the buildings and the shrubbery, the trees. All we could see was what was in the air. And when the *NEVADA* started up, all we could see was the fighting topside. But well, we could sure hear it. Yeah. I mean, it was shaking your teeth out, because those torpedoes and bombs were going off. Oh yeah, it was rough.

JM: Did that . . .

JH: But the thing is, so far as I'm concerned, personally, is it was a bunch of frustration because I couldn't get to my job or to my station and do the job I was trained for. And this is bad, because you just sit down and watch it. And this is a case of many people that morning, especially pilots trying to get back to the Naval Air Station and get to an airplane. But you can't do your job, you're frustrated. Now, the people that could get back, they went ahead and some of them were a little slow to start with, but then they went, fell right in their old training and went right to work, and did a good job.

JM: Did you --- the emotions while you were watching the attack going, you knew it was the real thing. The frustration of not being able to get up must have been incredible. Did you remember any fear?

JH: Yes. My biggest fear during the day was when the dive bombers and torpedo planes finished, and the horizontal bombers were coming in. I don't trust 'em. I know what a dive bomber will do, but those horizontal bombers, some of them have a habit of missing the target by a mile and, "Oh, we got a near miss."

JM: They --- so you . . .

JH: This bothered me.

(Laughter)

JM: So you were aware of the difference in the bombing techniques they used?

JH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. No problem. We could see the dive bombers coming down. And we could see the horizontal bombers going over. Now, the torpedo planes were too low for us to see. All we could do is hear them. And then that one bomber, they come down over the Navy yard, and I was looking out the lanai and saw him, and the tracers hit him right in the stomach, where his gas tank was located, set him on fire. And I yelled, "Boy, we got one. Look out!" 'Cause he was coming straight for the hospital.

And just before he got there, he curved just a little bit to the left, and that took him from hitting the hospital, and made him hit the laboratory, right at the end of the ward. He hit that with his right wing, he cartwheeled under a house, right behind the hospital. Now, we have a couple of relics out of that plane, the radio and the safety belt come out of that airplane. And it didn't hit the hospital, it hit the chief master of arms' house, right behind the hospital.

JM: One account --- one survivor said he looked like he veered away. Do you . . .

JH: Yes, that's what I seen. He turned slightly left. Now, whether he did it deliberately or whether he did and just fell on his controls, or just out of control, nobody will every know. But he did make a slight turn. If he had hit straight in as he was coming, he'd a hit right in the ward that I was in, right between the first and second floors. That's the altitude he was at. He was right in there. But he turned just enough where he actually come out about, oh, seventy, eighty feet to the left, that close.

JM: Did wounded start arriving soon?

JH: Huh? Oh yeah.

JM: The wounded?

JH: Oh yeah. They started coming in, oh, within about thirty minutes.

JM: What were they like? What were the kind of condition were the guys in?

JH: Well, you can hardly describe it, John. They, the casualties coming in, some of them were broken arms, some of them with broken legs, some of them with shrapnel hits, some of them were just covered with oil and weren't hurt at all. Just a varied -- it was just a complete, whole slate of troubles. I've often wondered how doctors could take, you know, train for something like this. Because everything, you never know what the guy is gonna have. And one of the big troubles was when he got his with the shrapnel. Now, fellow with a short sleeve shirt, or something like that, you get him hit with a piece of shrapnel, and all you see is a little dent in the skin. But when they x-rayed, they find it's a big hunk of metal in there, and then they have to cut a big hole to get the shrapnel out. Shrapnel going in makes a little hole, but then to get it out, you got to cut a big hole. And this is really remarkable.

One of the things I'd like to point out now is that there was a lot of people in the hospital that were not serious. They just -- you know, little, little minor things. Immediately, they got their clothes on and disappeared back to their units. I remember there was one Marine that got hurt on the coral reef. His face was cut up like bad. Dr. McPherson had been taking -- he had took almost a cupful of coral out of this man's face. He said, "Now, you're going to have to heal some before doing more."

Little sarge disappeared and we saw him about five days later. He come back in all dirty and, boy, he was in for days and he had been on patrol, I guess, the whole time. And he said, "Doc, I can't see."

And his left eye had pulled down, or the scar tissue was pulling it down. So the doc says, "You got a few minutes?" And just slapped him in a chair and put some PRO-CANE, or something in there. Reached in with a scalpel and cut the scar tissue out, and blinked his eye a couple times, says, "Thanks, Doc," and disappeared, boy he was gone. He had work to do.

JM: The attack, when it was over, itself, a lot of work to do. But that night, I understand, was one of the hairiest. What was the scuttlebutt going around that first night?

JH: Well, the attack really lasted about an hour and a half. But real honestly, it felt like all day. I didn't think it was ever going to quit, especially when that second wave come in, they went at it with a real vigor. On the first wave, over a hundred and eight-three, which is forty-three fighters, forty torpedo planes, forty-nine horizontal bombers, and fifty-one dive bombers. When the second wave evolved, fifty minutes later, it was forty-four fighters, forty-six horizontal bombers and eighty dive bombers, 'cause they didn't bring any torpedoes in on the second wave. Boy, they didn't bring any big bombs in. Now, these big bombs were 800 kilograms, but they were really converted sixteen-inch artillery shells that had been turned down because of -- to get some of the weight off of 'em, and then they changed the fusing and put fins on 'em, and it was one of those that went down along side number two turret on the *ARIZONA* and killed it. Blew the whole front end of it open and wrecked all the fire fighting equipment, wrecked the front end of the main oil tanks and the forward powder magazines, and a single black powder magazine, small one, and a large gas tank they used for servicing the airplanes. That all in one shot.

JM: So when the second wave came in, that was -- it all started up again?

JH: It all started up again, but they were having a little different targeting. They were looking more or less to pick up loose ends, so to speak. The first wave was to get with the torpedoes and the big bombs, working on Battleship Row. That was the main object in coming here. Now then, they used the other ones for picking up loose ends, like the *NEVADA* had just got under way, and they turned the dive bombers loose on that and they splashed the stuffings out of it. And then were trying to get to sea, but Admiral Furlong ordered 'em to beach it on the west side of Ford Island, and they couldn't make it, so they beached it right at hospital point.

JM: Right . . .

JH: Right in front of me. On one, they had a one and a half mile out going tide, and they caught the stern and swung it around, so they still had steam up, so they backed it down across the channel to Waipio peninsula. Now that point sticking out there is still known as Nevada Point. But they beached it up there and they sent a couple of tugboats over to push it up, out of the way, to get it out of the channel. So this is --- now that was the main thing, they didn't want to let it sink in the channel and Commander Fuchida, who was wanting to sink it in the channel. And boy, he was really working on it. And I remember how thrilled we were when that got under way. Boy, we were going to get 'em, yeah, one old battleship. And . . .

JM: She was getting hammered pretty good though, as she . . .

JH: Never got loose. There was a lot of discussion and controversy about what it could have done if it got to sea. I like to compare that to the two British ships that they caught in the South China Sea, without air cover, and they lasted twenty minutes in deep water, which they lost the ships and crew. If we had lost our ships and crew in deep water, we would have been in real trouble, because we needed those men for the new construction coming off. We had eight or nine *ESSEX* class carriers that were due off of assembly line within months, and we would have been really caught short. So this is why it's a lot of good and a lot of bad in all this. And Admiral Kimmel himself considered having the ships at sea. But he knew if he had 'em at sea, he had no air cover for 'em. They would be absolutely bare. And this is one reason why they were in port. And so actually there were -- could have been a lot better off, had they been fully alert in battle stations, battle status, in port, if we're at sea. Because they were so slow, they couldn't go anywhere. They don't go over twenty knots. And so, there's a lot to be said for either way.

JM: Can we go back to right when the battle was winding down? The end of the second wave. There's a --- what kind of took over in the Navy yard and around the hospital?

JH: Around the hospital, they were still receiving patients like mad. What happened around in the Navy yard, I really can't say, but they were going from fight status to repair status.

JM: Did you see a lot of ships scrambling out of harbor?

JH: Oh, while it was going on. Boy, those destroyers were going out of there like bullets. And, about nine o'clock, the *ST. LOUIS* got out. That was a big ship.

JM: Mm-hm.

JH: Big cruiser. And it went about nine o'clock. It was the only big ship to get out during the raid.

JM: I understand you were supposed to go slow in the channel.

JH: (Chuckles) They have about a five or six knot speed limit in the channel to keep them wash the banks down. But I know the *HELM* went out of there at twenty-seven knots. I know the *MONAGHAN* went out at thirty knots. And I'm sure those others did the same. And when the *ST. LOUIS* hit the channel, I don't know how fast he was going. But somebody said that he had run up for full speed before he come out of the lock, or the, or the southeast lock there and turned down toward the main town, but he was supposed to be pulling for full speed. Now I do know he got out on the wrong side of the dredge line and run through it. He didn't even slow down. He cut that dredge right off. Now, that ship was 10,000 tons and a 107,000 horsepower. That dredge line didn't mean a thing to him.

But I think the worst thing I felt that day, of all the bad things I felt, I think the worst thing was about seven o'clock at night, when the *ENTERPRISE* planes come in. We had three dive bombers, followed by five wildcat fighters. And we even knew in the hospital who it was before they come in. But then, all at once, somebody opened up with a lightweight machine gun, probably a thirty, and in less than two seconds, you could walk on tracers all over that harbor.

And when you figured there were about five bullets up there for every tracer, then you know how many was there. Now, they knocked down all three dive bombers and killed five men that night, and six of them died the next day. The five fighters come in right behind them, they knocked down four of five. The fifth guy pulled back to sea. Now, he had been running on an empty gas tank for about twenty minutes. He pulled back to sea, got a little altitude, put his wheels down, flaps down, throttle back, cut his lights off. He dove that thing in and put it down on the field, slid it down the field. And they were still shooting at him, even doing that.

This pilot was an ensign, Mr. Mote. He retired as a captain, recently. He now lives here in Kailua. And to me, shooting down our own people was the worst feeling I had that day.

JM: You said you knew, even before they started to open up, that it was our planes coming in? How'd you know that?

JH: That night, the radio -- they had radioed ahead and passed the word around, supposedly to all the gunners. And so somebody said, "The *ENTERPRISE* planes coming in," 'cause they didn't want to light the ship up to take 'em back aboard. And so this is, I tell you, I have a funny feeling. If an enemy shoots at me, sure I'm scared, but I can't really hold it against them because I can do it back. But for you to shoot down your buddies, now that's another story. That bothers me. That was my worst feeling for that day.

JM: In the last couple of minutes we got, first, how did you feel towards Japan and the Japanese, specifically those guys, that were overhead? How did you feel about 'em on December 7, '41?

JH: Towards December 7, and the evening concerned, I was kind of upset. I was ready to do battle. Now, I have a slightly different feeling, it's all over. And most of the people you see now had nothing to do with it. And those others, they were following their orders as they -- just like we do. We're professionals, they're professionals. And if you're in uniform, you are a professional man of arms, whether you like it or not. And if you are in uniform, you're a professional gun man, whether you like it or not, regardless of what your job is, either a cook or baker, or radio man, anything else, you're still a professional man, professional arms.

JM: You volunteer a lot at the memorial, talking to visitors. But when on that date --- how do people from Japan react to you? What do they want to talk to you about?

JH: Very good. I get some very good conversation up there with them. And they are, I would consider them about as polite and -- can't find the right word -- gracious. No, that's not the right word. They're respectful.

JM: What do they ask you?

JH: They are the most -- about as respectful as anybody that comes out there. And we get very many, very few conversations so far as things like that. I've only had one or two people ask questions that I consider irritable, which is wanting to place blame, or something like that, and I will not. I refuse to get into these arguments. I will not get into 'em. I don't get into arguing this. Most of the people won't have any answer for it anyway.

JM: Like what kind of thing?

JH: Well, placing blame and doing this and doing that. Well, we'll name one case. Why are they so upset about our internees that we interned? They think we picked 'em all up. Actually, we only got less than ten percent. And so these were people who had already been suspicious. And case in point, when the plane crashed up on Niihau, the storekeeper up there immediately joined the Japanese pilot. He turned against his neighbors, right there. So this is something to think about. And many of these other, if they had had a landing here, how many would have changed sides real quick? I do know of a case in Kailua, when they saw those planes hitting Kaneohe. Sure, you're gonna grab a Japanese flag and run in the yard, and started waving it back and forth. Would she have joined them if they had landed? So these are things to think about. Even in California, they only picked up about ten percent. So these are people who were suspicious to start with. Now, I want to get off of that subject. I don't want to get into it.

JM: We've got two minutes. There are people who will be looking at this tape for a long time, maybe in the seventy-fifth or the hundredth. As a survivor and one who works with the people, the public so much, what do you want those visitors that you get to meet at the memorial to go away with? What kind of a feeling, what kind of a knowledge about Pearl Harbor, and what you went through?

JH: Well, I think the best thing I can say is that they should look to the stupidity of shooting at each other and war. It doesn't solve a stinking thing. And the reason we have our national motto, "Remember Pearl Harbor and keep America alert," and this is not a celebration, this is a remembrance. And if we keep alert, we won't have Pearl Harbors. We won't be there if we stay alert. And that is our main theme and hope. Stay alert so we won't get into trouble.

JM: John, thanks for coming.

JH: Okay. I hope I've said everything that you wanted.

(Laughter)

JH: And that's the way I do it. I mean, this is what . . .

END OF INTERVIEW

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