

#170 KARL A. JOHNSON: USS *UTAH*

Bart Fredo (BF): Okay, let me slate this. The following interview is with Karl Johnson and is being conducted on December 3, 1986 at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. It is about 7:45 in the evening. Mr. Johnson now lives in Livermore, California. My name is Bart Fredo, I'm doing the interview and also with me is Dan Martinez, who's a historian with the National Park Service.

Let me start off, Mr. Johnson, by asking you to tell us your name and where you were from back in 1941.

Karl Albert Johnson (KJ): All right. My name is Karl Albert Johnson. I was born in Burlington, Iowa, which is on the Mississippi River in the southern part of the state of Iowa.

BF: What branch of the service were you in?

KJ: I went in the Navy.

BF: What was your job and rank?

KJ: I was Seaman [*First Class*], leading seaman of the Second Division, at that time. And one of my jobs was helmsman aboard the *UTAH*.

BF: You were aboard the battleship, turned into a target ship, *UTAH*.

KJ: Right.

BF: Let's go back to that morning, the December seventh attack. Before this attack started, what were you doing?

KJ: I was reading the Sunday newspaper in a metal chair, tilted back against the set of lockers on the starboard side on the second deck of the ship.

BF: You were topside?

KJ: No, I was two decks down.

BF: When did you first realize something out of the ordinary was happening?

KJ: Well, the first notice, a friend of mine was laying on the deck writing a letter and he said, "Hey, Cale, something happened up forward."

And I said, "Oh, you're crazy, Jigger."

And he said, "No, I felt the ship shake."

But I didn't. And then all of a sudden, we took the first torpedo and -- excuse me (drinking) -- I stood up and started over these, towards the ladders and the second torpedo hit us, maybe twenty, thirty seconds later and I was knocked over and I landed on my jaw and I busted sixteen of my teeth. I didn't know at the time.

About that time, someone hollered, "Japanese air raid, honest to god."

I thought a heavy bomber like a B-17 or B-24. I thought the ship would rise up, rock, settle down, 'cause I thought it was a near miss. However, I

started down to shut watertight compartment because we'd been wide open, getting ready for an INSERV inspection, and someone stopped me. I turned around and came back up, went up the ladder to the next deck. Went aft a way up the ladder 'til I was up topside, in the aft part of the ship.

BF: How long was it from the time of that first hit, to the time you managed to get topside? Was it very long?

KJ: Oh, I doubt if it was more than a minute and a half. It seemed rather long, but I think we were moving pretty rapidly.

BF: Were you feeling your jaw at that point?

KJ: No, I had spit out several pieces of teeth but -- it stunned me for a minute, but I'd done a lot of boxing and taken some pretty good punches. No, I wasn't feeling any pain.

BF: So you get topside, what do you see?

KJ: The first thing I saw was a plane swooping low overhead, coming from my left, which would be the Ford Island, and a huge column of black smoke off to my left, which I assume must have been the *ARIZONA*.

BF: That's on the other side of Ford Island from where the *UTAH* is.

KJ: On the opposite side.

BF: And what else did you see?

KJ: Well, I did see the *TANGIER*, the ship immediately astern of us, firing . .

BF: That's a seaplane tender?

KJ: Mm hm, a seaplane tender -- firing a gun. And then I was so busy occupied getting up to the side of the ship and down where I can jump into the water that I didn't see anything right at that time.

BF: Well then, what was happening to the *UTAH* at this point when you just reached deck?

KJ: Well, she was already beginning to list outboard port side enough of an angle that I put my hands down, I walked up the covered deck much like an animal or a dog would walk up, on my hands and feet. It was easier to walk up that way than try to stand erect.

BF: At this point, you knew the ship was going to go down?

KJ: I knew she was going to go down before I ever got topside. We were wide open like a bathtub.

BF: Because you were ready for this inspection?

KJ: Mm hm.

BF: So what happened to you next? You were . . .

KJ: Well, I slid down the side of the ship, to the blister, dove in, swam over to a whaleboat that was tied up by the after quay, and I got in and I looked up to the quay and I hollered up, "Is there an engineer who can run this boat?"

And a friend, Leonard -- we called him Gus -- Gus Horn came down, started the boat up. I couldn't remember where the tiller was. My mind was a blank. It was right there but I grabbed the jackstaff. We used the jackstaff to steer with.

BF: Let me go back just a moment. When you left the ship, did a lot of guys leave with you?

KJ: I guess it must have been. Some were still -- the lines had not parted yet. Some of them were still going over on the lines over to the quay, and they hadn't parted. And . . .

BF: This is onto the land side?

KJ: Yeah, on the land side, which was the starboard side of the ship.

BF: You went off the other side?

KJ: No, I went off the land side. I went off the high side, starboard side.

BF: How many other men did you see in the water when you were there?

KJ: Well, as soon as I got in the boat, I could see heads all over. And . . .

BF: Any estimate on the number?

KJ: No, I'd really not care to estimate -- if I were to make a guess, I'd say between fifty and a hundred.

BF: Was there much oil in the water? Was it on fire?

KJ: Not on our side. The oil was on the outboard side and the temp--

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BF: I understand that there were timbers on the *UTAH*. What were they used for?

KJ: Well, since the ship was a target ship, she was subject to being bombed with dummy bombs. Either fifty-six pound water bombs or five-pound black powder bombs. And these timbers were to protect the deck and some of them were built up over capstans and winches, so that none of the equipment got hurt. These were either six-by-six or six-by-twelve and some of them as long as thirty feet long that we placed over the entire deck of the ship.

BF: Did these timbers cause any problems during the attack?

KJ: I didn't know at the time, but I understood as they started to slide off, men were either trapped or hit and it probably caused several casualties. How many, I have no idea.

BF: But you didn't see any of these?

KJ: No. By this time, I was over on the opposite side of the ship.

BF: Were you one of the first ones to manage to get off?

KJ: Well, by the time I got into the boat and Gus Horn got there, there were heads floating around in the water, men swimming, some of them swimming in the island and some of them paddling around, waiting to be picked up, which we started doing.

BF: Did you see many wounded?

KJ: No, I didn't see, I didn't see any bloody ones that I would take to be severely wounded. Scraped by the barnacles, probably, something like that.

BF: The fact that the *UTAH* was no longer a battleship but a target ship, how many men were aboard that morning?

KJ: Our complement was somewhere between 610, 620, but many of 'em were on the beach, our . . .

(TAPE STOPS, THEN RESTARTS)

BF: Besides being a target ship, I understand the *UTAH* had another function.

KJ: She was a gunnery ship. We had some of the latest guns, most up to date, including British guns, the Swedish twenty-millimeter and the forty-millimeter.

BF: Those are anti-aircraft guns.

KJ: Yes.

BF: So it was a pretty sophisticated ship, besides being something that the Navy dropped dummy bombs on.

KJ: That's true. You see, in order to drop bombs on us, we had to get below decks and the estimated to be a million dollars worth of remote control gear to con her from the second deck so that no one would be up where the bomb might the bridge and injure somebody. Yeah, she was sophisticated.

BF: Let's go ahead now to -- you're in this whaleboat?

KJ: Yes.

BF: What happens next?

KJ: Well, Gus came down, started up, and by this time, there were men all around. The first man I pulled out of the water had a life jacket and a baseball uniform on. His name was Donald Austin Green from my hometown of Burlington. So he became my bow hook and as we'd ease up, he'd pull a man in and then we'd pick 'em up and I remember one in particular, all I saw was about this much of his face. He was next thing to drowning. A man named Green and -- we pulled him in. So we soon had a boatload, took 'em over to Ford Island, dumped 'em off, turned around and came back and started picking up a second load. And we got about half full and we picked up Lieutenant Commander Solomon Isequith, and he said, "Take me into the beach."

Well, a seaman listens to what an officer says, so I turned around. We took that half a load into the beach. Then we came out for a third load and by this time, there were very few in the water. We may have picked up, oh, four, five, six. And the ship was doing her last slow -- and I mean very slow -- roll. I had no idea how deep the water was and I screamed at the -- I really hollered because I was frightened that she might go under and suck us under. I had read about things like that.

BF: How close were you at that point?

KJ: Oh, twenty to thirty feet off from her, heading in towards her. So we stopped, Gus backed her down and we watched the men, as the ship rolled away from us, the men walked towards us. And then we slowly brought the bow of the boat up and . . .

BF: Up to the . . .

KJ: Up to the . . .

BF: . . . capsized ship?

KJ: . . . capsized ship and they walked into the . . .

BF: They never touched the water?

KJ: No, they never touched the water, the last group. Once again, oh, right, I guess, somewhere between six and ten or eleven.

BF: So how many total did you save, did you pluck from the water or from the capsized *UTAH*?

KJ: Oh, perhaps twenty-five, thirty-five, maybe forty-five or fifty. I really don't know.

BF: Really, pretty good.

KJ: We were so damn busy, we were too busy to be frightened, I'll tell you that. (Chuckles)

BF: Because you were so busy, did you have much of a chance to see what was happening around the rest of the harbor?

KJ: No, I didn't even know they machine gunned us.

BF: You were machinegunned?

KJ: Don, yeah, Don Green -- well, when he brought the boat in, the boat swung and the rudder disengaged. They had what's called pintle and gudgeons. And the rudder disengaged, so I tried to get it back in and of course, the action of the water, I couldn't do it. So Don Green got over, went over the side with his life jacket on and was -- so I just settled back to let him put it back in, and thank god he called me because when he called me, I leaned forward, they machine gunned past. Well, I was saved (chuckles). I didn't even know it. But he felt the bullets pound into the water. They hit that close to him that he could actually feel the force of the gun, or the slugs hitting the water.

BF: If you had not leaned forward?

KJ: I'd have probably taken it right through here, somewhere.

BF: Was that the only strafing that you took that day?

KJ: The only one I knew about. Like I said, I didn't know that 'til he told me about it.

BF: You were so busy.

KJ: Yeah, we were busy.

BF: So you really didn't have a chance to think about what was happening?

KJ: No, we then dropped a third load off. We said let's go outboard and see who's out there. So we tried to go between her and the *RALEIGH*, which was sinking, forward of us.

BF: That's a cruiser, light cruiser.

KJ: Mm hm, light cruiser, *RALEIGH*. The timber stopped us. So we went aft and tried to go between the stern of the *UTAH* and the *TANGIER*.

BF: These are the timbers in the water?

KJ: Mm hm. Those heavy timbers. In fact, we rammed 'em. We backed off and I thought maybe we could push. All we did was slide up on 'em, slide off. So we said the heck with it.

BF: So you went around 'em?

KJ: So we went -- no, we couldn't get around 'em.

BF: Oh.

KJ: Because we couldn't get around the *RALEIGH* and we couldn't get around the *TANGIER*, we were trapped in our own little lake there, so to speak.

BF: What happened?

KJ: Well, we took the boat back in and I jumped out of the boat and I don't know where Gus Horn went.

BF: You jumped out of the boat onto Ford Island?

KJ: Onto Ford Island, because there was nothing else to do and I had saw a pile -- now, this is the weird part. There was a pile of dirt there -- oh, I don't know, two, three blocks long, about six feet high. Where did this dirt come from? Some kind of a hole. That didn't register. I ran over the pile of dirt. I was like a dog, trying to, trying to dig a little spot to get into.
(Laughs)

BF: Why?

KJ: I was going to hide (laughing).

BF: Were there attacking planes still overhead?

KJ: Yeah, there were planes overhead.

BF: You could see them?

KJ: Yeah, you could hear 'em. And I thought, "Where's Don Green?" I turn around and looked behind me and Don was tying the boat up. I thought, what a stupid thing to do. Who cares about the whaleboat at a time like this? But what I was doing was very intelligent. (Laughing)

BF: So you dug your hole, did you go in?

KJ: Don Green -- next thing I knew, he was right alongside of me and we were like two dogs trying to get somewhere to hide, and about that time, we heard the funniest sound. It was -- the best way to describe it, is if you took a piece of cardboard or a playing card and stuck it into the blade of a fan. It kind of made that funny noise like that. We looked over and a bomb had lit upside down between us and the *TANGIER*, sticking tail first. And I thought, delayed action bomb, the safest spot's on the other side of that -- I thought it was going to explode and kill us. And we both ran up that pile of dirt and there's the ditch. And we jumped from the pile of dirt down into the ditch. It's a wonder we didn't break a leg or an ankle, but that was the crew that we'd been wondering where they were.

BF: The rest of the *UTAH* crew?

KJ: The rest of the *UTAH* crew and some of the shore members from Ford Island were down in that ditch.

BF: How many men would you estimate were there?

KJ: Well, let's say the ditch was about three blocks long. We were standing at least as close as you and I are. And then it dawned on me, here we were with our whites on, a nice long -- what a beautiful target. And that's -- that frightened me, 'cause they could have strafed us and nowhere to go. The ditch was over our head.

BF: So what did you do?

KJ: Well, what could you do?

BF: Did you go in the ditch?

KJ: Oh yeah, I was already in the ditch. I got frightened after I got in there and got time to think.

BF: Oh, and you thought about getting out, but did you?

KJ: No.

BF: You stayed with the rest of the guys.

KJ: My division officer, Lieutenant J. G. Hawk, came along and he had confiscated -- he'd gone down to the Navy housing, he came back with several bottles of liquor and cigarettes. Now, I boxed so I didn't smoke. He handed out a cigarette and lit a cigarette. I don't know why (chuckles) I did.

BF: Did that bomb ever go off, do you know?

KJ: I don't know, because by this time, I was on the other side of the big pile of dirt and down the ditch a ways up. I wasn't . . . if it went off, I don't know.

BF: Did the attack end with you still in the ditch?

KJ: You know, there was a pause in the attack.

BF: Between the two waves.

KJ: Yeah. When everything got quiet, we climbed out of the ditch and some men started coming across the island. We said, "Where you from?"

They said, "Wee-vee." *WEST VIRGINIA*, in other words.

And one of us said, "My god, did she get hit?"

And they named off the rest of 'em.

BF: You couldn't see what was happening.

KJ: All we knew is what they told us.

BF: What happens next?

KJ: All of a sudden, off in the distance, we heard shooting again. Back in the ditch we went. (Laughs)

BF: What kind of shooting? Anti-aircraft fire or . . .

KJ: It sounded like it and it was the second wave coming and I imagine, I don't know, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five minutes, space in there. Long enough to get out of the ditch and walk around a little bit and But still, we didn't really see what was on the far side of Ford Island.

BF: That's on the east side of Ford Island.

KJ: Yeah. The Battleship Row, in other words.

BF: So the next wave, the second and last wave of attacking planes come in, what do you do?

KJ: The only thing we could do, hide in the ditch. And an odd thing that happened, it started to rain. And a rainbow appeared. Another one, directly over it. (Crying) It was just -- oh, I'm sorry -- it was just like an omen saying, "Hey buddy, you're all right." Exactly like an omen.

BF: You stayed in the ditch throughout the second wave, the second attack.

KJ: Mm hm.

BF: Were you able to see very much?

KJ: Our field of vision was, well, let me see, you can imagine the ditch just a little wider than we were, and over our heads, so our field of vision was maybe eighty to ninety degrees total.

BF: Did you see any attacking planes get hit?

KJ: Yeah, I saw five planes either smoking or burning. I never saw a single one hit the ground, because they'd flash across and you could see 'em in that span of vision, then they were out of sight.

BF: Once the attack was over, you were still in the ditch, what happened to you next?

KJ: We got out of the ditch and they commandeered a group of us to go over to get some bombs out. We went over toward bomb storage and they were going to break out bombs. They never did and I -- to show you how ignorant I was, I had the Navy pocket knife in my pocket and that Navy pocket knife is buried by one of the old trees over there, somewhere, because I thought if I'm going to go in there, I don't want any metal on me (chuckles). So I dug a hole, put my knife in there and never got a chance to get back to get it.

BF: So what was the rest of the morning like?

KJ: If there's a complete, if there is a blank in my mind, it's what happened from then until we got over to the gun[boat] *SACRAMENTO*.

BF: You and all the members of the *UTAH* crew?

KJ: Yeah, they took quite a group of us. I think there was one man on from *NEVADA* got over there and quite a group of us. Essentially, there wasn't anything we could do. There weren't any planes to put the bombs on. The people on Ford Island were manning the guns that were out, and there were few of them. And the hangar was in shambles.

BF: This period of time that you really don't remember what happened, do you know how long a period . . .

(TAPE STOPS THEN RESTARTS)

BF: (Clears throat)

(Conversation off-mike.)

BF: Okay. Let's go back. Early in the attack, you were still below deck.

KJ: All right.

BF: I understand something happened, a man ran by you and told you do something and because he did, it may have saved your life? Tell me that story.

KJ: Well, we'd been cleaning bilges out at sea. I guess, maybe rights, but we'd been doing it. So we were wide open about six decks straight down. When they hollered, "Japanese air raid," and we took our second hit, I started down the ladder -- I was going to go down and try to set watertight integrity. And I was down the ladder about up to my ribs here and a pair of legs came by and a voice said, "Where you going?"

I said, "Down to shut C-group."

And he says, "Don't go down there, you'll get killed."

And I went down, it was completely black and I thought, "He's probably right." So I turned around, came back up and whoever he was, he was gone. But . . .

BF: No idea who he is?

KJ: Haven't the foggiest who he was. Just a pair of dungaree legs and a voice.

BF: And you listened to him?

KJ: I listened to him and that's why I'm here today, I think. Yeah, because then I turned and went up the ladder.

BF: Once you got off the ship and you got into the, to launch the whale boat and you were helping to pick men out of the water, I understand you also were involved in trying to help men who were trapped in the hull of the *UTAH*.

KJ: Well, only indirectly.

BF: Tell me about that.

KJ: Jack Vaessen was the electrician striker and he was down at a panel, electrical panel board that was directly above the manhole cover that I had put on with only four nuts. I had asked the bosun mate what to do and he said, "Pull the lens hole electrical leads out. Just put a couple of nuts on it."

So I put four nuts on it and put the dog wrench back where it belonged. Jack was down there with a battle lantern. When the ship was hit, he saw that manhole and he took the four nuts off and as the ship rolled over, he went down into that set of bilges, which left him in an air pocket. Because about, I would guess, probably ten to twelve feet of the ship, of the bottom of the hull was above the water line. And he was hammering with that wrench. Incidentally, he still has the wrench and the battle lantern at home. They're his. But they heard him and in that interval between the first and second attack, [*Lieutenant*] Commander Isequith commandeered a boat and got some men and a cutting torch and a ship fitter off the *RALEIGH* came down. Jack can tell you what his name is -- Hill. And I can't remember his initials. I think it's J. W. Hill. And they cut a hole in the bottom of the ship and got Jack out.

BF: Did you see any of this?

KJ: We were standing on the beach, watching them, but I had nothing to do with it. Just watched them go over there.

BF: Did you see any other activity around the capsized *UTAH* that caught your attention?

KJ: While we were picking up people, there was one other spot back by what's called the shaft alley and we could hear a tapping in that, but you could also see bubbles of air coming up. After a while it quit, so I imagine the man in there was probably drowned. Other than that, that's the only incident within the hull itself.

BF: Let's go to the time after the attack. It's over and you've gone over to the *SACRAMENTO*, which is a cruiser.

KJ: No, it was a gun ship.

BF: I'm sorry, gun ship. What happened then? Where did you go? Was this ship under way? [Note: *USS SACRAMENTO (PG-19)* was a gunboat.]

KJ: No. She was tied up over near ten-ten in one of the slips there. And . . .

BF: This is opposite the east side of Ford Island?

KJ: Yes. That's heading up towards [Merry] Point.

BF: So you can see . . .

KJ: Yeah, we could see out.

BF: . . . Battleship Row.

KJ: We could see Battleship Row then, and the *ARIZONA* is busted in half. Her mainmast and foremast were twisted like this. And she's burning fiercely. The stern of the *TENNESSEE* is on fire. The *WEST VIRGINIA* is sunk. The *CALIFORNIA* is down by the bow on the port side, looking like she's going to sink. And the *NEVADA* had beached herself farther out.

BF: And the *OKLAHOMA* . . .

KJ: Oh, of course . . .

BF: Yeah.

KJ: . . . the *OKLAHOMA* was over. Yeah, I'd forgotten about it. And the *OSAGE* was laying over.

BF: That was a destroyer?

KJ: No, that was a minelayer.

BF: Next to the *HELENA* on the opposite shore?

KJ: Right.

BF: Tough question, when you first had a good look at Battleship Row, could you believe what you saw?

KJ: No, not really. I couldn't believe my own ship would -- we weighed 27,500 tons. I didn't think they could sink her and I certainly didn't think she'd roll upside down in seven minutes. The odd Saturday, I had gone Christmas shopping and all the flags were out. They called it "airing bunting." And I thought, what a beautiful sight it was to see all those different color signal flags, because we went around from the topside of Ford Island, clear past Battleship Row to get over to [Merry] Point. It looked beautiful. And I remember thinking, "What a hell of a mess now!" It was a bad situation.

BF: What was your reaction when you first saw it?

KJ: Well, almost total disbelief and by this time, rumors were all over that they were landing, that the water was poisoned, that there were arrows cut in the cane fields, pointing towards Ford Island (chuckles), all the weird And it was easy to believe that they could send a landing force in.

BF: Do you remember how you felt? What emotion you were feeling when you saw Battleship Row from the *SACRAMENTO*? Was it one of anger?

KJ: That's funny. We had talked earlier -- we always said, "We're gonna have to fight 'em. Let's do it and get it over with. We could lick 'em in six months." And then when we looked at that mess, you realized, hey, we didn't have an opponent that couldn't fight. We're gonna have a tough fight on our hands.

BF: What was the rest of the day like for you?

KJ: We went over on -- when we got on the ship, they broke out clothing for us. I had on a pair of white shorts, a skivvy shirt -- though I had taken the skivvy shirt off, 'cause it got wet. So all I had on was a pair of shorts and the shoes and socks. And so they broke out dungarees and different clothing for us so at least we had something. They made sandwiches. And they were making pots of coffee. And they were arranging for us to sleep there that night. And by this time, by the time all that was done, it was into dusk or maybe dark already.

BF: At what point did you become aware that you had a rather serious injury to your jaw?

KJ: Well, the teeth surprisingly enough, didn't hurt. I didn't have -- I hadn't busted enough of 'em off that the nerves were exposed. When I hit, my jaw slid sideways, because I hit here, and as the teeth slipped across one another, they chipped. I chipped sixteen teeth. And I went until 1943 before we got a dentist to start working on 'em. So, see, they couldn't hurt too bad. They were just chipped. (Chuckles)

BF: But not much pain?

KJ: Not no pain.

BF: What was the next day like and then a few days after that?

KJ: Well, after firing at our own planes at night, I got put on burial detail. And I spend Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday on burial detail. And I was twenty-two years old when we got hit, with a seventeen-year old mind. No cares, no worries, but I grew up quick, real quick.

BF: That was not a very nice job.

KJ: No, that was a bad job.

BF: Has the thought of that lived with you?

KJ: Yes.

BF: That must be a pretty vivid memory of that whole episode.

KJ: Yeah. At first, I couldn't talk about it. Once I got so I could talk (crying), it gradually went away.

BF: What is the most vivid memory? Forty-five years later, what's the most vivid memory of that day?

KJ: Well, I think the ones that stand out are the first torpedo hitting us, that bomb dropping (chuckles) that I thought was going to explode and kill us, seeing the rainbow and then the first impression when we got over, where we could really see Ford Island. That plus the fact that we were always almost positive they would -- I felt myself that within two, three days, I'd be a prisoner. I honestly did, because I don't think we could have stopped 'em. I don't see how we could have stopped 'em, if they had landed.

BF: In the years since the attack, when you've heard or read the expression or the words, "Pearl Harbor," or "December seventh," does it bring back memories immediately?

KJ: Yeah, absolutely. Sure, it brings back -- and I'll tell you of what it reminds me. We were so woefully unprepared. We were so naive, sitting there, getting ready to go to church, play football, baseball, reading the Sunday paper, writing letters home.

BF: Hearing these words, though, did it suddenly transport you back in time? Were you suddenly back aboard the *UTAH*?

KJ: (Chuckles) I think when I come out here, like in '71 when we went out for the ground breaking of the *UTAH* memorial, and '76 when we went over there and took pictures of it to see the old ship, yeah. It tugs at your heart.

BF: Some people who lived through the attack have some bad feelings about Japan, (CJ mumbles) bad feelings about Japanese, still. How do you feel?

KJ: Well, first of all, they were doing a job like we were. The average military person that hit us was taking orders like we were. I had a lot of hate in my heart for the Japanese at first, but the only one I saw up close was one of the pilots, when we were on burial detail. We picked up one of the pilots. And . . .

BF: Will you tell me about that?

KJ: Oh. When we brought him in, he had a plotting board and they had a map. And believe it or not, the map showed the *ENTERPRISE* being where we were. See, that was their normal tie-up.

BF: Carrier *ENTERPRISE*?

KJ: Carrier *ENTERPRISE*. Now, she was supposed to -- we had heard that we were supposed to get under way at seven o'clock that morning because the *ENTERPRISE* was going to come in and take her rightful berth there, at Fox-11, where we were tied up.

BF: Where did you find the Japanese pilot?

KJ: I don't know. They brought him in and after they brought him in, we handled him then.

BF: I see.

KJ: I didn't see where . . .

BF: You didn't see the wreckage of his plane.

KJ: I don't know whether he was in a plane. I think you've seen the picture where they're hoisting a man, his face is gone? That was, I think, the one. I think that was the Japanese fellow that we picked up.

BF: You said a moment ago that you, at that time, you had a lot of hatred.

KJ: Yeah.

BF: What's happened to that hatred?

KJ: Well, the entire war was so personal, aboard ship you don't see your enemy face to face.

BF: So impersonal you mean?

KJ: Or so impersonal, I mean. Excuse me. Sorry. It's not like a man on the ground, seeing his enemy firing at him. We didn't see the enemy. The only man I saw was when I first came up topside, the first plane that came over, I could see his face very clearly.

BF: So the only enemy you saw the whole war is in the first minute?

KJ: Uh . . .

BF: Just about?

KJ: Just about. Up at Kiska and Attu too, I saw a few of 'em, but they were dead. Yeah. The only ones.

BF: So you were saying over the course of the war, this hatred that you felt dissipated?

KJ: Not 'til after the war was over. We still had a lot of hatred to get rid of in our heart, until after the war ended. And then, I guess it's like anything else, hurt goes away.

BF: You've been back to Hawaii . . .

KJ: Yes.

BF: . . . since the war. You see there are a lot of Japanese tourists here. What goes through your mind? How do you feel when you see a group of Japanese tourists walk by?

KJ: (Chuckles) I wonder if they've taken over our island if they wanted in peace what they lost in war?

BF: That's another question altogether.

KJ: (Laughs) Yeah.

BF: But how does Carl Johnson feel, when he sees them?

KJ: I don't have any, I'm not -- no ax to grind, I guess, is the word. I worked with some very good friends of mine at the lab in Livermore were Japanese and some of them came over from Japan and visited our lab. I think my feelings are pretty well resigned to they did what they did and we came back and did what we did, except when they say Hiroshima. My blood boils then.

BF: How so? Explain what you mean.

KJ: Well, okay. We were at peace when they hit us. They were at war. And anybody who has studied the invasion plans knows that if we had invaded -- and I probably wouldn't have lived through it -- they might have lost as many as two, two and a half million people and we might have had up to a million casualties, because we wound up going into Tokyo Bay, on the cruiser *DETROIT*, the twenty-ninth of August. And, boy, they were ready for us. So where they killed, maybe, a hundred, 130,000 people, they probably saved a million and a half of their own people and maybe a million of ours.

BF: Have you dreamt very much about the attack?

KJ: (Chuckles) My wife says I used to. I was damage control. And I used to have one dream in which a fire would start and the compartment like this would start closing in. And shortly after we were married, why, I was thrashing around, I guess, and so she put her arm and leg over me. I threw her clear out of bed. Because in my dream, the weight of her arm and leg was something had fallen over me and I had to get it off of me and I guess I just exploded.

BF: Did anything like that happen to you in the war?

KJ: Oh, then they're the same as I got my leg burned and took a piece of shrapnel across there, but . . .

BF: Where were you then?

KJ: I was up on deck of the ship. I don't know which ship I was on. Well, the carrier -- oh just a minute -- *SACRAMENTO* -- oh, not *SACRAMENTO*, excuse me -- *SARATOGA*.

BF: And where were you?

KJ: Off Iwo Jima. She had taken a kamikaze.

BF: And you took some shrapnel?

KJ: Yeah and we were fighting a fire. And some of the planes exploded. They had night fighters. She was so slow, by that time, that she was carrying night fighters, and the kamikaze got her. And part of the ship blew up.

BF: Was that . . .

KJ: That was . . .

BF: . . . your second wound received in war?

KJ: Well, yeah, if you want to call . . .

BF: The joint stood up then . . .

KJ: Yeah, but I didn't even go up to the hospital for that. This one here, aboard ship, they cut the eyebrow off and he put two stitches in it, so I relaxed and then he said, "I think I better put another stitch in that." Boy, did that third one hurt. I was, I was already for the first two, and then when I relaxed and he put that third one in, it burned. (Laughs) It hurt.

BF: You've played a part in a very important event in history. How has that affected your life?

KJ: Good lord, it's affected my whole rest of my life. I have taught high school kids. I've been interviewed out at the lab where I work. It got embarrassing at times, and at home, there were three boys on that same ship, all from the little town of Burlington, Iowa, and every time one of us got home, there would be a letter or an article in the newspaper . . .

(TAPE STOPS, THEN RESTARTS)

KJ: . . . war, got out again in '54. And I retired in January the first, 1970, no 1980. Forty years, five months and sixteen days regular and reserve time.

BF: What did you do at the Livermore lab? Are you still there?

KJ: Well, I retired in '81, but I'm back two days a week. I carried a security clearance in what was called an AE, authorized . . .

(TAPE STOPS, THEN RESTARTS)

BF: Okay. You lived through the attack. What did you learn about yourself from the experience?

KJ: Oh boy. Well, I guess, number one, I grew up. I maybe became more tolerant. I loved to travel. I got a chance to travel. And I think my outlook on life, since I did live through it, was live a full life. I've enjoyed every single day. It changed my life enough that I probably am a better man for it.

BF: Really?

KJ: I hope so. Yeah.

BF: If you had a way of waving a magic wand and changing history around a little bit so that you, Carl Johnson, could eliminate your presence on Oahu that day, would you do it?

KJ: No.

BF: You wouldn't change anything?

KJ: No. No, I was having a ball out here. I didn't ask to be in on the attack, but I was here and I can say I think I profited from it. I think I'm a better person because of it. I wasn't hurt, I was lucky. I went all the way through the war. I wound up sitting in Tokyo Bay watching them sign the peace treaty. And I don't think you can do much more than that. If you came through

that, why (chuckles) you were, number one, lucky and I just, I think that mentally I grew too. Yeah.

(Conversation off-mike)

BF: Hello? Keep it rolling? Okay. Let's see. Have you had a chance at all to talk with any Japanese survivors of World War II?

KJ: I had a conversation with Commander [Mitsuo] Fuchida.

BF: Well, tell us about that.

KJ: You know he Oh.

(Conversation off-mike)

(TAPING STOPS, THEN RESTARTS)

KJ: . . . by the time these kids passed the word along, by the time the fourth class came in and I said, "Would you care to venture a guess?," everybody hollered, "Nineteen thirty-seven." (Laughs)

BF: I understand that you, at one time, had an opportunity to talk with Commander Fuchida, who led the Japanese attack.

KJ: Yes. He converted to Christianity and gave a talk at a church in Livermore. I went to the talk and I went backstage and sat and talked with him like we are for about fifteen minutes.

BF: What did you talk about?

KJ: Mostly the attack.

BF: Well . . .

KJ: Okay, I had mentioned that I was on the *UTAH*. He says, "Yes, *UTAH*." He knew about it.

And he said -- we got talking about how they caught us so unaware. And then he told me the story that other people have heard of how come we were hit simultaneously, not only with the fighters, but the torpedo planes and the bombers.

They had two plans of attack. And they had a signal, was a Very pistol. If they came in undetected, he'd fire one shot and the torpedo plane would hit us first. If he fired two, that meant that they had been discovered and the fighter planes and the bombers were supposed to try to knock out the gun defense.

Well, he fired that first flare and it went into a cloud. And he said he thought that his pilots did not see it. So he fired a second one. Still needed to be one, okay. The ones that were looking for two, saw two. The ones that were looking for one saw that one and so we were hit almost simultaneously -- when the torpedoes hit the ship, the fighter plane was overhead. The first plane I saw was a fighter plane, so they were in there simultaneously, and fortunately for them it worked out perfect. For us, it was a disaster that . . .

BF: What did you think of him, the man?

KJ: He was a very quiet man, soft spoken and seemed to be genuine. He evidently was an intelligent naval officer and pilot. And at that time, I had more curiosity than animosity towards him. We had a nice conversation. He spoke English well enough that you could understand him well. And he knew that they had sunk the *UTAH*.

BF: Did he apologize?

KJ: No. I didn't ask him too, either. (Chuckles) No, he did not.

BF: Did you sense that he was in any way sorry for that day, or what was your perception?

KJ: Sorry or contrite. No, I think it was a very straightforward talk we had, and he had done his job as he was supposed to do. He didn't seem like he was bragging about it or anything. It was very matter of fact, like an engineer would go over a set of specifications.

BF: What if you had the opportunity to talk to some other Japanese veterans of the war? Would you avoid such a meeting or would you look forward to such a meeting?

KJ: I think it'd be nice to change experiences. See what, see how they felt, see what it was like to them. Yeah, I don't think I would shun away from meeting them. There are certain ones who would. In fact, five years ago, they didn't want to put a wreath out there that was brought in by the Alaska chapter, given to them by the Japanese vice consul, I believe, from Anchorage.

BF: Some people who went through the attack don't really like talking about it. Were . . .

KJ: I thought a lot if you talk about it, you get it out of your system.

BF: Are you still getting it out of your system?

KJ: Mm hm.

BF: It's not all out yet.

KJ: (Crying) I don't think it'll ever be out.

BF: Stop.

KJ: It just . . . no, it's a . . . but, I think if I had not gotten it out, you know how some of these Vietnam veterans are? Mental cases? You can't keep it bottled up. You gotta talk about it and surprisingly enough, the things I remember worked most about the war are the funny things. Even --- I didn't put this on the film, but I swam in boot camp for a kid who was that much taller than me. His name, Jimmy Oberto. I was a typical Swede, blonde, blue-eyed, fair-skinned. He was dark-haired, dark-eyed, dark-skinned. He couldn't swim.

So our chief had larceny in his heart. He had about five of us. I put on Jimmy Oberto's pants and I rolled 'em up about that much and I put his dog tag on and I memorized it and I said, "My name is James Oberto," and gave him the

dog tag number. I learned to swim in the Mississippi River when I was about like that. Swam up, swam back. He was aboard the *UTAH* with us, and he couldn't swim. He couldn't swim then, he couldn't swim when the ship was sunk. And Lefty Holtz literally put his foot in his butt and pushed him over the side. (Chuckles) And he told me -- he lives in Arizona, I believe, yeah, somewhere in Arizona. He told me that when he hit the water, he had a life jacket on him. Well, some of those life jackets were deadly. (Chuckles) They were a hindrance. And he maintains that my boat went over his head. Then he hit the water and the life jacket just sort of filled up with water and he started sinking. So he peeled it off. He came to the top and he swam. And he swam all the way to Ford Island, but he couldn't swim. That is, he couldn't swim until then. (Chuckles)

Now, that's a type of funny thing you remember so well. (Chuckles) That and trying to dig a hole in that pile of dirt. I was stupid. (Laughs)

BF: Thank you, Karl.

KJ: Sure.

(TAPE STOPS, THEN RESTARTS)

BF: Okay. Let me know when I can talk.

END OF INTERVIEW