

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#423

LAWRENCE R. RODRIGGS

KAIMUKI RESIDENT

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 6, 2001
BY BOB CHENOWITH**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

(Conversation off-mike)

Bob Chenoweth (BC): The following oral history interview was conducted by Bob Chenoweth for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, on December 6, 2001 at eight o'clock p.m. The person being interviewed is Lawrence R. "Larry" Rodriggs, who was a boy, nine years old, at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, residing on Maunalani Heights...

Lawrence Rodriggs (LR): Maunalani Heights, right, hm-hmm.

BC: ...on December 7, 1941. For the record, please state your full name, place of birth and date of birth.

LR: Lawrence R. Rodriggs. Place of birth, Wailuku, Maui, December 27, 1932.

BC: What did you consider your hometown in 1941?

LR: Honolulu. Actually Kaimuki and the mountains above it, but Honolulu post office.

BC: What were your parents' names?

LR: My father was Reginald Kalelani Rodriggs. My mother was Rose Rego Rodriggs. My father was a driver for the American Sanitary Laundry at the time and my mother was an executive secretary to the manager of Kodak Hawaii, at the time.

BC: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

LR: One younger brother, a little over two years younger than me.

BC: Where did you go to high school?

LR: Here in Honolulu, to St. Louis High School.

BC: You didn't enlist, so that's not an issue.

LR: That's later!

BC: Yeah. (Laughs) Larry, let's explore a little bit of your childhood memories prior to December 7 and tell me a little bit about your growing up and your brother and what kind of things you did and then we can maybe get into the events leading up the attack.

LR: It was a very happy childhood, prior to the war. We had a set routine as a family since both my parents worked, we had to coordinate as far as schooling is concerned and having a sitter at our house and so forth, when we came home from school before they came home. But we looked forward to Sunday. Sunday was first church and then after that we'd either go to Waikiki to swim or to Hanauma Bay and swim. And so it was, we'd have picnics on the beach. It was fun.

My father was from a very close family and so was my mother, as a matter of fact. So we always got together a lot with families when we went to the beach for picnicking. And my grandmother and her sisters would cook big

Portuguese meals and it was a very sort of laid-back, happy childhood. I guess any local person would kind of chuckle at the fact that my first three years in school was in a girls' school, but they allowed boys from the first and third grade in that Sacred Hearts Academy in Kaimuki, because we lived across the street from Kaimuki at that time, from Sacred Hearts. It was easy just to walk across the street and so we were actually there. And of course they wouldn't allow kids after the third grade at the girls' school, so I got my chance to go up to Kalaepohaku, where St. Louis is, which was a first to twelfth grade at the time. And that was exciting. And this was in 1941, I started the fourth grade in September at St. Louis School. The school had the high school on one side of the campus and the grade school on the other. And so we were walking up the hill to go to school with the big boys. We're in high school and I felt pretty big, although we did wear long sleeve white shirts, ties, and khaki pants. That was our uniform. Of course at lunch time the tie and the shoes came off when we played games in the dirt down at the field house, but it was a very nice, happy, sort of laid-back life.

BC: Can you kind of give me a picture of your neighborhood and especially, you know, how you guys sort of networked with each other and...

LR: You mean at the time?

BC: Yeah.

LR: Because we'd moved from Kaimuki up to Maunalani Heights in 1939.

BC: I see, I see. So this was a new neighborhood for you.

LR: This was a new neighborhood. Yeah, yeah.

BC: What was that like?

LR: It was great because we were up on a hill. We had a front porch with a tremendous view and the front yard was a series of hills that went down to the street below, and we had a carport down on the street and we had to go up the steps to get to the house. That was really exciting, 'cause we'd go running down that hill or even on a wagon, going down the hill. And the street wasn't that busy at the time. But I'll never forget the fact that our little

dog Scotty, who was always used to old place, where we had a lot of places to run, ran out on the street and of course we lost of him that way, after we moved. So that was the only sad part. But you know, to this day, I remember the telephone number of my mother and my father, four digits, and they were so similar. My mother was 6411, Kodak Hawaii, which was then situated on Fort Street in Downtown Honolulu. And my father was 6011, and the American Sanitary Laundry, where...

And I have an old wooden hanger from the American Sanitary Laundry, and right there it says, "6011," and I said, gee, I now am confirmed that I remember that.

BC: Did you guys have, you and your brother, hang out together a lot, you guys?

LR: I was big for my age and he was small for his age and so when we were very young, we didn't hang out that much, not in school. We had separate neighbor friends and so forth. But we had a little, my folks had a little problem as far as coordinating when we moved up to Maunalani Heights so we had to bring in a young woman, young girl. She was sixteen years old

and she was Japanese. Her name was Gladys Tamashiro, I'll never forget it because she taught us some Japanese songs to sing and she was a companion. She was a lot of fun. And so she would come over to our house until my folks came home.

There's a story about Gladys after the attack.

BC: Did you guys, did you have the *manapua* man come up to your neighborhood? Is that...

LR: That was down in Kaimuki and he would have this long bar across his shoulders with these buckets hanging on either end and it was the best *manapua*! He would go by yelling, "*Manapua, pepeiau, rice cakes!*" you know, and then we would buy it from him. I'll never forget that. Excellent food that they would bake and peddle on the streets.

Many years later I brought my wife on our honeymoon on her first visit to Hawaii and I saw one of these guys going down the street and I pulled over to the side and she had no idea what we were talking about, speaking pidgin and

buying this stuff. And she had never seen anything like that before. She thought it was great, just great.

BC: So okay, it's getting the weekend before the attack. What was happening? What were you guys doing?

LR: Well, my father was usually gone on a Saturday. If he wasn't having first day training for a major disaster, in what was called actually the "major disaster council," at the time. I didn't find that out 'til many years later. And then the afternoon playing golf, so we never saw him on Saturdays. He was usually volunteering for that, should a major disaster occur. And then he loved to golf. At one point, he was considered one of the amateur champions of Hawaii. And so we didn't see too much of him on Saturday, and that was a workday. That was more or less getting things cleaned around the house and getting all homework done for Monday so that we could have a leisure Sunday, because we always started off with church and then with our picnics every week. And that was something we really looked forward to.

So it was a standard Saturday, as I can remember. I don't recall what we did on Friday but I do remember that Saturday. And we had to go by car mostly unless we went down Wilhelmina Rise in a wagon. Sometimes we did that and just about broke our necks. It's a steep hill up there. Or walking down to Kaimuki sometimes. Going downhill is no problem, coming home was a little more difficult. But the Kaimuki Theater was right on the corner of Waialae Avenue and Wilhelmina Rise and that was one of our favorite stomping grounds, especially with Saturday movies now and then we would see. I think that's one of the things we missed more than anything, right after December 7.

BC: So what were you doing on the seventh?

LR: We got up early that morning to go to church and my mother's sister had asked us to pick her up and take her with us. And she lived at Fort Ruger, which was a military base at the time, on the slope of Diamond Head. And she had married a couple of years before, a young naval officer, my uncle Frank, who was stationed on the *Oglala* at Pearl Harbor.

So we walked out of the house and my father made a comment right away that he had never seen so many planes in the air on a maneuver on a Sunday morning, so early on a Sunday morning. We had been used to seeing war games in the skies and even to the point, the red army and the blue army and, you know, and it wasn't so unusual to see markings maybe on planes or on tanks or things like that. And 'cause tanks used to roll through town. In fact, along the Ala Wai Canal, there was a lot of tanks there at that time, on an open field between the Ala Wai and Kapiolani Boulevard. And he commented on that and we didn't think too much more about it until we got to my aunt's house. My uncle had had liberty that weekend and we were just getting there in time to see him dashing off in his car, so evidently he got maybe a telephone call or something, but anyway he knew that the attack was under way. And...

BC: What time was that?

(Taping stops, then resumes)

BC: Okay. So your uncle dashed off?

LR: My uncle dashed off. My aunt was standing on the front porch in hysterics. She had a little baby and I guess she was concerned for her husband and her child, thinking that planes coming over would be dropping bombs any minute. Thinking the worst and we didn't know what she was talking about. She said, "You gotta come in here and listen to this radio."

So she had the radio going and it was Webley Edwards on KGMB [radio station] and he kept saying things along the lines of, "This is not a maneuver! This is the real McCoy," and he used those words, the real McCoy. I can remember that explicitly and I didn't know what he was talking about.

You know, he did say that forces of Japan were in the process of bombing the Territory of Hawaii and we didn't know much more than that. My father had immediately caught on to the fact that he had to report to his post. I guess he had to go down to pick up his truck, which was in Kakaako, and then drive out to his post, which was Hospital Point, at the mouth to Pearl Harbor, on the Hickam side.

And so he left us, left us there. And that was early Sunday morning. You asked what time it was. I was trying to piece that together, years later, knowing when the first wave came in and when the second wave came in, and I don't know what mass we were going to at St. Patrick's, but it seems to me it was an early morning, so we might have even been going to, say, 8:30 mass or something like that. Maybe looking up the mass schedule at that time, something I never really considered doing, might shed some light on that because I really didn't know what time of day it was except it was early Sunday morning.

So he left us that morning and we never saw him again until Tuesday night. And it was a very long forty-eight hours.

BC: What did you think? I mean, when he was, when you saw your uncle rushing away and...

LR: Yeah, yeah.

BC: ...and then your dad goes and...

LR: You know, I'm thinking back to a nine-year old's perspective. This is exciting, this is new. You don't really have the fear. The only fear that you feel is from the eyes of your parents and of course my father was upset when he dashed off. And my aunt, she was just hysterical. And so I lost track of my memory right at that point because the next thing I knew, I was at my grandmother's house on Kaimuki Avenue and it was years later that my father's younger brother said, "Oh, your mother called me and I came over and picked you all up and took you to your grandmother's house on Kaimuki Avenue."

Kaimuki and Sixth Avenue, they lived right there. And I guess everybody kind of went to the motherhouse, to get some comfort and courage. So I remember going over there and a lot of my relatives were there. My grandfather and grandmother and my mother and her sister that was the wife of this naval officer. Another brother, who was living there and working, and an older brother who was just going through a divorce and was going back to Mama and Papa's house, you know. And he was living there

temporarily. And I can remember everybody—it was chaos around the house. There were kids, a lot of cousins that were coming and they were running all around. And the women were crying and my two uncles that were there were saying, you know, talking war. And it didn't all sink in to me until that night.

And we were back home that night. I was told that my grandmother, that a bomb fell close to my grandmother's house and some damage had occurred. And my father's sister was only sixteen and she was living at home, of course. And they wanted the lower areas of—this was, they actually lived on Liliha and Judd Street, just off of Judd, on Liliha. And they were told to evacuate the area because they assumed it had been bombed, and that's what we believed had happened. And I didn't find out 'til years later what really happened.

But so my uncle, the same uncle that took us up to the house, brought them up to our house. So our house up on the heights became sort of the gathering place of the clan that evening. And I remember no telephone communications were allowed. Radios were turned off then. And so we had

no communication. The radio had said all women and children remain in your homes, get off the streets.

We had heard before the radio went off, Webley Edwards give a prepared statement. Again, this is years later that I realized that this happened, that the military demands that all civilians follow the directions and orders of the military.

So we knew that martial law—or my folks did anyway—I'm sure I didn't realize it at the time—had already taken place and the announcements were preplanned, pre-written. And then the radios were turned off because he did say, "Turn your radios up loud and open your windows so your neighbors can hear it." You know, "Today the forces of Japan, the Imperial Navy of Japan has bombed Pearl Harbor and the island of Oahu."

Oh and he did an editorial, like, "The population in Hawaii has accepted this in a calm and satisfactory manner," which, how in the world would he know that?

And then, “The military will demand the full cooperation,” and then he said, “the radio will be on for just few minutes and will be turned off,” and it was. It was turned off.

So we were gathered up in the house. It was an early, I guess, sundown might have been six o’clock, December, you know, like it is now. And so that was curfew and that was blackout. And so we couldn’t turn on any lights. I can recall the, a gunshot at night. There were patrols and I think—the military couldn’t be all over the island so I assume these were civilian volunteers. And that, being a very dark night, I feel that people were shooting at each other in the shadows. We know now for a fact that that did occur and there were civilian deaths as a result of it. But even shooting out a light that you see, you know, not knowing what that light is, our neighbor kitchen was in the front of the house and they opened the refrigerator door and that light shone out in the front, and we heard this gunshot later. We found out that it was fired into the house from outside on the street, which was crazy.

BC: Yeah.

LR: But a lot of things happen like that. My uncle, who lived down in Kaimuki, off of Third Avenue, he went outside in the back of the house, because my aunt wouldn't allow him to smoke in the house. I mean, she was way ahead of her time. And he lit a cigarette out in the back and he said he could feel the whizzing of a bullet near his head.

So these things did happen. I don't know if there was any casualty as a result of it. But it was sheer panic.

Then I will never forget, we turned on the radio. We covered it with a blanket so that the little light—of course we had great big Philcos that were so high and came up from the floor, these big consoles. And they had radio bands and they had police bands and marine bands, short wave bands on it. So since AM was turned off. We only had two stations, KGU and KGMB, and since they were turned off at the time, we went to the marine band and couldn't hear anything and so we went to the police bands. And then we would hear the police calls and we would hear them saying that paratroopers landed somewhere in Makua. "The army asks the police to check for

paratroopers at St. Louis Heights.” And then a broad statement,
“Paratroopers landed somewhere on Oahu!”

You know, “Calling all cars. Look for paratroopers landing on your beat!”

And things like that. And so this is what we, as civilians, sitting in the dark in this house, listening to this, this is our communications process that we were getting. We were sure that there were going to be troops knocking down our doors any minute!

And my grandmother, bless her soul, she was a very, very devout Catholic. And she wanted to pray and she wanted all of us to pray for her. So first of all, we brought all the mattresses from all the bedrooms all together into the living room so that we were all there. There was my grandmother, her sixteen-year old daughter—my father’s sister, my aunty—and my mother and my brother and I. That was it.

And so Grandma had a flashlight and she climbed under a blanket so that flashlight wouldn’t be seen, and she had her prayer book, her missal, and she

went to the invocation of saints, asking for a prayer, “Pray for us, pray for us.”

So she started with the litany of saints, going from one saint to the other, to the other. And I’ll never forget this. This, again, the story with a nine-year old perspective. She said, she got to, you know, “Mary, queen of mother, pray for us.”

We all had to respond when she would read the litany. And then she came to queen of peace, you know, which we knew was coming, “Mary, queen of peace.”

And instead of queen, she used the word, “cream.” So she said, “Mary, cream of peace.”

And my mother said, “Pray for us.”

And my brother and I and my aunty started to snicker! And this was pitch black, you couldn’t see one another. You couldn’t see your hand in front of

your face. We started (snickers), you know, started that sort of a thing and finally we broke out laughing out loud and my grandmother, oh, she was so angry and she said, “This is serious! Your father is missing!” You know, “We have to pray!”

I’m sorry!

BC: It’s perfectly fine.

LR: It was funny and yet it wasn’t. But as a kid, even my sixteen-year old aunt, she thought it was hilarious. Well, poor Grandma, she went on praying. And at one point in the litany, and we were dutifully answering, “Pray for us, pray for us,” she lost her teeth. Her teeth fell out!

And she mumbled something and finally she said, “Help me find my teeth!”

And these mattresses were all put together and it had gone down between two mattresses. And so we were in the dark trying to find Grandma’s teeth.

Now, here the island had been attacked. Thousands of people were killed on one ship alone, 1177 were killed. We didn't know that. We didn't know the extent of it. All we knew was that my dad was gone. He reported to his station that we had an attack that occurred...

BC: Could you see?

LR: Yeah, we...

BC: Could you see the smoke?

LR: ...in the distance we could see—well, during the daytime, when we got up there, we would see the puffs of smoke from—and we could hear every once in a while, you know, the ka-booms and booms and that type of thing. But that's it.

We were far enough away so that it wasn't frightening to a child, you know. Might've been to my mother, I don't know, but it wasn't to a child. So this was a very, very different experience in blackout, in curfew and listening to

police calls with every rumor under the sun being reported on the police station, police calls, that we believed were fact, we believed were true. So it was difficult and different.

Then we heard the next day that there was no school and I had no idea what had happened except that my school, St. Louis, at two o'clock in the morning was taken over by the military and it became a hospital. And the largest, I understand, in terms of patient load in the Pacific, army hospital.

Found out later that many schools were taken over by the military. Some of them, the way Punahou was taken over, I told the story to a Punahou grad on the bus last Sunday as we were taking the military tour. He was twelve years old that day, so were commiserating about being civilians at the time. And I told him that I had learned that the Army Corps of Engineers vacated Alexander Young Hotel on Bishop Street that day, that was their station. And they decided to get all of these army trucks and load them with all their files and all of their equipment and so forth and go out and take over the University of Hawaii campus for their wartime place to operate. And the trucks, no lights on, blacked out. Trucks are going down Wilder Avenue

towards the university and they come to the corner of Punahou, and the lead truck driver thinks that that corner archway over the entrance to the school that said Oahu College—I'm sure he couldn't read it in the dark—was the University of Hawaii, and he started in there with all the other trucks following him in and they got all the way on the campus, discovered their error and said, "Well, let's take over this one."

That's how Punahou School got taken over that day. Kamehameha School was taken over. Sacred Hearts convent in Nuuanu area was taken over. So that night, evidently, the military was working overtime. I mean, they were preparing for the invasion and perhaps occupation.

And so we were listening to these police calls and fearing the worst when we could see tracer bullets going up in the air. And we could hear in the distance, guns. Cannons that sounded like explosions. And then we were sure that we were being invaded or they were coming back to get us. And so we just lived in constant fear. How we—I don't think we slept much that night but we got through the night.

And the next day, there was absolutely nothing to do but to stay in the house and await for the word as to what we were supposed to do.

BC: Do you recall what you ate? Let's say the next day at breakfast, do you recall what you did, what you had for breakfast?

LR: We were at our house. My grandmother always had a refrigerator full. She was an excellent cook. We were at our house up there and nobody brought food in so we had what was there. I remember almost minute for minute, but I just don't remember. My father always ate bacon and eggs, every morning, bacon and eggs. I can imagine what it did to his arteries. He died at age seventy. And so I think that's what we had. We had a lot of sweet bread, those Portuguese sweet bread, and my grandmother, my other grandmother, the maternal grandmother was great at baking sweet bread. As a matter of fact, Leonard's Bakery here in Honolulu is my uncle, my mother's brother. So that we always had *malasadas* and sweet bread and this is way before it became popular in Hawaii. It was just in the Portuguese community.

So bacon and eggs and sweet bread. That's what we used to have all the time and although I don't remember explicitly about Monday morning, that's what we had. All I know is that we had to stay indoors. We had to stay off the streets.

BC: How long...

(Conversation off-mike)

BC: Okay.

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

BC: ...seven years...

LR: ...in '99.

BC: Okay. We can talk about that later.

LR: Okay.

BC: No, that's fine. I think we ought to do this and then, you know...

(Conversation off-mike)

BC: How long was it before you started going back to school and where did you go?

LR: Well, first of all, I was nine years old and by god, I got an early Christmas vacation. We weren't going to go to school the next day and that was kind of fun. I was in the fourth grade and my brother was in the first grade and he was at Sacred Hearts and I was at St. Louis at that point. So we thought, well, we're going to stay home and play, you know, good. I had homework that I had done over the weekend that I didn't have to report on, so we played in the yard. We were told to stay off the street, so we had this big

yard with these hills and we'd go down on wagons and our garage was down near the street and we could actually climb on top of the garage roof and, oh, it was a lot of fun.

We didn't find out, of course, because our school was taken over that night. We didn't know that. And later, when we inquired, we went back to school in February. And at that point, we had all been issued gas masks and we had a bomb shelter and that's the photograph that I have in my book of my brother and I in our bomb shelters with our gas masks. But because our school was no longer available for the school system—these were parochial schools, Catholic schools—St. Patrick's there in Kaimuki became the host school for St. Louis grade school so that we went to school in the morning. We went from eight to twelve. And then they went from one to five or something like that. It was about a four-day, four-hour session. And we shared the same classrooms with that school. The high school went to McKinley. There's a very close association between McKinley High School and St. Louis because of that. So our high school shared their facilities at McKinley High.

BC: Talk about the making of the bomb shelter and getting a gas mask. When did that all happen?

LR: Relatively soon. We had to go somewhere and I can't remember where. See, this was after—when my father came home on Tuesday night, that was my clear memory. After that, it became very boring and I don't have explicit memories about that. I do remember Christmas. I do remember the palm tree that we cut with a branch and that was our Christmas tree, 'cause there were no Christmas trees here.

But—oh, what was I saying? Senior lapse of memory here.

Let me talk about Tuesday because my mother was not at Kodak that time. We were still all together. My aunt stayed with us for a couple of weeks and I recall that she used to go down to Sacred Hearts, her school, where she was a junior in high school, I think, or maybe a sophomore, and they would volunteer. The school would volunteer with Red Cross to roll bandages and to do all this for the war effort. So she would be down there most of the time for the day and then come up to our place to sleep at night. And that's

quite a long period of time. Remember, we were up there with no clothes. She had gotten permission to go back to their house and bring stuff up a few days later. But they expected the invasion to occur so the lower areas were asked to vacate and move uphill. What had happened was that they, one of our missiles fell out of the sky at Judd Street and killed the four people in the 1938 Packard that was there that we found out many years later. And evidently there was a lot of shrapnel or damage as a result of that. And that was the, quote, unquote, bomb that supposedly fell close to their house which precipitated their evacuation to our house.

My grandmother would do nothing but pray and cry because she feared for her son's safety. And that's what we really were affected by, when you see adults bawling unabashedly, you know that something is serious or something is really wrong, my mother too.

So it was before dark on Tuesday, I would say sometime between five and six, when my father came home. He went to Hickam Field that morning with a tie, long sleeve white shirt and our garage was way down at the

bottom of the hill. He drove in the garage. And this was the first time that we had any communication to know that he was alive. Phew!

He was completely, his white shirt was black, was dark. It was dried blood! And my mother was hysterical. But here he was, he was walking in, thank god! Thank god!

He didn't say a word. He just went to his bedroom. And I can remember hearing noises and my brother and I would slam the door going in and out and he would hit the ceiling. So we found out later that he was really suffering. He was shell-shocked.

He supposedly got a very slight shrapnel wound because he had a scar or a cut, you know, that was healing. It was very little. But all he knew, all we knew was that he was at Hospital Point at Hickam that morning. And we knew that before December 7 because we knew that was his station in case of a disaster of some sort. So he would never talk about it. Never mentioned a thing all his life. He was thirty-five that day, old enough so that he didn't, he wasn't going into the service, but he lived thirty-five more

years and died at age seventy. And he would never talk about what happened and would never mention it at all. So that was the traumatic forty-eight hours or whatever it is, fifty-six hours of the first beginnings of it that I will never forget. I will never forget.

You asked about the bomb shelter. There was an encouragement by, I guess, our new governor, Short, General Short, that we have personal bomb shelters built or we organized ourselves for community shelters in the neighborhood, if there was a park there or that type of thing. Our neighbor, our next-door neighbor was a Japanese couple, an older couple, and he was very, very handy. And my father went right back to work right away, thinking that he was going to have to go back to Pearl Harbor, but my mother was home for a while with us. And so the neighbor, who was, built a bomb shelter right away, this Japanese neighbor, in his yard. And I guess there was a run on bomb shelter builders, contractors at that point because people wanted their own, unless they were close enough to a community shelter. Because sometimes those air raids would last a long time and you didn't want to have to go a great distance. Downtown, Iolani Palace, across the street, they built, you know, wherever there was a park, they would build

great, big bomb shelters for everybody in the community, in the area. And the crazy thing about it is that it got old after a while and people would say, “Ah, I’m not going to jump in that mud puddle,” because the rains would seep down in and there were mud floors and it became pretty miserable.

Ours was built by a guy that my father had hired so it came, I would say, in early January, before we got that up. So in the meantime when we had air raids, and we had ‘em all the time, and I think these were our own planes coming over. Some say that it might’ve been reconnaissance planes coming over, looking at what we were doing and so forth. And so we would go into our neighbor’s shelter. They invited us over there. They always had wonderful food for us, a wonderful Japanese couple but I don’t remember their names. But I remember Gladys Tamashiro.

My mother had to—oh, you’d asked about when school started, it was in February when we started going back to St. Patrick’s. And so my mother then went back to Kodak Hawaii and Kodak Hawaii was taken over by the navy and became a censorship arm of the, for the mails, where all the mails were sent through Kodak and the old Victory mails, it was photographically

reduced and so forth. My mother was the executive secretary to the manager of Kodak Hawaii, who started the old *Hawaii Calls* in 1938. Well then, a commander became the, running the shop there for this arm of it, so my mother became his secretary. And that was convenient because we got film. That was the only way you could get film if you had connections. Thus the picture of my brother and I in our bomb shelters with our gas masks, because my mother had film.

BC: Why don't you go ahead and get that and you can show it to the camera.

LR: This, you know, this was a little, old, I would assume, about three-by-five photograph that was taken in our bomb shelter by my mother. This is my brother, who was seven, and I was nine, and we're holding our gas masks and we had them on but she said, "Take them off and hold it in your hand so we can see your faces."

And she took the picture with a little Kodak Brownie. And it was a four-seater, two seats on one side, two seats on the other, and it was underground. There was a mound of dirt above it...

BC: Mm-hmm.

LR: ...with a little air pipe that went up over the ground so we can breathe. And I guess we kept water down there or something like that. Very, very uncomfortable. And in the beginning it was kind of exciting because it was a thing to play with...

BC: Uh-huh.

LR: for youngsters. And it was, you could smell the pine, the plywood, down there. You look in the back, you can see what a mess it is. It was just raw plywood. But it had a floor, it had a plywood floor, so it was basically a box with double seats on either side and that was it. I don't know how many steps that you had to go down to get to it, but even at that, it would rain in and it would get musty and then, in time, we didn't want to go there because the bugs, cockroaches, even centipedes loved that wood and would get down in there, so we were kind of frightened at that. And the only time that I can ever remember staying in a long period of time was in early March, when in

the middle of morning, we got an air raid and we had to get out of bed and go down there. My father was carrying my little brother. He was very small for his age. And we went down there and I guess it was like two, or they said it was, in the morning. And we took our blankets down and tried to sleep. And we were in school now at this time and we stayed there until the all clear, and that wasn't until about seven in the morning. And I can remember that explicitly because that was about the longest at nighttime that we had to spend in there.

BC: But did that end up being the raid where the bombs fell on Tantalus?

LR: Yeah, I found that out when I was doing research on my book.

BC: Yeah.

LR: And it kind of all put together. You know, it got put together.

BC: Yeah.

LR: And you know what happened at nine o'clock at night on December 7 too? About that time, when we were seeing these tracer bullets and we thought sure that, and Captain Daniels was trying to find his way back.

BC: Exactly.

LR: And again, these were things that I found out many years later, doing research on my book. So it's kind of fun piecing history together with what you remember, but they were difficult times. They were very trying times. There was talk immediately of evacuation for women and children. They wanted all women and children to leave the islands, and men could not leave, obviously, to defend the island for the impending invasion that was coming. And my aunt had married a naval officer and there was no ifs, ands or buts for military dependents. They had to go.

My aunt had never been off the island of Oahu. Well, Maui, yeah. She was born in Maui and then moved to Oahu, so those were the only two islands she had ever been in. She had never been on the Mainland. Her mother and father were here. All her brothers and sisters. All her cousins, all here. And

she was a pretty strong woman and she was fighting the military and saying, “I’m not going anywhere! This is my home. I was born and raised here.”

Just like you were talking about with the other people that started in the Wards program. And anyway, she had no choice and I found out again through interviewing her and talk to her, ‘cause my whole book started with my family. I went around to family members to ask them what happened. With a little baby, an infant under a year old, she had to get on a military transport and take the nine to eleven days, depending upon the zigzags, up to San Francisco. And her husband was from Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, so he had arranged with his parents back there that she go to meet them. She had never met them before, never seen them before. Didn’t know them. She had never been off the islands so all of a sudden she was in a very cold wintry February—it was February when she was there—in San Francisco. And he arranged for her to pick up a car and she drove all the way to Salt Lake City in the winter time, never seen snow before, with a little baby!

Now talk about a strong woman! And she always has been a strong woman. She’s alive today, almost ninety years old. Yeah, living in California.

So these were the things that happened to families. And all of a sudden we got word that we might go. Another one of my mother's sisters was so frightened. She was traumatized by what had happened that she went to the doctors for psychiatric care. And Dr. GAS-PER, I'll never forget him, he was our doctor too. He looked at her and said, "You know, you're the type of person that needs to leave this island because you're not doing us any good being here under your conditions," and she left in February with a twelve-year old and a six-year old—a boy and a girl. Her husband had to stay and she went to her sister's in Sacramento, in California because my other aunt lived up there.

So that was what we had to ponder. I know that my mother and father stayed up nights talking about. I could hear them discussing, "Are we going to have to leave?"

I didn't want to leave. Didn't want to leave!

And we ended the school year in June and we then decided we were going to go to California. And we had no idea how long. We had no idea if we'd ever see my father again, you know, after the first experience at Pearl Harbor. And it was kind of exciting and yet we didn't want—all our friends, our school, you know. I was really enjoying St. Louis, even though we were sharing with St. Patrick's facilities.

So we were told, once we had decided and signed up, and I think my folks had to pay like a hundred bucks or something like that, for us to leave the islands, only because we had relatives. My father had an aunt, his mother's sister, living in Hayward, California, and we had, my father had an aunt and my mother had a sister. So we had a place to go in California. And that was, I guess, the qualifying, if you had a place to go, go, you go. And it almost sounded like we didn't have a choice, you had to go.

So I guess it was the end of June when one night we got a call and said, "Report tomorrow. Tell no one. Get on the *Ulysses S. Grant*, troop ship."

I remember that. "And go to California."

Now this was the end of June because we were—and I don't know what day it was—because we were in California sometime early in July. And we were the lead ship in a convoy of nine and we had two, four destroyer escorts, two on either flank. And then the rest were just troop ships, taking women and children to California.

On our ship we had prisoners, Japanese prisoners. I 'm trying to figure out where they came from, 'cause they certainly weren't here, but they were probably from the Philippines.

BC: It would have had to have been from, I think they had made a, done a Macon Island raid. I think they brought back prisoners from Macon Island and maybe Sakamaki.

LR: Okay.

BC: But that...

LR: And brought them to Hawaii and then to take them to the Mainland for...

BC: And maybe some from Midway. You know.

LR: Well, it was kind of early for that because Midway was June. Well, this was latter part of June, so maybe.

BC: Yeah. Yeah, I think they had brought 'em back fairly quickly.

LR: Yeah, okay.

BC: There were quite a few Japanese that were picked up.

LR: And as a nine-year old, this was really, really outstanding. And in a way, they were chained, one to the other, and they would let them come out.

Evidently, on the fo'c'sle of the ship, down in the front, there was a brig of some sort, and that's' where they were held. And we were in the back and, of course, up on a deck higher.

So, at noon, when they are taken out for their exercise, we can look down and see them. And we thought, those poor, miserable guys just chained one to the other. Their heads were shaved. They were—and one day, and this was early on in the trip, one got overboard. I'll never forget that. Jumped overboard. And we could hear the alarms going and, "Man overboard," and so forth.

And then all, everything came to a stop and destroyers went all around and they found him and they picked him up and brought him back. And I couldn't believe that but it happened. And the thing about the ship going there was that we were able to share a stateroom. If you were twelve, like my cousin, he, I found out later, when my mother's sister came up in February, he had to bunk with older men and—because she had a little daughter, the two of them can stay together. Well, I guess because I was nine and my brother was seven, we were able to stay with my mother.

But the good-bye with my father was kind of traumatic. I can remember going down to a pier in the dark. It was obviously in the morning, but I thought it was nighttime 'cause we were told the night before to go. So we

had to be packed and ready and my mother had that all organized. And even her work, she had to just disappear and that was it. And to tell no one, because there's no ship movements allowed. You know, you couldn't spread the word. Loose lip sinks ships. That's what the motto was at the time.

So every morning aboard ship at four o'clock, an alarm would go off. Now this is blackout. The ship is all blacked out. And we had to get up out of bed and go up the ladders, up these flights, and then turn and go up another flight and turn another way and then go out on the deck to the lifeboat that we were assigned to.

Now, I was the head of the household, at nine, and so my mother asked, because she didn't have good direction, she asked me to make sure we knew how to get to our lifeboat in the dark with crowds of people in this hallway. And I had a little scout knife and I actually disfigured the wood hand railings in this beautiful old ship, by cutting notches in it so that I can feel it in the dark. And this, and I held my mother's hand and she held my brothers' hand behind and, with all these people trying to get out at the same time, found

my way out to the lifeboat, Lifeboat Seven. And there's where we had to stay, sitting in the lifeboat, wrapped in a blanket or something, until seven o'clock in the morning. And this happened every day. It took nine days, ten days to get to Hawaii, to get to California.

And one day we did have a sub alert. And there was a submarine in the water and we heard all kinds of things and general quarters and sailors were running everywhere. And things kind of stopped at that point. And then we heard that it's all over, taken care of. Evidently there was a sub in the water and they other got it or it scampered, but it was all clear and then we continued on our way.

So I say I saw more action as a nine-year old than I did later in the Korean action when I was in the navy. Interesting times.

We came up to California for about a year and a half and I was telling somebody this story and I don't know if I can tell it! I was a star in my fifth grade class in California. We went to a parochial school, St. Mary's in San Leandro. And because I had just come from the war, you know, from

Hawaii, all the kids wanted to know all about it. And I was lamenting the fact that my father was back there and couldn't come with us. This Benjamin Long, I'll never forget him, he said, "You're lucky. My dad's on the *Arizona*."

Every time I go out there, I look for his name, Benjamin Long. So I was lucky. I was lucky.

We came back in about a year and a half, after Midway and after it became clear that Hawaii was safe. So I came back to school and again moved in with Grandma because we had sold our house up in the heights. My father went to live with my grandmother down on Liliha Street. And with my money, my mother bought a house in San Leandro and started on a war job up there and so my aunt took care of us and my two little cousins. We all lived together in San Leandro. My aunt was the housewife and my mother was the worker, for the war effort. And then we came back and moved in with my grandmother, my mother's mother, in Waikiki. And that's where I finished my eighth grade, seventh and eighth grade and then went back to St. Louis and my high school years were at St. Louis.

So it was a very difficult time in some respects, from a child's standpoint. It was exciting. It was new and blackouts in the beginning we thought were fun, until school started in February and we had homework to do. And, oh, I told you about our babysitter, Gladys Tamashiro.

BC: Yes. Yes...

LR: She was sixteen years old. When they finally told us that we had to go back to school, Gladys never showed up for work any more. We had, there was no communication. She lived out in Kuliouou and her folks had a pig farm up there in the valley. And there was no telephone, they had no telephone. So we went looking for Gladys because we needed her the following week, I guess it was, when school was going to start and we wanted her to come to the house. My folks wanted her to come to the house before they came home, so that the interim when we got home, she would be there. I'll never forget her. She's quite a young lady at sixteen. And when we drove up to their house in the valley in Kuliouou, she came running out of the house because she hadn't seen us for a while, for a couple of months, and having

no communication. And it was so good seeing her. She was like a big sister, a big friend. She came running out and following her were her father and her mother, and they were issei. So they came out and they fell prostrate on the ground, in the dirt, sobbing. And Gladys interpreted and said they're asking us for forgiveness, you know. As if they had anything to do with the war, but they were so ashamed of what had happened. So Gladys came back to work for us and we were very glad to have her back. But that was interesting thing that I had forgotten to say earlier.

BC: I was going to ask you about her 'cause you'd mentioned it. You wanted to say something about that.

LR: Yeah.

BC: Unfortunately, we're about out of time.

LR: Good.

BC: Okay, but just mention very quickly that you went on to write this book.

LR: I wrote a book, which is a compilation of fifty individual stories, starting with my family, ending with mine. The Japanese problems here in Hawaii, how they were discriminated against, how everybody thought that anybody who was Japanese was going to poison the water or slit their throats or do some other ridiculous stupid thing. So I've got some stories here of the problems that the Japanese went through, our local citizens, some of our very, very best friends. And I was very concerned that the generation is being lost that so many of these stories would not be told and I realized in 1986, on December 7, which was on a Sunday, a remote from Arlington Cemetery, where the Pearl Harbor survivors were holding a ceremony, that there was a civilian side. I flashed back. I remembered my father. I remembered what we went through and I thought, you know, there is a civilian side to the Pearl Harbor story and I've got to write a book. And I was retiring in three years and that's what I did for 1991 to get this book puto out...

BC: I remember that.

LR: ...so that civilian side of the story can be told.

BC: Thank you very much.

LR: Mahalo, appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW