

Lester Hartley #23
December 5, 1984

Q: Mr. Hartley, when did you first join the Navy?

A: On September the 6th, 1940, in San Francisco.

Q: Where did you go to boot camp?

A: In San Diego.

Q: How long was boot camp roughly?

A: Six weeks I believe it was at that time.

Q: What was the first ship you were assigned to after boot camp?

A: USS *Jarvis*.

Q: At that time, where was the *Jarvis* stationed?

A: At that particular time it was at the Pudget Sound Navy Yard.

Q: So you joined her there?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you first go to Hawaii on the *Jarvis*?

A: We went to Hawaii, early December 1940. I might add that the day I went aboard the *Jarvis* was on November 11th at 5:00 in the evening.

Q: What were your regular duties on the ship?

A: Well, after I was aboard for awhile I was in the fire room. That's where I was first assigned (ts). I was in the fire room until the first of the year, and then I got transferred into the artillery gang. They had the equipment aboard that the other divisions didn't have.

Q: What was your rank by the time December, 1941, came around?

A: Fireman 1st Class.

Q: What would a typical working day be like for you?

A: Well, the ones that I can remember the most because we had most of that was when I was in the auxiliary gang, which I was boat engineer all that summer and shortly after I was assigned to the gang I was assigned to boats. (ts) There was only about 6 or 7 in that gang (ts) you need a lot of them. This was my primary duties so far as daytime work. Now when the boats weren't running then I had other jobs of cleaning station, learning how to run a lathe, and different things like this. (ts) equipment that we had to take care. Of course studying for my (ts)

Q: What was the *Jarvis's* operating schedule like late 1941?

A: Quite busy. We had time in port too but we had a lot of sea duty. We would be out usually a week to 10 days a one time. We would go out on maneuvers different groups. Maybe we'd be out with carriers or maybe submarines. We fired torpedoes quite often, of course to me this was quite an (ts) the boat engineer of course after the torpedo was followed we chased it down, put our boat over the side and go out and retrieve the torpedo. At the cost of those things in those days they didn't like to loose them. (ts) They would have a lot of questions to answer if they lost one.

We were busy, we had a lot of anti aircraft practice, a lot of night time maneuvers in which I might add, I didn't know until after the War was over what it was to operate at night with a lighted ship. All my experiences before and during the War of course, (ts)

Q: What did you do the evening before the attack, the night of Dec. 6th?

A: O.K. on December the 6th, I was being transferred that day back to Virginia... Norfolk, Virginia. I was going to diesel school. Along that day in the afternoon, I had my sea bag all packed and everything (ts) USS *Ramapo* for transportation back to the states, back to the mainland. (ts) *Ramapo* would not take any passengers aboard. They were sending them all back. (ts) There was a lot of sailors going over for transportation. No explanations, no nothing. That's it. (ts) back to ship and the duty yeoman said, "Well we'll see what we can find for tomorrow. You stay aboard until tomorrow." (ts) See, I really had been detached from the ship. I don't know how they get around this, but I slept aboard. I stayed aboard that night and my normal sleeping place, I had a bunk in the machine shop. Hot weather... and I stayed (ts).

Q: About what time did you get up on Sunday morning?

A: Well, I was still on my bunk when the attack started, but the funny thing where Ford Island was just by looking out the door. And I heard the drone of planes, you know, like diving planes and I was wakened up but I just automatically looked out the door. And I saw, I'm sure, what was the first bomb dropped on Ford Island, and there were others falling down. So I was about awake at that time.

Q: What was your first reaction?

A: I don't know, you know really.... I got up, put my shoes on, pulled my shorts on (see these shorts were the uniform of the day out there), and went out on deck. Of course by that time, general quarters was sounded and everybody went to their battle stations.

Q: Where was your battle station?

A: My battle station was on the number four main battery aft. That was the one on the stern. We had (ts) anti-aircraft main batteries (ts).

Q: What caliber of gun was that?

A: They were 5-inch, .38 caliber, dual purpose, for a main battery (ts).

Q: What was your job on the gun there?

A: I was hot shellman at that particular..those particular times. And it wasn't too long, I wasn't there too long until I was (ts) low. We were in the Navy yard at that particular time, and we were partially disabled, fireroom-wise and engineroom-wise.

Q: Was the ship getting power and water from the yard?

A: It was getting power and water from the dock and of course everything immediately starts in as to get the ship ready to get underway. We had a fireman who cut the power off, and restored power as soon as the power to the ship could be maintained. They cut the power off, and cut off the water over there and we got under way, which was really 20 minutes after ten.

Q: Under normal routine circumstances, how long would it have taken?

A: Oh, in this particular routine type of thing, that would have taken probably four to six hours, or maybe more because they had some valves. I know one in particular valve that they had out of the line which normally two men would be putting in and taking out, but (ts) a little fellow by the name of Sare stuck that exhaust line up in the valve all by himself. We didn't have a full crew that morning, so everybody had a job to do, you know.

Q: Do you remember how to spell Sare's name?

A: S-A-R-E. I don't know his first name. He was from Laramie, Wyoming; a little short fellow... real interesting.

Q: So, what deck were on when you were helping to get the ship ready?

A: I was down in the fire room at this particular time. Now our class of ships carried 16 torpedoes in quad twos on the main deck. So we had 4 quads and they were all discharged so you had to have a compressed air system (ts) all discharged and I was in the fireroom, got the air compressors running, and I stood watch on those air compressors until we had all 16 of those torpedoes charged up, which came (ts) as I remember, 7 or 8:00 in the evening before we got them all done. It was (ts).

Q: During the progress of the attack while you were down in the fire room, did you get reports about what was happening topside?

A: No, I didn't, and I don't know whether any of other firemen and water tenders in the fireroom really knew what was going on down there, you know, at that time. The only thing we seemed like we could feel down there was that we was going at a pretty good speed. Of course, you knew by how hot it was in the fireroom and all this you know. The faster the ship went, the cooler it was in the fireroom. This was because it had a blower that had to force air to the boilers. As far as really knowing what was going on topside, I don't think any of us did, too much, because we were in pretty heavy seas a lot and you could tell that it was rough. (ts) I can't remember hearing anything.

Q: What stands out as your most vivid memory of that day; the day of the attack?

A: Well, there's two things that really stand out more than anything to me. This is before I went below decks; this is while I was still topside.

Q: At the gun?

A: Yes. The first thing was seeing in the second... well, the first attack really I guess, after that was over I saw all the boats coming in. There were all kinds of boats, whaleboats and motor launches out in the water, and they were picking up survivors from the battleships. We weren't really a long ways from the battleships; we could see real well, and they were bringing survivors in that some of those guys, their clothing was well you might say about all gone. They were oil soaked, they were wounded, and black, you know, with the oil and stuff. So this stands out real well.

And the second thing that I remember so well was, apparently when the second attack began, was the high flying bombers. I stood there, and everything was quiet around us, and watched those bombers come along over and they dropped their bombs, and they're headed right where I'm standing. I can see it today yet.

Q: How far away did they land?

A: Over on the battleship row. We were, I don't know, I guess it'd be 500 yards or maybe 700 yards from the battleship row.

Q: Did you happen to see the Arizona blow up?

A: Not that I can recollect, no. There was too many things going on and I think if you weren't particularly looking in that direction (ts) torpedo planes come around right off our stern and went right down the battleship row. Those were real planes to see... the pilots... and they was close to us, you know. The old story about how some of the sailors threw spuds at them, well, I wouldn't be surprised. That sounds a little strange but I wouldn't be surprised because they were pretty dog-gone close. (ts) real interesting in a way. I wouldn't give anything for that experience now, but at that time I wished I was anywhere else.

Q: When did you leave the *Jarvis*?

A: I left the *Jarvis* late the last day or two of January, 1942(ts). My orders were recut to go to Norfolk to be in some school. So but those orders still stood (ts). In the mean time in December, we were part of the task force that was going supposedly to relieve Wake Island.

Q: Oh really?

A: But we didn't get there in time. I don't know what we were doing really. We were out at sea that's all I know (ts) out toward Midway and then we went back (ts) tanker, escorted a tanker back to Pearl Harbor. (ts) and sometime during January we were dispatched to Hilo. A submarine had been sighted down in Hilo, so we was out with another destroyer and apparently we got a kill, at least all reports were (ts) Navy transports, we came back. I came into San Diego.

Q: Anything else you recall about the attack?

A: Well, I don't think too much (ts) because little things... Oh, I remember one thing... a little funny story in a way, going around. We had a young fellow, well, he was a little older than I was really, he was from Texas...no, he was from Colorado, and he talked real slow. And him and a third class electrician were down in the aft steering room. They were loading machine gun belts. See, we had .50 caliber machine guns, a couple of them. And they were loading machine gun belts, and the electrician said every once in a while you could feel the ship bounce a little bit... the stern come up a little. And he couldn't figure out what that was, and all the noise and so forth. And old Rosty, the fellow from Colorado sticks his head up out of the hole back there and he looked around a little bit and said, "Huh..." He says, "That's just number four gun going off." He didn't get excited, it didn't seem like, but he was a real nice fellow. In fact, all of them were, everybody aboard ship was. They (ts) I don't reckon anybody was outstanding in what they did that day but everybody chipped in together and all did their jobs. That's the way I look at it.

Q: Well, I appreciate your taking the time to come up here to talk to me.

A: Well, it was interesting. I thank you.

Q: Thank you.