

#161 LOREN BAILEY: USS *OGLALA*

Chris Conybeare (CC): This is an oral history interview with Mr. Loren Bailey. It's December 3, 1986, we're at the Sheraton Waikiki. Mr. Bailey lives in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. And my name is Chris Conybeare conducting the interview. I'm being assisted by Mark Tanaka-Sanders.

So, why don't we start out with can you give me your name and rank on December 7, 1941?

Loren Bailey (LB): My name is Loren Bailey. My rank, December 7, '41 was Seaman First Class, ship fitter striker.

CC: And what was your ship?

LB: USS *OGLALA*.

CC: What kind of ship was it?

LB: It was a minelayer. It was the flagship of the mine laying fleet.

CC: And where was the ship that morning?

LB: We were tied outboard of the cruiser USS *HELENA*, at the ten-ten docks at Pearl Harbor.

CC: How did you end up getting to Hawaii? Where was your hometown and just a little history and how you ended up out.

LB: Well, I was actually raised in Chicago and my folks moved to Wisconsin when I was a sophomore in high school. When I graduated from high school, the Navy kind of intrigued me, so I joined the Navy the day I graduated. And I came out to Hawaii on the transport [*USS CHAUMONT (AP-5)*]. And I was transferred to the USS *OGLALA*, I believe it was October 14, 1940.

CC: So you'd been here a little over a year?

LB: Little over a year.

CC: What kinds of things did you do onboard ship? What was your job?

LB: Well, when I reported aboard, I was a seaman second class and I did mostly deck force work. Painting, chipping, cleaning, stood watches. And they posted a job for a ship fitter striker, to learn a trade. And I applied for that just before December 7, 1941.

CC: All right, that Sunday morning, where were you and when did you first realize that the war had started?

LB: Well, I'd been over to Honolulu the night before and I used to buy records. I always liked jazz, big name bands. And that particular morning, I just finished breakfast. And we usually got up on Sunday morning, regardless of how late we stayed out at night, because the officers gave us all the fresh eggs and fresh milk you could drink on Sunday morning. And as I stepped out of the mess hall, I heard them playing my Duke Ellington records with a scratchy needle. And I started to complain. And just then I heard 'em say, "Away the fire and rescue squad," because someone had spotted a fire over at Ford Island.

So I was going to my fire and rescue station, which happened to be a fire ax. About halfway to my rescue station, they sounded general quarters, which is a different battle station. It was the mine track. And as I started down the starboard side of the ship, I noticed three airplanes. I paid no attention to 'em because there was all so much activity. I thought it was just planes off an aircraft carrier. I saw the red insignia and it never dawned on me. One of 'em turned, I saw a splash, and it dropped a torpedo. Now, the torpedo did not touch the *OGLALA*, my ship. It went under our keel and slammed into the USS *HELENA*.

Our plates dropped out on the bottom of our ship from the concussion. When that torpedo hit, it knocked me down. I got up, I think I was dazed a few minutes. I don't really recall. And all hell was breaking loose because by that time, they were starting to work on the battleships. There was some return fire from our ships. As we started to list -- they start chopping the ropes away that was holding the hauser, as they called 'em, from the *HELENA*. So I crossed the gangplank, went onto the *HELENA*. There was a man on the deck force there directing us what to do, because we had a surplus of men by that time. So the one-point-one -- I believe they were called pom-poms in those days -- they were forty millimeters -- passed the ammunition. And that's what I did during the entire attack.

CC: Did you have a chance to observe what was going on elsewhere in the harbor that morning? Did you see any other ships take hits, or . . .

LB: Oh yes.

CC: . . . what kinds of things did you see?

LB: I saw a lot of smoke. The problem with the *HELENA* was we were close to a naval building, a Navy yard building there. And these planes would come right over the top of the building, they'd be right on top of you, but there's a lot of smoke. And of course, I don't believe -- after that torpedo hit, I don't believe the cruiser *HELENA* had electricity. So they're trying to use these guns by manual operation. And these airplanes, at that time, were too fast for us. It would be like trying to compare a jet airplane today with a propeller-driven airplane.

I did not see the *ARIZONA* blow up, but I saw it burning profusely. I did see a lot of explosions near Ford Island. I observed them. And the battleship *NEVADA* got under way. And I was told the story wrong for many years. I thought that the battleship *NEVADA* was pounded aground by dive bombers. But I understand in later years, she was directed to ground herself intensely so she wouldn't block the channel.

CC: Let me ask you this, all this is going on and here you are, having a nice Sunday morning with plenty of fresh milk and listening, worrying about your record albums. And all of a sudden, you're in the war. What was going through your head? I mean, how did you feel?

LB: Well, many people have asked me that question. I can't actually say I was scared. I was probably more surprised and amazed. We couldn't comprehend the thing, it probably soaked in like two or three days later. And I even heard officers over at Bloch Arena, where I was transferred after the ship was sunk, and they couldn't believe there was a two-man submarine came in the harbor. They couldn't believe the extensive damage that could be done by this aircraft.

Then it started to soak in, but of course, at that time we were gung-ho to go back to sea. I got transferred to a destroyer and I was glad to get back to sea. I was glad to get out of Pearl Harbor.

CC: What was it like right after the raid? What kinds of things did they have you doing? Did you get involved in salvage? Did you try to salvage your ship, or what?

LB: The --- no. We did not try to salvage our ship. I was put on a motor launch, and we were picking up wounded and we were picking up bodies that were floating on the water, oil slicks on the battleships. We was hauling 'em back to the docks. We covered 'em up with canvas and they were, I recall, they were taking jewelry and trying to get identification, fingerprinting 'em and that sort of thing. Later on, that afternoon, quite late that afternoon, they set up sandbags and some machine guns. And I manned those for, I believe, a day and a half. And then, of course, they called the names out after they found out who the survivors were, and they transferred us over to Bloch Arena, that's where I got reassigned.

CC: Okay, you want to stop here and change tapes? Okay, we gotta change tapes.

LB: Okay.

CC: This is great, for a guy who says you're not an extempora-- . . .

END OF VIDEOTAPE ONE

VIDEOTAPE TWO

CC: Yeah. Actually the one thing I wanted to ask you is, if there hadn't been an attack that morning, what would you have done on a Sunday morning?

LB: Oh, usually the Sunday morning, at that time, of course, I had just become a ship fitter striker, but we'd sweep down and just light duty and just lay around, write letters mostly, read and relax. Sunday was a day of relaxation.

CC: And you were just looking for some time off and . . .

LB: Sure, time off to relax. Sometime we'd go ashore, but I stayed ashore the previous evening, so I'd have probably just layed around, wrote a few letters, listened to records, did some reading. That's about it. Because Monday morning, the normal routine started all over again.

CC: You were worried about them scratching your record. Did you ever see that record again?

LB: No, I never saw the record again. The only thing, I believe, that was ever salvaged from the minelayer *OG LALA* was one musician's saxophone. I believe he got that back. And we've often wondered what happened to everything that was in all those lockers, like my class ring, the few souvenirs we picked up or the things that salt water wouldn't destroy. I never did find out what happened to it.

CC: All right, so after you lost your ship and how long did it take to get reassigned or what was it like here in Honolulu after the attack and before you got reassigned? What was the mood and what was going on?

LB: Probably the most amazing thing -- I'd never seen a blackout. Absolutely no lights were permitted at all. Now, I did not leave the base. I could not go to Honolulu. Everything was restricted. There was a lot of military police. We had a lot of shore patrol. And of course, I stayed right down there at the base. Everything was very, very restricted. You couldn't just move around at random. No liberty, nothing. Then I -- then it started to soak in, that this is war. Now we have to live with this.

CC: And you didn't have a ship, where did they have you housed then?

LB: Well, I was sleeping in between those sandbags and some of us were sleeping in the building right there at the Naval yard. It was a machine shop. They had cots and bunks in there. I got reassigned, I believe, it was a day and a half later.

CC: And what ship did you end up with?

LB: I went on the USS *TUCKER*, a destroyer, which was present at Pearl Harbor at the time.

CC: And, well, you shared something with me, what happened to you on the destroyer?

LB: Well, the nicest thing, we went right back to the States. We went back to San Francisco on the USS *TUCKER*. They did a little work. They put a couple of twenty millimeter machine guns on it and restored everything, restocked. We headed out to South Pacific in a convoy. We went to New Zealand. We went to Australia. After we left Australia, we picked up a troop ship, the [*PRESIDENT*] *COOLIDGE*. It was off Espiritu Santo Island, in the New Hebrides. For many years, we thought we were sunk by a Jap torpedo. We actually ran into one of our own mines. Our minelayers had gotten there that morning, early. The word didn't get out. We was going up Second Channel. We hit the mine. We was in about fifty-two fathoms of water. The ship sank very slow. I believe we had five casualties in the engine room.

Two weeks before that, I had broken my ankle and I had a cast on my leg. So they gave us the orders, strip ship. So we threw everything over the side that was loose, and the ship probably took an hour and a half to sink. When they gave the word, "Abandon ship," I cut the cast off my leg, I just jumped over the side.

Now, we were in the sight of land. A sea-going tug picked us up. They took us over to the main island, where the Seabees were building Quonset huts and an air base. I stayed there about, oh, I'd say five weeks. I went back to the States on the baby flattop USS *LONG ISLAND*, and I was assigned to brand new destroyer, the USS *CARMICK* (DD-493). Now, had I got there a week earlier, I could have got a destroyer after my namesake, the USS *BAILEY* (DD-492). This is from Seattle, Washington. And of course, that ship was transferred to the East coast.

CC: So you got out of the Pacific?

LB: I got out of the Pacific for about three years.

CC: Now, how did -- okay, you lost -- you had two ships, say, go under you in less than a year. How did that make you feel?

LB: I was beginning to wonder if the war would ever end. There's a gentleman with a book called Iron Bottom Bay. And he put a remark in there, he says, "Loren Bailey was wondering if this damn war would ever end. How the hell could he be so unlucky to lose two ships in nine months?"

CC: What about after this is all over? You have forty-five years later, you're looking back, you have very vivid memories, obviously. Very good at recalling these things. How do you feel about it all? Do you think about the attack on Pearl Harbor in any special way?

LB: Well, yes, I do, in a certain way. The man who probably described it was John Toland, in his book, Infamy. The last three or four pages he tries to explain the Japanese side and he tries to explain our side. He doesn't condone the fact that it was right to bomb Pearl Harbor, but if you kind of read in between the lines or study the thing out, there might have been some justification because force is force and war is war. I've always made the remark to my children and a lot of people, "I can probably forgive, but I can't forget." Now, what tempers all of this is I feel that the Japanese payed a lot more dearer price than we did, because long before the atom bomb, I mean, we did destroy their fleet. We did destroy those islands. We did take thousands of lives. So all in all, as the old saying goes, you know, "War is hell." But, like I say, I can't forget, but I can forgive and I can justify the situation. And of course, I don't know politics that well, and there's a lot of politics involved, I felt.

CC: Right and obviously there were people on the other side probably just doing their job.

LB: Yeah, it's that. Yeah, those Nuremberg war, those war crimes at Nuremberg, Germany. Now, I think every officer to the man, and some of them were hung, they said, "We're just doing our job. We were following orders." And that's about all we ever did in the Navy. There's always somebody above you, I guess, unless you was the full admiral. And even they got criticized. So you were doing your job. You never asked any questions.

CC: And you really didn't have time to think a lot of it through either, did you?

LB: No. No. Never did. Probably the only thing we'd ever concentrate on and where I'd ever worry, my biggest worry -- of course, I hated aircraft. I always feared aircraft. Storms at sea. We went through a couple typhoons and believe me, they make you pray.

CC: The . . . this is the forty-fifth anniversary and obviously people are already talking about the prospect of the fiftieth. How would you like to sit down with some folks that fought on the other side and see how they thought about it? Have you ever thought about doing that, or have you had a chance to do that?

LB: Yes. A friend of mine has an interview with some of the pilots that actually bombed Pearl Harbor. Now, I also did some research and this is trivia, I ask a lot of others who the first prisoner of World War II was. And my friend, Bob Hudson, who wrote a book, Sunrise, Sunset on Pearl Harbor, had me do some research. He contacted this officer Sakamaki who was a survivor on this two-man submarine, and I went back to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin and actually took a picture of the barracks they interned him in. And we had contact with him, we

wrote him a letter. We have correspondence with him, and we understand now he's the retired vice president of Toyota Motors.

He, at first, he wrote us a letter, quite sarcastic and quite critical about the lack of discipline Americans have. Then we found him to be more and more interesting. And I would like to talk to that man, I really would, because I read his book and the fact that I took those pictures and then Bob has had contact with him. I would like to sit down with an interpreter, I would imagine, and talk to him. I really would.

CC: What kinds of things would you think you might find out?

LB: Well, I'd like to know what his feeling was when he tried to enter Pearl Harbor with the type of fleet we had there at that time and he hit this coral reef, and then he backed off, and he tried again, and he tried again. And then of course, I believe it was phosgene gas that finally knocked him out. This guy just never said quit. He was the . . . had to be the most persistent man I've ever seen in my life.

CC: And the war was over for him pretty quick, though.

LB: The war was over for him pretty quick. An interesting thing I found about Camp McCoy, at Camp McCoy, there was one officer that wrote a little document on him, and they used him to temper the disposition of all the other prisoners of war that were Japanese. And he was into the -- I don't know how authentic this is -- but he said there was a lot of threats of suicide from these Japanese because they didn't want to go back, it was a save face thing. It was very, very interesting. I could never get a hold of that document. He let me read it, that was the end of it.

CC: Well, do you have anything else you wanted. I think this has been great. I've enjoyed this. I hope to see you at the fiftieth.

LB: I hope you're right. I'll come if I can.

CC: Thank you.

LB: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW