

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#426

MICHAEL M. GANITCH

USS *PENNSYLVANIA*, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON

DECEMBER 6, 2001

BY COMMANDER BILL SCULLION

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL

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ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

(Conversation off-mike)

Bill Scullion (BS): Okay. This is oral history number 426. The following oral history interview was conducted by Commander Bill Scullion for the Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., and for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii, on December 6, 2001 at 9:05 p.m. The person being interviewed is Michael Mickey Ganitch, who was a seaman first class on the USS *Pennsylvania*, on December 7, 1941. Did I get that right, Mickey?

Michael Ganitch (MG): Correct.

BS: Okay, for the record, please state your full name, place of birth and date of birth.

MG: Michael Mickey Ganitch, born November 18, 1919, Mogadore, Ohio.

BS: And what did you consider to be your hometown in 1941?

MG: San Leandro. I lived in San Leandro, California before I joined the navy.

BS: Okay.

MG: And that was my home for several years after that.

BS: What were the names of your parents?

MG: My dad's name was Charles Ganitch, no middle name. My mother's name was Sophia, S-O-P-H-I-A, Kuzmik, K-U-Z-M-I-K. They're both from Yugoslavia.

BS: How many brothers and sisters did you have or do you have?

MG: Well, there was fourteen of us originally. There was nine girls and five boys. I was number twelve. And so there's four of us still living. I have three sisters and myself are living out of fourteen. My mother had fourteen kids in eighteen years.

BS: Wow.

MG: So she didn't have, in a period of eighteen years or nineteen years, she was either pregnant or nursing.

BS: And how many children and grandchildren do you have now?

MG: I have fourteen grandchildren and sixteen great-grandchildren.

BS: And where did you go to high school?

MG: I went to school in Mogadore, Ohio. I graduated there in just a small town of 2100, outside of the town of Akron, Ohio and I graduated in high school in 1937.

BS: And where and why did you enlist?

MG: Oh, work was so bad—in fact, I worked with the WPA, which is the Works Progress Administration. in Ohio, building roads and bridges because there

was no work. In fact, President [Franklin] Roosevelt encouraged that projects like that for employment for the people. The work was still so bad and I had a sister living in California and she said, "Come out to California. We'll see what we can do to get you a job out there," so I listened to what Horace Greeley said, "Go west young man," and so I came to California in 1939 and stayed there, worked in California until I joined the navy in January 1941.

BS: Any good recruiting stories for us?

MG: I was, oh yes, (chuckles). Yes, anybody that needs a little encouragement there as far as discipline, because it helped me. Because before I joined the navy, I was awfully hard to get along with. And so I went and joined the navy to become a man. And that's what I think I resulted out of me being in the service.

BS: Where did you go after you were recruited?

MG: Well, I went to San Diego for boot camp and I went to quartermaster and signal school in San Diego training center and from there I went to the USS *Pennsylvania*, Battleship BB-38, which was stationed at Pearl Harbor.

BS: When did you arrive on the *Pennsylvania*?

MG: August 15, 1941.

BS: What division were you assigned to?

MG: I was a quartermaster because I went to quartermaster and signal school so immediately I went to quartermaster division itself, to use some of the knowledge that I gained while I was going to school in San Diego.

BS: Okay. Why did you—did you get an opportunity to pick the *Pennsylvania* or at least type of ship?

MG: Well, they interviewed us to find out what our preferences were and one of the things I was very bad on was mechanical aptitude and so they said, “What would you like to be?”

And I says, “Well, I’d like to be in something there that doesn’t need mechanical aptitude.”

They said, “How about steering the ship?”

And I said, “That would be great for me,” because up to that time, the biggest ship that I had ever seen was the ferryboat in Lake Erie. And so being on the big ship would be great for me.

And then they says, “Well, what type of ship?”

I says, “Well, I was athletic-minded and so I’d like to be a ship where maybe you have a football team, because I played football high school and semi-pro football.”

And they said, “Well, battleships have a lot of sports teams here.”

So I said, “I’d like to have a battleship.”

And so that’s how I was chosen for the USS *Pennsylvania*.

BS: Did you join the *Pennsylvania* football team?

MG: I joined the football team and so we, in fact, we had a terrific team that year.

In fact, we lost one game out of about three months playing. And in fact, we were going to play the USS *Arizona* for the fleet championship on December 7 of 1941. We were going to leave the ship at five minutes of eight to do a little scrimmaging and the attack came at five minutes of eight and we had our football uniform on because we weren’t going to have a place to change clothes there, so I had my football uniform on when the attack came. So up in the crow’s nest, I went to my battle station. I was the lookout. So it was a pretty tight squeeze, especially with a little trap door like this to get through and pull myself through with all my shoulder pads there, so I was well protected during the attack.

BS: So you were dressed for football?

MG: I was dressed for football but that game never got played there.

BS: What position did you play, by the way?

MG: I was running guard.

BS: Running guard?

MG: Yes. I was really heavy there at that time. I weighed 170 pounds there and nowadays there if you don't weigh 250 pounds, you're nothing for a lineman.

BS: That's true.

MG: But I was pretty fast.

BS: Question we've kind of been asking some other survivors is what, do you recall what you were doing on December 6?

MG: Yes, we had, the big ships always had a big band. And so we had the Battle of Bands at Bloch Recreation Center there at Pearl Harbor. And we won it there and we barely nosed out the USS *Arizona* for the band. In fact, they said politics were pulled because we had the admiral on our ship 'cause we were the flagship of the fleet, the USS *Pennsylvania* there. And so they were going to try to get revenge from us the next day, 'cause we were going to play 'em for the fleet football championship at one o'clock on December 7, on Sunday.

BS: So about what time did you get back to the ship?

MG: Well, it was about, oh, it must have been about 10:30, eleven o'clock that night, so we had a short night's sleep there and then get ready to go play football the next morning.

BS: Where was the ship located at the time of the attack?

MG: Well, normally we're tied up at Ten-Ten Dock because I think the admiral liked to step off the dock and go on, go ashore. He didn't like to ride the boat there so we always tied up at Ten-Ten Dock, but we had propeller trouble. So either the day before or two days before, we went into dry dock to work on the propellers, and so there's no water under, we were sitting on blocks in the dry dock itself. So as a result there, when the Japanese attacked there, they didn't know where we were because they didn't get the word that we had moved into dry dock, because they knew just where the ships were and they didn't know that the *Pennsylvania* was in the dry dock so we didn't get hit until the second attack.

BS: Okay. You said you were getting ready to go off and do battle with the *Arizona* on the gridirons.

MG: Yes.

BS: How, where were you when the attack started?

MG: Well, then steering aft was the living compartment of the quartermasters. That's down there close to the rudder in the extreme bottom of the ship, in the stern of the ship. And so we was getting ready to go and we was going to go up on the dock, go up on the deck to leave the ship at eight o'clock. And so we're getting ready and the telephone rang and I answered the phone and it says, "Japanese are attacking Pearl Harbor!"

I said, "Aw, come on. Quit your kidding!"

'Cause we had been talking about maybe getting in a war with Japan there. Oh, in fact, when I went into boot camp, they said, "Don't worry about it, we'll wipe 'em out in a few weeks, anything took place there."

So they said there, they said, "Attack on Pearl Harbor."

And I said, "No, no, it can't be."

About that time general quarters went and we heard a shuddering there and the people that were close to the guns got to their stations there and started

firing before anybody below decks even knew what was going on. It was about the same time that the ship started shuddering from—‘cause sitting on blocks there—and _____ five-inch guns is fired, anti-aircraft guns that shook the ship. And so we knew that something was going on, so off we go into battle stations. Up in the crow’s nest I went. And to get to the crow’s nest, you had to go on the outside tripod and it had rungs on it. You’d go up there and so it’s just up in the open. You go up starboard and down the port there so you don’t get in a traffic jam.

So up I went there and I found out later there that machine gun nicks were in the, around the rungs of the ladder that I had gone up. Whether it happened before I went up there, during the time I went up there, or after I got up there, I don’t know, but they didn’t get me. I think god had other plans for me.

BS: Okay. And you said about having to squeeze into the crow’s nest up there.

MG: Yeah, it’s a little trap door. It must have been about this big and you think about me with shoulder pads trying to pull myself through. But I got up

there. When an emergency like that there, you don't waste any time. You make do. You maybe make yourself a little smaller to get through because you had to get up there and get up there in a hurry.

BS: What were your duties up there in the crow's nest?

MG: I was the lookout and I spotted this one plane coming in over on the, well, where the boats tied up at the boat landing. I saw the plane coming over and then I could see the planes coming over the top of the buildings. The guns down below could not see it, so I kept reported that planes coming, planes coming in there. And they came in over the tops of buildings, the guns were already pointing in that direction and they shot it down. So that made me feel pretty good that I accomplished something out of it, but it's like a bad dream, bad dream is what it was.

BS: What made it a bad dream up there? What were you seeing that was making it that way?

MG: I was looking at these ships burning here and planes flying around, debris around and everybody running all over the place because everybody was scared. ‘Cause anybody said they weren’t scared, they’re an awful liar because something like this happened there—I didn’t, maybe I wasn’t scared but I’d look about the machine gun and nicks was there and the whole _____ side of me practically where the bomb hit to where we got—that’s a little scary coming that close.

BS: Now, *Pennsylvania* started off in a dry, dry dock.

MG: Yes. But then this destroyer, the second attack is when they found us. Evidently the first attack planes reported a big ship in the dry dock. So when we got hit there, there’s a bomb straddled us alongside the dock, one hit us and one hit the destroyer in the dry dock ahead of us, ‘cause the *Cassin* and *Downes* destroyers were in the same dry dock. So the order was made there, “Flood the dry dock there. Put out the fire.”

Except the theory didn't work there 'cause the fire caught the oil. It came from the destroyer, came on top of the water and started burning. So it got pretty hot all around us. Me, in my football uniform, it got pretty hotter yet!

So the theory didn't work there, flood the dry dock.

BS: So, did you, do you recall any—kind of break it up. First attack wave, do you recall any particular event from the first wave that sticks in your mind?

MG: Well, we look around and see all this stuff going on and can't believe it's happening. And I don't know, it was just so much going on at that time, you don't even think about it. And there was a little bit of gap in between the first attack and the second attack, so we had time to change clothes. So I went below decks there and put on my regular clothes there so by the time the second attack came, which was about maybe fifteen, twenty minutes later, I had the regular uniform on there instead of my football pads. It was easier to get up, back up to the crow's nest when the second attack came.

BS: Did you secure from general quarters between the first and second attack?

MG: Yes, yes. But they kind of thought that it's over so it's kind of a modified securing from quarters there. People, they still kept people on the guns because they knew that it could be more coming on and so they were, everybody was on edge and everybody was prepared in case something happened, which did, the second attack.

BS: When you came out of the crow's nest at the end of the first attack, what did you see around you?

MG: Well, it wasn't until the second attack when the one bomb hit us, but everybody running around and it was just like everything was in turmoil itself there. Just can't believe it's happening, really. Just like a bad dream.

BS: Okay, so you had the second general quarters and you're back up in the crow's nest.

MG: Back up in the crow's nest through the hole and that's when we got the 500-pound bomb that missed me about forty-five, fifty feet, something like that.

It came passed me, this armor-piercing bomb, a 500-pounder, and it went through two decks and when it hit the main deck, which is the strongest deck, it exploded. It knocked out the gun crew and everybody that was in that area. We lost twenty-five men, maybe twenty-four men that day. And but look along side of me and here's a big hold wherever that bomb came down. If it exploded on contact, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you. So that gets a little a scary when you think about that too.

BS: Yeah. *Pennsylvania's* the sister ship of the *Arizona*, correct?

MG: Yes.

BS: Did you see the *Arizona* go up?

MG: Well, I heard the blast and looked over there and it was really smoking.

There was so much smoke at that time, you couldn't even tell which ship it was, really, because—of course, with the *West Virginia* tying up, tied up just forward of it and it got hit pretty bad. And so with the smoke between the *Arizona* and the *West Virginia* and then the *Oklahoma*, which was forward

of it, it was rolled over. And first it's upright and then just a few minutes later, it's laying over on its side there, 'cause everything happened so fast. And then the *Nevada* trying to get under way and got out of the harbor. And I figured, oh no, if they sink it in the middle of the harbor, what's going to happen to us? And fortunately there that they grounded it, beached it there close to the entrance of the harbor, so that didn't block any of the ships from going out.

BS: They actually beached it fairly close to you, didn't they?

MG: Yeah, it went past us because we were pretty much in the close to the entrance of the harbor itself. So we could see the people going out and looking. Planes coming in, looked like they were close enough to throw rocks at 'em if we had any rocks to throw at 'em. They weren't that close, but they looked awfully close.

BS: Did you see any—I've heard it reported that the *Nevada*—right, yeah—the *Nevada* had got a lot of attention when it got under way.

MG: Oh yeah, because evidently Japanese got the word there that if they sink it, then they'd bottle up the whole fleet. And they concentrated on, they had torpedo planes coming in, dive bombers and everything, trying to get it there. And we figured, what's going to happen now? Is it going to get out and hopefully there it's not going to block the channel. And fortunately it did not block the channel. And it really would've been something there. We were fortunate we didn't have any aircraft carriers in the harbor. Because at that time, up to that time, the battleships were the strength of the fleet. Any _____ ships that you have were the strength of the fleet. But fortunately we didn't have any aircraft carriers in there and from then on the aircraft carriers were the strength of the fleet.

BS: Okay and eventually you got secured from general quarters a second time...

MG: Yes.

BS: What did you see when you came down that time?

MG: Oh, I looked at that mess that they had there. In fact, I had to go right past the big hole where the damage was and see what we could do to help out the people. They had enough help there, so they had the hospital corpsmen and all, which was in a different part of the ship, so none of those people were injured. So we had enough people there to take care of the wounded and the dead.

BS: What did you see? If you can relate.

MG: Big mess of metal, torn metal and just wondering who could survive around that. So we just stayed clear of it and they started working. Once they got they mess cleared up, they start patching us up so we could go back to sea and we went to, out of the harbor about, oh, it must have been about a week and a half later. We were patched up because that bomb hit that we had did not hurt the watertight integrity of the ship so all we had to do is just patch the deck itself and what was underneath it there and we were ready to go to sea. So we came back to California, San Francisco and got, tried to get patched up and get ready to fight the war.

BS: Okay. Did you go forward and see the destroyers in the dry dock?

MG: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

BS: What did that look like?

MG: Oh, it was a big mess 'cause this one destroyer was laying over on the other one there and what made it bad there, you had the, when you're in dry dock, you can't use the heads, the restrooms there. So you had to go out on the dock to the restrooms, which is right alongside the destroyers, and see these people there trying to save the ships and it was really bad.

And one thing was a little comical, 'cause I had the duty of quartermaster that night and after dark, this *Enterprise* planes start coming in there and nobody knew anything about what's coming in and they start, everybody start shooting at 'em. And we knocked down some of our own planes there and because anything that moved, they shot at.

BS: Did you know it was the *Enterprise* planes coming in at the time?

MG: No. No, nobody knew anything there. Finally I heard ‘em say over the radio, it says, “Stop firing, it’s our own planes!”

And we had, since I was a quartermaster of the watch, we had one officer, the officer of the deck there, he was from Texas there and he was practicing his draw. We figured we better stay clear of him, no telling who he’s going to shoot at there and they’d fire, the guards would fire some rifles on the dock there because they had sentries on the dock there at that time, ‘cause after the attack. And as soon as there’d be some firing, he would pull his gun, wave his gun around there and everybody started getting, tried to get in behind him in case he starts firing his gun there. So he kind of scared us there. It got a little comical after a while, but at that time, it was a little bit scary.

BS: Where you keeping the log at that time?

MG: Oh yes. Oh yes.

BS: Did you log the shooting of the planes down or no?

MG: No, because at that time we really didn't know what we did. (Laughs)

BS: Did you log anything of interest that day?

MG: Well, just the attack _____. I wasn't, see, we had two quartermasters watch. I was the seaman. Now they had the third class and he's the one that wrote the log there. I just, I was more of a messenger quartermaster there, so I didn't get to write any of that but I knew what was going into the log there and so I knew a lot of that stuff went on and what happened at times and all that because, but there wasn't much to write about except we got the damage and the war was on.

BS: What was the atmosphere like on the ship after the second wave cleared out?

MG: Well, what's going to happen now? And here's the thing, they thought, well, the Japanese are going to invade Oahu. So that night, they got the word there, they says, for some reason a rumor came out there that the

Japanese were invading the land. So everybody that wasn't on watch went down below decks there and got rifles and ammunition and the canteens and get ready there to go ashore and do battle against the Japanese, 'cause everybody is scared. Everybody is scared and they didn't know what was going on, if they would attacked the land there, they'd took it because we weren't prepared at all. 'Cause even during boot camp there, we didn't even use the regular rifles there. Sometimes they used broomsticks and stuff, 'cause you didn't have the equipment that you needed to do the actual training for the weapons.

BS: Who was going to lead your landing force if you got called out?

MG: (Laughs) I don't know that! I was a seaman on the, of 1500 people on the ship there, so I would be following orders, whatever they say to do, that's what we'll do! (Laughs)

BS: Interesting. What's your most vivid memory of December 7?

MG: Well, so much of it is all the dream, the dream, as a nightmare, not really a dream. It was a nightmare that something like that could happen. You see it in movies. You've seen war movies and all that there, but it actually happened to you. It's just unbelievable that something like that could happen that we were not prepared. But we were very fortunate there. They says well they caught us off-guard there in Pearl Harbor. If they would've caught the fleet outside, they were so much faster than we are, if they would've caught us outside there, they would've wipes us out there and we would've lost thousands and thousands more people than we did lose that day. We lost about 2300, 2400 people that day. We would've lost—I wouldn't even be able to estimate how many people we'd have lost because their ships are so much faster, so much better equipped, trained and everything.

We did some, a lot of gunnery practice there, the few weeks there before the war started, but nothing like the Japanese did. They were better trained and they had—all the ammunition, a lot of our ammunition lockers were locked up. We couldn't even get to 'em that day! That's what made it bad. The people wanted to shoot the guns and they couldn't even get to the

ammunition! So they had to break open, knock off the locks there so they can get the ammunition lockers. But we were fortunate there that the ships that were sunk, like we were sitting in dry dock, so they couldn't really sink us. Now the *California* just settled to the bottom, same way the *West Virginia*. The *Oklahoma* laid over on its side, which they righted later on, tried to get it back to the States, which it sunk. But you know that water wasn't real deep so as a result there the extensive damage that could've happened if we were out at sea did not happen, so we were fortunate in that part.

BS: You said you did some gunnery training before December 7. Do you know what kind? Was it anti-aircraft surface or just general gunnery?

MG: No, it was, we had targets. We had towing targets there that tugboats pulling targets, we'd be shooting at the sleeves and drones that were out. We practiced with them. And but nothing up to the big actual thing.

BS: Was the practice anything like the real thing?

MG: Oh yes, it was. Well, we actually, our ship was so slow that we got in a lot of invasions but our ship would do, our cruising speed about fifteen knots, is what we could do.

BS: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't quite make that clear. Was the, when you were doing the gunnery training, which is probably a more controlled evolution, and then the actual attack that came in, was the training anything like the attack itself? I mean, were the gunners responding to something that they'd seen before, in terms of speed and altitude?

MG: Oh yes, oh definitely that, because once the war started there, we were so well-trained on operating the guns, we had a terrific record, gunnery record there for the invasions there, because a lot of invasions that they had there, the other ships could not knock out the gun emplacements. Well our ship did. They called on us because we were trained so hard so good that we had a terrific gunnery record.

BS: Okay. Was there any scuttlebutt before December 7 about an attack?

MG: Oh yes. In fact, when I went in boot camp in January 1941, I asked the instructor himself, I says, “We going to get in the war with Japan? A lot of talking.”

“Ah, no don’t worry about that.”

So there’s all kinds of talk going on, but I don’t think anybody really took it serious. But it did happen.

BS: Oh sure.

MG: But we got in the invasion there. Like our ship was so slow that we got in the invasion of Attu and Kiska, MAY-KIN, Kwajalein, Enewetak, Saipan, Guam, Palu, Philippines and we were one of the ships that crossed the tee of Surigao Strait. And then the invasion of Okinawa, we got into port that day, August 12, 1945 and well, a flagship always a flagship and the flag came on there and all our personnel came on. Eight-thirty that night, the Japanese plane came up, aimed its torpedo at the closest big ship it saw, was the battleship *Pennsylvania*. Torpedo hit the propellers. Everything went up.

The living compartment, the quartermasters, had twenty-six quartermasters, I lost twenty of 'em that night and the next morning the Japanese asked for peace.

I guess god had other plans for us, for me at least.

BS: The, one of the other survivors indicated that the *Pennsylvania* might have been slated to do something that the *Missouri* ended up doing.

MG: Yeah. We were the flagship here and it was a good chance that the admiral would want to stay on his own ship for the peace treaty. Well, since we were—in fact, they told us in the shallow water there, at Okinawa, in case we sunk, because we had nineteen foot of free board, and that was a wash.

BS: Yeah.

MG: And from that one torpedo because it's in the after part of the ship where it flooded everything in a hurry. And so they stabilized us and got as many bodies as they could out and towed us to Guam, put us in a floating dry dock

in Guam, patched us up so that we could go back to the States under our own power. We could go with the two port propellers. One of 'em was bent. The starboard propellers were shot because that's where the torpedo hit. So we got back to the States under our own power.

BS: Mickey, I see you got a senior chief badge on there.

MG: Yes.

BS: When did you earn that and how long were you in the navy?

MG: I was in the navy twenty-three years. I made chief March 1 of 1945.

BS: And how about senior chief?

MG: Senior chief, I made it in 1961. Yeah, just before, shortly before I got out of the navy in 1963. It started at senior chief and master chief just shortly before I got out.

BS: Okay. What's your best memory of the *Pennsylvania*?

MG: Well, it was like home. I went on at seaman second, August 15 of 1941 and came off a permanent appointment chief. They used it for the atomic bomb test at Bikini there because we were already damaged and so they wanted to have some capital ships in the atomic bomb test at Bikini, so they used _____ for it in the atomic bomb test at Bikini. They took us, put us in the harbor, anchored us and we went off on other ships there about ten miles away and they said face away from where the blast is going to be. Close your eyes and put your hand over your eyes and I still saw the flash.

BS: Wow.

MG: And so the second attack, second test there was to put animals aboard. And I was a farm boy, so they put me in charge of the goats and the pigs and the mice that they had. And so then I went aboard there and put the mice in the places there and after the underwater blast I had to go back on there and show 'em where I put all these animals and I came out with more animals

than I had, because the mice had little ones. And so I had more animals than the live ones that I started with.

BS: Wow.

MG: And they said, “Make sure you throw away your clothes and take a good shower.”

That’s the protection I had against the radiation...

BS: Wow.

MG: ...which they kept it in Kwajalein for two years after that, trying to wash it off and they never could and so ended up taking it outside the harbor and pulled the plug. It still wouldn’t sink and they ended up torpedoing it. That ___ so it’s outside the harbor in Kwajalein.

BS: Mickey, I’d like to thank you for your service and your information and...

END OF INTERVIEW