

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#283

REGINALD BACHER

USS *BAGLEY*, SURVIVOR

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 6, 1998
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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Daniel Martinez (DM): The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel A. Martinez for the National Park Service of the USS *Arizona* Memorial. This was conducted at the Imperial Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 6, 1998 at ten a.m. The person being interviewed is Reginald BAH-ER? (*Bacher*)

Reginald Bacher (RB): BA-HER, the “c” is silent.

DM: Okay, BA-HER (*Bacher*), who was aboard the USS *Bagley* on December 7, 1941. For the record, Reg, would you please state your full name, place of birth and date?

RB: Reginald Knight Bacher, San Francisco, California, September the 22nd, 1918.

DM: Okay. And in 1941, what did you consider as your hometown?

RB: Well, my hometown was Crescent Mills.

DM: Crescent Mills?

RB: That’s where I enlisted from.

DM: Is that California?

RB: Yes.

DM: Okay.

RB: Crescent Mills, California.

DM: Let’s talk a little bit about—you were born in Crescent Mills?

RB: No, I was born in San Francisco.

DM: San Francisco. What—how big was your family?

RB: Just me and my mother, and my father died when I was nine. So it was just my mother and me.

DM: So your mother raised you?

RB: Yes.

DM: Do you know what your father did?

RB: Well, he had a farm and then he sold the farm, I think in 1911. And they moved into town. They built a house for my grandmother.

DM: Right.

RB: And my mother was a housekeeper. And then my grandmother passed on and my mother and father, they married in 1914, and I came along in 1918. And I still live in the same house!

DM: Oh, is that right?

RB: Yeah.

DM: So you were born during the Great War, huh? Just at the end of the Great War.

RB: Right at the end, yeah, in September.

DM: How did—what were the circumstances of the passing of your father? Can you tell me?

RB: Well, I'm not sure. He had to go to Sacramento for some surgery and he never did come out of surgery.

DM: Oh, okay.

RB: And I don't know what the operation was and I never did ask my mother.

DM: Now, did you go to school in San Francisco?

RB: No. No, I went to school in Crescent Mills.

DM: Crescent Mills.

RB: Grammar school, eight grades of grammar school.

DM: How about high school?

RB: High school I went to Greenville, which is five miles away. And graduated from Greenville.

DM: So the famous, "I had to walk five miles to school," that's true?

RB: No, we had a bus.

DM: Okay. What did you like in high school? Did you like sports? Was there some subjects you liked?

RB: Well, yes, sports. I played basketball and track and I considered myself a track star. I had all the records at Pulmas County at that time.

DM: Oh, is that right?

RB: In the quarter-mile and half-mile.

DM: And what was your favorite subject in school?

RB: Probably history, geography.

DM: Okay. And as you graduated from high school and you looked towards your future, did you know what that future was going to be? Did you have any idea what you wanted to do after high school?

RB: Yeah. I wanted to go to Chico State College and be a coach, be a basketball coach or track coach.

DM: And what happened to that dream?

RB: Joined the navy. It cost thirty-six dollars a semester to go to school and thirty-six dollars was, in 1936, you know, there just wasn't any.

DM: Yeah. What would thirty-six dollars, what would that equate today, moneywise, do you think?

RB: God, I have no idea.

DM: It'd be in the hundreds, probably?

RB: Oh yeah. Yeah, I'm sure.

DM: So your dream of going to college wasn't realized. Why did you choose the navy and how'd that all come about?

RB: Well, another friend, Russell Austin, we decided—he went one semester to Chico State and but he had to drop out. So we joined the Navy for four years, save our money and get back out and go to college.

DM: Okay. So you had a plan?

RB: Yeah. And about the time we was ready to get out, 1940, well they started the draft.

DM: Right.

RB: I sure didn't want to be drafted into the Army, so I shipped over in November 1940.

DM: Okay.

RB: And that...

DM: So you enlisted in what year now?

RB: Nineteen thirty-six.

DM: Nineteen thirty-six, so you enlisted for a four-year hitch.

RB: Yes.

DM: And 1940 comes along, I wouldn't think, that you'd already served, that they would re-draft you, or draft you, period.

RB: Well, I didn't want to take a chance! Because we, you know, they're drafting you in the army.

DM: Okay. Let's talk about that first year in the Navy. You enlisted in—where was your place of enlistment? Where did they sign you up at?

RB: Well, Sacramento.

DM: Sacramento.

RB: And then we rode a ferryboat from Sacramento down to San Francisco, and that's where we were sworn in, was in San Francisco.

DM: And then where did they send you for sea school?

RB: San Diego.

DM: Or boot camp, I guess.

RB: San Diego.

DM: Okay. And did they get you down to boot camp, what did you think about all of that?

RB: (Chuckles) It seemed like when I got the four months in, I should be getting discharged. It seemed like four-year hitch was up.

DM: Is that right?

RB: Yeah.

DM: Were they pretty tough on you?

RB: Well, probably not, it just seemed like a long time 'cause we was busy and...

DM: Did you get homesick while you were there?

RB: No, I never did get homesick. It just seemed like it was such a long time that they keep you busy, so I don't think you had a chance to get homesick.

DM: Did the navy, when you were done with boot camp, find out what you were good at and selected you for a school, or how did that work?

RB: No, [to] the [USS] *Humphreys*, an old four-stacker destroyer, 236.

DM: Okay, so they assigned you to a ship?

RB: [*Yes, there were*] five of us, all went aboard that and it was up in the marine railway in San Diego, at the destroyer base.

DM: Right.

RB: And of course, in those days, you carried everything you owned, the sea bag and your hammock, and your bucket, and you had it all with you.

DM: Right.

RB: When I joined the navy I weighed 135 pounds. When I got out of boot camp, weighed 165 pounds, so I guess they did something right there.

DM: Yeah, put some muscle on you. How tall are you?

RB: I was five-nine and a half then.

DM: Okay.

RB: I'm probably about five-nine now.

DM: Now, you went aboard the *Humphreys* and eventually I guess they got her out of the marine railway and got her underway.

RB: [Yes].

DM: What was your job aboard the *Humphreys*?

RB: Well as a seaman—everybody was a seaman when you went aboard. And so then one day, a fellow by the name of Bosson—we called him Chug-Chug Bosson. His name was George. And we [*were*] over the bow on the stage, painting the numbers on the bow. And it was in Honolulu, and we [*were anchored*] at Pearl City.

DM: Right.

RB: And the water [*was*] nice and warm and we decided that we'd play king of the stage and no hands. We'd jerk each other off and we'd fall in the drink and then we'd have to swim back to the fantail and climb back over the guardrail, and get back up. We did this two or three times and the boatswain mate [*saw*] us and he said, "You guys are going to the black gang tonight!"

DM: Oh, is that right?

RB: That's how I got to be an engineer. (Chuckles)

DM: For taking a swim in Pearl?

RB: Right.

DM: You served how long on the *Humphreys* you said?

RB: I got off of it, [*when*] we put it out of commission in 1938, 1938. So I went aboard in '37, March of '37, I got off in September of '38.

DM: What was your next duty?

RB: Then I went aboard the [USS] *Barry*, 248, another four-stacker. And in '39, the fleet went east and we went through the canal and we did a lot of—maneuvering all down in Cuba and through [*the islands*].

DM: I understand that's good liberty ports down there.

RB: Oh man, it sure was then! (Laughs) Caimaneria, Cuba and...

DM: Pretty wild out there?

RB: Yeah. And cheap. Coke cost more than rum!

DM: Is that right?

RB: At that time. That's 1939.

DM: Yeah.

RB: And so I was up in Charleston and they decided to give England fifty of those little four-stacker destroyers.

DM: Right, part of the Lend Lease.

RB: Right. I thought the *Barry* was one of them, because there was seven of us transferred and went to the *Bagley*.

DM: Now, where was the *Bagley* home ported at that time?

RB: The *Bagley* was in the navy yard there at Portsmouth Navy Yard in Norfolk.

DM: Okay.

RB: And see, it hadn't joined the fleet yet. It just got [*back from*] shakedown.

DM: So you were part of the commissioning, or was she already...

RB: No, it was already in commission.

DM: Okay.

RB: I think it went in about 1936 or so.

DM: Now, what kind of destroyer was the *Bagley*?

RB: The *Bagley* was a 1500-ton.

DM: Pretty modern?

RB: Oh man. Some of those old four-stackers, you lived and slept in the same compartment and the compartments didn't have air conditioning or [*anything*] like that. You just had hatches [*for ventilation.*]

DM: They're pretty tight. Those were pretty narrow ships.

RB: Right. And when I got aboard that *Bagley*, everybody slept aft and ate forward, it's just like, my goodness, I've been delivered.

DM: Yeah. She was a pretty new ship.

RB: Brand new, yeah.

DM: And she was pretty quick.

RB: Yeah, yeah. It could do pretty near forty knots, [*and*] no smoke.

DM: Is that right?

RB: Yeah.

DM: Now the *Bagley*, you're in the Atlantic fleet. How do you get—how does she get transferred to the Pacific fleet? When did that all happen?

RB: In '39, July, we come around to the West Coast.

DM: You come through the Panama Canal again?

RB: Yes.

DM: What an experience. What's the Panama Canal like?

RB: Well, it's kind of fantastic. In those days, you couldn't take pictures of it.

DM: Oh really?

RB: Of the canal, I guess, for security reasons. But anyway, we had a boat and the captain's gig had a canopy and you could look out and sneak up [*in*] the captain's gig and get some pictures.

DM: Even though they said no pictures...

RB: Right.

DM: ...you guys took your cameras. So did you take some pictures?

RB: Yeah, I did.

DM: Do you still have those pictures?

RB: Probably.

DM: Okay.

RB: I'd have to [*look.*]

DM: So you took some pictures aboard the *Bagley*, maybe some just shots of the ship itself?

RB: Yeah, some of the sailors, yeah.

DM: Right. Friends?

RB: Yeah. Yeah, shipmates.

DM: Now, the shipmates, are you still in contact with any of those shipmates?
Are they...

RB: Yes, we have a ship's reunion every year, about the end of September. And
[yes], there's still a few of us...

DM: Left.

RB: ...alive, yeah.

DM: Now, how would—what was the size of the crew for the *Bagley*? About
how many men served on that ship?

RB: It seemed like to me there [were] about 250 before the war started. And then
they put [40 millimeter and] twenty millimeters [guns].

DM: More guns, huh?

RB: And forty millimeters, so they had to have a lot more crew to man the guns.

DM: Right.

RB: So then it probably swelled to about maybe 350.

DM: Okay.

RB: And then everybody—not everybody—but they started putting bunks up
forward then, when the war started.

DM: Right.

RB: And so you were sleeping and they went to a cafeteria style. Before you had
a family style. Everybody had their own seat at the table.

DM: And you were served?

RB: And you were served, [yes]. Mess cook come down and [started] the chow
on one end of the table and then seconds would start at the other end of the

table. And the poor guy in the middle, he was lucky if he got something to eat! (Laughs)

DM: I'll be darned.

RB: No, everybody got fed. But the more senior you [*were*], the further out you could move on the table.

DM: Oh, so the table had a pecking order?

RB: Right, right.

DM: Based on seniority.

RB: That's it.

DM: Now, did you have African Americans aboard as mess attendants...

RB: Yes.

DM: ...or were you too small a ship?

RB: No, all the mess attendants [*were*] either Filipino or African Americans.

DM: I see. Okay. Now, in those days, that was a segregated navy and they, on a destroyer that's awful small, did they have a place or a compartment for them?

RB: They had their own compartments. Yes, they didn't sleep or mess with us.

DM: Now, just one more question about that. Would the crewmembers that were African American, are they members of your group? Did they join the association, or...

RB: Well, we didn't, all we had [*were*] mess attendants and, no, they weren't close friends.

DM: Right. They had their own little world, right.

RB: Right, right. Yeah.

DM: A much different world then.

RB: Right, right. It was, well, segregated.

DM: Right. The *Bagley* now comes through the Panama Canal. Where is her homeport on the West Coast?

RB: San Diego.

DM: San Diego.

RB: Yeah.

DM: And is she part of a destroyer squadron?

RB: Right, right.

DM: Do you remember what number squadron you were in or that's a long time ago?

RB: I think it was the Fourth Squadron, Seventh Division.

DM: Okay. Now, you worked out of San Diego. When was your first trip to Honolulu on the *Bagley*, to Pearl Harbor?

RB: Must have been 1940.

DM: So you came out for some fleet maneuvers?

RB: Yes.

DM: Okay.

RB: Yeah, I think that was it. Then we came back and we went into the civilian yard in San Francisco, Bethlehem Steel Yard, to put what they called degaussing gear around.

DM: Right.

RB: It was supposed to get the electric mines away.

DM: Right.

RB: They put the degaussing gear on, that's when I shipped over. I got twenty-seven days leave because it was going to take that long to put the degaussing gear in, so I shipped over and got the leave.

DM: And where'd you go for your leave?

RB: I went home. (Chuckles)

DM: You went home.

RB: Crescent Mills.

DM: Yeah, saw your mom?

RB: [*Yes*].

DM: And did you—you know, a son and a mother, in your case, because she raised you and I guess you were very, very close to her.

RB: Well, yeah.

DM: What was your mother's name?

RB: Gertrude.

DM: Okay.

RB: Yeah.

DM: And did you write to her on a regular basis?

RB: Yeah. Well, probably at least once a month.

DM: Right.

RB: Yeah.

DM: And did mom ever send you stuff or...

RB: Oh yeah.

DM: Yeah.

RB: Especially white socks. (Chuckles)

DM: White socks.

RB: [*Yes*]. Everybody in the engineer's force used to want to wear white socks. It just seemed like it was better for your feet because those engineering spaces are hot.

DM: Well, let's talk about the engineering spaces, since you brought that up. What, to those listening to this tape, what is the engineering space? Can you describe what part of the ship that is?

RB: Well, the main and auxiliary machinery is located down there in the engine room and the evaporators for the water that we drink and make feed water, [*for the boilers*].

DM: Steam?

RB: Yes, make steam.

DM: Which generates the power for the...

RB: Right.

DM: ...for the ship.

RB: Because steam turbines [*drive the ship and heat coppers in the galley.*]

DM: How many props [*propellers*] on the *Bagley*?

RB: Two.

DM: Two.

RB: Yeah.

DM: She's twin screw?

RB: Right.

DM: Okay and for those people that never worked in engineering spaces, what would be the average temperature down there?

RB: Oh, probably 145, 150.

DM: So how do you work in those conditions?

RB: Well, we got blowers. [*That blow*] cool air, you know, it funnels it right to you and when you're on watch, these blowers [*are*] blowing right on you.

DM: So you stand in that area.

RB: Yes.

DM: And when you need to check something, you go around it and you come back, so you try to stay out of that...

RB: Come right back. Everybody's got a rag in their pocket to wipe their brow.

DM: Right. So it's like a sauna down there, right?

RB: [*Yes*]. You didn't put on much weight. (Chuckles)

DM: What was your job in that engineering space?

RB: Well, you start out as a fireman and that's being what they call a messenger.

DM: Right.

RB: And you go around and take readings of the temperatures of the bearing temperatures.

DM: The gauges?

RB: The pressures and we didn't have any scuttlebutt down there. We had an old beat-up pitcher of water. So once an hour you went up and filled it up with the scuttlebutt and brought it down and you handed it to the chief. He drank first and then the throttle man and the other throttle man, 'til it got down to you. Then you could have a drink. (Chuckles)

DM: Now, I've never—explain the term scuttlebutt. What is that? Sometimes it's what, you know, a rumor that goes around, but this sounds like it's a device.

RB: It's a drinking fountain.

DM: Okay.

RB: That's what a scuttlebutt is.

DM: All right.

RB: I guess years ago, the drinking fountain had a lot of fountains around it and...

DM: Right.

RB: ...and if you wasn't turning to, you'd be there at the scuttlebutt, and that's when the rumors started, at the scuttlebutt.

DM: People start talking.

RB: And so they called rumors, scuttlebutt.

DM: There you go. The *Bagley* now will make its trip back to San Diego and then you're sent over to Hawaii, and were you then permanently—well, temporarily attached to Pearl Harbor because the fleet moved over?

RB: Yes. It was called Hawaiian Detachment, HAWDET.

DM: Okay.

RB: Six months, we [*were*] supposed to be there six months...

DM: Right.

RB: ...and then come back.

DM: Right.

RB: And then somebody would relieve us, but we'd call it Hawaiian Detachment. We were scheduled to come back December the fifteenth.

DM: Okay.

RB: And on...

DM: Nineteen forty-one?

RB: Nineteen forty-one. And on December the seventh, 1941, our orders [*were*] changed.

DM: Abruptly.

RB: Yeah! Right.

DM: Before we get into the raid itself, tell me what life was like for a sailor in Hawaii?

RB: For me, it was, I liked it. I liked it.

DM: What did you like about it?

RB: Well, it was warm.

DM: Yeah.

RB: And we had awnings on the ships and we could sit back on the fantail and play cards and we had a Coke machine back there in the after deck house, and we could have Cokes. And there used to be a fellow come aboard with sandwiches, [*sold*] sandwiches.

DM: Right.

RB: And the liberty was good.

DM: What was good about the liberty, going downtown Honolulu?

RB: Well, (chuckles) well, there was a lot of clubs and there was a lot of...

DM: Female entertainment?

RB: ...hotels, yes. (Chuckles)

DM: Did you ever go into the Black Cat?

RB: Oh absolutely. That's the best—first time I ever had a bacon egg, bacon and tomato sandwich was the Black Cat.

DM: So your first BLT was there?

RB: Right, first one. I'd never heard of it before!

DM: Is that right?

RB: Yeah.

DM: And the Black Cat was noted also, I guess, for, it had culinary delights and they were pretty inexpensive.

RB: [Yes].

DM: Comparatively.

RB: Yeah, and it was right across from the YMCA and all buses and taxis stopped at the “Y” and you just went across the street, you got something to eat. That’s the first thing you look for, is something to eat and then something to drink.

DM: Now, for those that are unfamiliar with the navy, why would it be fun to get something to eat outside of the ship?

RB: Well, it’s just different. It’s just different food. But that’s the first thing you say, “Let’s go ashore and get a chow.”

DM: Right.

RB: That’s the first thing you think of.

DM: I had interviewed one sailor who said he loved going there for pork chops. He loved pork chops and he said he’d get a good pork chop there.

RB: Well, probably so because all the food I ever ate there was good and a lot of people that hear of the Black Cat, they think it’s not, they think it’s a house of prostitution, but it never was.

DM: It was a bar, restaurant?

RB: Yeah, bar and restaurant, you know.

DM: This wasn’t just a navy hangout, right?

RB: No. But mostly that, because it was across from the “Y” it was...

DM: Right.

RB: See, because the big hotel at that time was right down the street from there, was the Alexander Young [*Hotel*].

DM: Right.

RB: And the Alexander Young [*Hotel*] Roof Garden was where they had the dances.

DM: Right.

RB: And not too many sailors went up there though. It was a little expensive.

DM: Right. Now, moving on from the Black Cat, there was a number of sporting houses down the street.

RB: Oh yeah.

DM: Of course you never went to any of those.

RB: Well, but the older sailors told me about ‘em.

DM: They told you about what those were all about.

RB: Right, told me what it was all about.

DM: The week before the attack on Pearl Harbor, was the *Bagley* out on maneuvers? Was it out with any of the battleships, or what were you doing a week before Pearl Harbor?

RB: We were probably out drilling, training. And we used to anchor at Lahaina Roads.

DM: Okay, over on Maui.

RB: [*Yes*]. And see, they had the fleet split up. One weekend you'd be in, the next weekend you'd be out. And then the third weekend, we were all in.

DM: And on the weekend of December 7?

RB: We were all in.

DM: Okay. So that was a pattern that had been established, but it wasn't unusual. This happened to be the weekend when the fleet was all in?

RB: Right, right.

DM: Okay.

RB: One weekend you [*were*] out, one weekend you [*were*] in, and then the next weekend you [*were*] in, so we [*were*] all in.

DM: So that must have been a pretty roaring liberty town on that weekend, right?

RB: Oh yeah.

DM: Did you have liberty on December 6?

RB: No, I had the duty.

DM: Okay.

RB: I had the duty. I had the four to eight watch.

DM: So fifty-seven years ago today, you had the duty?

RB: That's right. I had the weekend duty.

DM: Now, what is the duty? What's the watch? Where would you be?

RB: Well, at that time, we was alongside the dock.

DM: Right.

RB: We were going to go into the marine railway the next morning, so I had the cold iron watch in the engine room.

DM: Okay.

RB: What cold iron is, you just made sure you didn't have a leak or something, or a valve wasn't open.

DM: Now when did your watch begin?

RB: Four o'clock in the afternoon 'til eight at night. And then four o'clock in the morning, 'til eight in the morning.

DM: Oh, okay. So you could rack out in between those hours.

RB: In other words, it was sixteen to twenty and four to eight.

DM: What was the evening like when you got topside in Hawaii? Do you have any recollections about that night, or was it just...

RB: No, they had...

DM: Was the moon out or was it, how was the temperature? You know anything about that?

RB: No, the temperature was probably normal.

DM: Right.

RB: Seventy.

DM: If it...

RB: I don't really know.

DM: Reg, was there any inkling that—I know that the ships were painted in their measure paint schemes, so they went to the dark gray and the light gray tops.

This was in preparation for a possibility of hostilities. The fleet was being the colors, the ships' colors were being changed. Did you have any idea yourself, personally, reading the papers or just scuttlebutt, that there's a possibility you guys are going to see action sooner or later with the Japanese?

RB: Not me. I guess I was naïve.

DM: Uh-huh.

RB: But on the *Bagley*, the number four gun was the engineer's gun.

DM: Right.

RB: One, two and three [*were*] the other, but number four gun was ours. And we had a gunner officer and we used to fire short-range and that was to get an "E." And if you got an "E" you got eleven dollars for, you know, for getting an "E."

DM: What's an "E?" Explain to me.

RB: Efficiency.

DM: Efficiency.

RB: Award, yeah.

DM: So if you could fire that gun quickly and accurately...

RB: Right.

DM: ...they would award you in efficiency and you got a reward for that.

RB: Right. And the pointer and the trainer, they got a reward the whole year, every month.

DM: Really?

RB: But the rest of the crew only got just eleven bucks, which is a bunch!

DM: Was that your gun? That was your battle station?

RB: No, my battle station was in the engine room.

DM: Okay.

RB: So it really didn't make sense, but that's the way it was. (Chuckles)

DM: On the morning of December 7, taking me back to that time, what was that morning like? You went on watch at four a.m.

RB: Yes.

DM: And so when did you feel something was up, something was going on?

RB: Had no idea. I had the sixteen to twenty watch and I got off and I played poker. Played poker all night 'til I had to go back on watch. I won sixty dollars. That's pretty near a month's pay. And I got off of watch and a fellow was in the fire room, his name is Smith, called him Toughy Smith. And we're both back there on the fantail wondering who we could get to standby so we could go ashore. Had the sixty bucks and I want to get it spent. And so we was standing there talking and pretty soon...

DM: What time was this?

RB: This is right after I got relieved, eight o'clock. Well, probably 7:30. The fellow that relieved me, his name was Kotrla. We called him Punchy. And he relieved me early and he said he didn't want chow but to bring him down a sandwich. And they had ham and eggs that morning. Everybody remembers the ham and eggs that morning. So I brought him a ham sandwich and handed it down the hatch to him and then went on back to the fantail and Toughy Smith was back there. And about—we was talking about it. We [*looked*] over at Hickam Field and we [*saw*] planes flying along, diving, didn't come up. Looked like a bunch of aspirin tablets dropping out. And old Smith, he says, "God, I wonder what kind of bombs those are?"

And I says, “Oh, I guess they’re water bombs.” I says, “Boy, that Air Force, they’re crazy drilling on Sunday morning.”

He says, “Yeah, they sure are.”

And about that time, the torpedo planes came right down Merry Point.

DM: Right alongside the ship, parallel to the shore.

RB: Right alongside the ship. And we watched the first one drop the torpedo and it went along and hit the battlewagon and smoke and water flew up and, “Boy, that looks real!”

“Yeah, it sure does.” [*Say Smith.*]

And the plane [*banked*] off. He banked off [*to the left*]. And the next one, right behind it, he dropped one. Same thing happened and he banked off the other way and then we [*saw*] the big rising [*sun*] underneath the wings. And we knew it wasn’t a drill.

DM: Now, how low were those torpedo planes?

RB: They was probably just about eye-high if I’m standing on deck and I don’t really know...

DM: Twenty, thirty feet high, huh.

RB: It wasn’t that high, I don’t think.

DM: Really low.

RB: Yeah. Coming right in. Then later on you heard that they had specially designed those torpedoes for that...

DM: Shallow water?

RB: ...shallow water, yeah.

DM: Now, you see this plane. You see the rising sun. How does the ship react? Does someone sound general quarters or how do they get the *Bagley* in action?

RB: God, I don't know. I think we [*were*] just trained well enough that we were all—I had five years in at that time. And most of the fellows, except for a few recruits that had just come aboard, [*were*] pretty well trained and I think we just—all the officers were ashore, except, I think, the gunnery officer was on board. And that's who took it out.

DM: So your bow is pointed towards Merry Point, so you were right in the attack pattern?

RB: Right. Yeah.

DM: So when did you start firing back at the Japanese attackers?

RB: Probably about five minutes.

DM: Okay. And how did the *Bagley* do? How did it credit itself that day?

RB: Well, I think we were high point man. I think we were high point man for the day. We got five [*or*] a possible six planes. And one of 'em was shot down with a five-inch thirty-eight.

DM: Tell me about that.

RB: Well, a gunners' mate, chief gunners' mate, he run up there and manned that five-inch and fired the five-inch and it hit it and it just exploded. The rest...

DM: Where did he hit the plane?

RB: I don't know. I was down in the engine room.

DM: Okay. But it all exploded...

RB: Yeah.

DM: ...and broke up into pieces.

RB: That's what I hear. I heard, I didn't see it, because by then, I'm down in the engine room. We wanted to get under way, but we're cold iron.

DM: Right.

RB: And all our lube oil is up in the settling tanks, so we got to strike the oil down before we can even jack the main engines.

DM: But you were in the process of doing that?

RB: Right.

DM: We're going to stop right here, 'cause we have to change tape and then we'll take that up in just a moment.

RB: Okay.

END OF TAPE #01

TAPE #02

DM: Okay. As the attack is unfolding and you're down there now, and you've gone down to your battle station which is in the engineering space, could you hear vibrations or explosions or tremors going on at all?

RB: I don't think so. I really can't recall.

DM: You were busy.

RB: Busy doing, you know, trying to get this thing underway. Normally it takes two hours to warm up the main engines.

DM: Right.

RB: You warm up slow and crank 'em over. We were ready to answer bells in forty-five minutes.

DM: Is that the fastest it was ever done?

RB: That's the fastest that I ever remember.

DM: Did you know of any orders for the ships to sortie? Were they telling you to get out of the harbor, or were you guys just doing this on your own?

RB: I don't know.

DM: You were just following orders.

RB: Yeah.

DM: Right. Could you hear the gunfire from your own ship?

RB: Oh [*Yes*].

DM: So the ship would reverberate from the gunfire?

RB: Yeah.

DM: And apparently from what all I've read the *Bagley* was just blasting away.

RB: Yeah. See we still had the fifty caliber mounted, from firing anti-aircraft practice.

DM: Right.

RB: ...[*at*] the sleeves. So they were still mounted. They hadn't taken 'em down. But it was target ammunition, but it worked.

DM: It worked.

RB: So, yeah.

DM: Did you have a full complement of crew or [*were*] there some people that had liberty besides the officers?

RB: No. We had Cinderella liberty. That meant liberty was up at midnight except for first class and chiefs, if you had a place to go.

DM: Right.

RB: But you had to be off the street. And we didn't have many people that was married in those days. And so I think we had pretty near all the crew but we didn't have the officers.

DM: Now the raid ends around ten o'clock, when did you finally get out of the engineering space or were you there for most of the day?

RB: Well, like I said, we had a pitcher to get water.

DM: Right.

RB: And so when I went up to get some water, then I looked over there and here's these battle wagons just turning over, sinking. And we've been lead to believe that the battleships was the backbone of the fleet...

DM: Right.

RB: ...and without them, you've got nothing.

DM: Right.

RB: So Herb Hull was the chief down there and I went down and I says, "Herb, come up and look."

And he come up and [*looked out*] the hatch and he looked and he says, "Oh my god, we've had it."

And we only had enough fuel for three days and it takes five days to get to the Mainland. So we thought we'd get out and run in circles until we run out of fuel and then they'd capture us and that would be it.

DM: Paint that picture because the *Bagley* had a ringside seat of looking at Battleship Row. Can you paint that picture as you remember it, what that all looked like?

RB: Well, that's the only time that I came up and looked.

DM: And what did you see? Describe to me that, the details, and your impressions, your feelings.

RB: Well, it was a sinking feeling because we'd been taught that those battleships, without battleships, there's no way you can win any kind of a battle. And all I could see is they're all sinking and I guess it was the *Oklahoma* that I [*saw*] going over. I didn't know what it was at the time, but it just, god, I don't know. I'm twenty-three years old, this is the end of it? You know.

DM: You thought it might be the end of your life.

RB: Yeah, yeah. That's the only time that I was really scared.

DM: The pictures that were captured at that time, they show this great devastation but I mean, to be there and looking at it probably is much different than a picture, right?

RB: Yeah. But you know, I can't really give you a good description. Dan, I'd like to, I just can't do it.

DM: Just smoke, fire and...

RB: [*Yes*].

DM: ...and twisted metal.

RB: And oil. Oil that deep all over.

DM: So you know as an engineer that they've hit those ships seriously and fractured the fuel tanks.

RB: Well, and on our way out, it was either [*the California or*] I think it was the *Nevada* had beached herself...

DM: Right.

RB: ...and we went right by [*it*] that on the way out. And if it had got caught in the channel, nobody would have got out.

DM: The south channel.

RB: Yeah.

DM: Now let's talk about that. The ship finally got under way. What time did you start going out?

RB: I would say around 9:30 or maybe ten o'clock.

DM: So the *Bagley* backed down or reversed, or how did she—'cause she was pointed, so how did she get—do you know how she got out?

RB: No.

DM: Probably turned her in the channel right there.

RB: Yeah, I think that probably maneuvered it around.

DM: And so you guys were going out probably to face the enemy?

RB: Yeah. Well [*we were*] going out to chase [*the Japanese*] fleet, yeah. Everything that got out, were after [*that fleet*].

DM: Okay.

RB: But our bilge keel was still loose and pretty soon it got pounded so bad that we had to stop.

DM: Is that right?

RB: And slow down so it wouldn't pound and the rest of the ships, they went on ahead and left us alone.

DM: So what did you—so how many knots were you doing?

RB: Well, we was doing twenty-five knots or probably thirty at first, but see, they were afraid we were going to pound that hole in the bottom, so then we had to slow down to about ten knots.

DM: And then you were susceptible to maybe submarine attack?

RB: Right. And everything else was gone. [*We were*] out here all by ourselves. And we just kind of ran it in circles that night.

DM: So you stayed out that evening?

RB: Yeah, stayed out all night.

DM: What did you think the next day might bring?

RB: We thought, like I told you before, we're going to stay here, we're going to run out of fuel and then we'll be captured. And we woke up the next morning and we could look over there and we could see the cranes and all of that stuff and we came in and went alongside where we were. And all we'd lost was the battleships and the *Oglala* and of course the old *Utah* on the other side.

DM: Right. The *Arizona* was still burning, huh, at that time? Still smoke in the harbor?

RB: It was probably still smoking, yeah. And the oil was really thick by then.

DM: Yeah. Did the *Bagley* suffer any casualties?

RB: No. Never. Well, one time at Guadalcanal, we shot a plane down and we was going to go capture the pilot, and he got out on the wing, pulled out his

sidearm and fired at us one time. It went hole through the stack and then he shot himself.

DM: No kidding.

RB: And we couldn't pick him up. That was the first Savo Island battle.

DM: Yeah. After Pearl Harbor and you come in and all of that, what would—the officers got aboard, what were going to be the orders for the *Bagley*? Were you guys going to get fixed finally?

RB: Yes. Yeah, we went into the marine railway and we stayed in there probably 'til about February. Getting guns on. They put on a gun tubs with the twenty millimeters and forty millimeters on there. So we fooled around there and we could go ashore about every fourth day, but there wasn't anything to do. You could go to a movie or get a chow, but that's about all. All the bars was closed. But I had a friend on the beach there, a young lady.

DM: Right.

RB: So I used to go over and see her when I got liberty.

DM: Got a girlfriend, huh.

RB: And she was native and she knew where to get a bottle of booze, so I give her twenty bucks and when we'd come back, she'd have a bottle of booze...

DM: That's great.

RB: ...and we'd be on the dock waiting to go out to the ship and we'd be the only ones intoxicated. They'd say, "How does he do that?"

DM: You were with the *Bagley* the rest of the war?

RB: I got off the *Bagley* in 1945, yeah. April.

DM: April?

RB: April in '45.

DM: And then where did you go from there?

RB: I went to shore duty there in Oakland, Oakland Naval Supply Depot.

DM: And that's where you heard about the surrender of Japan?

RB: Yeah, mm-hm.

DM: To the generations that'll see this tape, what do you think for you were the lessons of Pearl Harbor, maybe perhaps the lessons for the nation?

RB: Well, I guess our motto, "Remember Pearl Harbor. Keep America alert."

DM: So this'll never happen again?

RB: Right. It should've probably never happened, but of course it's, I don't know.

DM: The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, when did you join it as a member and why did you join?

RB: Well, I think I joined it in 1971.

DM: Uh-huh.

RB: And why, I just thought it was the thing to do. It's a kind of a unique organization. It's a last man club.

DM: Right.

RB: And we're losing about forty a month now.

DM: Right.

RB: So I guess I've never joined anything else, like the American Legion or VFW [*Veterans of Foreign Wars*] or anything like that.

DM: But you joined the Pearl Harbor Survivors.

RB: Yeah, 'cause I thought it was kind of unique.

DM: Some writers have said about the Pearl Harbor Survivors that this is an organization based on one day that was their defining moment. Would you agree with that, that that day was a defining moment in your life?

RB: No, I don't think so.

DM: What was it for you that day? When you look back at Pearl Harbor, what does it represent to you?

RB: Well...

DM: Personally.

RB: Dan, I don't know. Just lucky that we had the right training. I really don't know. I don't have a good answer for that.

DM: Well, that's okay. The loss of life, did you realize how many guys died that day?

RB: No because, see, we never had any casualties.

DM: Right.

RB: Everybody was—we didn't have any casualties and so everything was, you know, off in the distance, we never...

DM: Were you angry at the Japanese for what they had done to the fleet?

RB: Oh yeah, absolutely.

DM: Did you ever get over that?

RB: Oh yeah, yeah.

DM: When did you finally come to understand that, I guess this is part of war, but...

RB: Yeah, they were doing their job just like we were doing ours. And probably when I was out there in Japan during the Korean conflict.

DM: That gave you a chance to meet the Japanese people?

RB: Yeah, right.

DM: So maybe you—and I don't want to speak for you, but some survivors said, "I didn't have a problem with—those guys were doing what they were supposed to do, but I had a problem with the government that sent 'em to do it."

RB: Well, I mean, politics, I don't know. You know.

DM: Yeah.

RB: Well, I guess the first time I was ever in Japan was '47. In the fifties, they'd kind of, they'd give 'em their liberty back, you know, and their independence. And the people were fine. It was all right with me. But I think some—I don't buy a Japanese car. (Chuckles)

DM: And why don't you buy a Japanese car?

RB: Well, I think our economy needs it.

DM: Your economy—it has nothing to do with the war. Our economy needs it.

RB: No.

DM: Maybe you wouldn't buy a German car either.

RB: That's right. And I am German. No, I'm not German, my parents [*were of German decent*].

DM: Is your fondest memories of the navy those years on the *Bagley* or were the years before?

RB: You know, I liked all the ships [*that*] I was on. Each one of 'em had something else and you had different shipmates, but the *Bagley* was my home. I was on it for five years. Six years.

DM: She's a good ship, huh.

RB: I thought so, yeah.

DM: How many years of service did you have in the navy?

RB: Well, active duty and reserve, twenty-nine years.

DM: So the navy was your career?

RB: Yes. I did fourteen years active and fifteen years reserve.

DM: So you served in World War II and Korea?

RB: Yeah, I was on the *Iowa*.

DM: Oh, you were on the battleship *Iowa*?

RB: Yeah, during the Korean conflict.

DM: Wow. Now, that was a pretty spit-and-polish ship.

RB: Oh yeah. And after coming off of a tin can and going to that, you put the tin can in the engine room.

DM: That's right. The—I guess the last question I have for you is—and I'll try to hit this one again, if you were to summarize your feelings about Pearl Harbor and try to explain it maybe to your grandchildren, what would you tell them about it, and your role in it?

RB: Well...I don't know, Daniel. I just...I think I'm glad that I had—as long as it had to happen, I'm glad I was there. I just don't know. I really can't express my feelings. I don't know how.

DM: How do you feel about these other guys that are Pearl Harbor Survivors? This is such a unique club.

RB: It is. We always—when we get together like this, we seem to bond together.

DM: One day.

RB: Yeah.

DM: Two hours.

RB: Right (chuckles). We have the banquet and the reception and—oh, last night there was a few of us playing, well, ten-cent poker and kinda makes you remember back, but you always remember the good stuff.

DM: And yet you still have a vivid picture of looking at Battleship Row?

RB: [*Yes,*] I can see those ships [*turning*] over.

DM: I guess that is the image that you have of Pearl Harbor.

RB: That is. That's my main image is I can just see those ships coming over and hollering down to Herb and say, "Come and look."

And he looked and he said, "Oh my god, we've had it."

DM: Well, I want to thank you for this interview and it's a very interesting chapter of your life.

RB: You're surely welcome. I probably didn't do a good job but...

DM: You did just fine, just fine. Thank you, Reg.

RB: Yeah, you're welcome.

DM: Yeah, that was great.

END OF INTERVIEW