

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
#260**

**ROBERT ORVILLE HEFNER
USS *DOWNES*, SURVIVOR**

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 6, 1998
BY JEFF PAPPAS**

TRANSCRIBED BY:
CARA KIMURA
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CONTINUATION of Part 1 of Oral History #260

Robert Hefner (RH): ...well, it's a maintenance thing. They keep you busy.

(Conversation off-mike.)

RH: You've got a fighting force there. So you're not firing guns all the time. You're not working on the guns all the time, so you've got a supporting crew that usually handles ammunition or does something and you need somebody to paint.

Jeff Pappas (JP): Sure.

RH: And that's an easy way to keep 'em busy. So anyway, I went in there and finally I think that evening, the doctor came by to see me and he says, "Well son, how do you feel?"

And I says, "Oh, I feel all right sir."

And he says, "Well," he says, "we've got an epidemic of measles."

And that's the first time I knew what was wrong. Well, I don't know how many days I was there. Four or five days, whatever the quarantine time. And so the weekend rolled around and a nurse came in and says, "Hey Hefner, would you like to go on the beach?"

I said, "Yeah." I didn't know anybody.

She says, "Well, you get forty-eight hours."

The only forty-eight hours I ever had on the beach. Now, I had time off, but I always had to come back and then leave again, but a continuous forty-eight hours. So I went—there was two theaters there, one at Waikiki and one in Honolulu, so I went to the theaters and I ate ice cream and I went to the YMCA [*Young Men's Christian Association*] and I walked around in the park and didn't do anything, nothing significant. And of course, I had limited funds. I was still making twenty-one dollars a month. And I sent five dollars a month home to my mother, to take care of an insurance policy.

Anyway, I get a place to sleep. I get a cot to stay at the YMCA. Fifteen cents for a cot, so you can sleep.

So I get up the next morning and shaved and went to church. I knew it had to be the weekend 'cause I went to church and I'm sitting there. And it seemed like the chaplain kept looking straight at me. I thought I must look like a real sinner. (Chuckles) I realized that I had left my neckerchief on my bunk. That's why he was looking at me. So I went back to retrieve it and of course it was gone. But they had other ones there, so I got it. Then went back to the hospital and while I was in the hospital, the USS *Downes* is sailing out of the harbor and I thought, "I hope the thing never comes back." (Chuckles)

Well, go ahead.

JP: Well, that's okay. We're actually going to do an official opening and then we'll continue the interview.

RH: Okay.

(Conversation off mike)

JP: Okay. Well, the following oral history interview was conducted by Jeff Pappas for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial at the Imperial Palace hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 6, 1998 at twelve noon. The person being interviewed is Robert Hefner, who was aboard the USS *Downes* on December 7, 1941. Mr. [Hefner], for the record, could you please state your full name, your place of birth and the date?

RH: Robert Orville Hefner, 6-6-22, Oceanside, California.

JP: Okay. And you grew up in Oceanside?

RH: No.

JP: No.

RH: No.

JP: Where did you grow up?

RH: My mother was sick quite a bit so my aunts and uncles basically raised me until about 1930 or '31. And my folks split up so I still had to bounce around and I lived with my dad for about five years or so. My elementary schooling was in Santa Monica. My dad moved a lot so I went to every school in town.

JP: What was your dad's vocation?

RH: My dad was a bus driver for Bay City Transit to start with and then he went to Municipal Bus Company, which is still functioning in Santa Monica.

JP: What's your dad's name?

RH: Fred Hefner?

JP: Was he a teamster?

RH: No, they didn't have unions then. That was municipal and it was like civil service, but it wasn't civil service. They weren't that strong yet in those days.

JP: So you went to elementary school in Santa Monica?

RH: Then I went to live with my mother in 1938 in Los Angeles. I went to Mount Vernon Junior High School and L. A. High School. And of course I worked part time in a machine shop in Hollywood making electric products.

JP: Is this during high school?

RH: During high school.

JP: Okay. And then you graduated from high school?

RH: No. I went 'til eleventh grade then I went to the navy in November 27, 1940.

JP: Where did you do your basic training?

RH: San Diego.

JP: San Diego. Tell me a little about your training experience with the navy.

RH: Well, they gave me a physical with a group of guys and they found I had a cyst at the end of my spine that had to be removed before they would accept me. So that was in October.

JP: Had you had any prior medical problems (inaudible) enlistment?

RH: Not that I knew of. Anyway, when they checked that, why, they said, “Well, it has to be removed first.”

So I went to the doctor and they examined me and they said, “Well, it’s no big deal, we can get it out.” So they took it out.

And then after it healed, he released me. I went back and they looked me and they said, “Fine, we’ll swear you in.”

I was the only one swore in that day in Los Angeles. The next day there was a draft of so many was swore in—we’ll say twenty-five. I can’t remember the exact count. So that made me one day senior and I was in charge of the draft going to San Diego. And there was three chiefs there waiting for me to turn the papers over. And a chief came up and says, “Who’s in charge of this group?”

And I said, “Robert Hefner. I am, sir.”

And he says, ‘Where’s your papers?’

I said, “Right here sir.”

And he says, “You’re no longer in charge.” (Chuckles)

So went over and we did the usual thing—haircuts, inoculations, clothes, make sure you write your mother and a bunch of regulations and they give you five dollars worth of chits to buy your cigarettes, your soap and so forth. Everything is furnished except your shaving gear and of course any hygiene things you furnished yourself.

JP: Regulations. The regulations state specifically that you had to write your mother?

RH: I don't know if the regulations stated that, but I think that possibly the commander in charge of the base probably wanted it because they probably got letters from mothers, "What are you doing to my boy? Where is my boy?"

So anyway, everyday I wrote a letter. I don't know about the rest of the guys.

JP: So it was an informal policy essentially to relieve any mother's anxieties that they had about their children?

RH: I'm sure. And of course, you're in quarantine for three weeks. You know, you don't go anyplace. Nobody sees you. So this is a good time to get homesick if you were prone for that.

JP: How about your father? Was it recommended that you write to your father?

RH: No.

JP: Just your mother.

RH: Just my mother. My father had to sign for me. He was a bus driver. But at that time, he was driving for Santa Fe. So he signed for me and I didn't see my dad for a long time. Anyhow, we went through boot camp and...

JP: Well, before we continue, could you tell me your mother's maiden and married name?

RH: My mother's name was Bertha Agnes Salsbury. She's a native. She was born in the Santa Monica mountains. My grandfather was one of the first Santa Monica rangers. You might look that up. I don't know how true that is.

JP: Do you remember your grandfather's name?

RH: Charles Salsbury.

JP: Okay, so now you're in basic and you finish basic.

RH: So, well, do you want to go that far? Do you want to go into some things that happened at basic?

JP: Well, if there's some interesting things to tell me, sure.

RH: Well, I don't know if it's interesting.

JP: That's okay.

RH: But it's the normal thing that goes through. You go in there and you understand that you have bosses and you better comply. Military, rigid commands.

JP: This is a surprise to you?

RH: No. I knew what it was. I always wanted to be in the navy. My dad was in the navy and I knew navy men and I knew army and so forth and so on. So I knew what the discipline was and I was prepared to accept commands and execute them, which there were no big heavy things that you had to do except know how to turn left, right, right of right and left of right, about face, forward march, halt and about face. And then present arms and of course you've got a Springfield rifle. It was an old one. And you had to keep it clean and the normal things that you do. And you had to scrub your clothes every night. They did not issue us dungarees. We had undress blue trousers and undress blue jumpers. And of course, this is in November so it's still cold so we had this picture that you see. Notice there's a turtleneck sweater I'm wearing. And so it was cold and we just did a lot of drilling.

Get out there in the morning and we'd drill for four hours in the morning and four hours in the afternoon.

JP: Well, tell me about washing your clothes every night. Did you use a washboard?

RH: I don't think we had a washboard. We had a...

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

(Conversation off-mike.)

JP: Tell me about washing clothes every day.

RH: Well, they had a scrub table and you had a bucket. And of course, they taught you to conserve water because some ship's water was a very dear thing. And so to conserve water, it was shown. And what they would do when you first went in there, they would find out if there was anybody that had any kind of military experience—Boy Scouts, ROTC, past military, anything. Well, we had a Marine who had four years of Marine Corps, so they made him master-of-arms. And this is what they call recruit petty officer. You had a smaller crew over here. So then the other kids, whatever they were. I had no background such as that so I was just one of the sailors in training. And we had one that made chief petty officer. He was like a cadet type thing. And he was in charge of the whole—I think we had 125 men in this group.

JP: Do you remember the name of this...?

RH: It was 101, Company 101 of 1940. We did not have any flamboyant name. I can't remember the company commander's name, but we had three chiefs to start with. We wound up with two. I remember one of 'em was named Nelson. The gentleman I can remember—the one in charge I can't remember his name, but he was very firm, very strict. And I was up and we had a man that was appointed to be yeoman. He knew how to type so there was some forms that he was filling out. We're all lined up there and he was red headed. And he was filling the forms out and somebody said something to Red and this chief was there in the room. The kid's typing away and he

did not respond to the question from one of the other sailors. I said, “Oh, Red’s a big shot now. He don’t have to talk to anybody.”

That’s all I said. That night at muster, my name was called off, “Robert Hefner, front and center.”

And I don’t know what was wrong. I come out there front and center and he says, “I want you to know there’s only one big shot in this outfit and it’s me. Understand?”

“Yes sir.”

JP: This is the commander speaking?

RH: This is—he was the Chief Petty Officer.

JP: Okay.

RH: He was in charge of this company. He was a company commander.

JP: Remember his name?

RH: No, I don’t. The other one was Nelson that turned me in. I remember that. He was a nice guy. The company commander was firm. He wore pants, leather pants and he always had this little, like a stick. And he was very, very military. He had sixteen years in the navy and he had gold hash marks, which back in those days were hard to get because they would discipline you and break you for hardly anything because there was always people that wanted that rate. And he was trying to get advanced to warrant. And he was mad one day, he said that they wouldn’t have let him become warrant because he was too old. Well, he must have been all of thirty-five years old, you know. But he was quite mad and of course that meant that we drilled harder.

One thing happened is we had this one kid that was in charge of the whole squadron. What he—you’d get to go to movies after you did your clothes. Wash your clothes and you hung ‘em up and you hung ‘em up in a military fashion. Everything had to be put on this line and tied up with a square knot.

And that's the way it was. And all your clothes were marked. You had your name and it had to be exposed where anybody could walk by and see if you had a t-shirt, you had shorts, a pair of socks, a cap—a regular sailor cap—and the name would show.

Anyway, this guy got the idea because he was a wheel, he could let his clothes soak and then pick up later, give somebody assignment, and go back and do it. Well, the word got out that he was doing this and he would go to the movies. So this one morning, I seen the chief come through there. He didn't say anything to anybody. He just walked through. (Makes trotting noises.) And he didn't look right, left or nothing, but he spotted the bucket. And we all had our own bucket, had his name on it. So we had come down for muster, he called the chief, the guy that was the Marine, the—not retired Marine, but the guy that signed over in the navy from the Marines. And he says, "I want you go upstairs and get that bucket with—" the guy's name was Smith. And he said, "Bring it down here."

He brought it down there and he took the stick and he called this guy up. Of course, the guy's in front of him anyway. (Aside) Oh I'm sorry. I know you told me that.

Anyway, he took the stick and picked up his clothes and he says, "Smith, is this your leisure clothes?"

He says, "Yes sir. Thank you."

He says, "Go upstairs and get all your clothes, everything that was issued to you. Everything, except your personal things."

And he made him lay out all those clothes. Now, these clothes are all rolled up so you could put 'em in a sea bag. And they're rolled up in a certain way. He says, "I want 'em all unrolled and I want you to lay out there, lay 'em out there where the company can walk over them."

Well, by this time, this is the second week. Well, this guy's got authority, so some of these guys don't like authority. So they figure this is an easy way to get even with this guy. So these guys walk through and they rubbed their feet in the guy's clothes, some clothes never been worn. Then he was told to

take his clothes up there and scrub 'em. He was never a problem with scrubbing clothes from there on out. And that's one of the things I remember while we were in quarantine the first couple of weeks.

Then one time we were out there—and you wore your shoes out. In three weeks, you wore a set of shoes out. Or so you could have 'em half-soled. I had mine half-soled. And you were out there, you're marching and marched. You marched and you marched. You got to be very good marchers. I thought to myself, "We're in the navy, this is not for drill."

But I would watch the Marines next—they were the fence over—and I used to watch how they were being treated and how they had to perform and I thought, "I'd never make it over there."

Anyway, as time went along, we went into our—we graduated from quarantine. We went into the north part of the training station and then from there, we went into "T." What the "T" was, was the end of the transfer period of this and so this is after two months of training. And you went down and got the boats and rowed the boats and you did a lot of things—knot tying and elementary things. And then finally, of course I was there Christmas. I got mess cook assignment.

JP: This is Christmas 1940?

RH: Forty. Christmas of 1940.

JP: And you're still in San Diego at this time?

RH: Still in San Diego. So I got mess cook and of course they have abundance of food. And all this pumpkin pie was coming through there and we're throwing it out because it was more pumpkin pie than can eat. I'll never forget. I ate two and a half pumpkin pies and the guy said I couldn't eat it, and I won a dime for eating all that. That last piece of pumpkin pie went down, came back up, went down, come back up and I couldn't throw it up. I'd have lost the dime. So it stayed down.

JP: So you had a fairly disciplined training, basically.

RH: Yeah it was. Yes.

JP: This is December of 1940. Now, you're thinking about, at this time, you had plans yet or had been given the orders to leave San Diego for Hawaii?

RH: Not yet.

JP: Not yet. Okay.

RH: You had to be evaluated.

JP: All right.

RH: And you had to be reviewed. So you filled out a form, a whole questionnaire of things. I forget what all it was. Then I was reviewed by this Lieutenant and he said, "Now see, you want to be a [*Machinist's*] Mate?"

And I said, "Yes sir."

He said, "Well, we'd like you to stay here."

And I said, "Why?"

And he says, "Well, your English is so good, we want you to be an English instructor."

And I thought to myself, "English is my worst study. They certainly don't want me in here."

Well, we had a lot of southern boys and they all had a drawl. And their language is a little different than we were. And I said, "Sir, I don't think so. I don't think you want me to be an English instructor." (Chuckles)

JP: You remember the person who approached you about this?

RH: It was a ___ all I remember is a Lieutenant

JP: He was a ranking officer

RH: He was a commissioned officer. And anyway I said, "Want to go on a destroyer, and I want to strike for ___" that's what you call an apprentice who goes in and fills out a chit, and they call this a striking. You want to strike for this type of job, classification.

So I said, "I want to be a [*Machinist's*] Mate on a destroyer."

He said, "Well, okay. Fill it out."

I was put on the USS *Platte*.

JP: Before we get on to the *Platte*, tell me a little bit more about this Lieutenant who approached you about teaching English to some ___ was it specifically for southern ...

RH: No, they didn't ...

JP: ... accents or dialects.

RH: ... he didn't say that. I'm assuming that.

JP: Okay.

RH: Because most of the [*time*] I was in that company very few Californians were in that company. Most of those kids I waited for, for the next day, had come in from other states. Now, I don't know what states. I'd probably remembered at the time, but there were very few California kids. A lot of kids were looking for [*to*] get out of high school and there's no place to go. There's no jobs bank, say in Texas or Oklahoma or Nebraska or wherever.

RH: Yeah.

JP: The teaching assignment.

RH: Yeah.

JP: And you got on the *Platte*.

RH: On the USS *Platte*.

JP: Okay.

RH: *Platte*, P-L-A-T[-T-]E, I think. And it was a new tanker taken over—the navy took it over from Union Oil. And you could still see where the Union Oil had been on it, welded on the back end of the, or the stern of the ship. So I had still not got working clothes and I was told I went on there for transportation. So I get up in the morning and go in and have my chow. I get my A. N. manual out so I could understand more what the navy had planned for me when I'm at sea for three or four days. And I just go on the fantail back there and take my book. There's nobody else there, just me. I take my book and open it up and one day this Boatswain's Mate, First Class Boatswain's Mate—come walking around and he says, "Who are you?"

I said, "I'm Bob Hefner."

I thought he was going to jump over the side of the ship. He says, "I've been looking all over for you. Where you been?"

I said, "Well, I've been right here, reading my A. N. magazine."

He says, "You're supposed to be down there chipping paint and painting."

I said, "Well, I'm on here for transportation."

(Chuckles) That was unheard of. He about jumped over the ship again. He starts screaming and ranting and raving. And I said, "Well, I have no clothes to work with." I said, "I wasn't assigned any."

And I'm still calm, you know, I still figure, well, I'm just on transportation. Am I supposed to work? (Chuckles) Well, this is not done. Anyway, I reported to somebody and then he sent me back to see this other—the same guy. And he said, "Well, I'm going to assign you to this."

So they gave me some cushy job. I forget what it was, doing hardly anything. By that time, we pulled into Pearl and I got transferred to the receiving ship and that same day, transferred onto the USS *Downes*.

JP: When was that? What time of the year...

RH: Well it had to February.

JP: Of nineteen forty...

RH: Nineteen forty-one.

JP: ...forty-one.

RH: And of course then I got sick. I went in the hospital, like I told you before. Do you want to go through that again?

JP: Well, what I'd like to talk about is this so-called measles epidemic that you had been told of, what was the extent of that and where did you get that information from?

RH: I can't say it was documented. I was told there was an epidemic of mumps and measles.

JP: Who told you this? Was it a ship's doctor who told you that?

RH: No, when I got into the hospital, 'cause the doctor didn't tell me I had the measles. He just told me to get off the ship, get off of his ship, because we're tied up. It was four ships tied up together and he says, "Get off of this ship and get back on your own ship," and he says, "the papers will be over there."

And there wasn't any time at all. I was in a whaleboat and I may have been the only one infected. I don't remember. I don't think I seen anybody else in that ward. It was a large ward and that's where the hospital was right there at Barbers Point. That's where you go right into the channel there. And that's where the hospital was at that time.

JP: This is land hospital.

RH: It's a land-based hospital, yes. And it had been there for years. I don't know when they first built it. Of course, it was nice and clean and everything was in order. But this whole ward had nothing but mumps and measles. And I was told that I could get mumps later, which I never did. Anyway, it was nice to be in a nice, clean hospital. Clean bed and the food was brought to you and it was really living uptown, I'll tell you.

JP: Now, you said this was a large ward.

RH: Yes, it was.

JP: How many do you think were infected with...

RH: Possibly a hundred.

JP: Did you make contact with any of them? Did you get to know some of them?

RH: Yeah, I met a Coast Guard man and I can't think of his name but he was part Portuguese and part Hawaiian.

JP: You remember where he was from?

RH: He was from Hawaii. His folks lived in Waikiki. And his—I said Hawaiian—his dad was German and his mother was Portuguese. That's the way it was. And he worked for the city. And I got to be good friends of his and he was a second class petty officer, second class boatswain mate. And he had his own ship or boat. I guess he called 'em a boat. It was a fireboat. And it was nice to go visit him because he knew his way around town. He knew a lot of civilians—which I didn't particularly care about hanging around Hotel Street and places like this. Just wasn't my make up to start with.

JP: Well, in that ward, would you say that there were soldiers, servicemen?

RH: No, not soldiers, just sailors and Marines.

JP: Just sailors.

RH: Sailors and Marines.

JP: Sailors and Marines. Were they from all over the United States? Was it a large cross section of...

RH: Could've been. I couldn't say for sure.

JP: So you got healed. You got better.

RH: Yeah.

JP: And you went on and tell me a little bit about leading up now to the attack. Let's get into late 1941, moving through. Where were you?

RH: Do you want to go that far? Do you want to go when we sailed to Australia?

JP: Oh, absolutely. I'd like to hear about your Australian experience.

RH: Okay, so.

JP: Are you on the *Downes* at this time?

RH: Yes. Anyway, we—I get back on the ship and we went back out on patrol. Then one day, the ship got orders to get back into Pearl Harbor and we went back at flank speed. We went alongside the tender, and they started working on the torpedoes and they took the exercise heads off, which I understand later was against the Geneva Convention. And they put on warheads on the torpedoes. We carried twelve torpedoes.

JP: Now, when did you—when was this? Was this in the summer of 1941?

RH: This is March of '41. We went across the equator March the seventh. And that's when we went across the equator. We went through this ritual of transforming from a pollywog to a shellback. And it was quite a ritual.

Anyway, we took on more personnel and loaded all magazines to the hilt and there was nine destroyers and four cruisers and we went down to Pago Pago and there was a tanker waiting for us and we refueled from there at that location. And then we got so far down into the South Pacific and the two light cruisers went to Auckland, New Zealand and four destroyers went to Auckland, New Zealand. And there was five destroyers went to Sydney and two heavy cruisers went to Sydney. We were there three days and then from there we went up to Brisbane. And there had been no man-of-war there from United States since 1927, so the people opened their arms to us. We were super welcome. Most all their boys were in South Africa fighting, so there was a limited supply of men there. So the women were glad to see us there, I guess. And we had real fine time. Treated us royally. And I met a beautiful girl there. And from there I sailed back. We left there and came back to the States. We came by the way of Suva, Fiji, which was another experience. And then from there back into Pearl [*Harbor*].

JP: I don't want to cut the Australian story short, but we're going to have to change...

END OF TAPE #4

END OF TAPE #5

RH: I'll try to hit on some of the highlights that I recall, which are mostly what I recall. Yeah.

JP: Okay, good, okay.

RH: Whenever you're ready.

(Conversation off-mike.)

JP: Okay.

RH: Go.

JP: But, before we get to Pearl Harbor, you had gone to Australia with the *Downes*.

RH: Yeah.

JP: Tell me a little bit about Australia, some of the important things about Australia.

RH: Well, we sailed in there sometime after the seventh of March. I can't say exactly what the date was. I don't even know if I've got —my mother did give me a thing—there is some dates on that. But, anyway, when I sailed in there—and of course I'm still a young sailor and I don't mix with the old salts too well. And of course, most of the other kids my age were from out of state, and for some reason, California people just don't...

JP: Clarify the "old sauce." What was that? Is that an expression?

RH: It's an old expression. Anybody that's been in the service for some time, or the navy some time, you call 'em "old salts."

JP: Was that a common expression then?

RH: It's common, yeah. These guys were a little saltier. They had a little more stories to tell. Whether they were factual or not, I wouldn't guarantee. But anyway, the— we sailed into Sydney and I went off by myself. These guys—the first thing you wanted was to find a place to drink. Well of course I wasn't old enough to drink—not that I didn't have some drinks when I was there, because some of the older men wanted to take you to their pub.

JP: But how old are you at the time?

RH: I was eighteen. I would be nineteen in June. Anyway, I'm walking through this park by myself and these four young high school girls come walking up and wanted to know if I would like an escort. And I thought to myself, "I want an escort?" Here, I'm a worldly sailor, you know. But I said, "Fine," 'cause they were cute kids, cute girls. And I said yes.

So I got—one took one arm, one took the other arm and then the other two walked along. And they started questioning me, where was I from. And I said, "I'm from California."

"What part?"

I said, "Hollywood."

"Hollywood!"

JP: Now, were you in uniform at this time?

RH: Oh yeah.

JP: So they knew you were a...

RH: A sailor.

JP: ...a sailor.

RH: Yeah.

JP: And they asked you if you wanted an escort.

RH: Yes.

JP: Did you talk to them about that? Did you find that curious?

RH: Well, I thought it was curious because of them saying “escort.” In other words, they wanted to show me some things of the city, where things were.

JP: Do you know if this was a common practice in Australia?

RH: I have no idea. I’ve never questioned it. Anyway, we’re walking through the park and I’m talking to the girls and they wanted to know if I ever seen this one or that one. It so happens when I was going to high school, I delivered newspapers up in Brentwood Heights, where O. J. [*Simpson*] and Clark Gable and Marilyn Monroe—not Marilyn Monroe, Zazu Pitts and Shirley Temple and a whole bunch of ‘em lived up there and I delivered newspapers to ‘em. And they wanted to know about all that and I told them. And so the—was no dead conversation. They just were—they were asking questions.

As we stepped down, out of the park, down to the main sidewalk, this limousine drove up, an English type car, and it was a chauffeur, said, “Mac, do you have a minute?”

And I said, “Yes.”

And he says, “My governor would like to have a word with you.”

JP: Wait, wait here. You with the four women at this particular...

RH: I’m with the four girls.

JP: And this car comes out of nowhere and just...

RH: Comes driving up and stops and says, "My governor wants to talk to you."

JP: Now, where were you at this time? Are you in Sydney?

RH: I was in Sydney.

JP: So you were in one of the city parks in Sydney or walking the streets...

RH: Sydney, Sydney, park. I just stepped out of the Sydney park.

JP: Remember the name of the park by any chance?

RH: No, no.

JP: Okay.

RH: Anyway, I said, "Alright."

So he opened the door and this gentleman stepped out—elderly gentleman; I would venture to say in his seventies—and he wore a bowler. And he says, "Yank," he says, "would you do me a favor? Would you autograph the inside of my bowler?"

"Oh sure."

So I wrote my name, Bob Hefner, inside of his bowler. He put it back on. He says, "Thank you very much."

JP: Now, what's a bowler.

RH: A bowler is a derby. Derby hat. And that's what stylish gentleman in those days wore, English descent. And he got back in his limousine and the chauffeur closed the door and he got in the car and drove away. I never heard from him again.

So anyway, the girls realized that I favored the prettiest one, naturally. So they all disappeared. They all left me with her. And of course, she was just a young girl interested to know about America and especially Hollywood. So I could clue her in fairly well.

So I took her to an ice cream parlor and bought her a milk shake and I remember I had a ten dollar bill. I'm still making twenty-one dollars a month. And I took the ten dollars out and I remember there was a commissioned officer from the English military watching me. And I flipped this ten dollar bill out and I really wasn't trying to put on any airs or anything, because I had ten bucks, and he really frowned at me, like I'm trying to be aggressive with my money. And of course, we were always accused of that, because the Yankees always had more money than the other countries. (Coughs)

Anyway...

JP: The ten dollar bill, was it in American currency?

RH: It's American currency.

JP: They accepted American currency in Australia...

RH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

JP: ...in 1941?

RH: Loved to have it.

JP: They accepted it.

RH: It was probably almost five to one. So ten bucks would go a long way.

JP: A long way.

RH: Oh, like fifty bucks almost. Anyway, it was not quite five dollars. Anyway, I bought a milk shake and we sit there and talked. And I said, "Would you like to go to a movie?"

And she said, "I'd love to."

And she was a typical English descent girl and she was a natural beauty. There was nothing cosmetic about her. And she had her little umbrella and so we trotted off to the movies and she's just so happy. And she says, "My mother will be furious. I've never been out with anybody before in my life."

And I says, "Well, alright. Thank you."

We went into the theater, seen the movie. I don't even know what the movie was. But I didn't get fresh. I didn't get overly friendly or nothing. The movie was over, she said, "Oh, my mother's going to be furious, it's almost dark."

So I put her on a trolley—or started to put her on a trolley and she says, "Oh, I forgot my umbrella."

So we had to run, it seemed like halfway across town to go to the theater and the manager had the umbrella and give her the umbrella, put her on the train, and that was the end of that.

So then we sailed away and then I went up into Brisbane. I met other girls up there, but none of them made the impression this girl did. Her name was Jean Hall, very pretty girl.

JP: How much time did you spend in Australia total?

RH: Just the two days at that time.

JP: How much time would you spend in Australia?

RH: Would I have?

JP: Well, how much time did you spend?

RH: Well, we were there —was only allowed to be there seventy-two hours.

JP: That's it.

RH: Because they were at war and we were not. The Geneva witness—the Geneva conference had that in writing someplace. I never read it. All I know is what they said.

So we had to sail out of there, then we went up into Brisbane and they treated us royal there. There were cars to pick us up. There was a lot of—people didn't have a lot of cars.

JP: Well, tell me about going to Australia. Had you heard any rumors about why you were going to Australia? What was the intent?

RH: Not 'til afterwards. Not 'til afterwards.

JP: Not until afterwards.

RH: I'll tell you—do you want me to tell it now, or do you want the rest of the story?

JP: Briefly, right now.

RH: Okay. When we went back into Pearl Harbor to take the exercise heads off the torpedoes, naturally there's questions, "What are you guys doing?"

"We don't know what we're doing."

"Why are we putting on warheads?"

"We don't know."

JP: This is before going to Australia?

RH: This is before going to Australia. So we had to take on stores for this trip. We're going 6,000 miles. You know, they call it Down Under, 6,000 miles down, 6,000 miles back. I'm sure we got stores when we got down there. And we may have got stores on the way someplace. But a smaller ship does not carry a lot of stores. We had to rely on the two, the four larger ships for

stores. I remember going over on the *Portland* and getting stores and bringing 'em back, mostly cold storage stores.

JP: Okay.

RH: And so the ship was—even the brooms. I remember we took on extra brooms, extra swabs, extra paint, extra everything. And you know, it was—naturally everybody's curious. There's a lot of talk but nobody knew where we were going. All we knew this was a big crash program and all of a sudden we wind up outside of Pearl Harbor and we're sailing. And my station aboard ship was the lookout at that time. There was a port and starboard lookout at night on the bridge. And you were on the wing of the bridge so you could call in if there was something out of the ordinary, you'd call in, "Dead ahead, two points off the bow, three points off the bow," so much off the bow, off the beam and the same, executed the same kind of language astern too. It was abaft, and two points, and three points, and then dead astern.

JP: Okay.

RH: So these are the things that you learn that you had to tell an officer of the deck. And the officer of the deck was there by the helmsman, the guy that steered the ship. And so that was my station.

During the day, it was in the crow's nest. So you're up there, you could see the whole world. You could see as far as you could see. And occasionally a seagull would come by and want to perch there and you run 'em off. Then later on, albatrosses. The seagulls didn't come out that far so we had albatrosses and you get to see the albatrosses, the flying fish, the porpoise. It was quite an adventure. And we had no idea where we were going.

JP: You had no idea.

RH: No idea.

JP: So they hadn't told you you're going to Australia.

RH: No...

JP: You took on extra...

RH: All we had were sail orders. So possibly the admiral knew and he was on a capital ship, the *Portland*. There was two heavy cruisers.

JP: Right.

RH: And two light cruisers. And we had a squadron commander. He was in charge of all nine destroyers. And so probably only one man had the orders, and maybe he hadn't read 'em either. He was told to go out so far, so many miles, so much latitude, all the terms that they used in the navy. And then the word came out. Now, this is after we left Pago Pago. Is that right, Pago Pago? Anyway, it's a small, tropical island, beautiful island. That was another experience. You sailed in there and you could see the bottom of the harbor and all of these beautiful tropical fish swimming around. Never seen anything like that in my life.

JP: Yeah. Wow.

RH: And the sands were white.

JP: But at this point, though, you still had no idea why you were going...

RH: We didn't know.

JP: ...where you were going?

RH: We did not know until we went across the equator. Now, we went across the equator and everybody had to be brought in and go through this ritual of becoming from a polliwog to shellback – I'm sure you've seen this, news medium. You take quite a bit of punishment. And I was in a crow's nest and I thought they might forget me. So I, when those guys would look up, I'd kind of duck down in there. Well, I was one of the last guys to go through. And they said, "Hefner, get down here. We're going to beat you."

Well, they had shillelachs about this long nailed out of—they call 'em sailcloth. And they were about that wide. And what they did is they sewed

those together, turned ‘em inside out and stuffed ‘em with wet rags. And when they hit you, they hurt. And so, the first thing they ask you, “Are you a good polliwog?”

“Yes.”

“We don’t like good polliwogs,” so they hit you.

“You want to be a shellback?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you’re not a shellback, you’re a polliwog.”

It didn’t make any difference what you said, it was wrong. Anyhow, we— then they wanted to take me over and say, “We think you need to be charged up,” so they’re shootin’ water on you. It’s hot out there. I don’t know how hot it was. But the deck is steel and you’re in your skivvies. No shoes, no nothing, just your skivvies on. And every once in a while, somebody’d haul up and hit you just for fun, I guess.

So they put these wires in your hand and they had this portable generator. They use that to check shorts in the wiring aboard ship. And they turn this thing on and you’re sitting there shaking like this, jumping up and down. They said, “Think you’ve been charged enough?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, we don’t think so. Do it again.”

So...

JP: So this was all part of the ritual?

RH: This is the ritual.

JP: Going over the equator.

RH: So then they go take you over and they say, “You want to talk to the royal baby?”

You say, “Yeah, I guess so.”

So they got the fattest guy aboard ship and they got him in a diaper and they got mustard all over his stomach. And he’s got this crazy looking wig on and he says, “Do you know the royal baby?”

Of course there again you don’t know what you want to say. You just say something and they hit you regardless. And they said, “Well, you ought to kiss the baby’s belly.”

So you get down there and they take your head and they just push it right into the mustard. And they got some guy smearing mustard on there all the time for every applicant. And so you did that, then you had to go to the ship’s doctor and the ship doctor says, “You feel bad?” and you didn’t know whether to say yes or not.

So they give you a pill and they put it in your mouth and they spray it and that pill swells up. And then something to do with the royal Neptune’s daughter or somebody. I can’t remember that part. Then you go through the garbage chute. Now, they’ve been saving garbage all the time since they left Hawaii, or Pearl Harbor. And it’s nothing but a big canvas sleeve. And they fill it full of this stinking garbage and you gotta go through there. Well, when you go through there, you try to get through there as fast as you can because it’s really filthy and you get out and all these guys that had been initiated into being shellbacks are there with their shillelaghs and you go through their legs. Well, as you go through their legs, they hit you. And you get out the other end and you become a shellback.

JP: Okay, so after the ritual, now you’re en route to Australia and you get to Australia, you spend your time in Australia. You still don’t know why you had gone to Australia in the first place.

RH: The word was a goodwill tour.

JP: Oh, that was the word.

RH: That was the word.

JP: Okay. So seventy-two hours elapses, you're on ship back to Pearl [*Harbor*].

RH: No, seventy-two hours in Sydney and then seventy-two hours in Brisbane.

JP: Brisbane, okay.

RH: Then back and then we went to Suva, Fiji.

JP: Okay.

RH: We went in there to fuel up and rendezvous. I think the other ships rendezvoused with us. I don't remember the super particulars there. But I think we all rendezvoused. The capital ships stayed out at sea because they're larger. The cans came in. I think we fueled there and then went on. The capital ships probably had enough fuel to get back to Pearl [*Harbor*].

So then we sailed back to Pearl. And then when we get back we found out that Congress was madder than a wet hen, almost as mad as they are at [*President Bill*] Clinton right now, because Knox was the Secretary of Navy and [*Franklin D.*] Roosevelt naturally is the president. And between Knox and him decided to send us down there to see if the Japs would take any action. And this is what I found out some years later, that they had sent us down there basically as decoys.

Well, we were small fish and we wouldn't have had a prayer if the Japs had come in because they would've outgunned us. We just didn't have the firepower to correct any kind of an attack that they could've brought on.

JP: How did you find out about that? That that was the intent?

RH: By word of mouth.

JP: This was nothing written?

RH: It could've been written someplace. Somebody wrote it. I'm not going to say who wrote it. You gotta keep in mind that this time I'm paid grade two. I think when I was down there, I took an exam for seaman second, so I was making thirty-six dollars a month, which is big bucks. Anyway, so I was not told too many things.

JP: Okay.

RH: You're told to do things and you did 'em. And on the way back, I put in my chit to go down to the engine room, so I became a fireman then.

JP: Okay, now that we're back at Pearl Harbor, I would really like to stop there for now, today. I'd also like to reschedule a second interview with you, maybe sometime in the next day or so, to continue this story. Would that be okay?

RH: It's all right with me.

JP: It's been an hour right now. So let's schedule a second interview and that interview we'll talk specifically about your involvement during the attack at Pearl Harbor.

RH: Okay.

JP: Well, thank you for your time.

END OF TAPE #5

TAPE #27

JP: Okay, the following oral history interview is conducted by Jeff Pappas for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada, on December 7, 1998 at six p.m. The person being interviewed is Robert Hefner. All right, this is the second part with Mr. Hefner. We interviewed him yesterday—who was on board the USS *Downes* on December 7.

RH: USS *Downes*.

JP: USS *Downes*.

RH: Correct.

JP: On December 7, 1941. For the record, Bob, can you please state your full name, place of birth and date of birth, once again?

RH: My name is Robert Hefner, H-E-F-N-E-R. I was born in Oceanside, California, June 6, 1922.

JP: Now, yesterday, we had gotten as far as your trip to Australia. Documented that trip for me. And you're en route back to Pearl [*Harbor*], in which you made a stop in Fiji. Can you tell me about that?

RH: Well, we pulled into Suva, Fiji. I assume the reason for that is to be fueled by a tanker. If I remember correctly, there was a tanker there. So the smaller ships were fueled and there were nine destroyers, and I think we rendezvoused there. Part of the fleet went to New Zealand; part of it went to Australia. Then I believe we rendezvoused at Suva, the nine destroyers were probably fueled and then the thirteen ships sailed on in to Pearl [*Harbor*]. Now you have the two heavy cruisers, the two light cruisers and the nine destroyers. And we got back into Pearl like we said, probably the end of March.

And then we went back into, we were probably back in port for a few days and then went back on parole, patrol. And we patrolled the islands like we had been before we ever went and sailed down in there. And then it was back and forth out of Pearl on patrol and I think we patrolled like maybe a week, two weeks, and back in. And we were back in for maybe a week and then back out again. And the main reason for that was a lot of married men aboard ship with the officers, who were married also, so to give 'em a chance to be with their families. In my case, I had no family there, but I did know civilians on the beach. So it was good liberal time to go ashore.

Then at one time, I wanted to ride a bike around the island, but the admiral, he wouldn't allow it. So I organized a group of guys to ride up to the Pali

and there were twenty-five or thirty of us, so we rented bicycles and went up to the Pali. At that time, that road going up to the Pali on the Honolulu side was pretty treacherous. The one going down the other side was worse. So when we got up there and seen how the wind was blowing, we decided to go back down the Pali and out of the twenty-five of us, I think only five of us made it down without crashing. So we took the bicycles back to this Chinese renter and he was very upset with us. And there was a lot of sore sailors.

So then there was many things that we did, the younger men. We tried to find things that allowed us to find entertainment. And then I run into this civilian family and start visiting there. And they had two young girls and they were my age and of course they would show me different places in the islands to have a good time.

Then those months rolled by and finally the admiralty decided that there's a certain amount of ships that should be coming back to the States for leave and recreation. So we sailed back, I believe the *Reid*, the *Conyngham*, the *Cassin* and the *Downes*, and possibly the *Clark*, I can't remember. We tied up in San Francisco and we got, we were there for twelve days. And I got three days to come home, which fortunately for me, I lived in Los Angeles and visited all my friends and told them about my adventures going to Australia, and of course, these guys hadn't got in the service yet. I was...

JP: Let me stop you there for a second. And let's go back to Fiji, before you got back to Pearl [*Harbor*]. Not that I want to stop your train of thought here, but you told me an interesting story about meeting a young man, a schoolboy. Could you retell me that story?

RH: Well, this other sailor and myself, I can't remember who he was, but we decided to take a survey of the town and the town wasn't all that much. We'd heard it had a college there and we heard it was the capitol of the group of islands, the Suva, Fiji islands. And it belonged to the English, it was an English colony. And we went through town and looked at all the things they had to sell and there was many things to buy and sell and I should've bought a bunch of 'em, 'cause I'd really capitalize on them today. There were Indians there from India, and they were craft in silver. Made of

lot of jewelry in silver. And of course, it didn't look like much to me then. Today it would be really worth something.

But we went on down into one of the plantations where they had coconuts. It was a coconut plantation and we were told not to eat any of the coconuts on the ground, so we're trying to take coconuts that were on the ground and knock down the coconuts in the trees. And we were unsuccessful in doing this. We heard an English person, an English-speaking person with an English accent behind us saying, "Would you gentlemen like me to get you a coconut?"

And we turned around and here is a young man, young boy, almost a man, seventeen, eighteen years old, possibly, with khaki shorts on, barefooted, with a white shirt and tie, with books. And he was a college student. And his English was very, very good, very exact. And he climbed up this tree with his bare feet and his bare hands, naturally, as agile as anybody could be. We'll say as agile as a monkey. Got up there and reached up and got a coconut, broke it loose and dropped it down to us. And I remember that like it was yesterday. It was amazing that he could climb the tree as easily as he did and of course get the coconuts, and of course we took the coconuts, went back aboard ship. I don't recall too much after that. We—I think we were over there just long enough to fuel and go ashore and then get back.

I do remember the military—not the military—but the policemen there were Fiji islanders, the natural, natives. And they wore a jacket like our dress jackets in the Marine Corps. But they wore a skirt and it came down in points. And they were barefooted and they wore no gun and no club, no nothing, but they were large men. And I remember there was a merchant marine and he was sitting on the curb and he was drunk. And this Fiji islander told him, this policeman told him to get up and move along, that he could not do that. And this man wasn't very nice with his language towards him and I remember that Fiji islander reaching out and taking him up and shaking him good. He says, "You'll do what I tell you or you'll go to jail."

And he had broken English, but it was—you could understand what he said. And that guy knew what he meant. I remember that. On the wrist, I believe. We sailed away and then went right back to Hawaii.

JP: Very good. So now you're on leave, you're in Los Angeles. You are now a man of the world, so to speak. A young man of the world.

RH: This is in November.

JP: This is November of 1941.

RH: Right.

JP: And you had been given three days leave. The *Downes* had docked in San Francisco; you're now in Los Angeles. And at this time, you had seen Australia; you'd been to Sydney, Brisbane. You'd been to Fiji, you been to Pearl [*Harbor*] and you were an eighteen year old young boy. Tell me about...

RH: I was nineteen when I got back to the States.

JP: Nineteen. Tell me about the reception at home. What did your parents talk about? Talk to you about? Your friends?

RH: Well, they were asking me all kinds of question about—and this one girl I met down there had written to my mother, 'cause for some reason they thought I was quite a person, I guess. Mostly because I was connected with Hollywood, only not working in Hollywood as an actor or anything, but being there where people were, where I could see 'em and did talk to 'em and of course I delivered newspapers to 'em when I was a paperboy. Anyway, and of course, three days is not much time. And of course my buddies wanted to take me and show me where they were, where everything was. And at that time, Bob Nels, which we still are good friends, still see each other, he said, "I'm gonna get you a blind date."

And I said, "Well, fine. That'll be nice."

And he got me a blind date. He had a '39 Ford Coupe, all dressed up with something I would've love to had when I was a civilian. Anyway, he says, "We're going to the Palladium."

And I says, "What is the Palladium?"

And the Palladium was built during the year or introduced to the public the time that I was gone so I didn't know that was the place to go. And he says, "We're going to the Palladium and hear Harry James."

And I says, "Who's Harry James?"

So I was really out of it. Anyway, went over there and had a good time. And took the girl back home and of course that was the second day. And the next day, I guess mostly visiting people and of course I had to get back. And so my folks went with me to the Santa Fe bus. My dad drove the Santa Fe bus, so I got a free trip on that. It didn't cost anything. And while I was there, waiting for the bus, why, this beautiful girl—I was always attracted by beautiful women. And she come walking in and I thought, "Damn, I'd sure like to meet her."

And fortunately she got on the same bus and she was sitting by herself and we created a wonderful relationship, so I'm in love again. So we still had nine more days there before we sailed away. And we went back to the islands and in the meantime, when I get back, I had made some contact with some people where I got to know civilians, more than just hanging out with the regular thing and these people accepted me and I used to stay at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel for twenty-five cents a night. I never stayed there. That's the only way I could stay overnight. If I registered there, give 'em a quarter and the girls would pick me up in their dads' Buick and away we'd go. And of course it was no big party thing. What it was, we went to nice places to eat and we danced and it was a nice relationship. And that was a little before Thanksgiving when we got back. We had Thanksgiving at Pearl and of course, after Thanksgiving, which was the twenty-sixth, we're saying eleven days later, the attack at Pearl Harbor.

JP: Correct.

RH: And do you want to hear what happened at Pearl [*Harbor*] at that time?

JP: I do.

RH: Okay. Then of course my big promotion was mess cook. But my battle station was machine gun talker. There was aboard the USS *Downes*, we had two fifty-caliber water-cooled Browning machine guns, forward. They were in between, no just forward of the bridge. And then the two five-inch guns were forward of that. We had one five-inch, two five-inch forward. And then on the afterdeck house, there was two more machine guns, same type of guns. And I was what they call a machine gun talker, so I was supposed to—and then I had lookouts on all four corners. Now, I'm top of the bridge, so I've a visual ability to see everything and of course these lookouts would tell me where the enemy was coming. Well, we played war games and all the time I told you we went out on patrol. Well, we had had war games and exercised many different avenues of attack and we had aerial attacks. And we had dropped flour sacks on us and there would be umpires, several umpires aboard ship and they would tell us that you're out of the war, or you got a near miss, or you got a slight damage, whatever it was.

So my job was to let these guys know and they trained their guns around and simulated shooting an airplane down. So that was my job. But during the normal course of functioning, I was the mess cook. I peeled potatoes, got the onions ready and set up mess for the engineering crew. Now, that was only for three months, so I didn't have that job all the time. My job while we were steaming, underway, would be what they call messenger in the engine room. And there were three sheets of paper and I think there were seventy-some readings I had to take every hour, on the hour, and this was recorded. And then the chief in charge would look at the records to see if there was a possibility of an overheating or a malfunction, or possibility of a malfunction of some part of the machinery. There's a lot of machinery in a ship. You had turbines, that particular ship had three turbines that run the main shafts. You had two sets of reduction gears, which was as big as this room, almost, full of nothing but gears. And it had two shafts going in and one shaft coming out, then you had four oil pumps that pumped 700 gallons of oil a minute. And then we had condensating booster pumps and they pumped something like 600 gallons a minute. And they would take the condensed water out of the condenser that was steamed and put it up in the condenser and then take it back out and force it back into the engine room at 600 pounds pressure, into the fire room, into the boilers, and be made back into steam, which was about 432 pounds superheated steam would come back into the boilers again in that cycle. But there was an awful lot of loss

of steam, so there was a certain amount of water that was lost that was not recovered, so we had evaporators. And the evaporators made fresh water and it had to be super, super fresh because if water had any contaminants in it at all, it could cause a foaming. If that foaming carried over into the dry tube, it would go into the turbine and the turbine would automatically stop and possibly create some damage to the turbine blades. The blades were about that long. It seemed like there was 1400 blades to one of the turbines, 800 and some blades to another one and 600 and some to the other. I can't remember exactly. But a lot of blading and a very sophisticated piece of machinery. And that was—oh and make sure there was constant coffee and constant cold water.

We did not have cold water in the engine room. And we did not have refrigeration air conditioning. We had air ducts blowing air down on you and the temperatures would get as high as 170 degrees over the reduction gears. So we had to have a constant flow of air coming through because it's almost more than you can stand. But as long as you had air blowing on you, it was all right

And of course, when you went to battle stations, petty officers took those jobs in the engine room. I was not a petty officer. I was a Fireman. So I went to my battle station as a machine gun talker.

So when the general quarters took place, I had had that one job as mess cook. What I tried to fill you in on is what I did before I got the assignment of mess cook. This is every sailor's responsibility, to take three months of mess cooking. You were either a seaman for the deck force on the other upper decks. That's what you took care of. In my case, I took care of the engine room.

And so when the attack came on December 7, I had just finished up mess and general quarters sounded and my responsibility was to go to the bridge. Now, we were in dry dock. Dry Dock One, with the *Pennsylvania*, *Cassin* and *Downes*. We were in there primarily to have the forward plates and the bow fortified to where we could ram submarines.

JP: I see.

RH: Now, our plates, the hull as originally constructed, was only five-eighths [*of an inch*] thick. Now, you have five-eighths of a thin wall between you and the water. They were putting in one-inch plates in the bow. Those plates were cut away, so the whole bow of that area was exposed, nothing there.

So when the Japs attacked it, we were at our battle stations. I was on the bridge; we had no power. A man named Jimmy Foundation did get his machine gun going. We only had one going. They were trying to fire a five-inch, but we had no power, so it all had to be manual. To my knowledge, we never did get a five-inch fired, but they did get the fifty caliber machine gun firing. But then the real thing was going on and I wasn't aware what was happening except I seen this Japanese plane fly around and then you could see it turn, and as it turned, you could see the red meatballs on the wings.

JP: So you just happen to be on the bridge at that time?

RH: No, I went to the bridge.

JP: Okay.

RH: My battle station was at the bridge. I was in the mess hall. I left the mess hall, down in the bowels of the ship, went up the ladder, above the bridge, on top of the bridge, where the fire control platform is. That's above the bridge.

JP: So at that time, they had called battle stations at that time.

RH: That's right. This is general quarters, this is no drill.

JP: All right.

RH: General quarters, general quarters. And we had been doing general quarters, general quarters. When we went to the States, it was general quarters off and on. One o'clock in the morning, they'd call you. And what they would do is to time you to see how long it took you to man these stations, all the way down to Australia. We would have battle stations. We would maneuver with the thirteen ships we had there was like simulated war.

JP: So by this time, you guys were...

RH: We were...

JP: ...pretty efficient in this.

RH: We were pretty efficient in what we were doing. A lot of people thought we were over there just having a good time with hula-hula girls. Well, it wasn't true. (Coughs) We were pretty well geared for, we were disciplined well. That's the feeling I had for the ship that I was on, anyway, and I'm sure the rest of the ships were the same. So anyway, my battle station was up there. I seen this Japanese plane tip its wings and I turned to this guy and I said, "God," I said, "it looks like the army air force is down here and they're simulating a war!"

And he says, "You damn fool, this is the real thing!"

About that time, I seen a torpedo plane come down and drop the fish and it went over and hit one of the wagons, battle ships, and exploded. A few minutes later, I seen the *Oklahoma* capsize. I don't know if you got to interview that man or not, but you had one there waiting to be interviewed.

JP: We have already interviewed someone from the *Oklahoma*.

RH: Well, he was in the double-bottom and he was able to get out, but he was one of the few there. A lot of 'em perished. Anyway, that was the most sickening feeling about that day that I can remember, seeing that huge battleship (coughs) capsize. And of course then the *Arizona* got hit and everything was happening so fast, it was like a three-ring circus. Then all of a sudden, we got hit. And the stern of the ship got hit with incendiary bombs, which we weren't familiar with—at least I wasn't. I didn't even understand what incendiary was. But it's just like they drop the bombs, this chemical comes out and it starts rolling around and it burns up everything it comes in contact with. And of course a ship with a thin sheath as it had, it just cremates everything. And of course it was burning where the depth charges were. We had 800-pound depth charges and I think they were, I think we had sixteen on the fantail. And the *Cassin* had sixteen. And these

were 800 pounds of TNT. And this was boiling and burning and then I'm watching and the heat was getting closer and closer.

And of course we had what they call a damage control group and they were back there fighting the fire and you shoot water on it and all it does—it's worse than gasoline, 'cause you can shoot plain water on gasoline and it will just roll the gasoline on. And so they didn't understand how to smother it, to keep the oxygen away so it would automatically die. And it just kept getting worse and worse. And the flames were coming up as high as my level was.

JP: Now, what are you doing at this time, other than just...

RH: I'm observing.

JP: ...witnessing. You're observing.

RH: There's nothing to do.

JP: Right.

RH: My battle station was there. I was told to go there. You do not leave there. I knew that. So I'm watching all this and the flames are getting higher and I see all the commotion and everything going on. All the small craft going out, trying to rescue people. And I turn around and look and everybody's gone. So I thought, well, if everybody's gone, maybe I'll go find somebody to tell me what to do.

So I went down to Gun Two and we had a brow that went from Gun Two over to the dock. And there was a chief there and the chief was the fire control chief, so we knew each other. I said, "What should we do?"

And he says, "Bob, I don't know." He says, "This is getting bad." He says, "We're—nobody's given the word. I don't know if we should leave or not."

But men were leaving. They were leaving the ship 'cause it was getting hotter and hotter and everybody was aware of those depth charges back there. They weren't aware of the fact that they wouldn't go off. They had to

be detonated. They had to be set for a certain amount of pressure to be applied before they would explode.

JP: Right.

RH: Most of us didn't know that. The torpedo men knew that, the guys in charge. But anyway, while we were talking, there's a bomb dropped, a bomb or two bombs, whatever it was, on the torpedoes, which was at midship, and blew the ship at half. And that's all they had to say. They didn't have to say any more to me, I'm gone.

Well, I run across the brow. Well, when this attack occurred, there was this huge crane, and it's on tracks. And I call 'em trucks. Had a truck on—the trucks were probably fifty or sixty feet apart. But in between the trucks, they had this huge I-beam that joined 'em to fortify their strength. And being a short guy, I knew better than to jump over and I knew everything was flying all over, all kinds of rubble, shrapnel, parts of the ship. So I jumped under there. When I jumped under and was crawling out, somebody jumped right on my shoulder. And I thought, what in the heck is the matter? And a thousand things go through your mind. And I threw that man. I don't care what he weighed. He was gone. I don't know who he was, to this day. And I took off running.

So then I run with some other sailors and I seen this one guy, Tom Sawyer. He was a real nice guy. And I says, "Tom, where are you going?"

He says, "I don't know, but I'm getting the hell away from here."

So a bunch of us congregated over by a tin shed and when we got there, the shrapnel from our own guns—now, mind you, what goes up comes down. So we're firing, everybody's firing guns up in the air, trying to shoot these airplanes down. This shrapnel is falling and it's like rain falling down on this tin shed. And I turned around and I seen Pat Kemp. At one time, I run the shore boat. I was engineer on the shore boat and this Pat Kemp, a petty officer for the officer's shore boat, and he was the engineer for the shore boat. So we got to be good friends. And he was from San Diego, so we had a little something in common. And Pat was burnt from the waist up

severely. And the shrapnel was hitting him and he was delirious and he was just running. He says, "Please, please don't hit me any more!"

And I went over and got him and pulled him under the shed. There was a yard workman there. He says, "Take him to the hospital. Take my car."

He had a '38 Pontiac sedan and I took Pat, put him in the car and took him to the hospital. Came back and picked up a couple more guys, then went to the *Pennsylvania*, 'cause the *Pennsylvania* by that time got hit. And I think I took a couple of guys from the *Pennsylvania*, took 'em to the hospital and started on the way back and a Jap plane come down and was strafing me. I jumped out of the car and I sort of lost track of what was happening. I don't—maybe I got delirious, I don't know.

In the meantime, my shirt was blown off of me. When that explosion on the ship, my shirt got blown off. And some Marine gave me a shirt. So I had a khaki shirt. And somebody gave me a rifle full of Cosmoline. What you gonna do with a Cosmoline rifle and no ammunition? Because they kept talking about we're going to be invaded and nothing to clean the rifle with.

Finally, one thing led to the other and the first thing you know, it's getting dark and I wanted to get someplace where I could lay down. I was tired. (Coughs) And there was a lot of confusion. So I wound up over at the recreation center. They called it Bloch Center at that time. And they had some beans there and they had coffee and they had a cot to lay down. So I laid down on the cot and I had—well, first I had some beans and coffee and laid down. And I heard those airplanes coming over and all hell broke loose. And I had no idea what they were. I didn't know they were our B-17s. And the people that were shooting at 'em didn't either. There was a poor correspondence there. And of course all night long the *Arizona* exploded and blew and blew and blew.

The shell blew up was one huge explosion. You've seen pictures of that, I'm sure. (Coughs) Anyway, the...

JP: I'm going to have to stop you here, Bob.

RH: Yeah, so you can recharge.

JP: So we can put a new tape in.

RH: Okay.

END OF TAPE #27

TAPE #28

JP: It's that night now, December 7, late in the evening. The [B-]17's have come from California, the B-17's. You had told me that we had been shooting at them. It's a well-documented story. Tell me about the rest of that night.

RH: Well, of course, finally I went to sleep. And you get used to the noise. There's constant machine gunning shot, rifle shots, some aerial guns were firing, but you know, you're in the middle of a war. You knew this war started. We knew that sooner or later we were going to be in war with the Japs. We knew that. I knew it when I was a little kid because it was common talk. It wasn't like something just cropped up in front of me. Now some of the young men, they were from the middle of the United States, may not have been aware of that. But I worked with Japanese people; I knew 'em. I knew what their philosophy was. So it wasn't like—I was surprised as anybody, probably. But I wasn't surprised. I knew the enemy would be the Japs. (Coughs)

And anyway, I stayed there that night. The next morning I got up and I thought, well, I'll go back to the ship and see what happens. Most of those men from the *Downes* and the *Cassin* and the *Shaw* were dispersed. They were put...

JP: First, let's go back. I'm curious about this. You understood the Japanese philosophy and that was, to you, it was inevitable. You had known early on in your life that we were going to have some sort of conflict with Japan. Let's see, fifteen years after the fact, you're now at Pearl Harbor, you've developed an opinion, or at least a perception about Japanese culture, the

philosophy, as you state. What is that philosophy? And how did you think about the Japanese back then, even before Pearl Harbor?

RH: Well, you know, in my own mind, I felt they were an inferior military force. I figured their airplanes were made out of paper. Paper mache.

JP: Not just militarily though, the philosophy of the Japanese?

RH: Well, I don't even know why—you'd hear 'em talk. I used to sell magazines in front of markets and most of the markets, all the fresh fruit and vegetables were controlled by Japanese. And you'd hear 'em talking.

JP: Now this is your home down in Los Angeles?

RH: This is in Santa Monica.

JP: Santa Monica.

RH: I went to elementary school in Santa Monica. And of course my uncles were farmers and run Santa Monica Reed Ranch which is now Camp Pendleton with a lot of Japs down there. And of course they learned to understand some Japanese and they would talk about the damn Yankees and, "We're going to get 'em," imperialists and all that sort of stuff. The older Japs just didn't like us, but they were over here to get some sort of a foothold and possibly—and of course, they were making a better living than they were over there.

But I remember this one young Jap was going to college there and he was working in this market and he says, this one kid says, "What are you going to do when you get out of school?"

Two Japanese young men, and he says, "Well, I'm going to go back to Japan and get in the army or the air force and kick the shit out of the Americans."

And I heard that as plain as day. And I thought to myself, that'll be the day. That was a John Wayne term, but it wasn't invented at that time, but I thought that. I figured that they couldn't defeat us. There was nobody in the world could defeat us, because I had that feeling built in me, that we were a

mighty nation. Maybe the Japanese felt the same too or they wouldn't have had such a strong fighting force, but that was my feeling.

JP: Okay.

RH: So I hope that answers your question.

JP: Well, what I was trying to get at is that you had a perception of the Japanese, of Japanese culture prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor. I guess in a roundabout way what I was trying to get at is was there any sort of conscious or subconscious discrimination you had felt and I don't mean to ask an unfair question. But it seems to me that your reply and your feeling you had then sort of leads to that kind of conclusion. I want you to be able just to defend your position.

RH: Well, the other thing too, when, in the early thirties, when Japan went into China and basically the news media come right out and said it, Japan was raping China and most of Asia. You didn't have Korea and Vietnam and those places. It was China.

JP: Right.

RH: And that's mostly, geographically, that's what we understood. It was all China. And so they were in there to support an upcoming conflict which they knew eventually would happen, possibly. When the negotiations were coming about, before I even got in the service, they were talking about, "You're gonna have to get out of Asia. You're gonna have to leave those people alone."

Well we always tippy-toed, just like we are today with the Hussein. We tippy-toe with those guys. We try to give 'em every break in the world to back off.

JP: Now, for the record, that would be Saddam Hussein.

RH: Saddam Hussein. I get a bad habit of not calling him by the right name. Anyway, when it was brought up that we were going to suppress them and not ship them any more scrap metal, cut off their gasoline, then they were

prepared to defend what areas they already had. They needed rubber. They needed oil. They needed metals, certainly needed metals. And maybe their main source of metal at that time was from us. So we boycotted that, said no more.

When I was a kid, I lived not too far from Lincoln Boulevard in Santa Monica and used to see these salvage trucks go by and they were taking that metal to San Pedro, put on ships to sail back to Japan. And the common talk that this is what they're doing, that they're building a war machine. But mostly the war machine was against China. I don't remember or recall anybody saying that the war machine was being built to fight Americans. But we all had that sort of thing built into us.

JP: But yet you had overheard this conversation between these two Japanese youngsters, specifically about America.

RH: We also had an Asiatic fleet and when I lived in Santa Monica, I mean, in San Diego, there were sailors that had been in Asia and been connected with Russia, and they had married Asian women and some of 'em Russian women, and I could hear the men talking. I was real small there. A lot of people say, "How can you remember that?"

Lot of kids don't remember that, 'cause I was three, four, five, six years old. And I just remember the conversation. But I wasn't playing with a lot of kids, apparently. And of course then I was at the ranch with my aunts and uncles. My mother was sick an awful lot so I was with those people. And there was talk and the Mexicans would talk with the Japs and of course you just intermingle with some of the stuff and I was all ears.

JP: Okay, well fair enough. Let's go on because we don't have much time left. Tell us a little bit about your involvement with the USS *Shaw* and the newsletter that you have been publishing. I want to know how many newsletters...

(Taping stops, then continues)

RH: Well, you want to know when I went on the *Shaw*?

JP: I want to know your affiliation with the *Shaw*.

RH: Well, I spent the rest of the war on the *Shaw*. I went on the *Shaw* December 25 and stayed on the *Shaw* until October 5 of 1945, when I was decommissioned.

JP: Very good.

RH: And the *Shaw* was in, counting Pearl Harbor, I believe twelve battles. Then of course, when I got off of there, that was the end of the *Shaw*. I went on other ships. I spent the rest of my navy career on different ships. But if you want to get back to my affiliation with the newsletter.

JP: Yeah. Well, let me, let me introduce that first, that you have been printing a newsletter about the USS *Shaw*. I'd like to know when that started, when you get the idea to do a newsletter.

RH: Well, I imagine I print four a year.

JP: Okay.

RH: I'm trying to go back and figure out how long ago it was, well, say six years ago. I'm not saying that's correct. But at least six years ago I started printing it. And it's not my cup of tea. I wasn't too sure if I could handle it. The only reason I took it on is because out there in Landers, where I live, there was a man that had a printing business. And he and I went to the same schools in Santa Monica. It was really funny. We didn't know each other. I may have known his brother. His brother was older. This man was very good at printing. He knew how to print. He knew how to put scraps of pieces of paper together and that's basically what I had to work with. I would come in there, I'd call him and I said, "Look, I gotta get this thing together. I got a deadline on it."

"What do you got?"

I said, "Well, I got this, I got some stuff that's legible. I got some stuff that's scribbly." And I says, "Some of the stuff I'll have to read to you."

And I said then, “The stuff that I’ve written”—and his wife used to run it through and pick up the typos.

Now this copy that I give you guys yesterday, I gave Dan, there’s some typos in there and I didn’t catch ‘em until yesterday. But you’ve got one there. But anyway, he put together a very polished newsletter. It had a nice heading on it. He squared things off. He put the margins in properly. The whole thing was very professional and it was good because I was not getting all the information I needed. I wasn’t really sure how I should put the text together. And he helped me formulate it.

The last few newsletters that I’ve printed, there’s been a lot of text in there. And I don’t put the fringes on it because I need all the space I can get and usually eight pages is about as much as I can handle for the ounce that we get for thirty-two cents. And the one that you’ve got now, that cream copy, I think is eight pages, which is equivalent to sixteen sheets.

JP: Tell me about some of the stories. This is for future research, if someone wants to use your newsletter to look at, in the future, to understand what had happened on the *Shaw*. Tell me about some of the stories that you’ve worked on over the last six years in printing your newsletter.

RH: Well, being in the engine room, naturally, you don’t see everything. Now, Charles Copely, that I visited with today, which I hadn’t seen in about ten years, but I send him a newsletter because he was on the *Downes* and he was on the *Shaw*. (Coughs) And he was a signalman, so he’s up there. And of course, he was with me when we brought the *Shaw* back to the States with the false bow. You know, I told you before, there’s 130 feet of it destroyed. So we put a thirty-foot, they put a thirty-foot false bow on it and we sailed it back to the States. I was not aware. I was in the engine room or probably in the fire room when the bow busted loose, right there by Alcatraz, and we lost steerage. And we had a pilot aboard. And Copely was at the helm and he was told two degrees to the port, two degrees to the starboard, whichever it was. And he turned it and the ship wasn’t going. And the pilot turned around and he says, “I told you,” so-so.

He says, “I turned it, but it’s not responding. I’ve lost steerage.”

Well it meant the stern was up out of the water. So the rudder was out of the water, the two propellers was out of the water and we were going with the tide. Fortunately at that time, the tide was coming in, so automatically, they took tugboats and took us on in to Mare Island and starting putting the bow on. They had already started that 130 feet of bow. So they brought that in there.

Other stories that I get from different people. I remember somebody saying, oh, the other story I got was I got a phone call from a man one time. He had used, he was at one time doing the newsletter. This guy rides a bicycle all over the world. Now he was injured in the second landing that we made at New Britain, that's not too far from New Guinea. And he took shrapnel in the stomach and tore off part of his hand. So after that battle, he came back to the States. And I'd lost contact with him. And then one day he called me and said, "Bob," he said, "I'm taking a trip and I want to go across the United States."

And he lives up here in northern California and so he rode—he said, "I'll be leaving at a certain time. I'll be in Barstow." He says, "How far do you live from Barstow?"

I said, "Seventy miles." And I says, "You're coming across some treacherous desert. It's not bad if the wind's not blowing," but I said, "if the wind's blowing," I said, "I don't think you can ride."

And it happened to him. And I told him, I said, "I will intercept you at a certain road so when you get there, I'll be there to pick you up."

Well I give him the time that I thought was proper. Mind you, this man rode the bike as long as he could, but there's a big stretch across there at Lucerne. The wind really comes down there. It's just flat. And he had to walk a lot of it. But he had already cut past the spot that I had told him I'd meet him and he was getting close to where I live. And I come up with the pickup truck and he says, "I feel like riding the rest of way."

I said, "I don't feel like the time. I had a busy day, so let's put your bike in the truck and we'll take you back to the house."

Of course, we brought him in there and he showered and shaved and cleaned whatever gear he had. And we fed him. The next morning I got him up and I said, "I'll take you down to where the paved roads are," 'cause I live off of a, on a dirt road. I'm sort of landlocked in the dirt roads. And I said, "Stay in Twenty-nine Palms today." I says, "You're only going to ride about thirty miles, forty miles." I said, "Get a motel and rest up and call me at eight o'clock in the morning because the next junction is sixty miles away, across the desert." And I said, "You may want a break at that time before you go further."

So he said, "Okay." So then he called me and said he was leaving.

I said, "Well, I give you two hours."

So what I did is I get in the motor home, the one I drove up here and I was going across the desert, and I didn't see that man. I thought something must've happened to him. And I was up to eighty miles an hour with that motor home, looking for him and didn't see him. And all of a sudden, at LA-DELL Junction, I seen a silhouette of a man, standing there with his hands on hips. He was waiting for me. He was very, very well polished, I would say, as a bicycle rider.

And he said he thought he could ride some further. I gave him a sandwich and some 7-Up and then he rode. And that day he rode ninety miles. And I took him on into the next town of a friend of mine had a cabin there. We stayed overnight. He got up the next morning, freshened up again and took off again. And the next time I heard from him, he was in Florida. And then I got another letter from him, he had come back home and then he flew to New York and from New York, he flew over to England. Put his bicycle together and rode all through the English islands, then took a ferry over to Holland and Holland up into Germany, Germany over into France, France on over up above Spain and down into Italy, then took a ferry back across to Spain and went through Spain. Then he took another boat, if I remember right, over to England and then flew back home. Now that's one of the stories, that's not a war story.

JP: That's okay. That's an interesting story. I think, for the record, do you remember the gentleman's name?

RH: I can't think of it this moment. If I realize, I should've had this stuff in front of me. I know his name as well as yours, but I can't think of it right now.

JP: That's all right. That's not necessary.

RH: Now, what I'm going to do for you too, I'm going to put a bunch of these newsletters that I have and I'll send 'em to you. I said I'd send 'em to your secretary and I'll send 'em to her and then you can research it, whatever sort of a communication you have. If you'd rather have 'em to you, I'll send 'em to you. It's up to you. To her or to you. Then I can send them to the islands and I got her address, so I can mail 'em to her office and then you guys can sort through 'em if you like.

JP: Okay.

RH: Some of the other stories, we, here lately, we've been having ship's reunions every year because so many of us are dying off. And last year, I was in San Antonio, a year ago last May, in San Antonio. And we took a tour bus to Nimitz Museum and we got off the tour bus and we were going to go down there and we're sitting around there with our *Shaw* caps on, and this waitress come up and she says, "Are you men all off the *Shaw*?"

And then she's looking at me and looking around. And I said, "Yes."

She said, "Well, my dad was on the *Shaw* and he thought you were all dead."

And I said, "Well, no, we're not."

She said, "There's one thing that my dad was upset about and that's in relation to the Nimitz Museum."

The Nimitz Museum, as you walk in there, there's a huge mural on the wall...

JP: Which is in Fredericksburg, Texas.

RH: In Fredericksburg, Texas, with no ID on it. And I said, “Well, I’ll see what we can do.”

So I walked in and sure enough. But I didn’t say anything, but these other guys had already talked to her, so they came to me, ‘cause I’m the editor, I says, “Well, I’ll talk to somebody, see what we can do.”

And I was going to send ‘em a plaque and they refused it. They said it would mess up their décor. It was upsetting to me because I—and I had a hard time even communicating with them.

So this last May, we had a ship’s reunion in Laughlin, Nevada, at the Ramada Inn. And I went to the meeting and told them that because Fredericksburg had refused it, I would like to donate it to the Ramada Inn. They have, their second story is set up all for World War II paraphernalia. So I donated that to them and it also gives a little rundown on the history of the USS *Shaw*.

JP: Okay, I think there Bob, we’re going to have to stop.

RH: Okay.

JP: We’re getting a little bit late and I think that will give us enough information. If anyone wants to search out these newsletters, they’ll be able to with the information that you gave us.

RH: You can get a lot of information out of that. And there’s some people that climb out of the woodwork, just like that girl. I looked him up. You’re not recording any more are you?

(Conversation off-mike.)

END OF INTERVIEW