

#241 RUSSELL MCCURDY
USS ARIZONA, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 4, 1996

TRANSCRIBED BY:
CARA KIMURA
JUNE 12, 1997

Robert Chenoweth (RC): The following oral history interview was conducted by Robert Chenoweth for the National Park Service, USS *ARIZONA* Memorial, at the Sheraton Waikiki on December 4, 1996 at 5:30 p.m. The person being interviewed is Russell McCurdy, who was on board the USS *ARIZONA* on December 7, 1941.

For the record, would you please state your full name, place of birth and date of birth?

Russell McCurdy (RM): My name is Russell J. McCurdy. I was born in Chief, Michigan on the fourteenth of July, 1917.

RC: Could you also tell me what you considered your hometown in 1941?

RM: Oh, Chief, Michigan, Manistee County.

RC: Okay. Maybe you could start off by talking about your coming into the Marine Corps and your experiences in the Marines prior to December 7 and then at the time of the attack, what was your rank and what were your duties aboard the ship?

RM: Okay. I was in the merchant marines, in the Great Lakes, with Bethlehem Steel. And the draft was peeling up on me and I chose to enlist in the armed forces. First, I considered the Navy 'cause I liked the water. And then, I liked the Marine Corps that they were going to be going -- you could go sea duty on the Marine Corps also. So I thought, well, I'm hitting a double whammy there, so I enlisted in Detroit, Michigan in the Marine corps in March of 1941.

I went to San Diego to boot camp. Finished boot camp, I was selected to go to sea school. Completed sea school and awaiting assignment at San Diego. The USS *ARIZONA* was one of the assignments and I was asked if I wanted on a battleship, and I thought that would be an ideal place, a nice, big ship in the Pacific. And so I took that assignment and joined the Marine detachment in Long Beach, California in June of 1941. And at that time, I was a private in the Marine Corps and assigned to the broadside guns.

I was only on broadside guns a short while and my Commanding Officer, Alan Shapley, the Marine Major, selected me to take an (inaudible) duties assignment as admiral for Isaac C. Kidd, the admiral of BATDIV One [*Battleship Division One*]. I took that and in so doing, the, timewise, that was better that I not be on the guns if I was an orderly, that I be on the director, which was on the secondary aft, on the mainmast. So I took those two assignments, or I was directed to those two assignments, and that's how I became the Admiral's orderly. And the battle station, my duty

station up there, general quarters, was on the director for the broadside guns on the port side of the USS *ARIZONA*, some eight-five feet in the air, you know, in the director control room.

RC: Could you explain -- well, two things. Explain what your duties were as the admiral's orderly, and then explain what your duties were and what the equipment was when you talk about being in the gun director position.

RM: Being the admiral's orderly, of which we had learned the orderly duties and things at sea school. We went through all of the gunnery and all the different duties that you may encounter on the ship, was to stay with the officer that you were to be an orderly for, deliver messages for 'em, and accept the visitors that may come from the ship or for in port, whoever came and wanted to see the Admiral. We would notify the admiral in his cabin that the so-and-so was there and would he acknowledge, let him in. And we would then bring the man in or whoever, and same way when we're at sea. The officers, if they wanted to see the Admiral, why, we would have to notify 'em so that nobody walked in, in other words, into the captain's cabin, or the admiral's cabin, either way. And when he'd go around the boat to ship, then you stayed right with him, with the Admiral all the time, wherever he was. More or less, as a guard, I guess. I really can't explain what the closeness was there, but it was to protect the admiral and make sure that he wasn't floating around the ship alone. That's one thing I could see.

Then, in the gunnery part, up in the director, those days, there was mechanical from the director down to the guns. We'd get a mechanical message sent down chains and connections that you would have a trainer and a pointer on a director, pick your target out from up at that eight-five feet up in the air. You pick the target out and the trainer would be one man with the control. And then the pointer, he'd be another one. One of 'em says, "Go in this way," and one is checking this way.

Well, you're sending those signals down to the gun, then on the actual gun, in those days, there would be a pointer and trainer down on the gun. He don't see the target that we see up there, eighty-five feet in the air. So he's just matching these two wires.

RC: I see.

RM: And when the two wires get together, the fire control officer, who could fire, would fire the guns.

RC: The device that you're operating is an optical device.

RM: Right.

RC: Is that right?

RM: Mm-hm. And that mechanically went down tubes, chains, or whatever that was, or what wire, I don't know. But it run this thing that the trainer and the pointer was looking at down on the gun.

RC: So you . . .

RM: And if they didn't match . . .

RC: . . . directing the fire . . .

RM: We're directing it and then there was another officer that controls -- the gun had to be loaded and someone else fired it. When hairs were crossed and the target was clear and the no ship in front of you or anything of that nature, was controlled by somebody else, and then they would fire.

RC: How many of these . . . okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

RM: . . . (inaudible).

(Background conversation)

RC: How many of these secondary gun directors were there?

RM: There would be I really don't know.

RC: Was there . . .

RM: They had 'em forward and they had 'em aft, and they divide this broad sides into a section for the forward on the port side. And see, you have to have 'em on each side of the ship because the one from the other side couldn't see across, so I would say there was four. Because we divided the guns the after part on the port and starboard side would be guided by directors on the mainmast, and then the forward guns of that broad sides would be controlled from the directors on the foremast.

And of course, that day, I was checked out on these jobs that we're talking about, pointer and trainer. But that day, I was a GQ -- general quarters --

talker. And that means you had the headphones and a phone that you could talk to these guns that are associated with this director.

RC: I see.

RM: Then my captain was there and I had the -- both of the lieutenant -- and we had sergeants up there besides. There was maybe eight or ten of us in this director room, that you'd trade around jobs and wouldn't be sitting just glaring in that one time, as if one guy all the time, for hours. And so I was a GQ man this day. And I'd be talking to another telephone down there, passing word to the -- so we had communication between the guns and the director.

RC: What were you doing that morning, before general quarters was sounded and you went up to your battle station?

RM: On 7 December, '41, I was the last watch before breakfast. I was with the admiral and then I got off and had breakfast. And I was getting cleaned up, I was going to have liberty. And so I had been admiral's orderly and I was cleaning up and I had breakfast and cleaning up and getting ready for liberty. And as I recall, the first thing that I felt, I felt a couple thumps on the -- felt like it was on the ship. Not real sharp, but evidently those were bombs or something going off on Ford Island, being transferred by water, probably. But my thought was that it was a water barge bumping. They used to come every day and give us fresh water. And so I left the head area and came out into passageways, and then I knew there was something wrong 'cause the mess cooks were cleaning up tables and they were with their heads out the port holes. And those that didn't have their heads out, you could see their white faces, that there was something going on.

RC: So they had already realized?

RM: They'd realized something that I didn't know when I was up in the head area. And so then I picked up my speed, you know, going back to my quarters, which was the first compartment off the quarter-deck on the starboard side. And as I was going, I heard a message like, "Man above decks, take cover. We're being strafed," or something like that.

And then, three or four seconds later, general quarters sounded. I picked my speed up faster to get back there, because we mustered just for a second or so before we go to general quarters. And got back there and we hurried up that ladder, then on the leg of the tripod and to go on up to my station, eighty-five feet.

RC: Did you have time to dress completely?

RM: Nope. All I had on was trousers and a T-shirt, and shoes, and socks. That's what I had on. And went to the station like that. Up the ladder that was welded to the leg of the tripod, and there was Marines ahead of me and Marines behind me. And I was about one man behind Lieutenant Simonson, one of our Marine officers. And about the time we was getting to the searchlight platform of the after mast, I observed, on looking like this, I observed a (inaudible) and went through and seen the hole in the deck, on the starboard side. And I knew that when I seen that go through, I knew there was going to be some action after that, so I placed my body behind the leg -- well, see the leg is this big, you can see it out on the memorial.

RC: Yeah.

RM: And the ladder is welded to that. I placed my body so I would not see that hole. And sure enough, about third or fourth deck where we went down, then the debris combust, explosion and part of the ship and everything, 'cause I was pulled from the deck and stuff flew by, and I never got a scratch. I was protected by that leg. And my lieutenant, the second one I had, he had already stepped on the searchlight platform, and that, plus maybe strafing from the torpedo planes was coming in from back here, this way, that he was injured seriously and fatally. And he didn't have any protection and he just reeled over and he lay there on the searchlight platforms. There was nothing we could do for him.

And we continued up to our battle station and set up everything and just observed the biggest and the best observation place there was in the whole harbor. Being up eighty-five feet in the air, you could see Hickam Field; you could see Ford Island. You could see all the ships, everything, from up there. And the planes coming in, and the dive bombers, and the low level bombs, high level bombers, and the torpedo planes especially that would come up and they were romping them on the battle wagons ahead of us. And then they peel off. And they were machine gunning. And we went to our stations, they were spattering paint on there and how we all got through all this stuff, this spattered paint, you know, chipping paint on the thing as we're going up and never got hit. We were just lucky all the way.

And we got up there and all set up, and I'm standing forward, just looking, more or less, with these headphones, and talking to the guns when the ship blew. And when the ship blew, the force of that ship just reared like that. It was great that your knees buckled and forced you right to the floor. And all of us was forced to the floor with that. You couldn't possibly stand up. It was that great. And then, it started doing this. The vibration from up there and then the extra whip because of the steel and then they go

faster, faster, faster, faster. And we ended up in a human ball, about eight or ten of us Marines, just hanging on to each other, on the deck of that director room. When it quit doing that, we got up, checked each other out and nobody was hurt. There wasn't any of the glass broke up there in that -- I don't know how thick that glass was, wasn't broke. We looked down and it's just a white furnace in front of us. Just complete destruction. It was -- you just couldn't imagine that heat and the stuff that I seen before my knees buckled, just go up in the sky. I don't know how high it went. And we didn't get hit underneath or in front, any of us. It just kind of seemed tampered in such a way that it kind of went straight up.

And then we stood there for a while and Major Shapley was up -- a wonderful Commanding Officer, a wonderful Marine, Annapolis graduate, quarterback on the team and of Annapolis. And he just give us some nice talk to calm us down and actually we were (inaudible) in shock.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

RC: Okay. Why don't we start with (inaudible)?

(Background conversation)

RC: Could you start again talking about the Captain?

RM: You mean the Commanding Officer of Marine detachment?

RC: Yeah.

RM: Well, Alan Shapley, our Commanding Officer, was a Marine detachment, was in the director room. And he talked to us, calmed us down, told us our possibilities, the ship was out of action. He said, "The fire is bad. We better not go down yet," 'cause it was burning all the way down on the rungs and the twine on the railing of this ladder was burning. And the heat was terrific. He said we'll just wait.

And it seemed like in just a few minutes we just observed more. I watched the *OKLAHOMA*. I watched the *OKLAHOMA* go over like a wounded whale, went over the side. And the men, who were coming off over the life line and then walking on the side of the ship and walking near the bottom. And then evidently the mast hit bottom in the channel and didn't roll any farther. Then there was men just all on the side of that *OKLAHOMA*.

And you glance over, and I don't know the actual chronological of this, but I seen these other men from the fore part of the ship, I could see them through the edge of the fire and the smoke trying to go down that line that had been thrown to 'em by the *VESTAL*. And I seen them go down like

circus people down that line. And pretty soon, the wasn't any more coming down. I don't know if the rope -- rope is a bad word -- the line burned or broke, and there wasn't any more coming. And I seen people trying to jump from up in there, either from the yardarm or someplace. And it seemed like they'd swing and they'd go out and then like they're going to try to land in the water and they got about this angle out to the outer edge of the curve of jumping. The fire and the heat seemed to suck 'em right in and they never did hit the water. They right into the fire. And we watched that for a while and then the major said, "Well, we better go down and we'll go to quarter-deck. They'll probably be a OD or somebody down on the quarter-deck. We'll find out what we can do or if we can help, or whatever."

So we go down and going down and the wrappings on the rungs and the wrap on the rungs that we was walking on, stepping on. And the rail, that was almost red hot from that explosion. We had to balance ourselves every once in a while so that most of us burned our hands here going down. It was sticky from that shellac, or whatever they had in there.

We get down, I get to the boat deck and didn't see any action there. Then we come to the galley deck and here's some of the cooks down in there that I recognized. You recognize a man by his physique or his voice. No clothes on, charred, burned black, standing there. They wouldn't live long. They were in shock. One big cook that used to cook our early breakfast for us. I was on the Marine whale boat team for the ship and he used to cook breakfast for us in port. And when we'd go out to exercise, there he stood with the one leg on, one leg off. He didn't live. None of those burned people on that deck lived.

And then we go on down, I'm on the port side now. Going down and you get down and there's more men down there. I seen a red turkey who was a Navy man, mingling with line with going to the *VESTAL*. And I understand later that they caught it up at the *VESTAL*. And they got to take it away.

I then went around the turret and there was Commander Fuqua who directed us. My First Sergeant was standing with 'em. First Sergeant had no clothes on, not even shoes. And he was fully dressed fifteen, twenty minutes before, with tie and khaki and everything. And he was burned, charred. And he, I recognized him by his build and everything. And he used to call us old Champion. He said, "Champion, I think that the commander wants you to go for the beach."

And then, Commander Fuqua told us to abandon ship. And we did and we left him there because there was some people attending him. They

put him on a launch of some kind, and I found out later that he died on the way to the hospital.

And I go over the quarter-deck, or on the quarter-deck, I go over to the edge and sat down. I was attempting to take my shoes off. And the next thing I remember, I'm in the water swimming. So I found out later that there was another bomb that went off over there, either by the -- what do you call those, we tie up the quarry or something like that?

RC: The keys?

RM: Pardon?

RC: The keys.

RM: Yeah. There's someplace that blew us into the water, evidently. Because I don't remember from the time -- 'cause I know I sat down, tried to take my shoes off. You can't swim very good with them and we had the high top shoes, you know, in the Marine Corps. So I swam ashore with them shoes on, and my trousers and the t-shirt. And first --- and the oil about that thick and then less and less, because of we -- instead of swimming for Ford Island, you didn't dare go that way, 'cause this is all fire over and increasing. Fire was spreading. So we swam this way to Ford Island, out and then in. And we would swirl and then go down, and make more time underwater for a short while. We'd pop up and this major with a gun, with commands, why (inaudible) how well I pulled on the whale boat too. And just in the courage to hang in there. And that we did. And to keep our heads up when the bombs were going off, and sure enough, within fifty feet or a hundred feet of us, a bomb went off, in the water. That vibration took to flesh like your flesh was going to leave your legs. It was that much vibration in the water.

RC: Just the force . . .

RM: That force. And the good thing, none of us were under, or we'd probably have busted eardrums, or maybe even injured seriously. So we swam, we went to the pipeline and we rested there at the pipeline. In that process, going that swim, Earl Nightingale, a corporal on there, who was on our director, he was given out. [Major *Alan*] Shapley insisted that he ride piggyback. He wanted to give up, he didn't want to -- he wanted to drown. And Shapley labored him to that thing and of course, Shapley received a Silver Star for that, for saving Earl Nightingale. Now, you may have heard of Earl Nightingale afterwards, of his background and he became a very famous announcer on TV. He was the voice for Sky King and he became a writer for businesses that would -- he would give how to become

famous. And his theme was it's a changing world. We kept in contact with each other after that, all of us.

And then they -- most of 'em took off and I took a little more breather. And so I went direct from that. And they took off that way to an old ammunition place, which was a shelter of some sort. I never got over there. I went this way, come in the back door at the gate of some Navy quarters. Opened the gate, went in the house, knocked on the door, nobody home. Went in the house, in the kitchen, turned to my left and here was oatmeal cooking on the stove. I remember taking the oatmeal off, turning the stove off, and then go out the front door to the guard on the corner of the air field, Ford Island. And he said, "Here's a (inaudible) will come becoming and take you over to the hospital," which was the mess hall, big mess hall. "Take you over there and check."

And of course, I'm just covered with this black grease and this oil. My ears and eyes -- he didn't know who he was talking to, see. And get over there and first you tell someone who you were and where you were from, and you assign them chits, and there was every fifteen minutes or so, someone would come around and -- see, we had no dogtags on. There was no identification. You didn't have any wallet with you or anything. And you couldn't identify yourself, you had to do it all by voice. And they told me to go up and down the aisles in that mess hall and see if I could recognize anybody. And I done that for maybe an hour and never seen a person that I knew.

And then they called for ordnance people, and I was well-versed on ordnance as high as -- not the fourteen-inch, but all the rest of 'em. So they had a bunch of small arms in the armory. And I had had experience with most small arms, it was in Cosmoline. There was no machinist's mates, there was no gunner's mates or anybody there, just civilians around. So they grabbed off a bunch of civilians. We unpacked those guns and had tubs with things to wash the parts. And back -- I might state now that -- well, my date shows in here, what my age was. Well, I was twenty-four years old, little older than some of the others and only a private in the Marine Corps. So I had worked for Ford Motor Company prior to being in the merchant marines with Bethlehem Steel, in the engine room of a ship, big ship, 600 and some feet long. And I knew all about mechanics and about gunnery and all that, so I helped set up a production line. I assisted in setting the production line up. We take all the parts, put 'em in these tubs, wash 'em up and then had people sort 'em out. And if it was working out in this line and these mess tables was working out pistols, I knew exactly where to put the part. I take the civilian, that's the only part he dealt with and we produced I don't know how many weapons that day, that afternoon. We washed 'em and put 'em in shape -- machine

guns and rifles and pistols and Thompson submachine guns. Everything in that Cosmoline (inaudible).

After that, we got set up for -- they put me on a machine gun on the top deck of the armory, on Ford Island. And I was on that machine gun that night. Never seen any of my Marines and never seen any sailors or anybody that I knew. And we were all scared to death of course and it was getting dark and they run all the communications. Communications was set up good. We could hear when not to fire, when to fire and what was going on. Until those planes come from off the aircraft carrier, they gave signals for 'em and turned the lights on, and it was acknowledged that they seen the lights and it was assumed that they were going to come right in. But evidently, they were too close together or something and they didn't land right away and they came -- my feeling on the noise from the plane -- like they weren't in line with the field, not the first ships. And it seems like they was coming over the battle wagons in the cross (inaudible) the field instead of with. 'Cause they turned the lights on a couple times and you could see 'em, see the lights where I was, up on that deck. I don't know how many ladders that was up. But then once somebody started shooting and everybody fired, everybody. And I never seen anything like that in my life.

RC: Yeah, you were assuming because of the way planes were flying that they might have been Japanese.

RM: Not me, but because I'm listening to this speaker.

RC: Oh, I see.

RM: And they were telling us not to fire. And they told us whose planes they were and everything. And I know there were ships in there, but there's . . .

(Background conversation.)

RC: So here come the planes from the *ENTERPRISE*?

RM: Here come the planes from the *ENTERPRISE* and fire started -- it appeared like the fire was starting, gun fire, over Battleship Row. And when that few tracers went up, everything cut loose. The first -- it was a dome. Here's the thirty calibers. Thirty calibers are belted for no tracers, one tracer. And I seen in that dome, tracers hitting each other. So you can imagine how many bullets was in that sky. Then, above that was fifty caliber, that dome. And then above that was a the bigger -- twenties and the forties, above. And there was just a dome or something. No plane could ever get through that. And of course, we shot the planes down. And that was the first of I ever seen of real gun fire and real saturation. At

the end of the war, on Okinawa, when we heard that the bomb was dropped and the war was over, divisions of men done the same thing on Okinawa, but they weren't as well equipped that day on Okinawa as we were in December 7 for the fact that the men were doing it on Okinawa without helmets on and wasn't protecting themselves, like we had helmets on down here, on Ford Island. And I assumed that all the rest of 'em had helmets on, 'cause that stuff's gotta come down.

RC: Sure.

RM: And we had several people killed on Okinawa from the fall of that volume of fire. Well anyway, back then the drizzling rain black out and I don't know what happened the rest of that night, but I didn't see any more planes. And then I went to another assignment the next day. I went to the receiving ship. They said, "Well, we can't use you around here any more."

I had still had those greasy, oily clothes on and the boots and the stuff in my ears and nose, and we got some chow from someplace. I don't know where it came from. And it wasn't even -- we weren't even hungry, really. And so the next day, I spent the next day there, but then towards evening, I went on the ferry, or whatever it was, over to the receiving ship. And of course, that was all Navy and I'm a Marine. And I walk in there and this (inaudible) grease all over and everything, and nobody would know who you were. And who'd I meet, the very first one that was on the assignment desk was [*Lieutenant*] Commander Fuqua, the same guy that I had left a few days before. And he recognized -- I told him who I was and of course, I had been admiral's orderly and I had delivered stuff to him, a lot of messages and things. And he directed me down the basement to see the corps men and see if they'd get some of the grease out of my eyes and nose and ears, and see if I could scrub off any of it and take a bath, and everything and then to go draw clothes. So I did and went down, and of course they had just Navy clothes, so I got the shoes and socks and I said, "I'll take the blue work clothes, dungarees and blue shirt."

And then they tried to issue me the white hat, and I said, "Oh, I got doubts about that." I said, "I'm not the --- I don't believe I'll take that white hat."

They gave me a helmet then. And I went back, eat chow, and had some chow and I went to Fuqua and he says, "Some of your Marines is over on the *TENNESSEE*." He says, "I got a group going out there now."

This is about nine o'clock at night. I don't know what day it was, if it was Tuesday or -- I know it wasn't Monday. It was probably Tuesday. And why, I went with them.

So we come up on the fantail of the *TENNESSEE* and the rest of the guys had orders. I didn't have no orders. And so the chief master of arms, he says, "Well, who are you now?"

And I still had some of that grease around me and everything. I told him I was a Marine off the *ARIZONA*.

"Well, what are you doing with those Navy clothes on? Where'd you get that helmet?"

And then, a lot of questions, "Where's your orders?"

"I got no orders."

So I had to be identified.

"Some of your Marines are on here," but he says, "I don't know where their billets are. We're all at general quarters now."

So I said, "I do know a guy that I went to sea school with that's aboard. And I know that you can pass the word for him to come and identify me. If one of your own men, if you don't want to trust the Marines that came from the other place."

So they called the guy down, he identified me, from sea school. And then the chief says, "Here's a bucket. Here's something else." He says, "Go to the top . . . "

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

TAPE TWO

(Background conversation)

RC: So you're getting ready to leave the *TENNESSEE*?

RM: Right, and I . . .

RC: They'd called your name out . . .

RM: And we go to the receiving ship from -- call the name out and we went to the receiving ship and they told us to go to the Marine barracks. And there were several of us Marines off the *ARIZONA* that went to Marine barracks. And there we stayed and I was reassigned and we was asked by the sergeant major in the commanding officer's office, by the sergeant major and the (inaudible) that we could have any duty station that there

was on the island, anyplace that I wanted to go, that we wanted to go. So then they list off a whole bunch of stations that were available. And one of the questions was, "Anybody that has ever ridden a motorcycle?"

Well, I raised my hand right away, that I ride a bike. So I got that job, which was downtown Honolulu across from Pier Four, at old Naval station, shore patrol headquarters. And oceanic graph people, and there were several other piers there. There was sick bay there and several people. And so about a hundred or more shore patrol lived there.

So I got that assignment there and I carried mail from Honolulu out to the ships and to Nimitz and out to there daily, going back and forth, maybe two, three trips a day. I used to go on motorcycle and take mail. If we had a lot of mail, we'd take the bike with the sidecar and put that in. We had mail from personal mail came that way too sometimes. And we'd carry that out, like of an importance that I remember, that one day I got a letter at Navy intelligence, to pick up in an envelope to deliver on the way to the harbor at salt flats -- we had a Marine unit on salt flats. And the mail was to be delivered to Roosevelt. President Roosevelt's son was a major in the Marine Corps and he was training raiders.

RC: (Inaudible)

RM: And they were on the parade fields. I remember going in and I didn't pay attention to anybody, I just went up and down the battalions, on my motorcycle, until I come to him and I stop and he thanked me and I went out about my business and went back to the harbor. And . . .

RC: So how long did you do that kind of activity?

RM: All of '42 -- I got there in about January. All of '42 and then in early '43, the old commander, the commander of the shore patrol at headquarters was an old commander named Freed. Commander Freed, he had nearly forty years in the Navy, an old mustang. And he said he seen an all Nav and an all Mar that was coming through that they were going to have some classes in Quantico for NCOs. Well, that time, I had made sergeant. And NCOs in the world were 200 were going to be picked to go to Quantico for one class of officers that didn't come out of colleges and weren't ROTC or nothing, right off the field. Preferably combat, like Guadalcanal had already started and over. Had men like that. I was one of the 200 that was picked and we all graduated. We all were made second lieutenant.

And after I was commissioned, I went to 1st Marine Division, down through the Pacific, (inaudible) into [Cape] Gloucester and when I joined them, and then on Pavuvu, it was a rest area and a training area near

Guadalcanal, getting ready for Peleliu. I landed fourth wave from Peleliu. I was with the 1st Tank Battalion. And then we came back to Pavuvu again near Buka and Guadalcanal, and then a training area again. And we got ready and went to Okinawa.

I landed in Okinawa in the fourth wave. And I was in tank battalion and both times was first Peleliu was to go in with the fourth wave, measure the water and survey the situation from a reference point, out to the reef, that there were no shell holes in there, 'cause if a tank hits a shell hole, you're done. You can't back out of it. So I was on the bow of these amphibian tractors and everybody else is down in there in the mortars and the artillery is firing and landing and shelling and we had a lot of casualties going in from the reef. And I measured the water and we had a sergeant on the left and a sergeant on the right, they had two reference points. And then we came together after we hit the land, we came together and decided which place to bring the tanks in. They wanted to get it in early, so we're bringing in the eight wave, and that they done.

That was my job on Palau. And it was successful. And then when the operation come for Okinawa, I had made first lieutenant and so when they had the meeting and everything, and they set up the same invasion thing, my commanding officer was a graduate of Annapolis -- of the tank battalion -- and he said, "Mac's our survivor."

Now, he meant that in two ways, but what registered to me like I survived Pearl Harbor and I survived Peleliu, that we're putting him on the same job. That's what I thought. And I said, "Well, I'm good enough. I won't object or nothing."

But he was really meaning salvation, probably. There's our salvation, we've got the man to do it. So I took that same job going into Okinawa. But there was no gun, it wasn't bad.

RC: Let's go back to prior to the attack. You said -- asked me if I wanted to hear any stories about the admiral.

RM: Well, I was on the Marine whaleboat team for the *ARIZONA*. We trained real good and I had a good team. And we beat every division in the ship. We rode 'em all. And then when it come time for the Pacific fleet meets, the captain, Captain Van Valkenburgh, and Major Shapley got together. And by the way, they were very good friends and they got along well. Anyway, Shapley argued the fact that he objected to mixing one man from this division, one man from this division, one man from the Marines and mix it. And the captain said, "Make a real team."

And Major Shapley says, "You've seen the real team. We beat all these guys. Let's keep that team together."

And he argued and we won out. The team that represented the *ARIZONA* in 1941 in the National Pacific Fleet meets was an all-Marine team, and I was on it. And we took second place, another ship beat us less than three feet, *PENNSYLVANIA*. So we came in runner-up.

Now, going back to the admiral, in this training, to make this -- and he loved people who were athletic and would train and -- 'cause he exercised every day. And I used to help him with his exercises. Like if we were at sea, and it was day time, of course, we would look down and he'd sit there, and we'd be up on his bridge and nobody talks to the admiral. I don't know if you've been around the high-ranking officers. They're kind of -- everybody shuns away from them. Well, he had nobody to talk to. So he's from Ohio, I'm from Michigan and one day he'll talk about that, you know. When we weren't doing anything, just we're going out at sea and he's up on his bridge, by himself, and I'm with him.

He'd say, "The Marines are down there training and they're doing this." He says, "Take your shirt off and your thing and get down there on my mat," that he worked on, see, and he said, "I'll relay the commands that they're doing and you go through with the same exercises. I want you to be in the same shape they're in."

I said, "Okay, I'll do it."

And then, when it come time for his exercise, we used to do the feet like that and then pull each other. And I don't suppose -- I suppose he was fifty years old, I'm twenty-four years old, but when he said to do it, I'd do it. And run through his exercises. Didn't cost me anything. So that's the kind of an admiral he was. He just loved everybody and would listen and he wanted to know all about you and most of the time I would think, if I had been, say, eighteen years old, that I would have been not as brave, you know, probably rigid and not answer, or you know, go into that. So that's the kind of an admiral he was. He was wonderful. Just like a father to me, and I never did ask any of the other Marines if they ever -- and of course, none of them that I ever know -- none of the other orderlies were on the --- there was about six orderlies, none of them were on the whale boat team. So I don't know if they ever went through any of the exercise programs or not. But that's in the book on the *ARIZONA*.

RC: Oh.

RM: And there's a couple of other stories.

--: Who was this? Which Admiral was it?

RC: Admiral Kidd.

RM: Admiral Kidd. He used to be captain of that same ship. When he was captain of that ship, Nimitz was the admiral of Bat Div One, which was the *OKLAHOMA*, the *NEVADA*, and the *ARIZONA*, see, those three. Did any of the interviewers mention the collision, when the *OKLAHOMA* crashed us at sea?

RC: No.

RM: Do you know about that?

RC: I do know about it, but there's probably lots of folks that don't, so . . .

RM: Again, I had just got off watch, mist and rain. And so I was over on the starboard side, just outside of the passageway entrance, going out of the quarter-deck, standing out on the quarter-deck, just looking. And you couldn't -- real cloudy and misting rain. No sky at all. It all had fallen down on you, with the rain and -- little misty rain. And I look up and I see a little bit of light there. I said, "Oh, I just wonder what that could be."

And I thought maybe we'll see it, but it wasn't very big. It was a light on the *OKLAHOMA*, 'cause I'm standing right there and it hit forward of us, a little. It hit that garbage thing, the big hopper. Never thought -- but seeing the light and that crash and crunch and steel squealing, and everything, and then that ship kissed off like that, right in front of me. And here goes that thing over my head, it's over a ton, just over my head and hit the quarter-deck.

RC: Geez.

RM: Nearly got killed on that deal. And as I recall, it list just a fraction. It started 'cause these tanks were empty and it tore a big hole inside. And then the lights all come on and everything. We had some trainees aboard there. And they didn't have a general quarters station or collision station -- in fact, it wasn't general quarters. 'Cause I just got off watch from one of the watches, so those trainees ran for the life boats and got in the life boats. And of course, the captain is up above and he can look back, look aft and look right down on them, and there's these guys all in the life boats. And I suppose he didn't want a panic to happen or something, so he called us out. We were fixing bayonets and find a place for those guys to hide out during this -- of course, it was a crisis for them.

RC: Sure.

RM: Yeah, they thought we were going to sink, I suppose, and everything else. And but we aboard didn't think that much of it. When we seen that it kissed off and the angle that it hit, see. So we got the guys out of there and I didn't know what happened. Of course, they were trainees, like -- I don't know where they were from. If they were from Great Lakes, or if they were from Annapolis, or where they were.

RC: Well, I wanted to ask you just to kind of wrap up, looking back, after fifty-five years, with these events, what does this mean to you now? Why is this story important? Why should people know about Pearl Harbor?

RM: My feeling, at home, I speak in schools. I give 'em stories in schools and stories about Pearl Harbor, and stories that happened in the islands, in the landings, and the exciting things that would keep interest, you know. Not just, this was that, so many of them got killed and whatever. I would go into the little stories, some of the stories like I'm telling you, and they got a kick out of that. We're talking about fifth and sixth graders. And there's a couple of schools I hit and then I wait two years and they call me back two years, then there's a new group of fifth and sixth graders. And my theme is heavy, to keep the armed forces, keep America strong, and have a good armed force. That's my theory and my belief, that we stay alert and know what's going on in the world and have an armed force to back it up, because there's somebody in your hip pocket all the time, that's wanting do something to us. For what reason, I never could tell what it was. I don't know. But everybody around the world is wanting to get in our hip pocket, and they wanted to occupy us. That's my feeling. And the only way to fight against that is have a strong armed forces.

And I'm speaking about Memorial Day, which gets kind of sentimental there. But Veterans' Day, and those days is when I talk and then I talk history classes other days, even -- it don't have to be a holiday. But I belong to different clubs, the VFW and I'm a Mustang myself. And I talk to our reserve units up at Fort Wayne, Air Force, and I just keep 'em abreast with what did happen here at Pearl Harbor. And I come out and tell 'em, I said, "Now, this is going to be a hard story for somebody to stand up and here talk and tell you about a defeat, and how we were not alerted and why we wasn't informed."

And these things come up in my mind. Then, there's some feeling for years, it was a guilt feeling. Guilt -- how did I stay alive? And all of those good guys die. And that come up a lot. I was afraid to talk about it for a long time. And then, last twenty-five, thirty years, I've volunteered to give speeches in a lot of different places -- in clubs and whenever I could. And I've always had a good word for the Navy and I'll visit the recruiting offices and I was retired. I retired in 1965. I stayed in the Marine Corps and

retired as a lieutenant colonel. And very few people from private go to lieutenant colonel, no college. No outside technical school or anything, other than being in the Ford Motor Company and the merchant marines, and in the Marine Corps, and with the Navy. And I've always gotten along good with everybody and was off on the farm. Was handy with my mechanically, and things of that nature that popped in. I can go on with stories that happened in this tank battalion. I manufactured one time, with the help of a lot of men, on Okinawa, manufactured 1,500 rounds of seventy-five ammunition, against all ordnance regulations, that could have been court martialed for. And we were all decorated. Some ammunition ships had been sunk with our ammunition on it, that with a battle coming up on Okinawa, the same colonel says, "Mac, see if you can make some ammunition. We need fifteen tanks on such and such a day from now."

And we combed that island of Okinawa and took the bullets, or the shell of Howitzer ammunition, seventy-five, which is the same bullet that's in the seventy-five tank that we had. But the canister, the shell part is different. It's fixed in the tank and it's loose in the Howitzer. So it's in these silk bags -- the powder is -- and it come apart easy. So we got all the Howitzers that we could, truckloads of Howitzer. Took the dozers from the tank battalion -- we had big TD18. Dug a groove in the ground, some 500 yards from the front lines and we were run our six-bys down in there and got the volunteers, "You and you, and you," you know, all volunteered. And we went in and we started working.

We're tearing that stuff apart. We got fifty-five gallon drums, cut 'em, take these silk bags, dumped all the powder in those things, smoking lamp was out and careful no sparks. And we had to crimp the brass to the bullet, you know, to the shell. And I took ball peen hammer handles and tapered 'em down like a wide screwdriver and used that to crimp, so we didn't give off any sparks of any kind and have any problems.

Now that was what they called initiative or whatever thought, and we measured -- I had a good run and emptied that, tore that apart and measured the powder with -- and got the same amount of powder. I was in ordnance and I knew ordnance very well. And the powder is little pieces of spaghetti, you know. We had to have the ones with the thirteen holes, so some of that -- most of the H.E. that we received from the Howitzers had the thirteen holes in 'em. That makes it, the velocity, the right velocity. And so you don't burn the barrel up or whatever.

And we measured the canteen with a canteen cup, how many canteen cups was in that H.E. thing, and that's the amount we put in each one of those canisters. 'Cause the powder in the canister, which is a shotgun shell like, had a real slow burning stuff, so we had to throw that away, burn that. And we put the other thing. We even changed some of the caps in

the brass, and not one accident or anything and those rounds worked fine. And we equipped fifteen tanks in one day. (Inaudible) and we all received the bronze star for that.

RC: That's amazing.

RM: And another time on Palau, against ordnance regulations, well, I told you we went in on the fourth wave and bring the tanks in on the eighth. Here, the men hadn't gone more than a hundred feet off there and here come our great big tanks coming in. Well, they got up right practically in the front lines. An artillery shell hit the gun about that far back from the muzzle and put a dent in it. And you look in from the front and it had a dent, so therefore we couldn't shoot it. They called me on the radio -- I was right there. And then I made a message, I sent a message out to all the ordnance people in the three companies that was online to send their ordnance men with their toolbox. And they had hacksaws and hacksaw handles, and we sawed that eight inches off that barrel.

RC: Turned it into a Howitzer?

RM: And it was a wonderful rifle. It didn't go like that, but if ordnance would have known about that, why, we could have been court martialed, or a lot of people could have been killed in the first round, but it didn't. And that tank got a tank within a couple of hours after. It took two and a half hours to saw that off. Mortars dropping, artillery, and we just take one man jump up on the tank, and he'd saw just as fast as he could for a minute. And then another one standing there, he'd jump up, the other one drop off on the other side, lay down, 'cause the mortars and stuff was dropping. They had us pinned down. But we got that sawed off. Now, we all got a commendation for that one.

And that's another just what you would do on the farm, like (inaudible) whatever.

RC: Exactly, exactly.

RM: And that's how I got where I was, 'cause my commanding officers enjoyed it and I got good fitness reports and went on up.

RC: All right. That's great. Thank you very much.

RM: Well, you're entirely welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW