

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER  
202

Interview with  
Everett H. Johnson  
May 17, 1974

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
Terms of Use: OPEN  
Approved: E. H. Johnson  
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Oral History Collection

E. H. Johnson

Interviewer: Dr. Ronale E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Date: May 18, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing E. H. Johnson for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 18, 1974, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Johnson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack there on December 7, 1941. At the time of the attack Mr. Johnson was aboard the cruiser USS San Francisco.

Now Mr. Johnson, to begin this interview would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me where you were born, when you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Johnson: I was born on November 2, 1921, in Waterbury, Connecticut. We lived in Connecticut a very short while and we moved to Holyoke, Massachusetts. When I was seven years old my dad built a house in South Hadley, Massachusetts. That's the home of Mount Holyoke College. We lived there . . . I lived in that house

eleven years. Two fellows in the middle of February of 1940--or the first of February of 1940--two fellows talked me into joining the Navy because at that time forty cents an hour was about all you could make. The only jobs mostly were in the wintertime, cutting ice and shoveling snow, and they both paid forty cents an hour, so I was more than happy to do anything to get a job.

Marcello: You know, this is a reason a great many of the fellows have given for entering the service.

Johnson: Oh, certainly.

Marcello: It was a matter of economics.

Johnson: Certainly. The funny part was that these were two Polish boys--there were a lot of Polish boys there where I lived--and one of them was color-blind, and one of them had other eye problems, and at that time they didn't get in the service. I was the only one that got in. They both got in later after the war started.

I went to Newport, Rhode Island, on April 2, 1940. After about three weeks of boot camp I came down with psoriasis. I had psoriasis in July of '39, and as you might know about psoriasis, you don't get rid of it. It's a continuing thing. Well, anyhow, in boot camp it spread completely from the top of my head to my feet. They didn't know what it was, and they put me in the

isolation ward. When they finally found out what it was, they treated me for two months in the hospital. Then they called me in and said, well, I could be discharged. They'd give me a medical discharge. I said I didn't want a medical discharge. I didn't go in there for that reason. They said, "Well, you're as well-fixed now healthwise as you're going to be, so we'll send you back to duty."

I went another month in boot camp, finished my boot camp, and went home on boot leave in October of '40. Then 350 of us were sent from Newport, Rhode Island, on a special Pullman to Long Beach, California. After about two days in Long Beach, I was assigned to the USS Relief, which was a hospital ship. I was signed as a passenger. We went to Pearl.

Marcello: Incidentally, at the time that you entered the service, did you have any notion at that time that the country might eventually be getting into war?

Johnson: I never gave it a thought, really! Not at that time, no.

Marcello: How closely did you keep abreast with world events?

Johnson: Well, as much as any eighteen-year-old which was not . . . you know, eighteen-year-olds, not greatly. I was vaguely aware of things. In fact, the day that I enlisted

at the recruiting station they were talking about those German ships that the British were after at that time. I can remember the Navy men there in the recruiting office talking about those things . . . but truly not enough, not enough thoughts on the idea. Not enough . . . I was not really greatly interested.

It took us a week to get to Pearl. I arrived at Pearl Harbor Saturday, November 2. I can remember it because it was my nineteenth birthday. I looked around . . . we . . . after I went on board ship, I went down below and stowed my gear. Of course, that's a pretty big ship. When I came up, I was on the other side and didn't know . . . I was kind of halfway lost, and I thought, "Boy, I'm 5,000 miles from home, almost 6,000 miles from home, and am I ever in trouble (chuckle)." Of course, that feeling faded away, but it was kind of a frustrating feeling there for a while. We operated out of Pearl. We maneuvered out of Pearl for thirteen months while I was aboard until the war started.

Marcello: Let me just go back here a minute. You mentioned that you journeyed to Pearl Harbor aboard the hospital ship USS Relief.

Johnson: Right.

Marcello: Now how shortly after you got to Pearl Harbor were you assigned to the cruiser?

Johnson: I was assigned to it originally.

Marcello: I see.

Johnson: That was my assignment. That was my destination. They just took me as a passenger. They took quite a few of us as passengers.

Marcello: In other words, as soon as you got over to Pearl, then you transferred.

Johnson: Yes. As soon as I got there, I transferred, right.

Marcello: What was the USS San Francisco like? You might describe the ship as best you can.

Johnson: It was a 10,000-ton . . . well, originally it was built as a 10,000-ton cruiser, but from what I can understand or what I understood when I was on there, by the addition of more equipment and more guns and things, it was about 18,000 tons. It was about that size whenever the war started.

Marcello: Was it a fairly modern cruiser?

Johnson: It was. It was commissioned in 1937, if I remember right. It was one of the ships that took the goodwill cruise around South America. It went down one coast and up the other. It went around the Horn, around South America.

Marcello: During your stay aboard the San Francisco what sort of maneuvers did you undertake in the months prior to Pearl Harbor?

Johnson: Regular war games, what they thought were the essential thing--battleships versus battleships and things like that.

Marcello: With what frequency did these maneuvers take place?

Johnson: It seemed like it was reasonably frequent, but I just couldn't . . . I can't tell you exactly. It was reasonably regular.

Marcello: I know that in some instances these cruisers would go out on a Monday and not come back in until a Friday.

Johnson: Well, that seems about right. It seems like we were . . . we were in most weekends, but that . . . I couldn't give the days because I really don't . . . I didn't think about it that much. I didn't make that much money. When I was making \$21 a month, I got \$12 one payday and \$10 the next, so I didn't need many liberties.

Marcello: And I gather that these maneuvers were a rather regular thing. In other words, every week the cruisers would usually be out, and then they would usually be in port on the weekends. They would be working, of course, with the battleships and the cruisers and the other vessels.

Johnson: Right. That's as I remember it. Now I can't really remember the time or the amount of time we were out, but that seems about right.

Marcello: Looking back upon those maneuvers and what have you, how would you rate the preparedness or the readiness of the

crew aboard the San Francisco?

Johnson: We were as ready as could be. I went to machine gun school myself shortly after I got aboard ship. I went on board in November, 1940. I had mess cooking, and then I was assigned to the USS Nevada for two weeks for .30 and .50 caliber machine guns. I figure I had as good a training as was available. I could take a machine gun apart and put it back together, so I know that they did a pretty good job in two weeks, training me that. If they could teach me that, you know, an eighteen-year-old boy right out of the country, why . . . overall I would say we had as good a training as was possible under the circumstances.

Marcello: You brought up a very interesting point. I gather that a lot of the actual on-the-job training occurred aboard the battleships. They were used in many cases for training purposes, that is, to train crews on other ships.

Johnson: The Nevada was one that they did use for that. Now for the rest of them, I don't know. It seemed like the Utah they were using for a target ship.

Marcello: During these maneuvers, or let's say during a call to man the battle stations, what was your particular station aboard the San Francisco?

Johnson: After I went to machine gun school, I was on .50 caliber machine gun aft. That was my job until . . . right after I came back from machine gun school, they asked for ten strikers, which means helpers, trainees, in the carpenter shop. They wanted five shipfitters and five carpenter's mates. My dad had been a carpenter and was a carpenter, and the only reason that I put in for it was his background. So I put in for striker and I was taken. I went into the carpenter shop to work and worked with a chief carpenter's mate named Isabell. I believe that's about right. I worked for him putting signs on watertight doors and hatches. This was considered part of damage control, is what it was.

Well, after I had been in the division long enough, and he thought I was eligible to go up for a rate, I asked him, "Well, which rate should I go up for--shipfitter or carpenter's mate?" He said, "I think that you would be better going up for shipfitter because there are more shipfitters aboard the ship, and I think you'd have a better . . . that's actually the work that you've been doing." So I took my test. I didn't make seaman first class. I didn't have to make seaman first, thank heavens, because that was probably the toughest rate in the Navy to make at that time. I went up for third class shipfitter

and made it on July 1, 1941. So I was a third class shipfitter at the time the war started.

Marcello: So then in general you think that the crew aboard that cruiser was trained about as well as it could be for anything to come?

Johnson: As well as possible.

Marcello: Was there ever any talk about economy aboard that vessel? I know that from time to time the movements of ships and the maneuvers and what have you were restricted because of a lack of funds. In other words, it cost money to buy the oil to run the ships, and it cost money to fire the ammunition and things of this nature.

Johnson: Personally, I don't remember that talk, but I know that, being raised in a depression, that that was on everybody's mind. I just know from being raised in my era that it was always in the back of my mind, and especially being from New England, because you know New Englanders are very tight (chuckle).

Marcello: How would you rate the morale aboard this cruiser?

Johnson: Very good, I thought, I really did.

Marcello: What do you think made for the good morale aboard the ship?

Johnson: I thought we had a good captain. We had a good captain, Captain Dan Callahan.

Marcello: I think we also have to keep in mind that we're talking about volunteers.

Johnson: Right, right.

Marcello: They were perhaps a little bit more motivated than draftees.

Johnson: Right. I still feel like a military man. I only served six years, and that was many years ago, but I still feel like that I had enough military training that I lean in that direction.

Marcello: And I gather that in these pre-Pearl Harbor days, you were on these maneuvers quite frequently, and you really didn't have to fight boredom at any time. Boredom, of course, can be a factor that is very detrimental to morale.

Johnson: Well, now within reason, but at the same time there were a lot of cases of guys going "Asiatic." In fact, we had a man that just dove overboard and started swimming at Pearl. He was going to swim back to the States. Of course, he got . . . if he wanted . . . if he was going after this, I don't know, but he did get . . . he went back. I don't know whether he got discharged or got psychiatric treatment or what, but that was a case . . . that was always a possibility. The longer you stayed out there, the worse it was.

Marcello: Now the closer we get to Pearl Harbor, that is, the actual Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, was there any variation in the training routine or the maneuvers that the cruiser undertook?

Johnson: I don't remember any. It seems like it was always the same. One thing that I can say, though, is that the discipline got stronger. The dress code got really obnoxious. Right before the war started it was very bad. You had to change which . . . the uniform of the day in Pearl Harbor was white shorts, skivvy shirt with your chevrons tattooed on it, stenciled on it. You had to change into the uniform of the day to go to meals and to go to the movies at night. Of course, the movies were a big thing in port.

Marcello: Why was that?

Johnson: That's one of your . . . when you didn't have a lot of money, of course, you either went into town, or you went to the recreation center to drink beer. And if you didn't go ashore, when you didn't have any money, then movies were a big thing. A big thing! Everybody gathered on the well deck every night, and you had your movies at dark.

Marcello: Incidentally, when the San Francisco was in port, where was it located? Where did you usually tie up, in other words?

Johnson: Well, there was a variety of places. We might tie up to a buoy out in the harbor. If we didn't need anything right at that time, we'd tie up out in the harbor, out beyond Ford Island, or as we were in . . . we were in repair. We were in the middle of a three-months' overhaul on December 7, about halfway through a three-month overhaul, and we were tied up right across from the dock where the big hammerhead crane was. I don't remember the number of that dock, but that's where we were. We were right in the harbor itself.

Marcello: This, I think, is a very interesting point. I would imagine that during this period when you were undergoing this overhaul, the ship was perhaps virtually defenseless or wasn't up to fighting trim.

Johnson: No ammunition, no fuel. Welding leads, cutting torch leads, and hoses going down through the hatches. Nothing bigger than a .30 caliber.

Marcello: And I would assume that during this period that watertight integrity was kept at a minimum, meaning that that ship . . .

Johnson: Everything was open. Everything was open from top to bottom.

Marcello: . . . was very liable to sinking.

Johnson: Everything was open from top to bottom.

Marcello: You brought up the subject a while ago, and I'll come back on it again. You talked very, very briefly about the social life at Pearl Harbor. I would assume that after being out all week on one of these cruises that the crews of those ships were ready to cut loose once you got into port on a Friday.

Johnson: That's a sailor's prerogative, I feel like, and also his way of life.

Marcello: Normally, what form would the liberty take if you had money on one of these weekends?

Johnson: If you had money, you went to town. You rode the bus into Honolulu right down to the YMCA, which is still there. I saw it last year. Last November I went by there and saw it. And it was just one of those typical Navy liberties which I better . . . I better leave that as is.

Marcello: Well, I think this is important to get into the record because, again, we're talking about sailors who in many cases would really be whooping it up on Saturday night. The point we need to make is: what sort of fighting condition would this person be in on a Sunday morning?

Johnson: None of them would be in good fighting condition unless they stayed aboard. Any of them that were ashore wouldn't be in good fighting condition. I can say that right now.

Marcello: Normally speaking, when your ship did come in and dock on that Friday, what sort of liberty would you have on a weekend? Would it be a port and starboard-type liberty?

Johnson: That's what it is--watch and watch, what they called watch and watch. Port and starboard. You either had the duty . . . half the crew had the duty, and half the crew . . . well, only a quarter of the crew had the duty, but half of them had to stay aboard, and the other half went ashore.

Marcello: So this means that on either a Saturday or Sunday only half the ship's complement would be aboard the ship.

Johnson: That's right. It would be the same on each weekend. In other words, if I had liberty one weekend, I didn't get it the next weekend. I got the actual duty once every four weekends.

Marcello: Generally speaking, can you estimate what the ship's complement was at that time?

Johnson: 1,000 officers and men.

Marcello: Now was it up to the full complement?

Johnson: I don't know that. I assume that it was, but I don't know that because they had started that early in '41. They had started . . . in fact, when I went aboard in November of 1940, that's when they were starting to build up the complements on those ships to wartime complements.

Marcello: At that particular time of the attack or immediately prior to the attack, what sort of antiaircraft armament did you have aboard that cruiser? Now you've mentioned some of the machine guns and so on.

Johnson: We had five-inch 38's which are dual-purpose five-inch. They can be used for surface or for . . . it all depends what kind of shell you used for antiaircraft. And the .50's and the .30's.

Marcello: The point I'm trying to make is that I'll bet there were more antiaircraft guns aboard that ship after Pearl Harbor than there were before.

Johnson: Certainly, certainly. Right after Pearl . . . as I remember, in May of 1942, we went back and put on the twenty millimeters.

Marcello: When you say you went back, did you go to Bremerton?

Johnson: We went to Mare Island.

Marcello: From what I gather, after Pearl Harbor those ships had an antiaircraft weapon on every open space on board.

Johnson: Right. We had twenty millimeters, and the forty millimeter was a tremendous gun!

Marcello: So would it be safe to say that even under the best of circumstances that there wasn't a whole lot of antiaircraft protection aboard that cruiser prior to Pearl Harbor?

- Johnson: The five-inch guns were great, but it took us awhile to get zeroed in when you're shooting at a plane. A .50 caliber will knock a plane down if you hit him. A .30 caliber will knock him down if you hit him, but it isn't like an exploding shell.
- Marcello: And these weren't to come until after Pearl Harbor.
- Johnson: That's right. Of course, the five-inch were exploding shells, and they did a good job, but like I say, you had to fire those a little bit to get on target.
- Marcello: In any of your spare time or in any of your bull sessions, did you or your buddies ever talk about the possibility of Pearl Harbor being attacked by some outside power? Not necessarily Japan, but any outside power.
- Johnson: I don't think so. I don't think so. We may have, but it just doesn't stick in my mind, and I really have a pretty good memory, I think. I just don't believe that we did.
- Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your mind?
- Johnson: Just a typical little slope-head. That's the way they looked to us. That's the way we all talked about them (chuckle). That's about all. They weren't given much credit for being much of anything.
- Marcello: Was there ever much talk or scuttlebutt about the fighting

qualities about the Japanese Navy or anything of this nature?

Johnson: We didn't overestimate them. I know that.

Marcello: This more or less, I think, brings us up to the actual days immediately prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Can you describe exactly what you were doing on the Saturday of December 6, 1941? In other words, I would like you to tell me as much as possible about your routine on that particular day.

Johnson: I don't remember one thing about that day, but I know what my general routine was in the Navy yard under an overhaul. When I had the duty, I had to stay aboard. We had a certain amount of jobs that . . . whatever the chief gave us to do. If I had the duty, then I had to be in the shop all day, available. If I had any money and had liberty and could go ashore, I'd be ashore. But December 6 means nothing to me. Absolutely nothing!

Marcello: Do you recall whether you had duty or whether you happened to be in town that day?

Johnson: Standby duty. Second section had the duty, and I was in the fourth section, so I was aboard ship. I couldn't go ashore.

Marcello: I assume that you turned in at a reasonable hour that particular night.

Johnson: I'm an early-go-to-bedder, always.

Marcello: This, I think, more or less brings us up then to Sunday, December 7, 1941. Describe as best you can your routine on that Sunday of December 7, 1941, that is, from the time you got up until all hell broke loose.

Johnson: It seems to me that reveille was at 5:30. I feel sure that it was or even if it was at 6:00 . . . I believe it was at 5:30.

Marcello: That was fairly early, was it not, on a Sunday?

Johnson: It might have been six o'clock, but it was no later than six. Anyhow, breakfast was at seven. The watch that was going on would eat breakfast, so they got in line first, and then everybody else had breakfast. We had cafeteria-style by that time because the crews were so big.

The carpenter shop was where us in the C and R department got together in the morning. We were in the carpenter shop. Many of us were in there, as many as you could get in there. That's where all these guys'd shoot the bull. Two of the fellows were always playing acey-deucey on this table saw. There was a big table saw right in the middle of the shop, and there was always two guys playing acey-deucey on the table saw. I was reading the Sunday paper. In fact, I remember right on the front page was some kind of an article about us telling the

Japs what they could do, you know, about something. We were telling them something anyhow, which to this day always amazes me--how we could be telling them.

Marcello: Where was the carpenter shop located in relation to the ship?

Johnson: It was in the after superstructure on the main deck, port side, aft of the hangar. It had a door that opened out into the hangar. One door opened out into the after . . . where the ladder was that went up and down. One ladder went down to below deck. One ladder went up in the superstructure, and one door went out on the fantail, out on main deck aft. That's located right behind the hangar, port side aft. George Strictland, who was a second class carpenter's mate, was a duty petty officer for C and R department, and he had gone to the executive officer's office to get the liberty cards.

Marcello: When you refer to C and R, what are you referring to?

Johnson: Construction and repair. Carpenter's mates and shipfitters and painters and that sort of thing. George had gone to the executive officer's office to get the liberty cards. Well, all of the sudden we could hear this commotion, this noise, but being inside, it really didn't dawn on you what was happening. Then pretty quick here comes George flying across the well deck full speed ahead, and

he said, "Those are Japs!"

Of course, several of us ran out on the fantail, right out through the door out onto the stern, main deck aft. Like I say, the first thing I saw was a Jap torpedo plane. There it was, just going right by.

Marcello: How high was it?

Johnson: Right over the water. Just like in the movie Tora, Tora, Tora! If you saw it, a torpedo plane was making a torpedo run maybe ten or fifteen feet above the water. Maybe it was higher than that, but it didn't look like that.

The Arizona was already burning. There was a lot of . . . everything was going on over there. I mean the battleships had already been hit some.

From then on it was just one mass of us trying to close up the ship because, like I say, we had no . . . the biggest thing we had was a .30 caliber rifle and no ammunition, no fuel. So we tried to close . . . my job was damage control. The after repair party was my repair party, and I was right there. I was right on the scene. The first doors I closed were the closest to me. Of course, that's what the day was--trying to keep the ship closed up and tight.

One thing I do remember. The first hatch we tried

to close right aft of the carpenter shop, we closed it right on a hot welding lead. Boy, that thing was sparking and sparks were flying on an electric welding lead! If you can imagine trying to dog down a hatch on a welding lead, that shows you how excited we were (chuckle).

Confused.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what the general reaction of the men seemed to be after it was discovered that these were, in fact, Japanese planes. Would it be panic? Perplexity? Confusion? How would you talk about the reaction?

Johnson: Frustration because you couldn't do anything. Anytime there's a crisis, if you have something to do, I think you do a much better job. When you can't do anything . . . that's the reason we closed that hatch down on that welding lead--because we didn't care. We had to do something. We finally realized that we had to get that welding lead out of there before we could close that hatch.

Marcello: I would assume that the ship did not have very much power at this time, did it, since you were in the process of being overhauled?

Johnson: From the dock. From the dock. Water and electricity were coming from the dock.

Marcello: You were not in dry dock, however, were you?

Johnson: No, no, just tied up to the dock.

Marcello: Where were you now in relation to Battleship Row?

Johnson: Clean across the slip. They were northwest of us.  
I would say that was about west northwest of us. If you've ever seen pictures of Pearl Harbor, we were tied right up in the repair area.

Marcello: In terms of distance, how far were you from Battleship Row?

Johnson: I don't know whether that's a half-mile . . . maybe a half-mile, maybe, approximately. I was there this past fall, and that's what about it looked like--about a half-mile.

Marcello: So you mentioned that when the Japanese planes did attack that your first reaction was to get inside, I assume, and to bolt down whatever doors or hatches were there.

Johnson: That was my job, and I was well-trained enough . . . regardless of how young I was, I was well-trained enough to know what I had to do. That was it--close those doors!

Marcello: What did you do from that point? Now you were back inside the carpenter's shop?

Johnson: No, we went down below to our repair station until the attack was over. See, my repair party was the after repair party which was right down below the ladder in the compartment right below.

Marcello: In other words, after you went to your battle station, you really didn't see too much more of the actual attack itself.

- Johnson: Not until they let us come up . . . until we secured from general quarters.
- Marcello: I gather that you must have been down at your battle station for well over an hour or two.
- Johnson: It seemed that way. Of course, I can't be sure.
- Marcello: What did you do during this period when you were down in your battle station? You couldn't see what was going on. You perhaps could hear what was going. What sort of thoughts were running through your mind?
- Johnson: It's just hard to say. Frustration and anger and anxiety. I was afraid a lot during the war, but I don't think at that time that I really was afraid. I don't know why. I figure I'm the least likely to be brave of anybody that I know, but right at that particular time I don't believe that I felt afraid. I was mostly frustrated and just . . . if you just had something to do.
- Marcello: Can you think of any funny things that may have happened during this period while you were below deck during the attack?
- Johnson: I don't know when this happened, but the funniest thing that happened to me all day . . . of course, I had on my dungarees doing something, climbing through a hatch or something, and I tore the seam right down the middle of the seat of my dungarees. I remember that (chuckle) I

never got to change those until that night when I got . . . it was after dark when I got to change my dungarees. I thought about that all day, and everybody . . . everytime I'd go by somebody, they'd make some wise remark about it. I think that was probably about the funniest thing because there wasn't a whole lot of humor at that date.

Marcello: Once again, what sort of armament did the ship have to fight back with?

Johnson: Just rifles. Just rifles.

Marcello: You're speaking of regular small arms? The Springfield rifles?

Johnson: Right, right. A Springfield rifle.

Marcello: You didn't even have any of the .30 or .50 caliber machine guns operating?

Johnson: No. There wasn't any ammunition aboard. None at all. No fuel and no ammunition.

Marcello: You personally had nothing to fight back with, however. Is that correct?

Johnson: Nothing. I didn't even have that potato I wanted to throw at that plane.

Marcello: Now we mentioned awhile ago that usually half the crew had liberty ashore. How about the officers? What sort of a complement of officers were aboard that ship on the weekend?

Johnson: I don't know how their liberty worked, but I assume that it might have been a little better than ours. It possibly was three-quarters ashore and one-quarter aboard. Now what the complement was aboard, I wouldn't have any idea. How many of them were ashore, I don't know. Of course, I know that all the married officers were ashore because that was pretty well standard procedure. It was the same way with married enlisted men. They would make concessions if you were married and had your family there.

Marcello: I would gather that on most occasions your skipper was usually ashore for the entire weekend.

Johnson: Most of the time. I can't say that he ever stayed aboard, but I don't really know. I assumed that he was ashore most of the time.

Marcello: You actually were at your battle station during the bulk of the attack. What happened after the attack was over? What were you assigned to do or what did you do?

Johnson: Just anything to keep the ship closed up. I remember they dropped a bomb pretty close one time. I don't even remember where the bomb landed, but I know that they thought there might be some damage down below, and they sent me way down deep in the ship to check to see whether there was any crack in the seam in the hull.

Marcello: But I gather that the San Francisco sustained virtually no damage at all.

Johnson: Oh, it didn't. None at all. No, none at all.

Marcello: Were you ever the target of the Japanese planes very much during the attack itself?

Johnson: I don't feel like we were. There were a couple that went over us, but I really feel like that we were.

Marcello: When you finally emerged up on deck after the attack was over and you were able to survey the scene spread out before you in the harbor itself, what did it look like and what were your thoughts when you saw it?

Johnson: Of course, the first scene I had and the one that I remember was the Arizona burning. I don't know whether the Oklahoma had already capsized or not, but it was one tremendous mess over there on Battleship Row! Of course, down farther towards the dry dock where the Pennsylvania and the Cassin and Downes were, all of that down in there was a mess. When I came up . . . when we came back up . . . as soon as we could come back up, it was worse. There was more smoke and more fire, and, of course, the Shaw had blown up and everything.

Marcello: Did you ever see the Shaw blowing up?

Johnson: I didn't. I just heard it. No, I wasn't looking at it. I just heard it.

Marcello: What did the water look like? I'm sure that it must have been black with oil.

Johnson: Oh, oil and anything you can imagine. Mostly oil, mostly oil.

Marcello: What did you do from this point? What was your assignment? Obviously, there was no way that you could fight back or get up steam to go out and hunt down the Japanese fleet, so what sort of assignments would the crew members of the San Francisco have in such a situation?

Johnson: Well, in our department, the C and R department, it was just the routine damage control and repairs that we could do. It was really nothing organized for the rest of that day. It was just whatever they thought that we could help with. That was a day when mass confusion reigned.

Marcello: What sort of wild rumors did you hear floating around in the aftermath of the attack? I'm sure that there were all sorts of rumors floating around.

Johnson: All of them. All of them. That they were landing on the other side of the island, and that they were coming back. Truly, after it got dark that night, I figured, "Well, that's the last sunrise. I'll never see another sunrise." I really . . . I truly believed that I wouldn't see another sunrise.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that as wild as some of the rumors were, you still believed all of them, given the atmosphere of the time?

Johnson: Right! We did believe them! We certainly did believe them! I had no doubt . . . I had no reason to doubt it.

Marcello: I also know that at one particular point during the night there were a couple of planes off the Enterprise coming in, and every gun in the harbor apparently broke loose on them. Do you remember that particular incident?

Johnson: I remember that I was down below. I was in bed at the time, but all of the noise was tremendous. If you can imagine in a closed harbor with everybody firing at once at your own planes!

Marcello: As a result of the Japanese attack, what did this do to your attitude toward Japanese in general?

Johnson: Well, of course, it made you feel like you wanted to go out and get them just regardless, whatever it took.

Marcello: Were all Japanese considered bad Japanese, even those living on the islands?

Johnson: Certainly! Well, certainly, at that particular moment. At that particular moment, you don't distinguish between the enemy at that point or what you consider the enemy.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that your attitude was one of anger as much as anything else in the aftermath of the attack?

Johnson: Oh, certainly, certainly! Yes, in fact, I think that was the biggest thing.

Marcello: As you look back on it now some thirty years later,  
how do you feel the Japanese were able to pull this off?

Johnson: I think they had it well-planned. They trained for it  
well from what I understand. They got a good break, and  
we weren't near as alert as we should have been. Of course,  
we know that's the key to the whole thing.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that Pearl Harbor was prepared  
but that it was not alert on that Sunday morning?

Johnson: It was well-prepared had we had . . . of course, I blamed  
the people in Washington because we just know that they  
didn't inform the people on the job. By that I mean  
Admiral Kimmel and General Short, who were the men to  
talk to when . . . I'm sure that they didn't have enough  
warning. They couldn't have and have things to be like  
they were.