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Place of Interview: Las Vegas, Nevada

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Karl A. Johnson
(Signature)

Date: Dec. 8, 1978

Oral History Collection

Karl Johnson

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Las Vegas, Nevada Date: December 9, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Karl Johnson for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 9, 1978, in Las Vegas, Nevada. I'm interviewing Mr. Johnson in order to get his reminiscenses and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the target battleship USS Utah during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

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

Mr. Johnson: I was born in Burlington, Iowa, on September 25, 1919. My background prior to going in the Navy was the average high school education. In 1938, I joined the Naval Reserve, 42nd Division, located at Burlington, Iowa. I was called into the service for active duty in March

of 1941.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the Naval Reserve in 1938?

Johnson: Well, for two reasons. I was a boxer, and one of my boxing friends was already in the Naval Reserve, plus the fact that I had been interested in the military. At a younger age, I had actually hoped to go to West Point rather than the Navy. Of course, the Depression cut this off for many of the young fellows. So when the opportunity came along, I took advantage of it.

Marcello: The Depression affected most people of your particular generation, did it not?

Johnson: It certainly did. It probably left an indelible impression that will last as long as we live.

Marcello: I would suppose that joining the Naval Reserve meant that you would have a little bit of extra money coming in, also.

Johnson: It did. Of course, it was very little at that time. The apprentice seaman made $21 a month, and one day's drill was 1/30 of that.

Marcello: During that period that you were in the Naval Reserve, had you been able to find employment on the outside?

Johnson: Yes. I had graduated in 1937, prior to joining the Naval Reserve, and I was working at a local factory.

Marcello: That's kind of fortunate in a way, too, because a great many of the people that I've interviewed for this project joined

the service because they couldn't find work on the outside--even as late as 1938 or 1939.

Johnson: That's very true. I was only making 25¢ an hour when I started to work.

Marcello: How hard or easy was it to get in the Naval Reserve in 1938?

Johnson: There was a waiting list of people.

Marcello: Why was that?

Johnson: I think mainly because of the monetary situation. Then, too, there was the patriotic situation. Some of the people with foresight could see that something was apt to happen in the near future.

Marcello: How closely were you personally keeping abreast of current events and world affairs at that particular time?

Johnson: As the average high school student, we read articles about it. However, it wasn't until 1940 that I really became seriously aware of what was going on over in Europe and of what we were doing with Lend-Lease and aid to Britain.

Marcello: Do you remember what your reserve pay was at that time?

Johnson: Yes. We got paid every three months, so it was 12/30 of $21. I'd have to figure out exactly what that turned out to be. It was twelve drills per quarter, so it was 12/30 of $21.

Marcello: Describe some of the training that you received here in this Naval Reserve unit prior to being activated. Did you attend

weekly drills or monthly drills, or how did it operate?

Johnson: Ours was the weekly drill. We always lined up and went through our muster. After that we had classes. Seamanship was one of them; we had an excellent instructor in seamanship. We had a small sailing vessel set on wheels, and that was part of it. Military drill was another one, and, of course, we had our practical factors. We'd have these every week, and then in the summer we took a two-week cruise up on the Great Lakes.

Marcello: When you say you took a two-week cruise up on the Great Lakes, did you go to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station there?

Johnson: No, we went directly to Navy Pier, and at Navy Pier we picked up a ship and went out into the lake. Sometime during that two weeks,we landed in a city, like Traverse City, Michigan. The rest of the time was spent out doing gunnery drill, man overboard, and all the other drills that are acquainted with the usual shipboard drilling.

Marcello: As you look back on it, was that training, either in the Reserve meetings or in the summer camp, being taken rather seriously by the people who belonged to the unit?

Johnson: I believe it was. We had a certain amount of pride in doing a good job. I know I did, and I'm sure the rest of them did. If you goofed off, they let you know about it immediately.

Also, if you missed drills, you were tossed out, and there was someone waiting to take your spot.

Marcello: I don't know how it was then, but, of course, several years ago when they had the draft, if you missed reserve meetings you were thrown out of the unit, and then you were subject to the draft.

Johnson: Right. I stayed in the Naval Reserve after I got out, and they had what was called a Category A. If you had taken a Class A School, you had to attend 90 per cent of the drills, or you could be called back in for forty-five days of active duty.

Marcello: You mentioned that it was in 1941 that the unit was called to active duty. Between 1938 and 1941, could you see a change perhaps taking place in the training that your unit underwent as the world situation was becoming more tense and more serious?

Johnson: Up until 1940, yes. In 1940, I boxed Golden Gloves, and I went up to Chicago, and I unfortunately had my nose broken (chuckle). Needless to say, I lost the fight. So I stayed up in Chicago. From early 1940 until we were called in, I was unable to attend drills; I missed that part. What went on after that, I'm not sure; but up until then there was the heightening of the activities and the awareness of what the world situation was.

Marcello: Describe what happens after you were called to active duty.

Johnson: We were called to active duty as the remnants of several divisions. Most of the divisions had been called up between September and December of 1940. Like myself, being in Chicago, and several of my friends attending college, they were not called out. The remnants of divisions from Saint Louis, Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio, Kansas City, and Burlington were put on a train, and we all gathered together in San Diego and made the nucleus. In fact, we made the entire division--the first reserve division to go through San Diego. It was called 41-A.

Marcello: What exactly happened when you got to San Diego? Did you then undergo the normal Navy boot training? I'm wondering about this because you had had some experience in the reserve unit.

Johnson: Yes, we did. I was a seaman second class, and we even had a man who had done a hitch and was a coxswain--a third class boatswain's mate--and he had to go back through. We went through the regular boot camp, just like anybody else coming in cold.

Marcello: Did this cause any bitching or griping?

Johnson: Not so much. But it made us aware of the fact that we had a jump on them and that we were lucky enough to win all four of the flags which were awarded weekly. I think it was

because of our past experience, naturally.

Marcello: How long was that boot camp? How long did it last?

Johnson: It was ten weeks.

Marcello: They had cut back on it just a little bit then, had they not?

Johnson: Right. It had dropped down either from sixteen or twelve . . . I believe it was twelve weeks prior to that.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record?

Johnson: (Chuckle) I think there's one thing because it ties in with Pearl Harbor. We had a chief named Cassidy, and he said, "Everybody in my company will be a swimmer." Unfortunately, we had about five boys who, try as they might, could not swim.

Marcello: Could you?

Johnson: Oh, yes. I was born and raised on the Mississippi River. I don't know when I started swimming, perhaps at six or seven years of age. So near the end of the training period, he took either five or six of us aside and assigned us to a man. I happened to swim for Jimmy Oberto, who was considerably taller than I was. I put Jimmy's uniform on and took his dog tags, memorized his number. I went over and said, "My name is Jimmy Oberto, serial number so-and-so," and I jumped in the water and swam. Of course, it should have been obvious to them because I swam up and back. I'd been swimming for

ages, because I wasn't a novice.

Perhaps I should finish this story about Pearl because Jimmy was aboard ship with me, and he had a broken ankle and was wearing a cast. He was literally kicked off the ship into the water, and when Jimmy hit the water, he came up and started swimming. Even though he couldn't swim, cast and all he swam. He is from Ohio, and if I'm not mistaken, I think his hometown was Toledo. He is also a member of our Pearl Harbor Survivor's group, by the way.

Marcello: What happened when you got through boot camp? Where did you go from there?

Johnson: The particular group that I was with was assigned to what was called Target Repair or Section Base at San Diego, Point Loma.

Marcello: What sort of training did you undergo there?

Johnson: While we were there, we had several types of ships. We had an old ship that we used for oceanography work; it had been a private yacht and had been donated to the Navy. We had two magnetic minesweeps. Then we had a barge and a net tender, so our duties were partially on the shore and partially aboard these ships. While we were there, I also made an advancement from seaman second to seaman first class.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing with these ships?

Johnson: We'd take them out on maybe a day or two day's patrol. Of

course, with the magnetic minesweep we would go out and make practice sweeps with the degaussing gear that we had. The normal type of drills would come along, naturally--fire, man overboard, collision, that kind of thing.

Marcello: How long did you remain there at Point Loma working with those ships?

Johnson: Until September 16th, at which time we were put aboard the battleship Utah, the target battleship Utah.

Marcello: Where was the Utah at that time?

Johnson: At that time, she was at Long Beach, so they put us aboard a minesweeper, and we helped man the minesweeper on the way from San Diego to Long Beach.

Marcello: Describe what the Utah looked like from a physical standpoint. I guess it was not a very glamorous ship, was it?

Johnson: No, she was a very old ship. She had been laid down in 1906 and commissioned in 1909 During the WWI she had been called the "Big U." By the time we got aboard her, they had taken the main batteries off and had mounted 5-inch .38's up on top of where the main batteries had been. So that was her capital armament.

She was an experimental ship. We had three or four types of British and Swedish guns aboard her. We had the British pom-poms--the four in line and the type where the four barrels form a square. We also had the 40-millimeter

Bofors guns aboard us, plus a million dollars worth of electronics gear for remote control, since she was a target ship. They were in the process of covering the decks with heavy six-by-six and six-by-twelve beams. We called them "steel doghouses" to cover the guns, with the long arm reaching out over the curved arm to cover the barrels. We got aboard the ship at about nearly midnight.

Marcello: At this time, had the railroad ties already been placed over the deck of the ship?

Johnson: Unfortunately, no. Some of it had, but we got in on the placement of the rest of the heavy beams and the steel doghouses.

Marcello: You mentioned that you went aboard the Utah at midnight?

Johnson: Yes. The OD met us, and he said, "Well, it's a little bit late to go to work now." I thought, "Boy, it's a lot late to go to work now," but we didn't miss it by too far. We put in long, long hours laying the timber down and covering the guns over before we left. In fact, we continued on our way out to Pearl to complete the job.

Marcello: What sort of timber was this that was being laid out on the deck of the Utah?

Johnson: I would imagine it was fir; it was rough hewn.

Marcello: Was this timber very similar to railroad ties?

Johnson: Yes, except most of them were twenty to thirty feet long.

It normally took four men--two on each end--with peavey hooks to carry the timber and set it in place. That was a back-breaking job, believe me.

Marcello: Did you get in on that?

Johnson: I certainly did (chuckle). Unfortunately, I got in on quite a lot of that.

Marcello: What was the purpose of putting that timber on there?

Johnson: Well, mainly to protect the deck, and some of it was built to protect gear aboard the ship, like the capstan, winches, anything that might be hit and damaged by the bombs that they dropped on us.

Marcello: This is the point I wanted you to bring out. The timber was put on there, because the Utah was also used for bombing practice and so on.

Johnson: Right. Some of the bombs they hit us with were filled with water, and they weighed fifty-six pounds. So when they hit, they gave quite a jolt. Incidentally, they were color-coded on the nose, and they left a green, yellow, red, or blue mark to designate which division or groups of planes had hit the ship.

Marcello: Were you put on the Utah for any particular reason, or was it simply the luck of the draw that you got assigned to the Utah?

Johnson: As far as I know, it was just the luck of the draw. The crew

was small; it wasn't a full-time complement, and they needed more men.

Marcello: I guess even the Utah, like all the other ships at that time, was trying to work up to a full complement, were they not?

Johnson: I believe so, because I think they did put us aboard to add to the complement and to begin to bring them up somewhere toward a wartime complement or approaching a wartime complement.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going aboard the Utah? At that time, did you know you would be going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Johnson: Yes, when we got aboard her, we knew she was going to leave because she left practically immediately after we got aboard. I liked the idea. I loved to travel, and anything new was an adventure.

Marcello: Did you have visions of a tropical paradise? Hula skirts and all that sort of thing?

Johnson: I think so, like everybody else did at that time. I think if you had asked the average person what Pearl Harbor is, they wouldn't have known; but if you asked where the Hawaiian Islands were, everybody knew where they were.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get from the "old salts" when you went aboard? After all, for the most part, I guess

they still considered you something of a "boot," did they not?

Johnson: They sure did. Not only that, being in the Naval Reserve, there was some dissension aboard the ship, and I remember the rude reception that I got. At that time, anybody that was one rating above you, you respected and stepped aside. Having come aboard the ship very late that night, the lights were off, and I unknowingly stepped into the chief's head and used it. So the next morning when I got up, I knew where that head was, so I walked in and I found out in about two seconds I was in the chief's head because they literally kicked me out of there before I could turn around.

Marcello: What were your quarters like aboard the Utah? Describe them.

Johnson: Very cramped. Being an old ship, her overhead clearance was low. Fortunately, I'm short--I'm only 5'7"--but the taller men were constantly bumping their heads. We slept in hammocks, which I liked to do.

Marcello: Describe what it was like sleeping in a hammock. That is a part of the Navy that is no longer in existence, of course.

Johnson: That's right. The biggest trick in sleeping in a hammock is to lash it up very tightly, just as tight as you can stretch it, so it doesn't sag when you get in it. Then to swing yourself up in, you'd normally grab hold of an overhead

beam or whatever happens to be up there. If there's an eye or a cleat welded to the deck, that is nice to grab hold of. We used to spread the clews apart at either end with a stick that had a "V" notch at each end. The hammock, instead of being about eight inches wide, was more like about sixteen inches wide. It gave you something to aim at.

I enjoyed it. I even got to the point where I could slide over to one side of my hammock and turn and lay on my side, which is difficult to do.

Marcello: Why did you enjoy sleeping in a hammock?

Johnson: You don't feel the motion of the ship. It is very relaxing. You sway to and fro, and you can go through a storm and never know you're in a storm if you are swinging in a hammock. I don't know, I just liked it. I thought it was great.

Marcello: Describe the rest of your quarters. What sort of space did you have for your personal gear and your seabag and things of that nature?

Johnson: On the Utah, we called what was called the hammock stowage. Every morning you had to make your hammock up, fold it in thirds, wrap it up and tie it, and secure it into a quite small space. Space was very restricted, and it was the same space that was used for messing. They would have to

pull the tables down, The tables were hung to the overhead, and they had to bring the tables down three times a day. Then after eating, you clean them up and put them back up there. You lived, you ate, and you slept in the same compartments.

Marcello: Did you have small lockers for your toilet articles and personal gear?

Johnson: Yes, we had a little aluminum locker--let's see if I can describe it--perhaps fourteen inches wide, maybe sixteen to eighteen inches deep, and no more than two feet high. It was very limited space. If you were a petty officer, which I was not, they had a little better living. Some of them also had hammocks . . . or rather than hammocks they had the old-type Army cot, and they used those for sleeping. For us, space was very small.

Marcello: What was the chow like aboard the Utah?

Johnson: I guess I'd have to say average. After boot camp, we went to Point Loma, and we were all pleasantly surprised by the way chow was served at Point Loma. First of all, it was a very small complement of men. There were seventy-five men there when we came in, and they put fifty of us in and brought it up to 125, and we ate very well. When I got back on the Utah, the chow was average for a ship of that type. It was wholesome, and it was well-cooked, but it wasn't

anything to brag about.

Marcello: Did you get mess cooking duty when you went aboard the Utah?

Johnson: Oh, yes. I sure did.

Marcello: Describe mess cooking.

Johnson: Mess cooking at that time was done with a series of cans called tureens. They are a round cylinder with a lid that clamps on. You stack them up, and you had a clamp affair that clamped them together and had a handle on top. When you had mess cooking, you had generally two or three tables to serve. I think I had two, if I remember right. So you'd run up to the mess hall and get the chow and get back as quickly as you could, because the better you fed the men, the better tip you got when payday came around. The way they set the men, the first class petty officer sat at the end of the table, and then second class petty officers, then third class petty officers, and non-rated men sat down at the far end. So the first time you brought the chow in, the poor men at the end of the table didn't get any, or very little. So you'd make a quick trip back up for seconds, so you could feed the men at the far end of the table. This, once again, meant they were going to tip you a little bit when payday came around.

Marcello: How long did mess cooking last?

Johnson: I only had it for two weeks. Normally, it lasts for three months. They were short of qualified men, and I went into the Second Division; and they found out that I was capable of handling the helm on the ship, so I became a helmsman aboard the ship very quickly.

Marcello: You've kind of gotten into my next question, because I was going to ask you where you were assigned. You mentioned you were assigned to the Second Division as a helmsman. What sort of duties were involved in being a helmsman aboard the Utah?

Johnson: A helmsman stands a four-hour watch, and he generally breaks that down into about two hours of actually handling the wheel himself and about two hours of breaking in a new man who is called the lee helmsman, and watching him and teaching him the complexities of handling the ship. It is quite a job to handle the ship and keep it on course.

Marcello: Where did you learn to become a helmsman? At Point Loma? Or was this a result of your reserve training?

Johnson: This was a result of my reserve training, because I had done the same thing aboard several ships out on the Great Lakes . . . Lake Michigan.

Marcello: Was this the only function that you had aboard the Utah?

Johnson: Oh, no. We had cleaning stations. The old Utah had about fifty bilge compartments flooded with water. From what I heard, someone put a chipping hammer through the bottom

of the ship--it was so old--but I'm not sure that was true. Anyway, they had about fifty compartments that had flooded, and our job was to go down and drain these compartments out. This meant that we were down in a space that you couldn't stand up in, and you had to crawl in. When you sat down, your head just cleared the steel deck above you, and most of the water had been pumped out, and what remained had to be soaked up with rags and wrung into buckets. Then these buckets were passed out to dry the bilges up so that they could wipe them down and put new red lead in. It turned our bodies red; we looked like Indians when we came out. In fact, it was such a mess that the only thing we wore down there were a piece of rag tied around our head like a turban and another piece of rag around our waists like a loincloth. It was more like a baby diaper. When we'd come out of there, we would have to scrub up.

Marcello: I guess about this time you were wondering why you had joined the Navy.

Johnson: (Chuckle) I know one thing. I was wondering why I was one of the men that had been picked to go down and help dry those bilges out. You didn't question that. We had a first class boatswain's mate named Mikeloski and Bill Bruenner, who was a coxswain. I know Bruenner was from Tennessee because he'd look at myself and a couple of my friends, and I can

remember him saying, "Green, Hartnick, Johnson, come 'heah!'" Believe me, when he says, "Come 'heah,'" we went "theah"; we didn't hesitate (chuckle). Maybe because he figured we were reserves, he'd give us a good break-in into the Navy, and he did.

Marcello: So in essence, then, you were also a member of the deck force. Is that correct?

Johnson: Oh, yes. The First, Second, Third and Fourth Divisions are always deck force, so I was part of the deck at that time.

Marcello: The Utah moves out to Pearl Harbor Describe the type of training that the Utah underwent after it moved out to Pearl Harbor. Why don't you describe a typical training exercise. In other words, when would the Utah go out; how long would it stay out; what would it do when it went out?

Johnson: Normally, the Utah, after she arrived at Pearl, would go out on a Monday morning early. We would run a triangular course out there, running slow. Most of the time, we were only running around four or four-and-a-half knots. This would last until Friday, and unfortunately we always came back in Friday evening around chow time.

That meant that my job was tying up, also. I was on what was called the after breast line, and that was a

ten-inch line, a big, heavy line. You had to wear whites. We had cut our whites off, and everybody had a set of white shorts; we didn't wear the long white pants. You'd get dirty, and by the time you got the lines doubled up--and believe me, you couldn't leave there until the lines were singled up and doubled up--it was too late to eat chow, and mail was being passed out. You would normally pass that, so the only thing to do was quickly go down and take a shower and scrub your clothes in a bucket at the same time, which is the way we washed our clothes then.

Marcello: In other words, everybody was assigned a bucket in which to wash his clothing?

Johnson: No, there were buckets around, and you'd just grab an empty one. You'd run cold water in it, and then set it under a steam pipe. The Utah did not have hot water. The only way we got our showers hot . . . there was a mixer valve, and you'd cut in. One handle was cold water, and the other was steam. So whenever you filled a bucket up with cold water, you'd have to holler, "Watch the shower," because when you turned on the cold water, those showers became hotter than blazes. Then when you got ready to cut the steam in your buckets to warm the water up, you'd have to holler, "Watch the showers," because they'd turn icy cold all of a sudden. What we'd normally do is just take our bucket into the

shower with us and scrub our clothes and take a shower at the same time. Then we'd come out and wring them out and hang them up with the little clews that they used at that time. You'd tie your clothes up on a line.

Marcello: This routine worked like clockwork. In other words, you could be pretty certain that the Utah would go out on a Monday, stay for five days, and come back on a Friday?

Johnson: Yes, you could probably almost set your clock by it.

Marcello: In other words, if anybody ashore had been checking on the movement of the Utah during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, that person would know when the ship was going out and when it was coming back in. It wouldn't be hard to figure out.

Johnson: It would not have been hard to figure out. They could have plotted a chart--out on Monday, back in Friday evening; out early Monday, back in Friday evening again.

Marcello: What did you normally do when you went out on these training exercises?

Johnson: Aside from our regular cleaning stations, we would get ready for bombing runs. The Utah at that time was a target for the planes coming in, for their bombing. We had two types of bombs they used to drop on us--the water bombs, which I described, and a little five-pound bomb that had a hole through the center of it and a shotgun shell mounted in it,

so when it hit it would throw up black smoke, and the pilot could see they'd made a hit, Then we also were the target of torpedo runs from PT boats and submarines. They used us for a little target practice. So what we would do is prepare everything up topside, dog it down, and go down on the second deck. The ship was conned by remote control from the second deck. Then we'd kick up the speed. At that time, we weren't running at four-and-a-half knots. We were running at top speed for the old "baby," which was maybe eighteen knots. At eighteen knots you couldn't stand on the deck. She would probably get up to fifteen knots; I would "guesstimate" it was fifteen knots.

Marcello: Is it rather disconcerting to be down on the second deck at first while these mock air attacks are going on above?

Johnson: No, it was a rest period for us because we couldn't work at our usual stations, so really it was a chance to catch up on things--if you had a button off your shirt or had studying to do for exams in ratings. Unfortunately, about half that time I was back down still trying to dry out those bilges (chuckle), so that went on no matter what we were doing.

Marcello: Could you receive somewhat of a jolt when those water bombs or the other bombs hit the Utah?

Johnson: The small bombs made no notice, but you could feel a fifty-six-pound bomb. When it hit,you could actually feel it. They would

sometimes hit the superstructure. There was no way we could protect the foremast or mainmast. If one of them came down and hit a glancing blow on that, it not only meant that you could feel it; but you could see the damage done, and we'd have to try to repair the damage done to the superstructure.

Marcello: Awhile ago you also mentioned that the Utah had aboard the British pom-poms and the Swedish Bofors. Were these simply aboard for testing purposes in order to determine whether or not those weapons should be adopted by the rest of the Navy?

Johnson: Yes, I think they were used for tests and evaluation. I also failed to mention we had the old gun that was called the 1.1 aboard. That was a brand-new weapon. It, once again, was four barrels across, like the four fingers of your hand. They were testing that, and they found out that the more the elevated the guns, the less number of barrels that fired. You'd start out with one, and by the time you'd elevated the gun, as if a plane were coming overhead, you'd have one barrel firing.

Marcello: I guess basically most of the ships at that time had nothing but their .50-caliber machine guns for antiaircraft protection, didn't they?

Johnson: Well, they had the old 3-inch guns on some ships, and they had either the 5-inch .38 or the 5-inch .25. The 5-inch .38 was a good gun. I didn't think too much of the 5-inch .25; it was a shorter barrel, and, of course, its range was cut down. Other than that, the .50's and even .30-caliber guns were mounted aboard.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, could you in your lowly station recognize any change in the ship's routine or in your training routine?

Johnson: In the ship's routine, no. But in the attitude of the men, we not only sensed it, we talked about it. At that time, I was only a seaman; I wasn't a rated man. But we would overtly talk about it. Of course, we had the misconception that they all wore glasses, and they couldn't hit a bull with a shovel. I'm sure this was done aboard many ships, but we said, "Let's get it over with. We can lick them in six months." This was openly talked about, believe me.

Marcello: So in other words, you did in your bull sessions talk about the possibility of war with Japan.

Johnson: Oh, absolutely.

Marcello: But did you in your bull sessions ever think that it would occur at Pearl Harbor?

Johnson: No. The only indication of something like that was the last

week we were out. I don't know whether it is on the books, but we spotted a submarine,

Marcello: Describe this incident.

Johnson: We normally had one lookout watch, and we had a port and starboard lookout. They stood their normal watches. A submarine was spotted and reported. By whom I have no idea. So they doubled the watches up.

Marcello: When was the submarine discovered, Do you know? What time of the day or night?

Johnson: No, I have no idea. It was day sighting, because I think the submarine was actually spotted on the surface. The Utah at that time doubled up their lookout watches, because I suddenly found myself with extra duties. You would stand a lookout watch with another man, and they had us using binoculars. The constant use of binoculars is hard on your eyes, so we had fifteen minutes on, fifteen minutes off, fifteen on and fifteen off for a four-hour watch. I stood several of those. I don't know how many, but it was more than two and probably less than ten, in addition to my other duties of cleaning station, plus the helmsman watches.

Marcello: Did you seem to be having more general quarters drills than you had perhaps in the past?

Johnson: No, I am not aware of the fact that they doubled up any more on general drills, at least not enough that I was aware of

them. They may have . . . there may have been a few more.

Marcello: Would you sail under blacked-out conditions at night?

Johnson: No, because I used to like to stand the helmsman watch at night.

Marcello: Why was that?

Johnson: The ship was darkened, but the fluorescence in the water . . . I used to try to play a game with myself. I would try to hold the ship within half a degree of her course, port and starboard. The ship moved so slowly that you were able to anticipate, and if the ship was due to drift at port, you would give it a little starboard rudder. Of course, you know, a compass ticks every fifteen minutes. In order to cover one degree, it takes fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, forty-five minutes, to the next degree. You can hear that tick. We'd watch the fluorescence come out from the side of the ship; you could see it even when you were standing a watch. If you happened to be standing lookout watch, then you could really see it because you were out on the deck on lookout watch, and you could see the wake behind you. Other than that, we went through no extraordinary blackout conditions.

Marcello: Did you seem to be participating in more of these bombing exercises, or was it business as usual there, too?

Johnson: That seemed to be business as usual. The thing that I did

notice is the fact that there were a few more ships coming out to Pearl. A group of submarines were painted various colors--camouflage colors--so that they wouldn't be spotted, I would imagine, from the air.

Marcello: This is probably an unfair question, but I'll ask it, anyway. Do you know whether or not that submarine sighting was reported when the Utah came back into Pearl?

Johnson: I have no idea. I only know that we doubled up our watches on the Utah. Unfortunately, the Utah made a rather unsightly entrance into the harbor; she didn't look very nice. Where she had been called the "Big U" during WWI, I think the tendency was to call it the "P-ew" at that time prior to the start of WWII (chuckle). She didn't look like the normal battleship, cruiser or destroyer coming in, let's face it.

Marcello: When the Utah came in, what was your liberty routine like?

Johnson: First of all, I was making $36 a month, so it was normally something that wouldn't cost too much money. We would go out toward Waikiki Beach, or perhaps we'd go roller skating. A couple of us liked football and had played football in high school. Consequently, we would go out and watch the high school games--the usual weekend football games that they had. The rivalry was good between the high schools out there. Every once in awhile, we'd go out and have a drink. At

that time, when we left the States on the way out, I had my twenty-second birthday. I was twenty-two and allowed to drink, but you don't do much drinking on $36 a month.

Marcello: Did you walk around down on Canal Street and Hotel Street and that area?

Johnson: Oh, yes, we were down at Canal and Hotel like everybody else and probably participated now and then, too, when our money allowed us to.

Marcello: I guess that in those weeks immediately prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, downtown Honolulu was just wall-to-wall bodies on a weekend, with servicemen down there.

Johnson: It certainly was. The lower end, down on some of the streets that you mentioned, were definitely crowded. Waikiki was a popular spot for the sailors to go, because you could put your clothes in a locker and go swimming for little or nothing. I guess roller skating was popular. Then there were penny arcades around where you could go up and shoot a bullet at balloons that were pinned up to a target. We did the type of thing that if you didn't have much money, you were forced to do.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work aboard the Utah? In other words, when you came in what sort of liberty could you expect to receive?

Johnson: We had port and starboard. That meant that normally on

Friday nights there was no chance of getting off for the unrated men. I imagine some of the rated men who lived on the shore or had somewhere to go did get off. On Saturday or Sunday, one of the two, you would get a day's liberty.

Marcello: Did you have the midnight curfew aboard the Utah? I know a lot of ships had a midnight curfew.

Johnson: We had to be back by 2300. The rated men had to be back at 2400. Yes, we had to be back by eleven o'clock p.m.

Marcello: When people would come back off liberty on a Saturday night, for example, would there be very many drunks that would be coming back aboard and this sort of thing?

Johnson: I think so. I think in a port like that, unless you have friends who live on the beach, or have a girlfriend, there was quite a lot of drinking going on. There were a goodly number of people who would come back either half "gassed" or perhaps had a hell of a lot more to drink than they should have had. Let's face it, they were typical of any other Navy ship.

Marcello: Do you think that this would necessarily impair their fighting ability on a Sunday morning then?

Johnson: Let's see . . . our bugler came back drunk on Saturday night, and he sure blew "abandon ship" the next morning, I know that (chuckle). I think by-and-large, they figured that if you're going to go out and party, you still had to be a

sailor the next day. That was the attitude of the average regular who had a goodly amount of time in. When you're ashore, you're one thing; when you're on the ship, you're a sailor. I don't really think so. I think it would be a rare occasion where it would impair a man's fighting ability, unless he has a bad hangover and was firing one of the guns. Then it might.

Marcello: Generally speaking, was the Utah a fairly happy ship during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? Was the morale pretty good aboard her?

Johnson: Yes, I believe it was. There was a lot of griping about the chow, and when they gripe about chow, that means you're pretty well satisfied. Liberty was about average with any other ship, because we knew that when we came in, we were going to get liberty. The workload was perhaps normal. If anything, I think the griping was more about the fact that it took so long for the liberty boats to take off from the far side of Ford Island and come on around and go past Battleship Row and get up to Merry's Point. There were lots of guys that were eager, and they wished they could have jumped ashore, but, of course, they couldn't.

Marcello: This brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, so let us go into that weekend in as much detail as you can remember. Did the Utah come in, as usual, on a Friday?

Johnson: Yes, she came in as usual. I wound up with the 2400 watch, so I didn't get off Friday. Everything was normal with one exception. That exception was the story that the carrier Enterprise was due to come in at 0700 on Sunday morning, and we were going to move, and she was going to take over our berthing, which was Fox Eleven. Are you acquainted with the way they were numbered over there and how they were tied up to these huge concrete blocks with blocks with cleats on them?

Marcello: I am vaguely familiar, but go ahead and describe the procedure.

Johnson: Rather than a pier, you had a huge square concrete block set out in the water at the forward and after end of the ships. This is what you tied up to, and they were called quays. We were at Fox Eleven, and Fox Eleven on the other side of the island was the normal tying-up spot for the carriers. We had been doing that since we came out in September.

Marcello: In other words, you did tie up, then, over there where the carriers normally would tie up?

Johnson: Yes, and we were going to leave and go to a different spot on Sunday morning. That was the only difference in the routine.

Marcello: Did you have liberty on Saturday?

Johnson: Yes, I went over on Saturday.

Marcello: Describe what you did on liberty that Saturday evening.

Johnson: I think the thing that was the most coincidental about it is that I took Christmas cards over. I went Christmas shopping out at Ala Moana, at Sears. All the coconut trees were decorated with little monkeys dressed up in red outfits with little bags on their shoulders, and Santa Claus outfits. Up in the palm trees, you could see the little red monkeys dressed like Santa's helpers. I bought a couple of gifts; I mailed them home. I also mailed Christmas cards home. Coincidentally, the postmark on those Christmas cards is eleven o'clock a.m., December 7th, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1941. I have one at home postmarked on the actual day of the attack. In the bottom of the YMCA, down in the basement, there was a little annex for the post office. That's where I mailed the cards. I have a hunch they just had turned the date over on the stamp, and they probably stamped them that evening. I don't think they stamped them at eleven o'clock on December 7th. I think they were too busy doing other things.

Marcello: What did you do the rest of the day while you were on liberty?

Johnson: Well, we went across the street to a place called the Black Cat.

Marcello: The Black Cat Cafe?

Johnson: Everybody knew about the Black Cat. It entered in because any sailor that was out there at one time or another sat in the Black Cat and had a few drinks.

Marcello: What was the attraction of the Black Cat?

Johnson: Gee, I don't know. Some of the women that were in there, I think. I think it was that more than anything else. I had a buddy, J.R. Jones, from Saint Louis, and he always went over. He happened to know one of the high school girls whose family lived out there, which was another reason why we'd watch the football games. But we didn't go to a football game that Saturday. I think we hung around in town most of the day and into the evening.

Marcello: You said that you did end up down at the Black Cat Cafe?

Johnson: Oh, yes. That wasn't the first time. We were there at the Black Cat that evening, too.

Marcello: What did you do at the Black Cat that evening?

Johnson: A group of us, probably four or five, sat around the table. "Jigger" Jones was very young-looking, youthful. One of the girls was attracted to him, so she came over. I know she was older than he was. She was trying to make a pitch for J.R., so he sat there and bought her a drink and just generally shot the bull.

One more thing, that's right. The Worden had come in the week before. We had friends and relatives aboard--I had a cousin--so we had gone over to see them. A couple of fellows off the Worden came over and sat with us and had a drink.

Marcello: What time did you get back aboard the Utah that night?

Johnson: It wasn't exceptionally late. I would imagine we were back

aboard by ten o'clock that night, about 2200.

Marcello: How long would it take you to get back aboard the Utah under normal conditions after you were on liberty?

Johnson: You'd have to take one of the taxis out to the base and then walk over to Merry's Point. I think that late in the evening the boats only ran once an hour. We tried to time it, so we'd get back and not have to stand there on the pier and wait and wait for the liberty boat. Then the liberty boat would take us ten to fifteen minutes to circle around and get back over and get back aboard ship.

Marcello: In other words, if you had an eleven o'clock curfew, you would have to leave somewhere around ten o'clock or 10:15 in order to get back aboard the Utah at the proper time?

Johnson: At least. Maybe even at 9:30 to try to catch the 2200 boat because they left on the hour, from what I recall.

Marcello: So how long did you remain at the Black Cat altogether, then?

Johnson: An hour-and-a-half or two hours. We were sitting around like you and I are now, just generally shooting the breeze and talking about different things. Christmas was approaching, and some of us had already received Christmas gifts, and we were talking about them.

Marcello: Was the Black Cat pretty crowded that night?

Johnson: Yes. It was always crowded.

Marcello: About how big a place was it? In other words, if you had to

estimate how many people it could hold, what would you say?

Johnson: The bar along the left-hand side was perhaps thirty or forty feet long. I wouldn't be surprised if there were thirty or forty tables out in the middle and then some booths. So probably most times it had well over a hundred, and at times it was probably close to 200 people in there, I'd have to guess.

Marcello: Would there be lines outside waiting to get in?

Johnson: No, you could normally get in. If there were, they'd crowd in. Where the crowding many times was,was right at the bar. A lot of fellows stood at the bar and drank, and that would get crowded.

Marcello: If you were only there for a hour-and-a-half, then you couldn't have had too much to drink when you went back aboard the Utah?

Johnson: No. In fact, I was an ex-boxer, and I drank very little at that time--very, very little.

Marcello: Did you see anything out of the ordinary happening while you were downtown that evening, and before you went back aboard the Utah?

Johnson: No. The thing that impressed me the most was that Saturday when we went in, all the battleships were drying their flags out. It was called "airing their bunting." It was a beautiful sight, believe me. All the signal flags with their many colors were strung up airing, and I remember thinking what a beautiful

sight that was. If you've never seen it when a bunch of ships, a large group of ships, are all flying their flags at once, you'd have to see it to believe it. It is quite an impressive sight.

Marcello: Why is it that that stands out in your mind so? Is it because of the contrast that one were to see the next day?

Johnson: Exactly! The contrast was so vivid!

Marcello: I guess those battleships were rather magnificent-looking when they were all in port like that.

Johnson: They are. They are ponderous. They are so wide and low-slung. Their freeboard is not as long like a passenger ship or a merchant ship. They look like big sumo wrestlers, is a good example.

Marcello: And I assume that downtown Honolulu was just as crowded as it had always been.

Johnson: Yes, very active because of the Christmas shopping and everybody being out in the Christmas mood. It was quite jovial that Saturday.

Marcello: Was it unusual for all the battleships to be in like that on a weekend?

Johnson: As far as I knew, I thought there was a directive out. I do not know, but I thought there was a directive out that no more than two of the capital ships were supposed to be in port at a time. I have no proof of that; it is merely a

story that had floated around.

Marcello: The fact that all the battleships were in would have certainly made downtown Honolulu more crowded, too.

Johnson: Oh, sure. For everybody that rated liberty, you weren't going to stay aboard ship if you had any money or had anything to do, even if you had to go out and lay in a park under a tree.

Marcello: I guess, in the case of battleships, they normally stayed out two weeks on their training exercises, didn't they?

Johnson: Yes, some of them would probably stay out two or three weeks. Of course, the Pennsylvania was in dry dock; she had her screws off.

Marcello: But it was unusual for all the battleships to be in on a weekend?

Johnson: I think it was.

Marcello: So you go back aboard ship. Was there anything eventful happening back there?

Johnson: No, I think it was business as usual there. I was tired, and I put my hammock up and went to bed, and that was it until Sunday morning.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into Sunday morning. Once again, let's go into as much detail as you can remember. Sunday was normally a day of leisure unless you had a specific duty to perform, wasn't it?

Johnson: Yes, it was. I had no duties that morning. After getting up and having breakfast, I went up topside, and it was a typical day for that time of the year.

Marcello: When was breakfast served on Sundays?

Johnson: I generally tried to get there around 0700 in the morning. It was a little later; they allowed you a half an hour extra. I had my chow around seven o'clock . . . I think I was through by about seven o'clock, because I walked up topside and the sun was shining. At that time of the year, it rains off and on--little drizzles that don't do anything more than cool you off. Other than that, it was a beautiful sunny day. I went back down . . . and my locker was on the second deck on the starboard side, which was in the inboard side of the ship, the side toward Ford Island.

Someone, either myself or one of my friends, had purchased a Sunday paper. I was tilted back in a folding metal chair against my locker, or against a locker--I wasn't right at my locker--reading the Sunday paper. J.R. Jones had taken his blanket and folded it in half and had laid it down on the deck and was in against the inboard bunkhead writing a letter to his family. I noticed an article in the paper, and this is once again a coincidence, I suppose. I can remember the article so well. It said, "Two old American battleships, the USS Wyoming and the USS Utah, spent fifteen months in the North Irish waters

during World War I and never fired a shot at the enemy." It is also not a very enviable fact that we also never fired a shot in World War II, probably the only ship to be in two world wars and never fire a shot in either one of them (chuckle).

Marcello: At the time that you were reading the newspaper, was the ship beginning to stir? Were there people up and around?

Johnson: Yes, there were people out. However, where we were it was quite isolated. "Jigger" was laying on the deck writing a letter and myself tilted back against the locker reading a Sunday newspaper.

Marcello: Pick up the story from that point.

Johnson: I don't know how long I'd been sitting there reading. Jones said, "Hey, something happened up forward!" He felt the ship shake. I don't know if anybody else off the Utah told you that we brought back over 50,000 rounds of 5-inch ammunition for the destroyers and for our 5-inch guns. It wasn't stored in the barbettes. A lot of it was stored in empty storerooms. The hatches up forward were heavy armored hatches on the weather deck. The first thing that I thought about was that someone had allowed a deckcast to drop down, and they're heavy. He felt the shake of the ship. So when he said, "Hey, something happened up forward!" I said, "You're crazy! I didn't feel anything!" And I didn't.

Marcello: Was this the first torpedo that slammed into the hull?

Johnson: No. I think we got hit with what they said was about a 500-pound bomb. I don't recall whether I tilted my chair down on all four legs or whether I was still in that position when the first torpedo hit.

Marcello: Describe that incident.

Johnson: I didn't know what it was. All of a sudden, the port side of the ship raised up. The whole ship shook, and everything that seemed to be loose within the ship . . . like if you were in the kitchen, knocked pots and pans down. There were internal noises like crazy. No explosion. I didn't hear the torpedo go off. The ship came up on the port side, shook, settled back down, and slowly started to tilt. I expected to feel it rock; I didn't know what it was. Just about that time, a voice hollered down, "Japanese air raid! Honest to God!" That was the first indication I had. Having been stationed at Point Loma where they made the B-24 Liberator bombers, I thought a heavy bomber had come over and had dropped the bomb, and it hit close to us. Of course, we'd seen the movies of the war over in Europe. I saw the huge splash of water coming up from a near miss, and I thought we had a near miss. I stood up, and we got hit again.

Marcello: In the meantime, general quarters has not sounded or anything?

Johnson: No, we heard absolutely nothing.

Marcello: This voice that you heard, was this over the P.A. system, or

was this somebody hollering in?

Johnson: No, someone hollered down the ladder from the deck above. As I stood up, the second torpedo hit us, and once again I didn't hear any noise. It knocked me off my feet, and I landed on the side of my jaw. I didn't know at the time, but I had busted sixteen teeth off. I just chipped sixteen teeth.

Marcello: What did you hit your jaw against?

Johnson: On the deck. I did sort of a flip over the handrailing because I was right by the ladder. It flipped me so my feet were in the air, and I hit. It is a wonder it didn't knock me cold. Maybe it did stun me, I don't know.

By this time, I knew that I had to get down and shut the sea group. That was a bilge section that we'd been cleaning at sea. We hadn't secured anything. We had pulled the electrical leads out, and the windsail had kept us supplied with air; and I had put a manhole cover on and just put four bolts on, just dogged it down with four bolts. As far as watertight integrity was concerned, we were wide open, about seven decks straight up and down. I ran over to the ladder that headed down to the next deck.

Marcello: In the meantime, were you feeling any pain or anything from that jolt you had taken?

Johnson: No, nothing. I knew by then, by gosh, that we were hit.

There was no doubt about that, because after the second one we had already started to take a port list.

Marcello: Did you still have lights and so on?

Johnson: Yes, the lights were on. I can remember having plenty of light, and it couldn't have come just from the deck above down through the hatch, so we had to have lights.

I got far enough down the ladder--about half of my body was below the deck--and a voice said, "Where are you going?" I looked up . . . and I never did look up at the person. All I looked at was a pair of dungaree legs. I said, "I'm going to down shut sea group." Whoever it was said, "Don't go down there, you'll get killed!" He probably saved my life, because I stood there, and it didn't take more than a second to decide that I think he was right. I was looking down into blackness; it was black below.

I turned around and came back up, and, of course, by this time J.R. Jones was on his feet. Other people had appeared from somewhere, but don't ask me where. The ladder going up was jammed with people.

Marcello: Was everyone going up the ladder, however, in a rather orderly manner?

Johnson: Well, all but one. Surprisingly enough, I have no idea who he was other than the fact that he was a chief. What impressed me so much about this is that he was one of the engineering

rates because he always wore dungarees, which meant he was black gang, and he wore his hat in kind of a tilted-back, cocky fashion. I always thought, "Boy, if we ever get into any trouble, there's one guy you can depend on." I was wrong. I'll give credit to the other men; they just leaned as far to the left as they could get over against the hand-railing. He pushed his way right on up the ladder past the rest of the people. You can't fault a person for doing that, because you don't know what you'll do if you get in that situation.

We got into line and went on up to the next deck, walked aft; and as we passed the offices--that was the deck with the pay office, supply office, and a few others--the ship had listed enough that stuff was sliding off. Lockers were beginning to fall over, and it was a mess. We went past the pay office, and the records were starting to slide around. Anything that sat on top of a desk by this time had started to slide or had slid off and hit the deck already.

Marcello: Is the procedure taking place in an orderly manner at this stage, too?

Johnson: Yes, this was quite orderly.

Marcello: Are you running? Walking? How were you going along in this section?

Johnson: We were walking because there were enough of us that had we

run, we would have run by the one ahead of us. So we just stayed in sort of a single file, I would say. We had to go up another ladder to get up to the weather deck.

Marcello: So you were about three decks down, then?

Johnson: It is actually called a second deck, but we were down two whole decks from the weather deck. So we'd have to come up from the second deck to the first deck, and from the first deck to the weather deck. Yes, we were two decks down.

Marcello: So what happens when you get out on the weather deck?

Johnson: By the time I got out on the weather deck, the timber had not started to slide yet, but the deck was tilted enough that I ran up to the high side of the ship on my hands and feet. It was tilted enough that it was easier to put my hands down on the deck and run on all fours like a dog would do. I ran up to the high side, and by that time I could see that there wasn't anything that was going to stop her then. So I slid over the side, down to the blister of the ship, and from there I dove into the water.

Marcello: So you went off on the high side, then?

Johnson: Yes. I did not go off on the side toward Pearl City; I went off on the side toward Ford Island.

Marcello: Was this the side that most people were going off, that is, the high side, the side that you were going off on?

Johnson: Yes, from what I could see. The only people that I would imagine

had to go off on the other side were those that either had to come out of port holes or came out on that low side, and rather than face the timber . . . the timber did start coming loose at about that time.

Marcello: You would have been protected from the timber, I guess, because you went off on the high side.

Johnson: Yes. The timber at that time would not have been a factor of safety to me.

Marcello: Did you dive or jump into the water?

Johnson: Being a swimmer, I dove.

Marcello: Were you fully clothed?

Johnson: I was wearing white shorts and a skivvy shirt and a pair of regulation socks, and the shoes at that time were the high-type, not the low-type. I had them tied at my instep, so they weren't tied to the top. They actually acted like a sea anchor on my feet (chuckle).

Marcello: So what happens when you hit the water?

Johnson: I came up and I saw the motor whaleboat tied up to the after quay, and I swam over to the after quay. I reached up for the capping of the motor whaleboat, the gunwale, and I caught it with my right hand, and it slipped off, and I slipped back under water again. I kicked up again, and I caught it the second time, and I slipped under again. I can remember thinking, "Karl, are you going to swim over here and then

drown, because you can't get up in that whaleboat?" I guess I must have acted like a porpoise; I kicked my feet a little faster. I'm sure when I grabbed hold of the capping that time I left fingerprints (chuckle).

That time I locked on to it. I swung my body up, and I looked up on to the quay, and the lines had not parted yet. They were stretched very taut, but they hadn't parted. Some of the people were coming across hand-over-hand on the lines, so there were people already up on the quays. I hollered, "Is there an engineer up there?" or words to that effect. Anyway, I hollered for someone to handle the motor whaleboat with me.

A fellow--his name is Gus Horne--came down into the motor whaleboat, started the motor up. I had done coxswain duty, but, believe it or not, I could not remember where the tiller was stored. When you bring a whaleboat in, you slip the tiller over along the port side. I couldn't see it, so I grabbed the jackstaff, and I stuck the jackstaff in where the tiller should be, and he backed us down.

Bodies were in the water at that time, and one of the first ones I saw was a good friend of mine named Donald Green,who was from my hometown. He was wearing his baseball uniform, and he had a lifejacket on. We pulled him in, and he helped me pull people in then.

Marcello: By this time, were people already covered with oil?

Johnson: Not on our side. The oil had mostly floated out on the port side, because when the torpedo hit, it ruptured one of the wing tanks on the Utah on the port side. The fellows that we picked up were pretty well clean of oil. I picked up, I think, about half a boatload, and I picked up an officer, whose name was Commander Isquith. He later became an admiral, I found out.

As soon as I picked him up, he said, "Take me into the beach!" When an officer gives you an order, you react. I took the whaleboat and headed it into Ford Island, and as soon as we could touch, why, the fellows that were in the boat off-loaded.

We backed around, went back out. We picked up a second boatload, and one of the fellows we picked up was another friend of mine who'd gone through boot camp, and his name was G.W. Greene.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you coming under any strafing or anything of that nature?

Johnson: Yes, but I didn't know it. You are not aware of this. You see the things going on, but you think they are aimed at someplace else. Yes, they had strafed us, I guess. They tell me later that they made a pass at us.

We picked up a second boatload, and I think that sometime

during the first boatload, I saw the first American gun fire. It was from the Tangier. The old Tangier was a seaplane tender, and up on her bow she had an old one-pounder. It was more like a signal gun, I would say, but it was the first gun I saw fire at the enemy. I told the fellows on the Tangier about this.

So we picked up the second boatload and took them back in, off-loaded, turned around, and started toward the Utah. By this time she was way over, and there were men walking down the side, and you could see she was due to capsize. She was going on over.

Marcello: Could you see the timbers falling off?

Johnson: It was floating by this time.

Marcello: I see. So the water was full of this floating timber.

Johnson: Yes, but not directly where we were. It was up toward the Tangier and the Raleigh--at either end of the Utah. Of course, it couldn't be right in the middle, because the ship itself blocked it. I didn't know how deep the water was there, and I didn't know whether she'd plunge and there would be a suction or what. I hollered at Gus, "Back her down!"

We kicked the engine astern, and we stopped. The Utah very slowly completed her turn, and as it did a group of men walked slowly down the side of the ship toward us. When it stopped, I moved the whaleboat in, and they stepped in the

whaleboat without even getting wet. When I did that, while we were waiting, the stern of the whaleboat swung around, and the rudder flipped out. They have what they call the pintles and the gudgeons on a rudder, and when they line up, they can lift out. I couldn't get it back in, so Don Greene, having a lifejacket on, slipped into the water, slipped around to the stern, and grabbed the rudder and was trying to fit it in.

He saved my life. He caught me. I leaned forward, and when I did, they machine-gunned past where I had been sitting. They missed me, and they hit so close in the water that he said he swore he could feel the slugs hammering into the water as they passed his body. I didn't know that either until he told me about it later. He probably saved my life right then.

We got the rudder back in and took these people in, and we could see no more people. We left them off, and we said, "Okay, let's try to get out on the outboard side." I didn't know that there were boats out there, and we didn't know what was on the outboard side.

Marcello: Everything was blocked, so far as you were concerned, because of the Utah having turned over.

Johnson: Yes, because of the hull of the Utah. We tried to go between her and the Raleigh, and I think at that time the Raleigh

was starting to sink. She'd been hit badly. We couldn't get over between her and the Raleigh because of the timbers floating. So we went to the after end, and we tried to get between the Utah and the Tangier, and once again we couldn't get through, so we said, "Let's try to ram through them." All our bow did was slide up on to the timber and stopped us, and we'd slide back off. We decided it was useless, and we brought the boat back in for the last time into Ford Island.

I don't know what happened to Gus Horne; I don't know where he went. I jumped out of the boat, and there was a pile of dirt about six feet high probably, and it must have been three blocks long. With that much dirt, there must have been a hole or a ditch or something, but that didn't dawn on me. I ran over to the pile of dirt, and I got down on my hands and knees, and I was going to dig a foxhole. I was like a dog trying to rout an animal out of the ground. I started digging a hole, or at least a spot to get into. I turned around to look, and Don Greene was tying the whaleboat up. I thought, "What a stupid thing to do! What does he care about the whaleboat at a time like this!" From force of habit, he was securing it before he left it. Then he ran over alongside of me, and we were like two dogs side-by-side trying to dig a hole to get into. We would

have probably been there for the next half-hour if a bomb hadn't hit near us.

Marcello: Did this bomb hit over on Ford Island itself?

Johnson: Oh, yes. It hit about sixty or seventy feet from where we were digging the hole. Fortunately, it had hung up, and it came down . . . it made a funny noise coming down, much as if you'd put a playing card into a fan. We heard it and looked up, and it was coming down upside down with the nose up and the tail down. That's the way it hit into the ground.

Marcello: When the bomb hit, was the pile of dirt between you and the bomb?

Johnson: No, it was on our side of the pile of dirt and right down from where we were. We were in direct line with it with nothing between us but empty space. I thought, "Delayed action bomb!" When that thing hit and stuck there in the ground, which is what it did--it stuck on its tail and buried itself part way--I started running away from it and up the side of the hill--up the other side of this pile of dirt--with Don Greene behind me. We got up to the top, and we suddenly saw the ditch, and here were the members of the Utah down in the ditch.

Then we did a dumb thing. I jumped and it is a wonder I didn't break both legs. I actually jumped from the top of the pile of dirt into that ditch.

Marcello: How far a jump was it?

Johnson: Probably about twelve feet or so, because the hole was deeper than I am tall, and the pile of dirt was higher than I am tall. I probably went from six feet above the ground to six feet underground in one jump.

Marcello: That drainage ditch or the pipeline ditch or whatever it was must have saved thousands of people because that's where everybody who went from one of the ships to Ford Island ended up--in that ditch.

Johnson: The entire ditch was loaded with people. (Chuckle) You look back, and you say, "How stupid can I be? With all that dirt, there must be a ditch!" We wound up in the ditch, and then it started to rain--one of the tropical rains that they have. It didn't rain hard, but my skivvy shirt got wet. There was a two-by-four laying across the top of the ditch, and I took my skivvy shirt off--of course, we were soaking wet, anyway, and I didn't know what I was doing--and I hung it up over there. I don't know what I was doing. I thought, "Oh, hell! That's a good target for a plane! If a plane sees that and is coming down strafing, they'll wipe us out!" It was a beautiful target. I pulled my shirt down, and I guess it was about this time that the first raid ceased because we began to hear a noise. We could hear a sound that was on the Utah (taps microphone with fingers).

Marcello: It was a tapping sound that you could hear within the hull of the Utah?

Johnson: Right. It turned out to be a man trapped in the Utah.

Marcello: How far away were you from the Utah when you were in that ditch?

Johnson: At least a block.

Marcello: He must have been banging like hell on that hull, then, if you could hear it.

Johnson: He was. He was using the wrench that I had dogged that hatch down with and had gone down through that very hatch, or manhole cover, I should say, and he happened to have a flashlight with him. His name was Jack Vassean; he is well-known. He got the Navy Cross for it. We continued to hear this pounding, so we began to come up out of the ditch. Also, about this time a group of men walked across from the opposite side, and someone said, "Where are you from?" They said, "The 'Weevee!'" That's a nickname for the West Virginia. Somebody said, "Is it hit, too?" He said, "Yes, it and the Oklahoma, the Tennessee, and the Arizona," and he named off about most of the ships. We thought,"Oh, Lord!" All we could see . . . the only thing I could see, really, when I came off the Utah was a huge column of black smoke and those planes so close I could have hit them with an apple or a potato. They were that low. You could see their faces when they tilted

their plane over and dipped the wing down. So they came over, and someone had presence of mind to get a boat and an acetylene cutting outfit and cut Jack out of the bottom of the Utah.

Marcello: Did you actually participate in this procedure?

Johnson: No, I did not.

Marcello: In the meantime, what are you doing over there in the ditch?

Johnson: (Chuckle) Well, I've had my first cigarette since I was ten years old at that time. A Lieutenant JG Hawke was my division officer, and he had gone down to the Navy Housing, which was farther down the island, and he came back with a handful of bottles of different types of liquor and cigarettes. He was walking along the top of the ditch. I guess he was keeping the men calm; I thought he deserved a medal myself. I don't believe he ever got it, but if anyone deserved a medal, he did. He was walking up there keeping us calm while the planes were still coming over. He'd have been a beautiful target if someone had wanted to shoot at him.

Marcello: Now, these were high-level bombers coming over this time?

Johnson: At this time, I'm not sure. I do know this much, that I saw one get hit that was not a high-level bomber. When you're in a hole, your range of vision is quite narrow. The plane was hit and lost a wing while it was over our heads, and when it disappeared out of my vision, because of the edge of the

hole of the ditch, he was on his way down and was quite close to the water.

Marcello: When these planes came over, what did you personally do? Try to dig that hole a little deeper or what?

Johnson: I stayed in the ditch and just hoped they didn't strafe us. There wasn't a thing you could do then. The rain stopped, and a big double rainbow appeared. I don't know if anyone else ever mentioned this or not, but there was one rainbow directly above the other one. I remember thinking just as clearly as could be that out of all this mess something good must be going to come. It was almost like an omen to me, because I really felt after seeing that that I wasn't going to be killed in the war. Premonition or whatever, call it what you will. It was a beautiful sight up there, and encouraging.

As I said, we came out of the ditch and stood up there, and all of a sudden we began to hear the guns shoot again. They weren't directly where we were; they were over on the other side of the island or over beyond Merry's Point, somewhere off in the distance. Back we went into the ditch; there wasn't anything we could do. We didn't have any guns; we had no way to protect or defend ourselves. We went back into the ditch again and waited for the second attack to end. Well, we waited for whatever was going to happen. I

honestly thought that they were going to land a force. I thought they would bring a land force in, and we had no defense, and they would have captured us, I'm sure.

Marcello: I'm sure that this was one of the rumors that was circulating by this time.

Johnson: Yes. We heard rumors that paratroopers had come down; we heard rumors that they had landed over at various places. We heard rumors that they had set the oil tanks on fire and that there were paths cut through the cane fields with arrows pointed toward Pearl Harbor. All sorts of rumors that immediately began to fly. All you can do is stand there and wait or sit there. I guess we did sit down after awhile.

Marcello: What did you do that evening?

Johnson: We came up out of the ditch, and they said they wanted some people to go over to the bomb storage on Ford Island and bring some bombs out. So I was one of the men selected, and we went over to the bomb storage, but we never went down and brought any bombs out. They decided to take the crew of the Utah, and they put part of them on the Argonne and part of them on the Sacramento. I went aboard the Sacramento.

Marcello: What did you do there?

Johnson: Not a heck of a lot but wait.

Marcello: Are we getting on into evening by this time?

Johnson: By this time it is quite late in the afternoon. I would say

it was four o'clock in the afternoon at least.

Marcello: Are things kind of getting organized by this time?

Johnson: Aboard the ship they had passed out the rifles--.30-06 rifles. There was some effort going on. The Arizona was blazing furiously, and the fantail of the Tennessee, from where we were, looked like it had caught fire. You could see streams of water over there fighting the fire on the fantail of the Tennessee. There were boats moving around out in the water, different types of boats. I think by this time a couple of cruisers had gotten underway, and I believe the Detroit had moved out. The Detroit, I'm sure, had moved out from the side of Ford Island where we were. She was two ships ahead of us.

Marcello: I understand that as these ships were moving out that the sailors were cheering.

Johnson: Oh, yes! Right. I spent the rest of the war on the Detroit, and I remember cheering her as she moved by, not knowing I'd become a crew member of the Detroit.

Marcello: The Sacramento was an old vessel, wasn't it?

Johnson: Yes, she was an old gunboat. She was in at one of the slips along there near where the big hammerhead crane was.

Marcello: So you were just able to walk aboard the Sacramento, then?

Johnson: They had to get us from Ford Island over to that site. They took us over in boats, and we were able to walk down the pier

to the Sacramento. They had boiled some water. The rumor was that the water was poisoned, so they had boiled some water for us. I think they broke out some old dungarees--the fellows that had second sets of dungarees. I managed to get a pair of dungarees and a dungaree shirt from somebody--who, I don't know. They fed us some chow, and by this time it was night. The light over there looked like a beautiful beacon for a night raid.

It was about this time that the five planes from the Enterprise came back. We began to hear shooting, so I grabbed my .30-06 they had handed to me, ran out on to the deck, ran out on the pier, and there was a cloud overhead, sort of pink with the tracers going into it. I thought, "They must know what they're shooting at," so I emptied a clip from a .30-06 up into that cloud, not knowing what I was shooting at, hoping that maybe one more slug might hit something up there. We thought it was a night raid guided by the fire from the Arizona.

Marcello: I gather that it looked like the Fourth of July when those Enterprise planes came in.

Johnson: It sure did. Unfortunately, I think we shot three of them down.

Marcello: Were the rest of your shipmates out there firing away, too?

Johnson: As many as had guns. I don't know which ones did and which ones didn't. Some of them were on the Argonne. One of my

shipmates . . . unfortunately, someone on the California swept across, I think, with a 50-caliber and put a slug through the side of the Argonne and hit the Utah man in the shoulder, through his arm, and into his left breast and killed him. He dropped dead in the passageway there.

Yes, it looked like the Fourth of July, because by this time they did have more guns ready to fire.

Marcello: How long did this shooting continue at those planes? I'm sure it was rather continuous.

Johnson: Sporadically, I guess it must have gone . . . we fired what we had and quit . . . but I think the firing, from the time it started at one end until it disappeared at the other end, must have been ten minutes, it seemed like. Quite a long while, anyway.

Marcello: I gather that you probably had not even fired a rifle since boot camp

Johnson: That's right. Last time I fired a .30-06 was qualifying at boot camp back in early 1941.

Marcello: Did you get very much sleep that night?

Johnson: Excuse the expression, but I was so damn tired that, yes, I fell asleep. I fell asleep until about four o'clock the next morning because there was activity. You'd sort of subconsciously hear movement. There was movement all around all night.

Marcello: I'll bet if anybody did drop something on the deck above you, you were jumpy.

Johnson: Yes, any sudden bang like that . . . we were very, very jumpy. They needed ammunition, and they had sent some of the boats over by Pearl City to bring back ammunition. Everybody was so jumpy that one of the boats that a couple of friends of mine were in was hailed and fired at before they could answer. No one was hit, but a few shots were fired from a machine gun at them.

Marcello: Did you have much of an appetite that day?

Johnson: I don't remember eating a thing until we got aboard the Sacramento, and they made us some cold sandwiches, hot coffee, that tasted good. I don't have any recollection of whether I ate one sandwich or three. I know I ate something.

Marcello: When you got aboard the Sacramento, were you assigned to a specific space?

Johnson: No, just whatever was available. The fellows aboard the Sacramento passed out everything they had, and I remember them saying, "Look, here's a spot to sleep," and they gave us blankets. Most of the fellows just took a blanket, found an empty spot on the deck, and laid it out and crapped out.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Johnson: Buried the dead. Yes, I grew up the next day.

Marcello: I'll bet.

Johnson: Boy, did I ever (weeping)!

Marcello: Is this a part of the story that you would like to discuss, or would you rather not go into this?

Johnson: Well, it is a part of it I never used to be able to discuss. I had never handled a dead body. Certainly, I had never handled dismembered bodies, but that day I handled bodies without legs. They'd bring a leg , . . we actually had . , . we went over to Merry's Point first, and they began to bring the bodies there along the piers. There were so many missing arms and legs that, believe it or not, we had a pile of arms in one spot and a pile of legs in another. We assembled bodies and put them in big bags with the number stenciled on them.

Marcello: Did they give special gloves or coveralls or something like that to all the men to do this?

Johnson: No, they didn't have them. We just went down there, and sometimes the boats were dragging the bodies, or sometimes they were in the boats. They'd bring them up alongside, and our job was to get them up on the pier. I think they were taking fingerprints--who, I don't know. I'd try to stencil a bag. What they did later . . . I went up through Red Hill a day or two later. They had a stenciled number on the bag; they had a stenciled number on a matching stake and the same number on a box. They'd mask them together, and someone was

taking records.

Some Marines were there, and I remember one fellow was, believe it or not, stripping skin off the fingers, slipping the skin on his own finger, and using it to roll a fingerprint that way.

After being in the water, the bodies . . . we picked up one big black man who had swelled up until he fit his uniform, his white uniform, much like you see a picture of Superman. There wasn't a wrinkle in it, he was literally like skin on a sausage.

I think I got sick about four or five times that day. It was a hell of a lot worse than the attack. In the attack, I was so busy I didn't get frightened until I got into the ditch, and that's the reason I smoked a cigarette. Having been a boxer, I didn't smoke.

Marcello: I guess you wanted to get off that burial detail just as quickly as possible.

Johnson: Oh, God, did I ever! We had a break on Monday, and a very good friend of mine from Saint Louis, named Lester Hutnick, was the only one of our gang that got off with any money. We went over to the stand over at the sub base, and he said, "Come on! I'll buy you guys whatever you want." He was also on burial detail. We couldn't eat. I didn't have an appetite. I'm pretty sure it was Monday that we went over

there, and he bought whatever we wanted--an ice cream sundae, soda, or whatever.

About halfway through it, an alarm went off. They sounded an alert. They thought there were planes coming in again. We all started running, and (chuckle) my buddy, Lester, stopped and paid the bill. I said, "Here's your chance to get something for nothing, and you're so honest that you stop and pay the bill!"

We went back to burial detail, and I finally wound up on Red Hill, and that's where they were bulldozing a ditch and burying the dead. From what I remember, they had two rows of a hundred of these boxes--a hundred in a row and two of them end-to-end--so they buried 200 bodies at a time. That's where they brought a Japanese body in--one of the pilots--who had crashed and cracked up, and he was put right in the same hole, believe it or not. Then the stakes were driven into the ground at the heads of these boxes to mark them, so they were able to identify them later on.

Marcello: Was there any sort of a military honor or something that was conducted, or a service or anything?

Johnson: No, I didn't see any. We were so busy that, if there was, I'm not aware of it at all. They just dug the hole with a bulldozer, put the boxes in, and we arranged them in order. Then they just covered them up and put the stakes in then. Well,

the stakes had been put in far enough back from the edge of the ditch that the bulldozer wouldn't knock them down.

On the third day they let us off about around 1600, I think it was. We'd been staying in the new barracks at Merry's Point. We didn't dare move at night. You didn't even dare get up and go to the head, because the minute you moved, somebody shot at you.

I came back to where we were staying, and by this time, they had passed out . . . I got a new set of dungarees. My shoes were about ruined, and they gave us a new pair of shoes. They gave us a razor and a toothbrush and toothpaste, and that was about it. Also, we got a jersey--had no peacoats--and one of the wool sweaters and a watch cap, That was my total uniform.

When I got back, why, this friend, J.R. Jones, said, "Hey, there is a list up. We're all going to the Detroit." I said, "Boy, I'm going to sign up for it." He said, "It's too late. The list is closed." But he said, "I put your name down for you." That's the way I got aboard the Detroit. We had been buddies together, so he just signed my name up. It was a very fortunate thing, because the Detroit was, as far as I know, the only ship to be at Pearl when the war started and be in for the signing of the peace treaty when the war ended at Tokyo Bay. She was a very lucky ship. She never

got hit at Pearl; she never got damaged bad during the war. She traveled about 229,000 miles during the time I was aboard her.

That's the way that I was able to get away from the burial detail. I would have gone aboard a Japanese ship if they'd have told me I could get aboard it then. I'd have gone anywhere to get away from the burial detail, believe me. That was a bad scene.

Marcello: I guess that's probably a good place to end this interview, that is, with your having gone aboard the Detroit. Mr. Johnson, I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting things and important things. Your knowledge of details was amazing, and, of course, this is what we're looking for. I'm sure that the scholars will find your comments very valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.

Johnson: Number one, I'm glad I'm here. I'm glad to live through it. Number two, there must have been something in that rainbow that I saw. (Chuckle) At least it gave me a lot of confidence. Thirdly, I learned about life. I think it made me more tolerant, and I enjoy living. I'm certainly glad I could present this story to you, and I'm very happy that I met you.

Marcello: Thank you.

Johnson: Thank you very much.