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Interview with
GERALD E. WENTWORTH
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Place of Interview: Bedford, Texas

Interviewer: Duane Staton

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(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Gerald Wentworth

Interviewer: Duane Staton Date: February 12, 1989

Place of Interview: Bedford, Texas

Mr. Staton: This is Duane Staton interviewing Gerald Wentworth for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 12, 1989, in Bedford, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Wentworth in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS Tennessee during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

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

Mr. Wentworth: All right. I was born in Ohio in 1918, in Paulding County. There's no towns around there; it's all country. For Paulding County the nearest city is Fort Wayne, Indiana. I went to school in Detroit.

I went to the University of Michigan and graduated from there in 1951. I was kind of old when I graduated because of the war--interruption of the war. My first job after graduating from engineering school was at Convair, which is now General Dynamics. I've been in this area most of the time since, working for various aircraft companies.

Staton: Okay, what year did you join the service?

Wentworth: January 31, 1941. I was a veteran of ten months at the time of Pearl Harbor day [facetious comment].

Staton: And what branch?

Wentworth: It was the Navy. I was a seaman second class.

Staton: Why did you choose the Navy?

Wentworth: Because of the technical level of the enlisted men. There were almost all skilled technicians--at least that's what I've been told--and they had a good music school. I wanted to pursue a career in music, and that was my first assignment--the Navy Music School in Washington, D.C.

Staton: What ship were you assigned to and when were you assigned to that?

Wentworth: I was transferred from the music school, and I was bound for the USS Tennessee, which was stationed in Hawaii. They sent us aboard the USS Pyro, which was a Navy cargo ship. We hit several ports--Guantanamo Bay, San Juan, through the Panama Canal to San Diego. When

we got to San Francisco, I was surprised. Maybe the captain of our ship wasn't surprised, but the USS Tennessee was there. See, they had come to the States for rest and recreation, so they transferred us immediately there in San Francisco Bay at Hunter's Point, where the Tennessee was.

Staton: About how long was this after you had joined?

Wentworth: That was in July, 1941. We got to Pearl Harbor early August, as I recall--second or third week, second week probably, in August.

Staton: You mentioned that you were a seaman second class. Once you were on the ship, what rating did you strike for? What did you do?

Wentworth: Well, I was already a rated musician, so I didn't have to strike for any job. I was assigned to the band. Our first military duties were...they trained us for first aid, which is very typical for musicians. An alternative--we were always assigned to these at various times--was damage control. In fact, that was our division. The division they assigned the band to was the C and R Division, which was the construction and repair damage control gang--all the welders and the carpenters. However, our ship was so undermanned, which is well-known. We had only 1,100 people on that battleship, and that was only about half of its complement. So the band got pressed into service for

the main battery--14-inch guns--in the lower handling room, where we were pushing big bags of powder in the hoist and stuff like that in our drills with the heavy, very heavy, odor of ether, which always accompanies gunpowder. This is a well-known fact if you've been around gun powder very much. After a few hours in a closed room with ether, you feel kind of woozy and sickening. It's kind of bad.

Staton: What instrument did you play?

Wentworth: I was a trombone player.

Staton: Trombone player?

Wentworth: Yes, one of the worst. No, I was not that bad (chuckle).

Staton: Okay, when you joined what length was your boot camp?

Wentworth: It was an abbreviated boot camp for musicians. The first three weeks of boot camp in the Navy is quarantine to see if you have any addictions or vile diseases. I think boot camp at that time was twelve weeks, but after three weeks quarantine was over, and they sent us back to Washington to the music school. Our training was in Norfolk.

Staton: Okay, your boot camp was in Norfolk?

Wentworth: Norfolk, yes.

Staton: How would you describe your training overall? Would you say it was good? Fair? Poor? Your boot camp training?

Wentworth: Oh, boot camp was close-order drill. In the American Revolution, when the soldiers marched to battle in close-order, oh, that was terrific training. We knew that wars weren't fought that way anymore. And that's about all I got from the boot camp. Music school was of medium quality as music school goes. See, I had attended music school up in western Michigan previously.

Staton: So the schooling that you got in the Navy for music was probably less than what you already had.

Wentworth: That's absolutely right. I didn't even get a good review of what I already knew. And the speed-ups...see, I was only there about four months, and they shipped us out to the fleet. It was supposed to be two years. It was intended to be a two-year school and then four years in the fleet. I signed for six years. It was the regular Navy. I was not in the reserves, ever.

Staton: Okay, I suppose at this time everything that I have read insinuates that rank and promotions were really slow in the Navy prior to Pearl Harbor. Did you see that?

Wentworth: I didn't see that. I started out at \$21 a month. You know what they call that--"three seventy a day"--three meals and seventy cents. Four months later, they upped it to \$36, I think it was. I thought that was real

good. In another four or six months, it was \$54. Boy, you could buy a lot of whiskey with \$54.

Staton: You were in tall cotton?

Wentworth: Yessiree! I didn't feel it was slow. It was interesting. I loved that life, you know, at that age.

Staton: Well, it sounds like your morale was pretty high. How would you describe the morale of the ship and the morale of the people in the Navy?

Wentworth: Excellent. I was on a good ship. There is a little story connected with that. At the music school they sent out band units. They don't just send out musicians; it's a twenty-piece band. We were on the list as Band 22--the twenty-second band that had ever graduated from that school, and my first assignment was to the USS Arizona. Band 21 was assigned to the USS Tennessee. But our band leader had a brother-in-law on the Tennessee, and he'd been in the Navy long enough to know that the Tennessee was a good ship--happy, good athletic teams, good gunnery, just an all-around better ship to be on than the Arizona. I'm not going to say anything bad about the Arizona because I don't know anything bad. All I know was a comparison that this band leader made in his own mind.

So that rascal went down to the Navy Department. See, we were in Washington. He went down to the Navy Department, which at that time was bunch of wooden

shacks--the Pentagon hadn't been built yet--and started a conversation with one of the yeomen there in the Navy Department and switched the roster lists. Do you believe that? It's hard to believe for me, even now.

Staton: Very fortunate for you, I would say.

Wentworth: You betcha! He switched those roster lists, so now we were Band 21 and went to the Tennessee. We knew all those guys that went to the Arizona because they were our classmates in school.

Yes, the Tennessee was a good ship. We were happy there. We liked it. The sister ship to the Tennessee was the USS California, and we looked down our noses at the California. We called it the "Old Prune Barge. I think that with all the comparisons that you could make between ships, we had a good ship, and theirs was not nearly so good.

Staton: How would you rate the chow on the Tennessee? Was it good food?

Wentworth: I never complained. I thought it was good. It was properly planned and nutritious and tasty, and I never complained about the chow.

Staton: Tell me a little bit about your living quarters on the Tennessee.

Wentworth: We slept in a hammock, and I fell out of the hammock only once. Luckily, I landed on my...oh, I guess what I did was, I grabbed the rope which held my head up,

and it was only my feet that hit the deck. I hit the deck solidly. It was close quarters. We lived in a passageway where there was an ammunition conveyer belt running the length of the passageway.

Staton: Did you get used to hammock sleeping?

Wentworth: Oh, I guess so. Our band room was on the third deck, which means that we were below the waterline. The armored deck was our deck. The third deck was four-inch armor plate. It got hot when the engines were running.

Staton: I bet. Were your quarters together--the band members?

Wentworth: Yes, we stuck together as a group. We were all living in the same part of the ship, and I liked living all together.

Staton: So I assume that after a while you got used to these quarters, and they really were pretty good.

Wentworth: The way life was, yes, we accepted it. We could function, do what we were supposed to do.

Staton: Okay, everyone at this time was a volunteer, correct?

Wentworth: That's true. In fact, we were not only volunteers, but the physical requirements to enlist were very, almost unreasonably, high. So only about one--I heard the figure--out of every two hundred people who came to the recruiting office wanting to get in the Navy were accepted. I mean, a little crooked teeth, you know, and they'd say, "Well, we've got you on waivers. And

they'd wait for weeks trying to have those waivers removed.

Staton: When did the Tennessee go to Hawaii?

Wentworth: Well, it had been there for two years. It went there in 1939, which was long before I ever had any idea that I would be in the Navy. Like I said, when they came back in the summer of 1941 for rest and recreation, I believe that's the first time it'd been back.

Staton: So when you got on the ship there in San Francisco in 1941, how long was it after that that you went back to Hawaii?

Wentworth: Well, we stayed in San Francisco a couple of weeks while the ship was in the dry dock. Incidentally, that's kind of maybe the worst way to go aboard a ship, when it's all torn up with dirty workmen, shipyard workers, aboard. It's all dirty and torn up. Anyway, after we had been there a couple of weeks, we got the ship out of dry dock, and we went on to San Pedro for two or maybe three more weeks for rest and recreation. Glorious times! Glorious! Then we went back to Pearl Harbor. Incidentally, transit time for a ship going nine knots was a week--a week underway to get from the West Coast to Hawaii. That's seven sailing days, day and night.

Staton: The Tennessee, then, had a permanent Pearl Harbor assignment?

Wentworth: Yes, that was our...I was going to say that was home port. I'm not sure it was our home port, but that was our assignment, yes.

Staton: What was the routine training like aboard the USS Tennessee? Once you were underway, what was your routine training like?

Wentworth: Okay, that's one thing I'd like to get the record straight on. All you ever hear about Pearl Harbor is that we were unready, untrained, undermanned. The fact is, we were training vigorously. Unfortunately, I guess it's a well-known fact that you prepare for the next war with the technology of the last, so we were going through World War One-type routines. But we were doing it. We would have our gunnery drills when we were at sea. We fired frequently at Maui. Maui was our target island. Those mountains there on Maui got a lot of lead in them. We'd practice going to general quarters.

Staton: Where was your general quarters station?

Wentworth: Well, I think I've already hit on that. They trained us for first aid. It changed from time to time. It would be just a damage control station where usually we were assigned to the ready earphones. We had connections all over the ship by these phones. It was usually a musician that wore the phones and had to relay the word on.

Staton: So in first aid, you didn't have a specific area. You were kind of mobile in different places.

Wentworth: No, you had a station. In fact, when you go to general quarters, all the doors are locked. The doors and hatches are closed, so you are in a first aid station which is designated. If there were wounded people, they would bring them to that place. There was a doctor there. But later that year we were in the third turret, lower handling room--main battery handling room.

Staton: As relations between the United States and Japan began to grow worse, did your training routine that you just explained for me...did it change any?

Wentworth: It didn't change because it was already a full state of training--just as much as we possibly could. We were training hard. There were discussions where the turret captain, a chief petty officer, would talk about how war might get started and where we might be when something might happen. Nobody knew what it would be; nobody knew what form it would take or where we would be. He just sort of conjectured it would probably be sometime when we were farther west than we usually were. And we would encounter a Japanese fleet and start shooting. In the time I was there, which was August through December, the training didn't change. We read the newspapers. We knew what was going on in

Washington, and we knew something was going to happen sooner or later.

Staton: You mentioned that the drills were like in the previous war--World War One-type drills. So I assume at that time there were no antiaircraft drills aboard your ship.

Wentworth: Oh, no, no, no, no. We had antiaircraft guns.

Staton: You did?

Wentworth: Oh, yes, we did. Yes, we had 5-inch antiaircraft guns. Yes, they were fired in our drills at sea. But let me tell you about a landing party. You know, the Navy always has their Marines on board, where they land in Nicaragua or something like that to save a banana plantation. We had a landing party where we were dressed in white uniforms. There were two battleships that massed their crews, and I can't remember what the second one was. It was the USS Pennsylvania maybe. I'm not sure. But we had both bands, the crew in whites with their leggings on. We went ashore in our regular motor launches that were made out of wood, open, you know, no armor, no protection, or anything like that. They were just open motor launches. The crew went to the beach, but I don't think we waded ashore. I think there was a pier there where we got out and walked. And we had a parade. There was a parade ground, and we paraded in review and all that

stuff, you know. This was preparing for war. This is the best we knew; I mean, we were doing what we thought we were supposed to be doing, and seriously. We didn't know anything better. The war, when it started, changed very rapidly--new weapons, new vehicles, new battle gear. But we didn't have it. We had the World War One flat steel helmets and a bandoleer or ammunition belt with no bullets in it (chuckle).

Staton: You mentioned that you went on shore there. What was your liberty routine on board the Tennessee? Was it port and starboard?

Wentworth: Port watch. I don't know what that's got to do with it. I was port watch all the time I was aboard that ship.

Staton: You don't really know.

Wentworth: I don't know what the significance of that is.

Staton: Just curious.

Wentworth: I never attached any importance to it.

Staton: What did you do when you were on liberty?

Wentworth: I was a clean-cut kid. I was in Honolulu on occasion, five or six times in the few months that I was there. I went with some other guys to Waikiki. We went swimming on Waikiki. Mostly, though, there were recreation facilities there at Pearl Harbor, at Aiea. There was a swimming pool, baseball diamonds, tennis courts, and all that kind of stuff. Most of the time when I went ashore, that was where I went.

Staton: You went to the YMCA, I assume?

Wentworth: No. No, this was all Navy. It was a Navy recreation center.

Staton: Okay, you never did go into the city to the local..

Wentworth: I wasn't aware that there was any such thing as .what did they call the servicemen's club at that time? I wasn't aware of any.

Staton: There wasn't really anything there at that time.

Wentworth: It was a wide-open social life in Honolulu. They had bars and dance halls and bawdy houses.

Staton: Well, how would you describe the general condition of the crew when they returned from liberty? After they had been out on liberty, how would they return?

Wentworth: Well, I suppose you are going to want stories of guys coming back drunk. Yes, I saw a few of them that way, but I wouldn't say that it was a problem. It was normal incidents of guys who would drink too much and had to be carried back to the ship. Yes, I saw some of that, but I don't think it was out of hand.

Staton: When was your payday?

Wentworth: It was the first and fifteenth.

Staton: How much money would you have had around the sixth or seventh? Of course, it would have been five or six days since you were paid, so how much money do you think you would have had at that time?

Wentworth: In my pocket?

Staton: Yes.

Wentworth: I have no idea. I have no recollection of that. I was rarely broke. I usually tried to have some money left over. I'd draw enough of my pay so I'd have money by the time next payday came. That's all I remember about that. I don't remember how much money I had in my pocket.

Staton: At this time, before Pearl Harbor how did you feel about the Japanese in Pearl Harbor?

Wentworth: Oh, the ones we saw there?

Staton: Yes.

Wentworth: I don't remember any feeling. We knew who they were and knew what they were doing and knew that they were a potential...well, I wouldn't say they were a potential enemy because most of them were loyal Americans. We knew what they were and who they were. There would always be a bunch of kids around the yard gate at the Navy Yard asking for match covers. You know about the match covers?

Staton: No.

Wentworth: Paper packets of matches with your ship and the ship's seal...or the state seal, I guess it was. The seal of the state of Tennessee and the USS Tennessee would be on the cover of the match packet. We knew, or figured at least, that that was their way of keeping track of which ships were in. Kids would gather those and turn

them over to their parents who would relay them on to other people who were keeping track of such things. That might have been a trivial feature, though, because they probably had telescopes up on those high hills and could look down and see which ships were in. I suppose they could identify them from that distance--which ships were in.

Staton: Did you ever suspect a Japanese attack?

Wentworth: Oh, no. No, we were completely surprised. Nobody else did, as far as I know. Like I say, we did talk about it, how war might get started, but that was never suggested as the way it might happen.

Staton: Never really any specifics on who would attack, either?

Wentworth: Well, we knew the Japanese were the only potential enemy in that part of the world, but it was dismissed as being almost a joke as far as a powerful enemy was concerned. We felt that if we just shot our guns two or three times, they would just evaporate. That was the attitude. It was kind of a silly assessment of the threat, though, I'm sure.

Staton: Okay, what was your routine on Saturday, December 6, 1941?

Wentworth: Yes, that's a good thing I wanted to get into. We had the Battle of the Bands. You know about the Battle of the Bands?

Staton: I read about that.

Wentworth: You read about the Battle of the Bands. Okay, I'll just briefly tell how the contest worked. There were four bands that appear on every other Saturday night. They had what they called Bloch Recreation Center, which, I guess, is still there by that name. It had a big auditorium and a big stage, so four Navy bands could be on that stage. They would play a hot number and a sweet number and a novelty number and by applause select the two best bands that played that night. Then the two best bands would appear later. The two other bands would be eliminated.

So on December 6, when we played, that was, I think, our third appearance. It might have been only the second. I'm not sure. But we did play on the night of December 6. We were not eliminated, so if the war had not have started at that precise time, the contest would have continued, and we would have played again.

Staton: Do you remember what other band wasn't eliminated?

Wentworth: No, damn it, I can't remember. I don't remember what other band was not eliminated, and I probably can't remember any of them that were. But I want to just point out that the Arizona band had been eliminated.

Staton: They were eliminated?

Wentworth: Yes. I think they had a trophy which they put the winner's name on. When the war started as it did and

when it did, and the Arizona musicians were all deceased, they put their ship on that trophy as being the winners. And that's all right with me. I've got no complaint about that.

The Arizona musicians, like I pointed out a little earlier, and we were classmates back in Washington at the Navy Music School. We were transferred by ship down through the Caribbean and through the Panama Canal. But the Arizona band went across country by train and got to Pearl Harbor a couple of months before we did. And even after that, after we got out there, we hadn't seen them for a long time because when their ship was in, our ship was out. We hadn't seen them for a long time, until December 6, when we were in the contest and playing up on the stage. We were aware that a bunch of these Arizona musicians were in the audience, and when we were all finished and packing up, they came up and said, "Hi, you know, "Gee, it's been a long time since we saw you, and all that.

We went back to the Navy pier together. It was close enough that we walked to the Navy pier. I guess you know that the ship was at Ford Island. You couldn't get there from the mainland except by boat. We were enjoying talking to these guys. We hadn't seen them for months. We let motor launch after motor launch return. Theirs would go back to the Arizona,

and we stood there on the pier talking until 1:00 in the morning. As I recall, I was probably the last guy on our ship and one guy on the Arizona named Cianucca. I don't remember his first name right now, but his last name was Italian. He was from one of the big eastern cities, I think Philadelphia. I hadn't known him real well back at the school, but, you know, with an old acquaintances like this, we stood there talking until 1:00, talking about the likelihood of having a war and other weighty subjects.

Staton: That's interesting. That's very interesting.

Wentworth: And six hours later he was gone.

Staton: Okay, as detailed as possible, explain what happened prior to the attack on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. Just your activities as you remember them.

Wentworth: I got up at reveille and put my bedding back in the bedding...I want to call it a big hamper there where we had pulled up our bedding and threw it in there. I ate breakfast at a normal time.

But then I had a problem. Being a musician, you like to do your best playing a musical instrument, and I usually had at least a twenty-minute period of warming up. I'd get my horn out before colors and warm up carefully. It's not required, but I always thought I was there to be as good a musician as I could and get better as time went on. And if you never warmed up,

that was about the only practice you ever got. But I had a strong "call to nature, and I had to make a decision whether I was going to have my warm-up or go relieve myself. I chose to warm up and go to the head afterwards, after colors. Well, as things happened, they called us to our battle station, and we were down there in the lower handling room, down in a powder magazine, for roughly an hour-and-a-half, as I recall it. You can imagine my discomfort (chuckle).

Staton: Indeed.

Wentworth: Okay, we went up for colors. We usually marched back to what we called the fantail in the Navy at five minutes until 8:00. The bandmaster was making assignments for church. While we were standing there, a PBY, an airplane made by Consolidated, came down the channel. It was a seaplane, and it took off for patrol. Now the difference between Sunday and a weekday was that on weekdays there was a dawn patrol. Some old Brewster Buffaloes, as I recall--carrier fighter planes--took off at dawn and patrolled around the islands for probably a distance of a couple hundred miles. They didn't do that on Sunday, so the Japanese could come a lot closer to those islands before they were ever detected. Okay, the bandmaster was making assignments for church because the band always had to...not the whole band for church. You didn't need

the whole band. Maybe just five or six or ten musicians at most played for church.

Well, it got noisy. It got noisy. I heard machine gun fire and heard a big boom, and there was a muddy geyser on the other side of Ford Island. Apparently what happened was that they had dropped a bomb, and it hit in the water. It just shot a geyser up a hundred or two hundred feet in the air--muddy water. All the water in Pearl Harbor was muddy. Well, we knew something was up, and as I recall the bandmaster said, "We've got to break ranks! Go to your battle stations!" But he hadn't even finished saying it when the boatswain's pipe whistled, and the boatswain says, "All hands, go to general quarters! This is no drill!"

Staton: The "real McCoy.

Wentworth: Yes. So that horn I had was my own. The Navy will furnish you a horn. You don't have to buy your own horn, but I just figured I wanted a better horn than the Navy would buy. And I took it all the way down to the third deck. I mean, we were supposed to get to our battle stations as quick as possible. But I went all the way out of my way to get to the band room, and I got my case, and I took the horn apart and put it in the case and put it up on the shelf. I don't know why I was so protective of that Goddamned horn. But that's what I did. Then I went to my battle station. Well,

obviously, there was very little sense in manning 14-inch guns in port. But, like I say, they left us down there for something like about 9:30 before they said, "Hey, there's no sense in being down in there. Come on out.

Staton: Okay. Then I assume you went up to the main deck when you left your battle station.

Wentworth: No, I had no place to go. We came up out of the turret but just stayed there in that area for quite a long time. What happened then...well, for one thing there was nothing to do. At least there was nobody who could tell us what to do. I think I probably had a little cat nap. Sailors can go to sleep [snaps fingers] in a moment's notice. You've heard about your whole life flashing before your eyes--it happened. It happened.

A little later than that, there was a lieutenant commander there in charge of that station, and he says, "They need help fighting fire up on the quarter-deck. You, you, you, you, and you, go up and help fight fires on the quarter-deck. So we went up to the quarter-deck and reported to the guy that we were told to report to up there. He says, "Fellows, we've got all the help we need. Go back where you were. So we say, "Okay. Okay.

We went back where we were, and here is this lieutenant commander still saying, "Hey, they need help

up on the quarter-deck! You guys go on up there!" So we told him, "We went up there, and they sent us back. But that showed the confusion that existed.

There was a guy pulled out of the upper handling room at that station who had been...okay, a bomb came in the top of the turret, the third turret. It had penetrated and exploded in that upper handling room. This guy had flash burns real bad on his face. His face was a bloody pulp. He had been sedated, I believe, because he was just mumbling, you know, "I can't see. Why don't somebody do something?" And he died that morning. He didn't make it. He passed away.

The officers were all ashore. You probably heard that. That's been well-reported. The captain wasn't aboard. No commanders were aboard--none. So the first thing that happened when they needed first aid gear was that somebody took a chain cutter and cut all the locks off of all the first aid lockers, which is something they had to do.

Another assignment I had that morning...see, when the Arizona blew up, I knew something big happened because when a battleship lurches like that something big has had to happen. There was a big boom and a lurch. Well, what happened was that the prevailing winds...see, the Arizona was behind us, and the prevailing wind was from them to us. So when that ship

blew up and all that burning oil came out on the water, the burning oil was blowing up against our ship and set fires in the officers' quarters. So one assignment I had that morning was to go back there and pull everything burnable--any books, papers, bedding, or anything against that outer wall--away from the wall so it would decrease the likelihood of having fires inside the ship. I think there were some fires ignited inside our ship. At the very least, I know, the permanent record indicates that the ship's side or the metal was all buckled because it had been softened by the heat.

Staton: Did you know it was the Japanese attacking at this point?

Wentworth: Yes. Oh, yes, that the part that I need to recount. Some Japanese fighter planes came down a row of battleships strafing. Our bandmaster had been in the Asiatic Fleet while the Japanese fleet was stationed over there in China and Japan. Their planes were a little darker blue than ours--ours were pretty light gray at that time--and had a red circle on there. He recognized them as Japanese. We were down at the end of the row, near the end of the row, and the plane that was strafing was pulling up when it went over our ship --pulling up and away.

But there was another bomb hit on the second turret--not on the turret itself but on the guns. See,

the guns are usually about thirty feet long or so, and it hit down on those guns. They had to replace them all. There was enough suspicion about their straightness and cracks and everything that they had to replace them.

Staton: When you got to look around, did you have a pretty good view of everything outside--Battleship Row?

Wentworth: Yes. We could see what was left of the Arizona. It was down to the water level. The USS West Virginia, which was tied up to us...see, we were tied to the quays. The West Virginia was tied to us, and when they sank. .see, every battleship that was exposed to the water side was torpedoed and sunk. When the West Virginia settled, it leaned toward us and pinned us in. The Maryland, which was in front of us, was protected like we were, so they were undamaged or only had light damage on the deck or something like that. But the USS Oklahoma, which was tied to the Maryland, fell the other way when they sank. They fell outward and capsized. They weren't just on their side, they were...

Staton: ...turned turtle.

Wentworth: Yes. Their main mast was in the mud. It had to do with how the damage control people were able to control flooding. Somehow the Oklahoma filled up on that side real fast, and that's why they capsized that way.

Now let me point something out here. You didn't ask the question, but I'm going to tell you. It was an annual event in the Navy, and a long tradition in the Navy, that once a year they would have an annual damage control inspection. And that's what they had done a week or two weeks before. They had sent crews down and scraped off the paint on the double bottoms and repainted. They left the hatches open for the inspecting crews that came in--a bunch of captains and an admiral or so. They went down to those double bottoms to inspect the condition of the ship down there. So with no watertight integrity, all doors and hatches open, one torpedo could sink a battleship. If we would have had watertight integrity, in other words, if we had all those doors and hatches closed, a torpedo would have been nothing more serious than a mosquito bite.

So this is a scandal. There's no crap about that. I'm not telling any secrets. Nobody ever said it was secret. But by just declaring it "secret, they would just call attention to it. They've been lucky that very little--nothing--had been said except the guys I've told about it. But that's why all the ships were in--so they could have them all ready for inspection all at the same time. That's why we saw our buddies on the Arizona for the first time in months, because all

the battleships were in at the same time. You know as well as I do that the Japs knew of the vulnerability of those ships.

Staton: What kind of feelings did you experience toward the Japanese after December 7?

Wentworth: Oh, nothing. We had a war to fight, and we were serious about the war. But I figured they were just like us, that they were trying to get along in the world. It doesn't make a difference when your enemy has got slant eyes and otherwise physical characteristics that you can see. You can probably hate them a little bit better than if they were like the Germans, who look just like we do. But in the Navy you don't see them. Pearl Harbor is the closest I came to seeing any of them.

Staton: Were there any rumors after the attack about what was happening? If there were, tell me a little bit about the rumors that maybe were going around the ship.

Wentworth: I don't remember any rumors. I think that the people on the ship did as good as they could to tell everything that they knew. I'll tell you my own feeling. This is not rumor or something anybody told me. But when I was down there in the bottom of the ship waiting for...I don't know what--just waiting. I wouldn't have been surprised at all. In fact, I really expected to see some Japanese officer coming in and

saying, "Hey, you guys, line up, and take us prisoners. Of course, that was unrealistic. Like I say, I had been in the Navy ten months, so I wasn't real sophisticated in military science. It's been said that if the Japanese had landed an army, they could have taken over the island real easy. But they didn't have any such force. All they had was their carriers and their airplanes.

Staton: On December 7, do you remember your physical needs? Your appetite? Were you thirsty during all of these events? Do you remember?

Wentworth: I don't remember any such thing, no.

Staton: Do you remember when you ate that day?

Wentworth: I have no recollection of it. I think it was probably just like any other time when we had a battle going on. They would make some kind of arrangements for lunch. Sometimes they would just release just half the crew at a time and have some sandwiches and coffee. Then they would go back to their battle stations, and the other half would eat. Sometimes they sent sandwiches down to the stations. You didn't have to go up to the mess areas. No, I don't remember any details about that. (Chuckle) We were just doing what we had to do, is all I can remember.

Staton: What were the days like immediately following the attack? The next few days?

Wentworth: Gloomy. And that's not just because of the attack, but it was actually like today--very heavily overcast, rainy. I don't remember whether it was Monday or Tuesday...

Staton: Now you're talking about the day after...

Wentworth: ...the day after.

Staton: How was the weather the day of the attack now?

Wentworth: It was a bright, sunny day. It was a normal day for Hawaii, which is a few clouds and maybe an occasional rain. But it was mostly sunshine. That was a nice day. It was the subsequent days--Monday, Tuesday, and probably Wednesday--that were heavily overcast. I guess it was Monday that the captain says...he realized he had a morale problem because of the gloom. He says, "Get the band out!" So the band was released from what we were doing. I don't remember now how he got the word to us because we were all spread out at different battle stations. Anyway, we got instruments, and you could have guessed probably that the first march we played was "Stars and Stripes Forever. And we really blew it, trying to fill up that whole part of the world with the music. Yes, "Stars and Stripes Forever" was what we played first.

Staton: And your horn was in good shape (chuckle)?

Wentworth: Oh, yes, it had been well-protected.

Staton: Were all the band members there and all the instruments

there?

Wentworth: Oh, yes. We all got the word that we were supposed to be up on the deck and play marches to cheer up the crew. But I guess we didn't have a bass drum at that time because at the time of the attack the bass drummer just left the drum sitting where he was and went on to his battle station, and the drum somehow got kicked overboard into the water. I don't know if it was ever recovered or whether we had another bass drum. I just don't remember that detail now.

Staton: Well, do you think that your band playing did lift the morale that day?

Wentworth: Oh, I'm sure it did. It lifted everybody's--the crew's morale and ours. The only thing is, a battleship is so big that wherever the band is, only the people on topside are going to be hearing it and only on that end of the ship.

Staton: But it helped your morale.

Wentworth: I'm sure it helped. The captain was appreciative of having that morale builder.

Staton: Why did you join the Pearl Harbor Survivor's Association?

Wentworth: Oh, I guess I just wanted some recognition and maybe run into some guys I might have known. In fact, there was a guy that I recognized in those early days, back in the 1960s and early 1970s--a guy that we called

"Butterball" on the ship. He was a Fort Worth native. He was chubby when he was young, and I guess maybe that helps explain why he is no longer with us. But by the time I joined, he wasn't with them anymore. I don't know any other reason. I just figured that I belonged there and joined them.

Staton: Do you have any other comments you would like to make about anything else that you remember?

Wentworth: I think we've covered everything. I think we have made a pretty thorough coverage of what happened that day. I can't think of anything else.

Staton: Okay, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me. You've said a lot of things here today that are very interesting to me, and I'm sure these things are going to be very interesting to scholars that are going to find them valuable some day when they do research in this area. I really appreciate your time.

Wentworth: I'm glad to do it.