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Interview with
JOHN W. FLEMMONS, JR.
March 18, 1989

Place of Interview: Waco, Texas

Interviewer: Rick Burley

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Oral History Collection

John W. Flemmons, Jr.

Interviewer: Rick Burley

Date: March 18, 1989

Place of Interview: Waco, Texas

Mr. Burley: This is Rick Burley, and I'm interviewing John W. Flemmons, Jr., for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 18, 1989, in Waco, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Flemmons in order to get his experiences and impressions while he was aboard the old target battleship USS Utah during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Okay, Mr. Flemmons, to begin with give me a kind of brief biographical sketch of yourself, like, when you were born, where you were born, your educational background or whatever.

Mr. Flemmons: Well, I mentioned to you on one of your phone calls that I went in service to get out of working in the fields for fifty cents a day. Man, it was bad times back then. For that fifty cents a day, Dad was hiring us out when I was thirteen. Man, you'd have to scratch to get something to eat. So I went in

the Navy for \$21 a month, which wasn't much better, but you had room and board.

Burley: Where were you born?

Flemmons: I was born eight miles south of Lubbock.

Burley: And when? In what year?

Flemmons: August 11, 1923.

Burley: Nineteen twenty-three. So you would say, I guess, that you did probably join the Navy...of course, the economy wasn't real great.

Flemmons: No, it wasn't.

Burley: ...back then, and I think a lot of people..

Flemmons: Well, all the young fellows were either going into what they called the "Tree Army, the CCC, and the Navy and Army. I had plans of going in the Navy--put in a hitch and get out--but the war changed everything.

Burley: You may have said this, but when did you join the Navy?

Flemmons: I joined the Navy in June of 1941.

Burley: And you did join?

Flemmons: Yes.

Burley: At that time, how knowledgeable do you think you were about world affairs?

Flemmons: Man, I didn't know a blamed thing. I didn't know a thing.

Burley: You joined and then you went to boot camp, I guess. Where did you go to boot camp?

Flemmons: San Diego.

Burley: San Diego.

Flemmons: Yes. After boot camp I didn't have any money to come home, so I just stayed there, and they shipped me out there. When the regular bunch came back off boot leave, I had done shipped out before they got back (chuckle).

Burley: How long was it? How long was boot camp? Do you remember?

Flemmons: Man, I don't remember that. Somewhere like about a month and-a-half or two months, somewhere in there.

Burley: Was there anything that stuck out in your mind about boot camp or anything that you remember?

Flemmons: Well, it was just the old humdrum deal there. They just ran a company through there every day.

Burley: And did you go directly from boot camp to the the Utah?

Flemmons: Yes. There were three or four of us who came out of that boot camp and went on the Utah that same day. In boot camp there was so many of them that lived upstairs in the barracks and some were downstairs, and some of them I never did know. I see the pictures, but I don't know them. They shipped us on the Utah in San Pedro, and we pulled out two days later. The leave party was supposed to come back, but if I'd gone on leave, there's no telling what I'd have got on. That was in September that we caught the Utah--some day in September. I don't remember exactly.

Burley: You went straight from there to Pearl? Is that correct?

Flemmons: Yes. Like I said, I didn't know anything about world affairs or anything else, man. Well, even up to December 7, I was still amazed at what was going on around me. I was just a young country boy who just came out of the country, and I was trying to catch up on what was going on.

Burley: When you joined did you decide that you wanted to go to Hawaii or..

Flemmons: Oh, no!

Burley: Was there any decision like that?

Flemmons: No. Well, when we were in boot camp on the "grinder" one day, they wanted volunteers for sub duty. They wanted volunteers for Pearl Harbor. We said, "What's that Pearl Harbor?" We didn't even know where that was. Man, I didn't have no knowledge of anything.

Burley: What was it like on the Utah, like, the living conditions? The food?

Flemmons: Well, like I said, there was a lot of fellows who came on and said, "Ah, I wouldn't eat that trash!" But to me it was delicious. Like I say, we had to scrape for everything we got. But to me it was delicious, even in boot camp. I liked it.

Burley: The food was pretty good.

Flemmons: Yes. I had to get accustomed to that beans for breakfast--Boston baked beans. I weighed 136 pounds when I went in, and it didn't take long for me to get to

160 real quick because I liked that food.

Burley: What was the quarters like?

Flemmons: Oh, fine. But it was an old ship, and it wasn't maintained as well as the ship I went aboard after December 7--the Honolulu. Now, man, that was a palace. It was a light cruiser, and that's why I stayed on until 1945. It had all-metal lockers that were just like one big mirror, just polished; and the deck was red linoleum with polish that thick on it (gesture). Man, if you smoked in your compartment, you better not drop an ash on it, because you done had to repolish that deck yourself. And, man, they had three guys assigned to the compartment every morning. I mean, it was beautiful.

Burley: That was a palace, I guess, compared to (chuckle)...

Flemmons: Oh, man, yes, compared to that old battleship. They had taken on the main batteries off of there. All they had was a few antiaircraft guns, and they weren't functional, I don't think.

Burley: What was your duty on the Utah?

Flemmons: I was working in the head. You know what the head is in the Navy?

Burley: No.

Flemmons: It's the latrine (chuckle).

Burley: Oh (chuckle).

Flemmons: It's a good thing because I was sick and hung my head out the porthole for three days (laughter). Man, they

say rough water will get you sick. What's that island right outside of Long Beach there? Catalina, I believe it is. When we passed Catalina, I started getting woozy. Man, I was plumb sick after that all the way to Pearl. That was about two or three days. I said, "What have I got into now?" That was my first experience with the sea or, well, even a motor launch. I thought that was a ship itself. It was a fifty-foot motor launch.

Burley: Exactly what did you do aboard? I mean, you did just whatever, I guess, they told you to do?

Flemmons: Well, I was assigned to that--to keep them clean.

Burley: Okay, I see.

Flemmons: That's all I did.

Burley: That's all you did.

Flemmons: On the weekends we'd come in for liberty and stuff like that. When we'd go out, they'd have their practice bombing runs. Everybody who wasn't doing anything would go three or four decks below, and they would just go down and give each other a hot foot or play checkers, cards. They had a marking party, and they would run up and do their marks, and then they'd come back. Nobody does anything while we were doing that.

Burley: Everybody went below.

Flemmons: Yes, they went below. There wouldn't be no accidents that way.

Burley: You said something a minute ago [off the record]. Tell

me about the deck again. I thought that was interesting.

Flemmons: Oh, about the wood?

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: Well, I figure that might have been about eight inches thick and about twelve inches wide and about twelve feet long. There were two layers on topside--laying all over the topside. The dive-bombers would drop, I guess, about a two-foot little ol' bomb. They'd paint each one a different color. Each pilot in the squadron had their different colors; and they'd drop those, and they'd stick in the wood, and the marking party would come up and mark it. Then when we came back in, they could see how well they'd done. So that's about all we did.

Burley: You said all the main batteries were removed.

Flemmons: Yes, all the main batteries--the big guns.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: I don't even think they had any .50-calibers or .30-calibers. Like I said, talking about that wood, we had come in that Friday, and Saturday all day we'd stacked wood in the center. It was real high.

Burley: How often did the Utah go out?

Flemmons: Oh, we went out every week--every Monday--and came in on Friday.

Burley: So you were out quite a bit then.

Flemmons: Except until December 7 And this time we were tied up

at an aircraft carrier berth.

Burley: That's where you came in?

Flemmons: They were out for about two or three days. We took their place in there, and a lot of people believe that with that wood on top and us in the aircraft carrier berth, that's why we got the "fish, got the torpedoes.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: I don't know how true that is. I'm just quoting somebody else.

Burley: So you go out on Monday and get back in on Friday, and the ship served as a target ship.

Flemmons: Only when we were out.

Burley: Only when you were out, yes. I read somewhere that you also dragged targets behind.

Flemmons: Oh, yes, and we had a remote control setup, too. I didn't know that until I found out about it after...well, a few months ago.

Burley: What?

Flemmons: It was a remote setup--the targets. They used them on maneuvers and stuff like that. They rigged it up to remote control. I don't know all that fancy stuff, so I don't know what it really did.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: But they have what they call the Pearl Harbor Gram that we get every two to three months--the Survivors Association. That's where I read it--in there. They

gave the whole history of the ship.

Burley: That's interesting.

Flemmons: I'd like to find out about that because I wasn't there long enough to find out.

Burley: When General Quarters sounded, where did you go?

Flemmons: We didn't have no general quarters stations on there.

Burley: No?

Flemmons: No. I didn't know what General Quarters was until I went on that Honolulu. When they hollered, "Abandon ship, I didn't know nothing about that, either, because, man, everybody was scratching.

We were sitting down in the compartment when the first torpedo hit. I was sitting at a table. The regular tables, when they weren't in use, we would hang them up like that (gesture) and bring them down when you'd eat. I was still sitting there, and everybody had done got up. I don't know where they went. In those days they brought our chow to us down there. We just set the tables, and they brought it to us.

Anyhow, I was reading the Sunday funnies. When that first torpedo hit, I jumped up, and I didn't know quite what to do, and neither did no one else. Man, that lifted you off your seat. But I didn't have to jump up because I was already up. Anyhow, I was trying to decide what to do, and I folded my funny paper, and I put it down in the waste band of my shorts. Just then

the mess cook had fallen down the ladder and landed right in front of me. He said, "The damned Japanese are attacking!" I remember some ol' boy said, "Well, I didn't even know they was mad at us!"

But, anyhow, about that time another one hit, and then water started coming in that compartment. I don't even remember people being in there, but, boy, that ladder was full, and everybody was fighting in trying to get past each other. That water was coming in fast. I guess everybody made it out, as far as I know (chuckle). All you had to do was get in front of them, and they were pushing you out.

When we got out there on top, that's where you made your decision to go to the left or right. If you made the wrong one, that lumber would have caught you. And it did. I think it caught some of them. I remember looking back and seeing that. When I saw that, I pulled my shoes off and jumped. Why did I pull my shoes off? Why didn't I just jump? Talking about that motor launch, I got in the motor launch. The boat crew was down there waiting on guys, and they got the tiller hung behind the cable. I said, "I can't wait on this!" (chuckle). I jumped in. It really wasn't very far, but, man, I dog-paddled over, and I don't even think I hit the water very much.

They were doing some construction work over just on

the beach. They had big sheets of steel. I said, "What am I doing hiding behind this? I said, "That ain't going to do me no good if something hits this thing! That steel will be right on top of us!"

So they had a ditch dug there, and I got in that. I was looking around, and here comes a jeep with two guys in it. I don't know who they were or where they were from, but they said, "Come on!" So I got in, and they took me over to the Officer's Club on Ford Island. They had a lot of guys in there. I thought I was about to freeze to death, but actually I wasn't. I was sick, almost petrified.

Burley: So your ship was docked there pretty close to Ford Island.

Flemmons: Oh, yes. I don't know how many yards it was.

Burley: Let me go back a minute here. You came in on Friday...I'm jumping back.

Flemmons: Okay, go ahead.

Burley: I want to try to get a clear picture. You came in on Friday. That would be the 5th, right?

Flemmons: Yes.

Burley: The Friday before the 7th. Could you kind of give me a description of the 5th until the morning of the 7th? You came in. What did you do? For example, liberty. If you went on liberty that weekend, what did you do?

Flemmons: Well, actually, I really can't. I can just only

remember what the routine usually was there at liberty.

Burley: Okay, tell me about that.

Flemmons: I can't figure why they stacked that lumber that weekend, Saturday the 6th. It must have been the 6th when we stacked it there. We came in Friday and stacked it on Saturday, so evidently we worked our tails off.

Burley: Did you go on liberty? Do you remember?

Flemmons: No, I was there most of the time. I never did go on liberty, really. They had a curfew, anyway.

Burley: What was that?

Flemmons: In Honolulu.

Burley: Yes. What time did you have to be back?

Flemmons: We were supposed to be in at twelve o'clock at night.

Burley: Twelve o'clock. Do you know how their liberty was divided up on the ship? Do you remember?

Flemmons: They had watches--the port and starboard watch. But after the war started, they broke it up into, I think, about three or four different watches. But they were just port and starboard there, so just half of them would be left there to do anything that needed to be done, stand watches. They didn't stand many watches. They didn't do much of anything before the war. That peacetime Navy was better than that wartime Navy.

Burley: You said you didn't make very much money. What did the people usually do when they went on...

Flemmons: On liberty?

Burley: Yes, when you got out?

Flemmons: Well, some of them would go to the houses of ill-repute or go get drunk. But some of those bars over there, if you had too many to drink and you walked up there, they wouldn't even let you in.

Burley: I heard Honolulu was pretty lively.

Flemmons: Oh, man, it was. It was lively over there. Man, it was jumping all the time.

Burley: I imagine on the weekends it was wall-to-wall.

Flemmons: Yes, the servicemen there and everything. You couldn't walk down the streets. I think they called it Hotel Street where all those prostitute houses were over in there.

Burley: Yes, I think I've heard of Hotel and Canal.

Flemmons: Yes, servicemen lined up sometimes for blocks. The Shore Patrol would say, "Get back on the sidewalk now!" I might be wrong in this, but it looked to me like the government was all for that because the women there didn't have anything to do with the servicemen. At least as far as I could see, they didn't.

Burley: I guess Honolulu had a little bit of excitement at least..

Flemmons: Well, I guess.

Burley: ...or something to do if you had enough money.

Flemmons: Well, I was back there off and on all during the war. Then I was back there in 1946, which was my last time.

We were decommissioned after that, and that was my last time. Well, to me it still seemed like the same old place. I just got tired of going over there. Well, that may be one of the reasons I didn't go. I didn't see nothing exciting over there. You could go to a movie or get drunk, and I didn't have enough money to get drunk.

Burley: In the pre-Pearl Harbor days, when you thought of the Japanese, what kind of picture did you conjure up in your mind of a Japanese person?

Flemmons: Well, actually, I never gave them a thought. War was a threat, but in my group nobody ever mentioned the Japanese or war. Well, like I said, I didn't know they was mad at us. I never gave them a thought.

Burley: Was morale pretty high?

Flemmons: Oh, yes. Lazy! Man, there was nothing to do, and it was hot. You had a chance to lay around a lot. Oh, man, we enjoyed ourselves when we went below on those bombing things, you know.

Burley: I guess you didn't do anything.

Flemmons: If I'd give it a thought, it was a heck of a lot better than working in the fields for fifty cents a day.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: Really, I enjoyed it. I didn't know anybody, really.

Burley: Let me pick up now on the morning of the 7th--when you got up and what you can remember. Take it from there if

you would.

Flemmons: Well, it really doesn't seem like I came alive until that first torpedo hit.

Burley: That's the first you...

Flemmons: That kind of jars my memory (chuckle). Like I said, I was sitting there at the table. This fellow that I was in the same boot camp when we went aboard there.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: ...he was a mess cook. He told me he was a mess cook, but to me he's just a face there without any features. But I'll see him in May. That's when I'll get to see him. Maybe it will dawn on me who it was.

Burley: And he's the one you said that...

Flemmons: We was in the same boot camp. He was the mess cook who said, "The danged Japanese have attacked!" I called him and told him about that years later, and he said, "Why, I was that mess cook. (chuckle) But it kind of shocked us to see that garbage can coming down that steel ladder. Man, that made a lot of racket.

Burley: What deck was that on?

Flemmons: I was on the third deck, three decks below. They say it was officially...I think I heard that in seven minutes it rolled and settled. I was over there in that hold, and I had to fight my way up that ladder--three decks--and then I stopped to pull my shoes off. Then I jumped and swam to the beach. And I was over there watching it

when it rolled over.

Burley: It listed pretty quickly then.

Flemmons: Oh, yes. It was going when I jumped. She was already going over because the lumber was beginning to fall over.

Burley: And you jumped off the side that was, I guess, closest to..

Flemmons: The high side, on the starboard side.

Burley: ...closest to Ford Island.

Flemmons: Yes. The high side was the Ford Island side.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: The low side was out in the harbor side.

Burley: And then you swam to the boat and...

Flemmons: Yes, two or three paddles and I got to the boat. It was right there at the side of the ship.

Burley: Were there bombs dropping all around?

Flemmons: They were machine-gunning at that time.

Burley: They were strafing?

Flemmons: Yes. I don't know how I got out of that because you could hear those bullets hitting the water (chuckle). Them ol' boys would hit that water hard when those things come on through there. I don't know why they were doing that. They were doing a pretty good job of that there.

Burley: Okay, you said--I think, before we turned this on--that some people went out to where the boat was tied to...you

said the ship was tied to these big quays.

Flemmons: Oh, yes.

Burley: ...and there were people sitting out there.

Flemmons: Well, no. This fellow who was the mess cook, who I was talking about, I called him recently, and he said that when he jumped, he made a few paddles to these moorings, these big cement blocks. He climbed up on one and just pulled his clothes off. He went in on Ford (chuckle) Island naked. Why does a person do that? Why did I pull my shoes and socks off?

Burley: Okay, after you were on the boat, then you said that you jumped off and swam on in.

Flemmons: Yes. Well, some of the guys were diving but. .what do you call those things that help keep the ship steady? It sticks out there. The thing was beginning to come out of the water, and the barnacles also...man, that stuff was as sharp as razors down there. It was just like coral.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: I don't know if you've ever walked on any coral or not.

Burley: I haven't tried it.

Flemmons: It's like a razor. Well anyway, it popped in my mind right then that "them things will cut me to pieces if I slide down the edge of that or if I dive into it. So I just held my nose and jumped just as far as I could. I cleared the whole mess down there. Some of them ol'

boys. .I remember seeing the blood down there, but I didn't see the guy that done it. I don't know whether he slid down it or hit his head on it when he dove or what. I didn't want to take any chances, so I just jumped. Everything just flashes in front of you right like that. I didn't have sense enough to think, I don't think.

Burley: Everything that was happening was happening too quickly.

Flemmons: Yes. Then I made those few paddles, and I got to the motor launch. Then the next thing was that the tiller back there in the back got hung on that cable. What that cable was stretched around there for, I don't know. They were having trouble getting it off, and I said, "I can't wait for this. I just kept going.

Burley: Were they strafing the boat, too?

Flemmons: Well, they were strafing us in the water. This fellow I was talking to, the mess cook, said that they were having colors, raising the flag, and they strafed the topside, and one of the officers was killed on the first strafing run. But I don't know about that because I wasn't up there. It's a good thing that I wasn't.

Burley: Yes.

Flemmons: I thought that water was going to catch us before we got out of that compartment, though.

Burley: Okay, you got to Ford Island and then...

Flemmons: Yes. They gave me some officer's dry khakis, and then

here comes that jeep again with rifles, ammunition, bayonets. They gave me a couple of bandoleers and a rifle and a bayonet. They said, "Fix bayonets and put a clip in there and be ready. They were expecting paratroopers.

Burley: Oh, really.

Flemmons: Yes. I helped guard some underground oil or gas tanks or whatever it was--fuel--all day long. I think it was on Ford Island. I was walking around a fence. Then everything began to get dense. There was about three days I lost there.

Burley: Could you tell the difference between the waves of Japanese planes coming in?

Flemmons: No.

Burley: Did it get...

Flemmons: No. No, I wasn't up there because I was busy with these...some of them had come in before I ever got up. Then I was busy trying to get to the officers' quarters. I looked up one time--that's the only time I looked up--and I saw the horizontal bombers. After that, I got in that jeep and went into the officers' quarters.

Burley: So you were busy (chuckle).

Flemmons: I was just busy. I glanced up and saw a plane going by, and that's about all I saw. I really didn't see nothing else. I couldn't get to a place where I could see that many of them. But we walked that fence duty all day up

until that night, and then we did the same all night and then all day.

Burley: I know what I was going to ask you. So you were pretty much busy while.

Flemmons: Oh, yes.

Burley: Was there a lot of chaos and...

Flemmons: It seemed to me...I really wasn't around any activity, really, because they got me walking this fence duty.

Burley: Could you see over on Battleship Row?

Flemmons: I could see the smoke over there. Some of the ships were blazing. We could see hunks of steel as we would walk the fence duty, but it was at a distance.

Burley: Explain where Battleship Row was as compared to where the Utah was docked.

Flemmons: It was over on the other side of the island. When you come in the harbor there, the island goes all the way around it. We came in this way (gesture), and all the destroyers and everything were tied up over here (gesture), small craft, cruisers and everything. We were right here (gesture). Your light cruisers and battleships and all that was all double tied up and everything.

Burley: I bet that was pretty impressive.

Flemmons: Yes. And the carriers and the tenders were tied up around in there. We usually just tied up to a quay until we took the carriers place.

Burley: Did you hear anything about what was going on over on Battleship Row when you were...did you hear any news?

Flemmons: No. I didn't have any contact with anyone. That ol' boy said, "They're attacking!" and I was on my own after that.

Burley: You were carrying a gun and guarding.

Flemmons: Yes, they gave us rifles for the fence duty. That night I went back to the barracks--which barracks I don't know. I didn't even know where I was. The carriers planes came back in that night--it was after dark--and all hell broke loose. Man, that island just lit up with everybody firing at those things.

Burley: I'll bet it did.

Flemmons: If they'd been Japanese that night (chuckle), golly, we'd have got half of them.

Burley: That caused quite a bit of excitement.

Flemmons: Yes. That chief said, "Anybody who doesn't have a rifle, get under the tables; everybody that has one, get out there and fire!" I'd like to have burnt that ol' .30-06 up. I guess I turned that rifle over to him because I don't remember what happened to that rifle after that. I don't even remember where I spent that night.

Burley: Did you eat? Do you remember eating or getting anything to drink that day?

Flemmons: A couple of ships had already set up chow lines, so I

got in the chow line. The cooks and stuff don't like strangers coming in. It was all out of the same pot, you know, but they don't want to fix for extra people. There was a mess hall up toward the sub base.

Then after that, man, I just started losing a sense of time. They had me on a burial detail, ammunition detail. I just lost track of time until I ran across the guys from the old Utah bunch.

Burley: What did you do on ammunition detail? What is that?

Flemmons: You'd just haul it from one place to another. You'd haul it over to the sandbag emplacements-- .50-caliber and .30-caliber. Ships were going out or getting ready to go out. Man, that's just like on that burial detail. They had me on that motor launch picking up bodies back up there in those little tributaries or whatever they call them. We were picking up bodies that were floating in there and marking them and getting them ready to bury. A lot of them they just buried in a shoe box after they identified them.

Burley: So you actually were going around and picking...

Flemmons: I was just a jack-of-all-trades.

Burley: Just doing whatever they...

Flemmons: If they seen somebody, they'd say, "Come on. If it was a officer, you just had to do what he said.

Burley: I bet the burial detail wasn't too exciting, was it?

Flemmons: No. I was on this for about four hours one day. I

don't know. You kind of got used to seeing bodies laying around you. They were just trying to identify them. Then the truck would take them up in the hills. Some of the guys said they had a bulldozer, and they just opened up a ditch and buried them.

But, of course, on this tape they can't see my hand here, can they.

Burley: I know what your saying (chuckle). I was going to ask you something.

Flemmons: Did you run out of questions?

Burley: No, I just had a question when you were talking. What was it? I'll think of it later, probably.

Flemmons: Okay.

Burley: You said you met a bunch of people from the Utah somewhere. I guess you wanted to find out what you guys were going to do. When was that?

Flemmons: The best I can figure, it was three days later. There was this mess hall up there close to the front gate, and there was a little ol' tree out there, and I think there was a tin building or some kind of little ol' building. But that's where they were getting together. They had been on the same boat I had been on, but they didn't have no place to go or nothing like that. After we'd all got together there...well, they got the word, and they started coming in there, and the next day I was assigned to the light cruiser Honolulu.

Burley: I remember what I was going to ask you. When the planes came in and everyone fired at them, I bet there were a lot of rumors...I mean, they gave you a gun, and you were guarding, and they...someone was expecting paratroopers, so I bet there were a lot...everything was...were you tense? What kind of rumors were going around?

Flemmons: Well, like I say, I didn't see nobody, but that's what they told me when they handed me the rifle. So evidently they heard rumors or fact. I don't know. But that's the way I got it. They told me--the guys who gave me the rifle. I thought they knew what they were talking about and knew what they were doing. But I'll tell you one thing. Everytime I saw a bird it scared me to death (chuckle). I thought, "Here they come! What will I do?" There was about three of us, I think, and they would get too close to the other guy that walked sentry duty. There were about three of us. We never got to talk to each other, but I imagine they were as scared as I was. We couldn't protect very much, just the three of us. Everybody else had their hands full, I imagine. I guess before dark they had all them machine guns set up, and they would come alive when those planes came in that night. It looked like a 4th of July celebration. A whole lot of them tracers would just come in where the planes were. One plane came down in

the harbor to get out of it, and it didn't bother them. They strafed everything. They were strafing their own ships and everything. They just strafed everything that got in the way.

Burley: When the attack was going on and all that, how did people react? Was it kind of mixed? It sounds like you had something to do; I mean, you were sent to guard...I mean, what kind of reaction...was there chaos, or were people kind of calm, or was it...

Flemmons: The only group of people I was close to was when I went to the officers' quarters. The nurses--I guess they were nurses--and the people there all looked like they were calm and organized. They would bring some of those sailors in there that had dove under the oil. The oil was burning. They were trying to get under the ship, and they inhaled a bunch of oil.

Burley: When you jumped off, was the water on fire?

Flemmons: No.

Burley: You..

Flemmons: We didn't have that problem. It was over at the battleships where they had all that problem--fire and oil. Man, they just ripped them open, and here went that oil.

Burley: Okay, where are we? You said you got assigned to the Honolulu. You ended up on the Honolulu.

Flemmons: It was tied at Ten-Ten Dock, I believe, somewhere over

in there. They had a bomb hit. That day it was in dry dock. We were trying to clean up that oil on it and fix that bomb hole. It was in dry dock when I went aboard it.

Burley: What did the Honolulu do, I mean, after the Pearl Harbor...I mean, did you...I don't know. Where did it go, or what did the ship do?

Flemmons: Well, sometime in January we came back to the States. We got refitted, and then we took a convoy of ships to Australia. From there we went to Alaska and patrolled up there for six months, I believe, around Kodiak. We landed troops up there on Kiska and Attu. But you're not interested in that, are you?

Burley: Oh, you can talk about that. Then you spent the rest of the war on the Honolulu?

Flemmons: Oh, yes. My last day of the war on the Honolulu...later, we got a torpedo hit and got sixty-nine killed that day. So we came on back. It took us six to ten days to get back. Then we went into dry dock to get the water out to where we could get those people out of there. Sixty-nine were killed there by the torpedo hit. We came on back and went to Norfolk. That was my last duty there--on the Honolulu. I had eight months tug duty in Seattle and then caught an AK and took it back out to Honolulu and decommissioned it.

Burley: Is there anything else that you can think of about Pearl

Harbor that we didn't talk about and that you want to or you think we should? Is there anything you want to add?

Flemmons: No. I don't think I was smarter than anybody else. I was just there at the wrong time, I guess, so I did the best I could in trying to get out of there. Everybody else had their problems. I don't think I'm smart enough to know how to do any better on that. The only thing is just hearsay from what I know about it, what was going on. Just hearsay and what I read.

Burley: Okay.

Flemmons: Like I said, a lot of that is just blank.