

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER  
494

Interview with  
C. C. CHRISTENSEN  
October 1, 1979

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved:

Open  
Charles C. Christensen  
(Signature)

Date:

Oct 1 1979

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Oral History Collection

Charles C. Christensen

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Charles C. Christensen for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 1, 1979, in Denton, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Christensen in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the auxiliary repair ship USS Argonne during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Christensen, 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. Christensen: Well, I was born on September 7, 1922, in Cincinnati, Ohio. I finished the eighth grade . . . I went to vocational high school in Cincinnati. When I went into the Navy, they gave us an aptitude test. I went to Vocational Training School at the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan. We were the first group there.

Henry Ford had furnished the barracks, and we went right through his training school, right there on the grounds of the River Rouge plant.

Marcello: We will come back and talk about this later on because I have talked to several other people who had a similar experience, and I want to hear what you have to say about it. When did you join the Navy?

Christensen: I went in on October 27th, I believe it was, in 1940-- the 27th or the 29th. The 27th, I believe it was.

Marcello: Why was it that you decided to enter the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of service?

Christensen: Well, for one thing I wanted on the battleships. I thought that was really the life. Those big, beautiful ships . . . boy, that was really something for me to get on. And, of course, I liked the clean life that they had--three good meals a day . . . and I think they started us out at \$21 a month. I was working in a factory. I was making fifty cents an hour then. Of course, I had to pay room and board out of that. So that looked pretty good to me.

I happened to see a sailor that was all dressed up, home on leave. He had a lot of money and clean clothes, and I thought, boy, that is really the thing! So, I went down there, and the enlistments were for six years, and, of course, that did not phase me at all. My mother was a

little apprehensive of six years, but I guess I would have signed up for twenty, I wanted to go that bad.

Marcello: Now, you say you joined the Navy in 1940.

Christensen: Yes, on October 27 or 29, 1940.

Marcello: What part or influence did the Depression have upon your entering the Navy? Even as late as 1940, the country was still kind of in the Depression.

Christensen: Jobs were hard to find. I had a job in a furniture factory. The pay was, like I said before, fifty cents an hour, and they were really hard to get. They worked you with no breaks . . . and, of course, there was no income tax out of that, either. When you made \$20 a week for a forty-hour week, why, you got the twenty dollars. I was paying five dollars a week to my aunt and uncle for room and board, which was a fourth of it. So I thought, well, room and board and everything with it, why, that wasn't too bad.

Marcello: So you did have a steady forty-hour per week job at the time that you entered.

Christensen: Well, yes, it was pretty steady. There was really no future to it. It was really a labor job, is what it was. I had had vocational training there in Cincinnati at a vocational high school. The job that I had was just a common, ordinary labor job, and I wanted something a little bit more. At the time, I really didn't have my eye on

machine shop work in the Navy, as such, In other words, I didn't press for it.

When I went through boot camp, the officer in charge there . . . they gave us all an aptitude test. Well, the time that I had spent in the machine shop there at the vocational high school . . . when the aptitude test was finished, why, I come out number one in the whole class.

He called me up to his office and he said, "Christensen, I've got some real good news for you. We've got a brand new school--it's not even finished yet--up at the Ford Motor Company. Since you got the highest grade in your company, we're going to send you back to school."

I rebelled on that! I said, "Absolutely not! I don't want to go to no school! My whole company's going on the battleships!" They were already getting assigned to it. I had looked for my name, and my name wasn't on any of the . . . they were going on the Oklahoma and the Arizona and the Tennessee and the Maryland. The whole company was going on them battleships, and that's what I went in the Navy for. I wanted on them battleships!

He said, "Well, I'm sorry, but you don't get everything that you want in the Navy. This is one thing you're not going to get." It was really the best thing for me, but it split me up from all my friends in Company 101. So I

waited around there, and finally they finished the school, and I'm really not for sure . . . I've got some literature on it, but it seems like it was somewhere in the last of December or the first of January that we went to Dearborn, Michigan, to the Ford Motor School.

Marcello: Let's back up a moment here. When you were back in vocational high school, did you have a particular major or specialty when you were there?

Christensen: No, just machine shop--general machine shop. It was kind of a basic engineering course that we had there. When we went to the Ford Motor School there, it just fit right in there, you know. They put us right in the classes, and we went right to their school. I think we had four hours of school in a day, and we had four hours of machine shop right in their tool and die shop--right in the plant--which was really terrific.

But it was cut short . . . they had their first major strike at the Ford Motor Company while we were there. There we were--fenced in in our compound. We couldn't go into the plant. We couldn't get any schooling, so they cut our stay there short. I believe it was somewhere around March that they shipped us out without completing our schooling there. They shipped us to . . . I think I went to San Pedro, California, and from there I got on an oil tanker--USS

Sabine--and we went right directly to Pearl Harbor. I went aboard the USS Argonne . . . of course, nobody that I had talked to knew anything about the Argonne.

Marcello: Let's just back up because we're getting way ahead of our story, and I've got to ask some questions here. At the time that you entered the Navy, how closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs?

Christensen: I was just a young man. It really wasn't that much of an interest to me. Of course, I knew what was going on, and I knew that they were talking about the draft. But that really didn't affect me that much. I really wasn't that involved in it to really know what the world affairs in detail were. I knew what they were doing in Germany and so on that way, but the rest of it . . . I was just a young man living from day to day, I guess.

Marcello: So, when you did think of the country possibly getting into war, then, your eyes were turned more toward Europe than they were toward the Far East. War with Japan was perhaps the farthest thing from your mind at that time.

Christensen: Oh, yes. The Japanese were really our friends then. When I got on the West Coast, I loved to roller skate, I'd go to the roller skate rink there, and I'd met some of the Japanese there and some of the Japanese girls, you know. I had some Japanese friends that I had met over there in



Hawaii, That would have been the farthest thing from my mind. I wouldn't even imagine anything like that.

In fact, when they said we were going to Pearl Harbor, I really didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. I really just thought it was right off the coast of San Francisco there someplace. Really, I wasn't that well-informed about Pearl Harbor--where it was in Hawaii--or even, in fact, how far Hawaii was from the States.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Christensen: I went to Great Lakes.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record, or was it the normal Navy boot camp at that time?

Christensen: Oh, I had one little exciting thing there. It might not pertain to this at all. When we were on our graduation, I had the honor of carrying the American flag with the big eagle on the top. He had a bill on him like this (gesture). Just as we came by where the admiral was at, and all the captains in the reviewing stand, lo and behold, from the microphone over to the PA... system over there, they had a cable, and wouldn't you know that that eagle caught on that wire there! We were all "eyes right," and that thing caught on there, and I gave it a good jerk, and when I did (chuckle) it slipped out of my hand onto that wire. Of course, everybody

was going by, and I was embarrassed. I finally got the thing off, and it was just panicking me (chuckle).

The thing that I remember most there was sleeping in a hammock. I had no idea . . . the first thing they do is . . . they don't give you anything but a hammock. They had these stanchions in there, and first you start out at four feet. Well, after you get them real tight, you slip into that thing like a banana, and you roll your blanket over them. I got that pretty good. I could get in that thing and sleep real good. Of course, there was always an "old salt" there that, after we'd been in the Navy two or three days . . . the lights would be down low, and everybody would be quiet, and they'd sneak in the door, and they'd go down underneath these here hammocks and let their backs just touch you. Just as it would start over you, you'd just automatically throw your arms out, and, of course, that would upset the next guy. He'd go through that thing. There must be, maybe, 300 or 400 of us in there, and everybody is on the deck. And the lights are out; they just got a blue light on in there.

Then after, I think, about four weeks of that, once we got that down pretty good, they moved us up on what they called a poop deck which was four feet high and then on up four more feet--eight feet high--and that is where our

hammocks was, and there we lived on them hammocks for the rest of our . . . I think we were there nine weeks,

Of course, after we got out of boot camp, I didn't see the hammocks again because we slept in bunks. That was really impressive to me. In fact, I've got a hammock at home--I still love it--in the back yard.

Marcello: How long was boot camp at that particular time?

Christensen: Nine weeks. I got the worst time I guess there was up there in Chicago--in October and November and December.

Marcello: That was pretty short then, wasn't it?

Christensen: Well, I think they even cut it shorter after the war started.

Marcello: They did.

Christensen: I went back there--it must have been about 1944--as a basic engineering instructor there at Great Lakes, and I think then it was about six weeks. They had cut it down to six weeks.

Marcello: I was surprised that it was only nine weeks at the time you were there, considering that that was still about a year from the actual beginning of hostilities.

Christensen: They were beginning to build up then. You can see . . . like, the Ford Motor Company. They furnished the school. They were getting into this. They needed machinists bad in the fleet. They were preparing for . . . they were getting things up then to prepare for anything that would come up.

I don't think everything started just from December 7, 1941, on. I think that they were preparing possibly a year or maybe a little bit more than that because they were beginning to take men into the Navy. Probably, if I would have tried to get in maybe a year before, I might have had a little more trouble than when I did.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that when you were in boot camp, you had taken the aptitude test, and you qualified to attend this machinist school at the Ford Motor Company in Michigan. How long were you there altogether, and what sort of classes and practical work did you do while you were there?

Christensen: Well, we got there the first part of January of 1941, and they had the first strike at the Ford Motor Company there at Dearborn, and we had to cut our training short. I believe we must have left there in March of 1941.

Marcello: And you said that you left there in March as a result of that strike.

Christensen: Oh, yes, yes. We had more classes and more machine shop work to do there at the plant. It was a long, drawn-out strike, and I think we were there possibly a week or two weeks during the strike, and they could see that the thing wasn't going to end right away. Since we were the first company there, we were the first ones to move out.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do there at the Ford Motor Company?

What did this training consist of?

Christensen: Well, we worked right in their tool and die shop, right there at their River Rouge plant. We did all kinds of basic engineering work there, you know, running the shapers and the lathes and milling machines and that sort of thing. Then we had four hours of class every day. We'd go up and they'd give us the basic engineering in the classrooms on gear cutting and things that pertained mostly to tool and die work . . . sheet metal and so on. We got basically the same thing as the students that went to the Ford Motor Company School. We had the same instructors and everything. There really was no difference in it.

Marcello: I would assume that it was considered a choice assignment to have gone to that Ford Motor Company Trade School.

Christensen: Well, it was if you hadn't had your heart set on going to the fleet and going to the battleships that I did. Looking back over it, the things that I wanted in the Navy and I requested weren't the best things for me. The things that they insisted I do were the best things, such as this school. I went through their school, and then I went right into the machine shop on the Argonne. I went to the basic engineering school, and I was an instructor there. Then I went on the General J.C. Breckinridge, a large transport, after the war. I went right into the machine shop, and when

I came out of the Navy, why, I could almost pick my job. I had six years of machine shop experience, and you could see that where they were steering me was in the right direction.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that as a result of the strike, you were transferred out of the Ford Motor Company plant, and you were sent to the West Coast. Where did you go on the West Coast?

Christensen: Oh, we went to San Pedro. They had an airfield there, and I believe at the time they called it Roosevelt Air Field. They had the Navy there, and, of course, they had the Marines. They had an air squadron of Marines there. I stayed there for just a short time, maybe a week or two.

Then I went aboard an oil tanker, the USS Sabine, and we went from San Pedro down to San Diego. We spent the night there--I think they took on fuel--and then we headed for Hawaii. It was my first sea-going ship, and I thought, oh, this was really . . . I just felt sure that I'd get seasick because I always got carsick on the old streetcars. We went along the coast, and I thought, "Gee, boy, this is great! No seasickness!"

I had a job. They gave me a job as bull cook there in the galley, turning pork chops. So the first day out from San Diego, I was turning these pork chops, and we started getting into the high seas and the rolls. Oh, I knew what

seasickness was then. I was so sick that I could hardly hold my head up. I had a friend by the name of Draper, and I don't guess anything made Draper sick. He come up, and he took my job over. As long as I laid down, I was all right. But I couldn't go that route anymore.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being assigned to the Hawaiian Islands?

Christensen: Well, I really didn't know. I didn't know that much about them. In fact, I didn't even know where the islands were-- the location--and, gee, that was far off to me. I just wasn't too impressed with it one way or the other.

I was awful disappointed that I wasn't going on the battleships. I inquired, oh, with everybody that knew anything about the Navy about the Argonne, but nobody knows anything about the Argonne. When we come down through Pier Ten there, and they pointed out the Argonne, my heart went all the way into my shoes. I was so disappointed. I couldn't believe that that was part of the Navy. It looked like an old freighter to me. Boy, my eyes was . . . them men-of-war was what I wanted.

Marcello: Well, what did the Argonne look like? Describe the ship.

Christensen: Oh, it looked like an old freighter. It was an old . . . it must have been surely an old (chuckle) World War I ship. I was a little bit apprehensive of going to sea on the thing.

Of course, we didn't go to sea that much. We were tied up there at Pier Ten. That was really a permanent fixture there. Everybody in the harbor knew the Argonne because, I think, the base force commander was on there.

We took care of a lot of the small craft repairs-- tugboats and motor launches and things like that. Anything that was small repair, why, we took care of that. Of course, all the radio equipment that they had on there was the big thing. There wasn't too many ships that had the equipment that the old Argonne had. I guess if the Japanese were going to sink one of the ships in there, that probably would have been one of the least ones they would have wanted to sink, anyway, because it just looked like a freighter setting in there from the air. It just looked like an old tramp steamer.

Marcello: Why was it that they would put the radio equipment on a ship such as the Argonne?

Christensen: I have no idea. It might have been the fact they just had the space there for it and the quarters for the admirals and their staff and things like that. Of course, I wasn't too familiar with that. Most of my dealings that I had on the Argonne were all below the main deck. What was above the main deck, that was a different world altogether for us. For one thing, we weren't allowed up in there too much



unless we had business up in there. Other than that we were down in the holds. That's where we lived and stayed, and that was home to us.

Marcello: What sort of a complement did the Argonne have during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Christensen: Well, I really don't know. I really have no idea how many men were on that ship. Some of them never had a chance to even see or meet because we were living down there in the machine shop. That was our home down there, so I really couldn't say. If I just guessed, we probably had somewhere around 600 at the most. I don't know.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get when you went aboard the Argonne? After all, for the most part, you were still basically a "boot."

Christensen: Oh, I had a real good reception when I went on the Argonne. They said, "Well, since you're the newest one on here . . . ." As you go down the ladder, you look around and everybody knows everybody else, and you're the stranger. They said, "Surely you got enough sense to make coffee." I said, "Oh, sure, sure! I can take care of the coffee." So they tell me, "You got to wash all these cups here for the 'old salts.' We'll take you up here in the head where our showers are, and we'll show you up there. There's three lines here. One of them is for fresh water, and that's the green. This

one here is for the saltwater, and that's red. This one here is for steam." They said, "Now, make sure you don't get into this saltwater." It was coming right out of the harbor there--old, dirty saltwater. They said, "Then you take this here fresh water, and you shoot that steam in there, and you get it real hot. Then you come down into the machine shop here, and we'll show you how to make this coffee. You pour it all into these fresh, clean cups here that you made, and then you holler, 'Coffee's on,' and then we'll all come over and have our coffee."

Well, wouldn't you know that I'd get up there, and the first thing I did, well, I got confused on that fresh water and the saltwater. I got saltwater in that coffee pot, and I shoot the steam through it down there and put the coffee in it. And I was so proud. I poured the coffee out and hollered, "Coffee on," and everybody come over, and they'd grab them hot cups.

Oh, you'd never heard sailors cussing so much in your life. That was really embarrassing for me. Here I was, a new man, and here they were giving me a good going-over that I'm too dumb even to make coffee (laughter). So they knew me after that day. Everybody in the machine shop knew who I was.

Marcello: What sort of work were you assigned to after you first got

to the machine shop?

Christensen: Well, they put me on a lathe. I was a striker. The first jobs that I had wasn't really in the machine shop as such. When I was in the machine shop, the first machines I went on was the lathe.

But as a striker on there, they always put you with an "old salt," and they put me with a fellow by the name of Kaiser. He had been in the Navy for quite a while. He was quite a character. Everybody on there knew Kaiser. So I was his helper. I was his striker, and, of course, anything that had to be carried or any of the dirty work, well, that was always my job. Oh, we'd go maybe on a tugboat, or if they had different things that they were changing on the ship, why, I'd work with him.

That's what they started you out as when you first went there. Then as you got to be a little bit longer down in the machine shop, then they'd have an opening down there. But basically down in the machine shop I was on the lathe almost all the time.

Marcello: Those repair ships are rather fascinating to me because evidently they have all sorts of specialists and skilled personnel aboard, do they not?

Christensen: Well, on our ship we didn't. We did have skilled people, of course, in the machine shop. It was a very small machine

shop. Just thinking back, I think we had about four lathes. We had one big lathe there; it was a gap lathe. And we had a milling machine, a do-all saw, and a drill press. We had in the machine shop a typewriter repairman. He had his little cubbyhole back there in the back.

It was very small, and I was just trying to think, oh, how many of us were there before the war. Of course, after the war started, they brought a few more reserves down there. It seems like maybe twenty would have been a full crew down there at the most, that I could think of--somewhere around twenty.

Marcello: Were there any other sorts of specialties aboard that ship, though, besides the machine shop?

Christensen: The shipfitter shop was directly above the machine shop. They had a blacksmith on there. One of the fellows I met there was Mel Tousseau, and he was a blacksmith. We later met him while we were in Saint Louis. We were there at the convention. He called me, and he said, "We'll be down there at the ballroom." He said, "I have on a plaid coat." I said, "Oh, I'd know you anyplace!" We went down there, and there must have been a thousand people there. I looked around. I didn't have my glasses on, and I told my wife, I said, "Do you see that big fellow over there in the broad shoulders?" I said, "See if he doesn't have "Argonne" on

his name tag." She comes back and said, "Sure does." I said, "That's Mel Tousseau." He didn't remember me at all--not at all. I remembered . . . he hadn't really changed that much in thirty-some years. I would have recognized him anyplace.

Marcello: Well, the Argonne evidently wasn't nearly so large a ship as the Medusa, for example.

Christensen: Oh, no, no. No way. Now the Medusa was . . .

Marcello: A fleet repair ship.

Christensen: A fleet repair ship. Oh, yes. They could do almost anything on there. I think they even had them a little foundry on there. They could do almost anything on the Medusa. I think there was the Medusa and the Dixie and the Whitney and the Argonne . . . I might have missed one on the repair ships more because the fellows that went to the Ford Motor School with me, that's where they went. I went on the Argonne, some went on the Medusa, some on the Whitney, some on the Dixie. That's how I knew the repair ships.

The others were all full repair ships. They could take care of destroyers and cruisers and things like that. Ours was just a base force, just for small craft. We could take care of that, but that was about all.

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued

to deteriorate, could you detect any differences at all in the routine of your ship or the type of work you were doing?

Christensen: No, not at all. It was a day-to-day thing over there. Of course, I had a little different situation there in Hawaii than most of the other fellows. I had a relative that lived over there. He was in the Navy. He was a submarine man. He was assigned to a submarine temporarily--the one that I was telling you about there at Pier Ten right there. It was just forward of the Helena. Well, he was assigned to that--Fern Christensen. Him and his wife Idell and their little girl Judy lived over in Honolulu. If you had a relative or a friend or someplace where you could stay all night, well, you could get a weekend pass. So this Saturday . . .

Marcello: Now we're getting ahead of our story. I don't want to get up to December 7th yet.

Christensen: Okay. I did have a little different situation there--the fact that I had relatives over there. That was why I wanted to tell you, so you'd know that that my situation over there was just a little bit different than most of them.

Marcello: Yes, we'll come back and talk about that a little later on. What was the morale like aboard the Argonne during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? How would you describe the morale aboard the ship at that time?

Christensen: Oh, I'll tell you, in our machine shop where I was at, that was my little world down there. It was a big family. Everybody was right in there, and we all knew each other, and we worked as a team in there. We had a warrant officer by the name of Mr. Grey, who was just a first class Navy officer. Of course, warrant officers, there was something special about them, anyway. He was just really a nice fellow. The chief in charge, by the name of Jones, was a very nice guy. There was a lot of harmony. Thinking back, I can't remember of any fights or anything or where there was a lot of dissention in there. It was just a kind of a family up there.

Once you got in there, and they knew that you fit into the family, well, everything just . . . if you didn't . . . a little bit later on we had some that had come in there that didn't quite fit into the family. They kind of shied away from them. They lived in their own little world down there in the machine shop. We had a . . . we made a recorder down there, like a little jukebox. We had our records and everything. I'd say the morale was very good over there.

A lot of the guys didn't like it over there in Hawaii, mind you, as far as the liberty and the places to go over there. But I was just a little bit different from them because I had some place to go with home-cooked meals, and

I could put on Fern's clothes. He had an automobile. It was kind of a family life over there for me. Of course, I'd go on Hotel Street, or I could go down on Waikiki Beach, and I loved that . . . they had a roller skating rink over there, and I loved that. I spent a lot of time over there and a lot of time over at Fern's house, and he'd take me around the island to see things. I liked it over there. I was impressed with it.

Marcello: How do you account for the high morale aboard the Argonne?  
What do you think was responsible for it?

Christensen: I would think the officers probably had a lot to do with it on there. There was a lot of respect for the officers. Of course, I was just a young recruit on there, and I wasn't really that impressed with anything. I was more impressed after the war had started with the officers and the caliber of the men in there. But, see, in the machine shop we had . . . these were skilled men in there. They had a trade, and they were probably a cut above average on their intelligence. I think that had a lot to do with it. They had something that they were doing that they liked to do.

And they encouraged us to make a lot of what we called "government jobs"--things that you wanted to make, like, rings . . . and I have at home a lamp that I made in the shape of a lighthouse, and I have a pilot's wheel and a



clock that I had made. They encouraged us to do things like that on our off time. They would let us use the equipment there, and they would let us use the material. Mr. Grey had a lot of good ideas. He would encourage us to keep us busy, and I think that was one of the things that helped us a whole lot in there. I enjoyed it. I called Mr. Grey when I was in San Francisco, and he's really getting up into the years. He must be in his eighties now--a very nice gentleman, very nice.

Marcello: I would suppose the fact that all of you were volunteers at that stage also had something to do with the state of morale. In other words, you were all there because you wanted to be there.

Christensen: Well, yes, I think . . . of course, in my case it was. I was just tickled to death to be in there. I think a lot of the young men that went in when I did, they came off of farms and came out of real good homes, and they were homesick. I think a lot of them were disillusioned. They really had no idea what they were really getting into. Of course, one thing that was in my favor was that I loved to eat everything. Of course, the Navy chow was right down my alley, even the beans for breakfast that we'd have every Wednesday. We'd have beans for breakfast with them big, yellow-figs and cornbread. You'd be surprised that a lot

of them wouldn't even go up there, you know: "Beans!

Oh, no way!" To me it was something good to eat.

Marcello: So in other words, as far as you were concerned, the Navy chow was pretty good then.

Christensen: Well, especially on that Argonne. That was our saying there: "She's not much to look at, but it's a home and a 'feeder.'" And it really was! When I went on there, that's the first thing they told me. They said, "'Chris,' this isn't the best-looking ship in the fleet, but it's sure a home and a 'feeder.'" And it sure proved to be that.

Marcello: When you call a ship a "feeder," what do you mean? I'd like this for the record.

Christensen: Well, that means that it feeds good. The chow is good. While we had the flag on there, whenever the supply ships would come in, why, of course, you know whose motor launch would be over there. The first one would be off of the Argonne. I think we maybe had a little bit of edge on everybody else because we could get over there first before they run out of all the good stuff. They did feed us good.

Marcello: What were your living quarters like aboard the Argonne?

Christensen: Well, we lived right in the machine shop. We didn't have any special quarters there. Right along the bulkhead on either side, they had a bench there, and under the benches they had all of their billets, cast iron billets, and their

bronze billets. The cast iron would make liners for reciprocating steam engines. The cast iron . . . we made our own rings. We made perfect circle rings out of them.

Right above that we would have our bunks, and, of course, they would sort of fold up against the bulkhead there. They had an air duct that would come down there, so you'd have air. At that time, before and right after the war, of course, we only worked day shifts, you know, one shift.

But then as the war got on, it made it kind of bad to live in them quarters when we got to working three shifts in there and trying to sleep and live in the same shop where all the machines are going. Once we got more people in there, they started working two shifts and then three shifts. Of course, the shipfitters were right above us with all that big heavy sheet metal. They'd drop it, and they would cut it, and there'd be chipping and everything. It was really nerve-racking trying to get your rest and trying to do your work, too. As it went on, it was just a little bit harder living down there. That's where we lived at--right in the machine shop.

Marcello: So all in all, I think you've mentioned several things that would have contributed to the high morale. The food was good; the quarters weren't too bad in that pre-Pearl Harbor period.

Christensen: Oh, no, we had . . . it was clean. You could eat off of the . . . even in the machine shop there, you could eat off of the deck. It was clean. I loved that. I'm pernickety, anyway, about cleanliness. We always had a good warm place to sleep; we had three good meals a day; and we had clean clothes. To me, anything less than that is not living. We were doing fine.

Marcello: How slow or rapid was rank and promotion in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Christensen: Well, now, they didn't have too many. Of course, being in the machine shop, if you had a skill, you had an edge. Some things I didn't understand. When we would go up for examinations . . . I have here . . . let me show you a couple of them (refers to his papers). We'd take a test. We'd study up on it, and a lot of it that we had didn't pertain and had nothing to do with the machine shop at all. It would be for in the boiler room. Of course, the fellows that were going up for boilerman's rating, they would have machine shop questions. They would come down to us and want to know what about this and what about that. They were rather slow. I mean, they only had so many, and whoever got the highest rates, well, that was the ones that got the promotion.

Marcello: There had to be openings, too, did there not?

Christensen: There had to be openings, yes. They didn't just fill them to be filling them. There had to be an opening, and you had to compete with everybody else in the fleet in order to get your rate.

Marcello: Did you have very many of the old Asiatic sailors aboard the Argonne?

Christensen: Yes, we had several of them on there. We had one fellow by the name of . . . we called him "Shakey." He was a chief petty officer. This was right before Pearl Harbor, and I think, say, after the twelve to four o'clock watch and the four to eight o'clock watch, well, the officers would be relieved by a chief petty officer. So, "Shakey" had the watch there one night. We were right there at Pier Ten, and the officers would come aboard with their civilian clothes on. So, this one officer came aboard . . . and "Shakey" kind of shook, you know, like he had the St. Vitus's dance. So this officer just walked aboard, and he saluted the flag and saluted the officer-of-the-deck, which was "Shakey." He started on up the ladder, and "Shakey" said, "Sir! Sir! Sir! I don't think I recognize you!" He turned around to "Shakey," and he said, "That's all right, son. I'm just the captain on this ship." With that he walked on up the ladder, and I thought . . . I wasn't up there on the deck, but they said that "Shakey" almost shook

himself to death over that one (chuckle). He was one of what they called "Asiatics." I don't know. They had a kind of a faraway look in their eyes.

Marcello: I understand most of them are tattooed, and some of them even have an earring, did they not?

Christensen: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. They let them wear beards on there and such, but they had to keep them trimmed. They had to keep them neat. But they did allow beards.

Marcello: I'm sure those old Asiatic sailors could spin quite a few sea stories, too, could they not?

Christensen: Well, I'll tell you, down in the machine shop there we didn't have too many of them. We had some old-timers in there, but they hadn't really been around. They hadn't been over in Asia. I guess some of them had been on the Argonne probably all of their cruise. They got on there, and that was a home. It was hard to replace them, and they wouldn't let you out of that machine shop unless they had a replacement, so they were pretty well set right there in that shop. When I went there, there were some old-timers that had been there quite awhile.

Marcello: You know, that's a part of the Navy that, I guess, has disappeared. Like you mentioned, some of those guys would go aboard a ship and remain there for twenty or thirty years, would they not, on the same ship?

Christensen: Oh, yes, I guess that was true. Of course, there was a lot of shifting them around. I got around in the Navy. After the war was over, I was on a transport and went to Shanghai, Tsingtao, and Ta-ku and over all through Midway and Guam. I really got around there quite a bit.

Marcello: Talk a little bit about the liberty routine. You had mentioned this a little bit previously, but let's go into it in a little bit more detail. Normally, how did the liberty routine work for the people aboard the Argonne?

Christensen: Well, they had a port and starboard . . . I don't remember if I was port or starboard, but, anyway, it amounted to every other day. If you could get anybody on there that wasn't going ashore, that they would stand by for you, why, then you could go ashore. In fact, you could go almost everyday if you wanted. Somebody on there wasn't going to go because there wasn't a whole lot of money, and things were high like I showed you in that letter that I had written to my mother. I told her that things were really for rich people over there. Five-cent hamburgers were fifteen cents over there. There wasn't really that much that interested the fellows that they could afford to do over there, so you could always get somebody to stand by for you. There was no problem there.

Marcello: Now when you went ashore, let's say during the week or even on the weekend, was there a specific time that you had to

be back aboard ship, that is, assuming you didn't have an address?

Christensen: Yes, well, now, even if you had an address like I did, and you had a weekend pass, if you came back aboard ship, you couldn't leave until eight o'clock in the morning. In other words, if I came back, say, at two'clock on Sunday morning, I could leave after eight o'clock but not before. I had to stay aboard until eight o'clock. Yes, they had liberty hours. It would be in the afternoon after the workday was over. Well, then you could go, and you didn't have to be back . . . I believe that you . . . I'm not for sure, but I think it was somewhere around eight o'clock in the morning when you had to be back.

Marcello: So you could get overnight liberty, so to speak, aboard the Argonne even if you didn't have a permanent address.

Christensen: Well, now, I said that, and I'm really not for sure if that was . . . it didn't affect me that much. I'm saying something, and I really . . . when I went ashore, I always had the pass for overnight, and I knew I had to be back by eight o'clock in the morning. Now what everybody else had, I'm really not that for sure.

Marcello: I know that on a lot of the battleships, in fact, on all the battleships, they had a midnight curfew.

Christensen: Well, now, that could have very well been on the Argonne. It



didn't affect me that much that I remember about it, but it seems to me now that there was something on that.

Marcello: So theoretically, with port and starboard liberty, you probably couldn't get the full weekend off unless, like you pointed out, you could get somebody to stand by for you.

Christensen: Yes, that's right. I could get every other weekend off, yes. When I got it off, I could get Saturday and Sunday off. I think mine was every other one that I could get. If I had Saturday coming up, I could get Sunday. In other words, it would fall on that weekend on there, but if not, well, I could usually get somebody . . . if they went ashore, they'd be back on Saturday, so I'd get them to stand by for me, and I could go over late Saturday afternoon and stay until Sunday if I wanted to.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying is that under this port and starboard system, the port section might have liberty one weekend, and then the next weekend the starboard section would have liberty.

Christensen: I think that's the way that they did it. Of course, there wasn't very many on there that could get that weekends. See, I was one of the very few on there that could get the full weekend. In other words, if they got Saturday, I think they'd have to be back on Sunday.

Marcello: For duty . . . well, that's what I was thinking.

Christensen: Yes, yes. But in my case, where I had an address, where I could get it, well, I think mine was every other weekend. I could get a full weekend off, but then the next weekend I couldn't. I believe that was the way it was. I really didn't have that much trouble getting off. When I wanted off, I could . . . my only problem was that once that I had the weekend pass, if it fell on the weekend that Fern was off that weekend, well, then I could stay at his home. If it wasn't, if he was off on Saturday and had to come back, well, then I'd come back, too.

Marcello: What did you normally do when you went on liberty?

Christensen: Oh, I always made Hotel Street. I was a "Hotel Commando." Everybody made that. I usually . . . when I went over, I was always hungry so I'd go down to a nice restaurant and get me a real good meal and a beer, and I'd go to the roller rink. I loved that over at that roller rink. I went almost . . . if I had any liberty at all, I'd go to the roller rink and skate, and I met a lot of people over there. A lot of the sailors and lot of civilians were there.

I loved Waikiki Beach. I loved to go down there and rent me a surfboard. I loved to go up there to Fern's house and get home-cooked meals, and, of course, he had a car and everything. It was just like home to me, and, of course, they treated me real nice, and they were just tickled to death that I was over there.

Marcello: What was there to do down on Hotel Street?

Christensen: Oh, there was about, I guess . . . of course, Hotel Street was the "red light" district. I guess it must have been the New Senator and the Midway and the Honolulu Rooms and . . . I guess there must have been a dozen houses of prostitution down there. Of course, before the war, that was pretty good liberty for a lot of the fellows. They would go up there, and the girls . . . if you got up there around dinnertime, why, they'd invite them in because there wasn't that many sailors in there, and they would invite them in to have dinner with them. They had a lounge in there, and they had a jukebox.

Marcello: Now was this legalized prostitution before the war?

Christensen: Oh, yes, surely it was because it was so open. Even after the war, after they really got started . . . I didn't get too many liberties after that. We left in probably the following April. When they really started bringing them over, why, the lines would be double lines all the way from maybe on the second floor of the houses all the way down the steps, around the corner, all the way maybe a city block down and half a city block over.

The women there, they got a system there that they worked two rooms. It wasn't just one room; they worked two rooms. They would have one fellow, and he would come in, and he

would undress; and the fellow that had just been taken care of, he would leave and then she would go to the next room over there. The fellow over there, he would be undressed and then . . . I mean, she worked two rooms. They really got a production line system going there.

Marcello: I hear a lot of people talk about the Black Cat Cafe. Do you recall that one?

Christensen: No. Drinking wasn't one of my vices. I loved beer.

Marcello: Was it basically a bar?

Christensen: Well, that I really don't know because I didn't hang in the bars. I'd go over and have dinner, and maybe I'd have beer with my dinner. But as far as hanging in the bars, that I didn't do. That was one thing I didn't do.

One thing that impressed me over there in Honolulu was that at that time they had modern electric buses over there that we didn't have over in the States. We had regular streetcars. The city, to me, I felt, was modern. There was a Sears and Roebuck store, and things like that was very modern.

Marcello: Well, they had blue laws over there, too, did they not, in terms of . . .

Christensen: What?

Marcello: Blue laws. You know, like, in terms of the bars having to be closed down at a particular time.

Christensen: It could have very well been. I don't know. Just for me to go over there on a liberty in a bar to get drunk wasn't my bag at all. I just didn't do it, and what they had there, I really don't know. I just didn't have that much money to spend in the bars. I just didn't do that.

Marcello: From your observations, would there be a great deal of drinking that would take place on a weekend?

Christensen: Oh, no more than it would normally, anytime you get that many men together away from home. Really, basically, there wasn't a lot for the sailors to do over there. If you didn't like to roller skate and you didn't like to go down on Waikiki Beach and you didn't want to go around the island to see that, there wasn't really a lot to do. After the war started, you could tell that that was where everybody was at, was on Hotel Street, because as you looked down Hotel Street, you could see nothing but white hats just bobbing up and down. They were four abreast on each side of the street. That's where they hung out at--right there. If you wanted to see where the crowd was at, that's where it was--right there by the YMCA and all up and down the Hotel Street and on the side streets. It was just nothing but servicemen--soldiers and sailors and Marines--just loads of them.

Marcello: I guess even prior to the war, that is, in those days and

weeks before December 7th, Hotel Street was pretty crowded on weekends, was it not?

Christensen: Well, yes, but nothing to compare with after the war, but, oh, sure, it was busy there. They did a brisk business, sure. Oh, yes.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us up to that period of time right before the actual attack took place. As conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, did you and your buddies in any of your bull sessions ever talk about the possibility of a Japanese attack?

Christensen: None at all. None at all. The Japanese were . . . well, to give you an idea, Idell worked for the civil service, and, of course, you know how women are--they're matchmaking. So there's this young Japanese girl that worked at Sears and Roebuck, and she was matchmaking for me. She invited me over to their home and invited her over at the same time. She told me that she had a nice young lady. The Japanese girl came over, and it was on a Saturday, December 6th. She cooked us a Japanese dinner.

I had no idea on the Japanese. I liked the Japanese. I just thought they were very industrious people. They were very intelligent. I was just fascinated with them. I didn't know any Japanese up until the time when I went to Long Beach and that skating rink there. I didn't know any

Japanese, and the ones that I met there were very fine people. I just couldn't imagine, as friendly as they were to the United States, that something like that would happen. I didn't know anybody else over there that had any animosity to the Japanese. They were all over there. They're fine people. Even today, I don't have any hard feelings toward them. I think they're a great people.

Marcello: And like you mentioned, your routine really hadn't changed at all right up until the actual attack.

Christensen: Oh, no, not at all. No, no. This young lady that I was telling you about . . . see, Fern was over at the sub base. He was billeted over there, but he was assigned to that submarine there on Pier Ten. Well, Fern, on December 6th . . . he had the duty on the 7th. So, I told the young lady . . . she wanted to go back up into the mountains. There was a waterfall back there, and me and her was going to go back there hiking. She was going to show me the waterfall, and then we were going to go roller skating afterwards. I really loved that roller skating over there.

So I told her that I had to go back to the ship and that I would be back over there at Fern's house, and me and her would go hiking back up in the mountains Sunday morning. I tried to get up there somewhere around nine o'clock. I was planning on leaving at eight o'clock in the morning.

So I went on back to the ship that night, and I was getting ready to go ashore there Sunday morning.

Marcello: Was there anything extraordinary or unusual happening aboard the Argonne that night that you noticed?

Christensen: No, nothing at all. Everything was quiet when I come back, and it was just normal.

Marcello: Would there be very many drunks coming back aboard the Argonne on a Saturday?

Christensen: No, not any more than normal. You got "alkies" there, and if they go ashore, they're going to come back drunk. You got them. You'd be surprised at the number of people that that's not their everyday thing. Of course, you're going to have a percentage. I guess today if you went aboard ship you'd have some of them coming back drunk every liberty. That was a big thing in their life--to go over and get drunk. They said they spent their money, but I was more inclined to think that maybe somebody stole it from them, that they didn't just give it away or something. That never did bother me. We had a few of them in the machine shop. Most of them wanted to get the most out of their money and have a good time.

Marcello: So it was a quiet Saturday night then.

Christensen: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Marcello: What time did you get back aboard the Argonne? Do you recall?

Christensen: Oh, it just seems to me that maybe it was eleven o'clock



or something like that.

Marcello: And it was still tied up down at Pier Ten.

Christensen: Oh, yes, we set right in there. That was our permanent berth--right there inside of Pier Ten there near that big overhead crane there. It was on a big barge. That was our permanent berth there. We was there almost all the time we were in Pearl Harbor. If you wanted to look for the Argonne, you would find it right down there at the end of Pier Ten.

Marcello: What ships were around the Argonne?

Christensen: Well, we set right inside there. There was a cruiser on the inside, the Sacramento, and I remember the destroyer that was there because them boys come out there, and they started firing right away. It was the Mugford. I'm not for sure on the other one, but maybe it was the Jarvis. I'm really not that clear on it, but I do remember the Mugford because she was right in there, right there by the Argonne. I remember that distinctly in there.

Marcello: When you said they were firing her, what did you mean?

Christensen: Well, see, when the planes started coming over . . . the high-altitude . . .

Marcello: Oh, you mean they were firing at the Japanese planes.

Christensen: Yes, yes, yes, within a very few minutes, yes.

Marcello: Okay, so your activity for Sunday morning was to be another

date with the Japanese girl.

Christensen: Yes, I had gotten up fairly early, and I had breakfast.

We always had pancakes and sausage for breakfast. Everybody else in the machine shop was sound asleep. Nobody gets up on Sunday.

Marcello: That's an important point to make. If you didn't have the duty, Sunday was a day of leisure. You could virtually stay in the sack as long as you wanted.

Christensen: Oh, yes, yes. No practice on general quarters, no fire drills, no nothing. Sunday was a sleep-in day. Everybody slept in and was quiet.

I was up and I had had breakfast, and I come back down to the machine shop. I put my white pants on and my shoes, and I had my T-shirt on, my skivvy shirt. I was fooling with my skates. I was polishing them up because it was getting close to eight o'clock.

I hear this awful jar and a "BOOM," and it just jarred the ship. Well, that was, you know, kind of unusual, but I heard another one, and it just shook that ship.

Well, we didn't have a PA system on the ol' Argonne. We had a bugler, and we had a master-at-arms. The bugler would come to the passageway, and the master-at-arms would pass the word, and the guys as they'd get the word, they'd pass it all the way down. Of course, we were down in the

machine shop, all the way down on the last deck down.

They sounded fire alarm. They passed the word, "Fire over on Ford Island." So, I said to the guys, "Come on up! Everybody up! Fire drill! Fire drill! Fire on Ford Island." They said, "Get the hell out! We're sleeping and get out of here!"

With that, I ran on up the ladder to the shipfitter shop, I believe. We had our portholes, and they weren't welded shut. So, I pick the lid up on the porthole, and I stick my head out to look because we were directly over from Ford Island, and, sure enough, boy, that thing was really smoking. Smoke was billowing out.

I hear this plane, really loud, and he's low. I look over and he's coming like he's coming down Pier Ten, and he's making kind of a circle-like. Like this would be Pier Ten, and he's like this (gesture). His wing is up, and I can see the big red ball. I can see the man's face because me and him are not too far off of level because I'm one deck up, and he must have been off of Pier Ten maybe twenty feet and maybe out from me no more than, oh, maybe a hundred feet. He's looking for clearance that he don't drop this torpedo because it's sticking right out of the fuselage, down, sticking down. I can see the man looking to see for sure that he ain't going to drop it on Pier Ten. As soon as he

clears Pier Ten, he dropped his right wing to where he was level, and he dropped that torpedo just as straight to the Oklahoma as it could go. With that, he picked up altitude and went on out.

I knew right then exactly what was going on. I watched that torpedo go right for the Oklahoma just as straight as it could go, and I watched it explode.

Marcello: Describe that torpedo exploding into the Oklahoma.

Christensen: Well, it dropped just as pretty as it could because he wasn't very far off of the water. I don't know, but he was off of the water maybe thirty feet. I don't know. When it hit the water, it took off just as pretty as it could, and you could just see the white trail right from the stern of that thing, and it just went just as straight to the Oklahoma as it could.

I knew right away what had happened. Of course, there was a lot of rumors then, but a lot of the fellows said, well, they weren't Japanese pilots, that these were German pilots. But I knew that they weren't German pilots. I got a look at . . . if I ever met one of the pilots, that was the one. But I never saw another torpedo plane there around Pier Ten. If they were coming off of our bow, coming from the sub base, I couldn't see them. I could hear them probably after they had dropped their torpedo back in there

someplace and maybe going up. Well, with that, after I saw the torpedo heading for the Oklahoma . . . and it seemed like the thing started to list right away. It wasn't a long time. That thing started to list, it seemed like, right away.

Marcello: Well, when the torpedo hit the Oklahoma, did you see an explosion or a gusher of water going up?

Christensen: Well, it just . . . yes, more like water going up. That's about what I saw. I didn't see no real black smoke or anything like that. It was just a big . . . like a water explosion on that thing. It seemed like it started to list.

Well, about that time, our general quarters went off. Well, on our ship . . . on the modern ships they had a honker on there--HONK! HONK! HONK! Not on the Argonne. The Argonne had a bell. I could hear that bell today with a BING! BING! BING! BING! BING! BING! Oh, man, off we'd go!

Well, my battle station was after ammunition. Well, of course, I was one of the ammunition handlers. I don't think we ever handled ammunition that somebody didn't drop one of those bags of ammunition. Anyway, we could get into line almost anyplace we wanted, and, of course, on this after 5-inch surface gun, I take . . . I was . . . of course, I had a good headstart on everybody else. I was already up

there. Man, I went up that ladder and right up on the poop deck where I could really get the first . . . really see what's going on.

Boy, everybody, they come running up there, and it's a general quarters station, and the officer in charge, he said, "Secure after ammunition." It was an old 5-inch surface gun. It would only elevate--I'm just guessing--somewhere maybe thirty degrees, something like that. Well, what was we going to fire at? Nothing. So he said, "Secure after ammunition." So, boy, that left us free. Here we were, right up on the poop deck setting right there at Pier Ten--up high. We could really get a view of that thing. Well, about that time here comes high-altitude bombers over.

Marcello: About how much time has elapsed by then?

Christensen: Not very long. Not very long because we had just went to general quarters. Not very long.

Marcello: Less than half an hour?

Christensen: Oh, yes. Yes, I would think so. Yes, less than a half-hour. Oh, surely. We could see them coming over. Of course, we're lined up pretty well with Battleship Row.

Marcello: Did you have a good view of Battleship Row?

Christensen: Oh, yes. We sat right there. The California was just almost directly across from us, and it was very short distance. I mean, the guys on there . . . you could see the men and

everything on it. We're that close.

You could see these high-altitude bombers coming in, and as they came in, you could see the bombs coming out. I guess with the momentum that they're going, they're coming at an angle. They were hitting right there at Battleship Row.

Well, the officer in charge, he picked out some of us, and they had a motor launch over on our starboard side, and they had gotten some acetylene tanks and put on this motor launch. That motor launch took off. Well, he thought they were going to go forward to the forward gangplank and take on something else. So he said, "You, you, and you get on that motor launch!" Well, we took off on the run trying to get up there, but he never stopped. He went right on around. I looked over, and he was gone. He went on around the bow. I'm not for sure, but he headed over to where the Oklahoma was. I guess by that time that thing had pretty well rolled over. So I went back, and I told him, I said, "Sir, that motor launch didn't stop forward." He said, "Okay."

So then there was kind of a lull in there. We could hear the Mugford and the Jarvis and the Sacramento and all them cruisers and destroyers down there. They were really throwing up the 5-inch guns and the 20-millimeters and the

.50-calibers.

Marcello: Did you notice that they started putting up resistance very shortly after the attack started?

Christensen: Oh, yes, yes. Really. Yes, it was a very little lapse in the time from the time that the attack started until the Mugford . . . I can still see the fellow out there now. They had kind of a canvas over top of the gun. I can see him out there now. He had on shorts. Boy, he just jerked them off of there, and it was just a very few minutes, and they were really firing that thing off. It was really going good.

Marcello: In the meantime, basically everybody aboard the Argonne are nothing more than bystanders, so to speak.

Christensen: Yes. We really didn't have any firepower. I think we had another 5-inch surface gun on forward. Now what they did up there, I don't know (chuckle). They had some old 3-inch guns and some .50-caliber water-cooled machine guns. The Marines, I think, had some rifles and .45's. That first plane I saw out of the porthole, I could have knocked him off sure as the world with a .45. That man was that close to me. A .45 would have done the job on him.

Marcello: Describe what that pilot looked like. You said that you knew that he definitely was Japanese and not German.

Christensen: Well, he had a round face, and he had goggles on. He wasn't



a big man sitting in there. Of course, I didn't really have that long to really get a good look at him because he was in there and out. He had his plane throttled down probably as low as it could. It was a noise like "putt, putt, putt, putt." Yes, he wasn't coming in there with a real roar and real fast. He had it throttled way down. That's what got my attention when I heard that plane, you know, the "putt, putt, putt, putt," where he'd probably come in and then just throttled her down to get his air speed down. He was about as slow as he could go and still maintain his air speed on there. I didn't get a really long look at him because he wasn't there that long, but I can still see that man there, looking over the side, and he was looking down at Pier Ten. Once he cleared that, he was home free then.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you scared or are you basically just curious?

Christensen: No, no. No, I wasn't scared. I'll tell you when I got scared. After that first wave that I saw of high-altitude bombers go over Battleship Row . . . now I'm really not for sure where these next bombers came in at. It seems like they could have come in either off of the Shaw, or they could have been coming down from the Pennsylvania or the Cassin or the Downes and coming down toward Pier Ten. I can remember

looking up there at them, and as I look up, when they get directly overhead, you can see these bombs coming out. Well, I don't know that what they're coming straight down because here he is, straight over top of us, and these bombs are coming out. And I thought, "Surely, my time has come now." Here they were, coming down. I could just see them, just screaming down.

Marcello: And you're still out on the deck.

Christensen: I'm still out on the deck, up there on the poop deck. I thought for sure that, boy, this was it. And my mouth went dry. I really then . . . my heart was starting to really pound because I thought, "Boy, this is really it!"

Apparently, when you look directly up overhead and as the bombs are coming down, I guess with the momentum the bombs must have been coming at an angle because when they come down, oh, man, they were traveling so fast! I couldn't believe it. They went right on out, it seemed like, somewhere around the bow between maybe where the Mugford and the Argonne was, out in that part of the bay out in there. Oh, I thought surely that my time had surely come then. Then I was scared then. But up until then, even with the shrapnel falling and bouncing around, it didn't seem to bother me so much. I wasn't used to all the noise of all them 5-inch guns going off, and the 20-millimeters and the 40-millimeters and the .50-calibers. That was exciting, but I was only nineteen.

I didn't see any violence in my life, you know, nothing like that. I just really wasn't that scared at that time.

Marcello: Do you recall the incident when some of the gunners on the Argonne--I guess what few rounds the Argonne got off--shot out or shot down one of their own antenna? Do you remember that incident?

Christensen: No, no. No, I have nothing on that at all. We didn't fire our 5-inch surface gun. There was really no place to fire because . . . right there on the stern of us was the big overhead crane on that barge. Of course, there was the machine shops, and then right there was Pier Ten. There was no shots fired off because he had secured . . . the officer in charge had secured that 5-inch gun, so we didn't even bring up any ammunition out of the magazine.

Marcello: Okay, so you secure from the gun. You're now a bystander. You watch the wave of high-level bombers come over. Pick up the story from that point.

Christensen: Well, then the officer picked out . . . I don't know how many there were. About that time, apparently, they wanted somebody down on Pier Ten to help them with the wounded that were coming back in the motor launches. They were picking them up over there, over at the battleships. There was an awful big oil slick over there, and that thing was on fire. The fellows were in that oil, and they were picking

them out, and they were just dragging them into the motor launch. Some of them were half-dead. So they wanted some of us to go down there. So he picked me, me, and you. Luckily again, I'm picked to go down on Pier Ten to help them down there on the dock.

Marcello: Now is the attack kind of over by this time?

Christensen: Well, there was a lull in there. From the time that them bombers had come over, then there was a lull in there. Well, in this lull in here is the time he sends me--and I don't remember how many more--down on Pier Ten.

So down the gangplank we go, and when we get down there, the motor launches are coming in. They have got the fellows in there that are covered with this real black, thick fuel.

You can't tell the colored from the whites. The only thing was that the colored . . . and I don't know why, but I guess I assumed that the colored boys were black. They were black--deep. Here the colored boys were with their skin peeling off of their face, and it was snow white. I guarantee you, I was just flabbergasted. I'd never seen a colored man that had been burned, and I assumed that if he was burned, he'd be black underneath. But he was snow white. Around their eyes and in their nose and in their ears was still black.

And the white fellows, they were burnt, too. There were

a lot of burn victims. This fuel oil was in their eyes, and I can still see it today. Their eyes were just blood red from that fuel oil in there. You couldn't really hardly tell the whites from the colored boys and the Filipinos that were in there.

I remember the doctors were in their civilian clothes, and the corpsmen were there, and they had boxes of . . . I assume it was morphine, I don't know. As we got them out of those motor launches and got them up on the pier, they were giving them shots. They had boxes of them there. Apparently, they had . . . I don't know if they had come off of the ship or where they'd come from, but they were there.

There were no ambulances there. On the pier there, there was some old automobiles. There was an old dump truck, and there was a station wagon and a couple of coupes. Whatever was there, they fired them things up, and that's what we used to carry the fellows over to the Naval Hospital. I made one trip with them over there to the Naval Hospital, and I came back. When I came back, apparently the Oglala . . . they had moved it down from the Helena, down toward the Argonne. I knew two brothers on there, the McCullough brothers. They were twins. One was probably about my age, and then the other one was a little bit older. Well, the

young one about my age was standing up near the bridge, and the Oglala was listing, getting a pretty good list on her. I hollered up to him. I asked him how his brother was. He was all excited. He said, "Oh, he's all right! He's fine! I'll talk to you later!" And with that he left. Then of course, the ship kept coming over and coming over, and everybody was getting off of that thing.

Marcello: Do you remember the Oglala turning over?

Christensen: Oh, yes! Oh, sure!

Marcello: Describe it going over. This is the ship that supposedly sank from fright. Isn't that what they say (chuckle)?

Christensen: Yes, I think so. I think it was coming in toward the pier. It seems like that with some of the structure and things that were there, there was a lot of popping and cracking and really a lot of pressure on that thing.

There was other things that was going on after I had talked to the McCullough boy. I had went back on down on the pier down there, and it seems like . . . I don't remember seeing the Nevada coming up toward . . . oh, maybe heading in the direction of where the Shaw would be and then to make its turn. I don't remember it coming up until it got almost directly in front of me, maybe between where I was standing and the California. I noticed it then--very low speed. It was just like it was just barely making it.

Well, after it got past me and started like it was going to make a turn to the starboard side to go out the channel, these dive bombers come in from I don't know where, but they were coming in like bees coming into a hive. They were all over that ship. I don't know what kept them from crashing into each other. There were so many of them that were coming. As the bombs hit on the deck of that thing, that splintered the wood. I think they must have had wooden decks. That wood would just splatter and just splinter all over everything and was on fire--there on the deck.

It looked to me like they kind of lost control over there. I don't know whether they lost power, but it was just like there wasn't any power to it, like he was just drifting. I don't know where that tugboat came from, but that fellow had to be awful brave to pull that tugboat in there. Them boys on there on that tugboat threw those lines over there to that battleship, and boys on the battleship tied that thing up while the bombing was still going on. They were still strafing that thing and still dive-bombing that thing. Them boys went on there just like it was just an ordinary Sunday and tied that thing up, and that tugboat started pulling them on out. I don't know, but he went on out through the channel there, and I didn't pay any more attention to him then.

Marcello: Let's get back to you on the pier, What were you doing after you had helped to move some of the wounded up onto the docks and then take some of them to the hospital? What other functions were you performing from that time on?

Christensen: After we come back from the hospital, I don't remember doing anything else on there, other than getting them out of them motor launches there. I do remember after the thing had pretty well settled down--maybe at the last of it--that I did walk on up to where the Pennsylvania was, and I looked at the two destroyers in there--the Cassin and the Downes. I went all the way up there, and I looked at that.

Then I come on back down to the pier, and the Navy officer was there. I guess the attack was just about over then, and he was getting the working parties to go over to the warehouses to get food out for the destroyers and the cruisers who were getting ready to go to sea. So he said, "You, you, you, and you, you're going over there." And to tell you the truth, I was kind of glad to get out of that spot there. I didn't hesitate at all. I jumped on it, and we went on over to the warehouses over there.

We worked over there, and while we were in there, I can hear the antiaircraft fire going off. So it must have been the very last of the planes that were there because, while



I was in the warehouse in there--in these coolers--I could hear them really a bang-bang-banging. I thought, "Oh, my God, maybe it's going again," but it didn't. It pretty well settled down.

Marcello: Now what do you remember from the actual second wave coming over? Was most of that going on perhaps when you were over at the hospital and so on?

Christensen: No. The one there where I got so scared--when my mouth went dry--I was up on the poop deck.

Marcello: The second wave actually took place while you were still aboard the Argonne.

Christensen: Yes. Yes, I was still aboard the Argonne. I don't remember . . . it seems like there was another wave that came in, but where they come from or how they were going, it really didn't have that much effect directly on us. The two waves that I remember distinctly was the one that went over the battleships and the one that come over . . . and whether they came either from over on the direction of the Shaw or whether they came from the direction of Battleship Row, I'm really . . . in my memory I was so excited then that I just can't really remember exactly the directions they came from.

Marcello: At the time you're over at the warehouse, you're kind of jumpy. Everybody else is, too.

Christensen: Oh, yes, yes. Well, I had already . . . I had been shook there when them high-altitude bombers came over. I knew then we were really in trouble. I really then was nervous, and from then on I was shaking inside.

Marcello: Are you and your shipmates doing any talking throughout this whole affair?

Christensen: No, no. Well, see, I wasn't on the ship. From the time I went on the pier down there at Pier Ten, there was quite a time before I'd come back aboard ship. When I come back from over at the warehouse . . .

Marcello: Which was about what time?

Christensen: Gee, it must have been somewhere between nine and ten o'clock, I would think.

Marcello: In the morning?

Christensen: Oh, yes, still in the morning. Oh, yes.

Marcello: So a lot of things happened within that period, within a space of about three hours.

Christensen: Yes. Maybe it might have been later than that. We were over at the warehouse for a while, and when I came back, things were calm then. There was no more planes; there was no more firing. I was still on the dock there. I hadn't went back aboard ship.

I had seen the sampan coming in, and there was Marines on Pier Ten. They brought in a sampan. It seems like there

was three fishermen on there. I don't know. They brought the sampan in. They had the fellows--the Japanese fishermen--handcuffed, hands tied behind them. Their eyes were blindfolded, and they couldn't see. The Marines were there, and they brought them up on Pier Ten. They had them there and took them away and left their sampan there. Well, the sampan . . . I believe they moved it on around to the starboard side of the Argonne. I think the doctor checked them. We had their fish the next day.

Then I went aboard ship, and there was an awful lot of people on there. We had an awful lot of men. Most of them survivors we had on the Argonne were off of the old Utah. They had a lot of casualties in the passageways. The passageways were full, and I guess they were working on them up there in the dispensary.

So, anyway, they changed . . . I didn't go back down into the machine shop. They put me on a gun watch all the way aft of the bridge. I don't remember what they called that up there. They had two .50-caliber machine guns, and they were water-cooled. They had a pump in between them that you would pump, and it would pump the water into the jacket of the .50-calibers. They got headphones on there. So that was my station then. They put me up there, and they put a fellow from Collinsville, Illinois--Walter Lyons.

He went to the Ford Motor School as an electrician striker. We were good friends on the USS Sabine when we come over. Me and him was on watch together. They had two of us. We had four hours on and four off, four hours on and four off.

Well, it got right about dusk, and it was his four hours on and my four hours off. I think we had about four or five life rafts stacked up right there, right in the vicinity. I had my "Mae West" jacket on, and I think then we had them old World War I metal helmets. They were the thin band things on there.

So anyway, it was my four hours off. It was getting about dusk, and I went up there, and I laid down up there in this life raft with my "Mae West" on. Walter said, "Hey, 'Chris!' We got enemy planes approaching! Enemy planes approaching! Six o'clock . . . stern . . . coming off of the stern!" So he's telling these two guys that's on the watch . . . I think they sounded general quarters. He told these two guys, "Hold your fire! Hold your fire! They're coming in at six o'clock! Everybody hold your fire!"

Well, then they had brought guns in from all over that . . . they had .50-calibers, 20-millimeters, them 40-millimeters, and the 5-inch guns. Of course, the guys were so nervous. We just knew they were coming back. That's a logical thing.

Sure enough, boy, here they're going to come back that night, and, boy, we are ready for them.

So everybody all around that whole Naval base, they want to make sure their gun is ready. So it's short bursts-- "Bluuup! Bluuup! Bluuup!" Everybody's trying out their guns, making sure they're ready. Everybody's hollering, "Hold your fire! Hold your fire!" You can hear them all over. "Hold your fire!" But everybody wants to make for sure they're ready when they come in, and, sure enough, here come these planes in low, and it must have been over somewhere around the hospital. They're coming in low, and they got their running lights on. Man, we are going to do a job on these planes. So they get over there, and they're holding their fire.

Well, they get right over there around the machine shops, over in there. They're low in formation, and, boy, when they let loose with the fire, everybody from that whole base is trying to get in on the action. Well, lo and behold, them pilots know they're in trouble. Apparently, they came in to see that oil slick still burning because it burned all night and part of the next day. They must have wanted to come in and take a look-see. It's just about dusk. It's a hard part of the afternoon when you can see, but, man, there's no way you can miss them planes coming in. The

best I can remember, it looked like it might have been about six in formation with their running lights on.

Boy, when they started firing, them boys knew they were in bad, deep trouble, and they scattered. They broke formation, and they started really pumping it on. Well, one of them came down, and he come down somewhere around . . . oh, he veered off and came over somewhere around the Pennsylvania and the Shaw -- in there. When he came down, he was trying to get on that water as close as he could to get out of the fire. Well, when he come in, the Helena was letting him have it, and then the California was putting it on him. Well, one boy on the California, when he started on his .50-caliber, he started up here (gesture), and he brought that thing down on him.

I don't know . . . I don't remember, but we was sure cheering everybody on. I'm up in that life raft standing up because I got another real good front row seat on this guy. Man, I'm sure that's a Jap plane. Whether we knocked him out, I don't know.

Anyway, one of the fellows off of the Utah . . . they were in the mess hall getting supper. They kept supper over for them. The guy from off of that California . . . when he followed that plane down with his .50-caliber . . . there was a big air scoop right there by these here life

rafts where I'm standing. You talk about a charmed life, I lived a charmed life. Anyway, when he came down, one of them bullets came through that air scoop and came right down, and you could almost see right where he'd come down-- following that plane down, see. Well, one .50-caliber slug came through the bulkhead there in the mess hall and hit the one boy from the Utah in the arm, right there in the elbow. He was standing like this (gesture). It hit him in the elbow, and it hit the other boy right in the heart, and he died in the mess hall. That was the only casualty we had on the Argonne, and he was actually off of the Utah.

So the next day, Lyons said, "'Chris,' come here. I want to show you something." He said, "You really almost got it last night." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Look up there in that air scoop up there." There was a .50-caliber in that thing. He said, "You almost got knocked off when you were up there looking last night." That's where it come from--up there.

Marcello: What sort of rumors were going around that night in the aftermath of the attack?

Christensen: Well, I think the rumor that went the most that I can remember was that they weren't Jap pilots, but they had already shot some of them down, and I think that rumor had been pretty well put to sleep. They were supposedly German pilots, but

you could hear anything. Then they were saying that the Japanese pilots' eyes were slanted, that they couldn't make pilots out of them and all this, and that to me sounded kind of farfetched. After seeing that gentleman there on that torpedo plane, the first one, I knew that that was just a bad rumor on there. I don't recall any rumors, really.

Marcello: Do you recall any rumors concerning a Japanese landing or an invasion?

Christensen: Well, we suspected that, and I'm really surprised to this day that they didn't follow up with it. We hadn't really . . . of course, I didn't know what they had done to them, and apparently they hadn't done anything to them. Why they didn't follow it up, I mean, that was the logical thing to do. Here they had already . . . that they were brazen enough to come in there in broad daylight and do a job on us like they did and then them not come back and follow that up with an invasion that night, why, I just don't . . . it was just not logical for them not to do it--for them to strike and leave and then not come back at us that night.

We suspected it, and when the American planes come in that night--them six in that formation--and we did a job on our own planes (chuckle), we were so sure that they were Japanese planes. I don't think there was a man on that



Naval base or any place in that vicinity that . . . there was just no way you could convince us that those weren't Jap planes. And then to find out that they were American planes, we really felt bad.

We were so jittery and nervous about the thing that . . . I didn't see any panic, though. Fellows had fear in their hearts, I mean, which is normal. Things went off so smooth there. I was really proud to be in the United States Navy after that. It really put an impression on me. I wasn't too impressed with the officers and the enlisted men, and you have these practices--practice fire drill and practice general quarters and all that. That didn't impress me too much, but once that thing got started, I could see where the Navy was really a defensive unit at that point.

Then as the war went on, they really got into an offensive unit. I was just proud of them everyday I was there, and I am today. If they ever wanted a recruiter, boy, I'd be 100 percent because it's really the thing for young men. You get in there, and you see the world, and you learn a trade, and you got three good meals a day, and you got a clean place to sleep, and you got clean clothes. If you worked in industry, there's no way you could do it.

My oldest son, Mark, he was draft age, and I encouraged

him to go in the Navy. I said, "Mark, I'd rather put four years in the Navy than I would two years in the Army in the trenches and things like that." I said, "There's no comparison." He thought it over for about two weeks, and he joined up for four years and had a real good cruise. He was on the USS Constellation, and he went all through the Pacific. He was over into Singapore and Hong Kong and Japan. He was a survival equipment repairman. Of course, his trade that he learned there in the Navy didn't do him much good after he got out, but anything that you learn is a benefit to you.

Marcello: How well did you sleep that night of the attack?

Christensen: Well, see, me and Walter Lyons, we were four hours on and four off. In other words, we stood four hours of watch, and we had four hours that we could sleep. We were pretty nervous, oh, yes. But things quieted down over there; it just got calm. Then things started to bustle over there, and it wasn't long until we got back in the same routine that we were in before. There was a lot of activity, and then we started getting a lot of new men there.

Marcello: Had you eaten anything all day, that is, the day of December 7th?

Christensen: Yes, I had breakfast. I had pancakes and sausage for breakfast. I had a good breakfast.

Marcello: How about anything after breakfast?

Christensen: At dinnertime I really don't remember whether I ate or not.

I'm quite sure that I did. I don't think there was any problem on there of getting food. The evening meal . . . I remember going into the mess hall and having an evening meal. I didn't miss many meals. I was always hungry. I was a growing young man, and I was always hungry. There was no problem; I didn't dislike anything. I'd eat anything. If they'd put it out, I'd eat it.

Marcello: Earlier in the interview, you were talking about that sampan that had been brought beside the Argonne. Can you go into a little bit more detail on what you saw with regard to that sampan with the Japanese on it,

Christensen: Well, I noticed they were towing it in. I don't remember what was towing it in, but they were towing it in. They were just dressed in casual clothes, in work clothes, like a fisherman would be. I did notice that they were Japanese. Of course, we thought then that they were spies. Here they caught two or three. It looked like maybe it was a father and two sons, is what it looked like, or maybe they weren't . . . there was nothing really unusual about them,

Marcello: Did you say they were blindfolded?

Christensen: They were blindfolded, and they had their hands tied behind them. They had the hold open where the fish . . . we looked

at fish in that thing.

Marcello: Then did you say that the Marines took the fishermen away?

Christensen: Yes, they took them away. They helped them out. They weren't mistreating them. You'd think maybe in all the excitement and everything that they might be knocking them around, We were all sure that . . . and the Marines never . . . I never heard a word other than them telling them to move on or anything. I never saw any mistreatment of them at all-- absolutely not. No, they didn't shove them or jerk them out of the sampan or anything like that. No, no. They helped them out. They treated them as if maybe they were fishermen. I think maybe the ones that brought them in did suspect that they were fishermen. If you ever find out, I'd like to know who they were. We go back to Hawaii every five years, and if they still live in Hawaii, I'd like to meet them. That would really be something.

Marcello: Did you say that you and your shipmates did help yourself to their fish?

Christensen: Oh, yes. The next day we had a big . . . on Monday, oh, yes, we had a big fish fry on there. The doctor went down and examined them to make sure that they weren't poisoned. We sure ate them gentlemen's fish. If they were fishermen, they sure lost their catch for that day, I guarantee you. They were very good.

Marcello: Well, when was their sampan taken out of there?

Christensen: That I don't know. I don't know, They had it tied up forward--the last that I saw of it--and I have no idea when it was taken out. I never did see it. I do remember that they brought it around onto the starboard side and that they took the fish out of there and cleaned them and fried them. We all ate good for a while.

Marcello: So what did you do in the days and weeks following the attack?

Christensen: Well, it was back to the routine again. There was very little change. I can't remember any change that was in there.

Marcello: Were you having to make a lot of small repairs and so on aboard the Argonne?

Christensen: No more than usual. No more than usual, no. Most of our repairs . . . see, on them motor launches and everything was a direct drive, and their drive shafts were forever hitting the propeller and bending the Monel drive shafts. So, we made an awful lot of drive shafts out of Monel. I used to get the Monel; that was my specialty.

Marcello: Monel?

Christensen: Monel metal. Yes, it is a noncorrosive metal. It's got an awful lot of nickel and zinc. It makes a beautiful ring. It's a form of stainless steel, but it has a lot more copper in it than stainless steel does. They called me the "Ring King" on there. I used to make the rings. They would polish

up. You could see your face in them, but they wouldn't hold it. They were soft. So that was what we used for the drive shaft.

Marcello: Now how did the attitude and morale of you and your shipmates change as a result of the attack or in the aftermath of the attack?

Christensen: Oh, I can't remember that there was any change at all. It was still a big family in there. To the day that I left in there, it was still a family. What was asked of the men, they did it. They knew what they had to do, and they did it. There was no if's and and's. If they wanted us to work, why, we worked, I guarantee you. We had very little time off. They gave us very little time off.

I remember . . . of course, when we went on liberty back there at Pearl Harbor after the attack, we had to wear our gas masks. We had several drills on gas mask attacks. They took us over to a place where they had . . . I believe it was over around the sub base. They had a building over there where everybody . . . they showed you how to put it on, and then you all went in the building. Then they dropped a tear gas in there, and everybody put that gas mask on (chuckle). The ones that were slow, they were crying. We really got a good shot of the thing. So we knew pretty well what we were doing. Then, when we went on liberty, well, of course,

that was one of the requirements.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Christensen, that exhausts my list of questions. I want to thank you very much for having participated in our project. You said a lot of interesting and important things, and your ability to remember details was outstanding, and, of course, that's what we're looking for in these interviews. I want to thank you very much for having participated.

Christensen: Oh, you're welcome. I really enjoyed myself. There were a lot of questions that I had that you helped to answer. It's really been a pleasure.

A P P E N D I X



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I am well ~~not~~ ~~(serious)~~  
~~I have been admitted to hospital as~~ ~~(permanent)~~ ~~(not serious)~~  
~~I am getting on well and expect to return to duty soon.~~

I have received your (Letter dated Dec 7, 1941)  
(Telegram dated)  
(Parcel dated)

Letter follows at first opportunity.  
~~I have received no letter from you~~ (for a long time lately)

Signature Charles C. Christensen  
Date Dec. 8, 1941

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I am well ~~ill~~ ~~(serious)~~  
~~I have been admitted to hospital as~~ ~~(wounded)~~ ~~(ecthemias)~~  
~~Am getting on well. Hospital returns to destination.~~

I have received your (Letter dated Nov 27, 1941)  
~~(Telegram dated)~~  
~~(Parcel dated)~~

Letter follows at first opportunity.  
~~I have received no letter from you~~ ~~(for a long time)~~  
~~(lately)~~

Signature Charles C. Christensen  
Date Dec 10, 1941



"AT THE CROSS ROADS OF THE PACIFIC"

## ARMY & NAVY

Young Men's Christian Association  
HONOLULU, HAWAII

Dear Mom & all.

Just thought I would drop you a few lines to let you know we got here O.K. I had a letter all wrote & ready to mail & I went away & forgot it on the ship. I am writing this at the Y.M.C.A. There sure aint much to do on this island. it aint any place for a sailor. So Mary won't have to worrie about <sup>me</sup> getting hitched to any of these hube gals. There are plenty of source. there isint much difference from this place than the states only it is lots prettier here & things are twice a high. There are street cars buiss & every thing. There are more Japs here than any thing. This island is for rich people & rich people

2

only. a five cent hamburger is fifteen cents here. I will mail those other letters I wrote you. I think I told you most of the news ~~in it~~. There is going to be a complete black out on the islands tomorrow night I will get to see my first black out every light every where goes out at nine o'clock & stays out till nine thirty. Well now I will close now so write soon.

Charles.

My address is still

Chas. Christensen

173 Argonne

PO Postmaster

San Francisco - Cal.

P.S.

Tell Everyone Hello.