

Abe Santos Oral History Interview

BRUCE PETTY: Today is Saturday the 24th of February, the year 2001. I'm in Capitola, California. I'm interviewing Mr. Abe Santos. The interviewer is Bruce Petty. Yeah, can you tell me what year you were born?

ABE SANTOS: I was born in 1921. April 29, 1929 -- 1921, I'm sorry. (laughter) Yeah, yeah. I go for-- I usually say, "Fourth month, 29, 21." You know. Yeah.

BP: And you were born where?

AS: In Santa Clara, California.

BP: OK. Your father was in agriculture? Or --

AS: My father, no. He was an engineer at a lumber company in Santa Clara, the Pacific Manufacturing lumber company in the firewood and worked there. And then I went -- and when I joined the Navy, it was in 1939. I joined it in November and I went in November 13, 1939. And I took my boot training in San Diego at the naval station there in San Diego. And then from there, after I got out of boot camp, I went aboard a ship and I was assigned to the Astoria, the USS Astoria, heavy cruiser.

BP: That was your first assignment.

AS: My first assignment because I had a cousin aboard there.

He was a chief machinist then and he went up to full commander, you know, as going up through the ranks.

BP: A mustanger.

AS: A mustanger, yeah. And so then -- and when you're a mustanger, and when you -- you retired out of the service after about 30-some-odd years, then you revert back to like -- he was a warrant officer when he got his -- went to ensign, stuff like that. When you retire, then you get your retirement pay of the highest rank held, whether you go back -- revert back to a chief, a chief warrant officer, but you're -- that's what I understood. And then from there, well you know, like I don't know if -- what we did after that, after I went aboard the ship and stuff like that, if that's what you want to know.

BP: Well, yeah. Did you go into the engineering and space right away? Or --

AS: Yeah. No, first I went aboard and I was put in the deck -- the deck force on the topside. You know how that is. Everyone's there. And so then, and he was in engineering, so I applied and went down into the fireman's first. And I became a fireman, you know, in there. Then from there, after I got out of the -- after I was in the fireman's for some time, then I asked for other assignments like in the

auxiliaries, and I went into auxiliaries, and that was, you know, the maintenance of the ship, steam lines and different things, take water lines. And then from the A Division, I applied --

BP: That was the A Division?

AS: A Division, yeah. It was called the A Division.

BP: Like for auxiliary? "A" stood for auxiliary?

AS: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah.

BP: And then you could do steam lines and small motors? Or --

AS: Yeah, and then the -- well, mostly taking care of some little pumps, like steam lines throughout the ship, and things like that, and repairing those that were needed. And then from there, then I applied to go down to the engine room, and already the war -- I was in two years before the war started. And so then after I got out of the A Division, I can't -- I don't remember if the war had started then or not. I think it did -- it had started, yes. And so then I applied and went down to the engine room.

BP: OK. Now, where were you when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor? Do you know that?

AS: We left Pearl Harbor, I think it was a Friday. I'd say Saturday but some guy said, "No, it's Friday." Before, and we were on our way to Midway when we left, and all we --

all we had was, you know, TA aboard, target ammunition. No armor piercings, no AP.

BP: Were you with other ships, the carriers or anything?

AS: No! Just ourselves, and we had civilians aboard because we were going to Midway and at that time, Midway had civilians working there and we had some civilians that -- we're taking them over there, and we're gonna bring the other civilians back.

BP: Were these American civilians or (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

AS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They were from, you know, like maybe you considered them a Navy yard worker, but they worked, you know, as a civilian like on Wake Island, different islands. And we're taking these to replace the ones, and bring the ones back that did some time on Midway.

BP: Now were any of them Guamanians?

AS: Yeah. Lots of them probably were Guamanians, uh-huh. Yeah because you know, thinking back, maybe some Hawaiians.

BP: Do you remember any of their names?

AS: No, I don't.

BP: Do you remember the captain of the ship then?

AS: The captain of the ship then was P.B. Haines, Captain P.B. Haines. He took over from Admiral [Ron?] Kelly Turner, and Turner became full admiral with the Amphibious Forces.

BP: Before Pearl Harbor?

AS: Before Pearl Harbor, and this was when we had our captain aboard, we were in the Philippines with -- taking a trip. We went to the Philippines because they were trying out those new, what they called "degaussing cables." They had the big --

BP: Now, are we getting ahead of the --

AS: Yeah, I think so.

BP: If we could keep things in chronological order. If we jump around so much, I may have trouble ge--

AS: Yeah, well yeah. It's just, you know, it's because I know well before the war started, because I -- we were in -- before the war started, we had taken off and went to the Philippines. And then we were testing out these degaussing cables, and they were the ones that were supposed to -- I don't know, I think the purpose of them, they were like big round things all the way around the ship, and it was supposed to ward off maybe mines I think. You know?

BP: Demagnetize the hull?

AS: Demagnetize them, yeah. And so then our captain then was [Ron?] Kelly Turner. He made a full admiral later.

BP: OK. So that was before you --

AS: Before the war. That was before the war started.

BP: Before you went to Midway with the --

AS: Oh, yeah.

BP: OK. So you remember Kelly Turner, then?

AS: Oh, yeah. Sure.

BP: And how do you remember him?

AS: He was a hell of a nice little skipper.

BP: Really? OK because later he had a reputation for a terrible temper.

AS: Well, he was a -- you know, like I was just a fireman aboard ship. But I used to see him. But when he came around, and you had inspections, and then we -- I was with the engineering force so I would be last so by the time he got to us, well we'd be standing out there from maybe 8:00 in the morning or 9:00 and we'd be in the -- by the time he got to us in the fantail, well he would -- it would be maybe 11:00, close to noon. So then a couple of times, he'd point at me. I needed a shave, and I shaved that morning because I -- you know, so and a couple of times, he'd be walking back and I'd -- tap me on the back meaning I should get a haircut. You know, stuff like that. And so anyway, then he took us to -- then we went to, you know, in the Philippines and then on the way, we were there trying to -- and while we were hi-- actually, we were bringing him back to [Henderson?]. It was later on made into a hospital. We were bringing him back to [Henderson?] with

the families of the Asiatic stations and the Philippines.
They were bringing back their families.

BP: How long before the war was this? Like October, November?

AS: This was, let me see. (pause) Like the last time I was in the States was August of 19-- August of 1941, and then I went back, and the war star-- then I went back, then we went to the Philippines. So this was before the war. And then so I didn't get back to the States till after World War II. I spent the whole time --

BP: OK, so Turner was relieved by Haines before Pearl Harbor.

AS: Yeah, P.B. Haines.

BP: OK.

AS: Yeah, before Pearl Harbor, oh yes. Uh-huh, and I think Haines -- and I remember Haines, our skipper, he had a son. From what -- you know, you hear all this -- a son that just got out of the academy or something like that and was put aboard a destroyer. Put aboard a destroyer and then the -- and so from what we understand, he was so happy because he was -- he was gonna see his son at Pearl. And we're out, let's say like on an operation or something like that, and we were out on -- you know, and his son was killed during the reveal and we never saw the captain again. He went off the ship, and everybody said, "Well, he just sort of had, like had a breakdown." And then we -- then next skipper we

got aboard there, we got -- what the heck was his name? He was the captain of the Colorado, the Battlegwagon, and it had to beach itself going up, you know.

BP: That was in Nevada?

AS: Port in Nevada. Yeah, he was on in Nevada, and his name was Greenman, Captain Greenman, but I don't know his first name.

BP: OK. Yeah, Greenman.

AS: I only knew him as captain.

BP: That's interesting to me because the -- the senior officer aboard the Nevada was Francis Thomas, or Thomas Francis, and he won the Navy Cross. He was the Lieutenant Commander. He won the Navy Cross for pulling the Nevada away from the burning --

AS: (inaudible)

BP: And I -- and he's still alive today --

AS: He is?

BP: -- and I interviewed him. He's in my book.

AS: Oh, good.

BP: Yes. His name's Admiral Francis Thomas. He's 95 years old, sharp as a tack.

AS: Yeah, I can imagine.

BP: How about that? But the captain was Greenman. He's the one that de--

AS: Yeah, Greenman. He took over P.B. Haines.

BP: Oh, can I ask you a question? P.B. Haines, his son was killed on a destroyer in Pearl Harbor.

AS: That's what I heard, and I can't say --

BP: And you don't know the name of the ship.

AS: No. He was on a destroyer and he was gonna come back and they said he was real excited because he'd see his son. Yeah, and that's when, you know, when we're on our way to Midway. And like I said, then Greenman took over command of the ship. And anyway, and Captain Greenman, (pause) he was the last skipper we had. And see, we had been on different things so I remember him saying one time when he took over command, he said, "We had a good record," he said, "Now let's go out and get me some." You know, he told us. And then when the ship went down, I don't know where the captain -- I'd seen him once when we got back to Pearl. He was at Pearl, and I'd seen him once, just briefly. Because he had -- one of the kids was assigned to him as a driver from our ship. And so anyway, so he was to-- and I was walking somewhere in Pearl, you know, at the Harbor. And he must have told the captain that that -- I was on the ship so that they pulled over, and I went over and spoke to him, you know. Just momentarily, you know. He didn't know me from Adam really.

BP: Let me get back now to, you were on your way to Midway?

AS: Yeah. We were on our way to Midway when the war broke out.

BP: Yeah. And how do you remember hearing about it?

AS: Well, you know, it was, I'd say maybe after 8:00 in the morning or something like that, and we're lined up for chow. And he says that Pearl Harbor was under attack. We thought it was a drill.

BP: This is the captain who comes over on the loudspeaker?

AS: Yeah. Uh-huh. And we thought it was a drill. We said, "What the hell they having a drill? It's sunny." You know, and so everybody thought the same thing. They thought planes coming over at, you know, Pearl, that they were just planes, you know --

BP: Our planes.

AS: Our planes. And like they see that that one soldier, that -- where was that, that one Army base off the other side of the island?

BP: With the radar.

AS: Yeah. And I can't think of the name of the base right now, but you know, it's a good -- it's a big Army base.

BP: Kalaeloa or --

AS: No, Ka-- the other side, and it was a -- actually, one time they had the horses there, you know. Anyway, but he had spotted something on the radar or something like that, and

they told him it was maybe some of our own planes out of -- out of formation. And that's what -- you know, you hear all that stuff, and they'd say it was true. I guess it was. Finally, they made him an officer, I think.

BP: Oh, yeah. He retired as a colonel in the Army, I think.

AS: Yeah. Uh-huh. And anyway, so and we're milling around, and then they come out with the orders to strip -- to strip the ship, so we knew something was wrong.

BP: What does that mean, "strip the ship"?

AS: Strip ship, you've got -- when they say "strip the ship" you're supposed to throw everything out of the way that would -- in case there was something that would be flying objects around. You know what I mean? That's what they called it, like stripping the ship for action.

BP: Oh, OK. It didn't mean strip the paint or anything?

AS: No, no, no. Say like if you had a bunch of chairs or, you know, stuff like that, just -- you get them out so they wouldn't be flying around. So then, we were patrolling out --

BP: Had you been to Midway yet?

AS: No, we didn't get to Midway.

BP: You turned around?

AS: We turned around, yeah. Because Midway was under attack, and so they -- and the civilians aboard the ship, I

remember them saying -- they were civilians and they wanted to be protected as civilians because they weren't military. You know, you hear all this stuff that goes on. So they were put, I think, in a special place on the ship. And from what I understand, it was said -- because like [you say you?] hear this was said, and this was said. And they said that our orders were maybe from Makalapa. You know, that's where the headquarters were at Pearl, though.

BP: Makalapa.

AS: Makalapa. That's where, when I was with the flag there, that's where Nimitz was and you went up there every morning for briefings and stuff like that, and that was up in [IA?] district and they said that our orders were that if we'd seen anything afloat -- the biggest thing afloat, we were supposed to ram it and go outside at flank speed, whether it be a carrier about. Because the only way we could sink a ship with that target ammunition, we would have to shoot them way below the waterline to make a hole in it because it wouldn't explode, and we couldn't -- didn't have any AP aboard. So anyway, so that -- we patrolled and we stayed out, and that night, just about dawn -- I mean dusk, I didn't see it because I was down in the engine room perhaps or something like that. And they says that they seen something on the horizon, and they didn't see us, or maybe

we -- or they didn't -- we saw them, maybe they didn't see, or maybe they didn't want to do it. Then we found out later on that those were the ships with crew -- with the landing force that was supposed to go and land at Pearl.

BP: They had a landing force? They were gonna land?

AS: They were -- they were g-- that's what, you know, this is how it worked. The reason they didn't land, they say, because they had everything marked and they knew where all the carriers were. One of the carriers wasn't at Pearl Harbor.

BP: None of the carriers were at Pearl Harbor.

AS: No. I mean, but they sa-- but anyway, this one carrier, they had sent it over to Barbers Point, and they figured that carrier was out looking for them. So they say then their ships were turned around and either went to Truk or Rabaul, the landing point because they could've landed on the -- on Pearl if they wanted to. And at that -- you know, like I say, I'm just telling you the scuttlebutt that was going around the ship.

BP: That you heard, OK.

AS: Yeah. You know, I mean, I couldn't say, "Hey, I knew this" and "I knew that" because I was Fireman Third because there was no fourth class. That was the lowest you could get anyway at that point. And we stayed out till the following

Saturday, we came back to Pearl. When we'd come back into Pearl, Pearl Harbor was still afire and there was -- bodies were coming up in -- in the -- in the harbor. I forget how long we stayed there. We stayed at Pearl, and from Pearl, then we left there and we went to -- our first battle was the Battle of the Coral Sea.

BP: OK, now in Pearl Harbor, were you -- did you have any assignments in terms of cleaning up the mess, or no?

AS: Yeah, so they had working parties out. So --

BP: What were the ones that you were working for?

AS: Well, I was a skip on the ship but they had, you know, like engineering, we were aboard the ship but they do -- you know how you, they have working parties and you'd go ashore. Whether it was taking on ammo, getting -- I'd even been down before the war and on ships before, while waiting to get on my ship at trying to beach at the Pearl. We'd be on the ship and we'd go and get some sand on the beach or hose down the decks. You know, you have a working party and they just, you know, assign you to work in -- to a working party.

BP: But you were mostly in the engines.

AS: I was mostly in the engines, yeah. Uh-huh.

BP: OK. Then you're sent down to Coral Sea.

AS: Yeah, we went to the Coral Sea, and we were -- our, like a cruiser always flanked a carrier, you know, because if the fish was coming, we would take the fish for the carrier. Then when she got hit, then we picked up a lot, many, many of the pilots.

BP: OK, well let's get back to it. What do you remember leading up to the Battle of Coral Sea? Any problems between --

AS: No. No, uh-uh. No. We were just -- the Coral Sea, and I forget but there was one battle that wasn't -- oh, yeah. They say the Battle of Coral Sea wasn't supposed to have been the Battle of Coral Sea. We were supposed to go into Truk or something like that. I forget. Maybe we might have had [Blackjack?] Fletcher aboard. He was the admiral and he had -- I know we had the flag aboard. So we had to have an admiral or something like that.

BP: Yeah, I can look that up.

AS: Well, anyway. They say -- and before we got in there, the Aussies or somebody else bombed -- bombed in there hours ahead of time.

BP: Bombed where?

AS: Truk or Rabaul, wherever we were supposed to go. Their ships left, and that's where we caught them in the Coral Sea.

BP: OK. Truk is way up in the (inaudible).

AS: Well, or some -- one of those islands.

BP: Yeah, maybe it's in the Solomons or something.

AS: It could be around in there. I, you know, it like --

BP: I can look it up. I can look it up. But what do you mean -- what do you remember now about everything leading up to the actual fighting? Do you remember when the first planes came over or where you were?

AS: Well, I was down below and then, you know, we were all at GQ conditions. So then we could hear our guns firing, AAs and stuff like that. We had good guns because we never got hit. We had good -- kids on the five-inch batteries and stuff like that. Most of those batteries, the Navy batteries -- battles always were between the first and third or fourth of the month, if you remember that. You know, they were all like in June the 1st, and the ba-- it was always, would last me about three days.

BP: Hmm. I'll have to look that up. They were always --

AS: Yeah. It was always around the first part of the month, the first week or so of the month.

BP: I wonder if that has something to do with the full moon or something. I don't know.

AS: I don't know.

BP: I'll have to look that up. That'd be interesting.

AS: Yeah. No, it was because I remember like the Battle of Midway and --

BP: That's early June?

AS: Yeah. Uh-huh, early June, and the Coral Sea was in what, November?

BP: No, May, wasn't it?

AS: May? Yeah, that's right.

BP: Because May --

AS: Yeah, because see --

BP: Yeah, May and then everybody rushed off to Midway right after that and fought that there, end of May, early June. So, yeah.

AS: So they said, and after we'd come in, then at that time, we were at sea for 103 days without going to port.

BP: Before you actually had the Battle of Coral Sea?

AS: No. After the Battle of Coral Sea, we stayed out there. And you know what they did on our ship? The carpenters, they mounted the two-by-fours and (inaudible) said we could roll them off the head charges in case we sunk. We never had to. We'd have blown up our own fantail, perhaps. We couldn't have gotten away. But there was a -- they made a regular --

BP: Ramp.

AS: -- ramp that they'd roll those -- you couldn't fight them off. We didn't have any Y guns like the destroyer.

BP: What do you remember about the Battle of Coral Sea, then?

AS: Battle of Coral Sea? I'll tell you. It was just, you know, like I tell people, they say -- I said I never panicked. I never panicked, but you're so busy, you don't know whether you're being hit because you hit -- especially if they're shooting at, you know, your main battery, and the ship's vibrating and banging around. You don't know whether you're being hit or anything like that. You couldn't hit and not know it. You know what I mean? You could take a fish up forward and the ship would just gutter and all that stuff. But you didn't know it if you were being hit, or if that was your guns making those sounds.

BP: So when you hear all the noise and you felt the vibration, you didn't know if it was because your big guns are going off or you're being hit.

AS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. And aircrafts and like and then -- you know, if you're stuck, you would shoot your -- and you're broadsided, your main battery, you had three -- three turrets and if they're -- like we had the thing shooting into an island, and when you let them all go, you're sliding back about a few -- like about a half mile going through the water.

BP: Yeah, the recoil.

AS: Yeah, uh-huh.

BP: They're about five -- eight-inch guns?

AS: We had nine inch.

BP: Nine inch?

AS: Yeah, nine inch. Yeah, then the Battlewagon had the bigger ones. We had the second biggest because we're just the other ship --

BP: And theirs is like 14 to 16 inches.

AS: Yeah.

BP: Wow. OK. So basically, you had heard a lot of noise and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) lot of ammunition.

AS: Oh, yeah. We didn't know whether we were being hit or -- or -- you know, because you'd be down in the engine room or something, and you weren't -- you weren't on the topside.

BP: Did you ever get to topside?

AS: Yeah. Yeah, a lot of times. I've seen some dogfights. We used to have what they'd call like A and B watch. One night, maybe like you're A watch. On today, and even day, you would be down in the engine rooms. And if you were B, so you'd be up on -- in the mess hall above the engine rooms, and when there was a lull then the ship --

BP: Now, why would you be up in the -- in the mess decks.

That's just sort of a reserve? They didn't have enough people? They didn't need all of you down there?

AS: Oh, no, no. You have -- just your crews, you know, and so when like you go on a watch, so you have so many -- so many men to the engine room, so many men to the fire room, so many men for this and that. So then you're in a watch (inaudible) or something like that, and so you might be watch two. So then after the -- like when you do four and eight off. So when your four hours are over, yeah the other -- yeah, four to eight would come down, relieve you, and then you're through with your watch because you've been on since 12 to 4. And you just change, change watches.

BP: But you're pretty much confined to the mess room? Is that it?

AS: Well, no. During the battle, but this was during the battle when you're going to general quarters. Well, if you weren't going to be down in the engine room, if it wasn't your day to be to the engine room, the crew that was on there that day would go down, or that four hours or whatever it is. They would go down, and then if there was a more of a -- four hours. So when there'd be a break where they could undo condition Zed -- condition Zed is where everything is locked up. No air coming in, nothing.

That's called a "condition Zed" in the Navy. So then when they would get to the point where they could open up, so then you would relieve that crew. And then they -- and if you were still -- but they wouldn't do it while you were still at general quarters. Maybe there'd be a lull. I think it's secure from condition Zed, and then -- and then you would change watches. Because I was on watch many of times more than the four hours. I can say every four hours. It was four hours, four off, four -- not four, eight. So then we stayed out for 103 days at, after the Coral Sea, and we took on provision of oil at sea, you know.

BP: But there's nothing else you can tell me about what happened at the Coral Sea?

AS: Well, like I said, we had --

BP: You didn't see anything because you were down below? Is that right?

AS: Yeah, well you know, but we picked them up. Then some of the pilots at the Army, the -- I forget which of the carriers were at the Coral Sea.

BP: Yorktown and --

AS: Yeah. OK.

BP: -- and Saratoga.

AS: Yeah. The Saratoga, she -- you know, we'd say if you ever wanted to get, come ashore and go back to the States, get aboard the Sara. The Sara took a hit every time and she'd take one hit back to the States. So they said, if you want to go to stateside, see if you get some.

BP: The Lexington was over there. That's what it was.

AS: The Lexington, yeah.

BP: The Lexington was there.

AS: Yeah.

BP: And Saratoga was hit there?

AS: Yeah, the Saratoga --

BP: I know she was a bad luck ship.

AS: Yeah, uh-huh. And she even got -- took a hit one time going on through Torpedo Junction out of Pearl, took a hit.

BP: Yeah. Yeah, I interviewed a guy who was on board. He was part of the Air wing or something and he said, "Yeah, they took a torpedo," and then --

AS: Yeah. Like I tell you, whenever you -- everybody will tell you, "Let's put in the Stratford and get aboard the Sara." You know? But like I say, then we picked up a lot of pilots, a lot of the pilots at the Yorktown and the other carrier that couldn't take on any more planes. So those other planes came along side of us and then we had rescue rail boats.

BP: They ditched them.

AS: They ditched. You'd bring up their nose. I'd cut their engine, and flop in the water, and then they'd come out, and we picked them up. Then some of the planes that wouldn't go down, a lot of them would hit the water and go down like a wet sponge. Others would float so you'd have to use the 40-millimeters and shoot them, you know, so they'd sink. We picked up many, many survivors off of the Lexington.

BP: Did you get to meet any of them?

AS: Oh, yes. Sure. They'd talk to them and then there were burn cases, you know. Even some pilots we picked up that were -- hands were burnt, something like that, and we would bring -- caught in a fire, something like that, and a lot of the other men that we picked up. So we all pitched a hand in helping the corpsman and doing that, and trying to make them feel comfortable. The pilots, when they were on our ship, they were nervous as hell. They said they wished they were back in their plane. They felt safer in their planes than they did on the cruiser. It's just like whatever you're in. I talked with friends of mine that were in a tank corps and they said, boy, they wouldn't be on something like that. They felt safer in their tank. You feel safest with your --

BP: With your plane.

AS: Yeah, uh-huh.

BP: OK. So where did you go from --

AS: The corps, after we went -- we went back to Pearl and I don't know how long we were in Pearl, but then we -- then we headed to Midway. In the meantime, the Japanese were -- they thought we'd all run to Kiska. Remember they started some operations there? And they said that when we caught them at -- around Midway that they didn't think we were around. They said some pilots said when they made the first pass over them, they were -- some of the Japanese were taking sunbaths, and they thought we'd all -- we'd all run and go to Kiska.

BP: Yeah, it was supposed to be a diversion.

AS: A diversion, yeah. But we, to our intelligence, we knew where they were gonna be and they said we caught them offhand. So one time during the Battle of Midway, I was up on -- to see if they -- if they -- you're not going to use your shore battery -- I mean, your eight inch guns. Well, you'd make some sort of excuse if you're up there in the general quarters. So we'd pretend we didn't make it down. If the planes were going, we would just get under the turrets. And I've seen a lot of dogfights and [Henry?] Butch O'Hare, who they named the O'Hare Airport for, he

shot down five Betty bombers in one day out there, and he became an ace.

BP: At Midway, yeah.

AS: At Midway.

BP: I interviewed his wingman.

AS: Oh, yeah?

BP: This was in [Denver?]. Alex Vraciu. He was his wingman before he got killed.

AS: So anyway, and like I say, I've seen these planes dogfighting and these planes coming down but I couldn't say, "Well, that was Butch O'Hare up there doing that." Just everything, and planes colliding with each other, and you know just a hell of a --

BP: Now you're part of the fallback line though, right? You're back there with the [Merilyn?]? You had Midway Island, then you had the carriers, and then you had battleships and cruisers back there in case they came through.

AS: Yeah. Yeah. But we were all -- and you could see all the ships, and if you saw the movie, "The Battle of Midway," and a lot of those were actual photos that were taken. We saw the Battle of Midway three days later on our ship. It was all in color. So I could -- when I see that movie, I couldn't say, "Well, there's my Astoria there," or the

other ship but they were -- those were active pictures of our ship.

BP: So you were there close enough that you could actually see the Japanese and American planes fighting.

AS: Oh, yeah! You'd see the dogfights, sure.

BP: Did you see the Yorktown or any of the other carriers get hit?

AS: Yeah. In fact, we were watching the Yorktown and they say the Japanese put another fish in it. But what we heard, that we -- we sank the -- we put a fish in the Yorktown because she could-- she was just burning. You know what I mean? And they says -- and this is with a scuttle man, and he said there was two guys mid-ship, and but there was no way they could've got out, and they said they were informed that they were gonna torpedo it, and they said -- one of them says, "Well, put one right mid-ship because we've got a hell of a AC/DC game going on." That's what, you know --

BP: OK. Now here's the -- Yorktown was hit and it started to list. They ordered "abandon ship."

AS: Yeah, they abandoned ship.

BP: Everybody got off but the following morning, it was still afloat.

AS: Still afloat.

BP: The fires were out. So they sent a salvage party back. And I interviewed a man down in Santa [Mon?] who -- the name was [Dwight David?] and he was part of the salvage party. They went back, and what he says was that there was the Hammann, I think, was alongside --

AS: Yeah, the destroyer.

BP: -- and they fired about three fish. One of them hit the Hammann instead of the Yorktown and another went right under the -- under the Yorktown because he was having lunch and he saw the s-- the torpedo come up under the ship and go the other way. And when he got up to running across the hangar deck, that's when one of the fish hit, and one of them hit the Hammann too and killed a lot guys in the Hammann. But as far as he was concerned, it was the Japanese submarines.

AS: See, from what we understood, that they sent one of our -- our cans. You know, like I say, everyone --

BP: They may -- now, maybe the submarine didn't sink it completely but it made it beyond salvage, and then one of our cans --

AS: Yeah, the -- the --

BP: I'll have to go look that up and see. But anyway, but you saw the Yorktown get hit or no?

AS: Oh, yeah. Sure. I saw it, all the fires and everything like that.

BP: Did you pick up any of the pilots from that?

AS: We prob-- I'm not sure. I don't know if we did or not. Maybe not. I don't remember really. But we could have, yeah.

BP: How about any Japanese? Any Japanese picked up out there?

AS: You know, during the battle -- from what I understood, they said a Betty bomber had crashed, or something like that, and they were standing on the wing. And they says, whether our ship did it or another ship, that they went to pick them over and one of those little officers pulled out a pistol and started shooting at him, and they [racked?] him off with the 40, 40-millimeters.

BP: Forties? Not the 20s, huh?

AS: The 20s or 40s or something, you know. So anyway, and they said at -- and then they said another time, one ship picked up the crew and they said the navigator, I think, they assumed he was only about 16 years old.

BP: They surrendered them.

AS: Yeah. Well, yeah. They picked up but the one that they -- this one ship, and it wasn't our ship, or something like that, but what -- it could've been ours or one of -- had just racked him off with the 20-millimeters. They were

shooting him. Shooting towards the ship. Then they say another incident -- here's all the stories you hear from different guys on different ships, you know, getting (inaudible). You hear, well this guy had seen this -- that they captured one crew and they said the young navigator or whoever it was died of fright when they got him aboard ship because he thought he was gonna be like the Japanese put out those (inaudible) to show the Americans biting kids in half, you know. And they thought we were a bunch of cannibals. Because I've seen the posters, the Japanese posters like that. Have you?

BP: No. Showing what, Marines?

AS: Yeah, like Marines holding a kid and biting him in half. That's why all those people in that island were jumping over the cliffs.

BP: (inaudible)

AS: Yeah, and they were trying to tell him to don't do it? There's still -- I was watching the history channel and they figured there's still some of those islands, still some Japanese who are still on there.

BP: They might still be. They'd be very old, though.

AS: Oh, yeah. They'd be my age group or older.

BP: Yeah, one surrendered in Guam in 1970.

AS: That's right. You know, and I don't know -- and I heard two on what they said. In 1949, they found one of our pilots that was on one of those islands.

BP: Really?

AS: You know, I mean I've heard that from different -- from different people, and you know, you --

BP: He was stranded on the island.

AS: Yeah, crashed on the island and was found in 1949.

BP: Wow. Imagine that.

AS: Yeah, and they've been finding some on Guam, remember just till recent years in Guam, and they figured there's still some on Guam.

BP: I haven't heard any repor-- I used to live out there and I haven't heard any reported sightings. I think they found the body of one who had been hiding out there.

AS: And the little children on that -- the History Channel the other night -- I watch that quite a bit, you know. It showed these -- and I forget what year it was, but after World War II, and they were speakers in there. You can see Japanese in there pleading with them, "Come out. Come out of the jungle."

BP: So what happened? What else do you remember about the Battle of Midway? Anything? Or --

AS: Well, the Battle of Midway is -- see we -- in our ship, we did -- one of the things we get worried of is doing a lot of firings at times. You'll fight any aircraft. The planes were coming over. What we used to, like if it was cloudy, they weren't flying, we weren't flying. So all you have to worry about was your surface field.

BP: Surface ships.

AS: Yeah, submarines and surface ships. So then, but like people say -- I say well, the way they did -- if they sink -- and then they say at one time, I don't know whether it was during the Battle of Midway -- and they say after they secured, two planes were coming in and they were gonna take them aboard and there were a couple of Japanese pilots.

BP: Oh, yeah. That was at Coral Sea.

AS: Coral Sea. Yeah, one of those (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

BP: And they shot one of them down, I think.

AS: Yeah. There was no place to land, so hell we'll go over there. So like I say, a lot of things over that you try to remember, and then you'll hear some people say this, some people say that, and so then you, you know -- and I know I -- and I forget how long we were at Midway. So on our ship, and our captain requested that, well, we get -- now this is like what we hear, see, down in the engine room --

but the captain asked if we need some repair and he wanted at least a month or something like that to stay in the harbor, and they says -- they -- he was told we have 48 hours. And then that's --

BP: This is before Midway?

AS: That was after Midway, and that's when we headed for the -- for the Solomons.

BP: Oh, OK. So you were in there, in Midway, for just a few hours?

AS: Well, a few days until after the battle, then at the Navy -- after things were secured, then we came back. We went even to try to relieve Wake Island, and we were turned away in Wake Island when Wake Island fell.

BP: Oh, so you were part of the relief force that turned around.

AS: Yeah.

BP: I interviewed a guy who was on Wake Island and spent the rest of the war as a POW.

AS: That's right. I think we had -- I don't know if it was Fletcher aboard, and they said when we got the order to turn around and go back to Pearl -- we were outnumbered there because they had landed already on Wake -- and they says up on the bridge, he threw his hat down and stepped all over it. Like you say, our messengers go up from the

engine rooms, take the -- you know, every quarterly, even hourly readings up there, then they hear rumors. They come back and tell us this, and so then -- and that's what we heard. So then we went back to Pearl. That was like before taking off and going to -- and like I say, and our ship was a Task Force 58, and I think we were -- in our task force, we were with the ra-- with the to-- see we do the little raid. We don't (inaudible). We had a part in it.

BP: OK. That was in '42.

AS: Yeah.

BP: OK. Can I use your bathroom?

AS: Yeah, sure. It's right there.

BP: More about that. So this is after you -- go ahead.

AS: Yeah, well you know like you do a little raid. We didn't see up at -- and you hear what happened, and they say that half the planes waited until they could take off. They'd have had enough fuel to take them to like in the Russian area or China, I can't say. But from what we've heard and what we've said, at so many hours ahead of that time, they spotted a Japanese fishing boat.

BP: Ahead of the planes' launch time, you mean?

AS: Yeah. They said they had one and so then later on, they saw another one.

BP: Wait, wait. Wait, let me just get a second. Was Doolittle
Raid before Coral Sea and Midway?

AS: Oh, no. That was after Coral Sea.

BP: After Midway.

AS: Yeah.

BP: OK. I'll check the dates. I'm sorry, go ahead.

AS: Yeah. And so they said what happened, that they decided
well maybe those Japanese fishing ships or something like
that had radios aboard, and notified --

BP: Tokyo.

AS: -- Tokyo. So they launched the planes and that's why some
of them didn't have enough fuel to continue on. You know,
and so they landed in enemy territory. They said but then
-- and this is all stuff we hear aboard ship because, you
know, they're in contact with the other ships. They says
that when they went over Tokyo, that they hadn't even known
we're there because they had -- they heard music playing,
stuff like that, you know, what they picked up --

BP: Over the radio.

AS: Yeah. Yeah. They said they had not taken off at that
time. They would've had enough -- enough fuel left to take
them because one -- some were supposed to -- were -- some
were in Russian territory or something like that.

BP: (inaudible) probably.

AS: Yeah. Some were supposed to go to, into China, and a few of them didn't make it.

BP: Yeah. Yeah, they were captive. Some of them were killed, yeah.

AS: Oh, yeah. The hi-- well, like in that Korean War. You know right there? You know what the guys did to one pilot? They tied both of his arms to trucks and shot him away. You know?

BP: In the Korean War?

AS: Yeah, during the Korean War. It's in that book. So but anyway, and then like I say, and after that, then we did come back to Pearl. It's dark to try to remember all that stuff, you know.

BP: So what do you remember, though, about being on the Nashville during the -- the Doolittle Raid?

AS: You mean the Astoria?

BP: On the Astoria.

AS: Yeah, no we just -- we were maybe like plane guards over there in case we were needed.

BP: But you didn't really do --

AS: No, no. We didn't do anything, no. We were in the task force and you're like you're the backup. So you're --

BP: So either it was the Nashville, then.

AS: Huh?

BP: The Nashville was there too.

AS: Yeah. And I was on the Astoria.

BP: Right, OK.

AS: Then those other ships, there were tin cans and, you now, and so we were just there like in case something was really hap-- if the Japanese planes were to come over, some of our guns on the aircraft would've taken part in that. And if there's any surface ships that come over, well we'd engage in battle with them, but we didn't have nothing to do with that.

BP: Now what was --

AS: Because nothing was ever hit out of fifth out of Doolittle.

BP: Yeah. So what did you do after the Doolittle Raid?

AS: After the Doolittle Raid, yeah I can't even think. We probably went back to Pearl.

BP: Yeah, you've got the Solomons pretty soon, I think.

AS: Yeah. Well, but we went to the Solomons after -- the Doolittle Raid was before the Solomons before -- even before Midway.

BP: Oh, yeah. That's what I thought. In April, OK.

AS: Yeah. So then anyway, we'd come back and then we went to -- out to the Coral Sea and we opened up the campaign on August 9 of 1942 and we stayed -- and we were hit and sunk on -- we opened -- no, August 7th. We were sunk on the 9th.

BP: OK. Tell me about the details from the very beginning, what you remember though. You opened up the campaign on the 7th.

AS: Yeah, and we -- we just --

BP: You're probably doing what? What were you doing?

AS: Well, we were doing -- we were shooting broadside on the island clearly and the Marines hadn't landed yet. We had an officer aboard our ship. His name was [Ishan?], Lieutenant [Ishan?]. He was married to some girl whose father was a governor of state or something like that. A hell of a nice guy.

BP: How do you spell the name?

AS: [Ishan?].

BP: I-S-H-A-N?

AS: Yeah, something like that. But you know, and just a hell of a nice guy. He went up and him and somebody else, they parachuted on the -- one of the highest points at the Solomons for fire control.

BP: Parachute?

AS: Yeah.

BP: And they held it over in a plane?

AS: I guess so, because he left his ship and he said that's -- that's what he did, but he was killed, and like, you know a p--

BP: He was killed parachuting?

AS: No, no. He was killed after. He was on there and directly fire, you know, from the ships that were out there. They had their radios and all that, stuff like that, you know, like a commander type of deal. A lot of people didn't know but they say actually the first ones on the island are the Coast Guard. They would land and they're -- they're the fire control. A lot of people didn't know that. I didn't know that either.

BP: Well, I talked to a guy who lives in New Zealand now, but he was the beach master.

AS: A beach master?

BP: *The* beach master. He controlled all the beach parties that were unloading supplies and directing them. He's 89 years old. He lives in New Zealand. But OK, so you were firing on the island.

AS: Yeah, firing on the islands and tha-- and then any aircraft, whatever it is, you know what I mean? Because you're down below and you're so damn -- you know, you were so damn busy and stuff like that, but we were doing that. So then anyway, when we're -- we're patrolling -- (break in audio)

BP: OK. So after you're stopping to battle and you've got 40 mil--

AS: Yeah, and we're doing it, and there was a like, I think -- I forget which, who was the lead ship. Maybe the [DaVincent?], Quincy, or the [Australian Canterbury?], and us, and the Chicago. The Chicago was in that group and it got hit, and McVay, the captain of it, backed off, and he later committed suicide. Called McVay, he committed suicide also because the -- and that Japanese sub that was after him, and they said, "Well, he should've been [zag?] but he wo--" and he said there was no way in the world he could've wa-- because the Japanese sub had two human torpedoes aboard.

BP: OK. Well, I've got those two. I want to hear about the Chicago. You said something about the Chicago?

AS: And the Chicago backed off, and so whether that left a big gap, I don't know. But they say at that night -- and that, the battle started, I guess it was close to midnight, maybe after --

BP: You're talking about stage one?

AS: Yeah. That was in that dealer because the Marines, their - their troops were in the harbor so they hadn't landed yet and so -- and they say someone aboard our ship told the old (inaudible) that he's got something up there and it was saying -- and they didn't want to wake up the old man. You know, because you wake up the old man, and you'd better

have a good reason to wake up the old man, and they didn't. He said, "It's probably some of our own ships out of formation."

BP: That was the exec--

AS: That was probably who -- whoever was on the fritz.

BP: Mm-hmm. I had his name at one point.

AS: Yeah. Anyway, you mean off on the Astoria?

BP: Yeah. I think the guy the officer's name was [Sheets?] or something like that.

AS: Sheets? Yeah, and then our --

BP: And he wanted to fire. He actually requested permission to fire. The officer of the watch, I think it was the executive officer, hesitated and then finally the executive says he started firing on his own. The captain came up and wanted to know what was going on. Go ahead.

AS: Anyway, and so because we -- our navigator, what was his name? Hold on a second. He was (inaudible). So that's what we -- and they said that ignored that and said, "No, we don't want to wake up the captain." You know, they don't want to take the responsibility to go and wake up the captain. Like I say, they dropped star shells on us. The Japanese must've had a little plane off a sub or something like that, and then we were between them, and that's when they open-fired on us, and we -- we were shooting probably

on each other. You know, when you're at night firing, probably got -- because the Navy never did have any night firing battles, and that was one of the first, I believe. We lasted about 12 minutes before we lost power. We only got about nine -- nine (inaudible) but we were get-- holy Christ, we were just get to be hell.

BP: Any hits close to the spaces where you were [room?]?

AS: Yeah. I was in the engine room.

BP: Which one?

AS: I was in the aft engine room. See, and when the -- all the -- all the engines stopped, you know, and then the water, you know, bows and pipes and coming in, and that water gets hot. The steel, you couldn't even touch it.

BP: So you had hot, super -- you had steam coming in to your room?

AS: Oh, yeah. You know, and because your lines are breaking, and your water and when -- you know, like see, if you're in the engine room and you're coming in, you're going to leave the light off or you've got the, what they call the securing watch. So then you would -- you and your firemen, or your oil man, (inaudible) which I was, and my oil man, and the other turbine would have the messenger, and you secure your engines, and by the time you get it secure, that temperature's so hot, you could hardly stand it. Your

nose is burning. So soon as you -- all secured, you lock it down. You don't go down for about three days because it has to cool off normally. So then like I say, the water was getting goddamn hot and it coming up. So we finally got out.

BP: So the hot water was coming in and rising inside --

AS: Yeah, rising in-- yeah because the lines were broken.

BP: And then you were securing the steam lines? Is that what -
-

AS: No, no. Hell, no. No, you're just trying to get out.

BP: OK, got it.

AS: Because you're -- the turbines stopped, everything, you know? Because you're steam lines are open, so you have nothing to -- turning your fans, your turbines. So you're layin-- we're laying dead in the water.

BP: And how did you get out?

AS: How'd I get out? They say -- you know, and you go up and like there was a seven-inch armor over the -- around your mid-ship where your engines and above the deck.

BP: Seven inch of armor plating?

AS: Yeah. Armor plating. The hatch was sort of sprung, and so that they thought they shorted us down. You know, hey you can't get out. So anyway, and this is what stories you hear, you know, from the other guys. They said that some

officer running by, and there was a guy with the battle [JV?] phones on and was dead. So they said this officer, or whoever it was, picked it up and was in our engine room trying to contact our -- contact up there. You know, your cad-- either one's on your [JV?] phones, you know, your dial phone. So then the damage control party or something come out and got the hatch open, and we come out.

BP: Otherwise you would not have made it.

AS: Oh, no. Hell, no. And boy I'm telling you, it was hot. Oh, Christ. So then we -- and we got up in the -- in the mess hall because ours was -- we had two mess halls, one before and one after. So one of two engines were in the front mess hall and the other ones were below the after mess hall. So I got out, and I don't know. I would say there must have been about -- and other people were in there, about maybe 14 -- I guess maybe 14 people, and we took a hell of a hit. Myself and about three other guys, we were the only ones that got out of there.

BP: Now, wait a minute. After you got up to the mess decks?

AS: Yeah.

BP: You took another hit.

AS: Oh, hell. You know, you -- you couldn't realize. You know, that armor plate was that big. And you know, it was

laid open like if you got a knife on a piece of fat and just sliced it, and the fat would just roll over.

BP: So the hit actually hit the mess -- the mess compartment or no?

AS: There were holes all over. It was, you don't know where the hell you were being hit. But yeah, and hell, there was -- actually, our stacks were blasted and one of our turrets, I don't know the o-- it was "bows out," they say. A shell went in one side and it just hit inside and exploded, right through the -- right through the -- you know, turret.

BP: (inaudible)

AS: Yeah. So like I say, and then after there was a get on the stand, and when I -- and you know, and all I felt when that explosion, I felt like if you're standing by a fire barbecuing and the -- the little, you know, cinders would start going? That's all I felt. But when I -- and I was laying up against the steel sheet that goes across the [geodock stand?] and I must have dented that in 10 inches, thrown up against it. And when I'd come to, all I had on was a pair of Levis. My shoes were blown off. My lifejacket was blown off.

BP: Is that the --

AS: I put my lifejacket on and my wristwatch was blown off.

BP: So you were in the mess deck and a shell actually hit in the mess deck.

AS: Yeah, or it hit somewhere in there because all I could see was a big flash and then all I -- and all I could -- and I heard guys screaming. One guy was screaming. His arm was blown off or something like that. Somebody around and like we were crying help and gave him a shot of the morphine, you know, that little cartridge. You'd shoot them in the butt and that's the biggest part, and then you're supposed to mark them, and then I never saw him after that. They put a big battle bandage on him. I never saw the kid again.

BP: Now you say how many people were in that mess deck approximately when that happened?

AS: I would say, when that -- when I com-- I would say -- I would say there must have been about 14 of us.

BP: And how many of you got out alive?

AS: Myself and about three others; about four.

BP: OK.

AS: And then I knew -- and the ship was black. When you get into something black, it's black.

BP: Dark.

AS: Dark. Oh, Christ. So but I knew where I was at all times. When I'd finally come to, and all I could see was just

flames and stuff like that, and so but I knew where I was, and I knew over here was a -- was a tailor chop and I knew here is where they -- and there was a ladder going up to the trunk. And when I went up and got up in the trunk --

BP: Now what do you mean by the trunk?

AS: Well, it's different little compartments, and they call them "trunks." Not in the Navy, on the ship. That's ship talk, you know.

BP: They're escape trunks?

AS: Yeah, no they were not escape but just decks, different (inaudible) decks, maybe some high up and they'd take you to different parts of the ship.

BP: There's ladders that will take you up?

AS: Yeah, ladder will take you up there. So then when I got up there, and it was -- there was fire and you could see it, but -- and the water was about better than waist-high in there.

BP: In there?

AS: In there, and the trunk was not much bigger than the kitchen here.

BP: But was there water on the mess decks by then or no?

AS: Oh, yeah. The water was coming in, and up there. This is the honest-to-God's truth. I was pushing bodies and pieces of bodies away from me.

BP: From floating in the water.

AS: That was in that trunk. That was in there. I mean, you know, and you reached out and you could -- because there was fire, you could see some light, you know, coming in from the decks. You're in blood because the water is just real blood because -- and anyway, I finally made my way and I got on the fantail.

BP: Now there were people with you in that trunk trying to get out?

AS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. It was, I don't know, a few. You know, you can't tell because every, you know, like when you're swimming for your life at sea, you could be two feet away from somebody and don't see them before the waves jump like that, and you think you're the only one there. I remember this one kid [Phillips?] and (inaudible) went -- we got on the topside and the ready boxes were going off. You know, the ready boxes on -- on the --

BP: With ammunition?

AS: Ammunition. Going off. Guys were being blasted with both, and they sound like quail going by, you know? This kid [Phillips?], and I still remember. I told him, I said, "You know, [Phillips?], I wish I get it next." (pause) Because, you know, hearing all that stuff, and you should've seen our -- our deck with bodies. Huh! And so,

and I got up there, you know, and it was still dark. So we were standing around and our indication was our main battery for it, the eight-inch shells -- I mean the nine-inch battery was good always but indicated that it'd been flooded, that there was fire around. It wasn't funny. We'd have been the first ones into orbit if that thing would've gone. Some guy, we were standing around and somebody lit a cigarette and this is -- this is -- we were just trying to calm it with some little (inaudible). Don said light, "Do you want to disclose our position to the enemy?" And Christ, we're burning from stem to stern, you know? No place to go.

BP: Now, [Phillips?] was from the engine room with you?

AS: Yeah. He was in the engine room. He was one of the ones that got out. So we just -- and then some officer, he and a lot of people were abandoning the ship, and myself and another couple of guys, I can't think of who or what the name of our chaplain was, a nice guy, but he was hurt pretty bad. We told him -- and there was ships com-- throwing guys over to boats in the water and he didn't want to go, and we put a lifejacket on him, and we threw him over the side. I'd never seen him again either.

BP: That was [Phillips?].

AS: No, that was the chaplain.

BP: No, but how was [Phillips?]? Did you see him again after that?

AS: No I didn't because see, we got picked up by different ships. I had a cousin aboard ship and I didn't see him again until we got back to Pearl about three weeks later.

BP: OK. So what happened then? You finally left ship too, or what?

AS: Well, no. So I was aboard and this, an officer comes d-- and we're, there was a few of us standing around on -- you know, I can't think of who, some of the guys -- but they were, you know, shipmates. Some officer had come over and told us for us to abandon ship, and he says Tulagi is blocked out that way, and you know what we told him? To get lost. (BP laughs) He didn't even know where the hell land was, and he wanted us to go? So we just ignored him. So finally, there were -- it'd started to get light, and there were ships were pumping water into us but nothing was --

BP: You mean pumped out?

AS: You know, trying to put out them fires and stuff. Nothing pumping it out. This was at 11:15 up forward on the port side. I heard a, there was a big explosion and it was probably one of our five-inch magazines going up. Exactly an hour later, we sank.

BP: Now, you got off before you sank?

AS: No. I --

BP: You stayed on till it went down?

AS: And I was standing right next to Captain [Greenman?]. And I told him, and I says -- and he had shrapnel holes all over him, and I had stuff in my head and all over up and --

BP: You had shrapnel in your head?

AS: Yeah. You know, it was barbed wire but I didn't turn in because I -- after we got off of there, I was helping corpsmen, peeling guys' skin off the -- the burns, so bad, that you have to keep peel-- and that's how I used to work with the corpsmen. Corpsmen, after we got on the ship, they picked us up, and we went to Espiritu Santo --

BP: OK, let's get back. You were there with [Greenman?] and what happened?

AS: And then I says, I told them, I says, "Captain," I says, "aren't you gonna give the word for -- to abandon ship?" And he said, "Well, we're not down yet," and I remember that. I can hear him, still, saying that. Anyway, so me and little [Jonesy?] and [Jonesy?] is company with [Jonesy?] and he was in there, and he said --

BP: [Jonesy?] was from the engine room too?

AS: Yeah. And he said, "Santos," he said, "I'm scared." I said, "Hey, [Jonesy?]." I says, "You've got a lifejacket

on." I said, "You need to go for the low side of the ship. And we had wounded laying on the ship. When the ship went over, they all went down with the ship.

BP: Oh, they did.

AS: You always go to the high side. You know? Because if you go over. And anyway --

BP: So you had wounded there they hadn't taken off?

AS: Oh, no. Yeah, we had wounded. Hell, one of my officers, he was split from his gu-- up in here and down to his -- down to his hip.

BP: So his whole back was split open.

AS: Open. And so, and then -- and I'd go around and he would, a guy from Texas, a handsome guy. Geez, he was a handsome guy. When he'd -- and he was about six-foot-two, and when he'd have his white uniform on and his sword, and I still see him. I'll tell you. He was a handsome, handsome guy -- man. I mean, just a beautiful guy. And so he, I'd check, you know, the scene like that, and never moaning. Just moaning, sure. But he asked me, he wanted some water. And I don't know, some place -- you know, you used to put it in like garbage cans. They'd have water in it with like cornmeal in it. So you'd drink that and it would quench your -- your thirst. So I found some water. I can't tell you where and how I found it, but I found some water, and I

gave it to him. And I'm holding him up this way, and I'm try-- and he's trying to drink it. As he's drinking it, he's just -- I'm just covered in blood.

BP: And he didn't make it?

AS: He was still alive when the ship went over. And all the other ones, they got guys laying there.

BP: They couldn't get them off.

AS: No because the ships had to leave because there was the Japanese subs in the area again so they left.

BP: And after they left, the ship went down?

AS: Yeah. And so anyway, and so like I told [Greenman?]. So actually, I'm almost positive. I nudged [Greenman?] when we were going over, and as the ship went over --

BP: Rolled?

AS: Huh?

BP: It rolled to one side?

AS: Yeah, all over. The shipped rolled this -- it rolled this way, see?

BP: To port?

AS: It rolled to port because the holes must have been on that side. Rolled to port, and I walked over the ship and I jumped off the -- off the screw, the shack, into the water. I was trying to get away from the ship, and every time I'd try -- try to swim, guys were jumping in, and those big [K

props?] were driving me back. So I grabbed onto one guy, and he almost went berserk! I could hear him hollering to "turn him loose, turn him loose" so I turned him loose so he didn't drown, and me too, you know? So this kid, his name was [Sven?] from Chicago, and he knew what I -- so he gave me his hand and he swam me out. You know, I cut this way and he's (inaudible). He's got a lifejacket and he swims me out about maybe 7, 8, 9, 10 feet. So I said, "OK. I could do it." And I never saw him anymore.

BP: You didn't have a lifejacket on.

AS: I didn't have a lifejacket. And you know what happened? This officer, we had this officer. I don't even -- I don't want to name him. He might still be alive. He made full admiral too. He was our first lieutenant. And he asked me, he says, "Where's your lifejacket?" I said, "I don't have one." I said, "Mine was blown off." He said, "You've got to find another one." Him being an officer, it was his duty to give me his. You know that?

BP: No.

AS: Yeah. Yeah, because you're -- you're supposed to make sure your men are as safe as you could get them, and they say -- he was supposed to give me his. He told me to get another one. He took off. And it was still sort of dark and I -- so I found one. I found one and I put it on, and I put it

on, not a big deal. You know, I'm strapping on and I noticed that I felt something really odd. You know?

(pause) So I went by the -- by the fire. There was still fire and I looked in there, and you know there was a jaw in there and part of teeth?

BP: Huh!

AS: So I peeled that right off. And so when we went over, and I was, you know, hit the water, and (inaudible) the oil and shit like that, you know. Then my body started burning because they -- I -- I -- like water little, little pieces but not -- not enough where I had to be, I could say, "Hey, I'm wounded. You've got to take care of me."

BP: You had little nicks and cuts.

AS: Nicks and cuts. And for weeks afterwards, I s-- comb my hair, and I'd feel something. A little piece of wire would come out.

BP: Wire shrapnel?

AS: Yeah, from shrapnel. And you know, and after -- this was - - and after the war, I used to get a little fester right up in here. And every now and then, it would fester up and I'd squeeze it, and a little matter would come out and stuff like, and then go away. And so this was in about maybe '48 or '49. One time it really got bad and my wife says, "God," she said, "that looks bad." So I could go on

it, and I'd kept pressing. I'd feel something in there and -- and I kept wondering. And you know, a piece of steel had come out of me. It was about the size of a match head. I don't know how long it had been in my body. You know, it traveled around. And after I got that out, and I had it. I don't know whatever happened to it, but then it never happened again.

But when we were -- as the ship was going over, and I can still hear Captain [Greenman?], and with all that commotion, and going on, and it was rainy. And every time after, you could be in a nice day, and you have a sea battle, when you're using big guns. Pretty soon it's gonna rain. It blew -- the noise brings the clouds over, and it'd begin to rain. Captain [Greenman?], I heard him -- I heard him say -- now this is his exact words -- he says, "Turn around. Turn around, men, and watch your ship go down." And so, and we're -- I don't know how far we were from the ship and into the creed or something like that. And the ship, the ships would always roll over, you know, and the bow would come up. It would take that and then -- then go down stern because that's where your, all the enginery, and as soon it gets underwater, a big geyser comes up where the water was --

BP: Right, so you had walked off the stern, right?

AS: Yeah.

BP: So the stern was sticking out --

AS: Yeah, yeah the --

BP: -- and then it went back down.

AS: No, it -- and I walked off as the ship was rolling over, but when they sink, they'll -- they'll be laying this way in the water, see? And then usually, the -- the (inaudible) hull will come up a little bit, and then -- then for some reason, it'll start teeter-tottering a little bit, you know? Then the stern will go down, and when the stern goes down, then the water goes into your stacks and you'll get a big explosion.

BP: Did that happen with the --

AS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, certainly. Most every ship will do it because --

BP: Did that cause more casualties in your ship?

AS: No, it didn't cause more but a lot of guys, I'm almost positive, were taken down by sharks. Excuse me. I have to go there.

BP: Oh, sure. Sure. (break in audio)

AS: In the water. You know?

BP: Now you're in the water, and you said the sharks started coming?

AS: Oh, yeah because when they picked us up, there were machine gun sharks --

BP: There were sh--

AS: You know what we did? We knew there were sharks around. So before the ship went down -- we knew it was gonna go down -- we started throwing over bloody mattresses, and the -- the sharks smell blood miles away, I think. Because I've heard, this one guy said that something bit him and it di-- but we'd never seen him again.

BP: Hmm. Were you in the water, and he said something bit him, and then you didn't see him --

AS: Yeah, yeah. He says -- yeah. Yeah. A shark probably bit him. And one guy had come up, and they says -- because other ships picked them up, but they says half of his foot was gone where a shark bit off half of his foot. You know? And I never saw the guy anymore because we were all picked up by different ships, you know?

BP: How long were you in the water?

AS: I was in the water for almost six hours.

BP: That long!

AS: Yeah. And you know what? (pause) But I never panicked. Panic would kill you. I'd seen guys come out of the places on the ship with like wild horses and go right into the fire. You know what I mean? Just go bananas. So but I

just backstroked, and floated on my back, and but I was getting really, really tired, really right at the top. It was getting -- getting kind of dark, I think, almost dark. And I tell people this, I even mention it to some doctors, you know, when we're talking about it. They said, "Well, you're hallucinating" or something like that. And you know like on a rainy day in September, the sun comes out, and you'll see these like -- like the northern lights maybe come down? And I'd seen that, and I heard a choir singing, and I could still hear it today. If at certain times when you're in stress or maybe, I could hear it. And every time I hear it, and I try to hum it, it's gone. And so anyway, I remember the last -- when I was hearing that, I was on my back and I -- I -- I was so goddamn tired, you know.

BP: Nothing to grab a hold of and float on, huh?

AS: No but I'll tell you what, see? And I turned over. Maybe I was going to turn over to let myself go down. I spotted something about maybe from here to that next building.

BP: About 20 feet away maybe?

AS: Yeah. And I didn't know what it was, but I made a lunge for it. And you know what it was? It was a five-inch ammunition canister. That was -- you know before you just, when they were using it, throw them over the side after you're through. Otherwise, when you're in practice you

keep them but this way, you get them out of the way for the guns. You throw them over the side and it combined and it had the lid on it, but the lid was sprung, and only this much of it was floating. I lun-- and I got that thing and I held it this way in this arm.

BP: Under your left arm?

AS: Yeah.

BP: Right arm?

AS: Right arm. I held it this way and I had to keep it out of the water because I didn't want any more water to get into it. Finally, away on the horizon, or some were like coming over, I see a mass coming. I didn't know if it was our ship or a Japanese ship, but I started hollering and screaming, and pretty soon I see a whaleboat, a rescue whaleboat coming. It was a boat off of that destroyer.

BP: Do you remember the name of the destroyer?

AS: No, I really don't. I was only aboard, a bowl of soup, and strip to the head, and right off again. And so anyway, and so this officer aboard this deal and i-- the water was pretty choppy. And hell, I didn't know but there was guys maybe three or four feet away from me! But you don't see them in the water. It's so noisy, you can't hear nothing. It's raining and it wasn't cold. It wasn't -- you wouldn't last that long in the Atlantic. So he tells me, he says,

"Let that go and swim over," and I couldn't, and he says, "I'll pick you up on the next run." I really cussed him. I'll tell you. I cussed him. You know? And I heard him say this, honest to God. I heard him say, "Kick it in the ass and go pick him up." (laughs) So they come, and then you know, they have to pry my arm away from that lousy thing.

BP: So there were other men in the water around you.

AS: You don't see them! You know, you could be in -- in choppy waters but you don't -- like the surfers. One surfer's up here and the other guy's, you see him right in the beach, and they can't see this guy right beside him.

BP: There's only your head sticking out of the water.

AS: Yeah. But you know, the waves like that, and you know? Anyway, then they took me alongside this tin can and they had a cargo net going over. I made about three or four grabs, and that's all I got. They used a boat hook and hooked the back of my pants and pulled me off that way because I couldn't move anymore.

BP: Yeah, tired.

AS: I was -- you know, my legs are all stiffed up. Anyway, and then I'm sitting between the two stacks and I'm all covered with oil and shit like that. They gave me a bowl of soup, and I remember I was -- I can still see my -- I was sitting

up against one of the stacks, between the stacks, and there was other guys around too. I'm drinking the soup, and then the boat shuddered and someone said it got fished or something on the -- on the fantail. So then they're -- I can't think of the name but this big troop transport was there, and they come alongside and zigzagging because there was enemy stuff in the water. So they pull over that big cargo in there, and we -- they -- we have to go aboard there.

BP: So you weren't on that destroyer very long.

AS: No, no. I wasn't on it -- hey, I could say five minutes or an hour. I'm not sure. Because your mind is just, you don't know what the hell you're doing. So then we went on there and had to scale that. I remember, but they wouldn't tell even the paper that it would happen, but guys were falling between the ships!

BP: And being crushed?

AS: Well, they'd get down there and the screws, you're -- you're going. Shit, they just turn like you're in a Mixmaster. You know?

BP: So guys were falling between the ships getting cut with the screws.

AS: Right.

BP: Did any of them get crushed between the ships?

AS: Probably. I don't even think they put bumpers out.

They're not doing an exercise. We went aboard there and then they're -- and they had -- and then they had, on that ship there was maybe some men from the -- the [Canterbury?] and the other ships, you know, that were picked up. It was just so goddamn horrible. So you found a place where you sat down, and the decks were metal, and boy my feet were burning up, just burning up. We got aboard there and so we took off, and we -- we ended up dodging the Japanese and all they -- they didn't --

BP: Dodging Japanese --

AS: Yeah.

BP: -- destroyers? Or sub--

AS: Destroyers or whatever was in the area. We were gonna -- they had to get us all off and all the Marines' gear was on there. So we went to Espiritu Santo. And they say we were some of the first white people those people had seen there. Then they had to un-- so all of us on there had to go ashore, and they unload-- you know, it took them three and a half to four days to unload all of that crap the Marines had. You know? You wouldn't -- you ever see? It takes them a week to unload a ship.

BP: But weren't they originally destined for Guadalcanal?

AS: Yeah, but then we had to use that ship as a -- as a hospital ship or something. And the Marines, I think some of the Marines stayed there on that Espiritu and they unloaded tanks and all kinds of stuff, all their gear. Then we left there and they gave us a full [piper?].

BP: Well, OK. So let me just back up. So the Marines offloaded their stuff there instead of taking it to Guadalcanal.

AS: Yeah, because we needed that ship. We had a --

BP: OK. OK. So they, and they needed it for a hospital ship.

AS: Yeah, we needed to carry the -- the --

BP: All the wounded.

AS: All the wounded.

BP: And the survivors.

AS: And yeah, and survivors. Stuff like that. So anyway, and I think a lot the Marines stayed on the Espiritu. Then we took off.

BP: Now how long were you on at Espiritu Santo?

AS: We were there probably about four days, three or four days.

BP: OK. And then what happened? Yeah.

AS: Yeah, and then we -- they put us back aboard there, and we took off, and they gave us a light cruiser, the Raleigh. That was maybe from the World War I, cruiser. A three stacker, I think it was. Because like the old World War I

tin cans used to be four -- four stackers. They used that as a (pause) transportation. So they jacked their phones and we went to the island [Tutuila?]. We pull into the (inaudible) part of Samoa to get away. We stayed in there, I forget, a couple of days maybe. Then we took off again, and I forget how long it took us to get back to Pearl. And from there, then we went to Nouméa, New Caledonia.

BP: Now wait, they sent you to Hawaii and then brought you all the way --

AS: No, no, no, no. We thought we were going back to Hawaii.

BP: Oh, you thought you were.

AS: Yeah. Yeah, we were - no but see, but we needed fuel so they -- we went -- after we left, then we went to --

BP: Fiji.

AS: Nouméa.

BP: Nouméa, OK.

AS: Nouméa.

BP: In New Caledonia.

AS: Caledonia, yeah. And then the Chicago was in there. That was after it took a hit, and was in there, and this friend of mine I went to school with, Anthony Ornelas from San Antonio --

BP: Anthony?

AS: Anthony Ornelas is his name.

BP: Ornelas.

AS: Ornelas.

BP: How do you spell that?

AS: O-R-N-E-L-S. (sic) A Portuguese kid.

BP: O-R-N-E-L-L-I-S? (sic)

AS: Something like that, yeah. So and I saw -- so he gave me one of his toothbrushes and a bar of soap, you know? Because and then, we took on our oil, and then when he wa-- then they went out and the -- the ship was sunk. The Chicago was sunk.

BP: Later on.

AS: Yeah, later on. So he supplied that and he was picked up by the light cruiser Helena.

BP: Helena? Yeah. Wow.

AS: Another kid that we went to school with, Paul [Biaggie?] was aboard that thing. And when the Helena was sunk, Paul survived it. Anthony was a first class gunner's mate. He was killed aboard the Helena.

BP: Ornelas was.

AS: Ornelas was, yeah. He was picked up by the light cruiser Helena and [Biaggie?] was aboard there. [Biaggie?] I think was his name.

BP: And then he became a gunner on the Helena?

AS: No, he was a gunner on -- on the Chicago.

BP: Oh, but as a survivor, he was killed on the Helena.

AS: Yeah, as a survivor he was killed on the Helena. Yeah.
Maybe as a passenger or something, you know, because they
got their cruiser or something like that or just till they
could get him off, but he was killed when the Helena went
down.

BP: OK. And [Biaggio?]?
AS: [Biaggie?] was --
BP: Yeah, yeah.
AS: He was a crewmember on the Helena.
BP: What was his --
AS: Paul [Biaggie?]
BP: Paul [Biaggie?]. What was his rank?
AS: I believe he probably was a first class boatswain mate.
BP: OK. [Biaggie?]. How do you spell that?
AS: B-I-G-G-I-E. (sic)
BP: B-I-G-G-I-E.
AS: Yeah. We all went to school together.
BP: B-I-A, wouldn't it be?
AS: Oh, yeah. B-I-A, [Biaggie?]. Yeah.
BP: B-I --
AS: It's like a (inaudible).
BP: OK. And so then he survived that.

AS: Yeah. He survived that. He, yeah, he still lives in San Fran.

BP: Oh, really?

AS: Yeah.

BP: Wow.

AS: And then from -- I forget how long it took us to get back to Pearl. It took us quite a while for some reason.

BP: Now how about any, some of the people that you left on the ship? Did you -- anybody there that you know got killed? Most of the people in the engine room got killed or --

AS: Yeah, a lot of the engineers, the whole crew of the number one fire room or number two fire room were killed. There was, like they had -- my cousin and I were aboard ship and there was maybe two or three sets of brothers, and this one kid, he was looking for his brother. His brother was in the fire room that nobody came out of.

BP: Do you remember his name?

AS: Geez, I really don't. I don't. Because you know like on a ship, like you were in -- you were in the Navy, but you know, you could be aboard a ship for two or three years and never seen someone because --

BP: That's right.

AS: Yeah, you know, and we had guys that were trying to come aboard. I was back. They were forward so you had no reason to be up forward, so you didn't know who they were.

BP: Well, and in the fire room where you were, or the engine room, how many people got out?

AS: Well, all of us got out, but how many survived, I don't know because I -- we all split up.

BP: Some of them were killed in the mess hall, in the --

AS: Yeah, some of them. Some of them were killed. There was [Jughead?].

BP: That was his nickname?

AS: [Donald?]. Yeah, and [Draskovit?]. He was a first class lieutenant. I mean, first class electrician mate. And you know, like I was on the ship and the ship had holes, so I looked down into the mess hall, the forward mess hall, and I see [Jughead?] laying there. I see [Donald?] laying there. I see that little kid from Brooklyn, or the first class electrician. And b--

BP: What was his name?

AS: [Dashkovitz?].

BP: [Dashkovitz?].

AS: [Dashkovitz?].

BP: [Dashkovitz?].

AS: Yeah. You know, it's hard to -- and you [weren't supposed to?] know everybody. [Skid?] and there was [Sparky?] --

BP: And they were in the mess -- [Sparky?]?

AS: Yeah. We kee--

BP: Nicknames.

AS: And we called him [Sparky?]. You guys on the aircraft, we called you guys [Airedales?]. So anyway, he looked like -- just his head from a concussion, but it loo-- you know, like a white watermelon, you just drop it, and it cracks all over? That's what his head looked like.

BP: And so this is with the mess hall you had come out of. You were able to look down through the hole --

AS: Yeah.

BP: -- and these guys you knew were laying in there, and they were all dead, huh?

AS: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

BP: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: Like this one, my very good friend, we were in the same engine room, and his name was Harry [Lee McCann?].

BP: [McCann?], OK.

AS: Harry [Lee McCann?] from Norfolk, Virginia. I weighed 118 pounds. He weighed about 190. When we took our first hit, well he took a pretty good hit in his leg.

BP: Shrapnel?

AS: Yeah. And he was telling me to don't let him die. And so I was trying to get him out -- get him out and then we took another hit. So the next morning, I went down looking for him and he had one hand on the ladder. Until this day, I don't know how I got him on topside.

BP: Oh, so he was still alive.

AS: No, he was dead.

BP: Oh.

AS: I got him on top side and till this day -- and he weighed about 180, 185 pounds and I only weighed 118, and I had to bring him up two flights of stairs, level stairs. How I did it, I really couldn't-- I don't know but I did it, because I sewed him up in canvas and I was going to bury him at sea. I sewed and I put some iron. I found some scrap iron and sewed him up in canvas. I didn't get a chance -- and he had 68 dollars in his little white pocket. I left it right in there. He went down with the ship. But he was dead, but I sewed him up in canvas.

BP: But was he dead when you carried him up to the --

AS: Yeah.

BP: He was.

AS: He was -- he took another hit and he was split all the way up here.

BP: Oh so right (inaudible).

AS: Like his intestines and all tiny --

BP: So but you carried him up even though he was dead.

AS: Yeah. I wa-- you know and I -- I just, for some reason, I know I had to get him up there, and I picked him up and took him up. And like I say, until this day, I can't tell you how I did it.

BP: Because you weighed 118 and he weighed 180, huh?

AS: Yeah. He weighed about 180, and he was maybe about six foot -- oh, six-foot-ten-and-a-half, over six foot, almost -- I mean, five-foot-eleven, five-foot-ten. Almost a six footer.

BP: But he was still alive when you started carrying him up or --

AS: No, no. He was already dead. See, when I lost -- when our second hit, he was blown away again. That's why I got up above, see?

BP: From the mess hall.

AS: Yeah. And you know, I was on the well deck and on the well deck, I saw only this much of an arm and I knew it belonged to H.E. Brown from Michigan. No tattoos or nothing, but I knew it was his arm. How do you know? But I knew it was Brown's arm.

BP: And he was from the engine room too?

AS: Yeah. He was on that cruise ship and he was on one of these distribution boards, whether he was down in the engine -- he wasn't in the engine but he might have been some other place, but he was on the cruise ship and I knew it was his arm. People say ho-- I said, "I don't know. I just know it was his."

BP: H.E. Brown.

AS: H.E. Brown. [Harold?] Earl Brown, his name was. Yeah, hell of a nice kid from Detroit, Michigan. It's amazing what you -- what you see in your mind, I think. I don't know what it is. I could never -- I told doctors about it, you know, and stuff like that. And like I end up having migraine headaches and they said I just have to live with them. That was from that concussion.

BP: You still have them from that?

AS: Yeah. Not as bad but I still have them.

BP: That you had from the concussion? You had a concussion from the explosion.

AS: Yeah. Because you know, like it just -- that's, it tore off all the clothes off of me, you know, and it just hits and it pulls it away because I was completely dressed. No shoes on or nothing.

BP: Yeah. Just your pants was left?

AS: Just my pants. It looked like the pants were dipped in acid. There was a -- like I say, and then after we got aboard that ship, well I was -- went around and helped the corpsmen.

BP: On the four-stacker or on the transport?

AS: No, on the transport coming back. Then we picked up another ship in Caledonia. That's right. We got off at that one. We got another ship in Caledonia. The Wharton, it was called.

BP: The Wharton?

AS: The Wharton. I think it was the Wharton. That's the one that brought us back to Pearl.

BP: OK. A four-stacker.

AS: Yeah. No, it was a troop transport.

BP: Oh, OK.

AS: But it was, yeah. And those guys on the Wharton had never seen anything. And boy, you know? They only fed us once a day or twice a day. We had -- you and I got one of those torpedoes, the little can opener, you know, that you gave? Christ, I could only hack it together. The bunch of us -- and there were so many of us. You found a place to sit down, you sat there. They even had some Red Cross people aboard. So, and my feet were burning up, just burning up because I didn't have any shoes. So I saw this Red Cross

worker and I asked them. I says, you know, if they had a pair. He says, "Well, the officers haven't been attended to yet." I took off after him. And you know what, they passed the word a sailor was going berserk up there, up on deck. I thought I caught him. I would've thrown him over the side. I would have. I'd have killed him. They said - - they mastered arms up for me and then my captain was aboard that ship, and other crews were boarding. We were going through funerals all day long, burying guys at sea. Guys were dying.

BP: The guys at (inaudible) were dying.

AS: Oh, dying. Yeah. The ones that were wounded that they got off who were dying. So we'd have -- and they'd say, "A burial for the Astoria, a burial for the [Canterbury?], a burial for this." So you'd go up there. So my captain was aboard there. If your men -- something (inaudible), well you attend to that because you're the captain of these men that were on your ship. So I told him this stuff, and he didn't get me a pair of shoes, but he says -- he was pissed, you know. Then some guys were stealing from each other. You know? I mean, everything. You know, just -- and he told us. He says, "If you find any of our men stealing from each other," he says, "just kick the hell out of them but don't kill them." Let that community, you know

when you're stealing from somebody else. So they gave us all this like soluble cotton. So myself and about three other guys, we found a deck winch, steam deck winch, had the little cockpit. So we drained that, and poured, and made our coffee out of that dirty water.

BP: Water, huh. Huh! Couldn't you get enough water on the ship?

AS: Not enough. Like I say, if you sat down, you had somebody sit down and then you wouldn't -- we were, after we got picked up that night, that day, well you -- so the landing boats were all up on the deck of the ship. They picked us up. And it was rain, and rain, and stuff like that. So I called them, and they were only about -- on the skids, they were only about this high off the deck, you see.

BP: Right. Cut in half off the deck? Two feet up from there?

AS: Yeah, uh-huh. You know, on those, they have a stacked deck.

BP: On the divot.

AS: Yeah. This must have -- it was late at night and I woke up, and I heard gunfire, and I looked out in the distance, and I could see flashes, so I went to get up. Boy, and I hit my head on that boat. I slept for another hour. I knocked myself out, I think, because I just -- I remember I -- you know, you're only about this high, and I went to get

up to go, and I'd come right up under that landing, that Higgins boat. I must have knocked myself out because the next morning, geez, I had a hell of a lump here, you know? But there was, they were firing, a battle going on somewhere.

BP: You're still in the Solomons someplace.

AS: Oh, yeah, still in the Solomons. Yeah, it was still in the Solomons.

BP: And you're still on the Henderson.

AS: Yeah.

BP: On the Henderson, OK. But then you get through Caledonia and they put you on a four-stacker, you said?

AS: No, no. That was a ship that they gave us to -- as a --
(break in audio)

BP: Today is Saturday, the 24th of February, the year 2000. I'm interviewing Mr. Abe Santos in Capitola, California. The interviewer is Bruce Petty. (break in audio)

AS: So we brought that back from the Philippines.

BP: OK, so then you --

AS: Before the war.

BP: The transport took you to New Caledonia.

AS: Yeah.

BP: And then you transferred to --

AS: A ship called the Wharton.

BP: The Wharton, which --

AS: Wharton, yeah.

BP: -- which was a --

AS: Was a transport also. Again, that took us -- then we stayed aboard that until we got back to Pearl. We were kind of dodging around.

BP: OK. And you said that you're having burial parties all the way back to Pearl?

AS: We were having quite a few. You know, for a few days after because guys were dying and stuff like that.

BP: Now did you hear -- while you were on the transport, did you hear any more about other friends you might have had on the ship? What happened to them, or whether they made it or not?

AS: Well, you'd ask about certain ones and they said that they didn't know, but some of them -- you know, they even had me down as Missing in Action. Somebody said they -- or dead. Somebody said they saw me dead. You know? And I got that clarified.

BP: All right. OK. Do you know how many people were killed? Do you remember?

AS: You know, from what I understand, in that t-- we lost about one third -- we lost about 300 some-odd men and then there was ones that died later, you know maybe they -- but there

was a lot of -- you know, like that battle, the Hood? The English? It had almost 1,900 men aboard and only three survived that, and they figured they were on the top side when the [Kriegsmarine?] got them.

BP: 9th of June though, too. June --

AS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. And the general and yeah, that's where the Sullivan brothers were killed. Yeah, my cousin Earl that we were on the ship together, he put that ship in commission. Those used to be known as a plank owner. You went aboard the Sullivans and the Sullivans, they named a tug for the biggest -- for a big tug. Then they named the destroyer for them and I was on the [OCO?], the tug, the 129 and that was the biggest tug until they made -- come out with the Sullivan tug, the Sullivans. Yeah.

BP: So what did you learn about fellow crewmen by asking around? Anything?

AS: Well, they would say that they -- then we had a 30-year ship reunion so we saw a lot of them, that we went to Oregon. The Astoria had a 30-year ship reunion.

BP: That was 1980-something?

AS: Yeah, uh-huh. We see a lot of the shipmates. Now, a lot of them have died since then. I used to get the newsletters, you know? But after we got back to Pearl, I didn't see hardly any of my ex-shipmates because they went

to different -- they went maybe back to the States for new -- new construction or went to different places, and I only ran maybe into one or two all the time when I was with the crash boats in Kāneohe and places like that, you know?

BP: OK. So what did you do when you were put on crash boats then?

AS: Well, you know, then after I got back, after we got back to Pearl, I was kept at Pearl with the 12th Navy that was (inaudible) and I was put -- put on tugboat duty at the harbor. I was on that for, I don't know, maybe six months. Then they transferred me to Johnston Island. I was on Johnston. I was a second-class machinist mate at the time. Then they sent me to Johnston Island.

BP: OK. And what was going on at Johnston Island?

AS: Johnston Island? That's a place that used to be where only a few hundred miles from the Gilbert and Marshalls. They're still enemy, you know? So whenever we had a drill on Johnston Island, it was no -- a routine, a drill. It meant something but we never got into -- once in a while, the sh-- a tin can, or not a tin can, the submarines going back to the Gilbert and Marshalls or something like that. They'd surface a little bit and use our tower for target -- target practice.

BP: So you had an airstrip there.

AS: Yeah. We put the airstrip in and our hospital was underground. I was in the engineering with the diesel engines for the generators, and we had splinter shields all the way around us about 10 feet, 10 feet wide all full of sand. I was there for six months. We had to do six months but the Marines were there for 18, and there was like 280-something sailors and about 1,800 of the Marines. So you could see what we had to go through. You know? And there was Johnston Island, and then another little island on the way from it called Sand Island. So I used to take a little tug over there and go drink some beer, and their deal and buy some Hershey's, you know. And us, our uniforms there were Marines field (inaudible), shorts, Frank Buck hats, the elephant hats, and dark glasses. We were issued for the white corps and we were issued aviation glasses. You could walk the width of it, hell, maybe a half an hour, and the length of it in a little bit more than that. It was just a sand island.

BP: But you were never attacked by the Japanese.

AS: No, uh-uh. Uh-uh.

BP: Were you a second emergency airfield?

AS: Yeah. Well see, that was a stopping off point when planes were flying like maybe to the [Oregon?]. Now from what I

understand, Johnston Island has a skeleton crew there, that they have like atomic waste there now.

BP: I think they're incinerating a chemical biological (inaudible).

AS: Yeah. On Johnston. It was -- and we lived in Nissen huts and they had you go up in the barracks but we lived, us engineers, lived in these Nissen huts by our (inaudible). And like I say, everything was dark and chip at night, you know, and anytime something happened, you would -- it was something for real. Us petty officers, we carried 45 side-arm and we had 21 rounds of ammunition, one deal in there, and one in the chamber, and two clips. If something happened, all you had to do is back up and she's ready to fire. So and if you're supposedly caught out of your area, your place or barracks or whatever, without your side-arms and your glasses, they say it was -- you could be court-martialed because that was your protection and protection for your eyes. Nothing ever happened but -- and then all the non-petty officers were all -- they had rifles and you'd have tripods in your barracks. When something happened, you'd just run out and grab your rifle and take off to your -- then we had a lot of machinegun emplacements around like they did on Wake, you know.

So I was there and then I was -- (sighs) you know, we just had to do six months then. So then from there, they sent me to Kāneohe Naval Air Station at -- on the other side of the island. So then I was there for some time and I was in crash boats. We'd have, you know, be ready in case there was a crash at sea. We had a hut, and we had our boats and our -- and the slips by our crash boats. I was the number one boat and I -- the other g-- two and three would take off, go through Chinaman's Hat, and I'd wait for the doctor and the corpsman to come aboard because we had like a little operating room. It was a 65-footer, twin -- twin 12s, Hall-Scott engines in it. So then after the doctor and the ambulance would bring the doctor down and the corpsman, then I'd take off and I could -- I'd take over to the other ships in the Chinaman's Hat, going through there, and then I'd be the first one out.

We'd go to sea and we used to -- they'd beam us out to where we're supposed to be, and if you lost a beam, you crisscrossed till you picked up the beam again, and go out. We got to head way out into the ocean looking for the crash sites.

BP: Did you find any?

AS: We found a few piec-- you'd find wheels, and tries, and stuff like, and gloves, and hands in it. So one time we

were out and this doctor aboard, he wanted to -- he said to cruise. We were looking around. To cruise, slow it down. I said -- well, I said, and I was the engineer. If I said, "This boat's not gonna go out," it doesn't go out because I was the engineer on it. I told him, I said, "We've got to -- I've got to keep a certain RPM or we-- our battery's gonna go dead on us" but he insisted. And this is -- I said, "OK. OK, you sign this log" because that would -- like if something would happen to your ship before the war and you were on, a throttleman, and if something happens and the ship is going to go down, you pick up your log because you -- you would write down. Every time you'd get a bug, you would write down the time, when you get your bell, you know, if you change your speed. So that leaves you off the hook. So I told him. So he signed the log, and we did. We went dead in the water. We're out, I don't know, Christ, how many miles. It's overnight and there's -- there could be Japanese subs in the area. So then some other, a plane? I don't know. Something spotted us later on and they sent the picket boat off to tow us back in. A picket boat is like a pretty good size boat. They call them picket boats.

BP: [BEEs?] or --

AS: No, it wasn't like -- yeah, it was something about the size of a PT maybe, something like that. So they towed us back in, but I never saw that officer aboard anymore, either.

BP: He was a doctor, you said?

AS: Uh-huh.

BP: OK. And then did you pick up any survivors while you were doing that?

AS: Not that time, no. Then farther, they picked up some, and one guy on there, he said that it was rough so he threw out a grappling hook for somebody and he said he hooked -- just so happened to hook him under the chin and he said the guy -- the doctor was chewing him out. He said, "You throw a grappling hook, you don't know where that --" You know? And but I --

BP: He was dead though.

AS: Oh, yeah. He was dead, sure. Us guys, we'd be in our ready house when we -- we'd be there and we'd be in there maybe playing poker. We could hear a plane come over and we'd know if the plane was in trouble or not just by the sound of it. It was to the point that I identified every plane just by the sounds of the engine, not even looking up to see what they were. I could tell you what kind of a plane it was, just by its --

BP: And did you finish the war there doing that?

AS: No. After I got out of there, I was -- I went to staff headquarters at Pearl.

BP: Staff.

AS: Yeah.

BP: Staff of who?

AS: Of the flag for Admiral Robert L. Ghormley.

BP: Ghormley, OK.

AS: Ghormley. And Ghormley was in charge of the -- our group in the Solomons.

BP: That's right. He was.

AS: Yeah. And --

BP: He was pulled out after that.

AS: I know. But I never did let him know that I was on that because, you know? Robert L. Ghormley, you know, he was looking for a scapegoat like that guy on the sub, now. They'll hang you in. He's not going to get above commander. He'll be on a desk and he'll be like [McVeigh?] and the other guy. They'll commit suicide because they know they're not gonna get anyplace else. They're looking for a scapegoat. Like right now, what Bush did? Bush pulled a Clinton with that bombing, you know --

BP: Iraq?

AS: Iraq? Sure. You know, when Clinton, that Lewinsky and all that stuff was going on? So he, remember he put that raid

over there? Tried to get the pressure off of him. Now that's what I say, and Bush is -- Bush, he's --

BP: Trying to get attention back to him away from Clinton.

AS: Yeah, well no but he -- he's a one-time president, Bush.

So there was something coming up about this bad comp, bad comp you would say. Like you know, and I say, "To hell, he's just in there by name to me," and so to get the pressure off. So he has this raid and they're chewing his butt off now about that raid they did in --

BP: Iraq, yeah.

AS: Yeah, just recently.

BP: So OK, now but we're -- so you worked for Ghormley doing what?

AS: Ghormley. I was with the flag. I was in charge of his boathouse, the drivers, the cars. I had a gig in the barge. I had his barge and gigs, and I would -- I'd have to assign men to drive this, do this, you know and whenever they needed a car, a certain one. If they didn't ask for a certain driver, some officer, I would send -- send one guy and say, "Now, go over there and be there at this time to pick up this officer. Do what he asks."

BP: So what was his -- what was Ghormley's responsibility? Now, was he --

AS: Ghormley, he was Head of the 14th Naval District.

BP: So he's in charge of everything --

AS: Everything in the Pacific. The 14th Naval District was from San Francisco -- oh, the San Francisco was the 12th, I think, and the South Pacific, and Hawaii --

BP: I thought there was an Admiral Richardson or somebody there.

AS: Richardson? No but Admiral Ghormley, he had the flag right at Pearl. He was at --

BP: So was he demoted or promoted after the Solomons?

AS: He was a vice admiral, three-star admiral. He was -- when he got there, he might have been a vice admiral, two-star, and they gave him another star.

BP: So he wasn't really held responsible for what happened?

AS: I don't think so. But all he'd answer to was Admiral Nimitz. Then lots of times, I would have to assign a car. I would take some officer, and in the morning, you went off to Makalapa, Nimitz's headquarters. Sometimes I would take Commodore Robertson or somebody else up there, and with some messages or whatever it might be. If I didn't have enough drivers, I'd do that. Then when they'd say, "Well, I want the gig" or the admiral's barge to go pick up this, that, and like that, well I'd have to make sure the barge gets over there. You know, just --

BP: What was your rank by then?

AS: I was first class, first class and getting ready for chief,
(inaudible) chief.

BP: Did you make chief?

AS: No. I could have -- when I got out, I co-- if I'd extended
for another couple of years, I'd have gotten my chief's.
So then when I got recall for Korea --

BP: Well, let's not get to Korea.

AS: No, no. OK.

BP: But so you just --

AS: I just --

BP: You ended the war in Hawaii?

AS: I ended the war in Hawaii. I ended the war. I went from
there then Admiral Ghormley went and took over the Toulon
Naval Base, I think, in France.

BP: Toulon.

AS: Toulon? You might know. So I had a chance. I could have
went with him, but I only had -- well not to -- and I
didn't -- I didn't know whether I wanted to stay. I mean,
I wish I would've stayed in. So I didn't, then they
transferred me over to Iroquois Point and some other crash
boats up by Hickam Field.

BP: Iroquois?

AS: Iroquois Point, it was called.

BP: Iroquois.

AS: Iroquois Point. It was just a name. It was by Hicham Field and we had some crash boats there and I was over there. So then I was there for a while and the war was coming to an end, so they put me in Navy Yard supply at the building at Pearl, and that's where I ended my -- then I took my discharge and I was still making up my mind about three days before my time was up. I said, "I don't know." So I got my discharge at the Navy 128th. Yeah and then I had to --

BP: Where?

AS: In Honolulu. Then I had to wait for transportation and get back by myself. I met this kid, and him and I were going to get a tramp steamer and go to China. And then he'd meet some gal, and that was the end of that. So, yeah but we were going to go to China in the tramp steamer, steamer kind of merchant. Then when I got discharged, they had reps from the Academy for Merchant Marines. Us guys, like first class and stuff like that, we could've went in as, see, like third engineers and go to that school where it was in --

BP: Vallejo?

AS: Alameda someplace.

BP: Vallejo, there's a Marine Academy.

AS: Vallejo, yeah. Well, it was somewhere in there, you know, but I decided well, I didn't go. So anyway, then and this was in -- I got discharged in, oh, November or December '45, something like that. So then I came back to the States and then I was home, then I got married, and I was -- I was home from fin-- and I wasn't in the Reserve but then some kid friend of mine was a first sergeant in the Army but he wanted to get into the Navy and he thought maybe he could get a test rating or a, you know, a [G?] rating or something like that in the deal but then they wa-- the military didn't want him and this officer was there. And he said he had one billet open, and he said, "Well, why don't you join," he says, "to fill up my billet for me?" You know? And I said, "Hey, I don't want none of that." So I -- he talked me into it. This was -- and in June, that's when the Korean crap started. This was a couple of months before that. So then I was over there and I was -- became an instructor at the Naval [Army?] in (inaudible, laughs) and oh, goddamn it, that thing didn't -- didn't come up. So then, and my -- I got two girls at home under three years old, and December 26th, I got my orders.

BP: For another ship?

AS: No, to go -- to return to Korea. To go to Korea.

BP: On a ship?

AS: Yeah. Well, I had -- yeah, I had to go to Treasure Island first. So this was (sighs) I don't even know. Jesus Christ. Within a few -- not too long, I was in Inchon. Put another year over there, then I got out. But anyway, so I -- they put me -- I was on an LSD. I took some training at Coronado, like underwater demolition. Then I was the one on an LSD, a landing ship dry dock. And we would -- you know, battles go down. Our big gate would open up and we'd take on the Army gun boats or whatever it was, and then our ship was -- we went up into the Han River when it was still under enemy territory to pick up a Russian MiG and we went 40 miles up on the Han River under our air color and British or Australian air color and picked up this MiG and they -- they because they thought that there might've been a body in it. There was rumors that there was Russians in it or some-- flying MiGs, you know? But there was no body, and then they covered the plane with canvas and they took it off, and shipped it to Ohio where they have that experimental place for the Army Air Force or something like that. Yeah.

BP: So as a civilian, what kind of work did you do?

AS: Oh, when I'd come out, I was a painter by trade. So I went back into the painting, you know, and then after that, then

I -- we built the [lockkeys?] and the IBMs and stuff like that and then --

BP: So you retired as a painter.

AS: Yeah. Well, I retired from the Cupertino School District as a -- in the painting -- you know, the maintenance.

Yeah. But then I had my own business too for a while. You know, I mean I had a Laundromat and I'd go over -- I've had some copies there and (inaudible) and stuff like that.

BP: OK. So you, but basically you retired from a --

AS: Yeah, the school depa-- the 15th School, Cupertino School District.

BP: OK. OK. I didn't want to get too much so I'll stop.

AS: Yeah. (break in audio) You were ye-- during the time and tired, and hungry, and so they were -- broke into stores. You know?

BP: You broke into stores when you --

AS: Well, the -- stores is what you take your food aboard, you know, in crates, this and that, and they call that a store. You're loading the ship up with your provisions. I'm sitting by the turk --

BP: Now when is this?

AS: That was after, before the ship went down in the Solomons. So I'd seen this case, so I looked in there and it was cans, and it was pineapple. You know, like if you -- a

catastrophe, if you see one -- five people killed, that's a catastrophe. You would bother if you see one person, but if you see a bunch of them, it doesn't bother you as much. I don't know. It's just something. But I was there and there was a piece of the body, and the guy was dead, and I'm sitting on a box! And eating pineapple.

BP: This is after the ship has been hit.

AS: Yeah.

BP: You're still -- you're still on the Astoria.

AS: Oh, we're still on the Astoria. That's before it got that hit at forward that -- the explosion. But I was just thinking that, you know, and there was a -- I could still see our law officer, carpenter laying on that side of the turk with a piece of canvas over him and only one leg showing. The other leg was completely gone. Our guy with the barber, and we were kidding with him. He was from Texas. Blonde guy, you know? And he's just really red, see. And we were just kidding, "Hey, [Bo?] what a tan you got." And you know, about an hour later, he's sitting in this car by the hangar deck and you know, like this, and somebody went over and touched him and -- and the doctor says that he probably inhaled a bunch of flames. It just burned him up inside.

BP: Burned his lung, yeah. So he's looking all red. That must be from the flash burn.

AS: Oh, yeah. From the flash burn, yeah. You know, because a flash would be like that and you're a crisp. Then, I don't know if you've seen the cruisers, but they have that hangar deck and you've got your saddles where your planes are on? And this --

BP: The launchers, you mean?

AS: Yeah. The launchers. Like on this side, and there was a body laying from maybe his hipline on the edge, laying this way on the --

BP: On the launcher?

AS: Yeah. Up on -- not on the --

BP: The (inaudible).

AS: Not on the co-- on the deck where you kept your boats, laying about this much, like you'd think it would fall over.

BP: Oh, on the edge of the --

AS: Edge of that --

BP: -- the gun.

AS: Yeah. He was burnt to a crisp but I could tell he was a colored. Both of his -- his arms are like that and all he had was just little stubs here, and his face and his teeth

were exposed and stuff like that. I could tell he was a colored.

BP: How could you tell?

AS: Just the structure of his face, his bones. Then we had this -- when I was helping the corpsmen, and this one kid on our ship -- I can't even think of his name but he -- oh, Christ -- hit his -- he didn't have hardly any ears left, lips, nose, all burnt off. You know, just -- and this corpsman, I'd help him and he'd have to peel him and he had him --

BP: Now, the corpsman was -- who was the corpsman?

AS: No, no. One of my shipmates. [Cathy?] was his name. He was a deck hand. So and the corpsmen, so I'd help the corpsmen to go out. I'd hold pants for them. You know, I'd --

BP: And this is on the --

AS: On the --

BP: Transport.

AS: That (inaudible).

BP: OK, yeah.

AS: So he couldn't talk, and so one time I had to hold his penis so he could pee. He was just burnt. And like I say, and after we went to Caledonia and the guy got off, another ship. I'd never seen him again. I doubt if he survived.

I doubt it. No, his fingers -- half his fingers were burnt off.

BP: What are some of the other people? You said you were helping the corpsmen. What else do you remember from that?

AS: Oh, well this -- guys were with wounds and stuff like that, and helping the corpsmen, holding the bandages for him. Because a lot of guys would sit around. I walk at least 10, 15 miles everyday here. I'm not a sitter. I try to keep active. Whenever somebody needed some help, I'd go and help them. And helped feed some guys, you know, and go up and help them turn over in the bunk, or everything. Like this one guy, kid, he lost his leg and they had him sitting out on the deck, you know, in like a promenade? He had to sit and somebody said that he was gonna try to commit suicide and I don't know which officer it was, but it was an officer. He told him, he says, "You're just a chicken." He says, "You're lucky you're going home. The rest of us have to keep on with this stuff." You know? Then another -- we had a guy aboard our ship and he was a first class watertender. He was running and he thought he was stepping in holes but he -- his foot was blown off and he was stomping on his ankle. It was gone. We were up at -- you're on a promenade. They take them out when, you know, if they could. Our captain was always around the

ship, you know, looking after the guys and he had -- oh, Jesus Christ -- and he went over the side and he still -- when they picked him up, he still had his hat on. I can still see him. I can see his face.

BP: The guy who lost both feet?

AS: No, our captain, but the guy that lost both of his feet, he's up there and sad and so when -- and the captain would come by and I was standing right there. And the captain would come by and ask them, he says well -- and he says, "You know, captain," he says, "I've always wanted to be a chief in the Navy, sir, but now I -- I'll never become a chief." But then after the war, they took in guys that were handicapped. They could only go to Pearl because it's far. Oh, we had guys with a wooden leg. And I'd seen the captain, this chief was going by calling him, "Chief, come here." And the chief comes over, and the captain reached over and grabbed that chief's hat and put it on this guy's head. He says, "You're a chief petty officer." He just gave him like a field rank. Boy, that guy went to tears.

BP: Now they did keep some of the amputees in after because --

AS: Yeah, after but --

BP: A guy I just interviewed before you in Vallejo, he was a chief petty officer. He was on DMS 22, or destroyer converter too and he was hit by five kamikazes within 40

minutes off Okinawa. He lost one of his legs and he has multiple other wounds. He went to the hospital at Mare Island. He got a prosthetic leg and he requested to stay in the Navy --

AS: Yeah, well see --

BP: -- and he did. He retired in 1958.

AS: There was a lot of them they wouldn't let because we had guys, when I was in the Navy Yard supply, we had guys that were in there and all they could go is as far as Hawaii, like the waves at one time could o-- they could only go there and wax only as far as Hawaii.

BP: Now, this was after the war or during the war?

AS: That was during the war. We had a few. But otherwise, they didn't take them. If you got hurt, you got hurt. And like we had with this one guy in training, you know, when we were going through San Diego. He says, like on a ship or station, or wherever you are, and he says -- and somebody gets hurt, gets shot. He says, "Attend to the ones that you could get them back on the firing line," and he says, "and the ones that are really bad, forget them," and he says, "the dead ones, kick them over the side." I mean, that's what he was telling us. You know, you --

BP: Now, who told you that again?

AS: This was an instructor at the -- at San Diego.

BP: A Marine instructor?

AS: No, a Navy instructor. But you know, hey being real -- being real with risk, come on. Some guy that's got an arm blown off, well he can't man his gun anymore. If a guy's only got a little shrapnel wound, tend to him so you can get him back on the line, which makes a lot of sense.

BP: Anything else you want to add that you --

AS: No because like I say, you know, I've heard guys -- geez, you know, some of the (inaudible) that we're saying, I -- I just think to myself, "Oh, poor guy." One day, one lie you'll have to do another. I worked with the guy at the Cup-- at the (inaudible) unified School District and he had a big scar behind his leg, in his calf of his leg. So somebody asked and he says, "Oh," he said, "I got that in Europe." You know? Found out later, you know what? He was never in the service. He was riding a train --

END OF AUDIO FILE