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Interview with
Donald D. Johnson
December 21, 1974

Place of Interview: Corpus Christi, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Donald Johnson

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Corpus Christi, Texas Date: December 21, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Donald Johnson for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 21, 1974, in Corpus Christi, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Johnson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the old target battleship USS Utah during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Johnson, to begin this interview, would you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself? In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born . . .

Mr. Johnson: I was born in Yoakum, Texas, on the fourteenth day of July, 1920, in Lavaca County.

Dr. Marcello: What sort of education did you have?

Mr. Johnson: I had gone all the way through high school and two years at Texas A & I at the time I left in January of '41 to join the Navy.

Marcello: Had you already completed two years at Texas A & I when you decided to enter the Navy?

Johnson: Right. Well, I had been playing with it in my mind for about six months, and in January when the term ended, I went in the Navy.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service at that particular time?

Johnson: Well, you could see the war clouds building up. I couldn't see getting in a trench in the mud. I wanted to be where there were clean beds and good food.

Marcello: At that particular time, when you thought of the possibility of this country getting into war, were you thinking primarily in terms of Europe rather than the Far East?

Johnson: I was thinking in terms of Europe. I never gave Japan a thought.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Johnson: At San Diego.

Marcello: Is there anything from your experiences in boot camp that you think needs to be a part of the record that we're making here?

Johnson: Not a thing that I can recall. It was just ordinary training--get through with training and go to fleet radio school, drop out of it, go into engine force on the Utah, enjoying myself.

Marcello: When you were going through boot camp did you note any degree of urgency in the training? In other words, was it a hurry-up-type training? Did they try and cut corners to get you out to the fleet?

Johnson: It was a hurry-up thing. We went through in six weeks.

Marcello: And normally how long did boot camp last?

Johnson: Six months, I think. But I was the thirteenth company. That formed in January, 1941. We was already the thirteenth training company, already formed.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Johnson: I went to the Naval destroyer base in San Diego--fleet radio school.

Marcello: And how long did you remain there approximately?

Johnson: Well, on the base I remained up until July. At this time I was transferred to the Utah.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going aboard a battleship? Now, of course, the Utah was not really an active battleship as such.

Johnson: Well, I was dry behind the ears. I never even knew one ship from the other, other than a destroyer and a big ship. I never gave it a thought.

Marcello: Where did you pick up the Utah?

Johnson: At Long Beach.

Marcello: I see. Then from there it proceeded on to Pearl Harbor?

Johnson: It left the next day for Pearl Harbor.

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

Johnson: Oh, well, listen, that was quite a thrill going to sea, being seagoing. For a young buck that was quite a thrill.

Marcello: And I assume that you were looking forward to that tropical paradise that allegedly awaited you over in the Hawaiian Islands.

Johnson: Oh, yes, the swaying skirts and so forth--you know it.

Marcello: Now what were you striking for aboard the Utah?

Johnson: Machinist's mate. I was going to be a machinist.

Marcello: How would you describe the on-the-job training that you received on board the Utah during those pre-Pearl Harbor days?

Johnson: Well, I was able to get into the engineering force, and I learned turbines. I learned how to gauge them, how to check all the bearings on the propeller shafts and the throttles and so forth.

Marcello: Would you describe the training that you received as being thorough and excellent training, or just exactly how would you rate it?

Johnson: Well, really, I think it was very thorough because later when I got on a destroyer I was able to show them things they didn't even know that went on.

Marcello: To what do you attribute this thorough training?

Johnson: I had a first class petty officer on my watch. I can't even remember his name, but he was very, very thorough in training me. He made a point that I learn. He was very, very thorough in his instructions. He was interested in seeing me promoted and become a machinist's mate.

Marcello: I would assume that most of these senior petty officers aboard the Utah had a great many years of experience in the Navy, did they not?

Johnson: They were, yes. They had lots of years. Well, all of the old-timers at that time were . . . well, they were career men. They had been there for years and years. It used to be before World War II that if a man got on a ship that was his home. He would probably stay with that ship for ten or fifteen years, as long as he stayed in their service.

Marcello: How would you describe the morale in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Johnson: Well, what little I saw of it was very good. Everybody was full of vim, vigor, and vitality.

Marcello: How do you account for this high morale?

Johnson: Well, really, I don't . . . right now I couldn't put a finger on what caused it. Patriotism for one thing.

Marcello: Do you think that part of it could also be the fact that you were all volunteers for the most part?

Johnson: Well, that was it. We were all volunteers.

Marcello: In other words, you were in the Navy because you wanted to be there?

Johnson: I was in there because I wanted to be. I was investigated before they would even let me in. They investigated police records and everything around my home town before I was ever accepted into the Navy. There wasn't any drafting.

Marcello: Describe what living conditions were like aboard the Utah. I'm speaking now in terms of the crew's quarters and the food that you received aboard the ship and things of this nature.

Johnson: Well, the food was just as good as I can . . . well, as the ordinary, average, run of the mill, see. We were just coming out of the depression, and it didn't take too much to make a good meal at those times. Now the old Utah didn't have bunks. It had hammocks. Either that or you spread your hammock on the deck and slept on it, which I did. I couldn't see swinging and hanging up there like a monkey by his tail, so I would spread my hammock on the floor and sleep on it on the deck.

Marcello: Now what exactly was the function of the Utah during this period? I know that it was an old, old battleship and that it was a target ship, among other things.

Johnson: It was an aerial bombing target ship. Then it was also an antiaircraft training ship.

Marcello: In other words, they also would mount new guns to test on board that ship.

Johnson: Right, they had all kinds of new guns on that thing. But they were all covered in what we called "doghouses," which were, oh, three-eighths to half-inch iron to protect them from the aerial bombs. We had heavy timbers--three layers. I think it was ten-by-tens, twenty or twenty-four feet long, laying on our decks to absorb these practice bombs.

Marcello: Now how often would the Utah go out of Pearl to participate in these training exercises?

Johnson: Well, she'd go out every Monday morning and come in every Friday evening. She'd spend five days at sea.

Marcello: Now generally speaking, were you working with other ships, or did you usually go out there alone so that the airplanes and so on could perform their practice missions?

Johnson: We were alone. I don't recall ever seeing a ship unless it was something passing on the horizon.

Marcello: Now had the normal main batteries been removed from the Utah?

Johnson: Oh, yes, they had all been removed. The old turrets was welded up. All of the gun ports were welded up. The secondary guns for that type of battleship had been removed. All their ports had been welded up. In their place they had mounted five-inch .25-caliber and five-inch .38-caliber, then what they called the "Chicago Piano" or four-barrel 1.1-inch rapid fire cannon.

Marcello: From the air then, I would presume that perhaps the Utah could have been mistaken for an aircraft carrier if one didn't know any different.

Johnson: Well, that's what they always say. We were in the Enterprise's berth as it was. The timbers on our decks gave it the appearance of an aircraft carrier, so here they come.

Marcello: Now describe what one of these training exercises would be like aboard the Utah when you were out.

Johnson: Well, being in the engineering force, all I can tell you is if I had time off out of the engine rooms at that particular time that the bombing practice came, they'd just say, "Bombing practice! Everybody take cover!" and sound the general alarm, and we went all under decks--under the protection. As far as I know, we'd be down there for two or three hours.

Marcello: What sort of bombs would be used on the Utah?

Johnson: Well, the ones I saw were about eighteen inches in length, made out of pewter. They had a shotgun shell in them to give off a puff of smoke when they hit. They'd penetrate one of those timbers when they hit. I saw one of them after it had penetrated the smoke-stack, and it made a nice hole in it.

Marcello: I'll bet. And this is the sort of exercises the ship engaged in right up until Pearl Harbor itself.

Johnson: Yes. We came in the Friday evening of the fifth.

Marcello: And I would assume that your routine really did not vary any right up until Pearl Harbor itself.

Johnson: No, it didn't vary any at all. We'd go out and have a little bombing practice with the various aircraft units. Wherever they were located, I have no idea. We'd stay out all five days. Then we'd come in late Friday evening.

Marcello: Where was your battle station aboard the Utah?

Johnson: Really, I can't remember other than possibly the engine room. I don't think I was ever assigned one.

Marcello: Chances are it would have been someplace in the engine room.

Johnson: I think it was in the engine room.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that normally you would go out on a Monday and come back on a Friday. Then, of course, liberty would begin. What sort of liberty routine was there aboard the Utah?

Johnson: Well, I think it was the old three and one.

Marcello: Three sections ashore and one aboard?

Johnson: No, one section ashore and two aboard or three aboard. It'd be three aboard--something like that. But there wasn't very much liberty there. At midnight you had to be back aboard ship.

Marcello: Normally speaking, what would a young, unmarried sailor such as yourself do when you had liberty after being out all week at sea?

Johnson: Make a run for the gin mills and the other places if you had any money.

Marcello: I gather from what you're saying that you would usually go to Hotel Street or Canal Street or Beretania Street or one of those.

Johnson: Right, yes.

Marcello: Did you have any particular place that was a favorite of yours there?

Johnson: Listen, boy, I was so broke I didn't go ashore too much. I was only making \$32 a month at that time. By the time I took care of my cigarettes and other needs, it didn't

go very far. So I went ashore, oh, about once a payday.
That was about all.

Marcello: When was payday?

Johnson: On the fifth and twentieth--every fifth and twentieth.

Marcello: Which meant that on the weekend of Pearl Harbor you would have had about as much money as you would ever have to go on liberty.

Johnson: Right. Well, I had the duty that weekend so I didn't go.

Marcello: Now how closely were you keeping abreast with world events after you got into the Navy?

Johnson: I wasn't keeping up with them at all. I'd read the paper, and I'd just go on by. I'd read the funny papers and the front page and on through it. It'd just pass over my head.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Johnson: Really, I never even gave it a thought. But you pictured all of these little short, bucktoothed, slant-eyed individuals.

Marcello: In any of your bull sessions aboard ship, how much discussion was there about the Japanese Navy or the capabilities of the Japanese Navy? In other words, did the old salts ever talk about it?

Johnson: No, there was none that I recall. Our bull sessions usually centered around the engine room and promotions and so forth. More or less, that engine room kind of stayed together. It was the same way with the other engine room. They kind of stayed together. You didn't associate with other sections of the other divisions, no. You kind of stayed to yourself.

Marcello: As relations between the United States and Japan continued to decline, did you feel relatively secure at Pearl Harbor?

Johnson: I can't recall even giving it a thought, so therefore we must have felt safe. All of the history documents say there were alerts, but the old Utah knew of no alerts. We went on with our routine.

Marcello: Okay, so this more or less brings us up, I think, to the days immediately before the attack itself. What I want you to do at this point is to go into as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, . . . well, let's just back up a minute. Why don't you start with your routine on Friday, December 5, 1941, since that's when you actually docked once again. So let's start from the point of your coming in after being on maneuvers.

Johnson: Well, my routine, being in the engineering force, was very simple. I spent time in the engine room. We

cleaned the engines. We cleaned the engine room. While we were at sea we kept everything running, kept everything greased. Then in port it was maintaining it and keeping in condition to go. That was more of the routine than anything else.

Marcello: Where did you dock that particular Friday?

Johnson: My recollection says it was at a berth called Fox Eleven.

Marcello: And this would be over there, like you pointed out earlier, where the Enterprise normally would be docked.

Johnson: It was on the carrier side of the island.

Marcello: You're referring to Ford Island?

Johnson: Right, Ford Island.

Marcello: Where was the Utah in relation to the battleships?

Johnson: The battleships were in what they call Battleship Row on the other side of the island. Now directions-- north, south, east, west--I just can't get it.

Marcello: Did you have a very good view of the battleships from your position on the other side of Ford Island?

Johnson: No, you had that whole island--hangars, houses, officers' quarters--between us and them.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you had the duty on this weekend. What was your routine on Saturday, December 6? Again, give me as much detail as you can remember--anything you can remember about what you did on that day.

Johnson: It was cleaning, preparing . . . I don't recall whether I went ashore or not. That's more of a blank. My memory starts as of about 7:30 Sunday morning. That's where I can remember from. Now before that is just routine stuff that doesn't have any place that I can recall in my memory.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what was the condition of the personnel who came back aboard the Utah on a Saturday night after having been ashore on liberty?

Johnson: Well, being a . . . not dry behind the ears and being aboard ship, I was asleep. I wouldn't even know whether they was drunk or not.

Marcello: Normally speaking, when you went ashore and came back, let's say, on a Saturday night, what was the condition of you and your buddies?

Johnson: Oh, maybe a little feeling a little happy, but not drunk. We didn't have enough money to get drunk on. Twenty-one dollars or thirty-two dollars don't go very far. Not in those gin mills, it didn't.

Marcello: Okay, this more or less brings us into that Sunday morning itself. Once more I want you to go into as much detail as you can as to what your routine was on that Sunday morning, December 7, 1941.

Johnson: Well, that morning, December 7, 1941, I had the four to eight o'clock watch in the starboard engine room.

Marcello: How many decks down would this be?

Johnson: Oh, a good four decks down, underneath the armor plate. Yes, about four decks down under the armor plate. The ship being secured, my job was to maintain that everything was in good order. We had no machinery running, but I had to see that . . . well, we had the feed pumps. My engine maintained the feed pumps that fed the boilers. I had to see that they were on the line and maintaining their proper pressure and that there wasn't any calls for excess water. That's what I did for four hours. I'd watch the whole engine room and go all over it and come back, oh, every fifteen minutes or so and check the gauges on that feed pump and see that it was running alright--that it had steam pressure and water pressure and that the sump was full of water to keep pumping from. That went on till 7:45 when I was relieved. The old boy that relieved me was a Frenchman from Louisiana. I cannot recall his name. To this day I don't know whether he died or not. I think he did, though. I left the engine room and went up to the engineering compartment for breakfast.

Marcello: Now what deck was this on?

Johnson: Now that is up on the . . . oh, you could call it the main deck because above that was the boat deck, and

above that was the bridge and on up. But this was the one that . . . the engineering compartment was in the . . . you've got to understand the old ship. It had a broken deck. It has a high forecastle, and it comes back and drops off and goes on back. Well, now the engineering compartment was in underneath the boat deck, which is on the main deck one deck below the forecastle and the boat deck. It's inside the armor belt.

Marcello: You were still inside the armor belt.

Johnson: Yes. They had big armored doors to the outside that could have been closed, I think. Anyway, they were about eight to ten inches thick. But I sat down there to eat at collapsable tables, collapsable benches.

Marcello: These were the kind that were raised up to the ceiling?

Johnson: Up on the overhead, yes, right. The legs folded down, and then some iron hooks held them in place. You just kicked the hook up, and the whole legs would collapse under it.

I sat down to eat breakfast there. Then there was a loud explosion, so I got up and walked over . . .

Marcello: Did this explosion jolt the ship any?

Johnson: No, it wasn't on the ship.

Marcello: I see.

Johnson: It was a loud explosion on the beach which later I found out was over in the seaplanes which were pretty close to us.

Marcello: Over there at Ford Island.

Johnson: On Ford Island. So I stuck my head out the porthole and saw a Japanese plane climbing. I knew it was a Jap from the minute I saw it because it had the flaming red assholes on it. I had been an aviation fan, oh, back when I was in high school and all. I had read all of these magazines and the markings of the various countries and all. That flaming red asshole stood out like a sore thumb. I saw it going up, and I said, "Oh, God! A Japanese air raid! I'm going to watch this!" So I ran out that door to take a look, and about that time one of them strafed the ship. I said, "This is no place for me!" and back underneath that deck I went. About that time three torpedoes hit it.

Marcello: What did it feel like when those . . .

Johnson: They were just . . . have you ever been in an earthquake?

Marcello: No, I sure haven't.

Johnson: Well, it just shakes everything. It just jarred it. There wasn't much of an explosion, just a big jar. Then it started listing.

Marcello: Did those torpedoes virtually hit simultaneously, or did it feel like the hit at intervals?

Johnson: Well, I think about like that (clicks fingers three times)--one, two, three. I'd say within a period of a minute and a half all three of them hit.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from this point.

Johnson: The ship started listing, and about that . . . well, we had no directions of what to do or anything, so I went back outside on the deck to get away from all of that sliding tables and benches and food. About that time word was passed by the engineering officer. He was the senior officer aboard ship, and he passed the word to abandon ship. So the Utah had what they called blisters on it. You could go down the side, and they stuck out. They were armor belts, actually. But I think these were tanks. I'm not sure. I think they were fuel tanks. But you could slide down to them and hit them. Then you would slide on over them into the water.

Marcello: What did you think about when the word was given to abandon ship?

Johnson: When they said to abandon ship, this old boy was ready to go.

Marcello: Now at this time were the planks beginning to slide off the ship yet?

Johnson: I was on the opposite ship side from that. I was lucky. I was on the port side, which was raising.

Marcello: I see.

Johnson: All of the timbers and all were going to the starboard side, which was the sinking side. So I climbed over the rail and slid down to the blister. From there I slid on into the water, which I would say was roughly twenty feet or something like that. I went in feet first.

Marcello: By this time was the water already covered with oil, and was it burning?

Johnson: No, the oil was on the other side of the ship. Again, I was lucky.

Marcello: Were you fully clothed when you went in?

Johnson: Well, I had on the uniform of the day, which is white shorts, shoes, socks, and a navy skivvy shirt. I think I had my little white hat on, but I'm not sure.

Marcello: Were there a lot of other people in the water with you on that side of the ship?

Johnson: Oh, yes. They'd already beat me there. There was a big fat chief standing up on the rail hollering, "I can't swim!" I looked back at him and said, "Boy, that's your tough luck!" I could and I went. He learned to swim. He beat me to the beach.

Marcello: Okay, so what did you do from this point? You jumped off the Utah, and you were now in the water with a bunch of other men.

Johnson: Well, we were . . . I'd say it was seventy-five yards or thereabouts to the beach.

Marcello: Now did you have to swim around the Utah to get to the beach?

Johnson: No.

Marcello: You were already facing the beach.

Johnson: No, again I was lucky. I was on the side that was facing right to Ford Island. So I started swimming in, and I kicked off my shoes so I could get that extra weight off. I swam on into the beach.

Marcello: In the meantime did you get strafed or anything while you were in the water?

Johnson: I can't recall. There was so much commotion going on in the water that I can't recall whether we was strafed or not. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we weren't.

Marcello: What was your rank at this time?

Johnson: I was a fireman second class, serial number 3603211. The Navy or somebody had been putting in either new water lines or sewer lines along the officers' quarters. Boy, we piled into those! They were some of the nicest trenches you ever saw.

Marcello: Now where were they located in relation to the beach itself, that is, when you got to the island?

Johnson: They were just right after we came off the water and got up on the level ground. That's where they were.

Marcello: Did you go directly into those trenches?

Johnson: We went right into them. Just as we found them there, we went over into them head first.

Marcello: What motivated into going into those ditches? Were you under direct attack, or was it simply a herd instinct?

Johnson: No, we were under attack. There was shrapnel hitting all around us and shells bursting in every direction. No, we hunted a place of safety.

Marcello: About how deep was this trench?

Johnson: Oh, it'd be about chest high. When you sat down you had your head below the ground level. I picked up hot shrapnel in my feet in the ditch.

Marcello: About how long did you remain in this ditch?

Johnson: The final attack was over at ten-something. We stayed in . . . there was two attacks. We went in during the first attack. Then everything just quit. There was no firing. Everything was just as quiet . . . you could hear the little sparrows out in the trees just chirping up a storm. Then the second attack came in. That's when the shit hit the fan again.

Marcello: What happened at that point? In other words, you were still down in the ditch during the lull.

Johnson: We were either in the ditch or standing on the edge of it looking to see what . . . we could see the Arizona burning over there. The position we were in then, we could see between the houses and all. The Arizona was burning over there. All of the battleships were burning over there. It looked like hell.

Marcello: What sort of a feeling did this give you when you saw this occurring?

Johnson: It gives you an eerie feeling. You wonder what in the hell is going on. What if they're attacking the mainland? Are they attacking Panama? Are they doing this? Are they doing that? When are they going to land? I haven't got a damn thing to fight with--not even a pocketknife.

Marcello: Okay, so the second wave is coming in now. These are mainly dive bombers and high level bombers.

Johnson: They're high level bombers more than dive bombers, yes. Well, of course, all we could do was dive back in that trench and get out of the way and keep from being a casualty of somebody else's shrapnel. We had nothing to fight with. Somebody did find a bottle of Vat 69. We each got a swallow of it.

Marcello: When you were down in the ditch?

Johnson: Right. Somebody went in one of those officers' houses and found a whole fifth of Vat 69, so we proceeded to down it.

Marcello: And you remained in the ditch, then, during the second attack?

Johnson: During the second attack, right.

Marcello: How vicious was that second attack? Give your eyewitness account of that.

Johnson: From the sound of it, it was very, very vicious. There was lots and lots of fire. The sky was black with shrapnel.

Marcello: In other words, you weren't lifting up your heads to see what was going on.

Johnson: No. As long as we could look straight, which was clear, there was antiaircraft bursts all over the place. You could see the flames. I remember the planes diving on a seaplane tender out from us. I've been called a liar, but I still say it was the Curtiss out there. I remember the dive bombers going after her. I remember one of them hitting her, but that was while we were looking out of that trench.

Marcello: Incidentally, how long did it take you to swim ashore?

Johnson: Oh, it couldn't have been too long because it was a distance of about seventy-five yards.

Marcello: Okay, so you remained in that ditch along with a great many other people during the first and second waves.

Johnson: Right.

Marcello: What did you do at that point?

Johnson: After the second wave was over?

Marcello: Yes.

Johnson: Well, they started gathering us together and taking the roll call.

Marcello: Was there still a certain amount of confusion at this point?

Johnson: Oh, there was lots of confusion! A small group of men come by and . . . well, we asked them where they was from. They was from the Arizona, what all was left. So there was confusion going every direction.

Finally, somebody said, "Well, they're giving away shoes over here," so . . . no shoes. Then there was supposed to have been food over here . . . no food. There was supposed to have been drinking water over somewhere else . . . no drinking water.

Marcello: In the meantime, however, you were not assigned any specific tasks in the aftermath of the attack.

Johnson: Not immediately, no. We were finally . . . well, finally, I was told to go up to a certain building, which was a hangar up there. It was a little small hangar. I spent half the night there during the kind of a lull. Then they gave me a watch from midnight on. I got hold of a rifle somewhere and a few shells, so I was put on the firing lines.

Marcello: During this attack and in the immediate aftermath, did you have much of an appetite?

Johnson: Really, no. I never really got hungry.

Marcello: I would assume that in the aftermath of the attack that the island was one big rumor mill.

Johnson: Oh, it was.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors that you heard?

Johnson: Oh, that the troop transports were out there fixing to land troops, and they were attacking the mainland and on like that. You could expect any kind of catastrophe to happen. You looked over and saw all of those battle-ships burning and buildings burning. You knew it had to be.

Marcello: When you had a chance to calm down a little bit and you were able to look around and survey the damage, what sort of feelings or emotions did you have?

Johnson: Well, it was very disturbed emotions. You wondered, "Well, how could it happen? What happened? What really happened?"

What made them do it, and why did we get clobbered like this?

Marcello: How did your attitude toward the Japanese change?

Johnson: Well, my attitude . . . well, it's been hatred ever since, from that time on. I still have a hatred until this day, thirty-three years later. I think they're as treacherous a race as you'll ever find.

Marcello: Now that night there were some returning planes coming in from the carrier Enterprise that were fired upon. Do you remember that particular incident?

Johnson: Yes, I fired one shell.

Marcello: Describe what took place.

Johnson: Well, we were on the . . . oh, you might call it the flight line out in front of the hangars. I was told, "Now there are friendly planes coming in. Now do you see that red light over on top of that water tower? When it turns green that's friendly planes. But when it stays red they're enemy planes." Hell, I didn't know the difference. There was red lights that were supposed to stay on there the whole time anyway. Then somebody . . . one of those planes came in, and somebody opened up on it.

Marcello: In other words, this was false. This light didn't change colors.

Johnson: Well, the word I had, the light didn't change any color. It was a red light for a warning light to keep from running into the water tower. But somebody pulled a trigger, and that's all it took.

Marcello: What did the sky look like?

Johnson: I have no idea. It was all over that harbor. All night long somebody would get an itchy finger whether there was a plane around or not, and they'd pull a trigger on a machine gun, and there'd be a stream of tracers go up. By the time that stream of tracers got up to where it was going to make its arc, there was about fifteen more streams up there waiting on it. That went on all night long. There was more ammunition than you can think about expended that night firing into a blank, black sky.

Marcello: What did you do the next day? What was your particular assignment?

Johnson: Well, the next day, we were transferred . . . the Utah . . . the remainder of the Utah crew was gathered together and taken over to a barracks, not on Ford Island but over at the Navy base itself.

Marcello: This would be over at Pearl City?

Johnson: No, on the other side. Well, Pearl City is the old destroyer anchorage. Now the Navy base itself is in

the other direction from Pearl City. That's where it was. It was the base at Pearl--at Pearl Harbor. We were taken over there. I was put on burial detail.

Marcello: I'm sure that was a rather gruesome task.

Johnson: It was. I was on the end at the cemetery, thank God again. They was bringing them out to us on flatbed trucks. I was told that they would drag them out of the water, look at them, identify them, stencil a number on the lid of a wooden box, put them in this box, nail that lid on, and stack them on this truck just as high as they could stack them. Then they'd bring them out to us where they had bulldozers and dynamite digging the graves, you know, in civilian cemeteries. Then that truck would come up, and it'd back up as close to the common . . . well, it was a ditch to be frank . . . as close to that ditch as they could get. We'd take them off the truck and hand them down to the crew in the ditch. They'd just put them right next to each other. We'd come to one with a "J" stamped on it. We'd holler up to our commander up there, "What are we going to do about this one?" He said, "Hell, he's a damn Jap! He's got to be buried, too! Bury him!" Each box had a number and a stake on it. As we put it in the ground, that stake was driven

in the ground right at the head of that box. When we'd get that ditch full, they'd cover it up with a bulldozer. No ceremony, no nothing. We didn't have time--sanitation, see. It had to be.

Marcello: When you were over on Ford Island, did you have a chance to observe some of the casualties that were coming ashore off those ships?

Johnson: Yes.

Marcello: What were the nature of those casualties? Was it usually burns?

Johnson: Burns, oil-soaked, vomiting more so than anything else that I can recall.

Marcello: Did you witness any of the ships blowing up or anything of this nature while you were there? Of course, everything happened so fast to you from the time the Utah was hit until you got ashore.

Johnson: I think I saw the Arizona blow, but I'm not really sure. I think I did. I think I saw that number one turret blow in the air. Again, I've had those thoughts all these years that I saw it.

Marcello: Well, it's certainly possible that you did. Mr. Johnson, I want to thank you for taking time to talk with me. Do you think there's anything else that needs to be part of the record at this point?

Johnson: No, I can't think of anything else right now. Of course, tomorrow I might think of something. But offhand I can't think of anything.

Marcello: You've been most helpful, and you've given us some information that I think is going to be of a great deal of importance to historians.

Johnson: Well, I appreciate the opportunity. I've always thought something should be done as we were the only force that was ever attacked by a foreign nation on our own soil since 1776.