



Ken Potts

United States Navy

Coxswain

Pacific Theater

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Rick Randle

THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Rick: Today we have Ken Potts who was a survivor on the USS Arizona. Ken we would like to ask you to tell us about your early life leading up to when you joined the service and what your thinking was at the time, can you do that for us?

Ken: Probably, but there's not much to say. Back then during the depression and everything and I lived on a farm.

Rick: That was in Illinois?

Ken: In Illinois, on a farm about 50 miles north of St. Louis and my dad worked at the radiator company and was gone most of the time and there was nothing exciting back in them days I'll tell you.

Rick: Well when did you decide, you joined up before Pearl Harbor obviously.

Ken: Yeah. Well things were so rough then and my brother went in the CC camp for 6 months and after he came out, you made \$30 a month 25 was sent home and you got 5 bucks to get by on a month which was a lot of money them days. But then I went in for 6 months and when I got out, there was nothing no jobs or nothing except to work on a farm or something like that; so I seen pictures or something of the Coast Guard and I thought, "*man that looks like an exciting life*" so I went down to sign up and they wasn't taking any but they were taking them for the Navy so I signed up for the Navy and that was in 1939. And I was...I went to the receiving station in Great Lakes training station in October of 1939. And like I say up until then I worked on a farm and things like that, I worked with an old carpenter for a long time which I learned the carpenter work then and later I was in the carpenters union but that was after I come out of the Navy.

Rick: So after you joined up where did you go take your basic training?

Ken: Great Lakes Naval Training Station. And when they shut the gate that night I knew I'd made a mistake. That was the first time I couldn't go anyplace I wanted to go.

Rick: So you had second thoughts after they shut the gate behind you.

Ken: It was too late. But I look back and it's all right.

Rick: Was it 6 weeks of basic training?

Ken: Let see October, December we were sent to California and that was either the last of November...that's what I tell you some of these dates I'm not too sure of. But I went onto Arizona in either the last of November or the first part of December.

Rick: Tell us about your first experience on the Arizona and what it was like.

Ken: Well I don't just remembering settling in and was one of the boys.

Rick: How many men were on the Arizona?

Ken: There at that time there was 1,300 and something at the time that I went onboard there. And then we anchored there in Long Beach harbor and we'd go ashore all the time and once in awhile we'd go out to sea and come back. Then in 19 – I got to look this up. We went into dry dock in Bremerton Washington in 19 the fall of 1940 and we was there clear up until April of 1940 there in dry dock chipped every bit of paint of it and repainted it, that's a big ship when you get to see every bit of it down in that dry dock. But we'd go over to Seattle every night and ride that Kalakala ferry back and forth across there and then when we left there we crossed the equator went down and crossed the equator. And I'm going to get choked up, when I talk too much it shuts me off but we crossed the equator (talking to his wife) we couldn't have crossed the equator in '40.

Rick: It had to be '41?

Ken: Well after we left, we left the dry dock and went and crossed the equator.

Rick: While you were docked there in dry dock you just had daily duties you performed then you'd get off at night and go to Seattle?

Ken: They allowed almost...ordinarily you only get half the people to go out at a time but there were I think they only kept a skeleton of just a few people that wouldn't be going each day. I was a part of the Captain's Gig what they call...that's just fancy boat that we put about 30 coats of varnish on while we was up there and we could go I mean we'd just come in and do a little bit of work in the daytime and go across to Seattle at nighttime.

Rick: So life was pretty good then for a farm boy from Illinois.

Ken: Yeah, that was wonderful.

Rick: Were there any fears or concern about being in a war at that time?

Ken: I don't remember, maybe there was scuttled up about the war over in Europe and afraid that we were going to be dragged into it but I don't ever remember anything about being afraid of being attacked or being at war with Japan. Maybe because I wasn't really interested but then on the other hand I don't know. I think of most of us it was a complete surprise.

Rick: Then left Seattle area and crossed the equator probably early spring of '41?

Ken: No it was, I think if I remember I got a book that shows everything crossing the equator, I think we crossed the equator if I remember right in July of '41 it couldn't have been '40 had to be '41.

Rick: Then what happened after that?

Ken: After that, then there was 2 battle divisions, 7 battle ships, so many cruisers, so many aircraft carriers. One goes out for 2 weeks and while they're out the other one is in for 2 weeks and at Pearl Harbor and the Liberty.

Rick: So when you crossed the equator you went right over into the Pacific fleet and joined that at Pearl Harbor, you were based a Pearl Harbor.

Ken: Oh yeah, that was our main base and like I say one goes out for 2 weeks and the other comes in for 2 weeks and that's the way it went clear up until and we were the unlucky ones that come in.

Rick: Then you would stay on the same routine, you'd be able to during that timework on the boat and then go to shore or go over to Honolulu.

Ken: Yeah but while we...over there then you were back to where they have what they called the starboard and port crew, when starboard goes ashore the port stays aboard and vice versa. And that mess cooks gets to go after they get everything done at night the mess cooks can go every night. In fact, for a while me and my buddy that lived in Colorado...we took that job just so we could go to shore every night instead of every other night. But after both of us him and I both got put on the Captain's Gig all we did was haul him around, him and his lady friends.

Rick: So that was pretty good duty wasn't it?

Ken: Oh yeah because nobody could tell us, the Captain is the only one who told us what to do. That was after I became a coxswain, the 3rd class boats mate is called a coxswain that's the one that runs the ship or boats I guess you'd call it driving it; and that's what I was at that time and they...there was "*R.E. Fowler*" in Colorado and "*Howard Watson*" from Illinois and me and "*W.H. Smith*" from Colorado and that was the crew that was on the... But I'll tell you it was a good duty but you had to keep that thing SHINED inside and out all day long and it had its advantages. When we left Seattle we took...got a bunch of bottles of whiskey and put them up in the place up in the front with the Captain where nobody ever went except us guys who run it

and people kept wondering how come we always had something to drink when nobody else had anything to drink. We kind of stored a little bit on that gig, if we'd gotta got caught we still be in Leavenworth.

Rick: That's interesting. If you can, your experiences and your views being an eye witness to one of the most horrific things that ever happened in the United States is vitally important and so if you wouldn't mind. Take us leading up to what happened on December 7th and what you were doing and give us as much detail as you can.

Ken: If you want to ask me questions about it I can probably answer you but start in and I know I can't do it.

Rick: What did you do on December 6th, Saturday?

Ken: Went ashore.

Rick: So you went ashore and partied without any kind of thought.

Ken: Well I don't think the two guys who took the blame for that came onto shore, I don't think either one of them had any inclement, well you know they didn't or there would've been something done about it.

Rick: Right, was the Captain's Gig parked outside the Arizona or where did it dock? This boat the Captain used that you guys ran?

Ken: At that time I wasn't on that crew, I wasn't part of that crew at that time, I was back...the 5th Division is on the very top deck is where all of the boats are stored in cradles, what they call "cradles", I was a crane operator which we'd have to lift them up and send them down into the cradles. The airplanes was on the after part the fan, what they call the "fantail" and we'd have to pick them up out at sea if they landed out at sea and set them in there and then they'd shoot them off with this what they call, I forgot what they call it. (Catapult?) Yeah. And they...but

that morning some of the people was still eating breakfast that morning when that happened. But the 5th Division is right...the 1st Division below where the boats are on the starboard side is the 5th Division and that's where I was at which is the opposite side of where the torpedoes came in.

Rick: So you were onboard the boat but you were on the opposite side.

Ken: Opposite side of, on the side where the torpedoes come in they were setting up for the church, they held church on the fantail back on the fantail they was setting up for church and an awful lot of those fellows was killed and the ones that was up on the lookout tower I've never known why they was up there cause we don't man that, they was just goofing off I guess and...but those...a lot of those are the ones that they jumped. Some of them tried to jump in the water some of them made it, some of them didn't.

Rick: What were you doing right at the time of the attack?

Ken: I, to the best of my knowledge I was doing nothing. That's one thing that I just remember...that I remember the planes and I remember when they finally decided that they were Japanese planes then everybody was...then they sounded general quarters and everybody went to their gun base which I was on a 5" 51 that shoots that one that I showed you – a 5" 51 and...

Rick: Let me ask you, did you hear any shooting or bombs dropping or anything?

Ken: There was no bombs, the torpedoes only make a noise when they hit and explode, the strafing...you could hear the strafing once they started in. They strafed the ships with airplanes.

Rick: Was the Arizona one of the first ones that were hit?

Ken: I don't know if anybody knows which one. We were...Liberty Dock is over here and its an opened place over here where the ships are tied up and we're right...and the planes come in over here, drop their torpedoes and come in here like that. And the Arizona, well actually it was

all in the open but it was like straight down there, the Nevada which was behind the Arizona...I don't remember whether the Nevada got hit or not.

Rick: And the Utah was right there too?

Ken: No the Utah was way over on the other side of the island. She wasn't a fighting ship; she was used for a training ship.

Rick: But they hit the Utah.

Ken: Did they? Oh yeah, they hit the Utah. But Fort Island and all the battleships tied up here and the Utah was way over here, I have a map in there that shows where every ship was on December the 7th.

Rick: So you were on the other side of the ship, they were setting up for a church service and all of a sudden you heard an explosion I guess from the torpedoes?

Ken: No, well the vibration of them is all you could get on that was the vibration when the torpedoes hit it.

Rick: When did you realize that it was a Japanese attack was it right then?

Ken: The people that was outside wasn't inside spotted the rising sun on them and started hollering that they was "*Jap's*" and they was telling me that they was throwing potatoes at them off of the bank.

Rick: Then did you hear the battle siren go off?

Ken: Well yeah they sounded general quarters.

Rick: General quarters and then you were headed to your battle station. And then what happened right after that?

Ken: Well there's...I remember you have what they call a ready box, there's 5 rounds of ammunition in that ready box after that...by that time they send the crew that does that, they send in ammunition up to you on a conveyor belt and that's the way you get your other ammunition. Well when them torpedoes hit I guess they couldn't send no more ammunition up so after them 5 shots was...rounds was fired that was as far as you could go with those 5" 51. They fired them at low flying airplanes, I know it to be a fact I don't know how far away it was from Pearl Harbor but a 5" 51 caliber went right through a guys house right over his bed where he was in bed and right out the other side and yet nobody we know of was hit and that I know was verified. I don't know whether I shot it or what but it was from one of our ships. They were shooting, they had those 2 man submarines that got in and they were shooting them and sank that one and...but they were shooting at those little airplanes...was almost straight out from that 5" 51 out on the boat deck.

Rick: So you were manning your gun and you had 5 rounds there that you could shoot and so you shot them at the airplanes that were flying over?

Ken: I'll tell you, I don't even know what it was shot at.

Rick: But you were shooting anyway.

Ken: Well the guy that run the thing that aimed it I guess I can't even remember who it was.

Rick: When these torpedoes hit you just felt the vibration; you didn't feel (**Ken:** just the ship shook) shook vibration. Then after those 5 rounds were shot and then what did you do?

Ken: I don't know how soon it was after that that they sounded abandon ship and we got off, there was a motor launch. Before that there was a big heavy set cook and he had both legs blown off I guess from the planes shooting those 50 caliber probably, and they were trying to

get him off of there and over onto Fort Island and then when they sounded General Quarters once it got into that launch and I could show you on that map but all you had to do is go to the stern of the Arizona and you could just go right over to Fort Island. I mean, basically you was tied up...at Fort Island there were just these big things that you tied up to that was cement out there at the edge of it and once it was on...after the torpedoes, after the torpedo run was over with there was a blow I don't know how long it was, a different amount of time but I don't know what it was. But at that time I was on Fort Island, over onto Fort Island.

Rick: So you, when they said abandon ship you were able to get out.

Ken: Get out and get onto Ft. Island.

Rick: And get onto Ft. Island.

Ken: Evidently whether it was the wounded ones, something that I don't know and I don't...because they...once the bombing started or whether some of them didn't get off of there before it started. But when they...when the bomb that went down and blew up all of our ammunition that's the one that done the damage to the Arizona and killed an awful lot of people. They claim it went down the stack but I don't think there's a chance in the world that it went down the stack, that bomb would have to be awful. Anyhow, but its true our ammunition was right up at the flute.

Rick: Neither a torpedo or bomb hit that?

Ken: It wasn't a torpedo cause it didn't happen while...that's this last movie which is funny because they was supposed to have had all this information from people that was on that ship, of course there's things I forgot so I can see other people. But they claim that it showed them, the torpedo planes and the bombers at the same time. Well you know they ain't going to have bombers up there dropping bombs if you've got your own planes down here going across there which didn't happen. I think it was at least 20 minutes from the time the torpedo planes quit dropping torpedoes til the big bombers come over.

Rick: And you had abandoned ship by then and were over on Ft. Island when the big bomb hit?

Ken: But they claim, the thing that like I say it could have been that there was wounded up on the decks because when that bomb...when our ammunition exploded and they were dropping them bigger bombs there over on all over around there there was a...which I wouldn't even tell you now because it...but it finally came out there was body parts flying everywhere so...but it could have been, like I say, it could have been the ones that was already dead on the Arizona which there was a quite a few there. But that, that's something I had never said until it come out here in a paper here awhile back and they never...another thing that I never talked about or said to anybody was that there was a stack of bodies that was there after it was over with and they started picking them up you know, something (sobs)

Rick: The...I want to try to take this, you're over at Fort Island when the bomb that hit the ammunition of the Arizona and then there was a big explosion.

Ken: Yeah. The people on the other ships claim that it blew the Arizona up out of the water and that's something...I think the explosion blew the water away from the Arizona, but I don't think even with all of our ammunition, I don't think you're going to lift that ship up in the air. But the ones that was...I think Sweppie was one of our boats there, he was on the...let's see Darrell was on the West Virginia, Sweppie was on the Tennessee I think which was the 2 that was right in front of us. But then you see the Oklahoma was right in front of the West Virginia and that's the one that rolled over on the side. But they had later on after that was over there were ones trapped down in the hall of the West Virginia which was the one right in front of us, the guys that were trapped in there which I bet was a terrible feeling.

Rick: I imagine. Let me ask you this, when those torpedo's hit and you got the abandon ship signal, how did you get off? Was the ship listing at all or was it still upright?

Ken: Well, it was still...it hadn't listed hardly any at that time.

Rick: And did you get on another boat?

Ken: Yeah they had a motor launch right along...

Rick: So you just climbed over on...

Ken: The ramp that went down had not been damaged, see the hits were above, were forward. The Vestil, which is the repair ship, was along side the Arizona but it was back towards the stern and it wasn't hit. Either it was far enough back or it was shallow enough in the water that the torpedos went under it – that's something I guess nobody knows. Well I'm sure it was back far enough because when we (later on I'll tell you about the salvage crew that go down) because that was ahead of that so I'm sure the Vestile was far enough back; but the torpedo's was all in...

Rick: And was that launch full of men going over to Fort Island?

Ken: Oh yeah, and there was a lot of people that jumped off – jumped overboard, lots of em. In fact some of them jumped overboard and swam out to ships that was leaving and got on to a boat went up and they went on aboard that ship out to sea.

Rick: And so the lucky ones were out on deck like you and were able to hear that ??? and...

Ken: Most of the one's killed was down...most of the ones killed out on deck was by machine gun fire from the airplane and then like I say, some of them jumped from the crows nest into the water and another thing I cannot remember is when the ocean caught on fire, I mean when it actually started burning. I know oil...right away when the torpedo's started hitting, oil started coming up but when it caught fire I don't even remember. I remember seeing it on fire but I couldn't tell you at all when that first started ablaze.

Rick: So I guess with all the oil that was spilling it ignited...I guess after that the guys after that would get burned.

Ken: They jumped...yeah they jumped right into the oil...some of them jumped covered with oil and...it's...a...whether it didn't start burning until after they dropped the big ones or not, after the big explosion I don't know, I really don't know.

Rick: Well when you're on Fort Island were you able to observe quite an area and see how devastating?

Ken: Well Fort Island...they got a big...there was a big what they call...well the building where all everything was transacted. It wasn't the receiving station because it was over on the other main part but a...and then the rest of it was homes for the bigshots and their family. And the beautiful trees...I mean it was a nice...and right over on the far side is a big place where they kept all of those seaplanes. All of our seaplanes was kept there – those PB2Y2 and the PB4Y2's and that's where they'd bring them in when they'd come into...flew in from all over the country and that was on one part but then when you get away from that, like I say it was homes for the fancy and the...

Rick: Did they ever strafe or shoot or bomb anything on Fort Island?

Ken: Oh well it was...when they come across those strafing, yeah they strafe...

Rick: There was bullets going on there?

Ken: They hit all those PBY's. Almost all them PBY's were hit in there, yeah.

Rick: And what...did you have any close calls over there or did everybody just take cover?

Ken: No, as far as I know I never got...I don't know how close I got? No I don't...I wasn't hit or nothing...I and...but that night we, the one's of us that was left on the Arizona we went back aboard the Arizona. In fact I...we sat in the 5th division which was untouched by anything, that's where we spent the night was onboard the Arizona and the...about every five minutes you'd hear a machine gun go off because they passed the word "*nobody move after dark – don't move*" and

every time that machine gun would go off I'd think "*well did somebody get shot, or?*". See we were expecting the Jap's to land...yeah that's one thing – everybody expected that for a long time afterwards.

Tape Interrupt

Rick: Tell us about what happened to the Arizona then after you...

Ken: When it exploded all it done was went down like that. It didn't tip over, it didn't list or...you can tell there was pictures in there. All it done was just go straight down.

Rick: And how many feet of water was it in then?

Ken: I have no idea, I don't know how deep, I don't know how deep that place is. I know it has to be pretty deep or them battleship's don't come in there.

Rick: So everybody was expecting an invasion by the Japanese as far as you knew and so after the bombing raids and torpedo raids you were assigned to go back to the ship?

Ken: That day I wasn't assigned to nothing. People just I think was more in a daze and us people that finally got together there that was off the Arizona, that's where we went that night was back aboard the Arizona and nobody had eaten all day long and I don't remember the first meal I ate after that really. It wasn't December the 7th I know that.

Rick: Right, so you went back onboard and what did you do?

Ken: Just sat there. I tried to sleep and I remember one thing – putting my head on the...there's a place to step up on those five...see there's the division and there's a five inch 51 caliber gun here, big, they're big I mean they swing around along the...and there's a thing you step up on when you're operating the thing and I remember laying my head on that. I can remember...I remember that just as plain as day. I was laying my head on that thing trying to...but nobody

slept. Them machine guns every so often would keep you awake over on the shore and everyplace and boy you'd hear them "ratt-a-tatt-tatt" of a machine gun going off and wonder who in the heck...wonder if they were coming...

Rick: Whether the invasion had started or what? Do you think it was just a jumpy guy???

Ken: Oh yeah some triggers were happy, yeah that's all.

Rick: You know I could go on about Pearl Harbor but I could never imagine that you went back on the ship after that and then what happened during the night and the next day?

Ken: Nothing. I mean it was quiet that night other than those machine guns. That was about the only sounds you ever heard there and the next day we all checked in at the receiving station and that's a big receiving station for...that handles all the incoming and outgoing servicemen – navy men and that's right up by the main gate where you go out to go to Honolulu or any place like that.

Rick: So you checked in there and registered and...

Ken: Checked in, they put you on the list and gave you a bed – a bunk. They had bunks set up in everyplace that you could imagine because there was a lot of people that didn't have anyplace to go.

Rick: Set up bunks on land you mean?

Ken: No up in the receiving...that receiving station's a big building, I mean it was...I mean that's where...there may be 150 men come in to be put on different ships. In fact that's where I first went when they shipped us out there and then was sent from there out on to the Arizona.

Rick: Alright, now how many men?

Ken: I'm wrong there. I mean "a" receiving station at Long Beach – I mean the same thing, but that's what they are. That's where they send men to be sent and distributed. You take like our bunch from Great Lakes, the whole bunch was sent out to the west coast and then they would put some many on this ship, so many on that ship and that...but that's the receiving station is where they go to be put on...assigned to ships.

Rick: Right, and that's where they were using that as temporary lodging and so forth.

Ken: Oh yeah.

Rick: How many men were on the Arizona at the time of that Pearl Harbor attack?

Ken: Fifteen Hundred and ummmm 30 something I believe it was – 1530 something.

Rick: And how many survived?

Ken: Well they claim there was 1177 killed; I always thought there was more but they should know I mean they'd have to go through all that.

Rick: So two or three hundred survived which you were one?

Ken: Yeah. Some of them got on...would swim out to ships that picked him up and took him out you know that never did come back to the Arizona or never back... So what happened to em...well they just got on other ships. I've read where one or two people get on another ship and it was sunk and said they had three or four ships shot out from under em – well they're pretty lucky.

Rick: So what happened the few days after Pearl Harbor?

Ken: I was immediately assigned to a salvage crew. Three guys off of the Arizona were qualified divers (you could qualify as a diver and you got extra pay), there was them three and

me (I wasn't a qualified diver) and...I don't know how many there was. Anyhow they gave us a big motor launch and all the diving equipment – both kinds, the kind that just come over your head and the air kept the water out and the big one's with the big heavy lid on the bottoms that you've seen them in diving and that's what I done then for and I can't remember how long. And that was the first job I had after December the 7th. The...was on that taking bodies and bodies...we could never get ahead of where the ammunition exploded and broke the ship – basically broke it in two almost – we could never get ahead of that. All we could do was get what bodies we could off from there aft...get the bodies off and then they'd...which is a nightmare the way they done it, but I guess it's the only thing you could do. They'd bring them over to where the hatch was and they'd load it up real quick underneath that water and bring them over there and let go of them and they'd just pop right up through that hatch and come clear out of the water and then these crews they had that would take em and get a rope on em and tow em through that oil...well over to where they'd try to identify em and take care of em which is something that...

Rick: So that salvage operation was kind of a tough duty wasn't it?

Ken: Yeah it was. I got better after we found that safe. Now here's something that you can believe or not, I don't even know whether I want to believe it or not – they had a big safe that they kept little bottles of 180 proof alcohol in and it blew the door off of that safe and never broke a bottle inside of it.

Rick: And that safe was down underneath?

Ken: Way down in the lower decks, yeah. But after we found that, life was a little better then. You'd couldn't buy anything to drink and everybody wanted a drink but we found that and we'd bring those little bottles of 180 proof alcohol up and mix it with...what was it...grapefruit juice I believe it was we'd mix that with and kind of took the edge off of everything.

Rick: Yeah, well I can imagine having to be part of the salvage operation of the Arizona when that was you're ship had to be one of the hardest jobs you could...

Ken: Yeah, it wasn't...I've got a fountain pen (I still got it in there) that we took out of the...everybody had a locker...Lieutenant Commander Chung Huen – he's a Hawaiian born and raised and he was one of the one's over the fifth division but I've got that. I've always wanted to go to Hawaii and take that fountain pen...I got a fountain pen back there that belonged to him and I always wanted to take it back to him, I should have sent it to him but I thought "*well someday I'll get to go over there*", but I guess I won't.

Rick: You haven't been back since the war or since the memorial was built?

Ken: I was there until the war was over in Japan and not too long after that...they wouldn't even let me come home when I was eligible to come home on the...for being over there so long you know. Because they...one of the things that happened later is everybody that wrote me from home asked me why the FBI was checking up on me and that kind of scared me and it was to see if I could handle secret material which later on I'll tell you where I went to and you'll know why I had to have that done but the...after we got what we could off of the...one thing we got off that Arizona that I can remember where the...we got into the safe that kept all the money to pay the crew – God we had money laying out on the deck of that motor launch that we had there – I'd have liked to get away with some of it but I didn't dare try. But we had all the money that was in the safe to pay the crew...

Rick: They paid the crew in cash I guess?

Ken: Oh yeah, everything was always in cash. And I can remember seeing all that money laying there on that deck of that boat and...

Rick: Well now what did the divers do? Did they go down and did they cut into the hull of the ship or?

Ken: No, they just went down through...see from about where the boat deck comes out here and then drops down to the lower deck which is what they call a fantail because it's on the stern and

that's where they were setting up the...the hatch is going down there...they wasn't hurt, you could go down it.

Rick: And then they went in basically to rescue the bodies...

Ken: Anything – the money...

Rick: Anything, yeah and bring it up to you guys...

Ken: To the deck to the boat. Um hum.

Rick: Is there anything else you want to tell us about that experience right there while you were salvaging...

Ken: No, that went on...I don't remember how long. I know one thing, all of us, none of us had any money and we went over to the pay master and they go through a big book and the first thing they told me "*well, you were killed*". And I said "*I don't feel that way*", but you know I couldn't get no money and I went to the redcross and they wanted me to sign my life away – that's the reason I wouldn't donate a penny to that redcross that they were all starving to death. And I went to the Salvation Army and just like that they helped me.

Rick: So you were still in active duty but they had you listed as dead and so you couldn't get paid?

Ken: And they ain't gonna pay you if you're listed as dead I'll tell you that.

Rick: And how long before you got that straightened out?

Ken: There again I don't...I mean time is one thing that I don't remember because it just went, but that...one day we were almost through on there and they come over and they call my name, a boat come along side and called my name and saying I was being transferred to an oil tanker.

They wouldn't let ships come in the harbor for a long time, we had to go out to sea to fuel them and that's the last time I seen that Lieutenant Commander Chung Huen, he had been made Captain of a destroyer, we went out and fueled it and he come out on the deck and that's the last time I'd seen him.

Rick: So you worked on a tanker outside of the harbor?

Ken: Go out and fuel them and come back in and I don't remember how long I was on that and one day they says that the port directors office in Fort Harbor – at that time I was *'bosen mate second class'*...needed a bosen mate to...they needed somebody that could run a fancy cabin cruiser with two big Chrysler engines in it, you could control it here or go up on a deck up here and control it – from Honolulu round to Pearl Harbor and so I was transferred and from then on that was a...and that, after that by that time they wasn't very afraid of being...they still thought there might be a...that the Jap's might come ashore but it wasn't like you know right afterwards. And they...so once I was...and our office was on the ninth floor of Aloha Tower – that was were our office was where we'd see all the ships in later when they started letting em come back in. The ships that come back in to the Honolulu Harbor.

Rick: Well now where were you during the battle of midway?

Ken: At Pearl Harbor – at the Port Directors office. Yeah see when I got there my job was to...I had that boat, I had a station wagon and I had a little jeep to do all my running in and I had a...I carried a forty five, I always said 24 hours a day if it wasn't on me it was close by and but they...every merchant ship, some of em couldn't come in. The ones that couldn't come in we'd have to take...now that's where this FBI deal come in, to handle secret papers which is...nobody wanted the Jap's or anybody to get a hold of em and I'd have to take em to ships out at sea. When I say out at sea it's not too far out and the one's that come in port tied up inside then we'd have to...that's what the other vehicles were for to deliver those to the Captains of those ships. Those papers, maps and how to get into all these harbors and everything like Midway.

Rick: And so you were being investigated by the FBI back home and whatever to see if you were worthy?

Ken: Yeah, I still got my papers to show them that I was okayed to handle secret papers.

Rick: Did you have to wear any ID badge or anything?

Ken: All I wanted was a band on here said “*PDO*” – Port Director’s Office and I could...after sundown nobody was allowed out except I could go anyplace, anytime of day, anytime of night and nobody could stop me. They could stop me but that’s as far as they’d get. But because there was a lot of military police on patrol all over the island.

Rick: Well tell us then about during the rest of the war where you served and...you stayed right at the Port Director’s Office?

Ken: The Port Director’s Office until the day it was over with and not long after I was sent home.

Rick: Well when you first heard of VE Day or the Atomic bombs dropping (or not VE Day – VJ Day) where were you and what was your feelings and...

Ken: I was right...somewhere on the island and I was happy as a lark because people was tired of it going on and on and all them islands being...having to be taken and all those boys being killed and people was sick and tired of war I mean it was...I guess it was just as bad here in the United States but...

Rick: Could you follow the war pretty closely from what your duties were there?

Ken: We knew every...yeah. We knew it before the...we knew where it was gonna happen before those papers was taken to the Captains of the ship. And another job I had was a rough job that these Captains would come in that was...I had a Lieutenant Commander, well he made

Commander during the war and he was a Hawaiian, they were what you called “*Naval Reserve*” that was the head guy of the Port Director’s Office in Honolulu but “*Dirks*” was a full Captain out at the main Honolulu what they call the Administration Building and he’d have parties, he lived in a fancy place out at Waikiki Beach and he was a...he lived there too, they wasn’t Hawaiians, they just lived there and I’d have to take these people out to his house and drop them off and usually I’d just fall asleep in the station wagon – that was the main use of the station wagon was for these people like that – got them old one’s with the wooden sides on em you know the old fords...a nice vehicle. But that too, I had to run these people around for that and the...you couldn’t come in to harbor without a civilian pilot and there was a guy named “*Jensen*”, “*Axel William Prestigard Jensen*”, that was his name and he’d become a Lieutenant Commander and he was a part of our thing. He had to...all the ships that come in to sea, in to port – he had to go out and bring em in. He was a pilot and that was his job before the war broke out, all the commercial ships, he was the pilot to bring them into Honolulu, that’s the reason he got to be a Lieutenant Commander right off the bat. But we had about oh...one, two...lets see...”*Gard*”, he was a Hawaiian that lived over there, he was...him and his dad was the head of the “*Stevedores*”, “*White*” was him and his dad owned the Intermountain Airways, he was one of our men. Then there was...I guess there was about seven officers...seven officers and me and a yeoman which done the typing and we had an old chief that was there with me that stayed right in the office, he died while...during the war. But like I say that was good duty except when the elevator wouldn’t work and you had to walk up to the ninth floor and I was in and out maybe ten times a day and that’s where you get your exercise.

Rick: I guess so. Did the elevator not work often?

Ken: No, well in that length of time quite a few times but I mean it wasn’t something that happened all the time.

Elizabeth: After the attack were the soldiers feeling in the mood for revenge or were they shocked?

Ken: I guess it was...the one's that actually went out on ships I don't know what their feeling was. I didn't other than...well yeah...we wanted to see them annihilated if that's what you mean. Because of the...I guess it was because of the sneak. If we'd known they was coming I think it would have made a lot of difference in all of those people that was there and the way we feel – I got no use for...I spent 38 years in the used car business and never bought or sold a Japanese car. They'd cut my own throat because they were good merchandise but it wouldn't...I wouldn't buy or sell a Japanese car. And I think that...I don't think after considering everything I thing what the United States had done I don't go along with it but I don't...that's here nor there because if I get in a fight with somebody I ain't gonna take him to dinner after the fight's over with.

Rick: Well I hear ya, anything else?

Elizabeth: Yeah he was telling about how he came home through San Francisco, can you describe that to Rick?

Ken: Yeah that was a...they sent me home on the Luraleen or the Matsonia I can't remember which...a big you know cruise ship.

Rick: This was right after VJ Day or how long after?

Ken: Let's see when did I get home? When did they...when was the...when did they sign the thing over in Japan?

Rick: It was in August I believe.

Ken: August? I came home in...I think I got home either the last part of September or the first part of October.

Rick: And you'd been in since 1939.

Ken: 39 – just about six years. By the time I got out of the navy I had six years and two months I think it was.

Rick: So you're on a ship heading back to the United States?

Ken: Coming back on...and like I say it was either the Luraleen or the Matsonian...one of the Mason Liners and I told her I got a menu. They had a fancy menu made up for what funny names for everything with a name for it you know? I've got one of them in there on that wall too and...but when they come into San Francisco boy they blew the whistles and...

Rick: So coming back it was like a cruise ship almost, you go order from the restaurant...

Ken: No, no, they set it up, they set up tables and you just ate what...I guess, I don't know how they worked it but anyhow. But I remember one thing when I left over there I had three 1,000 dollar bills and I was scared on ship you know I didn't know...and I'd put em in my pillow at night time, slide em in way in my pillow because I'm a light sleeper, nobody could touch it without me waking up and I remember bringing em home in three 1,000...I ain't had one since then.

Rick: Well tell us about first entering San Francisco Harbor again in detail.

Ken: Like I said they had a lot of whistles blowing, a lot of whoopla you know and they took us right over to a receiving station and...

Rick: Were you all standing out on the decks and?

Ken: There was a lot of people on that ship...

Rick: Yeah it was filled with servicemen coming home I guess.

Ken: Yeah and they says that nobody could go ashore until they had all this information and I lost my dog tag on December the 7th. It had all the information blanked out...I don't even know...I never did get another one and they wasn't gonna let me go ashore that night without a dog tag. So I got a hold of a guy and talked him into whipping me up a...I think he put "*type o*", like I say I don't know what my blood type is but he fixed me a dog tag and do you know what the first thing I wanted when I went ashore? MILK! All we had over there that we could get was that darned old powdered milk. I love milk, I drink milk today but that was the first thing I wanted to do was get someplace and drink milk. But I...because I...you couldn't get no milk.

Elizabeth: What was it like seeing the Golden Gate Bridge?

Ken: Well I had never seen it before so it wasn't probably not as good as the people that lived there but to know that...well by that time we pretty much settled in to, I mean nothing bothered us very much, we knew we was going home and that was the only thing that...I had a...when I went aboard, when I went over on to Fort Island I found a Colt 45, a navy Colt 45 and I hung on to that thing all through the war and I was gonna bring it home, I wanted to bring it home and the last thing they told us when we left – "*if you've got anything in there that belongs to the Navy in your bag, a soon as you hit San Francisco they're gonna go right through that bag*". So I took it out and gave it to somebody else, they never even looked at my bag.

Rick: Well that's a fascinating story Ken thank you for sharing that with us.