

Drew Foss

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Question: We'll start out with just to get it on tape what your name is, if you could spell it out and tell us what it is.

Answer: You on now.

Question: Yeah, we're rolling.

Answer: Well, my name is Drew Foss. You need it spelled? D-R-E-W F-O-S-S.

Question: Well, if you're from Washington, you don't need it spelled, but if someone that's not from Washington sees this, they might want it spelled.

Answer: ok.

Question: I don't think there's anybody in our state that doesn't know how to spell Foss, unless you're from Eastern Washington you might not. Now, you are, of course, the Foss tug family.

Answer: Yes, correct.

Question: And, could you tell us a little bit about how your family got here and involved in tugboats?

Answer: Oh, I thought it was going to be about the war here. Well, I guess, my grandparents, Thea and Andrew Foss, came out from Minnesota, and he built a little float house down there, which I have a picture up here on the wall, and um, they had a couple, three children. My father was born down in that float house, right between 11th and 15th street bridge, and grandma rented out rowboats, and they kept, people kept coming in. There used to be a walkway down from A Street there, came right down underneath the 11th Street bridge, and you could walk right down there to it and she rented rowboats and that led to getting some launches and then they got a contract to haul some brush up the Puyallup River to make dikes, and what have you, and that just kind of grew and grew and grew and that started the tugboat business.

Question: From renting rowboats out.

Answer: Startin' with renting rowboats. Well, there's a picture on the wall there, you can see the rowboats and you can see the projection of the rowboats, and we ended up right there the end of Dock Street, where Thea's Landing Park is now, and then they got some bigger steam tugs and so on, and that, and in 1913 it became Foss Launch and Tug Company.

Question: That was your great-grandfather.

Answer: No, my grandfather.

Question: And where's.. Foss, where in Europe is Foss from, the name?

Answer: From Norway.

Question: Norway? So you were, your grandfather, was he a seaman before he came here?

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Answer: Yes. He was sailing the old square-riggers and was a carpenter on the ships, and he took his name from Shen Fossen, something like that. I have the spelling in some papers in the other room there, but that's where he took his name from, which means um, running or falling water, waterfall type thing. That's where he got his name.

Question: And then in the, then on in years, you were in the '30s, was your father a legislator in the State of Washington?

Answer: hmmmhmmmm. That was back in the early '30s. That was when Martin was Governor.

Question: Was he a legislator for Tacoma?

Answer: The 29th district here in Tacoma. Those districts are all changed now, but he was 29th district.

Question: So what was Washington State, what was Tacoma, Olympia, Seattle like back then.

Answer: Well, that's. I guess the best thing I can say is we had cable cars running 11th street and down 13th street and had streetcars running down Pacific Avenue and so forth, so that'll tell you what the city was like back in those day, why, that's the way it was.

Question: Olympia. What was it like back during legislature?

Answer: I think it was very much the way it is now. It's grown much more, but the Capitol was still there, but, uh, I really wasn't a pageboy, but I wasn't old enough yet. I was only 14, you're supposed to be 15, but I did take tours all through the Capitol Building in those days. Acted like a pageboy.

Question: You said that you actually lived in Olympia during session?

Answer: No no, I didn't.

Question: Oh, I thought, didn't... Your father brought his boat down during...

Answer: Well, he lived on the boat down there, but I didn't, but I was down there on various different occasions and every time I could get away from school I'd go down there and be with him.

Question: He was living inside what is now Capital Lake, isn't that correct?

Answer: No, it was uh, right where the boats are now. Delta Smith's, we tied up and his dock, and it was right there, right outside where the Oyster House area is now, and when you have all those tents down there during the...

Question: Percival Landing.

Answer: Percival...yeah. Whatever that is. It was right there. You could walk up to the Capitol in about 15 minutes.

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Question: Did the..., now you were in junior high school, high school then. You'd been about 14.

Answer: Yes. I didn't quite understand your question.

Question: I said you were in junior high or high school back then, weren't you.

Answer: Right. Junior high.

Question: You went to school here in Tacoma?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And then from there you ended up at the University of Washington finally?

Answer: Well, I went back East to school for, after I graduated from high school. Graduated in '38, and went to Alaska on, well, the tug that I left for Wake Island I was up in Alaska all summer on it up there with, acted as mate on it, and I went back East to school for a year, then came back and went to the University of Washington in '39.

Question: So you were in, how far were you into your college education in '39?

Answer: I was a sophomore. Had two years there.

Question: And then, how was it that you ended up getting on the Justine Foss and ending up in the Pacific?

Answer: Well, I got out of, uh.. summertime and they had a Russian ship was on the beach down on the Columbia River there on Peacock Spit, and we had the old.. the yacht was down there, kind of used it as a office and bunkhouse, what have you, and every morning we'd run out and take a look to see how the weather was over the bar out there 'cause we were right in the mouth of the Columbia River. If the weather was pretty good, we'd call the tugs over and come down and start working on the salvage operation. The name of the ship was the Vaslav Vorovsky I can remember that. There's a lot of pictures of stuff there in the museum there in Astoria, and a big storm came up and we knew we couldn't be working for a couple weeks so I came back to Tacoma, and I relieved one of the skippers on one of the tugs that towed logs from Olympia to Port Townsend, and brought a couple of hog fuel scows back from Port Townsend and Dad met me about midnight down at the office, said they needed a skipper on the Justine over in Wake Island. He said, Would you like to go? I said, well, it sounds kind of interesting. I said, yeah, but I'm in the Naval Reserve and in ROTC and so forth, I said, I gotta get some permission to get over there, so I went to Captain Barr, told him the situation, got a 9-month contract, I'd be back the latter part of April, and um, he said ok, great experience for you. Why don't you do it. He said, don't worry about a thing. I'll take care of all the paperwork and everything here, so, 'cause I knew I was scheduled to either be in the Navy or be someplace and so I said, Well, ok, so I took off and it was a great experience, alright. Four years later, I finally got home.

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Question: Did you know, at that time, did you have any idea of what was going on, what with the Japanese, the troubles that were brewing and...

Answer: Well, we had kind of an inkling, 'cause Dad was in the Naval Reserve and he was in a situation where he had, was kind of like Naval Intelligence operations, and so he told me, he said, Well, things are kind of brewing but nothing definite yet. 'Course the war was going on over in Europe, and so we kind of had our fingers crossed, and I thought, well, it's 9 months and I can get back here, and we'll be alright. But things kind of changed. I left here the latter part of July, and went through San Francisco, and over to Honolulu, and I had about a week, week to 10 days to kill over there before we got on the ship to go out to Wake Island, and one of our ex-skippers was running one of the tugs out of Pearl Harbor, towing dump scows in and out of there, and um, even then we had, well I made a couple of cruises with him out there, couple of trips just to kill time, and at night we had to open the submarine net to get out to dump the dump scow and open to get back in again. And then when we got on the William R. Burrows to go to Wake Island, 3 days out of Pearl Harbor, we sailed in a black out, all the way to Wake Island. So our government knew something was going on. They had inklings that things were brewing.

Question: Now the Justine Foss left from Washington to Pearl Harbor, then Pearl Harbor...

Answer: No, it left long before I...it was chartered to Pacific Naval Airbase Contractors, which consisted of Morrison-Knudsen, Raymond Concrete Pile, (Wann Dredging?) and so forth. I think there were five companies and I don't remember all the rest of them, but, so it was a conglomerate, which was building Wake Island for a submarine base and building an airport out there. So it was chartered to them and it was pretty much towed out there behind a dredge and uh, well, the crew was on it and they stayed on there and they went and husbanded it all the way to Wake Island, so it was towed out there, but. Well, it's only a 58-foot boat, 200 horsepower, be a 5,000-mile trip out there would be a long ways, so...it was escorted and towed to Wake Island, and I met it there on the first of August.

Question: What was Wake Island like when you got there? What was your impression of it?

Answer: It was pretty bleak. It's just nothing but a little atoll, and it's about seven miles in circumference and half of that's lagoon and what have you, so there's not much property and the elevation I think is 16 – 18 feet is the highest point of land there on Wake Island. But, it's nothing but a little atoll way out in the middle of no place.

Question: Is it pretty exciting to be there?

Answer: Oh, I didn't think it was exciting. I knew it was a job to do and we had a lot of work to do and we worked 10 – 12 hours a day. Nothing else to do, you might as well work.

Question: So what was the Justine Foss doing during that time?

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Answer: Well, there's no docks at Wake Island and there's a little channel that comes in there and they built a little, um, kind of a basin, I guess you'd call it more than anything, so the ships had to unload onto barges and we had to tow the barges into Wake Island. That's how they got the supplies in was on barges.

Question: So you were working for Morrison-Knudsen sort of, or...

Answer: No, we were Pacific Naval Airbase contractors.

Question: And then, who was on...how many people were there.

Answer: oh, I don't remember. There were about 1100 contractors and there was. There weren't that many military when I first got there, but there ended up about 300 Marines and about 25 – 30 Navy people. That was it.

Question: Was there an air base there when you got there?

Answer: No, we were still building it, and they were doing dredging. They were dredging another channel to get some...I thought they said they were going to have submarines in there, but I couldn't believe how they could get submarines into that place 'cause it was so doggone shallow, but that's what they claimed they were doing. Digging another channel to bring submarines in there.

Question: The Pan Am Clipper flew through there, didn't it?

Answer: Yes, and they had a base there. That'll come in later in the story.

Question: Did the, um, when you were there did you live on the tug or did you live on...

Answer: Oh, no. We had big barracks and stuff there. It would've been pretty tough living on a tug over there. I'd be...it's pretty warm and muggy. No, we had big barracks over there.

Question: That's sort of like being in the military, then.

Answer: That's right. Had stalls and what have you.

Question: Did you eat well?

Answer: On Wake Island, we did. I mean, before the war we did. Yeah, the had good food over there. The contractor did a good job of doing that to keep the men happy 'cause there wasn't anything else to do.. they did have movies, but it was a great big outdoor screen and the trade winds were blowing and you had to take a blanket or sheet or something or the sand would be blowing at you and hit you in the face and...but, there wasn't much else to do. Had a couple pool tables and...there was no booze, nothing like that on there. Lot of guys did a lot of gambling out there. They had, they'd set up their own operation, cribbage, and what have you. We didn't have any money. I think we kept maybe 25 bucks a month. The rest of it went to the bank, so you could buy some candy bars, some pop and cigarettes and what have you.

Question: Was there communications back home, or just letters or ...?

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Answer: Just mail.

Question: Wasn't a real tropical paradise then?

Answer: Oh, gosh. No. Well, most of those islands out there aren't paradise, anyway. Particularly those little atolls you're on.

Question: Did you know where Wake Island was when you first heard about it?

Answer: Oh, yeah. I knew where it was, 'cause the tug was already headed out that direction, so I knew where Wake Island was.

Question: So your Dad thought it would be a great experience for you, huh?

Answer: Well, he didn't think so. He asked me if I wanted to go, and I said, Sure, I think it would be kind of a good experience. He just asked me. He didn't tell me to go or anything else. I just said, ok, I'd like to do it.

Question: Now, how many crewmembers were with you on that?

Answer: Well, there were 2 during the daytime and 2 during the night. Skipper and deckhand, skipper and deckhand is about all we used.

Question: So, 24 hours a day, were you?

Answer: Yes. If the weather was good, it was, and a ship were in, why, we'd work right around the clock and then, when there wasn't a ship why, we had other...we tended the dredge and tended the drill barge and hauled the dynamite from the beach out to them so they could drill the hole so they could blast the lagoon so the dredge could dig out the coral.

Question: So what did you do in your leisure time off? How did you entertain yourself?

Answer: On Wake Island?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Well, we did...well, I think we had one day off, I think it was during Thanksgiving. We went out and swam all around that coral reef. Other than that you didn't have a day off, you just kept working. There was always maintenance to do on the ship and what have you.

Question: Did you get to know any of the Marines that were on there, or were they sort of separate from you?

Answer: No, they were pretty much separate. They had a separate camp from where we were. The only time we got involved with them is when, and/or the military is when some military ship would go by and they'd have to have some kind of a quorum or get some of the officers to elevate something, and we took a couple of those trips out to sea to take those fellows out to their ship so they could have their meeting or whatever they did.

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Question: So they were busy building up fortifications while you were building an airport?

Answer: Well, it really wasn't building fortifications, it was building a base, is what they were building. Building buildings and extending the airstrip, and it was just an entirely different operation, and uh, they weren't fortifying anything. They had a few gun emplacements out there, but those came very late, too. There was. We had very little armament on the island.

Question: So did things seem to change all of a sudden, as you got closer and closer to the...

Answer: Not really, no. We just did the same day in, day out.

Question: So, you most likely remember the day Pearl Harbor happened.

Answer: Oh, very much so. I'd been working that night on there, and I was in my bunk and a friend of mine came in and said, They bombed Pearl Harbor, and I said, Wait a minute, Herb, slow down, slow down. You're all excited. He said, No, they bombed Pearl Harbor, and so we were sittin' there discussing it a little bit, about noon they hit us. And so we scattered and got out of there and. We could've thrown rocks at those planes that came over. They came from the Marshall Islands, which is about 600 miles south of Wake Island. We could see the guys in the cockpits, they call them bettys I think, four motored bomber planes. We could've thrown rocks at those guys. But they were advised to hold fire, so we didn't do anything.

Question: So no one shot back?

Answer: No. One guy fired his rifle off and I think they were going to try to court martial him for disobeying orders, but that fell by the wayside. That didn't last very long.

Question: So why did they order them not to return fire?

Answer: You ask Uncle Sam that? You ask him why they left the gates open to Pearl Harbor to let the Japanese in. Oh, about almost about a week before Pearl Harbor hit, three PBY's come flying into Wake Island and I helped them anchor out in the lagoon, and took them ashore to the dock, and I asked them. Well, I was wearing a UW buckle and the pilot asked me, you go to the University. Yes, we both did, so we got to chitchatting. I said, where the heck you guy's goin' anyway? 'Cause these were different from the planes that had been going through. They were flying them PBY's over to the Dutch East Indies and they had a big orange triangle on the wings. Well, these had the regular Air Force insignia on these wings. And they said, oh, we're looking for the Japanese fleet. We know they're headed our direction, and we're looking for them. You're looking for the Japanese? He says, Yeah, they're headed our direction. We know that they're coming to hit us, so.. we knew the war was coming, at that point.

Question: That was 3 weeks before Pearl Harbor, huh?

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Answer: No, no, no, no. Just a week. Week, 4, 5, days was all. So they knew they were coming. They'd already left Japan evidently, 'course they didn't know which direction they were coming, I guess, so, but uh, that's what, that's what we know. And well that, December 7.. December 8 where we were because we were across the international dateline.

Question: So did you get, did they get a radio message, or did you not know until the Japanese showed up in bombers that they were coming?

Answer: I'm having a hard time interpreting your question, there?

Question: Did you, you heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Answer: Yeah, they'd been attacked.

Question: So you knew before the Japanese showed up that it had happened.

Answer: Yes, well they bombed them that morning and then they hit us at noon, bombed us at noon and we had all our planes sittin' on the ground and they ruined most of them. Hold your fire. We were pretty disappointed.

Question: So in the few hours that you had after you were told that they were, what had happened, did all of a sudden did everyone scramble to try to get ready for the Japanese.

Answer: We tried to get ready to hide ourselves to save our behinds. 'Cause we weren't organized at all. We weren't organized or anything. And there was no particular announcement. My friend came running in. Evidently he had heard it on the radio or something. They had radios there. And that's the first I heard it. I didn't know anything about it until pretty soon we're talking, all of a sudden here come the airplanes.

Question: So what did you do when the planes came. Were you on the tug or?

Answer: No, no, we were, I was asleep that morning. I'd worked that night and he came over and woke me up just before noon and said, Pearl Harbor's been bombed, so, that's how I knew about it.

Question: So that was early in the day, and what happened as that day progressed?

Answer: Well, we just tried to figure out what the sam hill we're going to do, and we're trying to find little foxholes and things to dig ourselves into and what to do and try to get things planned, but there was no particular plan, and uh, then couple days later we finally got organized and went back to our barracks where we normally stayed and had some dugouts made to stay in and, but we just toughed it out. Four days later the, um, Japanese came in with a whole big flotilla and were going to come ashore and fortunately, um, they said Hold fire, again, Hold fire, and we said, Oh, God, what's going to happen now? Fortunately we did, and they had a troop ship, couple of destroyers, couple of cruisers and what have you and so they. They had a 5-inch gun and they let the ships come right in within, oh, I think it was about less than 4,000 yards, and then finally they said, ok, fire, and they hit the troop ship pretty firmly and then it was damaged badly, and we must have hit some kind of

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magazine or something, 'cause there was quite an explosion on that one. And sunk a submarine and sunk two um, I guess they're kind of cruisers light cruisers, and so they figured that well, we got an article in there. I wish I could read it to you, but I can't read it, about exactly how it happened, and how many we sunk and how many were lost and what have you, and they turned tale and figured out. And this was the first battle of the world war in the Pacific and um, they turned tale and went back and they came back, oh, let's see, that was, 4 days. It was a couple weeks. They came back on the 23rd and finally took over the island. They came back with battleguns and really were organized that time when they came back. They thought they were going to walk right ashore on Wake Island, but they found out differently. So we won the first battle of the war.

Question: So were people, was there a lot of fear when all this was occurring?

Answer: No, I don't think so. I think the fellas just, they knew, we went about our job and did what we had to do.

Question: So did the military sort of help, did they take control, or did, how did you organize, 'cause you by far outnumbered the military didn't you?

Answer: Oh, yeah. There was only about 350 military on the island, but we helped them out. We just went along with them, and so um, some of the fellas were armed, but we didn't have any armament, particularly. A few rifles and what have you, but we were scattered around and helped them with their ammo for the gun emplacements we had. 3-inch anti-aircraft guns and so forth, so we just kind of fell in with the Army and military and helped them out, and I was running the little ferry, little LCVP, one of those little landing barges and we had a little tug there, was about a 40 horse tug and we had to take the ammo and grub trucks across the channel there so they could keep the guys supplied over on a different island. So that was our job. That's what we did.

Question: There's two little, there's a little island by Wake, isn't there? There's Wake and then there's...

Answer: Oh, there's Wake and Peale and Wilkes. You can throw a rock between them practically, but they're all kind of tied together, and when the Japanese were bombing, they bombed the bridge out between the main island and Peale Island, but the channel cut the island off of Wilkes Island, cut that off so you had to ferry across to get to that one, but about all you did was turn around in the channel and you were there.

Question: Did the, what was like with the air attack? For someone who has never been in one, was that, what was that like when the Japanese first showed up and started dropping bombs?

Answer: Now you mean...

Question: Being under aerial attack by the Japanese. What was that like?

Answer: The first day was the main aerial attack, then they came up every day and threw some.. a few bombs around at us. Every day for 16 days, then an invasion happened at night, so there was no aerial attack.

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Question: So after 16 days of that, were you getting jittery, or...

Answer: Oh, gosh, no. We weren't getting jittery.

Question: So you were just pretty confident in your ability to withstand them?

Answer: No, you can't get jittery. You'd drive yourself crazy if you did that. You just had to take what happened and go day by day. There's no way, no other way to do it.

Question: Was there any hope that an American fleet was going to show up or anything?

Answer: Well, there was some scuttlebutt that that the aircraft carrier Lexington was headed out there to pick us up, but we don't know what happened it never showed.

Question: So you knew it was pretty bleak, then.

Answer: Yeah. We knew it was pretty bleak then, particularly after they took over on the 23rd.

Question: But you held them up for quite awhile, 'cause they expected to walk right over the top of Wake Island, didn't they?

Answer: That's what they expected to do, but on that fourth day when we sunk those ships out there, well they thought oh, oh, something else was. We got here, we better go back and regroup, and that's when they regrouped, came back with battleships, and troop ships and what have you, and then they just came ashore.

Question: So when they came ashore, what was that like the day that they finally did capture the island?

Answer: I don't know. I'd taken the ferry with the grub and ammo truck across and we worked 12 hours midday to midnight, and it was after midnight and we didn't have any communications, and the ammo truck and the grub truck were still on the other island, so I was waiting over there for them on a little ferry boat to bring them back, and they came roaring back and were mad at me 'cause I wasn't right there to pick them up, 'cause I laid down there alongside the road there on the sand and took a little nap. It's all white sand, so they could see me. I said, what the sam hill's the matter with you guys. Come on, now, we've been at it for 12 hours here and nobody said anything to us and you guys are all upset. Anyway we got across, so my deckhand and I were sitting there and nobody was around, didn't hear anything. First thing I knew you could hear these shells firing across. You could see the flashes out to sea, and I said, God, Eddie, I think we're getting invaded. And we had a little dugout we had there, it was pretty well camouflaged. We crawled in there and went to sleep because we were bushed. Woke up the next morning and looked out and here was a Japanese flag hanging on the water tower there at Camp One, so we said, oh, oh. They must have come ashore last night, 'cause we were right down on the waterfront, way off into no place, and so we thought, Oh, God, what are we going to do now? So we, uh, just kinda hung on down there and stayed in the, our little dugout for two days, as a matter of fact, 'cause we could hear little pop, pop, pop going from time to time. We thought oh well, as they're finding the guys they are

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shooting them, and that was our assumption of being captured. And we to relieve ourselves so we crawled out of the thing and there was a Japanese guy walking down the beach there and fortunately he didn't have a gun and he went kai-ai-ing' down 'cause he didn't know what we had either. So he went kai-ai-ing' down the road, and so we crawled out sayin' we didn't want to get shot sittin' on our backside, so we got up and started walking down the road, and here comes a pickup truck and they stripped us down and I was talkin' with Eddie and I said, Well, it's been nice knowin' ya Eddie, and I said I guess I heard when you get shot it just kinda stings for half a second and that's about it and so forth, so we kinda shook hands with one another and embraced one another and almost said good-bye. Well, we'd ended up on the airport on the tarmac and, uh, here was all of our other carpenters and Army personnel, Marines and what have you, and they'd taken other people's, as they brought them in, I guess, they'd taken their clothes off and we grabbed a sweatshirt and a couple of things just to put over us, so we sat on the tarmac over on that island Christmas Eve. Then the next day they kind of organized us and got us back up into the barracks and what have you, which was a lot better. We thought we were going to get shot, but no, they kept us. Then right after the first of the year, they took the majority of the personnel on Wake Island off. I think they went to China and they left 350 of us on the island to run and maintain the island for them, which I was one.

Question: So did they continue to, did they continue your work to build the airstrip and...

Answer: No, they didn't continue doing the airstrip. They were putting their gun emplacements together and fortifying themselves on the island, then of course they brought some supply ships in and, of course, we had to go back to work and we were doing the same thing we were doing before the war after the war for the Japanese haulin' supplies in on barges.

Question: So you thought, though, that you were going to be executed.

Answer: Pardon?

Question: You had no doubt that you were going to be executed?

Answer: Well, we thought we were when, you know, until we ended up there at the airport where all the rest of the fellas were tied up.

Question: No way to leave a last letter for your Mom or anything, was there?

Answer: No, no.

Question: Did you think about Mom and Dad and home and...

Answer: Oh, heavens yes. 'Wish you could just tell them what's going on, but...there was no way to do that. Matter of fact it was two years before my parents even heard whether I was alive or had been taken prisoner.

Question: But they knew when Wake Island occurred. They knew it was occurring, didn't they?

Answer: They knew what?

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Question: They knew that Wake Island had been attacked?

Answer: Oh, yes, heavens yes.

Question: 'Cause it was big news in the United States, the defense of Wake Island, wasn't it?

Answer: Well, I guess so. They, um, well, the Arthur Foss had left there two days before Pearl Harbor on the, headed back to Honolulu. Even brought a couple of barges out and he was headed back, and he said, We had pretty good trade winds and he said, I think we can take a little more, so I gave him 2,000 gallons of diesel fuel, and um, they had less than 24 hours of fuel left when they got back to Pearl Harbor and I guess they had to identify themselves so they could get back into Pearl Harbor without getting shot by the Americans.

Question: And they just left Wake Island a couple of days before.

Answer: Two days before. Two days before Pearl Harbor.

Question: Ever wish you'd been on that boat?

Answer: Well, yes and no. They said, why don't you get on here and go back with us for Christmas? I said no, I've got my contract. I'm going to fulfill my contract, so I stayed there and they said, Well, ok. But what I did miss. I had a beautiful shell collection, 'cause it was virgin territory in those days, you know, and I wanted to go up and get that at camp and the skipper said, Oh, gosh, we haven't got time. We gotta get going, here. So anyway, I didn't bring my shell collection home.

Question: So you just woke up and the Japanese were there. That's a completely different story than we've heard before. We've heard people that, we've interviewed Marines before. They were there and saw them coming in, but we never have spoken to anyone that woke up and saw a Japanese flag outside.

Answer: Well, that's what happened to us. We knew we couldn't do anything and we'd already fulfilled our obligation to get the grub truck and the ammo truck on the main island, which we did and we were....we'd been there for, well, we'd been there all day. Twelve noon to twelve midnight and it was long after midnight.

Question: There was quite a bit of the military there. They put up quite a fight didn't they?

Answer: Oh, they put up a hell of a fight. They put up a hell of a fight.

Question: Was that, was that sort of inspiring to be involved in all of that, I mean was it, to be, to know that you were all involved in such a desperate struggle. Was that something you thought about?

Answer: No, we didn't really think about all that. That's just, I mean you were in a situation and you were going the best you could with the situation in which you were.

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Question: Pretty good being in a situation with no weapons and to hold off a Japanese attack like that.

Answer: Well, what can you do, it's like um.. David and Goliath. You got a sling shot and God, that's about it. So you just kind of put your hands up and go along with what's going on.

Question: Did, what was it like when the Japanese came there? What were they like? How did they treat you?

Answer: Well, they didn't, they made us stay on that tarmac there overnight on Christmas Eve and what have you, then finally they took us back up to the...and they were a little touchy. 'Course we really didn't get um, talking with the Japanese per se. They had some interpreter and what have you, but, they just kinda herded us up into the barracks and that was it. We were there for a couple of days and finally we got, they divided who was who and what was who was what, organized the thing. They interviewed us, asked what we did, what was our profession, and so forth, so we told them we were in the tugboat crew and the carpenters did what they did, but they didn't do much with them. They put us to work, but the rest of the gang didn't. And as I said, right after the first of the year, why they took the big group off and left 350 of us on the island.

Question: Did you get treated differently than military was treated?

Answer: I don't think so. I don't know how the military was treated.

Question: You didn't see much of them after the...

Answer: No.

Question: Did they take all the Marines off the island, do you know?

Answer: Oh, yeah, they took them all.

Question: Right away.

Answer: Well, right after the first of the year. They were there about a week. Week, 10 days, I guess, before they could get some ships in to take the crew off, or take our civilian people off and/or the military.

Question: So you were still running the tugboat, then, even with the Japanese there.

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: Did you have a Japanese skipper?

Answer: No, I was the skipper. Tom McGinnis was the other skipper, so we just, we did our same job, and now I get into a story for you that might be interesting.

The, as I said, we were hauling stuff in, the ships would come in, we'd lighter? all their supplies and stuff ashore, including ammo and what have you, and it was kind of interesting. We bunched? The barge on the side, sittin' on a barge with about 500

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tons of different bombs and explosives and shells and what have you on it. So anyway, they would bring the, they call bentous, little boxes about the size of your big lunch pail for, which was our lunch and bring it down to us from camp, and well, that wasn't too good, so I got the idea to...their foreman was a little Japanese guy and he spoke pretty good English. We called him Goldie 'cause he had gold teeth, and I kept telling Goldie, I said, You know, Goldie, you know, we gotta go out and check those buoys out in the lagoon once in awhile. He said, No, the buoys are fine. I said, Goldie, we gotta go check those buoys, and I kept after him for several days, and I knew that the big warehouses over on Peale Island were jammed full. We were just loaded for Christmas out there. All kinds of canned goods, and you name it, it was a grocery store, and so I knew we could get over there 'cause Pan Am had a little spot there. I knew I could get over on the beach over there with our tug, and so I kept after him. Finally he said Ok, so we went out. I looked at a couple of buoys and went on by them and went right over to the Pan Am dock, and he said, Where you going? I said, Come on, I'll show you. So we went up to this warehouse and we got a few cases and God, there was peas, carrots, beans, hash, you name it. Fruit, goodness, and so we just loaded the tug up with what we could. So when they brought the chow down to us, we had a bunch of dynamite caps on board, and so we dumped that over the side. Boy, the fish all came around so we'd bang, bang, stun a few fish, go over the side and bring the fish ashore. Those Japanese I think ate better than they've ever eaten in their life. And he said, Now I know why you have to go check the buoys. I said, That's right! So we ate pretty well, 'cause we were cooking down there on our tug, and the Japanese crew was down, there were 4 or 5 of the guys. That's all we had around, and Goldie didn't even carry a gun with him. So we.. we couldn't go anyplace, I mean, you're 2500 miles from no place out there, so that's how we operated and kept ourselves fed and enjoyed ourselves.

Question: Did...he spoke English fairly well, Goldie?

Answer: Yeah. Goldie Akasawa

Question: Did you get to be buddies sort of?

Answer: I wouldn't say real buddies, but I mean, we understood one another pretty well, and he knew what I was doing. And one night I was coming in there with a barge and it was kinda blowin' pretty good and what have you, and he was out there Kai-ai-ai-ing' and I picked him up and set him on the settee up there in the pilothouse and I says, Now Goldie you sit right there and we'll get the barges and then I'll talk to you. And he took it. He took it. So I mean, that's how we operated, then we'd talk to some of the Japanese aviators that were there. Couple of times in the evening we had time to sit around camp a little bit and we talked to some of the fighter pilots.. educated at UCLA, USC, Washington State, and I said, Gosh, you know. I don't understand this thing at all. He said, Gosh, a couple of days ago we were trying to kill one another and now today we're sitting here talking with one another. And his comment was, and I had the same comment and I had the same question several different times, even after we were in Japan. He said, You're not Oriental, you won't understand. I got that same answer I don't know how many different times about, You're no Oriental, you don't understand. Which was kind of interesting. I think I can lay claim to one Japanese airplane. They had like a PBY, a little different from our PBYs. They were a little bit bigger and they were a flying boat. They came in and landed in the lagoon and struck a coral head out there and tore the bottom out and was sittin' there, and so we made arrangements to go out and pick it up, 'cause we had a derrick barge and so forth, and the other skipper on

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the Justine, there was two of us, he was runnin' the Justine and there was another little tug there and I was running it. And we went in and I had the barge, the crane barge and they were going to pick it up, and they had lift pads on top of the airplane, but every time he tried to pick it up he'd shear the pins off of the shackle, and so finally I said Goldie, why not take these big slings and we'll just go right around the wing and we'll just hook them together and pick it up. He said, Oh, ok. I don't think he understood what was going on either, but I knew what was going to happen. So I told the crane operator, ok, and those things pulled right in within a couple of feet of one another and almost cut the wings right off of that thing. He said, Sabotage!, Sabotage!, and I thought, Oh, God, I'm in real trouble, but fortunately I wasn't and we picked it up and set it on the barge and they took it apart and sent the parts back to Japan, I guess.

Question: Did you ever understand what they meant when they, finally, when they said, You're not Oriental. Did you finally understand?

Answer: No. They never explained it. You won't understand, you're not Oriental.

Question: What did you think about...was this sort of strange, these American educated Japanese? What did you think about that?

Answer: Now say that again?

Question: Having spoken to all the Japanese that had been educated in USC and WSU and, was that sort of strange?

Answer: No, I didn't think it was strange. I didn't think it was strange at all. But I had a bunch of Japanese friends here and we knew the Japanese were going to college over here.

Question: There was a lot of, before the war started, they were buying a lot of was it scrap metal from the United States?

Answer: Oh, gosh, yes. They'd take whole ships over there and take them apart.

Question: And oil also?

Answer: That I don't know about the oil, but, uh...

Question: Did any of these people ever tell you why they did it? Why they felt that needed to attack us, why we were a danger?

Answer: I don't think we were a danger. They just needed expansion.. they were getting'...oh, Japan isn't much bigger than the whole state of California, you know. How many million people they have there. I can go back to 1927 when the Japanese fleet used to come in to Tacoma Harbor here. And my father invited some of the young lieutenants out to his house at Day Island and kind of entertain them, and one which was a young fellow by the name of (Haw-be-no *PhoneticSP*) And anyway, he kept corresponding with him. We knew then that they were planning something, because the ships they bought here they put certain things aboard them. They were working on them way back when 'cause,

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I don't know if they actually planned a war on a certain date, but they were ambitious to expand and get their people in other places, scattered around the world, because they were just jam backed with a place to put their people.

Question: So that's a pretty regular occurrence for the Japanese fleet to visit?

Answer: Pardon.

Question: Was the Japanese fleet...was that a regular occurrence for them to visit every year?

Answer: Not every year, but they, they'd, couple of times I remember them being in here, and, um, I supposed kind of a good will tour, 'course we did that, too. We, back in Admiral Perry's day, when he went over and visited the Japanese, for goodness sake, but nobody thought about that. It was kind of evident that the way they were putting things together that they wanted to expand, and they were going to build a fleet and they were going to do all kinds of things.

Question: After the Japanese took over, did it make it a, did you think of home a lot? Did you know you were going to get home, or were you not sure?

Answer: The only thing you could do was pray and say I'm going to tough it out, and just as sure as I'm sitting here talking to you, the reason I am sitting here talking to you is that I made up my mind I was coming home. You took whatever they dished out and you took it and bit your tongue and grit your teeth and said, I'm going home. And I'm just convinced that's the reason I'm here talking to you.

Question: Did some people not bite their tongues and some people...

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: What would happened?

Answer: Well, several guys just gave up and died. They said, I'm not going to take this anymore, and.. literally.. a couple friends of mine said, hmmm, I kinda said, Well, come on now, we're just getting going. Oh, no, he said, he just gave up, really. And I think that's the reason he died. Two of them did.

Question: So you lost close friends, I mean, real close friends.

Answer: Oh, yeah. We were on the island until um, September 30 of '42. We worked for the Japanese for 9 months, then they took us back over to Japan. I gotta back up a little bit, though. This Goldie guy was, Goldie Akasawa, he said, Well, I've gotta go down to Truk Island, so he got on a ship one day and off he went. We said Good-bye. Well, things didn't change too much, but we still were doin' what we were supposed to be doin', and about a month later, We went out to the ship to pick up the stuff to haul things ashore, and who comes on off the ship but Goldie again. And I said, what are you doing here? He said, well, how are you doing? I said, well, same old thing. He said, Do you need anything? I said, God, if we could get some cigarettes, Goldie. By God, he went back aboard the ship and came down with a carton of cigarettes. They were (Voldie?) Kinshi, but they were smoke-able, and he even brought down some lemon pop soda and gave to us, and then 'course when the ship left again he was on the ship and I guess he went back to Japan. So that's kind

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of an inside story, that, you know, the weren't all bad. There were some good guys in there. We kinda got along together. But then they took us to Japan on a coal-burning oil tanker. Well, I don't think it was burning coal in those days, but it was built in Glasglow in 1800-something, all riveted and all one-inch plate steel and I think we made all of 7 knots and we were a week going from Wake Island to Tokyo. And then they ran around the beach going into Tokyo. They had us down in a little hole. 250 of us, and there wasn't enough room for everybody to lay down. It was just sitting in an oven down there. We just sat there and sweated all the way to Japan. Fortunately, they had a little tank over to one side. I think they had a, it was probably connected with the sanitation thing, but it was a tank about 4 feet wide and about 6 feet long and with sea water running through there and boy that saved our bacon. Otherwise, you'd just expire from the heat down in that thing. And then they ran aground on the beach going over there, and everybody is, Oh, my God, they're going to, we're going to be trapped on here, and put your ear against the skin of the ship and, Well, no I don't hear a lot of water running. And I could hear a bunch of chains being dragged around up on deck and I guess they got their gear out and pulled it off the beach and got in and then they took us off the ship and marched us in through Tokyo and put us on a train and took us down to Sasebo which is on the southern island, and we were taken up into a camp, which was nothing more than an old cement shed is what it was, with a thatched roof and a dirt floor, and they had some kind of benches, what have you, where they had the tatami mats. I don't know if you know what a tatami mat is, but it's a nice mat, and that was our quarters.

Question: What was it like....

Answer: Pardon?

Question: They marched you through the streets in Tokyo?

Answer: Not in Tokyo, but they did in Sasebo when they got off the train, they marched us a long ways through the streets.

Question: Were there people lining the streets watching?

Answer: Oh, yeah. It was scary and all get out because people wore those wooden shoes, you know, they just clatter, clatter, clatter as they were walking along and they were all, you couldn't tell what they were saying, but they were kind of shouting something and so forth. But then they finally got us on a couple of buses and took us up in the mountains where they were building a hydroelectric dam, and that's what we did over there. Had a tram that hauled the cement bags up and we packed those on our back and packed them in, then we used jackhammers and what have you to cut all the stuff out to make a spillway and we were there 18 months working on that place.

Question: Did everybody leave Wake Island?

Answer: Pardon?

Question: Did everybody leave Wake Island then?

Answer: No, we left 98 guys on the island.

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Question: Were any of your friends left behind?

Answer: Yes. Several of my friends and the other skipper, and I'd been hurt 'cause we were fixing a marine railway for them over there which they wanted to do, had some sampans that were damaged and they wanted to get them hauled out to be repaired. Eddie, my deckhand and I were going to put this big beam down at the bottom of it so they could put a sheave on it so we could pull the carriage, and the carriage was nothing more than some "I" beams with some 4-inch pipe underneath them to use for wheels. So anyway, we tucked our feet underneath this thing to let it down and we were going to kind of place it in about 20 feet of water. We were pretty good in those days. I could go down and we were in the ocean every day, hold my breath pretty well. Anyway, so we were going to let this thing down, and the crane operator, rather than let it down slow, he dropped it, and ripped the top of my foot wide open and so I made a beeline for the beach and went back up to camp and got it sewed up. And so they put me on light duty, so I was no longer a member of the tugboat crew. And so when they got ready to take us off in September, end of September, I volunteered to stay on the island 'cause I thought, Well, we got food here, we can...it rains every day, or a little bit of rain anyway, so we got water, and there's fish in the ocean, and I'm pretty sure we're going to have to take Wake Island back before they get back to Japan, but I was so completely wrong. Anyway, I was told to go, said, You're supposed to go, you go, so I had no choice. I had to go to Japan with them. Which turned out to be the best thing, because those 98 fellows, they finally executed them someplace down the line, and they were all in a common grave. We now have them all back in the Punchbowl in Honolulu.

Question: So there were some of your crew. Weren't your crew among those 98 people?

Answer: Yeah, George Van Valkenberg And Tom McGinnis were the crew on the tug and they're there. I volunteered to stay, but they said No, you have to go, so. You don't tell the Japanese what you're going to do and not do.

Question: Do you ever think about those two men? Do they come into mind?

Answer: Now say that again?

Question: Those two people, do they come to mind at different times, or...

Answer: Oh, you bet. You bet. I get to Honolulu, and I go up to Punchbowl and I start reading the names on the big plaque there, they also have the military guys in the same thing. They brought those bones back to Honolulu, and I start reading those names, and I grabbed my wife's hand and I started getting choked up. I get choked up now just thinking about it. I said, Let's get outta here, I'm getting all choked up. Well, I am just talking about it. You bet, it's emotional. You don't, can't understand unless you've been there how it works. So they kept us there on Sasebo up in the mountains building this hydroelectric dam for 18 months, then they took us down to Fukuoka and they kind of split us up. They took us, can't remember exactly how many members, but we were almost split in half of the 250, but we'd lost... that winter, um, lost about 12 guys that passed away up there on, and we had to haul them up the side of the mountain and bury them. And then we were working on building an airport down in Fukuoka, all this small little tracks, little dolly type things, you know, these boxes hold about a yard of material. We'd shovel those full and then push them out across the valley and then dump the box and then go back and

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do the same thing. We were making a fill, and we did that for almost 10 months, and then they took us down to Nagasaki where we worked in the shipyard.

Question: So when you got to Japan what was the conditions like for you?

Answer: Pardon?

Question: Once you got to Japan, what were conditions like for you and your fellow prisoners?

Answer: Before we got to Japan?

Question: No, when you got there, were you being fed, were you...

Answer: Oh, it was tough. I think we got almost, figured out a little less than a pound of food a day. Little bit of rice, little bit of soup, and that was it. And we slept in those doggone, well that first barracks we were in, I remember the thatched roof and then the boards about the size of apple box boards, and they were almost wired together practically, and we finally built our own, a couple of drums we finally scrounged up from someplace. I've forgotten where we got those and made a stove out of it so we could get some heat in the place, get a little warmth, and finally we would kind of steal lumber, so to speak, little boards and things and we finally built a box wherein we could put some water in it so we could heat it so we could. We were almost a year without having a bath. So we finally got that done. Go out a steal wood and bring little pieces of wood back into camp with us 'cause in the camp we were with the Navy and out on the job we were with the Army, and there was a lot of conflict between those two from time to time which we were in the middle of, so it was tough. And the , one day we just decided we were going to take those tatami mats out and burn them, and boy they didn't like that at all, but those darned things were full of fleas and lice and what have you, so there was no sense, we'd rather sleep on the boards, which we finally did. My dear friend, (Norm?) Rogge When we got through at night and time to get to sleep, we'd sleep spoon fashion, so that we could keep warm, and then, ok, you want to turn over on that side, ok then we'd turn over and we'd sleep spoon fashion, and there's certainly nothing about gay in that department, I'll tell you. That was the furthest thing from your mind, and but the doggone rats were all running around up in the thatched room up there and every once in awhile they'd fall out and down, and it was pretty tough living. Pretty tough living. And the outhouse out in back was just a hole cut in the floor, so you'd use that. They were so full of maggots and what have you, it was like walking on peanuts, peanut shells when you're walking in there, but.

Question: Was there smell that you remember from that?

Answer: Oh, that's a silly question. Does is smell. Damn right it smelled!

Question: From just being...

Answer: Pardon?

Question: Is there something a smell that you remember, though, I mean Is it so engrained in you that, being unwashed and the whole camp, is there some smell that brings back memories?

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Answer: Oh, every once in awhile you get a whiff of something, but no, that stuffs kinds of washed that out of your mind. Used to have to dip that stuff out of there and carry it off on your back and take of over and dump it someplace where they could put in on their rice patties.

Question: Did the, now you said the Navy was in charge of the camp.

Answer: Yeah, the Navy was in charge of the camp. Well, I guess we were their prize. 250 of us were their prize, so to speak, I guess, so we kind of leant them to the Army to build this hydroelectric dam that they were building up there.

Question: So you were sort of a commodity, then.

Answer: We were a commodity.

Question: So the Army got their prisoners and the Navy had their prisoners.

Answer: Well, they didn't have there, but then after we left that camp and went down to Fukuoka then we were strictly all under the Army. Strictly under the Army. As far as any facilities, there were little or none.

Question: Did you, all through your travels through Japan, have to change tape here. Do you want to stand up and take a break?