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Interview with  
J. L. ASHMORE  
March 8, 1989

Place of Interview: Sherman, Texas  
Interviewer: Louis Gene Richardson  
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Oral History Collection

J. L. Ashmore

Interviewer: Louis Gene Richardson

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Mr. Richardson: This is Gene Richardson, and we're in the home of Mr. J. L. Ashmore. It's March 8, 1989, and this is my first tape as a part of Dr. Ron Marcello's class. Good morning, Mr. Ashmore.

Mr. Ashmore: Good morning.

Mr. Richardson: To begin the interview, I'd like to know a little bit about you--where you were born and where you went to school and so and so forth.

Mr. Ashmore: Well, I was born in Peoria, Illinois, in October, 1920. I went to school in Newman, Illinois--elementary school--and then I went to high school in Riveton, Illinois, graduating in 1939.

Mr. Richardson: How did you end up in the service?

Mr. Ashmore: Well, anyone that was living through the 1930s knows how hard it was to find employment. Graduating from high school, there was absolutely nothing doing, so I joined the service for work, three meals a day, and a place to stay.

Richardson: Do you remember how much pay they were offering?

Ashmore: In the service?

Richardson: Yes, when they signed you up.

Ashmore: Twenty-one dollars a month.

Richardson: That's what they promised you, huh?

Ashmore: That's what I got.

Richardson: That's what you got.

Ashmore: About \$11 every two weeks.

Richardson: Why did you join the Navy?

Ashmore: Well, I guess at that time I wanted to see the world--  
I guess.

Richardson: Is that what the recruiter told you?

Ashmore: No, no recruiter could. A friend of mine--well, we  
went through high school together--joined the Army a  
short time before. I don't know. I guess maybe it  
appealed to me. That was the saying: "Join the Navy  
and see the world. I guess that's what I figured I'd  
do.

Richardson: Did you have anybody else in your family that was in  
the Navy?

Ashmore: No, no.

Richardson: No family tradition of Navy service.

Ashmore: No, no, no.

Richardson: How'd your family feel about you signing up and  
taking off?

Ashmore: Well, naturally, Mother didn't care too much about it.

I know Dad had to be relieved a little (chuckle).

Richardson: Where did you go to boot camp?

Ashmore: Great Lakes, Chicago.

Richardson: In Chicago. Do you feel like you had good training?  
How long were you in boot camp?

Ashmore: Well, if I remember now, I believe it was eight weeks.  
Well, it was hard--hard for me, I mean. I was going from one environment to another, and it was just like night and day from the way I was. Before I entered boot camp, there was absolutely no system to my life. I got up at irregular times, did not eat three square meals, and did not sleep regular. Naturally, that was all changed.

Richardson: Did you like the change, or was it pretty hard for you to get up early and...

Ashmore: Well, I don't know whether I liked it, but it wasn't nothing I couldn't stand. It was hard, yes.

Richardson: What kind of training did you receive? Did you have any specialized training while in you were in boot camp?

Ashmore: No, I think it was just the regular boot camp.

Richardson: How did you end up on the West Virginia?

Ashmore: Well, I don't know. When we finished training, they posted a list every so often for people that were going to various stations. I forget how many there were that were assigned to the West Virginia. It

seemed to me like there were somewhere like twenty-five or thirty of us.

Richardson: Out of your group?

Ashmore: So we went by train from there at Seattle or Bremerton Navy Yard. I know we was all marched down the dock alongside the West Virginia, and it seemed to me like that crowd had to be twenty-five or thirty people. There we were assigned to different divisions.

Richardson: Which were you assigned to?

Ashmore: Well, the black gang were the firemen, and they received the biggest quota of "boots. I was assigned with two or three others for the Fifth Division, which manned a secondary battery. You know, the main battery was the big guns. Well, they had four guns that were ship-to-ship batteries.

Richardson: Behind the big guns.

Ashmore: Behind the big guns, there were four 5-inch .51's. I was assigned to that division, the Fifth Division.

Richardson: Who was your officer in charge? Do you remember who trained you?

Ashmore: I have no idea.

Richardson: How long were you in Bremerton before you shipped out?

Ashmore: Well, the West Virginia was in for an overhaul, and I got there just in time to go in there and scrape the bottom--scrape and paint. That was an experience, I'll tell you (chuckle). They lined up in waves. I'm

going to tell you, it was something. First come the brushes and the scrapers, and then come the painters. Let me tell you, if you got ahead of them painters, it was something.

Richardson: What did you think when you first saw your ship?

Ashmore: I didn't like it. Well, you can imagine somebody from...

Richardson: Peoria.

Ashmore: Peoria, Illinois. God, I never seen anything that huge in my life. That's what made it so unbelievable later on--anything that huge sinking.

Richardson: You sailed out, then, after you got her all overhauled?

Ashmore: We went right to the island. We had one full year there.

Richardson: You were there at Pearl Harbor for a full year.

Ashmore: Yes. That was wonderful duty, too--two weeks in and two weeks out. Oh, man, that was nice.

Richardson: Describe a typical two-week tour or training schedule.

Ashmore: Two weeks out?

Richardson: Yes.

Ashmore: Well, to me right now it just seems like ship maneuvers that they would conduct, and which we had had nothing to do with. Of course, we had gunnery drills on the guns. Then once, I think, during that year we had firing practice--actual firing practice

with targets that were towed.

Richardson: What was your job in the casemate?

Ashmore: On, on these guns you had a pointer, you had a trainer, you had a plugman, first shellman, second shellman. Then you had two or three powder handlers to get the powder bags. See, that was semi-fixed ammunition, that is, the projectile and the powder was two separate pieces. You had...oh, I don't know. There must have been...well, let's see. There was a pointer, a trainer, sight-setter, a plugman, two shellmen...well, about eight or nine.

Richardson: All crowded in there in pretty tight quarters.

Ashmore: Well, the casemate was about the size of that room in there (gesture).

Richardson: About ten-by-twelve or so?

Ashmore: Yes, something like that.

Richardson: Were y'all pretty good gunners, or did y'all have much luck with shooting at the target?

Ashmore: Well, let me tell you, it was hairy--that first time. While I was aboard that first year, we had two firing runs with live ammunition, and that first one I didn't do nothing but just stand back in the corner and watch and study. I couldn't have done anything if I'd wanted to. I was all right until they lifted the top off that powder can, and that ether or whatever it was in there got out and started circulating. It scared



the hell out of me, I'll tell you.

Richardson: Did the fumes get to you?

Ashmore: It was just so much difference in what...

Richardson: Different from the practice.

Ashmore: Oh, Lord, yes, from what I'd been used to. Hell, you take a man from...if a kid has never seen anything larger than a BB gun, well, when you get out there with guns of that size, it is unbelievable.

Richardson: Pretty loud in the casemate when they fired a round?

Ashmore: Oh, yes.

Richardson: Did y'all cover your ears or...how could you hear anything?

Ashmore: Your hearing is hard. The second time we fired, well, then I was a part of the crew. When we fired one round, I was a pointer, and then we rotated positions in case of casualties. That was a part of the drill, I guess, so then I went to sight-setting--setting the sights, spinning the knob. Now there's where the hearing...of course, all your information on sight-setting was coming from sky control over earphones, and, man, that thing had lots of static, and it was hard to hear.

Richardson: What was life like during these drills when you were at sea? Where were your quarters?

Ashmore: Well, we were in the casemates. That is where this battery was located.

Richardson: Where did you actually get to sleep in the ship?  
Where was your living quarters?

Ashmore: Living quarters and things like that?

Richardson: Yes.

Ashmore: Well, there you might say amidship. On the forecastle just aft of the main battery, on the weather deck, is what they called the casemate. There was five of them. Four of them housed the four guns, and then the central casemate was the big one, and it led to these four, you know. We ate and we slept and worked there. Of course, a few of us would be detailed down on boats maybe or up on the boat deck.

Richardson: Were those considered pretty good quarters..

Ashmore: Well...

Richardson: ...since you were not down in the ship?

Ashmore: Well, I liked it. I never did care much for being down below.

Richardson: How did you like the food?

Ashmore: Man, you're talking about 1939 and 1940, so any kind of food felt good.

Richardson: They fed you right.

Ashmore: I've heard a lot of fellows say they couldn't stand the food, but maybe they weren't as hungry as I was.

Richardson: Maybe it depends a lot on what you are used to, I guess. When you came in after a two-week tour, what kind of liberty did y'all get?

Ashmore: Well, we didn't. We had duty one day on and one day off--every other day.

Richardson: So you'd have one day of liberty, and that was it, and you'd come back to the ship?

Ashmore: Before I got out there, they were getting weekends--overnight passes--but that year I was out there, it was just one day. I think liberty was up...you had to be back on board, I believe...I could be wrong, but it was around 5:00 that you had to be back. That meant we had to leave Honolulu or wherever we were...if we was there in Honolulu, we had to leave about 3:00 to get back in.

Richardson: Five o'clock in the afternoon?

Ashmore: I believe it was 5:00.

Richardson: So you didn't get to spend the night?

Ashmore: No, no overnight.

Richardson: Anywhere in Honolulu?

Ashmore: Not overnight liberty. I guess the officers got some.

Richardson: How was the liberty? What did y'all do when you got time off from the ship?

Ashmore: Well, I don't know (chuckle). I guess you can imagine.

Richardson: Well, I've heard about what sailors did. How about Hotel Street?

Ashmore: Oh, yes. But then there was a whole mess of streets--Canal.

Richardson: Did you have a favorite place that you liked to go?

Ashmore: No, I liked Hotel Street. To me it was different from in Illinois. When I was growing up, you heard of Chinese, you heard of Japanese, you heard of Italians. There on Hotel Street you had them all, you know.

Richardson: Real diversity.

Ashmore: It was just a kick to me just to walk the streets, you know, and hear them jabber like monkeys. You couldn't understand them, but still it was a kick, you know.

Richardson: You still liked it even after a year there? Were you still going down to Hotel Street for fun?

Ashmore: Oh, yes. I'll tell you, if it hadn't been for the war, I would have been a twenty-year man in that Navy. I loved it. I really did. I never could understand fellows that said they couldn't stand the service. To me anybody with an ounce of sense ought to know that with 1,100 or 1,200 men you've got to have discipline. You got to have order, and if you can't follow orders...that didn't seem too hard. It wasn't hard for me. All you had to do was what you were told to do and keep your nose clean. That's not asking too much.

Richardson: Did you ever get in trouble?

Ashmore: Not before the war (chuckle). Well, once we were in a skirmish, but it didn't amount to much--just a little shoving and pushing.

Richardson: Was it with some of the guys from another ship?

Ashmore: Oh, it involved a chief and his girlfriend and--oh, I don't know--there was four or five of us (chuckle). Boy, that was something. I know we finally had to...it boiled down to...it was brought aboard the ship, and we had to go before the captain. When he found out that it came down to four or five sailors and one chief, the captain said, "I just can't understand this. Here's four or five sailors and one chief. That's it?" Well, it came out that what had happened is that this civilian officer, one of the Honolulu police, was right across the street, and I still think he jumped up from the pavement. He was there right on the spot, you know, so it didn't have time to go any farther. That was the only time I got into trouble.

Richardson: Where were you at when this happened?

Ashmore: I don't know. We had been in one tavern there. Somebody got a brainstorm about going someplace else-- I don't know where--so we was on the way, and that's when it happened. Well, that was just a minor thing.

Richardson: But you were called before Captain Bennion, anyway.

Ashmore: No, the Shore Patrol loaded us up and carried us down to the station, but they let me go. I wasn't involved; I didn't swing at the chief. I was happy. I had a bellyful of beer, so I wasn't looking for

trouble.

Richardson: Did y'all drink a lot when you were there?

Ashmore: Well.

Richardson: Or did the sailors in general. .I understand they did consume massive quantities of liquor.

Ashmore: I would say they held their own, yes.

Richardson: Did it make it hard the next morning when you had to get up for duty?

Ashmore: Not really. I didn't drink that much. There's been a few times after the war started that I got a little out of hand, but I could pretty well control it before the war.

Richardson: Did you get involved in any of the sports or any of the athletics that were involved there?

Ashmore: Oh, yes. They had all kinds of sports. The only one that I really went out for was...we had a whaleboat crew in that division of battleships. That was a mistake. Man, I'm going to tell you, them whaleboats may not look it, but those are the most awkward and the heaviest things. And those oars seemed forty or fifty feet long. God almighty, I mean, that was work. I regretted ever putting in for that.

Richardson: Did y'all compete with other ships, then, in whaleboat races?

Ashmore: Oh, yes, we had whaleboat races.

Richardson: How often did you row?

Ashmore: Just once.

Richardson: How many men were in a boat?

Ashmore: I forget now. I think there were ten.

Richardson: Ten men?

Ashmore: I think there were five side-by-side. But that was a mistake. It liked to killed me.

Richardson: Only one time, huh?

Ashmore: One time was enough for that. But they had all kinds of baseball teams, basketball teams, boxing.

Richardson: The West Virginia had quite a boxer on her ship, didn't it? Doris Miller was the heavyweight boxing champ.

Ashmore: I really didn't..

Richardson: Did you ever meet him?

Ashmore: No, no.

Richardson: Did you ever get involved in any of the boxing?

Ashmore: No.

Richardson: How about baseball?

Ashmore: No. I just had that one time in that whaleboat.

Richardson: And that was all for you.

Ashmore: That was it.

Richardson: Leave you pretty sore, did it?

Ashmore: Exhausted!

Richardson: Exhausted (laughter). Did you notice any difference as December 7 approached? When they sent out the orders, did y'all do any extra drills or have more

inspections or anything when the time was approaching?

Ashmore: Not that I can recall. Of course, as a third class seaman, you know, we could have been out on special maneuvers or drills that would involve all the ships. It wouldn't necessarily involve me unless it came to actual combat--general quarters. I knew where my station was, and that's where I'd go. Being just a sailor, you did what you was told. Well, hell, you didn't know what you was doing, and you didn't know the overall cause of what you were doing in your daily routine. So I don't know. They might have been out maneuvering around on special orders, but I wasn't aware of it.

Richardson: Did y'all have any antiaircraft guns on the West Virginia?

Ashmore: Oh, yes. I forget now how many. They had 5-inch .25's on the topside, on the boat deck. I forget how many they did have.

Richardson: What was it like on Saturday, December 6? Do you remember that Saturday? Were you on liberty that day?

Ashmore: No.

Richardson: No.

Ashmore: No, I had liberty on Sunday morning.

Richardson: Sunday morning. What was it like on Saturday on the ship?

Ashmore: Saturday was just another day.



Richardson: Another day of looking forward to your liberty on Sunday.

Ashmore: You bet (chuckle)! You always looked forward to that.

Richardson: Where did you go on Sunday morning on your liberty? Did you get off ship?

Ashmore: I never got off.

Richardson: You never got off.

Ashmore: That's one liberty I'll never make.

Richardson: What was it like? When did you first know that something was amiss?

Ashmore: Well, that's what I say. The thing that baffled me was...you couldn't believe it. It's hard to believe. We finished breakfast, and we swept and clamped down the weather decks, and that's about all there was on a Sunday morning. The rest of the day was yours practically even if you had the duty, you know, unless you had a watch. Time was your own.

Richardson: But you had to stay on board.

Ashmore: But I had just come back from the head--showered and shaved--and was standing in front of my locker, which at that time was in casemate five. Like I said, it was the central casemate. Casemate two was probably twenty-five or thirty feet from my locker. Well, I was standing in front of my locker dressing, and we could hear in the distance a couple of thumps, you know, explosions. Well, we just thought it was the

Army on field maneuvers or firing some. But then "Burrhead" comes in off the forecastle, and he said, "The Japs are attacking!"

Then just shortly after that the torpedoes started to hit, and--I don't know--it was just one after another. I imagine there was three or maybe four. I don't know. It's just hard to say how many hits. But let me tell you, when that first one hit, you can't believe a ship that big...the weight...you've got to remember it was sixteen inches or armor around the waterline. Not all the way around the ship but around the central section of the ship was sixteen inches of armor. Now that's a lot of weight. It was wide enough that you could walk on it. Those explosions picked that ship up and shook it like...and then there was another one hit, and it just kept on.

Now those torpedoes came in two ways. That first one...boy, oh, boy...like I say, then first three or four hit, and then there was a lull. Then is when I mosied outside. Mosied hell! I ran outside on the forecastle, and there wasn't a whole lot to see. You could see up off the bow up there. In the distance, well, about where the dry dock was, you could see smoke up there, and directly forward of us was the Oklahoma completely capsized. All you could see was

the bottom of her.

Richardson: She was already over when you got out on deck?

Ashmore: Just that fast. I mean, it was fast. So then the next wave of planes must have come in, and then torpedoes just started hitting. Then, I'm going to tell you, it just shook that ship. It was hard to stand unless you grabbed something like a locker or a stanchion.

I'll tell you how hard it shook that ship. It knocked paint chips off the bulkhead and the overhead. Some were three-sixteenths to a quarter-of-an-inch thick. It must have come from the corner, you know. Our mess tables, when not in use, were hung on the overhead with a strap on each end, you know, swinging. You put one end of the table in one end and then the other. It shook that big ship so hard that it shook those table out of the overhead.

Richardson: And they came down at you?

Ashmore: They came down. They had two benches on top of the table, and they flew all over. All the hatch covers that were locked up came unlocked and came down, and there was a little weight there. Then is when I wondered, "How? How did this happen? Why?" Hell, I didn't know anything about diplomatic relations and all that. How could this happen, you know, to something that we'd thought was unsinkable? It just

couldn't happen. Well, it did.

Anyway, it was along about then that I decided I better get to my battle station. Like I say, that wasn't far. I went in there, and I realized that I was on a battery that was hopeless. It was useless. I mean, we couldn't possibly fire. But even if we would have had all the ammunition in the world in the casemate, we couldn't have fired. Hell, ours was for ship-to-ship bombardment.

Richardson: You were aimed...

Ashmore: We weren't an antiaircraft station. We thought we'd go up on the 5-inch guns and give them boys a hand, but they didn't have any ammunition either. So there we were. You just stood and took it. You see, all these things...I can't tell you just how each one of these events happened, like, to say this happened and then five minutes later this happened. I can't do it. These were just things that did happen.

Richardson: Yes, that's all I really need. I'd like to know your impressions about what was going on.

Ashmore: So this coxswain was standing there, and I guess we both had the same idea. We ran to casemate two. I guess we both figured--not at the same time--that we had to get to the armory on the third deck because if we were to get anything to fire, it would be there in the armory. So we went down the ladder in casemate

two. We went down to the second deck and forward across the second deck to the ladder of the hatch going down to the third deck.

Well, as we were going across the deck, we could see the sailors that were on the second deck. Whether they were sitting at the tables writing letters or sitting on deck reading a book or whatever they were doing, they were out--they were knocked out.

I guess my interpretation of what happened is that when those first torpedoes hit, that ship was completely open. There was nothing sealed--no watertight doors. It was completely open from stem to stern, and when those first torpedoes hit and exploded, they compressed that air and forced it all the way through that ship.

Richardson: The concussion got them.

Ashmore: With that compressed air, the concussion knocks them out. You can do the same thing with your hands on both sides of your ears. If you hit hard enough, you'll go out. Well, they were out right where they were sitting.

Anyway, I can't remember this coxswain's name. I know I was the first one there at the hatch, and I looked down, and the water was already up in the third deck and rising. Hell, I told him, "There's no use! It's flooded!" So we started back.

Then about that time it dawned on me...oh, boy, I just looked forward and seen the Oklahoma bottom side up. By this time our ship was listing, and it was a pretty good list. But, anyway, I thought, "God almighty, we could do the same thing! There ain't nothing keeping this son-of-a-bitch from flipping!"

Richardson: Were you going uphill or downhill?

Ashmore: All I wanted to do was to get back up on the weather deck. If this son-of-a-bitch turned over, I didn't want it to do so with me down below decks. So by that time, like I say, they must have been...it was enough of a cant to the deck that these sailors that were sitting on deck lost their footing and slid down the deck. Well, there wasn't nothing that we could do with the decks at that angle. If you'd grabbed them, all you would have done was went with them because at that steep an angle you couldn't have possibly stood up yourself, let along hold anyone. But I wasn't concerned with them; I was concerned with me getting up on deck.

So we went back the way we came--across the second deck. And, you know, the angle as steep as the deck was listing, you started up, and then you went down to the next stanchion. That's the way we went back the way I went--back to that same hatch and up into casemate two.

Well, somewhere around in there, it seemed like the ship ceased to settle--you know what I mean, to lean. Well, naturally, we know now that the West Virginia wasn't in deeper water.

Anyway, while me and this ol' boy were running over there, some people there in the casemate had went down, and they were dragging up the people that they could reach on the second deck. I say "drag" because you couldn't take them up and carry them because of the angle of the deck. But they'd drag them to that hatch and pass them up that ladder hand-over-hand and then dragging them out through the forecastle and across the forecastle to the portside.

I'd like to say something here. We had two ol' boys in this division, big boys, and it was their...I don't like to use the word "bully" because they were...they were like a couple of tomcats. They couldn't get around each other but what they weren't poking or punching. These were two ol' boys that if anything came up, a disagreement, the only way to settle it was with their fists. Maybe you've seen those types. But like I say, you couldn't really call them bullies because they never bothered anybody but themselves. Anyway, these two ol' boys were standing at the top of the ladder, and they were trying to knock these boys out to ease their pain. Well, they

were out, anyway, but then this is just one example of the confusion. That didn't last long. They realized that the boys were already out, but the human hand can only take so much.

Well, now I don't have any idea in time how long, but I do know that I went back out the one time. I don't know what for. Well, I do, too. I remember that on watch the officer-of-the-deck wore a gun, and I thought, well, maybe there might be a gun down in one of the wardrooms. So I went aft to the officers' quarters into two or three of the cabins there, but there were no guns. Hell, they were in the armory, too. Everything was locked up. All you could do was stand and take it.

But then is when I went back aft and went out on the quarter-deck. I could see the Arizona. Man, the black smoke was thick. You could see that the Arizona was settling, but she wasn't listing a whole lot. She seemed to be settling. Well, if anything, she was down by the bow, but she wasn't leaning nothing like the West Virginia or the Oklahoma. She just seemed to settle.

I came back forward, and, well, there didn't seem to be any point staying aboard. I couldn't see nobody up on the forecastle with me, so I thought, "Well, I might just dive in and get over to Ford Island. I



don't recall who threw the lifeline. And where he came from, I don't know, but there was this ensign, and that was the first officer I'd seen all morning. He was standing there. To show you how shook up everybody was, he said, "Can you swim, sailor?" Well, now that will give some idea of how shook up everybody was--asking a sailor if he can swim. But I don't know what happened to him.

About that time I hit the water, and I remember while I was in the water and looking aft, I could see the flames on the water between us and the Arizona. I didn't know how fast that was going to move across the water. There was oil all over the water. I remember swimming across the Tennessee's bow.

At that time, along the edge of Ford Island, they had a series of bungalows or houses. They must have been for noncoms or personnel there at the air station. Well, I don't know if it was an air station or not, but I do know there was a bunch of PBY's and seaplanes connected with Ford Island. Anyway, these houses were there, and I remember going in this one. I was looking for a pair of trousers--something to put on. I was in my skivvies.

Richardson: Still in your skivvies (chuckle).

Ashmore: Now here things get hazy. The next thing I knew, I was over on Aiea Landing. You know, to this day I

don't know how I got from Ford Island to Aiea Landing. At that time at Aiea, they had an arena there, and it seemed to me like a tennis court. I thought it was called a stadium. Now maybe it wasn't, but I know it was at Aiea Landing. And there was administration buildings.

Along about this time, some "nut" started the rumor that the Japs had landed on the island on the other side and were coming across. Well, the next thing I knew, I was at this administration building, I guess it was. Anyway, it was the armory because they were passing out rifles and bandoleers to anybody that would take them. You know, it's a good thing it never came to the point where they had to fire them rifles because you can imagine how long they'd been stored, coated with cosmoline. God, there would have been more casualties than the Japs could have inflicted if we had had to fire them.

Richardson: Did you sailors have much practice with rifles, anyway?

Ashmore: Oh, yes, we had rifles in basic training. But I didn't fire that one. I kept it with me, but I don't know why. I guess it felt good.

Richardson: You had found some pants by then, though.

Ashmore: Apparently.

Richardson: Somewhere in between.

Ashmore: Somewhere. Anyway, I stayed around in that area all day, and that night I slept there in the .well, I don't know what you call it. I guess it was the bleachers. Anyway, I met a fellow, a friend of mine, that was attached to the Fifth Division, too, and we heard a rumor that the New Orleans was needing eighteen men. She was due to go back to San Francisco for overhaul. So we decided we'd go aboard and get back to San Francisco. So the next morning there was eighteen of us, and we boarded the New Orleans.

Richardson: So you did get that duty on the New Orleans.

Ashmore: Yes, until 1944.

Richardson: You were on the New Orleans the whole time. Did she sail back to San Francisco with you? When did y'all leave?

Ashmore: Yes, we finally went back there. First, we had to take a convoy to Palmyra, south of Oahu. I don't know, but it was about a thousand miles, I guess, south. Then we came back, and then we went to Frisco.

Richardson: How soon was this after the attack that you got your reassignment?

Ashmore: Well, I went aboard the 8th, the next day.

Richardson: The next day you were on board.

Ashmore: That should tell you something. I think I was still in shock. Anyone who goes through what I did on one ship and then the next day board another one, he had

to be in shock.

Richardson: You didn't have any of the clean-up duty or anything afterwards. Did you see the West Virginia afterwards?

Ashmore: Oh, yes. We came back off our first patrol, and she was still sitting there. As far as ever going back aboard, no. I don't think they would have let you aboard at that time, anyway.

Richardson: You said that you had seen a lot of Japanese and Chinese and everything down in Pearl Harbor or Honolulu. Did you have a different attitude toward the Japanese afterwards? How'd you feel about the native Japanese there?

Ashmore: Before the war, I don't know. To each his own. Nationality didn't mean nothing to me. But then after the war started, I'll tell you, these Jap pilots...that morning when they came in with their bombs or torpedoes, after they made their run...[tape changed]

Richardson: Okay, we were talking about Jap pilots.

Ashmore: Yes. They'd run up and down Battleship Row there strafing everything that moved. They'd strafe anything that moved. It didn't matter what it was-- motor launches, civilians, airplanes. When I got on Ford Island, they were still bombing the barracks and one thing or another. But these pilots...I remember this one son-of-a-bitch even to this day. He couldn't

have been 200 feet off the West Virginia. Man, he was grinning. Man, he was smiling. Even today, when I see slant eyes, I get a queasy feeling in my stomach. I would make a hell of a diplomat.

Richardson: So you took it kind of personally, then (chuckle).

Ashmore: You bet I did! If you stand there and take it like we took it, it don't foster too much love.

Richardson: You say you've never been back. You really have no desire to?

Ashmore: No, not really.

Richardson: Why did you join the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. You're trying to start a new chapter here. Is that right? Could you tell me a little about that?

Ashmore: Yes. Well, we've got it pretty well started. We're just wrapping it up now. Have you ever tried to get nine or ten people together all at once at a future date? Well, you know what I mean. For the last three weeks in a row, I've been trying to meet. Well, we are scheduled this Saturday to meet and get everything ironed out, and then we'll make a date in the future. This gentleman from Thrall, Texas, will come up and swear us in. We've got the necessary members, so we should be wrapped up in a month, anyway.

Richardson: You started up the association. Do you feel that the association will deal with some of the ideas that you

were talking about--what really happened at Pearl Harbor? I know you hinted that you had some disagreement with the historical perspectives.

Ashmore: Well, I don't know. But while talking to these survivors that I've located, I talked to a few of them that were soldiers stationed around the island. They tell me what happened to them. They were talking about a red alert they were issued. Well, now they would know because they had a rifle--they had something in their hands--and they were issued bandoleers for that rifle. So they would remember. I'm going to say that aboard the battleship I was issued nothing. All I did was do what I was told. So I had no way of knowing that an alert had been issued or anything like that. Like I say, these soldier boys had their rifle, and they knew they were issued ammunition, and then that ammunition was withdrawn at a later date. Well, I'm confirming that, and then I'm going to say more. But right now, until I do, I can't say anything. What I think is another thing.

Richardson: The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association...how long have you been a member?

Ashmore: Well, I forget now just when I did join. I joined that Chapter Four in Dallas--North Central Texas Chapter.

Richardson: Have you met any other fellows from the West Virginia?

Ashmore: No. Well, there's one that is a member of our chapter, by the name of Ben Howe. That's the only boy that I've met.

Richardson: Did you know him while you were on the ship?

Ashmore: No. He was in the black gang.

Richardson: Way down there. Well, that about concludes all I wanted to say and find out. Is there anything else you'd like to say to posterity about Pearl Harbor? This is going to be preserved, so this is your big chance.

Ashmore: No. Well, when I get confirmation of what I think I was told then, then I'll write it down.

Richardson: Well, I certainly thank you very much for your help, and you will be receiving your copy of this interview. I do appreciate--and future generations, I'm certain, will appreciate--all that you've told us.

Ashmore: Well, that's one reason that...as long as this is for people...I mean, it seems to me like it's no more than fair that we give them the facts, and that's what I'm concerned with, is to give them facts and not supposition. I believe some people are entitled to know the facts that actually happened and then let them judge.

Richardson: Thank you very much.

Ashmore: All right.