

Interviewer: State for us your full name.

Gentry: Charles K Gentry.

Interviewer: Okay and when were you born?

Gentry: July 4, 1924.

Interviewer: What branch of the service did you serve in?

Gentry: Navy

Interviewer: Navy ok and what primary unit?

Gentry: Aboard ship?

Interviewer: Yes

Gentry: After I was assigned aboard ship I worked with the Captain in the executive office and in the quarters. I was a gun corporal.

Interviewer: Okay what were your parent's names?

Gentry: Their maiden names?

Interviewer: Yeah

Gentry: Well my dad was Ike Gentry and my mother was Mary Gentry.

Interviewer: Do you remember their occupations?

Gentry: My dad was an engineer on the railroad and my mother was a house wife.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Gentry: I've got a brother that joined the Marine Core right before I joined the service and served overseas. He was in Guadalcanal you're probably not familiar with that. He spent twenty six months _____.

Interviewer: Wow just real quick before the war do you have any recollections of the great depression?

Gentry: Not really just maybe what I hear when mother or daddy was telling me.

Interviewer: Okay well were you able to have a job were you old enough to have a job before you joined the service?

Gentry: Yeah I worked at the drug store behind the soda fountain soda jug and also delivered from the drug store prescriptions and things like that.

Interviewer: How much did that job pay?

Gentry: I have no idea because I can remember that I never did get enough ice cream when I was a kid. And I remember the first paycheck I got I bought me a pint of ice cream and sat down on the curb outside and ate every bit of it.

Interviewer: Okay before Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat of the Japanese or a Nazi invasion in America?

Gentry: I wasn't really concerned I mean you know I was still just a kid. I tried to keep up with what was going on.

Interviewer: Did you, you said you tried to keep up with what was going on, did you read newspapers or?

Gentry: Yeah

Interviewer: Or did you have a radio that you were trying kept up with news?

Gentry: Both radio and newspaper.

Interviewer: Do you recall where you were when you heard the news of the invasion of Pearl Harbor?

Gentry: Yeah I was up at a little girl's house on 16th Avenue in Nashville which had become now that Music Row stuff. And when they said the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Did you hear it on the radio?

Gentry: Yeah the radio.

Interviewer: The next day the speech that FDR gave "A day That Shall Live in Infamy." That speech did you listen to that?

Gentry: Yes

Interviewer: Okay how did that affect you?

Gentry: Well I was ready to volunteer then and I was trying to make up my mind you know what branch of service I wanted to be in. So I felt like I wanted to go in the navy.

Interviewer: With your education did you pretty much, did you finish high school?

Gentry: Oh yeah and college too.

Interviewer: Okay with your education did you pretty much have a choice in what you wanted to do in the military then?

Gentry: Well not really because in a time of war they pretty well put you where they need you. And I remember my first assigned aboard ship was down on the third platform that was way down below deck. And I told them no that I had been to gunner school. And at the time we called them suicide missions the komokozzies.

Interviewer: Right

Gentry: And I said I didn't want to be there I wanted to be up where everything was happening. So they reassigned me to a gun crew cabin _____.

Interviewer: Okay so you volunteered then you didn't get drafted?

Gentry: Yeah I was about to get drafted and so that's when I said I was trying to decide which service I wanted to go into so I chose the navy I volunteered for the navy.

Interviewer: Do you remember when that was that you volunteered to go?

Gentry: In 1943 I say I walked right out of the high school door and volunteered.

Interviewer: When you went in were you tested for skill and IQ levels and all of that?

Gentry: Yes

Interviewer: Where did they do your testing?

Gentry: At boot camp San Diego California.

Interviewer: And you said earlier that well you had a job at the soda shop so your job didn't have much to do with what you went into the military for.

Gentry: I was a member of the ROTC in high school.

Interviewer: Okay

Gentry: Now that's one thing that when I went into boot camp I didn't have to march in rank I was platoon leader. So I mean that's one skill I learned before I went in the service I knew the ____ and stuff like that.

Interviewer: How many did you do that in high school?

Gentry: In high school?

Interviewer: Yeah ROTC.

Gentry: Two

Interviewer: Two years in ROTC. What were the things they had you guys doing?

Gentry: In ROTC?

Interviewer: Yeah in ROTC.

Gentry: Primarily drilling things like that we didn't believe we were actually firing a rifle.

Interviewer: Right alright your basic training was in San Diego then?

Gentry: Yeah

Interviewer: Alright when were you selected for well did you do specialized training with the gunnery or whatever?

Gentry: Yeah went to gunnery school.

Interviewer: Was that in San Diego as well?

Gentry: Yeah we fired the they were called sleeves aircraft patrol and we'd fire the sleeve.

Interviewer: Out in the water then out in the ocean?

Gentry: No it wasn't on the water it was at a ranch.

Interviewer: Oh at a ranch okay. When you were doing your training basic training specialized training what were your feelings of the other crew? What was your impression of them?

Gentry: The other members?

Interviewer: The other yeah?

Gentry: Sailors and everything?

Interviewer: Yeah

Gentry: They was good kids I mean most of us were kids I mean literally. I had spent one night away from home before I went in the service. And the guys that was in the company with me I still remember the number 264 were a bunch of kids. I remember some other members of my group that went to East High School had known of them and heard of them. And we got together then I remember we had a basketball team in our boot camp we joined that real good. But the people themselves were a great bunch of guys none of them were crying and carrying on you know wanting to go home. Ready to go to war yeah.

Interviewer: Did you participate in maneuvers stateside while you were there training?

Gentry: We went on what they call shake down crew. I wasn't on the West Virginia in Pearl Harbor. I got assigned to it after she was raised from Pearl Harbor and put in dry dock in ___ Washington and that's when I was assigned to the USS West Virginia PV48 battleship.

Interviewer: How good do you think your training was for the job you were about to do?

Gentry: I think it was real good. That's what saved a bunch of lives too paying attention to what you're doing and doing what they tell you. These were guys that were old veterans like _____ in charge of our company. Things like when he told you to move you moved you didn't ask any questions.

_____.

Interviewer: Right how good were the living conditions?

Gentry: Great the best crew, go through the chow line you could have anything you want. Now this was stateside.

Interviewer: Right

Gentry: In that dry dock we'd have scrambled eggs, fried eggs, sausage, ham anything you just name it. And the noon meal and supper we had ice cream you know all kinds like that. They was fattening us up.

Interviewer: What else did you do in your down time while you were still here stateside besides basketball you guys had a basketball team.

Gentry: Well after boot camp I got assigned to the West Virginia we were aboard ship doing some kind of physical work. Nobody was excluded you did what they told you.

Interviewer: What kind of work did you guys do?

Gentry: What kind of work?

Interviewer: Yeah

Gentry: Anything they wanted done. Chipping paint you know the bottom of the ship, you're probably not familiar with it, it's like a honey comb down below deck. And you had to crawl through there they'd send a light with you you know. And it would take you sometimes twenty or thirty minutes to get out of there you know we did stuff like that just everything. I think more or less we were still in a period of testing you know when you're told to do something and how well you participated. Which meant a lot as far as the crew was concerned. And of course I told you about going to gunner's school that was we were assigned to the West Virginia but I never thought that they'd ever get the West Virginia out of Pearl Harbor it was torn all to pieces. Then when we went to sea we were in A1 shape.

Interviewer: Did you guys get a lot of the repairing done to the ship or did they bring people in to do that?

Gentry: No once we got aboard ship and on the shake down crews where we fired and you know all that checking to see _____ and so forth. But you were just on regular duty learning you know like you were told when to go and how to participate.

Interviewer: When you went when you left the states to go into combat did you leave from San Diego?

Gentry: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay and where did you guys go from there?

Gentry: Well our first combat was in the Philippine Islands. And I had some stuff I had to go make a talk at the school not too long ago and I gave them some material and they haven't returned it yet and I'll let you see that. But our first real mission as far as the war was concerned was in the Philippine Islands. We lead the troops in the Lady Gulf in the southern Philippines. And that's where we had our first encounter with komokozies. It scared the daylight out of me.

Interviewer: What was that experience like?

Gentry: Real frightening once they participate in a raid on you the Japanese they took those planes the Japs ____ which we were fighting mostly. And the pilot flies them right into you I mean he don't waiver he just dives right down and you've got a 500 pound bomb or something like that aboard ship when he hits you. But it was frightening I'd never seen anything like this. We had 16 inch guns main battery five inch secondary battery and then 40 millimeter and 20 millimeter. And when we'd get to firing not the 16's against aircraft but five inch the 40's and 20's we all had to _____. But that was it was frightening.

Interviewer: That first experience in combat for you did they ever the Japanese planes ever hit your boat?

Gentry: Not then but they did later on.

Interviewer: Okay alright did you guys drop troops off you said then in the Philippines?

Gentry: We pre-bombarded that's the one we hit with the main battery and a five inch battery and pre-bombarded the shore the landing area for the troops to land. Now we didn't carry troops we didn't carry troops.

Interviewer: Okay do you remember when that was when you first went in there?

Gentry: I can't remember that's where I got that other stuff I was telling you about.

Interviewer: Yeah

Gentry: No I don't remember the dates. Let's see it was right after boot camp shake down crews repairing ship and shake down crews. It must of have been I want to guess at it but it must have been three or four months after I was in I would say. But I don't whenever I make a talk I don't ever refer to dates anymore because at the time it didn't mean anything to me. All I was primarily interested in was staying alive like all the rest of them. But I don't remember I should remember that but I don't.

Interviewer: I wasn't sure what kind of memory you have. What I care about a little bit is we want to stick with the first experience at firing. When you're shelling the shores or whatever talking about a little bit how much of your attention can be focused just on that when you do have the komokozies and things like that as well coming in? Was it hard to focus on?

Gentry: Yeah but not after the komokozies started diving on us our total focus was on them.

Interviewer: Okay

Gentry: Really you know that's what my job was. We wanted to shoot them down kill them make them crash or something. Usually like pre-bombardment and everything else they'll get a certain period during that phase of action that you don't usually what they usually would do would be in real late in the afternoon is when they'd usually jump on us all during the war. But no my focus primarily my primary job was antiaircraft crew to ____ the plane you know. Guys with 16 inch guns _____.

Interviewer: Alright did you ever hit any of the planes in that first in the Philippines on that first experience?

Gentry: When we would take them under attack they were usually anywhere from five, twenty to twenty five planes that would jump on us. And you couldn't just focus you know of course we had a gunnery control officer you know and he would and all the guns were fixed aboard ship where you couldn't come ____ on another gun group you know set up like that. That was more frightening to me than just about anything they would be all over like a bunch of bees or something. And you know everybody was firing and you've probably seen pictures of flack you know in the air and everything a lot of times we couldn't' hardly see the airplanes for the flack. That was as far as I was concerned that was really a frightening time for me. Even though I was firing the gun and we had three other guys on the gun with me loading and _____ and all of that. We didn't get hit when we were in the Philippines that comes later on but you know just being there was scary.

Interviewer: Right

Gentry: And we'd get a call you know over the speakers for us got bogies they called them bogies. We've got a bogie twelve miles _____. And then we turned all our attention to that area and usually what the gunner patrol office would do is he'll tell you when to commence fire and sometimes we jumped the gun. But in the Philippines that wasn't too bad that wasn't too bad but one of the biggest things was and I've got a book that was printed and published that I was really proud of. I was in the greatest naval battle ever recorded in history in the Philippines. And you want me to tell you about that?

Interviewer: Yeah

Gentry: I don't know whether you're familiar with the Philippine Islands but see they come on down like that. Down there there's several pieces of island in between there and they were going to try and stop us from landing troops at Lady Gulf in the southern Philippines. And that was their primary purpose but they sent one group two groups down in the ____ Sea on the other side of the Philippines. And one group was going to come in down here another group was going to come in up here. And Admiral Halzie he sent part of the navy my navy up north.

Interviewer: Your commanding officer here?

Gentry: Of a group that was here yeah. And that Japanese sent a few ships way up on the north end of the Philippines to try to draw part of our naval vessels up there. But he made a mistake and I was reading something about it not too long ago. He sent part of our heavy armored crew up there to stop that and weakened us down here in the southern part. Well we had two groups come in one of them came through the ____ Straights and the other was just a little bit north of it. But we went ahead and

formed what they call the navy T like if they were coming this way through the straights there we formed our T right across here the battleships and destroyers and cruisers.

Interviewer: Right

Gentry: And we didn't have too much advance warning about it but when he sent some of our vessels north of the Philippines that really weakened us quite a bit. But we took them under fire at 2:30 something like that in the morning and it was just dark as a _____. And we opened up eight of our six inch guns and we were topside by five and you know shooting flames from here to the country club and it was dark and it was really scary. But anyway and then the destroyer the PT boats and the destroyers went into the straights and engaged them like eyeball to eyeball.

Interviewer: Right

Gentry: And didn't any of the PT boats come out and destroyers quite a few of them were lost. We turned them back and they took off running and we sunk a Japanese battleship _____. And that's why they call it one of the greatest naval battles in history. And of course you look back over it now you know I was glad I was part of it.

Interviewer: When you were there I know you said you've read about it and lately or presently but when you were involved in it there did you know much of what was going on in the way of what the officers were trying to accomplish?

Gentry: No

Interviewer: Or were you just there to do your job?

Gentry: CIC combat infantry _____ they took care of all of that. Of course the captain the exec all those _____ they did all that.

Interviewer: So you guys were there to do your job and.

Gentry: Of course the guys CIC had radar and all of that they were picking them up. Telling us what the range telling CIC and gunner control officers what the range was.

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