Frazier Woolard, Pearl Harbor Survivor

Cheryl Lee Toler (left) and Penny Langley with Mr. Frazier Woolard

By Penny Langley and Cheryl Lee Toler

Introduction

By Penny Langley

“Remember Pearl Harbor” was a common phrase on patriotic lips during World War II. Pearl Harbor is an American naval station in Hawaii that was bombed by the Japanese on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, around 7:55 a.m. Mr. Frazier Woolard, a local Washington, N. C., attorney and former member of the U. S. Navy, remembers Pearl Harbor better than most people do. He was stationed
aboard the USS Sterett, which was in Pearl Harbor on the dreary morning in December. We interviewed Mr. Woolard in October, 1993, in his home in Washington, N. C.

His memories were vivid and his emotions very real and heart-felt. He shared with us his memories of sailors trapped in the USS Arizona, a ship that capsized during the Japanese bombing; trapped sailors were tapping the side of the ship, hoping they would be rescued from the darkness and the water of the doomed ship. Mr. Woolard told us what it was like to witness the attack on Pearl Harbor from aboard a ship that was there. His account gave us more understanding of the horror of war but of the bravery of men under pressure than any textbook ever could.

Life: Let me ask you how you came to be at Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Woolard: I went through training in the navy at Norfolk in March, April, and May, 1939. And then I got a leave to come home, and by the time I got back, it was June, 1939. I was eventually shipped down to Charleston, S. C., to bring a new destroyer into commission that had been built there, the USS Sterett with the number 407 painted on the side. After some shake-down cruises, we went to Veracruz, Mexico, and went on through the Panama Canal and went on to San Diego. We left San Diego to join the fleet, which was supposedly temporarily based at Pearl Harbor.

Life: How long did it take you to get from San Diego to Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Woolard: Oh, about nine days; just not in any rush, you see. They [destroyers] can make high speed.

Life: What was your rank and your job on board ship?

Mr. Woolard: At that time I had just made third-class petty officer, an electrician. When we got to Hawaii, we didn't even go into Pearl Harbor; we patrolled off the entrance of Pearl Harbor. Then, we learned there that the fleet was not going back to the West Coast [of the U.S.], that it was permanently stationed in Hawaii.

Life: Were you upset about this?

Mr. Woolard: No, I wasn't upset about it, but we wondered why. But that was Roosevelt's doing; he's the one who kept the fleet out there [in Hawaii].

Life: Do you know why?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, he wanted to provoke Japan. See, it [the fleet] was like a dagger sticking out, and he even fired the admiral that was in charge of the fleet, fired him because he made a trip from Pearl Harbor to Washington and said, "I can't be responsible for that [the danger of the fleet in Pearl Harbor]; there's only one entrance in and one out." And he told him he would not be responsible for it, trying to get Roosevelt to change his mind. Be he wouldn't do it, so Roosevelt fired him and put Admiral Kimmel in charge. That brings you up to how we were at Pearl Harbor. Then we operated out of Pearl Harbor from, well, let's see, May, 1939 until December 7, 1941.
**Life on the Pamlico**

*Life*: Can you tell us about these patrols you would go on in your destroyer? Were you looking for Japanese?

*Mr. Woolard*: No. We always had a purpose. We spent a lot of time doing what they call plane guard duty for the [aircraft carrier USS] Enterprise. Two destroyers would be plane guard. They had one at the starboard quarter—that's toward the right and one at the left quarter towards the rear. The purpose was to pick up any plane pilot that crashed his plane into the sea in trying to land. Besides that, we took on a lot of turns of escort duty for ships that were going to Wake Island, Johnson Island, and Midway Island—things like that.

*Life*: A destroyer is mainly protection for larger ships?

*Mr. Woolard*: Yes.

*Life*: Did you pick up many fliers who had crashed?

*Mr. Woolard*: Yes, but it didn't happen after they landed on that carrier day and night [i.e., becoming experienced at landing].

*Life*: How many occurrences actually happened while you were on it?

*Mr. Woolard*: Two or three.

*Life*: Were you able to save the men?

*Mr. Woolard*: Oh, yes!

*Life*: When you were out there during this time—this year and a half to two years—were you and the other men aware that something might happen?

*Mr. Woolard*: Oh, yes! We were concerned about it, but we were such little pegs on the totem pole there's nothing we could do.

*Life*: Is a destroyer a kind of small battleship?

*Mr. Woolard*: Smaller and narrower. It's more for protection and for attacking other ships. This one [showing a picture of a destroyer at Pearl Harbor] was 1,500 tons, but the destroyers before the war was over had reached 2,100 to 2,200 tons.

*Life*: Were any destroyers sunk during the Pearl Harbor?

*Mr. Woolard*: Yes, about three, I think.

*Life*: Was there any warning in the weeks or so right before Pearl Harbor that something big was about to break loose?

*Mr. Woolard*: No, no, nothing, nothing, nothing, not one thing did we ever get any word about.

*Life*: Was there a feeling in the air? Did you kind of feel like something was going to happen before it did?

*Mr. Woolard*: Yes, we did.

*Life*: Was there much activity that you were aware of, like concern about espionage and spies and that sort of thing?
Mr. Woolard: No, no, we weren't concerned about that because Hawaii was a polyglot island; they had Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, just a polyglot in addition to the Hawaiians. There were some things that concerned or scared us. I've got [an article] here from the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*. On August the 8th and August the 9th, 1941, "City stocks medical supplies for M-day." M is Mobilization Day. So, you see, there were little things like that happening, and the Honolulu government was concerned. Otherwise they wouldn't have been stocking war supplies.

*Life*: Right on the day it actually happened, could you tell us your personal experience?

Mr. Woolard: On December 6th, that was Saturday, a shipmate of mine and I went ashore in Honolulu, beat around town and so forth, got a haircut and things like that, stopped and drank some beer. Along about 11 o'clock [p.m.] we met a fellow from right here in Washington.

*Life*: Is that right?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. His name was Edward Chauncey. This fellow we met, Edward Chauncey from here, we met him close to the time to go back and to catch the launch back to our ships [at] one o'clock [a.m.]. We had to catch the bus back to Pearl Harbor and then get the launch to go to the ship. Liberty expired at one o'clock in the morning on the dock at Pearl Harbor. So we made plans to meet the next day at 10 o'clock. He was serving on the USS *West Virginia*, a battleship. Well, the next morning ordinarily everybody sleeps in, you know, because you have a day off and you don't have to get up like you do every other day.
Life on the Pamlico

Life: You were now on the ship?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, I was on the ship, and this fellow I went ashore with off of the Blue was named Allen Day. He and I got up early and ate breakfast. That's unheard of on Sunday morning because everybody sleeps in, you see.

Life: Was this about six a.m.?

Mr. Woolard: No, it was about seven, between seven and 7:15. After we ate breakfast, he and I were standing on the after main deck, and at about five minutes to eight some planes--Japanese planes but we didn't know they were Japanese planes at that time--swooped down on Ford

USS Blue, Survivor of Pearl Harbor, but Sunk at Guadalcanal Eight Months Later
Island; that's an island air station inside of Pearl Harbor. I said to him, "It looks like they're pulling a mock attack on our ships of the fleet."

Life: That's what you thought they were?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, because we didn't hear anything, you know; they just swooped down.

Life: Were they firing?

Mr. Woolard: No, no. I mean, if they were, we couldn't hear them because the distance was half a mile from where they were over the air station.

Life: And you couldn't tell they were Japanese?

Mr. Woolard: No, not then. But the next bunch that came, and there were plenty of them, I knew that they were Japanese because they had a red dot on the side and one underneath the wings.

Life: What color were the planes? Do you remember?

Mr. Woolard: Some of them were sort of light gray. They had a red dot about a foot in diameter.

Life: And you were still up on the deck then with your friend?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. But his battle station was down in the engine room. Mine, fortunately, was in the repair party, and I didn't have to go anywhere because I was just available to the repair party. Another friend of mine, I looked up and saw him coming with the bolt cutters. The keys to the magazines [ammunition] were all locked up in the gunnery officer's room in the key locker. The gunnery officer had taken the keys to the key locker ashore with him on weekend leave.

Life: The officer was ashore?

Mr. Woolard: Yes! the gunnery officer, the captain, first lieutenant, chief engineer were all ashore, every one of them. They had overnight leave.

Life: So your friend cut the ammunition magazines open with the bolt cutters?

Mr. Woolard: He and I went around cutting open the locks.

Life: What kind of weapons did you have?

Mr. Woolard: We had four five-inch .38 caliber guns and two .50 caliber machine guns, which were useless.

Life: They weren't any good?

Mr. Woolard: The bullets were too small to knock an attacking plane down. Further, the five-inch guns were really too big for close-in planes because you need something bigger than a .50 caliber machine gun and smaller than a five-inch. The .50 caliber were too little, and the five-inch guns were too big, but we were firing them anyway and trying to reach planes up in the air.
Life on the Pamlico

Life: Were they firing at you or going on in?

Mr. Woolard: Oh, they were dropping torpedoes and bombs, yes, all of them. There were 354 Japanese planes.

Life: How did you and your ship mates react? Were you panicked?

Mr. Woolard: No, we were not panicked. Everybody went to his battle stations.

Life: How come nobody saw the Japanese aircraft carriers before it happened? Weren't they waiting out there before it happened?

Mr. Woolard: They were far away. They launched their planes from 200 miles distance.

Life: There was quite a bit of criticism about how the Japanese could have gotten down there without somebody knowing something.

Mr. Woolard: Oh, well, what they did was come from the north, the northern route. It's very choppy with no traffic up there. Then they made a cut down behind Midway Island. They attacked from the northern tip of Hawaii.

Life: Were you still on the Sterett [407]?

Mr. Woolard: No, this was the Blue [387]. I was transferred from the Sterett to the Blue about May, 1941.

Life: Was it hit?

Mr. Woolard: No. They dropped three bombs at us, but they all went in the water about from 50 to 150 feet away.

Life: So they missed you?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Did you feel the impact?

Mr. Woolard: No, they didn't even go off.

Life: Were you close to other ships?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, they were all around.

Life: How far away from the Blue would you say?

Mr. Woolard: They were not anything close together like they were in the navy yard where the New Orleans was, but I'd say the distance would be about a block.

Life: So you didn't get hit?

Mr. Woolard: No, we didn't, but they tried to hit us. One Japanese plane flew over, and it had been hit. I saw the pilot, and he was looking as he flew over us. He was a little bit aft [towards the stern of the ship]; I could see him. When he passed us, he was looking down, looking at us, and he purposely and intentionally drove that plane into the USS Curtis, a seaplane tender.

Life: Aren't they called kamikazes when they do that?
Life: Did the Japanese try to drop the bombs down the smoke stacks?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. I saw a bomb go down the smokestack of the Arizona.

Life: Is that right!

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: The Arizona sank, didn't it?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. But it blew up after that bomb went down the smoke stack. Then in about eight seconds, a Japanese torpedo plane put a torpedo into the forward [ammunition] magazines, and the forward half of that ship blew up. Now the fire came out of the boiler rooms and went four or five hundred feet high. But when that torpedo was let go, it hit the magazines and it blew up and that's the end of the Arizona.

Life: The Japanese had regular bombs, and then they had torpedoes?

Mr. Woolard: Yes

Life: Would the same plane be carrying both?

Mr. Woolard: They had torpedo planes, and they had dive bombers.

Life: How may torpedoes would one plane carry?
Mr. Woolard: They only carried one.

Life: It was under the fuselage?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: And so they could just aim it and drop it?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, that's right. Fly right down close to the water.

Life: You were close to the Arizona, weren't you?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: And you could see it hit?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, and I could feel the concussion when it blew up.

Life: Weren't many men lost on the Arizona?

Mr. Woolard: Oh, terrible amount of men lost, thousands!

Life: On one ship?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Were they jumping overboard and trying to get out?

Mr. Woolard: They were on the Oklahoma, which capsized. It took several torpedoes and went down and turned over, and there were men tapping for the next ten days.

Life: That's awful.

Mr. Woolard: Tapping.

Life: Did they rescue any of them?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, they tried to rescue them. Some of them they did, and some they didn't.

Life: So they were trapped in a capsized ship?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. Can you imagine being in there and with it pitch dark, and the sinking, and then being upside down? You don't know where you are, really.

Life: How were they able to rescue some of them?

Mr. Woolard: They cut through the bottom [of the ship].

Life: I guess the men were in different compartments?

Mr. Woolard: They were.

Life: They really would just have to cut through everywhere.

Mr. Woolard: That's right.

Life: Your battle station was on deck and that's how you saw all of this?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.
Life on the Pamlico

Life: Your job was to repair things?

Mr. Woolard: No, to be available if anything went wrong, you know, if they needed help somewhere. Like they called this other man, that one that brought the bolt cutters; and he and I got a call to go down into the magazine for gun number four, which we did because nobody was sending up ammunition. So we went down there and sent up 50 or 75 powder canisters.

Life: This was for the five-inch?

Mr. Woolard: Right.

Life: How long did the attack last?

Mr. Woolard: It started at five minutes to eight and the last plane that I saw was at 9:30 when we got out of the harbor to get out from all that bombing and torpedoes.

Life: What time did you leave?

Mr. Woolard: We got underway at 8:47.

Life: Did your officers get back to the Blue?

Mr. Woolard: No.

Life: You left with out them?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Did you have a second in command?
Life on the Pamlico

*Life:* Some of those ships, like the *Arizona*, they were unable to get power up and get out in time?

*Mr. Woolard:* No, they are just bulky ships. See, I told you that [President Roosevelt] fired one admiral because the admiral wanted the battleships to go back to the West Coast. They're too bulky, you know, but Roosevelt would not do that.

*Life:* How many ships were actually able to get up power and sail out? Do you know?

*Mr. Woolard:* Let's see; I know of one cruiser and four destroyers.

*Life:* Is the passage out of Pearl Harbor narrow?

*Mr. Woolard:* Yes, it is. You can't have ships going both ways. Only one ship can get in or out.

*Life:* So even if everybody had power up, it would have taken a long time for the ships, to get out.

*Mr. Woolard:* Yes!

*Life:* What was the purpose of having them all there at one time, anyway, if they couldn't defend the area?

*Mr. Woolard:* That was President Roosevelt's doings, to send them there like that.

*Life:* Didn't some admirals say let's get these people out of here, I mean, never have but so many in there at once?

*Mr. Woolard:* No, no, that was never brought up. In fact, just by a stroke of luck two aircraft carriers were not in the harbor.

*Life:* Where were they?

*Mr. Woolard:* They were delivering airplanes, one of them to Wake Island, which was 2,160 miles west of Pearl Harbor, and to Midway; they were delivering 18 planes to Midway, which was 1,200 and something miles away.

*Life:* Did anyone on your ship get hurt or killed?

*Mr. Woolard:* No, we didn't have a single casualty. I forgot to tell you something. These Japanese two-man submarines got inside the harbor. They slipped in sometime during the night.

*Life:* How is the world did they do that with so many American ships there?

*Mr. Woolard:* They followed an American ship in.

*Life:* They got right behind it?

*Mr. Woolard:* Right behind it.

*Life:* Didn't they have nets that would open-up?

*Mr. Woolard:* Yes, but they would open those nets up for American ships to go through, and the Japanese followed right behind. They were clever; there's no doubt about that.
Life on the Pamlico

Life: Did the submarines do much damage?

Mr. Woolard: They were destroyed right in the harbor. They sent five and only two got inside the harbor. The rest were stuck outside, and one's gyrocompass was messing up, and it ran aground 20 miles away.

Life: So they didn't do any damage?

Mr. Woolard: No, but you had to look up for airplanes and down for submarines.

Life: When you sailed out of Pearl Harbor, were there still Japanese planes?

Mr. Woolard: That's when I saw the last one.

Life: How far out did you go?

Mr. Woolard: We were just outside a mile or two. We made sound contacts and were supposed to have sunk a submarine.

Life: Your ship did?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Did you come back into the harbor?

Mr. Woolard: No, we joined this cruiser [USS St. Louis] I told you about and two more destroyers and proceeded out to sea. We met up with the Enterprise approximately 500 miles from Pearl Harbor. No ship knew where the Japanese were.

Life: The aircraft carrier Enterprise was out of the harbor?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: And so you [the Blue] joined up with it?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Looking for the Japanese?

Mr. Woolard: Looking for them, but we didn't have any idea where they were.

Life: How long before you eventually went back in?

Mr. Woolard: We went back in Monday night, and it was absolutely black pitch dark. I mean, you wonder how they got in there, but they did.

Life: So you were out almost a week before you went back in?

Mr. Woolard: No, one day. Well, Sunday and Monday.

Life: Tell us about the men trapped on the capsized Oklahoma?

Mr. Woolard: I saw [sailors] working, and they had a cutting torch. Cutting the bottom out of the Oklahoma and fishing men out.
Life on the Pamlico

Life: That's tragic.

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Do you know about how many people were killed in all?

Mr. Woolard: Over 3,000, over 3,000.

Life: I think that you were saying the biggest single disaster was the Arizona?

Mr. Woolard: The Arizona and also a big number on the Oklahoma. I told you the boy I saw ashore from Washington, N. C., was on the West Virginia. They had to jump off because that ship went down. The harbor water was right level with the main deck, so they were picked up by destroyers.

Life: Did he survive?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, he survived. I later saw him in Australia. We were pulling in there, and his destroyer was backing out.

Life: Tell us about the officers who were not on board the Blue during the attack and when the Blue put out to sea.

Mr. Woolard: When the officers came from Honolulu in a taxi, they got down to Pearl Harbor fleet landing where all sailors catch a launch and got someone to take them in a motor launch. They were trying to get back to the Blue, but the Blue had gotten underway and so they tried to catch us.

Life on the Pamlico

We saw them waving, but we just kept right on going out to sea.

Life: They had been granted leave, right?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. They had leave, but the enlisted men did not have leave. Our leave expired at one o'clock, but they had weekend leave.

Life: Did they eventually get back on the ship?

Mr. Woolard: They got back Monday night.

Life: Did anyone on the Blue, like the young ensign, receive recognition for heroism?

Mr. Woolard: He got a commendation.

Life: Did you remember his name?

Mr. Woolard: Nathan Fred Asher. He was from Massachusetts, Boston. He was an academy ensign, and he had been aboard the Blue for two years.

Life: And he did real well, huh?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, but he had help, you know; he wasn't by himself. He had a chief quarter master who was experienced with 16 years in the Navy to help him with the navigation.

Life: How many men would you have at full strength on the Blue?
Life on the Pamlico

Mr. Woolard: We had about 190-200.

Life: How many were on board when this happened?

Mr. Woolard: All the enlisted men were there, every one of them, but there were only four ensign officers—and they were inexperienced.

Life: And all the top officers were gone?

Mr. Woolard: All the top officers were gone over in Honolulu at the hotels.

Life: Having a ball?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. That's right!

Life: Recent times when you think about Pearl Harbor, what do you think about most?

Mr. Woolard: I think about how we were sitting ducks out there. Roosevelt knew they were coming and didn't tell us.

Life: Do you think he wanted a war?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, he really wanted to get into the war in Europe.

Life: And this got him in?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. The American people were divided about going to war to help England, even though the Germans had sunk half a dozen United States merchant ships and two or three destroyers and torpedoed two or three more.

Life: The Germans had sunk American naval ships prior to Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: I didn't know that. Prior to Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. The Germans sank the American destroyer Rubin James October 31, 1941, and we lost 118 men.

Life: Did the U.S. government protest?

Mr. Woolard: Oh, yes, they protested. Roosevelt told American ships to fire on them whenever they saw them. But, anyway, see, he could not get a unified nation into the war in Europe. So he was provoking the Japanese, really.

Life: How did you feel about America going to war? Did you think we should have gotten involved?

Mr. Woolard: I felt like we were going to go, and it was just a matter of when. We just were doing what we were trained to do. I didn't even question whether or not I approved of it, you know. If President Roosevelt wanted to provoke the Japanese, Pearl Harbor was a costly way to do it, wasn't it? I don't think he really thought about the possibility that an attack by 354 Japanese aircraft would result in 3,300 deaths of American Navy men.
**Life on the Pamlico**

*Life:* Was it kind of like a show of force, just having all the ships over there?

*Mr. Woolard:* Yes, yes, that's what he was interested in.

*Life:* What about the criticism that all these ships shouldn't have been there?

*Mr. Woolard:* In my opinion the battleships should not have been in Hawaii, in Pearl Harbor. They should have been on the West Coast.

*Life:* The Japanese couldn't have picked a better place to hit the American fleet.

*Mr. Woolard:* That's right, absolutely!

*Life:* And like you say, we were just lucky some of the aircraft carriers weren't in there.

*Mr. Woolard:* That's right; we were lucky. The admiral in command of the fleet, Admiral Kimmel, after the attack, they fired him and retired him because Roosevelt had to have a scapegoat.

*Life:* You would blame Roosevelt?

*Mr. Woolard:* I would blame Franklin D. Roosevelt, yes. This book [Mr. Woolard's book on Pearl Harbor] is full of radio messages that were intercepted by the Americans, decoded and translated. And Roosevelt saw every one of them, and they talk about how many ships were in Pearl Harbor. Roosevelt wrote a letter to Wendell Wilkie.

**Life on the Pamlico**

Wendell Wilkie was the 1940 Republican presidential candidate, and Roosevelt, of course, defeated him. But they stayed on good terms. Wilkie was going to go down to Australia, and on December the 5th, 1941, Roosevelt wrote Wilkie a letter and said the Japanese situation was a real crisis and perhaps the next four or five days would tell the story.

*Life:* Have you studied much about the Japanese admirals, like Yamamoto?

*Mr. Woolard:* All those Japanese army and navy forces were much more advanced than we ever had any idea about. The Japanese had been mass bombing Chinese cities since 1932 with advanced-designed, multi-engined bombers.

*Life:* I read that they really could have come back and hit us and maybe done much more damage.

*Mr. Woolard:* They could have. See, the Japanese didn't have any oil tanks in Hawaii, but they could have come back and finished off our oil tanks in the hills overlooking Pearl Harbor, and we'd have been in hell of a shape.

*Life:* Have you ever read why they didn't?

*Mr. Woolard:* No, I read where this Lieutenant Fuchida led the Pearl Harbor attack and he said after the second wave that when he landed back on the carrier he asked Admiral Nagumo, the Japanese admiral of that attack force, to have a third wave sent in, but Nagumo turned him down and withdrew; the Japanese fleet withdrew.
Life: It's just incredible to me. Of course, hindsight is great. Can you speculate as to why they didn't do it?

Mr. Woolard: I guess the Japanese admiral thought they had had such success, he wasn't going to bother anything else; but they could have. Really, if they had come in there and bombed all the oil tanks, we'd have been in a mess.

Life: And, really, weren't you just defenseless?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: They could have come back the next day, and you really couldn't have done anything about it?

Mr. Woolard: No.

Life: What about our planes? We didn't get many up, did we?

Mr. Woolard: No, because they bombed them on the ground.

Life: That was another big scandal having all the planes down there close together and they were able to just really hit them.

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: They [the Japanese] must have had very good intelligence. They must have had spies all over the place.

Mr. Woolard: They had one spy. But he went out daily and sent messages back of what he had seen, what ships were in, what ships were out.

Life: If Roosevelt wanted to get involved in the war, didn't he know we'd lose a lot? Didn't he know what a big loss that would be financially, especially?

Mr. Woolard: I really don't think he thought that [disaster] was going to happen. I think he thought there would just be an air raid, and that was it.

Life: Maybe he just wanted to provoke them by having these ships out there, and he didn't dream that they would come in there and just blow the whole place up.

Mr. Woolard: Right.

Life: You know, the Germans when they went into Poland, they pulled this stunt of claiming the Polish army had attacked a German radio station right near the border, and they actually did it themselves.

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: And they planted dead bodies.

Mr. Woolard: Yes, Yes.

Life: Then they blamed it on the Poles, and then they invaded. So maybe Roosevelt was trying to get some little incident to happen and then he could get in the war.
Life on the Pamlico

Bow of Two-Man Japanese Sub, Two 18-inch Torpedoes

Life on the Pamlico

Side View of Two-Man Japanese Submarine

Propulsion End of Two-Man Sub: "It Was Like a Big Torpedo."
Life on the Pamlico

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: [Mr. Woolard told us about the book he has written about Pearl Harbor.] Did you publish this book or is this just for your own benefit?

Mr. Woolard: No, I published it.

Life: Have you sold copies of it?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, about 75.

Life: You're a lawyer; did you write your book while you were practicing law?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Are you retired? Do you practice law anymore?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, I still practice law. It took me years of research that I have done even though I was at Pearl Harbor. I had to get to see these Japanese messages, and that took me two years. I had to go through 39 volumes of Congressional reports to get those. Few people have ever gone and done what I did.

Life: These are the Congressional hearings held about Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: That was right after the war, wasn't it?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, I think it was July, 1945, to May, 1946. Here's the section: interception decoded translation and delivery of Japanese messages. Roosevelt got them, Secretary of the Navy Knox, [and several others, including General George Marshall].

Life: Weren't they aware that the Japanese ambassador was meeting in Washington?

Mr. Woolard: The Japanese ambassadors there were carrying on holding the talks between the Department of State and the Japanese ambassador. They were holding talks. Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, said there was not one chance of a hundred in coming to any terms of agreement with Japan, and he said that and kept stalling and stalling. The Japanese had the message that they were breaking relations with the United States. That message took some time for the Japanese interpreter and translator to get it right, and they requested an hour. They were going to deliver it at one o'clock, but it was two o'clock before they got the message delivered.

Life: This broke relations with United States?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: But they actually wanted to do that before Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Woolard: But the United States already knew it from the translated messages.

Life: They already knew what the message was?
Life on the Pamlico

Mr. Woolard: Absolutely!

Life: Did you after Pearl harbor stay on this ship very long, the Blue?

Mr. Woolard: It was sunk at Guadalcanal, by the Japanese about eight months and two weeks after Pearl Harbor.

Life: Were you on it when it sank?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Tell us about that. This was Guadalcanal?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. We invaded Guadalcanal in late summer of 1942.

Life: That was a very bloody invasion wasn't it?

Mr. Woolard: Oh, yes, terrible! It was terrible, really!

Life: What was your activity at Guadalcanal?

Mr. Woolard: We were escorting. We escorted the transports and supply ships in. The marines went ashore, and small landing crafts were taking supplies in. That's what we were doing.

Life: When did the Blue sink?

Mr. Woolard: We didn't get sunk that day [first day of invasion]; it was about 14 days later.

Life: Were you still at Guadalcanal?

Mr. Woolard: No, because we had a night battle the second day we were there, and the Japanese sank the USS Quincy, the USS Astoria, the USS Vincennes, and an Australian cruiser, Canberra. So we pulled out, left the marines. [with] no supplies, no ammunition, or anything. We pulled out because they had sunk the main ships there, and they were going to come back.

Life: Where did you all go from there?

Mr. Woolard: To New Caledonia, a French possession, which was about 1200 miles away. I guess.

Life: And then you went back?

Mr. Woolard: We went back, took [escorted] one supply ship that had food and supplies for the Marines.

Life: Were there other destroyers?

Mr. Woolard: Two more destroyers were with the Blue. We escorted that ship back to Guadalcanal. We were just arriving and were about 10 miles off of Guadalcanal when they spotted this fast moving identification light, and it let go a torpedo that hit us right in the rear and knocked about 40 feet off, damaged the propellers and so that it was useless. The Navy took all the crew off except 13. I was one of the 13 who stayed on it.

Life: Was there anybody injured?
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Mr. Woolard: Yes, we had about five killed, one or two missing.

Life: One of the other destroyers took the men off?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: But you remained on?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, thirteen of us remained on trying to save it. They would take it and tow it and tow it, and it would break the lines because 40 feet was hanging down under the sea.

Life: Oh, I see. Kind of pulling the whole thing down.

Mr. Woolard: Yes, right, and the next night after we had been hit, we got word that the Japanese were coming back, so they told us to get off and let it go down. That's what we did.

Life: So you got on another destroyer?

Mr. Woolard: I jumped over. It put its bow to ours, and I jumped over. I was the last one to leave the ship.

Life: Is that right! Did you actually just jump off of one ship onto the other one?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, they put the bow right up against the bow of the Blue.

Life: What happened after that? Did you get assigned to another ship?

Mr. Woolard: They took us to a place called Espartos Saints, that's some islands three or four hundred miles away. The army had started to make a base there, so we got some cots from the army and slept out in the open. At night we'd wake up in the morning and see where horse hoofs [prints] were. So I said I was going to wake up and see if I couldn't find out what that was, and I did. I woke up, and it was the wild horses.

Life: Is that right!

Mr. Woolard: Yes, and they were walking all between the beds because everybody was asleep. But I coughed, and, I tell you, they were gone! We were taken away from there to Wellington, New Zealand, and transferred to a New Zealand ship and then to Sydney, Australia. At Sydney I was scheduled to go back on another destroyer back up into the Guadalcanal area, but at the last minute a fellow that was coming back to the United States got sick, and so my orders were made out to come back to the United States.

Life: With him?

Mr. Woolard: No, he couldn't go. He stayed there.

Life: So you came back in '42?

Mr. Woolard: Came back in '42 and then went to Seattle, Washington, for the purpose of another destroyer, and I did get that other destroyer.
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Life: Did you go back into the Pacific from there?

Mr. Woolard: About six months later, I made one trip to North Africa.

Life: Oh, really?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: Were you involved in any more combat after that?

Mr. Woolard: Yes, at Okinawa.

Life: Oh, boy, that was something.

Mr. Woolard: That was terrible!

Life: What ship were you on there?

Mr. Woolard: The Smalley, number 565 on the bow.

Life: Where did you finish up your tour?

Mr. Woolard: I left the ship that I was on and was sent back to Seattle to get another destroyer, the 565, and I was on that from June, 1944, until September 2nd, which was the signing of the surrender in Tokyo Bay, 1945. And during that time we had 30 days off of Okinawa.

Life: Tell us about Okinawa. What was the date?

Mr. Woolard: The month of June, 1945.

Life: What happened in Okinawa?

Mr. Woolard: Thousands of Japanese kamikaze planes attacking ships.

Life: Didn't the Japanese just leave a certain number of men there and say, "Here it is. You either win or die?"

Mr. Woolard: Yes. They fought. They fought right on down to the end.

Life: How long did this battle go on?

Mr. Woolard: Let's see, now. It started about April and it was over, I'd say, the end of June by the time we left Okinawa.

Life: So it was about three months?

Mr. Woolard: Yes. But that didn't stop the kamikaze planes; they kept coming, sinking ships.

Life: Was your ship involved in shelling the island?

Mr. Woolard: We were involved as a radar picket ship off of Okinawa. They put a wreath of destroyer ships around it, a half moon, and they would pick up Japanese planes coming in with radar. The Japanese had to knock out those radar picket ships first and then start with the kamikaze planes.

Life: Did you try to blow them up before they got there?
Mr. Woolard: Sometimes we'd hear our radio operator say, "Bogie, 10 miles." Next report, "Bogie, nine miles; bogie, eight and a half miles; bogie seven miles." Then maybe all at once he might turn; he hadn't seen you. But you didn't know whether he'd seen you or not so a lot of them didn't and a lot of them came on in, bogie, five miles; bogie, four and a half; bogie four; bogie, three and a half. At three miles our ships opened fire with the 40mm guns because they didn't know whether they had been seen or not, but they weren't taking any chances.

Life: Did your ship get hit?

Mr. Woolard: No, it didn't, but one missed us from about here to across the street. One was coming straight [at us], and we were firing the 40mm as fast as we could fire.

Life: He just missed you, huh?

Mr. Woolard: We hit him!

Life: Oh, you hit him!

Mr. Woolard: We hit him.

Life: And if you hadn't, he would have hit you?

Mr. Woolard: Oh, absolutely, no doubt about that!

Life: Did they usually come in right straight down?

Mr. Woolard: In the daytime they would sort of come in out of the sun, but at night they flew about 10 feet off of the water because the could silhouette [the target ship] you see, in the moonlight.

Life: That must have been terrifying.

Mr. Woolard: It was. That was really nerve wracking.

Life: How long did this attack last, days?

Mr. Woolard: Oh, yes. It started back in April, and we lost approximately 35 or 40 destroyers there.

Life: Is that right? That many ships?

Mr. Woolard: Yes.

Life: You were so lucky to have never been injured or killed during that time. Where were you at the end of the war?

Mr. Woolard: I was just off of Tokyo Bay. We had the biggest fleet I've ever seen. I didn't know we had that many ships, carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers. The Third Fleet was moving up and down the coast of Japan, and these planes on the carriers were taking off and going in and bombing Japanese ships that were seen on the Japanese coast. I stayed on there until they dropped the atomic bomb on August 6th, and then on August the 8th or 9th they dropped it on Nagasaki. They [the Japanese] were busy trying to make their minds up on what they were going to do. By the 12th they had agreed to send a plane to Manila where General MacArthur was. The Japanese sent a plane down to see what terms could be reached for the signing of a surrender. And on the 14th of August- I'm talking about
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Japan time now- the Emperor spoke and said the war was not going to the advantage of Japan and said they would accept surrender terms. And so on the 2nd of September after the signing of the surrender, I was transferred to a carrier [USS Essex] and was back in the United States September 12th.

Life: You got back quick.

Mr. Woolard: I was the only single man on my ship that was eligible for discharge at that time. See, you got points if you were married; that gave you a lot of points. I was the only single man. I had a lot of time in, and that's what enabled me to get out.

Life: So you got out in September?

Mr. Woolard: September 24th.

Life: Where were you brought back? Was it California?

Mr. Woolard: We landed in Seattle, Washington, and were sent down to the receiving station at Los Angeles and were discharged there.

Life: Did you get a hero's welcome when you came back?

Mr. Woolard: They had welcome signs up; you could see them when the ships were coming in port.

Life: How long were you in the Navy?

Mr. Woolard: I was in the Navy for six years, six months, and nine days. I enlisted for four years, but I couldn't get out, you know.

Life: I always like to ask the people we talk to about their earlier life. Were you born here in Beaufort County?

Mr. Woolard: Right in this house.

Life: What was your father involved in?

Mr. Woolard: In the grocery business, wholesale grocers.

Life: You grew up here in Washington?

Mr. Woolard: I did.

Life: You graduated from Washington High School?

Mr. Woolard: That's right, 1938.

Life: So you went in the Navy pretty soon after that.

Mr. Woolard: Yes, because that was in the middle of the Depression, and there were no jobs, and to find something [an occupation] I went into the Navy.

Life: What prompted you to become a lawyer when you got out?

Mr. Woolard: I could see that I wasn't going to be doing anything by being a tradesman, you know, climbing ladders
and things like that and could go in business after going to law school.

*Life*: Where did you go to law school?

*Mr. Woolard*: At Duke. I went to William and Mary undergraduate two years, and by the GI Bill Duke admitted anybody who had two years to the law school.

*Life*: How did you end up at William and Mary?

*Mr. Woolard*: They had a division in Norfolk, and that was the place for us to go. I could get a job, and my wife could get a job.

*Life*: Did you get married pretty soon after coming home?

*Mr. Woolard*: I got married in 1949.

*Life*: And you've been practicing law here?

*Mr. Woolard*: Since 1958. I graduated from Duke in 1954 and then I worked with Federal Internal Revenue Services Alcohol and Tobacco Taxes. You've heard so much bout that in Waco, Texas [refers to Branch Davidian compound seige].

*Life*: Waco, Texas, they've had a tough time. Would you have any advice for our leaders today of how something like this could not happen again?

*Mr. Woolard*: Well, no, I wouldn't have any advice. I wouldn't know what to tell them all really, but, hopefully,
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they're not going to run into anything like that [Pearl Harbor] again!

Mr. Frazier Woolard Reads from His Book on the Pearl Harbor Attack.
Life on the Pamlico

Conclusion

By Cheryl Lee Toler

Mr. Woolard shared with us his memories of serving in the Navy during the time Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese. It is not every day we get a chance to talk with someone who was a part of such a historic event. He told us many details not only about Pearl Harbor but about other battles in the Pacific, such as the terrifying attacks of the Japanese kamikaze planes at some of the fierce island battles.

Mr. Woolard proudly showed us the book he has published about Pearl Harbor. Mr. Woolard has researched many original documents associated with the attack on Pearl Harbor, and in his work are reprints of messages that President Roosevelt received, which were intercepted and translated from Japanese. These messages show why he blames President Roosevelt for the attack because the President did not inform the military that it was going to happen. He does point out that he does not think that the President had any idea of the severity of the attack and of the potential for massive loss of life and destruction.

Mr. Woolard shared with us information about a significant even in our country’s history, which he was a part of. What impressed me the most was his telling us about the young men who bravely died a horrible death trapped in the sinking Arizona. As he told of being able to hear them beating on the ship in hopes of someone hearing and saving them, we identified with his sadness at this American tragedy.