

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JOHN (Jack) LANGFORD  
Commander, Navy, WWII and Korea

2000

OH  
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**Langford, John D.**, (1923-2000), Oral History Interview, 2000.

User copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 125 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 125 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **ABSTRACT**

John Langford, a North Platte, Nebraska native, discusses his World War II service with the Navy first as a gunner and later as an officer. He mentions basic training at Great Lakes (Illinois), assignment to the U.S.S California, and duty as a range finder for 16 inch guns. Langford details the attack on Pearl Harbor including playing cards prior to the attack, seeing a hanger explode and believing it was sabotage, and seeing a Japanese plane drop the bomb on the Arizona. He talks about running to his battle station, being strafed and torpedoed, and the sinking of his ship. Langford, who could not swim, relates wading ashore and receiving orders to search the island and bring any Asian people to the Marines. He comments on reassignment to the U.S.S Astoria, crossing the International Date Line, and the role and sinking of his ship at Savo Island. Langford evaluates the naval strategies of World War II concentrating on the Pacific theater. He touches upon the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal. Langford mentions taking the entrance exam for Annapolis, being erroneously reported as dead, attending Annapolis, and being commissioned to the U.S.S Santa Fe. Langford mentions occupation duty, becoming a pilot at Pensacola (Florida), Korean War service flying PBMs, jet training at Odessa (Kansas), and experiences crash landing. He comments on taking courses at the War College, lecturing about naval defeats, and negotiating Naval base rights in Europe and North Africa.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Langford (1923-2000) served with the Navy in World War II and the Korean War. He was present at the attack on Pearl Harbor, and stationed on two boats that sank. After attending Annapolis, Langford eventually attained the rank of commander.

Interviewed by James F. McIntosh, M. D., Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2000

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2002

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

**Interview Transcript**

McIntosh: Okay. Do you prefer Jack to John?

Langford: Yes.

McIntosh: I wrote John. That is, I assume, your official name.

Langford: Yes.

McIntosh: Okay, I'll leave it, then. I won't change it. Okay. When were you born?

Langford: Thirteenth of February, 1923.

McIntosh: You're six months older than I am.

Langford: Is that right?

McIntosh: I was born in September.

Langford: I'll be damned.

McIntosh: And, born where?

Langford: North Platte, Nebraska.

McIntosh: And you entered military service?

Langford: 1941.

McIntosh: You went to the Academy?

Langford: Later.

McIntosh: Okay, later. 1941. Okay.

Langford: I was sworn in—

McIntosh: In the Navy?

Langford: Yea. 12th of February, 1941.

McIntosh: And you volunteered, U. S. Navy? Right?

Langford: Yes.

McIntosh: Volunteered, U. S. Navy.

Langford: Now, there is a reason for that 12th.

McIntosh: A reason?

Langford: A reason for it being the 12th of February.

McIntosh: Okay.

Langford: At the time I entered the Navy, the normal enlistments were six years. I didn't really want that much time obligated, because I didn't know what I was getting into. But I found out that if you enlisted before you were eighteen, you could get what they called a minority cruise and you were out when you were twenty-one years of age.

McIntosh: You were careful.

Langford: So I managed to make it. I got sworn in on the 12th, because the next day was my eighteenth birthday.

McIntosh: Right.

Langford: I just got in under the wire.

McIntosh: You forgot to check with the State Department so you wouldn't get in trouble. Right. Okay. So, and where did you train? Where was your basic at?

Langford: I went to Great Lakes.

McIntosh: And, how, what did they rate you? Into what field, there?

Langford: I just became a seaman.

McIntosh: Regular seaman. And then, from there?

Langford: Well, I was assigned to the USS Mississippi.

McIntosh: Right from Great Lakes?

Langford: Yes. When I left, I had to be assigned to a ship, to be sent.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. Okay.

Langford: But I had leave on the way.

McIntosh: Sure.

Langford: That's nine days, I think all it was.

McIntosh: First duty is USS Mississippi.

Langford: Well, no. My first assignment.

McIntosh: Oh, okay.

Langford: This gets kind of involved, so I'll just—

McIntosh: Just go ahead and I'll write down how it is working.

Langford: All right. So, I am sent to the west coast, for transportation out to Pearl Harbor, to go aboard the Mississippi. But, while I am there, and I was sent out on an oil tanker, the Kaskaskia. Things happening in the Atlantic, major circumstances, they transferred the one trio of battleships, the Mississippi, the New Mexico, and I've forgotten what other one, were transferred from the Pacific to the Atlantic. And here I am, going out. And, of course, they weren't going to send me around. So they changed my orders and I was assigned to the USS California, which was in the Pacific Fleet. And so that was my first real duty station.

McIntosh: That was a bad move.

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: The California. And you picked that up in Honolulu?

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Okay. Now, so you arrived what, about a month before the war started?

Langford: Oh, no, more than that.

McIntosh: About September?

Langford: Let's see. February, March. I think I got there in July, or something like that.

McIntosh: July?

Langford: I think so. So I was aboard the California for a fair period of time. We even came back to the United States for one short period of time, at Long Beach, for a week.

And then back to Pearl Harbor.

McIntosh: Now, before we leave everything, what was duty like in peacetime there, and aboard a ship, a Navy ship. I mean, I'm trying to determine how casual it was, or not.

Langford: Well, it was peacetime, of course. But it was also very rigorous. We'd be holy-stoning those wooden decks. We called it holy-stoning. Cleaning them all the time. And it was just a matter to keep us working. And, of course, we had our battle drills, the like. And they were vigorous, to say the least. But other than that, it was calm.

McIntosh: Food was good?

Langford: Food was good. The Navy fed well.

McIntosh: Always been my experience whenever I got Navy food, it was always good.

Langford: Yea. It was quite reasonable.

McIntosh: So, your plan there to put in three years, and that was going to be it?

Langford: Well, I didn't know.

McIntosh: Of course. Sounded like a good deal.

Langford: I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. Very honestly.

McIntosh: You were a young kid. So, big event?

Langford: Big event was December 7, of course.

McIntosh: What were you doing? With the fleet, on the California, or ashore?

Langford: No, I was on the California. My division, fire control division, had just rigged for church on the fantail of the ship. And then there was a slack period before Church Call. And the division boatswain's mate and I went up to the fo'c'sle to play a game of Acey-Ducey. I don't know whether you've ever run into that game or not. It's a lot like backgammon.

McIntosh: I've played it for an entire year aboard that hospital ship in Korea with my roommate. Every night.

Langford: Okay. Well, we were up on the fo'c'sle playing Acey-Ducey, Sunday morning, the 7th. And suddenly there is a big kawhoom! And the seaplane hanger over on Ford

Island just went boom, like that. Shattered all over hell. And Stacey, he had his back, I was facing that direction. Stacey had his back to it. He turned around, of course, with that noise, looking. Came back and looked to me and said, "You know, Jack, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that was sabotage." And I said, "I wouldn't either, Stacey. That could well be. It sure looks strange." And Stacey, he says, "Well, Acey-Ducey," and rolls the dice again. But about that time, this Japanese plane, maybe not the one that dropped that bomb, but it was pulling out of a dive and canted, and flew across the fo'c'sle of the California like that. And we saw those red balls on the wings and now we knew what was happening.

McIntosh: The whole world was changed after that.

Langford: Yea. So, we knew that the war was on, and we headed for our battle station. And we were there long before they sounded General Quarters, on the ship, to get us there.

McIntosh: He was all alone? That plane was alone, was not—

Langford: Oh, no. There were others.

McIntosh: The one that came close to you.

Langford: I didn't see any other near him. And I didn't run around looking for the planes. I headed for my battle station.

McIntosh: Right. What was your duty?

Langford: I was a range finder operator.

McIntosh: For the 20s, or the 40s?

Langford: For the sixteen inch guns.

McIntosh: Oh, the big ones?

Langford: For the big ones, yea.

McIntosh: Oh?

Langford: Pretty useless.

McIntosh: Yea. I was going to say, we didn't need those right at that moment.

Langford: We could have used them, and did, once, fire a main salvo, main battery. Salvo at the water to splash up ahead of torpedo bombers that were coming in.

McIntosh: Oh, very good. I hadn't thought of that.

Langford: Well, they had never thought about it, either. But it occurred to them, so they did it. And it was successful.

McIntosh: You did get off a couple of shots with that?

Langford: Oh, yea. But I had nothing to do with it.

McIntosh: I understand.

Langford: I was to be ranging on more or less stationary things like ships.

McIntosh: You must have been so excited you could hardly—

Langford: Yea, well. That was the situation. And, but we were being bombed, and strafed, and the California got hit by a couple of torpedoes.

McIntosh: Did you see those coming?

Langford: Well, they were all over the place. Yea.

McIntosh: If you weren't looking, you wouldn't see them, though.

Langford: I didn't see, particularly, the torpedoes coming at me.

McIntosh: I see.

Langford: The thing I was in was a sheltered, only tin-like metal, but it was— I was in this range finder casing and, but, being strafed, I could hear that, and hear pellets hitting around the bridge.

McIntosh: I was going to say, it offered you some protection.

Langford: Well, not much. And I was not injured, or anything. But there were two of us inside this little thing. It would have been no bigger than this. And a young seaman, just like I was. And he was the talker, as they called it. He had the earphones. I would find what the range was, and I would say that, and then he would transmit that information to the plotting room. And my talker got killed by machine gun bullets, sitting right next to me. So I was very lucky.

McIntosh: Oh, there was no protection at all in that shed.

Langford: No. Not really. No. It wasn't armored. It was just to keep the rain off you, that was



about it.

McIntosh: Gosh, Well, that was a shock. You suddenly turn and this guy is snapped.

Langford: Yea. Yea.

McIntosh: Was he killed right away, or — ?

Langford: Pretty much. He may have been unconscious for a moment before dying.

McIntosh: Right. So what did you do?

Langford: Things were happening so fast.

McIntosh: I know that. What did you do? Did you climb out and start yelling for someone to get him out, or...

Langford: No. I just—

McIntosh: You just sit there?

Langford: Well, I was at my battle station. That's where I was supposed to be.

McIntosh: That's right.

Langford: And even though they weren't using the main battery, I thought they ought to tell me what to do.

McIntosh: Well, you gave them the information, though.

Langford: Yes, I did.

McIntosh: That fifty percent of the team is not operating. What did they do? Did they send somebody down to get him?

Langford: No. Well, things were happening all over. The ship was being hit by bombs and torpedoes, and when one of those would hit you, there'd be a shake all over. And, of course, we sank. The California was...

McIntosh: The bombs, would you say several, eight, four, five, six? How many bombs do you recall?

Langford: I think, as I recall, it was three. Of the 500 big bombs, for that time. They were armor piercing. They went through the main deck and exploded inside the ship. And torpedoes, too, I believe.

McIntosh: The ship started to list, to one side, or the other? I know it never got under way.

Langford: No. In fact, it seemed to go straight down.

McIntosh: So, you are in a position that you had to get out of.

Langford: Well, word came, Abandon Ship.

McIntosh: And you left it. So, when you got off...

Langford: I obeyed that order very quickly.

McIntosh: When you got out of your little hut, there, what was the situation around you? I mean, was everyone, was the water up to the top deck yet?

Langford: No, no.

McIntosh: Did you know you were sinking?

Langford: Yes.

McIntosh: Right at that moment. You could tell.

Langford: I could tell.

McIntosh: It was settling down into the, of course, it settled in the mud. It never went completely under water, did it?

Langford: It did, but not, that is, the main deck went under water. The mast still remained above the water.

McIntosh: How far off the shore were you?

Langford: Well, not far. We were tied up to Quay 3, which is right off Ford Island.

McIntosh: You could walk off the ship onto that pier.

Langford: No, it wasn't a pier, it was a quay. And I couldn't swim. So I slid down the hawsers that tied us up to that particular quay, and got onto the quay, and then on the other end of it, there was a boat, boats going through there, picking people up out of the water. The Oklahoma that hadn't capsized. And I wasn't able to get aboard the boat, but I jumped into the water, trying to, and found that this water was shallow enough that I could just walk, wade through it.

McIntosh: How did you get through Great Lakes without having to swim?

Langford: Well, I wasn't supposed to.

McIntosh: When I went there, everybody had to swim.

Langford: Well, I wasn't supposed to.

McIntosh: Right. You got by with it.

Langford: I got by with it. Yea.

McIntosh: Because they were death on people not being able to swim.

Langford: That's right, Absolutely so.

McIntosh: I know one guy was not allowed, no liberty. He kept avoiding going to class, avoiding, and finally they said "You're here until you swim." They did not let him off the base.

Langford: When was this you went through?

McIntosh: In 1943.

Langford: Well, they were getting more strict, you see.

McIntosh: Yea, right.

Langford: This peacetime that I had, they probably didn't think that was it. Well, that's the answer to that question.

McIntosh: Okay, so you walked off. And then, of course, you didn't have any home.

Langford: No.

McIntosh: Did someone say, "We're going here," or did you have to figure something out for yourself?

Langford: We had to figure it out for ourselves. And, of course, with that walk through the water that I made, there was a lot of oil. So I was pretty well soaked up. And, at that time, the uniform of the day was shorts. And, but my skivvy shirt, my shorts, and my socks and shoes were soaked up with oil. And I got to the marine barracks over there, and this marine officer looks at me and he said, "You've got to get those clothes off." And I did. And he said, "You go down here. The lockers are open. Pick out some clothes and get them on." I did what I was told. There was a

marine corporal's uniform there and I came back. Because he had been telling me to do things, and I figured I had somebody to tell me what to do. And he did. He said, now, he gave me a .45 pistol.

McIntosh: Oh, my God.

Langford: And he said, "I want you to take these men." He had five other guys there, just like me, pulled out of the water, sailors. And they had marine uniforms on, too. And he said, "I want you to take these men, and go around Fort Island here, and any Asian you see, get him back and bring him back here." Now, what they were concerned about, of course, was an invasion. Nobody knew what the heck was going on that morning, at that time. But the only problem with that was, I did what I was told. But I must tell you, at that time, Hawaiians looked pretty Asian to me. And, of course, we had a lot of civilian laborers on the island. So I brought back quite a crew for him.

McIntosh: With them screaming and hollering about being brought back, I'm sure.

Langford: Well, no, they weren't. Because they didn't know what to do, either.

McIntosh: Total confusion, I'm sure.

Langford: Oh, absolutely.

McIntosh: So, you brought back your little group to the marine officer.

Langford: And by that time the attack was pretty well over. And now I don't remember a lot about what happened except that I stayed on the island and that night, three aircraft, I believe it was three, came in to land. They were off the carrier Enterprise. Somebody shot them. Didn't know for sure whether they were, and so we shot our own planes down. Nobody, I don't think there was any loss of life. I'm not sure.

McIntosh: I forget.

Langford: I'm not sure.

McIntosh: I know they shot three of them down.

Langford: Yea. And then the next day—

McIntosh: Don't leave the California, now. You must have taken a look to see what was going on there.

Langford: Oh, yea. Well, she was just under water.

McIntosh: That's right. That's what you saw. Just the top masts, and that was about it.

Langford: And, of course, looking elsewhere, the Oklahoma had been hit and had capsized.

McIntosh: It did. And the Nevada, that got under way.

Langford: The Nevada had gotten under way.

McIntosh: But it didn't get very far.

Langford: No. It didn't and, wisely, beached it.

McIntosh: Yea.

Langford: Because if they hadn't —

McIntosh: Well, there was no place to go, really, at that point.

Langford: I don't know, but if they had been sunk there right in the middle of the channel, Pearl Harbor would have been blocked for everything. Yea. So it was really good that they beached it. And then, of course, the Arizona had just blown apart.

McIntosh: Did you have any experience of that? Did you hear anything?

Langford: I guess I heard it, but I was not —

McIntosh: Just another noise.

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Well, how did you get back in the Navy? You had to go some place to bunk in

Langford: This is kind of hazy right now, very honestly.

McIntosh: Right.

Langford: I do recall, though, the next day I found myself on a working party, and in the group with me was the guy Jimmy Fluter, from North Platte, who had been on the Oklahoma, and it was good to see him. And we went into Honolulu and picked up a bunch of foodstuffs, cases of vegetables and whatever, and put them on a truck and brought them back to Pearl Harbor. We were just hands to load and take care of. And did that. Then, within a couple of days, I was assigned to the USS Astoria, a heavy cruiser. And went aboard there. And was in the F Division, fire control, again. You know, by fire control, in the Navy, doesn't mean fighting fires, but

controlling gunfire. Of course, you have been there. Somebody just listening to this may not. So I went aboard the Astoria, and before very long I found myself heading westward with the Saratoga, and some other ships. Now, I don't recall.

McIntosh: You were part of the convoy that was protecting the carrier Saratoga.

Langford: And we were heading west, and my understanding was, word that went through the ship, was that we were heading out to relieve Wake. Wake had not been captured yet. Philippines had. Guam had. But Wake was still holding out.

McIntosh: Not much longer.

Langford: No. And we were on our way out there. The very first time I crossed the International Date Line was on that particular venture. We jumped into Christmas, by crossing the International Date Line. And the ship celebrated Christmas with a big dinner and, you know, music and stuff over the— But we got that far and our orders were to return to Pearl Harbor. Wake had fallen. So we turned around and went back. And I jumped back into Christmas, crossing the International Date Line again. It is now Christmas on that side. So we had another dinner. That was really ridiculous. This is war time.

McIntosh: I know it.

Langford: But we did it. And then we returned to Pearl Harbor, and on the way in, a Japanese submarine put a torpedo into the Saratoga. And she was severely damaged. She wasn't sunk but she was severely damaged.

McIntosh: I had forgotten that.

Langford: And she was returned to Bremerton, Washington, to be fixed up. So that took the Saratoga out of commission, for the rest of my time in the war.

McIntosh: Did you see that? The Saratoga get hit?

Langford: Yes. Yes, I did.

McIntosh: How did, tell me about that experience. Were you on deck when that happened?

Langford: Well, yes. I was up in the forward director of the anti-aircraft battery system. And General Quarters was sounded on the ship because of this submarine.

McIntosh: Had been picked up on sonar.

Langford: Yes. And destroyers were heading for, as near as I could tell, where they thought it was. And I did not see the torpedo coming, really. But I heard, and I saw, the

explosion on the Saratoga.

McIntosh: That must have been impressive.

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: I suppose everybody wondered if it was going to go down.

Langford: Yea. I wondered, but she just kept on going.

McIntosh: Well, it was a big ship.

Langford: Yea. And only one. She got the one hit, and only one. And apparently it didn't hit the screws, or anything like that. Just internal damage, but it was enough that she had to be sent back for repairs.

McIntosh: Back to Bremerton.

Langford: Un-huh. And then I found myself in Task Force 17, which was the—

McIntosh: They took you off the Astoria?

Langford: No, I was on the Astoria. But now I was with the Yorktown, the carrier Yorktown. The Astoria was part of that group. It was Task Force 17, by designation. And we were sent around to various places to, well, I don't know exactly what they were doing, but the aircraft might overfly, or see what was going on at one of the places the Japanese were overrunning. But, you should see, this is something that people don't quite seem to understand. But, at that time, the Japanese were the masters of the western Pacific. There was no question about it.

McIntosh: Right.

Langford: All we could do was agitate them, at best. That is the best we could do. And just to digress here a little bit, not only the western Pacific, but the Indian Ocean, as well. But, fortunately for us, Japan and Germany did not have a unified strategy. They were each doing their own thing. And so the U. S. was able to send the ships to the Indian Ocean with all these supplies for Russia, undamaged. Never torpedoed, or anything. Or surface ships. No intervention of any kind by the Japanese in the Indian Ocean, and the Germans didn't get that far away from their homeland, because their navy was, their navy surface forces and their submarine forces were in the Atlantic. That was the area they found to be very important. Incidentally, in my studies, I came across something that I thought was pretty, it intrigued me. The German navy was never fully prepared for World War II. Hitler, of course, had taken control and their military and he had his plans. They invaded Poland, and England and France had declared war on Germany. And English sea

power had dominated the European continent for generations, you know. And the German naval forces were building, and they had quite significant building projects under way. But nowhere near completion. I thought their chief of naval operations, Admiral Doenitz, I think it was—

McIntosh: Quite a mariner.

Langford: Yes. But when war was declared, he told his immediate subordinates an interesting thing. He said to them, “We can do no more than show that we know how to die gallantly.” That’s a hell of a way to start a war. But, you know, that is exactly what they did. The German navy just got decimated.

McIntosh: Well, the submarines, seventy-five percent went down.

Langford: Yea. Of course, they took a hell of a toll on our merchant ships. And then, of course, the Bismark. So, yea, they did die gallantly, I’ll say. Well, I digressed there a little bit. Yea, and so, at that time, there wasn’t a heck of a lot that we were doing. And then, we were down in the South Pacific, I am with Task Force 17, and the Lexington, also. And the Coral Sea battle took place. And I guess that was the very first time that we had a big battle where only the aircraft participated in it.

McIntosh: It was famous for that. It was a tactical loss and a strategic victory for the United States. They were heading for Port Moresby. Then, after that battle, they turned tail and went back home. But, of cost us plenty, because we didn’t have a lot.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

Langford: We didn’t, and we lost the Lexington.

McIntosh: Right, and damaged the other one. The other carrier, besides that.

Langford: Yea. And the Forrestal.

McIntosh: No, not the Forrestal.

Langford: The Yorktown. It took a hit, a near miss. It was damaging to it. And the Astoria got a near miss, too.

McIntosh: Oh, you did?

Langford: It wasn’t significant, in our case.

McIntosh: So, you got to do some shooting, now.

Langford: Oh, yes. Yes. We shot at aircraft.



McIntosh: Now, what kind of a, on the Astoria, you were shooting what, six inch guns?

Langford: Well, we had eight inch main battery, but we had five inch anti-aircraft, and 20 millimeter.

McIntosh: What did you shoot?

Langford: I was in the directory for the five inch. Yes, and we fired against them. We think we got some.

McIntosh: Oh, very good. The Japanese lost a lot of airplanes in that Coral Sea battle.

Langford: Oh, yea, they did.

McIntosh: Did your ship help the survivors from the Lexington? Or, the Yorktown, I mean.

Langford: No, the Lexington was the one that was sunk.

McIntosh: And you picked up some of them?

Langford: Quite a few. And it was, I remember this very well, here I am reaching down, picking people out of the water by hand and lifting them onto the ship, and I am finding old shipmates from the California coming aboard with me, who I had known on the California. But we had gone different directions, different ways.

McIntosh: Talk about irony.

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: I couldn't believe it.

Langford: Hi, Charlie. How the hell you been? What have you been doing? Weird. Weird.

McIntosh: For goodness sake. That is really unusual.

Langford: Well, then after the battle of the Coral Sea, we returned immediately to Pearl Harbor, and, of course, at that time, everything that was going on, I was just a seaman, striker for firecontrollman. And, but, I knew the Yorktown had been damaged, and we were just tied up. We didn't go into dry dock, ourself, or anything else. The Yorktown did very quickly. And I thought, well, we'll be here two or three weeks. But I think we were there three days.

McIntosh: [Unintelligible.]

Langford: And they did what they could for the Yorktown. They got it out of there. And then the word came that we were off to have a big battle with the Japanese.

McIntosh: Right. That was in June? Right.

Langford: And now, let me tell you some more things that I didn't know then. All right. If that is okay with you.

McIntosh: Whatever you like.

Langford: Let me get my, of course, we were heading out now with the Yorktown. And Midway was where the Japanese were going to attack, but we didn't know that. But they had broken —

McIntosh: But we did know it.

Langford: Well, we knew they were going to attack someplace, but we didn't think it was going to be Honolulu or Pear Harbor, because —

McIntosh: No, no.

Langford: Because by now we were too well fortified. But it made sense, maybe, at Midway because the size of the fleet that they were bringing, but it also could have been the Aleutians, you know.

McIntosh: Well, they also did attack the Aleutians at the same time.

Langford: We thought that might be the main —

McIntosh: Joe Rochefort, he is the guy that solved that problem.

Langford: Who?

McIntosh: Joe Rochefort. He is the guy that broke the code. He suckered them into giving away Midway as their objective.

Langford: Yes, you know this?

McIntosh: Very well.

Langford: And you know how they did it?

McIntosh: Yes, I know exactly how they did it.

Langford: I thought that was clever.

McIntosh: Saved our ass, is what it did.

Langford: We knew they were going to attack, and we knew their target designation. We didn't know what the hell that designation meant.

McIntosh: Well, we found out. In a very clever way.

Langford: They're having trouble with their drinking water.

McIntosh: Yea. So, tell me how your ship handled all this.

Langford: Well, of course, again, the air attacks were severe.

McIntosh: You were escorting the —

Langford: Yorktown.

McIntosh: Yorktown.

Langford: Yes.

McIntosh: Okay. The hastily repaired Yorktown.

Langford: Yes. The Enterprise and Hornet were up on the northern, and we were further south. We were trying to get —

McIntosh: There were two units.

Langford: Yea. And we only had the one carrier. They had two carriers up there. Well, of course, I didn't know what was happening up there but down where we were, the planes came and they attacked, and we shot back at them. And downed some. And, of course, they took the Yorktown. She was lost there.

McIntosh: But everybody got off.

Langford: Yes. It wasn't, well, not everybody.

McIntosh: It wasn't sunk until the next day, you know.

Langford: No, it wasn't. They abandoned ship. They had lost the flag but it wasn't because of drowning or going down with the ship. Admiral Fletcher, was it? I'm not sure, transferred his flag to the Astoria, so he came aboard.

McIntosh: Oh, did he? You were in the big time now.

- Langford: But, going back to Pearl Harbor, the word, you know, it just kind of filtered down from the bridge and through the ship, about we had had a major victory. And, of course, our weakness was that we had lost the Yorktown, so we weren't so damned sure we had had a great major victory.
- McIntosh: Was the Astoria wounded?
- Langford: No, it wasn't. Well, no. Might have had a machine gun strafing somewhere but no loss of life that I know of.
- McIntosh: At any time, were you having trouble with water or food supplies during the battle, I guess? During those times there. Was that ever a problem?
- Langford: It might have been. I'm trying now to remember.
- McIntosh: It must not have been severe because you don't remember it.
- Langford: Well, maybe it was before the Coral Sea battle, but there was one time there when we were at sea a long period of time and we got re-fueled. Of course, we had to be re-fueled at sea. But we weren't replenished, and so we, during this one time, we spent a hundred and five days without even seeing land, let alone tying up anywhere. And we had one replenishment, but that was it. And this is not enough for a hundred and five days.
- McIntosh: How many men did the Astoria have?
- Langford: Around twelve hundred.
- McIntosh: Twelve hundred at that time. It was a heavy cruiser?
- Langford: Yea. And I do remember that, it got pretty low, and part of what we were eating were candy bars out of the — And, so.
- McIntosh: So you went back to Pearl Harbor after Midway?
- Langford: Yea. Not too long, and then we found ourselves going south.
- McIntosh: How long do you recall you were back in Pearl Harbor? A month or so?
- Langford: I don't think, feel it was that long.
- McIntosh: I see.

- Langford: But it was more than just a three days, at that time. It didn't mean a hell of a lot how long.
- McIntosh: I understand. So, now we are into fall of 1942?
- Langford: Yep. And, the early fall. I recall we, the Astoria and, did we have a carrier? If we did, I don't know what the hell it might have been. Maybe it was the Hornet. I'm not sure. But we went to the, I believe it is the Friendly Islands, New Korlufa (??) and stopped there for a day or two, and we had liberty there. And then when we —
- McIntosh: Had your rating improved by this time?
- Langford: I was now a seaman first class.
- McIntosh: Very good.
- Langford: And had taken, well, at about this time I had also taken the competitive exam for Annapolis.
- McIntosh: How was that offered to you? Just an announcement aboard ship, "Anyone interested in —"
- Langford: As I recall, my Ensign Frye, Ted Frye, and there were several division officers in there, and he was one of the junior division officers. And a very young officer, because he had just graduated from Annapolis himself, and he advised me that this exam was being sent throughout the fleet, and he had it. Everybody on the ship was eligible, but you had to be of an age when you would be under twenty-one to enter the Naval Academy, in June, of '43. And you had to have a year of sea duty.
- McIntosh: Before?
- Langford: Yea.
- McIntosh: Hey.
- Langford: And there weren't many like that.
- McIntosh: No, but that was you, almost.
- Langford: Yea. So, he said, "You should take the exam, Jack. It was competitive. There will only be a very limited number that the Navy will appoint but you have a chance."
- McIntosh: Didn't need a Senator or a Congressman. It wasn't part of their —

Langford: No.

McIntosh: Okay.

Langford: It later became a part.

McIntosh: Right.

Langford: So I took the exam and never thought no more of it. I didn't know who I did, good, bad, or indifferent. But part of it was chemistry, and I was not a great student of chemistry when I was in high school. And so, it didn't even bother me. And then, now, from there we were joined by other forces at Korlufa (??) and now the word is that we are going to invade Guadalcanal. And, of course, this was the first offensive that the Navy got into.

McIntosh: That was in August, of '42.

Langford: August the 7th, I believe. And we laid down the bombardment for the marines and they went ashore. And we had air attacks, Japanese Bettys, I think they were that bombed us. And, of course, we fired back at them and we knocked some down, but then the Astoria didn't seem to be the main target. We had some bombs that came in our direction but I think they were aimed mostly at the troop ships.

McIntosh: Sure.

Langford: And supply ships that were unloading. That was their— Then, on the night of August 9th, I'm in my bunk. We had been in General Quarters for almost a whole damned day, and I was in the Turret 2 for General Quarters. I was [coughing] My job, battle position on the Astoria was in Turret 2, I had the big twenty-three base range finder, and I was the range finder operator. It was a stereoscopic thing, and, but, and that is where I was during the bombardment. But then we went to Condition 2, where half were on battle stations and half were resting. And I was, happened to be, off. So I went down in my bunk. You know, it had been a long time. And around two o'clock in the morning, a shell went through the compartment, just like that. Came in one side and went out the other.

McIntosh: Your compartment?

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Jesus Christ!

Langford: Yea. Let me tell you.

McIntosh: That was within inches of you.

Langford: Well, it wasn't too far.

McIntosh: A couple of feet?

Langford: Yea. A couple of feet. And that is not good for your rest. You know.

McIntosh: Did you know exactly what had happened? In an instant?

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Jesus.

Langford: Well, yea, somebody's shell was right in to it.

McIntosh: But it went in and out?

Langford: Yea. An armor-piercing shell, and in that case —

McIntosh: But it didn't explode, fortunately?

Langford: No.

McIntosh: Did it explode eventually on the ship?

Langford: No. Went out the other side.

McIntosh: Just holed it.

Langford: My bunk was in the forward portion, where the ship was pretty thin.

McIntosh: Jesus Christ!

Langford: Well, so I got to my battle station and everybody else did to. There was pandemonium. And I get to my battle station, and we train this turret out towards the things that were firing at us.

McIntosh: What was that? Where had it come from, shore?

Langford: No. A bunch of Japanese cruisers and destroyers had come in. And they really smacked us. I found myself, I took the first bearings that I got on this, I presume, cruiser, 4000 yards. Now, 4000 yards with naval gunfire is like being in the same room with you.

- McIntosh: Yes. I appreciate that.
- Langford: And with that big magnification, I was looking right down the barrel of their damned guns, you know. It was very frightening. Yikes. Well, the Astoria was sunk.
- McIntosh: Wait a minute, didn't you shoot that thing?
- Langford: Oh, yea.
- McIntosh: Did you hit the Japanese ship?
- Langford: Well, I didn't see anything get hit. But, afterwards, the word was that there were a couple of their cruisers that were damaged. We didn't sink any of them.
- McIntosh: Well, hopefully, one of your did it.
- Langford: Yea.
- McIntosh: Then you got sunk?
- Langford: Oh, yes. The Astoria —
- McIntosh: By a torpedo, or cruiser fire did it?
- Langford: Both. Mainly, gunfire. But we lost not only the Astoria, we lost the Quincy, her sister ship, the Vincennes, the Australian cruiser, the Canberra, and the American cruiser, Chicago, was severely damaged. And this has been called the first battle of Savo Island. And it was —
- McIntosh: Someone said that the admirals should not have, they were running their cruisers in a straight line, and were inviting this type of attack. I read that.
- Langford: Well, we were kind of making an oval-like pattern. We were protecting the ships that were unloading, you see. We were there to be a barrier against those, anybody that would come to harm the troopships. And, but the problem was, basically, that there was a major blow-up of communications. We had no warning that any ships were even approaching.
- McIntosh: Were you attacked by a submarine, do you think, or land?
- Langford: Surface ships. Surface ships. You bet. They had, as I recall, they said they had eight cruisers and seven destroyers that came in to hit us. And they did a good job. They sank all of us.



- McIntosh: Tell me about that. You were in the gun, firing, and then some, suddenly, what happened?
- Langford: Well, word comes, the firing against us ceases and —  
McIntosh: But you could tell when the ship got hit, with the damaging blow —
- Langford: Well, I knew we had been harmed. I didn't know how bad we had been hit. And then the word comes [break in the recording] now. Looking around, the ship was on fire. It was a mess.
- McIntosh: A lot of people killed?
- Langford: Yes. Yes. A lot, it turned out. A lot of people down below just never got out. A lot of people killed. Turret 1 caught a salvo of three shells that went right through the front and exploded inside, and wiped out everybody in Turret 1. But I don't know this until we get out of there, of the turret.
- McIntosh: So, did the ship go down pretty fast?
- Langford: It turned out it didn't, but we thought it was.
- McIntosh: So everybody was over the side well before —
- Langford: Well, not me. I couldn't swim, remember. Didn't I tell you that?
- McIntosh: Ah, we didn't solve that problem, did we?
- Langford: No, we didn't. We haven't yet. Shouldn't have a life preserver. But I was so lucky.
- McIntosh: I was going to say, there was no place to walk where you were now.
- Langford: No, I can't walk this one.
- McIntosh: No.
- Langford: No. But we were burning amidships, so those of us who were survivors were either on the fantail, by Turret 3, or a little bit forward, by Turret 2. And the destroyer Bagley came alongside and was taking survivors off.
- McIntosh: There you go.
- Langford: Now, this is kind of interesting. I find it interesting. The Astoria, after all, was a heavy cruiser, an apparently good-sized ship. The Bagley was a destroyer, and a rather small ship.

McIntosh: Yea, about half the size.

Langford: Yes. But, by this time, we were sinking fast enough, had sunk enough on the Astoria that I had to step up onto the Bagley.

McIntosh: Lucked out again.

Langford: Yes, I did. No question about it. Just God's luck, and nothing else.

McIntosh: Right. Fantastic story.

Langford: So, that was the end of that. And I went --

McIntosh: So they put you on a destroyer that was overweighted with people.

Langford: Yes. I was transferred from there to some other ship. I don't know what it was.

McIntosh: In that area? The Bagley didn't go anywhere?

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: I mean, did they return to Pearl?

Langford: Well, they may have but they didn't return me to Pearl. Those survivors were put aboard another ship that was at, seems to me it was Tahiti, or Pango Pango. And went aboard, it wasn't a troop ship but similar to it, I guess it would be. And anyway ultimately worked my way, going ship to ship, as a passenger, to Pearl Harbor. And there, later, was a bunch of us, the survivors of the Savo Island. Brought us back to the United States and I was given survivor's leave, which I didn't have at Pearl Harbor.

McIntosh: Did it occur to you at that time that you were attracting trouble?

Langford: Um-huh.

McIntosh: Because wherever you went, something was getting sunk.

Langford: Yes. Having been present at Pearl Harbor, and the first battle of Savo Island, I have a unique status. I have been present at the two worst defeats the U. S. Navy has ever suffered.

McIntosh: That's right. So, how did the leave go at home?

Langford: Gosh. I forgot to tell you. I was erroneously reported killed.

McIntosh: Oh, my God! Did you know that?

Langford: Not for some time.

McIntosh: Okay.

Langford: My parents received a telegram on the 16th of December. It wasn't any, no misunderstanding of any kind could exist. It named me by name and said I'd been killed in action at sea while engaging the enemy, and if my body is recovered, it will be returned to Pearl Harbor for the duration of the war, and then to my family after.

McIntosh: And this was right after Pearl Harbor?

Langford: Yes, yes. 16th of December.

McIntosh: 16th of December. Well, that's pretty quick.

Langford: I later got to read that telegram, and, incidentally, I didn't know at the time, but later when I read it, I wondered who signed it. It was C. W. Nimitz, who, at that time, was the head of the Bureau of Navigation.

McIntosh: I was going to say, he wasn't out at Pearl Harbor.

Langford: No, no. But, then, well, my dad—

McIntosh: But, wait a minute, when you got back home, you didn't know this. And so the minute you got ashore, you picked up the phone and started calling home, and then everybody fell in a dead faint at home?

Langford: No, no.

McIntosh: It didn't occur that way?

Langford: I wrote a letter. Lots of letters, from the Astoria, to my parents. And they got one in January.

McIntosh: So they knew something.

Langford: And it had been dated the 15th of December.

McIntosh: So, It still could have —

Langford: Well, my dad got thinking about that, and he said, there is no way that I could

write this letter, mail it, and my ship get in some sort of an action and get killed, and the Navy find out about it and advise them within twenty-four hours. It just, things just didn't happen that fast in those days.

McIntosh: So he suspected it for what it was.

Langford: Yea, he suspected that something was wrong. And he got ahold of Congressman Coffey, I believe it was, from Nebraska, and the Navy gave them a telegram saying that, it they had heard from me since December 7, it must have been an error and I am alive and well. Well, I get this in the mail from them, in that they sent me all the articles in the paper that I had been killed and from my memorial service. You know, weird.

McIntosh: The statue was already up?

Langford: Yea, pretty much. Including nice comments from my high school principal about what a fine young man I was.

McIntosh: Outstanding student. Wonderful man. You don't recall that at the time?

Langford: This is the guy I went to talk to once a month, once a week.

McIntosh: Right. There was trouble here.

Langford: Well, what reminded me of this, of course, then, I get survivor's leave, and I come home and while I am there, I think it was a long leave. I think I had two weeks at home. And see my family, and mention to my dad that I had taken this test to go to Annapolis, and so forth. And then I go back to Terminal Island, in San Francisco, and they send me across to United States, to Philadelphia. And I was assigned there, they put the heavy cruiser, Santa Fe, in commission.

McIntosh: That was a new one, that had not been at sea.

Langford: No. And then while aboard, I was only aboard there a few days, it seemed. Well, maybe a week or two. I get a letter from my dad, wants to know if I am still interested in going to the naval academy. And he says that he happened to mention to Skip Neville, who was a fellow North Platte citizen, who was an ex-governor of the state of Nebraska, and was well known in political circles. And Skip helped coach the high school football team. So I knew him. And then he also hunted with my grandfather, and I would be in the party with him often, so he knew me, and knew me pretty well. And so, dad thought, sure, if I wanted to go, Skip would find a spot for me. So, that was that. I said, sure. It wasn't long after that I was called up to the bridge. They said, "We have orders to send you to Naval Academy Preparatory School, in Norfolk, Virginia. And they were drafting up the orders. They were brought up there to the bridge to be told this, you know,

before they — they were kind of surprised. So was I.

McIntosh: Was there any of the trade school boys on your ship, then, who knew about Annapolis?

Langford: I am sure there were but I was just a newcomer. I didn't really know anybody, yet.

McIntosh: I thought they might chat with you, to tell you that they went through the school, too. But, no?

Langford: But another thing about that that was interesting, this Congressman tried to appoint me. He had his secretary call the Bureau of Navigation, later it would become the Bureau of Personnel. And tell them what he wanted to do, and my name, and where I was from, and so forth. And they said they'd do what was required, because they had others. But then this Congressman got a call back from the Navy. They wanted to know about this guy. They said, "We're trying to appoint him, too. Where is he?" Can you imagine that?

McIntosh: No. I mean, sure. They always had things screwed up.

Langford: Well, of course, they probably hadn't written orders to me on the USS Astoria, and now, somebody had them. Where did I put them? You know. So, I never saw those orders. But my appointment to Annapolis was by the Navy, not by Congress. So he had to find somebody else.

McIntosh: So, when did you start?

Langford: I went to the Naval Academy Prep School there in Norfolk, Virginia.

McIntosh: Yea, how long did that last?

Langford: Oh, I got there, seems to me to be in February, something like that.

McIntosh: Of '43?

Langford: Yes.

McIntosh: Was this standard routine? To go to the Prep School? Before you start Annapolis?

Langford: Well, you went to the Prep School to prepare for the test. You had to take the examination.

McIntosh: Oh, you weren't in yet? Got it. Okay.

Langford: And so that is what it is. I went there and I barely passed. You know, I hadn't even graduated.

McIntosh: Was it six weeks, the course? How long? Couple months?

Langford: Well, the course had been going on longer than that. I was a late addition. But they did a good job, I think, because they had all the previous tests that they could get their hands on. And so they did the best to prepare us.

McIntosh: The rest of the boys who were preparing, were they mostly civilians, or mostly Navy?

Langford: They were Navy. There was nobody else there for that., except Navy. But I later found out, when I entered the Navy, that most of the people who were there had already had a couple of years of college.

McIntosh: Oh, sure.

Langford: And this was war time, of course.

McIntosh: Right.

Langford: So, if they had political connections, they got an appointment to Annapolis. Or West Point. Or someplace.

McIntosh: Right.

Langford: And I don't look down on them for that. That's—

McIntosh: But, War. Everything happens different.

Langford: But, it made it tough for me, because the system of grading there was purely competitive. In any subject. If you had, say, math, you had a number of problems to do, the one who did the most correctly got the A and the ones who were lower than that got lower grades, and when you are competing against guys who have had a couple of years of college, and you haven't had a day of it, you got problems. You know? But I managed to survive through it, got my commission.

**[End of Side B of Tape 1.]**

McIntosh: Was your experience at Annapolis okay? Very good? How would you say? Some of both?

Langford: Well, in some ways, since I had already been out and had my taste of battle, and the rest of it —

McIntosh: That is what I was, leave.

Langford: Some of the stuff —

McIntosh: Seemed pretty tacky-tacky, didn't it?

Langford: Yea, you know. That I couldn't go out in town. We were not allowed to ride in automobiles.

McIntosh: Got sunk twice, and I can't even —

Langford: That boiled me a little bit, but not much. You know. What the hell. I knew why I was there and I knew why the rules were like they were. They were trying to teach us something, discipline and the logic.

McIntosh: You must have been the oldest guy in the class.

Langford: Well, I was one of the oldest.

McIntosh: Sure. You were the only one who had been at sea, I'll bet.

Langford: Oh, there were others who came in with me from the Navy.

McIntosh: Oh, who had been at sea?

Langford: Oh, yea.

McIntosh: But I'm sure they hadn't been sunk twice.

Langford: Oh, no, no.

McIntosh: So, you had better stories to tell than any of them.

Langford: Um-huh. In fact, when I got to Annapolis, one of the first classmen I got to know, and he found out I was on the Astoria. So he spread the word that he would like to talk to me. You know. The way things were then, when you are a plebe at Annapolis, when a first classman wants anything, it's yes, sir, whatever you want. So, I went to see him. And he wanted to talk to me, because his dad had been the navigator on the Astoria, and was killed [unintelligible].

McIntosh: Oh, boy. Did you know him?

Langford: No. I knew the name, that's all.

McIntosh: So, you got through the four years there. Did it in three?

Langford: Um-huh.

McIntosh: I went to medical school that way. Four years, then three. In fact, boring continually. I never stopped. The day I started, it was continual school. In three years and one month, I did four years. But that was about it. Everybody did that in those days. They pushed the education process up for everybody.

Langford: And I got through there. And got married the day I graduated.

McIntosh: Did you ever know a guy named Emil Roth, R-o-t-h, at the academy? Probably not. He was somebody I knew who went through there.

Voice: Can you tell me many minutes, or how much longer you want?

Langford: I haven't the vaguest notion, but it shouldn't be too much longer.

Voice: I'll just check.

McIntosh: You can come in and listen, if you like.

Voice: I'll stay down stairs.

McIntosh: You don't have to. You can do whatever you want.

Voice: I have got a stick parking outside.

McIntosh: Oh, you didn't go in the ramp?

Voice: No, I didn't.

McIntosh: Oh.

Voice: I'm okay. I'll just see you downstairs when you are done.

McIntosh: Oh, all right. So—

Langford: The name sounds familiar, but I—

McIntosh: Yea. He was from Wisconsin. Somebody I knew.

Langford: And he was at Anapolis at this time?

McIntosh: He was during the war, but I don't know exactly when.



Langford: When then it probably isn't —

McIntosh: Well, anyway, after Anapolis, what was your next duty station?

Langford: I was assigned to the USS Chicago, with the occupation forces in Japan.

McIntosh: You just can't get away from those cruisers, can you?

Langford: No. Occupation forces in Japan. And then CIC School, at San Diego. And then to the carrier Biroko which was a converted carrier.

McIntosh: An aircraft carrier?

Langford: Yea. I was the assistant navigator. Then, from there, I had spent enough time, two years, since my commissioning, that I could apply for flight training. So I did. And I was assigned to Pensacola. Went there. Got my wings.

McIntosh: Flying what?

Langford: Well, there, it was just the basic training, but from there I went to Corpus Christi, Texas. Seaplanes.

McIntosh: PBYs?

Langford: No. PBMs.

McIntosh: PBMs. Okay. Oh, yea. A little bigger.

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Four engine.

Langford: No, it was only two engines, but they were a bigger aircraft.

McIntosh: I'm trying to visualize the difference between a PBY and a PBM.

Langford: Mostly body size.

McIntosh: Okay.

Langford: So, then I was assigned to VP-46, out there in San Diego. And my squadron deploys in June, and that happened to be at the time the Korean War broke out. So we got out there just in time for the Korean War.

McIntosh: How many, what was your crew in that PBM?

Langford: Well, there were usually three officers. Three flight officers. Pilot, co-pilot, and navigator. But we didn't have navigators, as such. The navigator would be one of the junior pilots. And they worked their way up to the patrol plane commander, which I ultimately did, of course.

McIntosh: Easy to fly?

Langford: When the water is calm, yea. Not too tough. But they're not heavy, they're not fast.

McIntosh: No. Hundred and twenty-five miles an hour?

Langford: That's about it.

McIntosh: And your duty was, specific ally that aircraft was designed to do what?

Langford: Well, it was designed for anti-submarine patrol. But during the Korean War, we were used for electronic work, or intelligence.

McIntosh: Oh.

Langford: And we had a bunch of equipment loaded aboard, and we had a bunch of technicians, and we'd go around the China coast, mostly, and listen. Picked up radar signals.

McIntosh: So you were just a cab driver?

Langford: Yea, for those guys. That's right.

McIntosh: How did you get that aircraft over to Korea? Did you fly it over?

Langford: The what?

McIntosh: The PBM. Did you fly it over?

Langford: Yes, indeed.

McIntosh: It could go distances? It went from the mainland to Hawaii, and Hawaii to Johnson, and Johnson to Kwajalein? That is the way I went over. Kwajalein to Guam, and Guam to Okinawa, and Okinawa to Iwakuni, in Japan. Right, I did that.

Langford: Oh, you've done that bit, huh?

McIntosh: I did that. In a four engine land plant, though. MATS. [Military Air Transport Service] You know. DC-6.

Langford: But, that is the way that went. Then I went to, well, that was the end of my combat action.

McIntosh: You were there in Korea how long? A year?

Langford: I made two trips. Two deployments. And then I was transferred to the staff of the Commander, Air Force Pacific Fleet. I was a multi-engine training officer there. Then I was transferred to Illinois, Glenview, Illinois, where I was assigned to the Naval Aviation Promotion. And NavCad [Naval Aviation Cadet] Recruiting. With the staff of the Chief of Naval Air Reserve Training, Admiral Dan Gallery (??).

McIntosh: You finished your career there?

Langford: No, good heavens, no. So, then, from there, I was assigned to Heavy Attack Squadron 5, in Sanford, Florida, and made deployments to the Mediterranean on the carrier Forrestal.

McIntosh: As a flyer or as a —

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Flying what?

Langford: A3Ds. Sky-Warrior. Swept wing jets. It was quite a transition.

McIntosh: I was going to say. You didn't talk about, you can't just jump into that jet without some training.

Langford: I went to Odessa, Kansas, for the jet transitional training.

McIntosh: How was that?

Langford: Tough. Here I was flying these little old things.

McIntosh: From a puddle-jumper to a hot aircraft.

Langford: They put me there, and they put me in the F9F, a fighter.

McIntosh: Christ!

Langford: That was my transition to jets.

McIntosh: Jesus Christ.

Langford: But, you know, if you fly, you fly. It doesn't make a difference.

McIntosh: Just a matter of adjusting distances and space.

Langford: Speed. You don't stay airborne too long in a jet.

McIntosh: No, they don't have the capacity. You could probably stay twelve hours in that PBM.

Langford: Sixteen.

McIntosh: That could hold enough gas that it would fly sixteen hours? Incredible.

Langford: Fully loaded. And if you were carefully monitoring, you could make sixteen hours. Then you were dead.

McIntosh: Did you ever have to land on water in that with that, where you didn't planned?

Langford: During Korea, I did.

McIntosh: What? What happened? You had engine failure?

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Nobody shot you up there? Where you were?

Langford: Been shot at. But that wasn't what caused it. No, this time the port engine quit. Well, oil ceased to go in and she was going to cease, and so I feathered it. And with all this damned equipment aboard, and extra people, only one engine. I didn't have enough fuel, though, because we had gone through a good portion of our mission. Didn't have enough fuel to go back down around south of Korea, and up that way, to Iwakuni, in Japan, where the base was. And I was too low to fly up over the mountains of Korea, and go direct to Japan. So I had to do something.

McIntosh: Your options are thinning out.

Langford: So, I got south of the bomb line and landed in the Kunsan (??) River.

McIntosh: I'm not sure exactly where that is. What was that near?

Langford: King 8. I don't know whether that helps you or not. That was just the designation

that the Air Force had for their positions.

McIntosh: I see.

Langford: I landed there.

McIntosh: Where, from Seoul?

Langford: South.

McIntosh: So you landed inland, at an inland river.

Langford: Yea.

McIntosh: Well, the waves are not so bad there.

Langford: No, no.

McIntosh: That should have been fairly easy, then.

Langford: It was. But, that ended my seaplane career. Well, I mean, I flew the plane back when my squadron returned. I don't mean that I ceased flying seaplanes, or anything. But I did have to pitch that one in the Kunsan (??) River, and they never got it out. They got it up and pulled —

McIntosh: They got the equipment out.

Langford: Yea, but we had to jettison quite a bit of stuff. And they had to remount the engine. And, near as I know, they never went through the process to get it done, and get it back out of the river, and fly it out of there. Nobody designed them for that. They probably did, but I was done with it.

McIntosh: Right.

Langford: As I say, I went to —

McIntosh: Flying a what, an A3?

Langford: A3. yea. And I had the unique circumstance of having, I think this is still true, at that time it was the truth, the only person who had ever successfully crash-landed an A3 jet. But —

McIntosh: Why was that so difficult?

- Langford: Well, because the jets don't stand up very well if they're not on the runway.
- McIntosh: I see.
- Langford: You know, when you try to land someplace else, because they —
- McIntosh: They just weren't equipped or weren't built for that at all?
- Langford: I was very fortunate. But I had launched off the Forrestal, down near Barcelona, going up to London for some radar bomb scoring with my crew, which we did.
- McIntosh: Carried a crew of two men?
- Langford: Two men besides me. And then heading back to the Mediterranean, my port engine just quit. Hadn't any reverberations or explosions, or anything. Temperature just went to zero, and fuel flow went to zero, and she quit. Now, I got problems. I can't bring that thing aboard the aircraft carrier, and there is no river. And I wouldn't want to land it there anyhow. And, but, I am on my squadron frequency, and I tell them.
- McIntosh: We have a problem. [Unintelligible.]
- Langford: And they said, well, we'll just have to land at the nearest military facility that you can find. And we'll try to get an engine up for you. So I got ahold of the proper radio facilities, you know. Didn't have to get on the Mayday circuit, because it wasn't, at that time, an emergency. But I did get radar control out of Paris and they vectored me in to Evrafovo (??) Air Force Base outside of Paris. And I am coming down. I went under their direction, radar control, you know. And flying the headings and taking the altitudes they tell me to take. And all this time I'm trying to restart that damned engine. Because, you know, what the hell. But it doesn't happen. And, this is bothering me greatly, because no reason for it to quit. So I am beginning to think maybe some fuel contamination, or something, you know. So I called every bubble who was under their control. I had been told that I would break clear at about fifteen hundred feet, and I was cleared to land on Runway whatever, 27. And so I, while I was still up in the soup, I was declaring a major emergency, and as soon as I am in the clear, I request an immediate landing. And, of course, that takes it for what it was, because I am declaring it. And I broke clear, and wheeled her around, and got on the glide path for the landing. Keep a little extra altitude. You do that with only one engine. And got the gear and flaps down to make my landing. And no sooner was I all dirtied up like that, with flaps down and gear down, then the other engine quit. And that swept-wing jet glides like a rock. You know. That's all there is to it. It doesn't fly anywhere.
- McIntosh: Where? How far off the deck?

- Langford: Oh, I was probably at about three hundred feet at this time. That's a guess, now. But all I could do was put the nose down, you know. And I managed to keep air speed as I got over this telephone wires. They might have been high tension wires, I don't know. But I got over them anyhow. And then I'm in a wheat field, or some kind of field. To touch down. I couldn't make it to the airfield. Pretty soon the nose wheel tears off. And I'm giving it body English trying to keep it from wing-catching, you know. That's what I am anticipating is going to happen.
- McIntosh: Would it flip?
- Langford: Yea, that is what usually would happen. Because you got no control. You know. But, I was fortunate. The damned nose wheel tore away, and the nose went down. It crowned away, but the wings stayed low.
- McIntosh: Right.
- Langford: I was lucky enough.
- McIntosh: Bet you scrambled out of that in a hurry. Next thing was going to happen was it was going to blow up.
- Langford: Exactly right. That's what I thought. And standard procedure, first thing after crash landing, get those damned battery switches off. Well, the pilot's pedestal, right here, was on the right hand side. With the fuel levers and the like. And also, battery switches. And I reached up to get those battery switches off, and my third crewman, by this time, has got that hatch open. He's getting the hell out of that airplane. Foot comes down on that pedestal, to jump out, and my hand is on the pedestal. Oh, no, no. So I reach up again, and now the bombardier is going out, and his foot —
- McIntosh: Is on it too!
- Langford: Well, I got a lot of it out of the way. He just got my fingers. But I said, the hell with you. They were both gone. And I just calmly turned off the battery switch and got out myself. But, laughably, the battery was about three hundred feet behind us. It had been torn out.
- McIntosh: Oh, it wasn't there? Wow. That was close.
- Langford: Well, listen, I have given you a lot of talk.
- McIntosh: Well, that's delightful. From this moment, you went back to where. They put you back on the Forrestal?
- Langford: Yea. Yea. And from there I went to the War College. Well, Jeannie wouldn't want

me to tell you this, I guess. I go to the War College and go through the course, and they keep me on the staff. As an instructor. And they started something new, at that time. More often it was the bosses War College. They wanted to have courses more specifically on warfare tactics, and the like. And I was one of the newcomers that was there, and I guess, maybe having been present at Pearl Harbor and Savo Island, they thought I ought to be pretty good at defeat. But, anyway, I was assigned the task of developing a study.

McIntosh: At what rank were you at this time? Lieutenant commander?

Langford: Commander.

McIntosh: Commander. Okay.

Langford: A study on Japan and Germany, why sea power failed. That was to be the —

McIntosh: That was your subject?

Langford: Yes. So, I took it to heart, and I did a lot of research on it. That's how I came up with this comment I gave you about Admiral Doenitz, that we can do no more than show how to die gallantly. And gave them my lecture. But I had worked hard in the preparation of that. I had done a hell of a lot of research. And, oh years before that, I had joined Toastmasters International, and had done public speaking, and the likes. I was fairly proficient at that.

McIntosh: Sure.

Langford: In fact, I had won the Southeastern United States Conference Toastmasters championship, at one time.

McIntosh: Excellent.

Langford: But, anyway, I was comfortable in public speaking. And so, without any notes or anything, I gave this War College class my lecture on Japan and Germany, why sea power failed. And somebody ran up and grabbed the admiral and got him to come down and listen, you know.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Langford: You know, I was just wandering around the stage, looking these people in the eye, and talking to them, and telling them these things. This was unusual. People stay there and read, and worry, and the like, and I had had some screen things that I would put on, when I wanted to. Well, anyway, when it was over with, I had got comments from so many people, that that was the best lecture they had ever heard



in their life.

McIntosh: Oh, how nice.

Langford: Yes. And I am very proud to tell you that.

McIntosh: Of course.

Langford: But, even more so, later, I leave there and, of course, I had to continue with that, with my work there. I did that in other ways, with the War College, but I leave there and they had published that particular lecture in the Naval War College Review.

McIntosh: Oh.

Langford: Which was nice, complimentary. And I get over to England, where I am now with the U. S. Naval Force-Europe. But my task is to do the base rights negotiations for the U. S. Navy throughout Europe and North Africa. And we had lots of those, because NATO was, and lo and behold, I get an official letter from the Naval War College. Well, the letter was to the Japanese Self-Defense forces, but I was “information addressee” on it. The Japanese Self-Defense Forces had read the article that was in the War College Review, and they wanted permission to reprint it for their own use. And the War College had no objection, but they said that they would have to have my permission, too.

McIntosh: Oh, that was nice.

Langford: Yea. Which I quickly gave. But it made me very proud.

McIntosh: I should say.

Langford: When I tell the Japanese why they lost the war, and they want to get that word out to their own people, but they must have thought it was pretty good, too.

McIntosh: I'd think so. That is terrific. That is a wonderful story. I always thought that one of the reasons the Japs, major strategic mistake they made, was not bringing their men back from Pearl Harbor and not putting them in training, to train the others because they lost so many of their experienced pilots, so by the end of the war, they didn't have a nickel's worth of experience. And they could have used them, like the United States, always took a portion of the squadron, always sent them back so that there is always a cadre to teach, and the Japanese never did that.

Langford: Yea, yea. No, they didn't.

McIntosh: And it was a terrible error for us.

- Langford: You could tell the difference. I could. Between Pearl Harbor, Coral Sea, even, and Midway. There was a difference between Coral Sea and Midway in the caliber of the flying.
- McIntosh: Well, I'm reading —
- Langford: And I'm sure it got much worse after that. But, after that, I was out of it.
- McIntosh: I'm re-reading Cave's book on Midway now, which is probably the best of the Midway books. But he speaks, in fact, that the training in preparation for Midway was quite deficient when compared to Pearl Harbor, when they trained, and trained, and they had it down perfectly. But they became careless with their success, and, in, well, careless. And they didn't train hard or long enough for Midway, so that a lot of their losses were influenced by the fact that a lot of their pilots were just not the same caliber as they had earlier.
- Langford: No, they weren't. And, in that book, does he mention picking Jim Spruance to be the —
- McIntosh: Oh, yea. Right.
- Langford: Gosh, that upset so many of those —
- McIntosh: Well, he wasn't a flyer.
- Langford: Wasn't a flyer, and he was also quite junior. On both counts, it shouldn't be him, you know. But, oh, Bull Halsey insisted he was the man he wanted.
- McIntosh: That was a tribute to Halsey.
- Langford: Yes, it was.
- McIntosh: To be smart enough to recognize this guy's talent.
- Langford: Yea.
- McIntosh: Cave Brown, that's the guy's name who wrote that book on Midway. Damn good book. Well, thank you, sir.
- Langford: Thank you. I enjoyed the visit with you.
- McIntosh: Well, this is my pleasure. It was something well told, now.
- Langford: [Unintelligible.] A pleasure to have met you.

McIntosh: Delightful. I will make a copy of this on a video tape, and I'll send it to you. Okay?

Langford: Well, fine. Thank you. You are very nice.

McIntosh: Yea. I'll give you my card.

Langford: Okay. You take care. I'm impressed with your facilities around here.

McIntosh: They're very nice. The museum has won awards for the quality of —

**[End of Interview.]**