

"Man-on-the-Street", Washington, D.C., December 8, 1941

AFS 6357A

Location: In front of the Gayety Theater on 9th St., approx. 8:30pm

Cut A1 & A2 — Test strips

Philip Cohen: Hello, hello, hello. One, two, three, four. Test. We are testing the recording equipment prior to going out on a field survey of the Washington reaction. [*cheers from crowd of people*].

Cut A3

[the following is sometimes unintelligible due to traffic and muffled speaking from recordists setting up equipment; the loud banging in the background is from a shooting gallery that was nearby]

Alan Lomax: Here we are boys. Are you going to volunteer?

Unidentified man: ???.

Alan Lomax: You think we can? When did you hear about it?

Unidentified man: What did you say?

Alan Lomax: Think we can?

Unidentified man: ??? declared war before they started bombing.

Alan Lomax: Well, that's the way it shouldn't be done.

Unidentified man: Why?

Unidentified man: ???

Philip Cohen: Well, we want to have it for a permanent record, what are people thinking?

Unidentified man: Oh, I see, I see.

Philip Cohen: That's all, just what people are saying and thinking about.

Unidentified man: I thought you were broadcasting.

Unidentified man: huh?

Unidentified man: I thought you were broadcasting.

Philip Cohen: Oh no, it isn't a broadcast. We're just making recordings, that's all

Unidentified man: Recordings, I see ???

Philip Cohen: Just come on, just a little bit closer. I mean, what was your first feeling when you heard that they had declared war?

First Draftee: My first feeling?

Philip Cohen: Yeah. What did you think about it?

First Draftee: ??? came home from my furlough.

Philip Cohen: You did? When did you hear about it first?

First Draftee: Just when I got outside the football game.

Philip Cohen: Where are you? Are you on a ship now or are you on leave?

First Draftee: No, Naval Air Station in Anacostia.

Philip Cohen: Well, what's the word? Do you think you'll be ordered off, you can't tell, I guess.

First Draftee: Can't tell.

Philip Cohen: How about it, do you think we have a good chance of winning?

Second Draftee: No doubt about it.

Philip Cohen: No doubt, huh?

First Draftee: I don't think anyone else is any stronger.

Philip Cohen: What's that?

First Draftee: Ain't nobody else any stronger.

Philip Cohen: What did the fellas think? What did they think when it first happened? Were they all surprised? I mean, there's no way of expecting it.

First Draftee: Well, I did. Yeah, I kind of expected it I think.

Philip Cohen: You think we're really going to win?

First Draftee: ??? [*speaks too quiet to pick up words*]

Philip Cohen: OK. How about you fellas? Do you think we're going to come out of this thing OK?

Second Draftee: I hope.

Philip Cohen: What was the first feeling you had, any of you fellas about it when it first —

Second Draftee: Might as well get it over with. We're here, we got to learn, so we might as well make use of it.

Philip Cohen: Are you fellows out at Meade or . . .

Second Draftee: We're over at the Belvoir.

Philip Cohen: Belvoir?

Second Draftee: Training.

Philip Cohen: Was there any change in the camp, I mean any difference in the order?

Second Draftee: No, except that the fellas are worried about passes [*laughter*], getting home. [*many talking at once*]. They're worried more about the passes than they were the war.

Philip Cohen: What did they do? Call all passes in, didn't they?

Second Draftee: They did, but they canceled again. They haven't made up their mind yet.

Third Draftee: First they canceled all leaves and furloughs and then they gave them back to us.

Philip Cohen: Are you fellas from around this part of the country?

Second Draftee: We're from Philadelphia.

Third Draftee: Philadelphia.

Philip Cohen: Philadelphia. A lot of people said they didn't believe the news when they first heard it, that war was declared. Did you have any of that feeling?

Draftees: We were at home when we heard it.

Fourth Draftee: I was at camp when I heard it. We believed it.

Philip Cohen: You were in camp?

Unidentified man: Yeah.

Fifth Draftee: I didn't think something like that would ??? [*all begin talking at same time*].

Philip Cohen: Did you think it would come from that direction though?

Draftees: No. I wasn't surprised. [*unintelligible due to many talking at once*]

Second Draftee: I had word from a fella down ??? he said they were expecting any day to start war with Japan.

Philip Cohen: It's going to be a — do you think it's going to be a long one or how do you feel about it? [*all begin speaking at same time*]

Unidentified Draftee: I don't know.

Unidentified Draftee: I think it's going to be short and sweet.

Unidentified Draftee: I think it's going to be something like Germany is going to surprise us.

Philip Cohen: You think they're going to surprise us?

Unidentified Draftee: Yeah, I think it's going to be longer than what a lot more people are thinking it is. A lot of people think it will be over in about six months.

Philip Cohen: Well, that's what the president said in his speech today. It's going to be a long haul or words to that effect.

Alan Lomax: Did you all listen to the broadcast that happened today? [*all begin speaking at same time*].

Unidentified Draftee: Yeah.

Unidentified Draftee: Everybody had to.

Unidentified Draftee: They made us sit there and listen to it.

Unidentified Draftee: Five times listened to it.

Philip Cohen: What, did you assemble in . . .

Unidentified Draftee: We were supposed to assemble outside, over the loud speaker, but then everybody had a radio in their barracks so they let us listen inside.

Alan Lomax: What were the fellas saying out there at camp, generally, I mean when the speech was coming over?

Second Draftee: Well, now we can learn to shoot. Now we can use it, that's all. We all were anxious to get going.

Philip Cohen: You said the first thing everybody said they were worried about the passes.

Second Draftee: Oh they were worried about the passes, They said, "Jeez, we can't go home no more now, our furloughs are gone." [*laughter*]

Philip Cohen: Well, how do you feel? Do you feel there's more behind us than that? Do you think this is really the beginning of a bigger thing or do you think this is, this is, will be the end? [*unintelligible as street car passes by*].

Unidentified Draftee: That's hard to say. [*street car passes*]

Alan Lomax: What do you think we'll be fighting for in this war anyway? I mean from your point of view what are you going to be fighting for yourself?

Unidentified Draftee: Well, democracy, I reckon. Something like that, you know.

Unidentified Draftee: That's what they always say.

Unidentified Draftee: Our forefathers fought for us, so we'll fight for our ??? [*laughter*].

Unidentified: It would be a nice trip.

Philip Cohen: How did you feel about it? How did you first hear about it?

Fourth Draftee: I first heard about it when it was about five o'clock and I was in the house and I couldn't get out until a bit late. [*all speaking at same time*]

Philip Cohen: Were you surprised by the news or did you —

Fourth Draftee: No, I rather expected it. It looked like the appeasement talks had failed, or the peace talks had failed. It was just a question of time. See the . . . something had to be done very quick about that. Come right to our feet. It was either to go to war or give it up [*talking in background*].

Philip Cohen: Do you think this is going to be a short or a long war?

Fourth Draftee: No, I think it will be a long, drawn out affair.

Philip Cohen: Do you think it's going to be any more than just the present war or just with Japan?

Fourth Draftee: No, Germany, Italy, and Japan have a mutual assistance pact I believe isn't it?

Philip Cohen: Has anything been done about that?

Fourth Draftee: Well, Italy and Germany haven't declared war yet, but they're expected to momentarily the way I understand it.

Philip Cohen: Sir, would you say a word? What's your name?

War Veteran: Yes sir. My name is [removed]. I'm a World War veteran, '17 and '18.

Philip Cohen: Mm, hmm [*affirmative*].

War Veteran: The last time I went to fought for democracy. [*loud intermittent banging from shooting gallery*] They told me to fight for democracy. And I went over, and I volunteered. But next time I'm

going to fight with the hate in my heart. What's in me, what's in my veins, I'm going to kill, slaughter those [not a one (?)]. If I come across a wounded one, it wouldn't interest me. I'd kill my own father if he dare to fight against this country. I am American, not by birth, but by choice and I'm mighty damn proud of it. What we ought to do in this country to chase every damn skunk, German, Russian, the Japanese where they come from and never bring them back in this country. I wish I was the president for about one year, there'd be not a goddamned skunk left here in this country [*laughter*]. I tell you that right here and right now. [*several voices talking at once*].

Second War Veteran: That goes for me too. I'm a veteran too.

Philip Cohen: Are you a veteran? What's your name sir?

Second War Veteran: [removed].

Philip Cohen: [removed]

Second War Veteran: Yes sir.

Philip Cohen: When were you over?

Second War Veteran: 1918.

Philip Cohen: How do you feel about the present war?

Second War Veteran: How I feel about it? I feel that they ought to knock the shit out of Germany and Japan both which I think we will do [*laughter*]. It's got to be done, so why not start now? I think we held it off too long as it is, I think.

Philip Cohen: You think we've waited too long?

Second War Veteran: Yeah, we should have been in action long ago.

Philip Cohen: And you think it's going to be a long war?

Second War Veteran: Well, when we get going it won't last long I don't think.

Philip Cohen: It was pretty bad news the first part of it.

Unidentified man: Yeah, that's what we heard.

Second War Veteran: Well, they got a little jump on us, but we'll make up for that, I think.

Philip Cohen: Think we're coming back fast?

Second War Veteran: Sure. I know we will.

Philip Cohen: Were you surprised when you heard the news?

Second War Veteran: No, I wasn't. I even went as far as to predict last week that Japan would attack first.

Philip Cohen: Is that a fact? That's what a lot of people thought that that'd be the first one. It came a little more suddenly.

Second War Veteran: I know they were stalling for time at least I thought so anyhow, that was my view of it.

Philip Cohen: But you feel we're going to see it through all right?

Second War Veteran: Oh, no doubt about that.

Alan Lomax: What's going to be your part in this thing do you think?

Second War Veteran: Do everything I'm supposed to do. I'm working at present in the Government Printing Office.

Philip Cohen: You won't be called back to service?

Second War Veteran: You can never tell. But if I have to be called back, I'm willing to go again.

Philip Cohen: OK sir, thanks. Would you . . .

War Veteran: Pardon me, and I'm going to tell you something else. United States never lost a war yet, they're never going to lose it. Because, by gosh, we might chewing the rag about our presidents, about our Congressmen, about our, what do you call it, the — in charge of a state —

Philip Cohen: Secretary of State?

War Veteran: No, no, no.

Philip Cohen: Governors?

War Veteran: Governors. But when it comes to fight, damn it, we will fight to the last breath. And I'm mighty damn proud I am American. The only one thing hurts me, my heart is American, my toes are American, but my damn tongue, I never could nationalize that. *[laughter]*

Alan Lomax: ??? the guard over here at the Gayety.

Philip Cohen: He'll come over here and say something?

Alan Lomax: Yeah, I'll ask him. *[unintelligible due to voices in background]*.

Philip Cohen: Can you take the cord over for the guard?

Cut A4

Barker: ??? I don't know what to talk about ???.

Philip Cohen: How do you feel about the war? Do you —

Barker: How do I feel about the war? You want my candid opinion?

Philip Cohen: Yes we do sir.

Alan Lomax: Yes we do. ???

Barker: The gentleman asked me how I feel about the war. Well, yesterday afternoon about twenty minutes to two right here over this, in front of the Gayety Theater. We got the word over the radio that Japan has declared, they shot, took a shot at Hawaii, killed about three hundred and fifty men. Well, myself I was fit to be tied, and if I was young I'd be in an aeroplane tonight making for that destination. That's about all. This is the barker at the Gayety Theater.

[several voices. unintelligible due to traffic and volume].

Alan Lomax: Phil, let's get his call. Let's get his — that's all right, no. ??? like a carnival worker.