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Interview with
John Lowe, Jr.
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Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

John Lowe, Jr.

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Milford, Texas

Date: August 7, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing John Lowe, Jr., for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on August 7, 1978, in Milford, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Lowe in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the oiler USS Neosho during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Lowe, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Lowe: I was born on February 3, 1920, in the city of Dallas, Texas. I was born and reared in Dallas and grew up in Dallas and graduated from Sunset High School in 1938. I attended the North Texas Agricultural College at Arlington for a year-and-a-half when it was a junior college. In between that time, I worked at Sears, Roebuck and Company to gain enough money to continue to go to school.

Before World War II started, I joined the Navy in the V-6 Reserve Program. I selected that instead of waiting to be drafted. Along about that time, your draft numbers were being posted in the newspaper. I had enough military ROTC training at Sunset High and out here at NTAC to convince me that I believed that I would prefer the Navy; and therefore, that was the reason I joined the Navy at that time.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of world events and current affairs at that time?

Lowe: Oh, I read the newspaper, and also during this time, as one of my side jobs, I carried the Dallas Morning News. And also back there when Great Britain declared war on Germany, I sold extras on that day and made several extra dollars for that. So therefore I was pretty well abreast of what was happening overseas.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you went in the Naval Reserve first of all, and then soon after I gather that you were called back to duty.

Lowe: Well, during this time they had a program called the V-6 Naval Reserve Program. A man could join for a certain number of years in the Reserves--not regular--and by going in in that, you stood a better chance of getting a rating and that sort of thing. That was another reason I selected the Navy.

Marcello: But sooner or later along in there, wouldn't you have been

activated? In other words, when did you go into the regular Navy?

Lowe: The day that I joined up was the day that I was sworn in.

Marcello: Did you have a regular boot training that you went through at that time?

Lowe: I didn't go to a boot training school. I went to . . . it wasn't the Naval training school at San Diego; it was the Naval station. I was there for about six weeks with intermittent training and such as it was; but as far as going to the Naval Recruit Training Center, I did not.

Marcello: Was this the case because you were actually in this V-6 program?

Lowe: I believe that's correct, because when I went in, I went in as a third class petty officer--rating being storekeeper third class.

Marcello: It seems to me that this might have caused a little bit of resentment among the regulars, that is, the fact that all of a sudden you were a third class petty officer. Because I know that rank moved very slowly in that pre-World War II Navy.

Lowe: That's very true, and during this period of time, there was a number of fellows just exactly like myself. Not only were some of them coming in as third class, they were even coming in as high as chiefs. The regular Navy people at that time

more or less resented us and referred to us as "feather merchants."

Marcello: Now when did you get out of San Diego?

Lowe: Well, actually I left San Diego and went to the USS Argonne in Pearl Harbor, which at that time the USS Argonne was a receiving ship. You hear a lot about a receiving ship, which actually a lot of times was just a base; but this was a real ship, and I was assigned to that for further transfer.

While I was there, I received my assignment to the USS Neosho, and instead of leaving the USS Argonne, I stayed aboard there and awaited the arrival of the Neosho. When it arrived in Pearl Harbor, I went aboard as a member of the crew.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands on a permanent basis?

Lowe: I liked it. I thoroughly enjoyed the Hawaiian Islands.

Marcello: When you received news of your assignment, were you looking forward to a tropical paradise and hula skirts and all that sort of thing?

Lowe: I was a twenty-one-year-old boy at that time, and I never actually had been out of the state of Texas, so anywhere I went was new country to me. I've never seen any country as beautiful as the Hawaiian Islands were at that time.

Marcello: Of course, at that time the Hawaiian Islands were not dependent upon the tourist trade. I guess there were only two major

hotels there--the Royal Hawaiian and the Ala Moana.

Lowe: That's correct.

Marcello: How long were you aboard the Argonne before you picked up the Neosho?

Lowe: I would say I was on there about three weeks.

Marcello: When did you pick up the Neosho? You would probably have to estimate the date.

Lowe: I really don't recall because when the Neosho came into Pearl Harbor, at that time its assignment--the Neosho's assignment--was to run from Long Beach, California, to the Hawaiian Islands with high-test aviation gas. I caught it there and my sole time aboard that ship was about three weeks, because it took us about five days, as well as I can recall--four or five days--to make it from Pearl Harbor to Long Beach. In the Long Beach area, we stayed possibly a day--maybe two days--loading up and then returned. On that return, which was in December of '41, one of the things that stands out in my mind--my memory--was that on the night before we entered Pearl Harbor, we noticed a series of lights--signal lights--flashing.

Marcello: Oh shore?

Lowe: No, at sea. We were at sea travelling alone with a high load of high-test gasoline coming into Pearl Harbor. The captain ordered all the lights out on our ship at that time. Our

signalman attempted to contact whoever was doing this signaling between themselves, and then all of a sudden it was over with. That was, like I say, the day before we entered the harbor.

Marcello: Well, we'll come back and talk about this later on, because we're getting a little bit ahead of our story at this point, although we don't want to forget about it because obviously it's an important part of your account of the Pearl Harbor attack. When you went aboard the Neosho, what sort of reception did you get from the rest of the crew that was there? Do you recall?

Lowe: I don't recall. It was favorable.

Marcello: Where were you assigned?

Lowe: I was assigned to the number one storeroom which is in the bow of the ship. I was assigned to assist another third class storekeeper who was a regular Navy man by the name of Earl Couse. Our job was to issue whatever supplies that came from that storeroom and also to keep it clean and tidy and well-stocked.

Marcello: I assume that there was no friction between you and Couse?

Lowe: None whatsoever. At that time, I guess you could call us very close friends.

Marcello: I guess probably he welcomed another man in that storeroom to help him.

Lowe: That's right. If you're thinking that because I was a reservist, and he was a regular . . . there was no animosity. If there was, I couldn't detect any.

Marcello: And, of course, by the time you went aboard the Neosho, there was probably quite an influx of reserves coming into the Navy.

Lowe: That's very true. The Navy was gradually filling up with reserves along about that time.

Marcello: What were your living quarters like aboard the Neosho?

Lowe: Well, on the Neosho we had bunks. Now, on the Argonne, we swung hammocks. On that particular ship, they made us store our sea bags in the very, very bottom of the ship, and each morning we would have to roll up our gear and carry it all the way down and store it. Then at bedtime we'd go all the way down and get it and then swing the hammock up on the top-side there. Most of the time we slept outside on deck.

Marcello: Am I to assume that you welcomed the change from sleeping in a hammock to sleeping in a bunk?

Lowe: That is correct (chuckle).

Marcello: I've heard some people say, however, that once they got used to those hammocks that they were fairly comfortable sleeping; and on the other hand, I've heard other people tell me that they never got used to those hammocks.

Lowe: I'm one of those that never got used to sleeping in one of those things like that.

Marcello: Were your quarters and so on comfortable aboard the Neosho?

Lowe: Yes, very comfortable. At that time a tanker was--so I learned later after I got aboard--was pretty good duty due to the fact you were in and out of ports and you had plenty of fresh provisions and liberty and that sort of thing.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Neosho?

Lowe: Excellent. In fact, I can say all during my Navy career that there was very few meals that I didn't enjoy. All of them was outstanding. Even when we landed in the Marshall Islands, they was still good out there.

Marcello: Now you may not have been on the Neosho long enough to answer my next question, but I'll ask it anyhow. What was the morale like aboard that ship during that period before the war? How would you rate the morale?

Lowe: I would say it was average. Of course, I really wasn't thinking along those lines; I just was trying to get along with everybody, and everybody was trying to get along with everybody else. I feel that I was accepted as well as anyone as a member of the crew.

Marcello: And, of course, I guess most people on the Neosho were volunteers. They were there because they wanted to be there, so I guess that would have accounted for the high morale to some extent.

Lowe: Possibly, or they were assigned to it. At that time, I believe

the complement of that ship was maybe a hundred or 150.

I don't believe it would have been any more than that.

Marcello: So it was not anywhere near wartime complement then?

Lowe: I wouldn't think so. However, it was one of the larger tankers; it was classified as a fleet tanker, and it was just assigned at this particular point in time to the duty of getting high-test gas from Long Beach to Ford Island and also Hickam Field and places like that.

Marcello: So in other words, the Neosho was only carrying high-test aviation gasoline as opposed to fuel oil for the ships or anything of that nature--at least on that run you made.

Lowe: Yes, on that run that I made. However, it was equipped to do the other, also.

Marcello: Did you ever get a chance to have liberty in Honolulu?

Lowe: Just a number of times.

Marcello: Describe what the liberty routine was like for you personally.

Lowe: Well, my liberty was usually to . . . I like to sightsee and I've done that since then in the past job I've recently retired from. During those days when we went ashore, Honolulu was very, very crowded with service personnel. When you went downtown--this was before the war--it was jam-packed with soldiers, sailors, and Marines, and everybody usually wound up down in the Army-Navy YMCA area, which was downtown. And also along the beach there, they had a radio program, and as well

as I remember, it originated from the Moana Beach Hotel there.

Marcello: Under the banyan tree or something like that?

Lowe: Yes, that great, big tree. I always tried to go there and watch that, and then we drank a little beer and that sort of thing.

Marcello: I gather a lot of the servicemen used to frequent Hotel and Canal Streets with a certain degree of regularity.

Lowe: Well, some of them did. I never did get down in that area.

Marcello: Like you pointed out, there were lines for everything, whether it was to get into bars or the houses of prostitution or whatever it might be.

Lowe: Well, I never noticed that so much during that period of time. However, later in the war when I was back out there, I noticed quite a number of lines along that line.

Marcello: In your bull sessions, did you and your buddies ever talk very much about the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor as relations between the two countries continued to deteriorate? Did the thought ever cross your minds?

Lowe: That thought never crossed my mind. The talk was that we figured eventually that we were going to have a war with the Japs. But as far as being attacked as we were there, I don't recall anyone making any conversation along that line.

I remember one day while we were on the USS Argonne, one of the fleet cargo vessels came in, and they had a load of PT

boats on. I'd never seen a PT boat, but they were destined for farther on down the line. They took off about four of them and ran around that harbor out there, and I had never seen anything quite like that. You were talking about war and everything; well, those boats were primarily designed for that, and that was quite a bit of conjecture as to what those boats were for and where they were going and what they was going to be used for.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-war period, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind? Did you have a stereotype that you more or less went by?

Lowe: To tell you the truth, I couldn't tell one from a Chinaman. Someone would have to point one out to me.

Marcello: And there was quite a polyglot population on the Hawaiian Islands at that time.

Lowe: Right. That's correct. The Hawaiians were called Kanacky, and they were of deeper skin--darker skin--and then there was Chinese and Japanese and Chinese-Japanese mixture and all this sort of thing.

Marcello: Suppose war did come between the United States and Japan. Did you and your buddies feel relatively confident as to what the outcome would be?

Lowe: Oh, yes! We figured there would be no problem whipping the

Japs. That was nothing (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you perchance ever run into any of the "old salts" who had served in the Asiatics, so to speak?

Lowe: Yes, I have. I've played poker with a bunch of them.

Marcello: Aboard the Neosho and the Argonne?

Lowe: Well, aboard both ships and other ships and stations.

Marcello: Evidently, they were quite an interesting group of characters-- a part of the Navy that's no longer in existence.

Lowe: They were a little bit. . . if someone said that they were "Asiatic," that meant that you were just a little bit on the dingy side (chuckle), and that was very true.

Marcello: I understand that most of those people had tattoos over a large portion of their bodies?

Lowe: That is correct. We had one man on the Neosho that he had . . . I couldn't believe it, but I saw him in the shower, and the only place on his body that was not tattooed was from his neck up. Everyplace else--front, sideways, and back--was tattooed.

Marcello: I understand some of them used to wear a gold pierced earring. Perhaps they didn't do that on duty in Hawaii, but evidently that was rather common in the China Station.

Lowe: I've seen that among submariners. On my second tour out in there, when the Royal Hawaiian was turned over to the submariners for a rest and recreation, I saw a lot of those submariners,

and those guys did look kind of weird, the way they dressed
(chuckle).

Marcello: I'm sure those Asiatic sailors could keep you entertained with
sea stories?

Lowe: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Did they ever talk very much about the Japanese? Maybe they
had run into them ashore in China or something along those
lines.

Lowe: I don't recall any conversations along that line with those
fellows. Actually, most of those guys wanted to get drunk
and play cards and that sort of thing. That's about all
they wanted to do . . . and go ashore.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about the voyage of the Neosho when you were
aboard as a crew member. Now, you mentioned that you picked
up the Neosho in Pearl Harbor, and, of course, it would eventually
go back to Long Beach, I suppose, where it would pick up this
load of high-octane aviation gasoline. Why don't you pick
up the story from that point. So you went back to Long Beach.

Lowe: Okay, we went back to Long Beach, and we were there long
enough for us to go ashore. And back in those days, they had
what they called "locker clubs" where a man could rent a locker
and put his uniform in there and wear civvies. I rented a
locker; however, I didn't have any civvies at that time. But
I went ahead and rented a locker because the fellows that I

was with went in there. to get their civilian clothes.
As well as I recall, we were there a couple of days--a
couple of shore leave nights--and then we went back aboard
the ship.

Marcello: Did you notice any tension or tenseness there in Long Beach?

Lowe: No, I sure didn't. However, I did notice we had a number of
passengers. In addition to carrying fuel, we had all of our
empty bunk spaces and what-have-you . . . we carried transits.
They called them transit passengers. I hesitate to say how
many we had on that particular trip, but I would say at least
between twenty-five and thirty.

Marcello: In other words, these were personnel who were going to be sent
off to the various other ships there at Pearl.

Lowe: Correct. That was just one way of getting them out there. And
as I told you before, our cruise was very uneventful until our
first day that we approached the Hawaiian Islands when we saw
the signal of these unknown lights in the distance.

Marcello: Do you recall what time that was?

Lowe: That was at night.

Marcello: And this would have been on the Saturday night of December 6th?

Lowe: No, it would have been on a Friday night.

Marcello: Which meant that they probably would have been. . .

Lowe: It's very possible it could have been Japanese submarines opera-
ting in the area out there.

Marcello: Did you actually see these lights yourself?

Lowe: Yes, I did, because I was topside.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

Lowe: Well, I could see a signal light blinking and flashing, and there off in the distance you could see another signal light answering. This continued and our signalman signalled to them with our light, and they just shut it off (snaps fingers). When that happened, the captain ordered all lights on our ship out.

Marcello: Oh, you were not sailing at a darkened ship at that point?

Lowe: No, not to my knowledge. We didn't have any darkened ship.

Marcello: Were there any other actions taken by your skipper on the ship after that?

Lowe: Not that I recall, because the next day we approached Pearl Harbor and entered the harbor--this was on a Saturday--and we stopped our ship at, I believe, Hickam Field, where they had an unloading dock. We cast our lines over, and we were discharging a bunch of gas into their tanks. This was all day Saturday and well into the night.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up one more time and go back to those mysterious lights that you saw. What sort of speculation did that cause among the crew? Now we all know that ships are one big rumor mill, and the scuttlebutt is rampant.

Lowe: Well, we didn't know what to expect.

Marcello: But at that time, did you fully think that it might possibly be Japanese?

Lowe: Yes, we did, because there was quite a bit of talk about the Japs and their motives and what-have-you. That was my belief along with the fellows that I associated with on the ship there. It's possible that that was what that was--Japs out there.

Marcello: But I gather, without putting words in your mouth, that you and your shipmates were still not thinking in terms of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

Lowe: That's right. Absolutely.

Marcello: Do you know approximately how far from Pearl Harbor you might have been when those lights were detected?

Lowe: It was on a Friday night, and Saturday morning early we entered the Harbor, so we weren't too far out. Being, of course, a third class storekeeper and not a quartermaster, I couldn't say.

Marcello: Let me ask you a question here that might help clear up something that I heard from another individual that I interviewed who had been aboard the Neosho. I've heard it said that when the Neosho entered Pearl Harbor the next day, and especially when it went through the submarine net or when the submarine net had been drawn back, that there was a scraping sound as though the Neosho were passing over some submerged object in the water. And later on, scuttlebutt had it that it possibly

could have been one of those two-man submarines. Do you remember this incident at all?

Lowe: No, I don't. Later on in my story, I'll tell you why, because I wasn't even on the ship at that time when that happened or when this was being talked about. Do you want me to continue with when we entered the harbor--my version of it?

Marcello: Yes. Okay, you entered the harbor, and you first of all docked close to Hickam Field, where you unloaded a portion of the aviation gasoline.

Lowe: Okay, during this time, the Air Force or the Navy was having kind of a two plane pulling a sock, and the antiaircraft batteries were firing at that sock. It was kind of a training exercise, and that kind of fascinated me because I never seen that before.

Marcello: Now this was being done on Saturday afternoon while the Neosho was unloading.

Lowe: Yes, while unloading at Hickam Field. And about nine o'clock that night, as well as I recall, the Neosho got underway from Hickam Field and went on in to Pearl Harbor itself and tied up at Ford Island.

Marcello: In the meantime, nobody has liberty aboard the Neosho. Is that right?

Lowe: That's correct. When we tie up at Ford Island, all of our transit passengers, as well as I recall, went ashore. Now where

they went, I don't know. But as far as liberty for the Neosho crew, I don't recall any.

Marcello: Did that cause a certain amount of bitching and griping?

Lowe: Well, now as well as I can recall, I believe it did. But anyway, this was late at night, and we tied up right among all those battleships.

Marcello: Evidently, that was a rather pretty sight that night with all the running lights and everything on.

Lowe: It was beautiful. The battleships were lined up two-by-two, and we just slid right in there among them, so to speak. The next morning, I had the eight to twelve o'clock gangway watch.

Marcello: In the meantime, was the unloading of the fuel continuing?

Lowe: Still continuing. Correct.

Marcello: And this was being unloaded at Ford Island?

Lowe: Right.

Marcello: What battleships were you among there? Do you remember which ones were closest to you?

Lowe: Well, after looking at some of those pictures later, I believe we were close to the California, and the Arizona wasn't too far away from us, and I believe the Tennessee and the Maryland . . . and I'm thinking along those lines. Now I had been aboard the Arizona before that while I was aboard the Argonne, and it wasn't too far from there because I recognized that ship when we came in. A friend of mine was on that ship.

Marcello: Okay, so anyway, you're now over among the battleships, and the unloading of the gasoline is continuing. What did you as a storekeeper do during this process?

Lowe: Well, just man our usual watches, and my watch at that time was a gangway watch--more or less as a petty officer of the watch. We had our usual . . .at that time of the night, I didn't have any duties in the storeroom. Our storeroom was on more or less an eight to five o'clock type of thing, just like a regular job. In addition to those duties, we had to stand our watches, and we had, I believe, port and starboard liberty; half the ship went ashore one time, and then the next day the other half had liberty. And as it so happened, the next day was my day . . . December 7th was my day to go ashore.

Marcello: But nobody got liberty on Saturday night to your knowledge.

Lowe: No, not to my knowledge. If they did, they went ashore and I didn't know about it. Like I told you before, I believe all of our transit people left us on Saturday night there.

Marcello: Did you have a watch that Saturday night?

Lowe: No, my watch started at eight o'clock Sunday morning on December 7th.

Marcello: What did you do Saturday night? Do you recall?

Lowe: I probably played poker. And actually I stood along out there and looked all over the harbor and all of that. It was really something to see back in those days.

Marcello: Now was all of the fuel unloaded that night? Do you know that?

Lowe: No.

Marcello: It was not?

Lowe: It was still pumping fuel when the attack came.

Marcello: This process had actually continued all through the night.

Lowe: All through the night the ship was unloading.

Marcello: So let's talk about that Sunday morning of December 7th.

Lowe: Well, that particular Sunday morning I got up early in order to arrive at my post at eight o'clock. So I had an early breakfast, and I was wearing . . .that particular day . . . in those days, you could wear shorts and a skivvy shirt.

Marcello: Now Sunday was a day of leisure, also, was it not, if one did not have the duty?

Lowe: That is correct.

Marcello: It was probably the best day the Japanese could have selected for an attack.

Lowe: I would think so. I think the people that didn't have the duty could sleep in and that sort of thing. But I recall very vividly that I had brought a couple of oranges with me up from the mess hall, and I was standing there waiting to relieve my man and throwing peelings over the side when I noticed these planes coming over.

Marcello: What sort of a day was it in terms of weather and climate?

Lowe: Beautiful! It was a beautiful day!

Marcello: Was it a good day for an air attack?

Lowe: Excellent! An excellent day (chuckle)! In fact, I don't recall any bad days out there.

So anyway, my battle station on the Neosho was on a bridge operating the annunciators. You know what an annunciator is?

Marcello: I must say I'm not familiar with those.

Lowe: Well, the annunciator is like a big deal that has a crank on this side and a crank on this side, and the captain says, "Full head astern" or "Forward," or that sort of thing.

Marcello: I know precisely what you are referring to now.

Lowe: Anyway, that was my station. I was to stand there, and when the captain said to do this or do that, that was what I was supposed to do.

So when the Jap planes started coming over--which we didn't know they were Japs at the time--and started circling, I was just looking at them as we had the day before with the target practice with the sock. I just figured it was some more of our planes until they started coming in kind of low, and then you could see . . . when the planes came in, you could see the red meatball signs on their wings when they peeled off. And I recall somebody hollering, "Japs!" They started sounding general quarters, and I'm still standing there kind of transfixed, and I noticed these torpedo planes that

started coming in.

Marcello: Describe the descent of these torpedo planes as they came in.

Lowe: These torpedo planes came in just skimming the top of the water, and as they--the ones that I saw--came in and when they got about midway in the harbor, their tail would kick down, and the torpedo would go in and splash and hop about three times. The one that I recall very vividly is the one that hit the USS Helena.

Marcello: You could follow it all the way in?

Lowe: All the way in. You could see it going in, and when it hit, it just blew up. Then I started to run to my battle station. I had a white skivvy shirt on and a white pair of pants, and I had on a brand new pair of shoes, as well as I recall. I'm going up this ladder, and during this time all these planes are coming in, and the bombs are falling all around, and bullets are hitting our deck from all directions.

Marcello: This is strafing that's taking place already?

Lowe: Strafing is taking place on our decks, and I'm trying to get up to the top of this ladder.

Marcello: Are you thinking about all that aviation gasoline still aboard?

Lowe: Yes, sir! But I'm still trying to get to where I was supposed to go. As I got up halfway to the top of that ladder . . .

Marcello: Which is about how high?

Lowe: It's pretty high. Actually, on the Neosho the bridge is about

as high as high as you can go. Right underneath the bridge on the next landing is the captain's quarters--he's right underneath there. I was between the captain's quarters and the bridge when I got up about waist-high, and I got hit by one of those strafing bullets. It hit me in the right lung, and I had hold of the ladder in this manner, and the bullet hit . . .

Marcello: In other words, you're hanging onto the ladder with both hands.

Lowe: I was hanging on with both hands going up, and I get hit right here in the bottom part of my lung--your lung is filled in kind of a sack--and the bullet went out underneath my shoulder blade.

Marcello: So it went in the front over the right lung.

Lowe: It missed my heart about by a half-inch and came out . . . due to the fact that it didn't hurt my shoulder blade was because I'd pulled in, according to the doctor. It came back out underneath my shoulder blade, and I didn't feel any . . . I never passed out. I just felt a sudden stinging, and then I grabbed myself, and I looked down, and every time when my heart was beating I could see that blood coming between my fingers. Then I . . .

Marcello: Got kind of scared?

Lowe: Got kind of scared. Not kind of scared, but "sure enough" scared (chuckle), and I just kind of slid back down the ladder.

I didn't make the bridge. I slid back down the ladder and eased up against the bulkhead of the captain's quarters, which I didn't know at that time, where the captain stayed. And those bullets was . . . you could see them hitting that grey deck and going in and ricocheting and bombs popping all around.

Marcello: At this stage, I assume that all you're interested in or noticing is your own wound.

Lowe: Yes, that I've been hit. So I ease into the captain's quarters, which was right there, to get out of all these bullets flying around. The captain had a full-length mirror in there on one of his doors, and I saw myself in that mirror, and that's when I nearly passed out. During this time . . . this is right at the very minute . . . I would say it was in the first three to five minutes of the attack when this happened.

Marcello: The captain is not there, I assume.

Lowe: He's not there. He wasn't there. Then I staggered back out; I'm still on my feet. I'm still conscious and still on my feet; I never did lose consciousness.

Marcello: Do you have very much pain at this stage?

Lowe: No pain. Just losing blood and feeling kind of weak.

Marcello: Did it tear a big gash in you or anything of that nature?

Lowe: It was just like a pencil hole. Actually, what it was was a 7.7-millimeter bullet from one of their planes. It chipped

just a small chip off one of my ribs and went through my lung, and other than that it didn't do any other damage.

During this period of time , there was a lot of pandemonium, needless to say, on the ship; guys were running and hollering and screaming and carrying on. I noticed a couple of guys that hollered at me, and they said, "Lay down!" They put me down on the deck, and I laid flat. In a matter of . . . I don't know whether it was five minutes or ten minutes or what, but there appeared a couple of guys with a wire stretcher, and they put me in this wire stretcher. Our ship was still tied to Ford Island. As we were going over . . . they carried me over the gangway. During this time, I'm seeing these amphibian planes being hit and on fire and what-have-you all on Ford Island.

Anyway, they get me across, and during this time, they were frantically chopping the lines of the Neosho to get it underway, to get it the hell out of there where they were.

But anyway, as far as my recollection--what happened to me from that point on--that's when I left the Neosho. They loaded me in a grey Packard ambulance, and where it came from I don't know.

Marcello: But it was waiting right there at the end of the gangway?

Lowe: Right. It was right there on the gangway.

Marcello: Did they load anyone else in there with you?

Lowe: Not to my knowledge. They loaded me in there and carried me not too far to the Ford Island dispensary, which is kind of a rectangular affair with a kind of a little square deal in the center--a patio-type thing. So during this time the battle is still raging, and I'm in the . . . they laid me in one of those bunks, and all they do is put a band-aid on the hole on my chest.

Marcello: Literally a band-aid?

Lowe: A band-aid, that's all. And then they also put a band-aid on my back and said, "Lay flat!" After we'd been in there maybe a few minutes, a bomb hit right square in the middle of that dispensary and blew up mortar and everything. Of course, everybody got panicky, and I jumped up and raised up. I remember that a corpsman slammed me back down in my bunk, and when he did my band-aid came off, and blood from my wound spewed all over him; and that shook him up and also shook me up.

Marcello: But that band-aid had effectively stopped the bleeding up to that time?

Lowe: That's right! It had! I was lucky and very fortunate that the fact that the bullet was steel-jacketed, and it just went straight through. But anyway, from that point on, that's where I remained during the rest of the battle.

Marcello: I assume that at this point, you were concerned about "number one."

Lowe: That is very correct.

Marcello: In other words, you really were not cognizant of the destruction that was being done in the harbor, and you probably weren't even that cognizant of the other casualties that were coming in then.

Lowe: Oh, I was aware of other people coming in, because they were bringing them in left and right.

Marcello: Did this make you feel any better because some of those men may have been hurt more than you?

Lowe: No! No! I felt fortunate that I got out as light as I did after I saw how some of the other boys were wounded.

Marcello: What happened that night?

Lowe: Well, when the attack was over, they loaded some of the fellows that were off of these ships that were tied in around Ford Island there in motor whaleboats and carried us across the harbor to the Pearl Harbor hospital, and that's where they put me--in the Pearl Harbor hospital along with all the rest of those fellows. We had a packed hospital. And that night we thought that the Japs had come back over again.

Marcello: What made you think that?

Lowe: Every kind of gun that you could think of went off, and all of this shrapnel and stuff started falling on the hospital, and we thought we were under attack again and that the Japs were going to invade us. By being in the hospital flat on

your back . . . and by this time I was getting a little bit sore and getting to where I couldn't breathe as good as I had been breathing.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you talking to anybody, or do you hear anybody else talking?

Lowe: Well, I could hear what was being said, and the moans and the groans. It was just like it would be in any regular . . . like you see in the movies--a hospital ward when they bring the wounded in.

Marcello: But you're not talking to anybody yourself.

Lowe: No! I do recall that the doctor came by and checked me very quickly and still didn't do anything to me other than, I believe, give me a shot or two and keep the band-aid on my bullet wound.

Marcello: They evidently weren't too concerned about you.

Lowe: They weren't too concerned about me, because there was other people who were injured much worse than me.

Marcello: Is this the only time you saw a doctor that night?

Lowe: That's the only time. He did tell me one thing, he says, "Stay in the bunk and keep yourself covered up. If you catch a cold, you'll die!" (Chuckle) So that's what I did. I kept that Navy blanket up around me pretty good.

Marcello: In other words, he gave you these instructions more or less in the form of a military order?

Lowe: That's very correct, and I obeyed them (chuckle). Anyway, I recall that the guy in the bunk next to me--during the night--passed away. What ship he was off of, I don't know.

Another thing I recall during my stay in that hospital was that my bowels wouldn't move for about ten days, and I had a hard time, and they were reluctant to get me in a wheelchair. But they eventually got me into a wheelchair, and I still had a lot of problems along that line.

Marcello: Was this normal for a particular person in your situation?

Lowe: Well, apparently not because they gave me every kind of a laxative that the Navy had--black and white and everything.

And then--I forget the date--the doctor in charge of the hospital and his staff comes along and checks each man's chart in the ward there as to how long he's going to be there before this man recuperates and can go back to action and what-have-you. The ones that could recuperate rather shortly, they kept them there; and the ones that couldn't, they said, "Ship them." Well, I was one of the ones that was to be shipped. They loaded me . . . during this time, I'm still flat on my back, and they had already started marking off markers all across my chest, because during this time fluid had collected all over my chest, and I was really in bad shape.

Marcello: Did you have much more pain at this time?

Lowe: I had much more pain at that time. It was pleurisy pain, and I

still have a little bit of it every now and then when I'm excited. But we were loaded aboard the . . . it was a "presidential" ship. It was a commercial ship, and I believe it was the President Jackson. There was another ship, and they loaded up two ships of Pearl Harbor wounded--the very first ones to get out of there. We left there, as well as I recall, unescorted, and we were zigzagging . . . and, of course, I'm down below in my bunk, and I don't see anything at all. All I know is what I hear.

We arrived in San Francisco on Christmas Day, 1941, and they loaded us on some sort of a barge or something or other, and we went up to Vallejo to the Mare Island Naval Hospital, where I stayed until I finally recuperated from wounds received in Pearl Harbor, which was in April sometime.

Marcello: Then did they ship you back out to the fleet again?

Lowe: Well, they sent me to what they called Goat Island. I was assigned to go back to this ship, the Neosho.

You talked about sleeping in hammocks, well, back in those days that's sure enough sleeping in hammocks--high--at Goat Island. It was a receiving station there. If you're familiar with San Francisco, it's this island right in the center of the bay. I had a little luck there. During this time, I talked with my mother and father.

Marcello: I was going to ask you when they received word that you'd been

injured?

Lowe: They received word . . . I'm not sure when it was, but they got a telegram. They allowed me to make a phone call to my mother while I was at Mare Island. I believe it was right after Christmas Day, just soon after we got in there. What they did to me after they let me make that phone call, they started tapping my lung and all of that--whatever they did to get me recuperated.

But when I got to Goat Island, I noticed on the bulletin board that there was a third class storekeeper--this is kind of ironic--and this fellow was wanting to swap duties with people that was going to sea. He was a third class on duty out here at the Naval air station in Dallas, so I got hold of him and said, "I'll be glad to swap duties with you." And to make a long story short that's what happened--he took my place. Now whether he wound up and got on the Neosho and was on there when she sunk, I don't know.

But I was out here, and I stayed out at the Naval air station approximately until early 1943. I saw that the guys that was out there was being shipped out, so I said, "Put my name on the list to be shipped out." I shipped out, and I made the invasion of the Marshall Islands.

Marcello: What sort of a ship were you assigned to at that point?

Lowe: I wasn't assigned to a ship; I was assigned to what they call

an "Acorn Unit." It was called "Acorn 21," which was, in effect, to be base command of this island if we captured the island. We were in Navy talk "plankowners" of Roi and Namur in the Kwajalein Atoll. The Navy and the Marines attacked this particular part of the Kwajalein Atoll simultaneously with the Army. The Army attacked Kwajalein itself. An atoll, as you're well aware, is just a necklace of islands with a lagoon right in the center.

While I was out there, I was wounded again in a bombing attack. I was sure enough nearly killed on this one. They dug me out of a hole during this time--this was in February, 1944, when this happened--and I was transported back to the Aiea Heights hospital in Pearl Harbor. I stayed there possibly two more months recuperating from the wounds that I received in this particular fracas. I was reassigned back to the same island, and I remained there until the war was over.

Marcello: I have just a few more questions here and we can wrap up the interview. When you were back in the hospital at Pearl Harbor that night after the attack had been completed, you mentioned that you thought the Japanese were coming back when all the guns in the harbor were opened up. I assume that these were the guns that were firing at these unlucky planes off the Enterprise that were coming that night?

Lowe: That's right. Later, the next day or the day after that, we

learned that that's what happened and that some of our own planes had been shot down during that night.

Marcello: Now even considering your position, did you hear any of the rumors that were floating around in the aftermath of the attack? Such as the rumors that the Japanese had landed or were about to land and things of this sort?

Lowe: Those were rumors that I heard while I was in the hospital.

Marcello: Did you believe all those rumors?

Lowe: Well, I was in no position not to believe them. I kind of suspected it, and after seeing what damage had been done and what I had heard and listening to some of the other survivors off the other ships, I suspected the worst.

Marcello: Later on in the interview, you mentioned hammocks again when you were back at Goat Island. Now maybe I didn't hear you, but did you say that you were assigned to a hammock during that period?

Lowe: Well, that's what we had to sleep on in this particular receiving station. They were hammocks that were swung much higher than the average hammock would be on a ship.

Marcello: It seems to me that that would not have been the greatest thing for a person in your condition.

Lowe: That's right! But when they shipped me out of that hospital, I was ready to go back. I went out with a full sea bag, and, you know, during that time you filled your sea bag and latched your

hand around it and threw it over your shoulder, and that's the way you went. That's the way everyone slept at that receiving station.

Marcello: It seems to me that for you it would have been much more comfortable just to have slept on the floor.

Lowe: Well, I may have tried the floor, but I recall being in the hammock, because the way they woke you up in those days was a boatswain's mate coming along with a stick about the size of a billy club and hitting on the bottom of your hammock and telling you to hit the deck.

Marcello: All of this occurred while you were still a medical case, so to speak?

Lowe: Well, I had been released from the hospital, and I was awaiting transfer to my duty station.

Marcello: This is when you were coming back to Dallas?

Lowe: Right. I was in the receiving station waiting orders to come back to Dallas.

Marcello: Awhile ago in the interview, I think you also mentioned that you were going to clear up the mysterious scraping on the bottom of the Neosho. Did you say that you knew something about it?

Lowe: No.

Marcello: Oh, you didn't.

Lowe: No, I didn't. I did not say that. In fact, I don't even remember

anyone saying that. What I said was that one of the reasons I probably didn't hear that rumor was the fact that after being hit on the Neosho and carried off the Neosho, I never went back aboard the ship. After I was hit, I didn't talk to anyone on the Neosho except one other fellow--Earl Couse. When the Neosho made another run back to the San Francisco area, he was kind enough to gather all my gear on that ship and personally bring it up there to me and invited me to visit his mother and father in San Jose, which I did when I was able to get up and get about while I was a patient there in the Mare Island Navy Hospital. And from them, I learned that when the Neosho went down in the Battle of the Coral Sea, he went down with it.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Lowe, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having participated. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things. I'm sure that historians will find your comments most valuable when they read them.

Lowe: I've been glad to cooperate.