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Interview with

Frank Townsend

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Place of Interview: El Paso, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Frank Townsend

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: El Paso, Texas Date: July 6, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Frank Townsend for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 6, 1974, in El Paso, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Townsend in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the USS Pennsylvania in dry dock at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack there on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Townsend, to begin this interview, would you 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. Townsend: I was born in a little town in Arizona--Morenci, Arizona. It is one of these towns that was set up by Phelps-Dodge Corporation. My father was a superintendant for the mill, and he worked for Phelps-Dodge until 1930, when he died.

Dr. Marcello: When were you born?

Townsend: I was born on May 13, 1920. We left Morenci in 1932 after they closed up the mines and the mills and what have you. Most of the people left Morenci, and we came to El Paso, where we established residency, and I attended public school until I graduated from El Paso High School. At the time of my graduation--within a month after graduating--I went down and made application for enlistment in the Navy.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Townsend: I had been a member of the Texas National Guard--the 36th Division, Company H--while I was in high school, and during our last encampment, there was another fellow there that was just leaving for the Navy after our training in Camp Stanley, I believe it was, and I had decided after talking to him that I would do the same. As a matter of fact, I had to get a release from my second enlistment in the National Guard in order to join the Navy.

At this time, when I made my application for enlistment, they told me that the four-year enlistments would be over as of July 1, 1939, and that if I enlisted at all or made my application, that I would have to sign up for a period of six years. As I understood it, these were the first six-year enlistments that had been tried

out, and since I wouldn't be called before then, I had to sign up for six years. I was called by the recruiter around the latter part of June to report on July 7. I am now, as you probably know, fifty-four years old.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy as opposed to one of the other armed services?

Townsend: Simply because of the romanticism associated with it. I had been, like I say, with the National Guard in a machine gun company. I traipsed up and down hills pulling ammunition wagons and everything that goes with the Army, and somehow the Navy seemed a more romantic thing for me to take up at the time, you know, the posters and travel and see the world and all that. At that time, it was very exclusive, too.

Marcello: Yes, I understand it was quite hard to get in the Navy.

Townsend: Yes. Out of about twelve people that left here, El Paso--they weren't all from El Paso; some were from the surrounding areas of El Paso, as far away as Lubbock--of the twelve, I believe, as I recall, if memory serves me right, only five of us were accepted on examination at San Diego from this area.

Marcello: Is that where you took your boot camp, at San Diego?

Townsend: San Diego.

Marcello: Is there anything that happened in boot camp that you think needs to be a part of the record?

Townsend: Oh, yes, definitely! Everybody was going through San Diego training in three months. Ours was cut short due to the fact that World War Two started over in Europe in the month of September. We had been there at, as they call it, South Unit, where all you do is learn the basics.

Marcello: What was it called?

Townsend: South Unit. They have a North Unit and a South Unit. On arrival at South Unit, you go into quarantine for the first thirty days. You are not allowed out of camp at all, and naturally for the first two weeks you are barricaded in a fenced area. If no contaminating disease breaks out, then everybody leaves the enclosure, and you go to barracks where you begin your training. By that time you have been examined, you have been interviewed, you have taken your dental work and so on, and you have raised your hand and given the oath of allegiance. So you begin your training then.

Then you graduate to North Unit. About the time that we had graduated into North Unit for our tenure for the month of September there, the war had broken

out. My company was company 39-18, and of all the companies that went through training during this three-month period, or two-and-a-half, I should say, from my company about . . . there couldn't have been more than ten or twelve who left San Diego after graduation. The rest went to make up crews for the "Ghost Fleet"--destroyer fleet--at San Diego. The other twelve went their separate ways. There was one other man that went with me from San Diego to the battle force which was at San Pedro at the time. We went by sea--the USS Arctic.

The only reason that I got to go to the USS Pennsylvania was because at this particular time I had made application and I had been accepted for possible Naval Academy training, and in order to facilitate this, if you qualified, they would send you to a battleship, as I understand it, to further your training until such a time as you could take the fleet examination. In those days you could get a hundred from the fleet for Annapolis to compete. Otherwise, you had to know a congressman to get in.

Marcello: Now what did you say? You had to get a hundred?

Townsend: No. Before, in order to enter the United States Naval Academy, each congressman has two . . . or has the right to . . .

Marcello: Appoint two people.

Townsend: . . . appoint two people. If you're not influential, then the other thing to do is to join the Army or the Navy--in this case the Navy--where you have 100 chances in the whole fleet.

Marcello: I see.

Townsend: And as you go about your training on this battleship to begin with, then you get an opportunity to compete with the others for one of those places of 100 that are available. So this is the reason that I went to the battleship force. Otherwise, I would have been in a destroyer with the rest of them.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do aboard the *Pennsylvania* after you were assigned to it?

Townsend: Well, when I arrived on the *Pennsylvania*, I arrived just like any other boot. The master-at-arms there told us that we were the first recruits in six months to come aboard the *Pennsylvania*. So it didn't take long for them to put us to work. I was assigned to the first division--just a deckhand, get up in the morning and swab the decks, shine the brightwork, handle stores, and any work to be done, why, all you had to do was get your hat on and go up to the quarter deck and start doing it without being asked because you were it.

Within three months after I arrived on the _Pennsylvania_, I made friends with a man from Deer Lodge, Montana, and a good friend of mine on the _Pennsylvania_, John M. Whitaker. He had already had what we called a job as a striker in the armory, and he was a few months ahead of me there. But we became fast friends, and he recommended me to the gunner who asked my division officer on the first division is he could latch on to me, so to speak, and go into the gunner's gang, which I did.

At that time they assigned me to the ordnance storeroom on the _Pennsylvania_, where I remained until I left the _Pennsylvania_. The man in charge at that time was J. A. Purta, a gunner's mate first class, and he was in charge of the ordnance storeroom, and under him I learned all about that parts that go in every piece of ordnance equipment aboard the _Pennsylvania_. I remained in this particular job as a seaman second, seaman first, gunner's mate third class, gunner's mate second class, and gunner's mate first class. I left the _Pennsylvania_ in 1943 at Mare Island. But up until this time I served in the ordnance storeroom.

Marcello: What does a person do in the ordnance storeroom?

Townsend: It is just like a hardware store for ordnance. We carry and stock all tools that are special to the job, and people from the different divisions who have a job to do on their guns would come down to the ordnance storeroom and solicit special equipment which we would issue to them. They would sign for it, and then, of course, they would bring it back. We also carried all parts. We kept records. We ordered replacement parts when we were coming into Navy yards. We also carried all the cleaning paraphernalia for ordnance--rags, brightwork polish, which is one of the things the Navy is never without. We also mixed the different hydraulic fluids there for recoil systems.

Besides that, of course, being in the ordnance storeroom, just the fact that you are there in the F division and you become one of the senior petty officers, you also get involved in all the watches pertaining to the F division, which although have nothing to do with that, you have to learn. For example, powder. You have to check it every day, and then you have what you call the periodical--

testing of powders at three months, six months, every year--where you dismantle fixed ammunition, the kind that you have to lock yourself up in a little room and have a talker, and you do this periodically. All these tests have to be done in the ordnance storeroom on special occasions like these periodicals.

Marcello: What were your impressions of the Pennsylvania when you first went aboard it?

Townsend: I was awed. Being a landlubber, so to speak, I had never seen the ocean. However, back in my younger days I can remember seeing a picture of a column of ships dating back to World War One, and I could see these battlewagons in line with their cage masts and all, and then I was very disappointed when the motorboat that brought me from the USS Arctic to the Pensylvania in the harbor came to this ship that had a tripod mast on it.

Marcello: Instead of a cage mast.

Townsend: Instead of a cage mast. And as a matter of fact I remember seeing the West Virginia and a few of those others that still had cage masts on it, and I was a little disappointed. But then, once I came aboard, I found out that she had been remodernized with the

tripod masts, and actually there was no change other than the masts.

Not that I knew anything about battleships, but from looking at the others . . . we had a rammer bow wheras the rest had clipper bows. The difference is the rammer bow sticks out and the clipper bow comes in, and it made us look more formidable (chuckle). Our guns were the same as some of the other ships, the sixteen-inch battlewagons.

But after awhile I became very attached to it and made a lot of friends on it and engaged in all activities that I possibly could with it.

Marcello: How would you describe the morale aboard the _Pennsylvania_?

Townsend: Morale was very good. In fact, the _Pennsylvania_ had the reputation at that time for being a battleship to be shunned by everybody. Nobody wanted to come aboard her for only one reason. The reason was the _Pennsylvania_ carried the flag. It was the flagship of the Pacific Fleet. Consequently, everyone on the _Pennsylvania_ had to wear the uniform of the day at all times, and we were under certain restrictions topside that the other battlewagons didn't have

simply because the captain and the other officers on the Pennsylvania wanted, of course, the ship to be strictly regulation for the flag. When I refer to the flag, we refer to the admiral aboard--four star admiral. So this was one thing that a lot of people would say, "Oh, you're on the Pennsylvania? My gosh! I wouldn't be on that ship." Not that there was anything wrong with the morale, it was just the idea of not wanting to be strictly regulation.

But actually the morale and the discipline was very good. Divisions competed against each other in all sports events, and when we competed against other ships, why, it was just out of this world. Everybody pulled for the Pennsylvania. As far as the people that had been on there for years when I came aboard, they all, of course, had their loyalty to her, and I can remember instances where even ashore you would see how one faction would defend their ship against other ships, whether it be on how many efficiency marks any particular ship had as compared to the other ones. We would fight for these efficiency marks.

Marcello: How do you account for this high degree of morale? Was it mainly because everybody was a volunteer, and they were there because they wanted to be there?

Townsend: At the time, I would say that it wouldn't be necessarily because they were volunteers. I would say it would be because of the way the ship was handled. There was a certain thing to discipline. I've always liked discipline, not matter how hard, and when you get some ships that are undisciplined, just due to that one factor that you don't have discipline, you also have a falling down of morale. There's no loyalty to anybody or anything. Everybody does what they please. On the Pennsylvania I wouldn't say it was just because we were volunteers.

Certainly, after the feather merchants, as we called them, the USNR, started coming in from all facets of life and occupations and all, things started deteriorating a little bit. But this occurred just for a little while because actually the old-timers there, the rough kinds of sailors who had been there for years, it didn't take them very long to bring them into line, and this was one of the reasons that when we come to Pearl Harbor that everybody was doing the best job that they could.

Marcello: How would you describe the training that you received aboard the USS Pennsylvania?

Townsend: Very rigorous and efficient. There wasn't no softening up on it at all. Everybody was striving for perfection. There were drills, constant drills. Even myself, for example, in the ordnance storeroom, I stood watches on different conditions. They had, for example, as many as three conditions--conditions one, two, and three--in which you did a certain job. There was one job for condition one, another for condition two. In general quarters you'd do another one and so on. In air defense, you'd do another one. And you would probably have a different job under any one of these conditions. Some were lucky and had the same job under all conditions. But to be able to do this, you were trained through your different ratings from seaman up until you got to be gunner's mate first class. In my case, I went through practically all those facets of training--gun captain on an anti-aircraft gun, and, of course, there you strive for quick loading because they were hand-loaded at the time of Pearl Harbor. Later on, of course, it was a little different situation. But we were striving to knock off seconds from each gun. And also, the captain, as I recall, was interested in seeing how fast all

departments would report ready after general quarters sounded. He was trying to cut that time down, and we'd go out to sea, and we'd have gunnery practice, and we'd have drills of all kinds. Not only that, but we had collision drills and torpedo attack drills and so on.

Marcello: Did you get the impression that the old-timers aboard that ship had plenty of time to train you and were willing to train you as long as you were willing to learn? In other words, was there a sense of urgency in your training when you first boarded the Pennsylvania?

Townsend: No, no. There was no urgency. It was just a question of discipline again, and in first division . . . I'll never forget that man as long as I live, a first class boatswain's mate, Meaden. The man had been in there a long time. He was rough and tough. And in those days it was still permissible in the Navy for a first class boatswain's mate to kick you in the bottom if he saw fit, and they never hesitated. You were a volunteer in the Navy. You came there voluntarily, and the discipline was there. They had to carry out their job. And again, remember what I said--discipline. He was

competing with the second division constantly for efficiency and all. If you didn't do your job and didn't do it well, then, not only would you suffer at his hands from then on, he could even restrict you from going ashore. But also, he would suffer because then the division officer would be . . . in those days, a division officer, too, had a little pride, and they'd get in the wardroom and say, "Well, your division didn't come out so well today, did it?"

So there was always this competition, this continual discipline, and consequently there was no problem. Now you learned, and he saw that you learned to have an efficient division, and this was, like I say, the primary source of the efficiency because that was the job. Not that there was any urgency of impending disaster or anything else, it was just because you had to learn it.

Marcello: When did the Pennsylvania move on to Pearl Harbor?

Townsend: Let's see, I boarded her in '39, we stayed there and went to Pearl Harbor for the first time in 1940. I cannot recall the exact date, but it was in 1940.

Marcello: And that's where you more or less remained, then, at least up until the time of Pearl Harbor.

Townsend: Yes, off and on.

Marcello: Of course, you went out on maneuvers and this sort of thing.

Townsend: Oh, we came back. Towards the end of 1940 we came back to the States, and then we went back, and, of course, carried out maneuvers and came back and so on. But in '41, we came into Long Beach, in 19 . . . in the spring of '41, I'm sure. I haven't got the record here, but it was around there because I got married the first time (chuckle) here in the States just before I went back to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: During this period when you moved over to Pearl Harbor more or less permanently with the Pennsylvania, how closely were you keeping abreast with world events?

Townsend: We had a radio in the division spaces which you only listened to actually during your meals, and the people that lived in that particular space, of course, they got it all the time. Being in the ordnance storeroom, that was my living space and I didn't have a radio there. We did not get any newspapers, and the only touch that we had with the news was through radio, and, of course, through manner of talk and when we went ashore, of course, on a liberty of something, we would, of course, read it in the headlines of newspapers and

on radio. But there were various radios aboard ship. You just didn't care to listen to them.

Marcello: When you thought of the nation plunging into war, did you usually think in terms of Europe around this time?

Townsend: Yes, we thought that immediately after the news hit us at San Diego when I was in training that Germany had attacked Holland . . .

Marcello: Poland. September of '39?

Townsend: Well, no, when she came over and actually started for France. Well, I guess it would be . . .

Marcello: This would have been 1940 when she hit France.

Townsend: Pardon?

Marcello: This would have been 1940 when the Germans went into France.

Townsend: Well, in September of '39, when actually war was declared in September of '39. At that time I remember that everyone was talking about it, and, of course, the radio was full of news, and we had a radio in our space there in San Diego. We thought that immediately that we were going to go to war right away. Naturally, after President Roosevelt gave his talk about being the arsenal for democracy and that we're going to furnish all the arms and that we would

always be ready and so on, by that time we knew that we weren't going over there, although we were furnishing, as we understood, personnel to man liberty ships. In fact, a lot of us put in for those things. Of course, we never got them.

Marcello: Why did you want to put in for those liberty ships?

Townsend: Again, the romanticism of the thing. There was a war on. We wanted to go to war, not for any particular reason other than this was what it was all about.

Marcello: When you got to Pearl Harbor, of course, the _Pennsylvania_ would periodically participate in maneuvers with the rest of the fleet, and as one got closer and closer and closer to war with Japan, that is, as relations between the two countries declined, the _Pennsylvania_, I suppose, like a great many of the other ships, was going out for a week at a time, was it not, undergoing training? In other words, what were the maneuvers like that the _Pennsylvania_ went through in those months immediately prior to Pearl Harbor.

Townsend: Alright, right after . . . let's say just immediately before Pearl Harbor . . . let me go back a few months before then. We were undergoing, of course, gunnery practice on moving targets. We were training antiaircraft defenses

against our dive bombers, torpedo attack, and this was constant. When coming into Pearl or coming into the States, you always got attacked by your own planes because this afforded them a ship coming in and it afforded us a chance to go into action, so to speak, coming in and going out.

But out at sea, it was mostly maneuvers with other ships, coastal bombardment. We bombarded Catalina Island I don't know how many times. We bombarded this other island down there . . . I don't know. It's in the chain of the Hawaiian Islands. It's not where they keep the lepers at Molokai. It's another island over there used for this purpose.

But mostly, just before Pearl, we were undergoing training in radar, and this was what we would do mostly--keep dispositions at night, keep track of where all our ships were in the formation. It was something new to us, and fortunately, I got to be one of the first operators of that CXAM-1 radar.

Marcello: You might talk a little bit about that because it was a rather novel thing at that particular time, and I think that the Pennsylvania was more or less the guinea pig for the development of radar and this sort of thing.

Townsend: Well, yes and no. There were only . . . as I recall, we took our training on our radar from the crew of the USS *California*. They had this first. Some cruisers had theirs ahead of the *Pennsylvania*, but we got ours, and it was a CXAM and it was a search radar, and all it did was let you know that there were planes in a vicinity of 150 miles, and that's about it.

Marcello: How reliable was it?

Townsend: Well, it was reliable as far as picking up aircraft at 150 miles if you were out at sea. But once you came in close to mountain areas or in port, you couldn't pick up anything with it. Everything was a blip. Actually, at sea you could pick up waves, you could pick up . . . you know, a high wave would just show up as aircraft. We had many scares like that . . . not scares. I wouldn't call them that, but it was alerts, you might say, due to false reporting. A school of fish would cause signals. Most anything would. A heavy cloud formation on the horizon would send a signal back.

But later on, they started putting an instrument on planes called Identification Friend or Foe. They called it an IFF. It was shortened from

Identification Friend or Foe. And this little thing, when you saw this in the radar, would have a intermittent little blip that would show up, and it would tell you that it was yours. Of course, if it wasn't yours, you wouldn't know whether it was just a flight of planes or what. But if you had doubt, then there was a way to signal them to turn on their IFF because if they were picking up the ship on their radar, then you had a little button that you could press for IFF. And, of course, if they didn't, why, you reported it to CIC, and, of course, it was up to them to decide what to do with it. I recall one time tracking the China Clipper for--I don't know--I guess about a full half-hour. It caused an alert.

But this was more or less the type of training that was going on--maneuvers, gunnery, and learning how to use the radar.

Marcello: As relations between the United States and Japan worsened, did you notice any sense or urgency or intensification in the training?

Townsend: There was this urgency . . . up till that time we had kept our ammunition in the ship's magazines where it had always been kept, but ready boxes had been built

on the boat decks where the antiaircraft guns were located. And these ready boxes were nothing more than a box on the side with a cover held by what we called dogs, you know, the type to keep the sea water and the sea air from the ammunition. And they were there so that the guns could start firing while the ship's magazine crews would be assembling to start the continual stream of ammunition. And these ready boxes gave us that feeling that something was going on or we may have to be ready for action. The ship was painted, oh, long time before that, as soon as the war started, from the traditional battleship gray to a dark blue to more or less match the ocean.

Marcello: Now quite obviously these ready boxes were not installed around the five-inch guns or the . . . what did you have--twelve-inch or fourteen-inch on the Pennsylvania?

Townsend: No, the ready boxes were only for the five-inch twenty-fives.

Marcello: For the antiaircraft weapons.

Townsend: That's all, the five-inch twenty-fives. Just for antiaircraft defenses. Because by the time the plane was sighted and by the time they sounded air defense

and by the time the ammunition got to the boat deck, the plane would have been there and gone. This way, you had ready boxes to where under certain conditions you had the guns manned already--under certain conditions. But there would be no ammunition. So this is why we had these ready boxes--to immediately start firing.

Marcello: Of course, around the big guns you couldn't keep those powder charges and all that sort of thing. That would have been very, very dangerous.

Townsend: No. For the main battery there were fourteen-inch guns. Those went another route. They sounded general quarters, and everybody would man their stations, and then the ammunition would be broken out in the magazines because that type of powder is not dangerous as such. A bag of this smokeless powder, as we called it, is very hard to explode. The fact of the matter is it will burn, but it won't explode under those conditions. It must be confined, and it must have an extra charge of black powder. Now there's the danger. The black powder is on the end of this bag that's made of pure silk, and you need four of those charges of 104 pounds each to propel one of those shells out of that one gun. So those, you can

imagine, were very, very fragile. You can't . . . the slightest . . . oh, if you drop it or if you rub against something with it, you tear the bag and those little pellets start coming out of there. So they had to be handled with care on hoists and all. But the ready boxes were mainly for the five-inch twenty-fives.

Marcello: Generally speaking, when you went out on maneuvers during those months immediately prior to Pearl Harbor, did you usually go out on a Monday and come back on a Friday? This was the usual routine, wasn't it?

Townsend: Yes. Half of us . . . not all the fleet would come in. Half of it would stay out, and half of it would come in on any particular weekend. The next weekend, it was our turn to stay out and they'd come in and so on. This went on until that particular Sunday.

Marcello: This was done, I suppose, so that the entire fleet wouldn't theoretically be caught there by some hypothetical enemy.

Townsend: Again, I'm not speaking about this as though I know of it.

Marcello: You're speculating.

Townsend: A lot of this has come to us from past history and from listening to other people and what have you.

But we always wondered why our flag was changed just prior to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: I don't understand.

Townsend: The admiral in charge of the entire operation was Admiral Richardson, and he is the one that kept half the fleet out and half in. Speculating now, thirty years later, after we read about it and read the history and this, that, and the other, it has been said by some that he had a falling out with our President. Whether that's true or not, I don't know. But he was in more or less the same situation that MacArthur was. "You do what I tell you, or I'll relieve you and put somebody else who will."

And Kimmel went in. He relieved Richardson just prior to Pearl Harbor, and, of course, he had to take the responsibility. But when Kimmel came aboard, the whole fleet went into Pearl Harbor. So I speculate now as to whether this was the reason that Richardson was relieved. Whether it is or not, I have no way of knowing. But Kimmel, as I say, was in command just a short time prior to Pearl Harbor, and, of course, he took the responsibility for it. But under Richardson we traded off and we stayed out.

Marcello: Generally speaking, when you did come into port for the weekend after you had been out all week on maneuvers, how was the liberty set up?

Townsend: Well, all the time that we were in Hawaii we had daylight liberty. The only way you could get to stay overnight, if you were an enlisted man, was either to know someone who lived on the island or to have a special pass given to you through . . . oh, for some reason, you had to have a very good legitimate reason to be ashore. Simply because there was no room out there for an entire personnel, you couldn't get overnight liberty. There was no place to stay, no hotels available. And the only people that got overnight liberty were the officers and the chief petty officer ratings.

Marcello: Not even the married men?

Townsend: Well, that's a legitimate reason. I did have a few overnight liberties there because I knew some people from El Paso who were working in the Navy Yard, and they had a house rented down there and all that, and as soon as I found out they were there, I visited with them, and anytime I wanted a pass I had a place to stay. This was the primary object. If you had a

place to stay, you could stay overnight. But it was all daylight liberty from about, oh, nine, ten o'clock in the morning till about five, six o'clock in the evening.

Marcello: Did you usually get the entire weekend, or did you have a port and starboard liberty?

Townsend: We had port and starboard, and I can't remember any occasion at Pearl where we had our condition watches No, it was port and starboard.

Marcello: In other words, you either had daylight liberty on Saturday or daylight liberty on Sunday, but not both.

Townsend: Well, the only time you got overnight liberty or you got a three-day pass was if you made an application to your division officer to go to the R and R camp that they had down at Aiea down there. If you went down there, of course, you would go out there to this particular camp and spend the weekend. They had a little train down there that used to take us down to the beach, and they had a camp set up. When you went there, you could get a pass for three days or over the weekend.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what percentage of the crew might possibly be ashore for the entire weekend? You'd have to estimate this, of course.

Townsend: Well, again, I say the commissioned officers and chief petty officers would make up the bulk of those that would be ashore on any given night or any weekend. The enlisted men would be there as a rule.

Marcello: Well, there wasn't very much to do, and anything that you did, you had to stand in line for--for beer, for a bus. In other words, to go to Honolulu you had to wait in line sometimes an hour or an hour and a half just to get to a bus there at the submarine base to get up there.

After you got there, there were just a few bars on Hotel Street, as I recall, and one of our favorites was the Rialto, and you had to stand in line there four hours just to get in. Once you got in there, of course, you didn't get out (chuckle). You stayed in there. Then, of course, you had other places that a lot of single men frequented--your houses of ill-repute. Of course, in those places, you even had lines for two and three blocks.

So it was not too conducive to anybody going out there. At first, yes. Everybody went out there with their cameras. Everybody took a daylight tour of the islands. But after you went in there weekend after

weekend for practically a year, it was old hat. There wasn't anything to do. We would stay aboard the ship most of the time, play cards, have bull sessions, just rest in general. We had whaleboat races. A few things of this nature--boxing smokers and sports in general, played softball. And we had more fun doing that than going ashore, actually.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what would be the condition of those men who returned to the ship, let's say, after they had been ashore? How common was drunkenness, for example?

Townsend: In Honolulu, not very. Like I said, you couldn't get enough to drink down there to get drunk on. But not there. The condition of most sailors returning would be more or less . . . what would be the word to use . . . "feeling good," but not staggering drunk like coming out of Long Beach or out of Bremerton, Washington, or out of San Francisco.

Marcello: Okay. I think that this is an important comment that you've made here because what I wanted to establish was the fact that contrary to what many people think, those servicemen would have been in fairly good condition to fight on a Sunday morning.

Townsend: Oh, certainly! Certainly they would have been!

Marcello: In other words, a Saturday night wasn't necessarily a night of revelry and debauchery and what have you for everybody in the fleet.

Townsend: No. Every man that I know of and I can recall in my particular area was at peak effeciency on that morning. There was no problem as far as anybody being in any bad shape to do his duty. Like I say, there wasn't really anything to do down there. Had the attack been somewhere else, well, I could tell you truthfully now that people came to the ship in very bad condition.

Marcello: Incidentally, when was payday?

Townsend: They paid on the first and . . . well, the fifth . . . the fifth and twentieth.

Marcello: The fifth and twentieth.

Townsend: Yes, of the month.

Marcello: Which meant that probably, at least on that weekend of December 7, every sailor would have had a little money in his pocket had he wanted to go to town.

Townsend: Yes, however, most everyone aboard the ship would leave their money--wouldn't draw it out. I can't remember anybody that would draw out his entire paycheck because there wasn't anything to spend it on. You would leave

it in there so that when the ship came to the States you would have enough money to go home on leave or to spend it in San Francisco or Los Angeles. But in Honolulu you just took out enough money for your necessities of buying your cigarettes and your personal items and still keep, say, $10.00 or $15.00 just to go make a liberty if you decided you were getting bored with the ship, but that would be just for . . . you wouldn't go ashore more than two or three times between paydays because there wasn't anything to do out there, except, like I say, some people might stand in line for an hour and a half or two hours for a drink of high-priced whiskey or rum and Coca-Cola, but most of them wouldn't. So we just stayed aboard ship and had more fun, like I say, with our sporting events and so forth. Now, of course, I'm speaking for my division. I don't know about . . . from a general view, the submarine base had better food than you could find in Honolulu, anyhow, and the ship served us better food than we could get out there ashore. So there was really no . . after the first . . . don't misunderstand me. When we first came into Pearl, to most of us, it was the first time there, and there was a lot of activity and a lot

of things to do for about the first four or five liberties--going around the island, going to this park, going to that park, going here and going there until we became acquainted with the island. After that, there wasn't anything to do.

Marcello: How secure did you feel that the fleet was at Pearl Harbor?

Townsend: Oh, we thought it was A-1. We thought--at least I did--that we could take any comers, anytime, anyplace. We felt that the United States Navy was the most powerful Navy in the world.

Marcello: Was it not true that also just from the sheer fact that you were so far from East Asia and Japan more or less gave you a sense of security? In other words, if there would be a war with Japan, chances are that all the action would occur probably in the Philippines or maybe someplace in East Asia.

Townsend: Well, yes, this is true. We never dreamed--at least I never even thought--of planes ever coming from Japan to bomb Pearl Harbor, carriers or no carriers, because we always thought that although our fleet was based there that we always had stations at Guam, at Midway . . . there were patrol planes out all the time, and certainly

somebody would see a fleet coming, which would give us plenty or warning. Like you say, we felt very secure. There were constant patrols. You could see those PBY's coming in and going out morning and evening just day after day, Sundays included, holidays. We had this Naval base right across the bay from us, and they were constantly patrolling.

Marcello: I gather that Pearl Harbor was simply a beehive of activity, was it not? In other words, there were so many ships in that harbor to begin with, and they were coming in and going out constantly.

Townsend: Well, yes, like you stated, when one fleet was coming in, the other was going out. Sure, ships came in. There was always shops around there. You had ships bringing in stores, taking out stores, taking on ammunition, repairs, and there was any number of things going on. Besides the battleships, there was destroyer tenders there and submarine tenders coming and going. So there was quite a bit of activity.

Marcello: Now sometime during those weeks immediately prior to Pearl Harbor, the Pennsylvania went into dry dock. When was this?

Townsend: The day we came in. We came in on a Saturday morning.

Marcello: This would have been December 6.

Townsend: Yes, December 6. We pulled into our usual berth, which was 1010 Dock--not the dry dock. Ten-ten Dock is immediately behind the dry dock.

Marcello: How come the Pennsylvania was not tied up with the rest of the battleships over by Ford Island? Was it because it was the flagship?

Townsend: Because the admiral could get right off the Pennsylvania to his limosine. This was our choice berth--1010. It was always reserved for the USS Pennsylvania. On this particular morning, we came in, we tied up to 1010 Dock. The admiral and his flag, of course, they left the ship as they always did.

In the meantime, the dry dock was being prepared to receive the Pennsylvania. They had to change the blocks, you know, that they have for different sized ships and all. But prior to this, they had set up the blocks to receive two destroyers ahead of the Pennsylvania--the Cassin and the Downes. So they took those two destroyers in and then in the afternoon . . . at noon, actually, we pulled into the dry dock. That's when they started pumping the water out of it. In fact, they got far enough along with it that they had removed one screw

completely off the ship, and we had the deck division down there scraping barnacles and doing those other little chores that you do when they put you in dry dock. All this activity was going on on Saturday, so there wasn't too much liberty for anybody on that particular day because we were in dry dock and we had all this cleaning to do.

Marcello: And usually, when you go in dry dock, everybody pitches in and helps, do they not?

Townsend: Oh, yes. It's a question of as the water recedes from the dry dock, you have these stages of people moving along with the water and scraping as you go along. By the time the water's out, you're on the bottom of the ship. Then you scrape the bottom, and it's ready for painting with red lead and so forth. In the meantime the shipyard workers are doing whatever they have to do--remove the screws, which are pretty big. They went through all this business. In the meantime all personnel on the _Pennsylvania_ had to go off the _Pennsylvania_ to use restrooms and facilities that were on the dock. But this was our berth--1010.

After we pulled into dry dock, another ship similar to Pennsylvania, very similar to it, including

the tripod masts . . . the only difference was the size. She was a cruiser, the USS Helena. It pulled right into 1010 Dock, our space, and next to her they placed an old minelayer, the USS Oglala, a wooden ship that I understand was captured from the Germans a long time ago, World War One. They put that up against her, and this took a lot of the attack off the Pennsylvania.

Marcello: Now normally, as I understand it, there would always be an inspection on the weekend. Is this true?

Townsend: No, not on the weekends--on Fridays.

Marcello: That's what I meant. It would be on Friday. When you tied up, there would be an inspection before any liberty would be given.

Townsend: Well, we were at sea on Friday, coming in, so there was no . . . we had our field day. That was routine. You had to do certain things. But out at sea you dispensed with certain particulars of the routine due to the watches that you were standing. In port on a Friday, you would have your field day, also, but along with the field day you stand a muster, you fall out in your undress uniform, and you go through the regular captain's inspection. If a captain's inspection isn't held, the

division officer inspects the spaces anyhow. But out at sea you don't go through this because everything is manned. There's no way to do anything except certain routine things, like the mess cooks still go through little procedures for field day. Everybody has a check-off list for the field day, but, as I say again, when you're out at sea there are certain things you can't do, so you just forget about them.

Marcello: But the point is you did usually have an inspection of the spaces when you came into port.

Townsend: Yes, if it was on a Friday. And, of course, every day the division officer inspects, but I mean as a general inspection only on Friday mornings. On Saturdays and Sundays there's never been none. I never can recall any particular inspections.

Marcello: Normally, when you're in port watertight integrity is usually maintained at a minimum, is it not?

Townsend: Yes.

Marcello: Except for those . . . I would assume that those spaces below the waterline usually maintained a good deal more watertight integrity, did they not?

Townsend: Let me put it this way: those spaces that are very seldom used are always sealed off. As a general rule,

no one will open them without permission of whoever is the officer of the day or in charge. Magazines, for example, powder magazines, were always closed and they are below the waterline and on the starboard and port sides of the ship and these are watertight. But they are opened every morning at eight o'clock for about two or three minutes while somebody goes in and takes a temperature reading, inspects the sprinkler system, and takes a look at some samples they have there to see if they have not deteriorated because if they have, of course, then it's something else. But they checked this and it took two or three minutes. But every magazine would have to be inspected every single morning, and unless there's work to be done in that magazine for any reason, then, of course, it's locked back up.

Marcello: But a great many of your critical spaces are below the waterline, are they not? And these are usually locked.

Townsend: The orderly storeroom is on the third deck. That's below the waterline. Those spaces are living spaces, so they are open to the run of the ship. Now other spaces below that, where you go into the engineering compartment, oh, they're open. You go down there if you have any business; otherwise, you don't go there. But I

couldn't find any particular hatches that weren't open on that day because there was no condition set. There was no . . . like I say, they would have set condition three or condition one or two or something. But there weren't any conditions set.

Marcello: The point that I'm trying to make is that when the ships are in port and in that particular condition, they are much more vulnerable to sinking, quite obviously, than if watertight integrity is maintained.

Townsend: Oh, yes, definitely. Any one of those ships would never have been sunk, actually sunk unless . . . the *Arizona*, of course, this was a freak-type thing. But the *Oklahoma* would never have capsized and the *California*, the *West Virginia*, and the rest wouldn't have been sitting on the bottom. They went down straight due to somebody balancing their ballast. It must have been that. It's the only thing I can figure. But as a rule, even in port, if for any reason the Army . . . it happened one time before somewhere, I forget just where it was. Prior to the war, there was an alert, and, of course, the moment they sound or set condition Zed . . . that's another deal. All doors marked Z have to be dogged down, as we say.

Marcello: Boy, that's the old Navy! Was Z Zed? When I was in the Coast Guard, it was Zebra.

Townsend: Yes, Zebra. Well, it was Zed in my day. Condition Zed was set, and right away all those doors marked Z, close them. There were very few of those, and like you say, those were more or less below the waterline and outboard of the midship line.

Marcello: Okay. I think this more or less brings us up to the actual attack on Pearl Harbor itself. What I'd like you to do at this point is to describe to me in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941, and then from there we'll move into Sunday when the attack itself took place. Let's start off, however, by talking about your routine on Saturday.

Townsend: Well, as I say, we went into dry dock, and we had just come in from sea. I had two or three duties then as a gunner's mate first class in the F division. One of them was I was in charge of the saluting batteries besides being in the ordnance storeroom. I had strikers, I had a gunner's mate third class, I had a gunner's mate second class and all that. Not at the time of Pearl Harbor because I was only a gunner's mate third class

then. But this fellow--Fordemwalt was his name--he was the gunner's mate first class in charge of the storeroom at the time.

Marcello: What was his name?

Townsend: Fordemwalt. He was a Dutchman. We used to kid him. Anyhow, he came off the Houston. J. W. Fordemwalt was in charge of the ordnance storeroom at the time. I was gunner's mate third class, and one of my duties at that time besides being in the ordnance storeroom was in charge of the lifebouys and saluting batteries. The routine was that as soon as we came in we were supposed to shine them up again because you couldn't do this at sea with salt water spraying all over them, and they were practically nickel plated, and some were copper and some were bronze.

Marcello: These were the saluting batteries?

Townsend: No, no, these were the lifebuoys. They were electronically controlled from the bridge. In case a man goes overboard, they could hit a switch, and the lifebouy, of course, would drop into the ocean, and it had pockets in it with chemicals that make smoke . . . carbide or whatever it is in there.

But anyhow, one of the duties was to get these things shined up as soon as we hit port. So Saturday's

routine right after we pulled into the dry dock was to take down all these lifebouys, and I had my men held shine them up. Saluting batteries were dismantled, checked over, repolished, and light oil put into them. The saluting battery boxes--they're just blanks, you know--those were taken care of. This is about all that happened for me on Saturday besides being in the ordnance storeroom and issuing out gear to the different divisions as they needed it for whatever their overhauls needed.

Marcello: When did you secure from these tasks?

Townsend: Oh, about 3:30, 4:00. At that time, 3:30 or 4:00, we'd all, of course, go and take our showers and all. We had limited shower spaces on the dock, so we went and took our showers and came back to the ship. We ate aboard ship.

And we went into the usual routine that evening. We had a game going at the ordnance storeroom where we used to sit and play cards, and we had a coffee pot. We always had something to eat there for our evening . . . shall we say nightcap (chuckle)? We sat and played cards until about nine or ten o'clock. And usually the master-at-arms would come around and make

sure that everybody was in their bunks. If you didn't want to be in there, you'd dog the door. Of course, you're safe in there, but you're still inside your space. If you heard any ruckus going on in there, of course, he'd pound on it and make you go to bed. But this Saturday evening, as I recall, we just went through our regular routine and went to bed.

Marcello: What time did you turn in about?

Townsend: I'd say about ten, 10:30 that evening. As far as the routine of the day was concerned, that was all it was--just coming in from sea and all and just making the ship ready for Sunday.

Marcello: Generally, Sunday was a day of leisure, was it not, aboard ship?

Townsend: A day of leisure. No "turn-to" except for anybody who had the usual routine watches. You always had a magazine watch, you always had what they called a sprinkler watch that was set. You always had, oh, a telephone talker on the quarter-deck and one on the forecastle. There were certain watches that were just routine. And then there was security, just a routine watch that the Navy had.

Marcello: Describe your day on December 7, 1941, from the time you got up until all hell broke loose.

Townsend: Well, the ordnance storeroom door which was on the third deck on the starboard side was closed, and it only had one dog on it--not completely sealed off, just one. I was asleep on one of these canvas cots. I remember that this gunner's mate first class, J. W. Fordemwalt, got up--I heard him--and he says, "Do you want me to wake you up for breakfast? I'm going on the dock." I said, "No, don't bother. I'm just going to have some coffee." I ate a lot of that baloney last night (chuckle). Anyhow, during our game, bread and our other night rations. And I said, "No, I'm not hungry, I'll just have some coffee," but I went back to sleep.

I don't know how long he was gone, but the next thing I knew was when he came tearing into the ordnance storeroom. I heard the door open--the hatch open--and he shook me. And he said, "Tommy . . . " my name is Frank but he used to call me Tommy. I don't know why, because my name was Townsend, I guess. He used to say "Terrible Texas Tommy Townsend" (chuckle). He shook me up and he says, "Tommy, Tommy, wake up! The Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor!" I says, "Oh, come now!" And he says, "Yes, I'm not kidding you. By

golly, they just bombed Ford Island across the way there! And they're going to sound air defense at any moment!"

While he was telling me this, I heard air defense go off so I believed him. So I got up, stowed my cot off to one side, got out there, and we dogged the door down. This is what happened in air defense-- to get out of the ordnance storeroom, dog her down.

And by that time everybody was coming to their stations. The ammunition passageway was right in front of the ordnance storeroom, and my duty and his and another striker would be to have the phones on. We were known as the ordnance repair party on air defense, and we were supposed to stay right there in front of the ordnance storeroom by the door, by that talker, and just wait. Then if we needed anything we were supposed to find out from the talker what we needed, and then we would open the ordnance storeroom, get whatever we needed, and go about our business.

So we stayed there, and all the time that this was happening we could hear the bombing. And the hatch on the third deck was open, people were streaming

in from topside going to their stations, and what have you. While we were standing there, the reports started coming in on the talker. He said, "My gosh, that thing's going down! The Arizona is on fire, the Oklahoma is capsizing!" He was in touch through the communications system on the ship with the observers on the topside for the fire control and the bridge and everybody else.

Marcello: What thoughts were going through your mind? You knew that things were happening outside, but you hadn't seen them yourself.

Townsend: I hadn't seen anything.

Marcello: You were only getting these things over the communications system. What sort of thoughts were going through your mind?

Townsend: Well, I figured, "Well, what's going on here? What's happened? Where did these guys come from." All of these things were going through my mind all at once. And just the shock of the Arizona just blown up! Of course the fire controlman stated from topside to this talker anyhow that they had dropped the bomb down the stack. And immediately it came to my mind, "Well, we're here in dry dock, and sure enough they're going

to put one through our stack!" (chuckle). And all of these thoughts just circulated to me because I wasn't doing anything. The rest of the . . . the ammunition was beginning to start moving topside right by us.

We were waiting there when about that time the ship just . . . it was shuddering everytime we fired our guns, but this was something different, entirely different. We felt something like the ship was just picked up and jarred down hard, you know, from side to side. We knew we were in dry dock.

And at the same time that this happened, there was a flash of orange that just came over the overhead. About that time I looked over, and I hollered at some boys that were down there. See, the ammunition passageway was manned mostly by cooks and stewards and what have you. And I hollered at them, "Close that hatch!" And about that time two of then had gone up and closed them. They had _just_ tightened the dogs on that thing real tight because I saw fire and sparks come down . . . the ammunition was down below. So they closed this hatch which hadn't been closed after the last guys came down.

Immediately after they closed it, the word came down on the communications system, "Ordnance repair

party, lay up to the boat deck, gun number ten." So J. W. looked at me and I looked at him because "That's us!" (chuckle). So here we go again. So we went up there and we opened the hatch, and right after we left the third deck and went up to the second deck as we called it . . . and this hatch led right up the ladder into officer's country if you continued straight, or if you turned left it went into the F division's compartments and the offices down there, or turned up the other ladder.

So we tried to get up that ladder and we couldn't. There was oil, water, blood, slippery, you just couldn't get up that hatch at all. So we went out the other way. We went out through what we called . . . the ladder coming down from the first division. We went down that deck up to the boat deck, and we finally got a ladder clear. But we didn't know why all this stuff was coming down here.

Up to this report we didn't even know that we'd been hit until we came out from the first division deck up to the boat deck, and then the first thing that hit me when we came out was all this blood and oil and . . . oh, a mess, in other words, if you can picture a mess

like after you've seen a fire out here, where they mess up everything. You're used to seeing everything just spic and span. And to see that linoleum deck just shining . . . and it wasn't anything but a mess!

I was in front, and the first thing that hit my eyes as I stepped out of that hatch was two dead seamen down there. One was a young fellow. Oh, he hadn't been dead too long. I guess he'd been one of the recruits. I don't think he could have been more than eighteen years old. And what stopped me in my tracks was the fact that he lost his hair just like somebody had scalped him. He had just a hole where his head should have been. His head was hung down, and he was missing an arm and a leg, and he was hung up . . . he wasn't exactly in a natural position. He was like somebody had picked him up and laid him over a boat davit. That's a gruesome sight. And another one was laying along the side.

Marcello: Now you said he had not been decapitated. He had just lost his hair.

Townsend: Yes, like he had been scalped, you know. He didn't have . . . just a hole with nothing in it. This is what . . . you're not used to seeing these things. And this just stopped me in my tracks for awhile.

About that time while I was just frozen there and I saw this, the gunner's mate in charge of the air defense battery, a fellow by the name of Golding, came over. I had been standing watches on that particular gun, on number ten, in certain conditions, and so he said, "Tommy, you know all about this gun over here, so why don't you go ahead and take over as gun captain on this particular gun?" And he turned around to the first class gunner's mate, J. W. Fordemwalt, and he said, "No use in your staying around here, Ford. All the hydraulic lines are broken, the air lines are all torn up, and you can see how the gun lays." Actually, the gun was at about a . . . easily a fifty or sixty-degree angle, with the deck raised up where the hole went in in the back. The gun was still operational as far as training it or elevating it, but I doubt if you could fire it at all. But anyhow, I told him I'd stay here.

And he had this man on the training seat--we called it training because training is to move it in a horizontal position--and he was glued there. He was in shock. I could tell that. He had his hands tight on the wheel.

I was looking all around. I could see the pall of smoke coming out of the _Arizona_. I couldn't see but just part of the _Oklahoma_. Looking over . . . everywhere I'd turn around, I could see nothing but disaster--fires, smoke, and no planes. Over to my right I could see a couple of seamen out there with dustpans picking up bits of flesh and what have you and putting them in bags.

Everybody seemed to be wide-eyed and in shock. Well, we stayed there about . . . I lost all track of time up until this time.

Marcello: Up until this time, would it be safe to say that just about everybody aboard the ship was acting in a very professional manner? There may have been an initial period of very brief confusion or perplexity, but then very quickly the training and the professionalism took over.

Townsend: Yes. The ship actually started firing when they were still sounding air defenses, and this is what made me realize that it wasn't a joke. Those people opened up. But from . . . shall we say from my own experience, later on we found out other things, but I mean from my own experience right then and there, the firing had

ceased when I got up on the boat deck. There was no more planes flying around.

We were there for about ten minutes when all of a sudden a ship opened up, and, sure enough, they started hollering about planes coming up, and we saw three of them coming in. I guess it would be in a westerly direction. They were coming across the island and the guns started opening up. Alright, we had our loaded, and they were trained up there, but they couldn't elevate that far up, so we just sat there and didn't fire any. The rest of them opened fire on it. The planes were flying very high. You couldn't reach them anyhow. So that was the only planes that I saw, and I remained on the boat deck at that gun until I was relieved around noon.

But all this that went on was just a clean-up immediately after the attack. People were being taken down to sickbay. I never got to see that space below me except through that hole, and all you could see was just a black mess down there where the fire had occurred. I consequently learned what had happened when that bomb hit, but I didn't see that.

But after I was relieved and I went down below, we had sandwiches and coffee and this was the worst part of the whole thing. The first part, like I say, we all jumped to our duty right away like I did--jump in there, close our compartment door down, and wait for instructions when we were called up on the boat deck. I could see guys doing the same thing. Everybody was doing their job. This wasn't the bad part.

The bad part came in late evening--four or five o'clock in the evening. After this let-down, everybody was talking, and rumors were flying back and forth, "They're coming back tonight, and they're going to land troops, and they probably have troopships out there waiting until nightfall to come in for a landing," and all sorts of things were going on. Everybody was nervous. Everybody was still in shock. Nobody could believe it.

By that time--that afternoon--I had been called, along with some other people from the F division, to identify a body in sickbay . . . and this man was attached to the ordnance storeroom at the time to do some blueprint work, but he was really a gunner's mate first class from the seventh division, and he was one

of the fellows killed, a fellow by the name of Slifer. They weren't sure. He was badly burned, but we could tell because it was very easy to tell. He was a tall man, about six foot three or four, and lanky, and he still had the skivvy shirt, by the way, with three stripes because we were all wearing shorts at the time with just our skivvy shirt. Most of the injured, by the way, were burned due to that scanty clothing.

But about four or five o'clock, we gathered in the ordnance storeroom again. The gunner decided that he had to sleep down there, too, because this officers' country was all messed up by that bomb that went through there. He came down there and we stayed there. We lost all track of daytime or what have you until just evening, about 6:30 or seven, something like that, 7:30.

Somebody passed the word out that you could hear it on the intercom, "All hands lay up on to the armory and draw small arms. Repel boarders!" That's the way they put it. So away we go. We all ran up to the armory. I went up there to help dish out ammunition and rifles and what have you. That was a mess, a disaster. Everybody was grabbing what they could.

They weren't even careful what they picked up--the wrong ammunition for the wrong rifle and everything else.

Well, after everybody got out of there and we dispense all the equipment, the word came back to secure from repelling boarders, so here comes all this stuff back. A little later on we learned what had happened. Some fliers, some Japanese fliers, had finally made it to shore, and these were the Japs that were landing at that particular point, and by that time some submarines had been brought in and so on. But that night was the worst night because of the uneasiness.

Marcello: I'm sure there were all sorts of trigger-happy sailors around that night.

Townsend: Yes. That night . . . about that time . . . guns opened up on the island, and we didn't know the reason. Again, like I say, you're in the ship confined in there, and you don't know what's going on on the outside. You hear the guns going off, you hear the rumors, and we actually thought they were going to land on the island, and we'd have to fight not as a naval unit, but as foot soldiers, and this was really what had us more or less puzzled.

When nothing happened, then the damage was surveyed the next day, and then the rumors started flying around, "Our cruisers have gone out, our destroyers are gone, everything else, and everything's under control. The Japs are running back to wherever they came from." But that was it until we left from there around December 20.

Marcello: Did you witness the fate of some of the returning fliers off the carrier Enterprise when they tried to land? You remember there were several fighters that were flying in from the Enterprise, and I think that just about everybody in the harbor opened up on them.

Townsend: They opened up but I was under the impression that those were B-17's coming into the island from the mainland.

Marcello: No, these were fighters. The B-17's had come in during the day. These were fighters that were coming in at night.

Townsend: I didn't know what they had opened up on, but I had heard later on that B-17's had come in. So like I say, we were down below when they opened up and said to repel boarders and this, that, and the other. Then, like I say, there were all these guns that went off,

and we were, like I say, all in shock, all nervous, just awaiting word. Radios were not allowed to be turned on. That's the word that went down. All radios were to be shut off and turned in to the radio shack. They confiscated all radios, everything, not because they didn't want us to hear the news, but because they felt that radios would attract . . . you know, would tell them where we were.

Marcello: What sort of emotions or feelings did you have in the aftermath of the attack, that is, after you had calmed down a little bit and the action was over and you could take stock of the situation?

Townsend: What words would best describe it? Completely let down like getting beat by a rival high school in your last game. Something that you cannot ever get a chance to redeem. Just a complete letdown. You felt a lump in your throat when you saw all these ships the way they were, what had once been your pride, you know, the Navy and all that, and then you thought, "What will the folks think of us back home?" That's about the feeling that we had: "Here they are depending on us, and look what they've done." In other words, it was something that we felt . . . that I felt responsible for even

though there wasn't anything I could do about it. I guess everybody felt the same way.

Marcello: Did you ever look for any scapegoats, that is, for placing some of the blame on somebody like Admiral Kimmel or General Short?

Townsend: No, no. We wondered why nobody had reported these planes coming in and all, but we always figured that we could get into Japan without being observed, too. We flet that we could have done this ourselves, and after all, we figured that they would do it, too. They must have flown low until they hit the island, then gained altitude. Up to this day, even seeing the movies, I don't see how it was possible to do so, but nevertheless at the time, we knew that you could escape radar detection by flying low, and this was not the problem. The problem was why were we in Pearl Harbor in the first place when it had already happened at Scapa Flow and at the other places? These fleets had been caught the same way as we were, and this was what we couldn't figure out.

But as far as putting the blame on anybody, I don't believe anybody talked of that by saying, "That guy's responsible or this guy." No, the media took

it up later on, and, of course, we all got to wondering the same thing. But knowing how the Navy works and how any organization works, the man at the top has to take the responsibility. But unless he already knew that there was a possibility and he had been warned, "There's a possibility the Japanese will attack you. We're going to put the fleet there to tempt him." And I don't know this for a fact, but this was what came out later. Whether this is true or not, I don't know.

But at the time, we didn't blame anybody. We knew that every man had done the best he could. The guns opened up the way they were supposed to, but the ammunition wouldn't fire. I myself saw stacks of it alongside the guns after we started cleaning up. I was there till noon, like I told you, on the boat deck. There were stacks of ammunition that you couldn't dump over the side because there wasn't any water to begin with. That ammunition could have gone off at any time. They were duds--old ammunition, old guns.

So I was very proud of those guys up on the air defense, though, to stand there and naturally take all that machine gunning and everything and stay at their stations. But according to what I've learned since

then, subsequently to that, talking to the people up there after the attack and all, every guy stood by his gun. There wasn't anybody that I know of that shamed their ship in any way.

Marcello: Usually, in a situation as serious as this, there's a funny incident that many times will unintentionally take place. Did you perhaps witness anything of a humorous nature that took place?

Townsend: Yes, but that happened that evening. This gunner--Weaver was his name--and we were all in the same shape that he was in. But there was this loose deck plate in the ordnance storeroom deck, and everytime everybody walked over it and stepped on it, well, it released. It would cause a sound that sounded like a bomb going off way off someplace because right below us was the double bottoms. The first time somebody hit it--he was tying to get to sleep--and it sounded like a bomb going off, and he jumped off his pallet that he had fixed up. "What was that? What was that?" he said. I didn't know what happened, and nobody said anything about the plate, you know. So he says, "Any word been passed?" "No." And he went back to sleep. Sometime later, somebody else walked

over that thing and again the same thing. By this time he stayed awake, and about that time another fellow went over and stepped on it and made the smae noise, and then he said . . . it was humorous at the time. He was so mad and angry, he says, "The next guy that steps up on that plate, I'm going to shoot him." He took his .45 and laid it to one side (chuckle). That's about the only incident that I remember.

Marcello: I would assume that there were a lot of jumpy sailors around that night, and he wasn't the only one.

Townsend: Very jumpy, very jumpy, everybody. But that plate, right there in the middle the deck, we should have known what it was because it happened all the time, but we had a one-track mind. That's about it.