

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
240

Interview with
Carl E. Lee
August 17, 1974

Place of Interview: Houston, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: open
Approved: Carl E. Lee
Date: 8-17-74

COPYRIGHT © 1974 THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Oral History Collection, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 76203.

Oral History Collection

Carl Lee

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Houston, Texas

Date: August 17, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Carl Lee for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on August 17, 1974, in Houston, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Lee in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the old battleship USS Utah during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

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

Mr. Lee: I was born in Hitchcock, Texas, down here in 1923, in October. I was raised in the Houston area, in the westend part of Houston. I went to George Washington Junior High School and Sam Houston High School for one year. At that time, when I quit there, I joined the Navy. From then on, well, I went aboard the Utah right out of boot camp.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Lee: I had a brother that was in the service at that time. He was aboard the USS Mississippi. He had been in the CCC camps in Colorado. He had joined the Navy, and I wanted to get with him. The Navy promised me that they always put brothers together, so I went in. But I ended up on the Utah, and he was on the Mississippi.

Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Lee: December 26, 1940.

Marcello: In other words, you were in approximately a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor took place.

Lee: Yes.

Marcello: At the time that you joined the Navy were you keeping abreast with current events or the world situation or anything of that nature.

Lee: Well, of course, being that age, about seventeen years old at that time, I wasn't too familiar with things. I had heard . . . I mean, I knew that Roosevelt was President. I had . . . I was raised during the depression years. I knew a little bit about the things that was going on, of course, the troubles over in Europe over there that they were having at that time.

Marcello: I would assume that when you did take note of current events that your eyes were usually turned toward Europe

rather than toward the Far East at that particular time.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: Where'd you take your boot camp?

Lee: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think ought to be a part of the record?

Lee: No. In boot camp I was just one of the recruits, and we just went right about our business. I didn't have any problems or anything. I was just looking forward to getting on the ship with my brother.

Marcello: Now you mentioned previously that after you got out of boot camp that you went straight to the Utah. Where was the Utah at this time, that is, at the time you got out of boot camp?

Lee: I believe it was in Long Beach--Long Beach, California.

Marcello: Then you boarded the Utah in Long Beach.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you found out that you weren't going to be able to get aboard the USS Mississippi with your brother?

Lee: Well, I didn't give up exactly until after Pearl Harbor because at one time the ship had gone to Pearl Harbor,

and my brother was out there. I went to see him on the Mississippi. We had applied for a transfer, and we were told that . . . his executive officer told us that he'd be glad to have us on board, but my executive officer told me that I was in the process of gunnery training and this kind of thing. I'd have to wait until that was over. Later on, I may be able to be transferred.

Marcello: Did you take the Utah from Long Beach over to Honolulu or to Pearl Harbor?

Lee: Yes.

Marcello: Describe this ship. What was the Utah like?

Lee: Well, the Utah was a big ship. Of course, the first time I went to sea out there and got in those big waves and saw that huge ship being tossed around the way it was, it was kind . . . well, it was kind of frightening to me at first. But as I looked around and saw the other fellows that had been on the ship all this time, well, I saw that they weren't concerned. So as I looked up and seen those mountainous waves coming at the ship there, and then looked down after the ship went over the top and went down to the valley, well, I began to just take it as a matter of course.

But the ship itself, it had had the big guns taken off of it. It had been a battleship, but they were using

it at that time as a training ship to train the recruits and so forth in gunnery. They had experimental guns on the ship that they were trying out such as the 1.1 which I believe was later developed into, I guess, a 40 millimeter or something like that. It was also a target ship, which our own planes would drop dummy bombs on us. Submarines would fire dummy torpedoes at us and that kind of thing.

Marcello: Of what vintage was the Utah? In other words, how far did it go back?

Lee: The Utah, I believe, was--if I remember right--was built in 1911.

Marcello: What sort of complement did the Utah have aboard it? In other words, how many men would normally be aboard the Utah?

Lee: There were approximately 500.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, this was used primarily for training.

Lee: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what your training was like aboard the Utah.

Lee: Well, of course, I went into the gunnery training. I started out there on the deck force, and I became a

mess cook. Aboard that ship, we served meals to the men in family-style. Each mess cook would have two tables of men to serve, which would be approximately . . . let's see. I believe we had ten men to a table. That would be twenty men that we were serving. Of course, at that time each mess cook would vie for the tips between the tables, you know. On paydays, why, the table that got the best food or the most food or most satisfied would tip the mess cook a little bit more. As a mess cook . . . I spent most of my time as a mess cook except when I went into the gunnery gang. I was going to go in for gunner's mate.

I had a little problem there in that. I don't know. I always felt like I was framed. One of my jobs in the gunner's mate gang was to take care of the magazines below--keep them clean, cool. On an inspection tour the captain had found a book down there. I was accused of spending my time down there reading that book by the chief gunner's mate at that time. I could never convince him that I had never seen that book down there (chuckle).

As a result, well, he . . . at that time out there we were in the process of doing this bombing--

dummy bombing--our own planes dropping dummy bombs on us. At this time all our decks--the wooden decks--were all covered with timbers--heavy timbers--to protect them from these dummy bombs. They were just about six or eight inches long and shaped just about like a bomb and had a little old shotgun shell in them to make a racket so they'd know where they hit. The guns that we had on there at the time was covered with steel doghouses to protect them from these dummy bombs. While I was working in this, I was also a compartment cleaner while I was striking for this gunner's mate. Well, when this book was found in there, anyway, I was taken out of the gunner's gang, and I was given the compartment cleaning job, period.

Of course, during the bombing attack that we was going through, the dummy bomb attacks, they had what they called bombing quarters which was three decks below. It was necessary for the mess cooks to get their meals fed as quickly as possible while we was out there for these things and get their messes cleaned up as quickly as possible in order to get everybody down to the third deck when the bombing run started. So the chief gunner's mate, he decided that I should be a mess

striker and help the mess cook. I was still in the gunner's gang, but I was to be a mess cook or mess striker and help him.

Of course, I felt like this was an unfair assignment, and I committed one of the big sins at that time by refusing to do it. I got called before the captain and went to a captain's mast. I was given a summary court martial and fined \$72 and fifteen days on bread and water. Well, of course, \$72 at that time, when I was making \$36 a month as a seaman second class . . . of course, it was strung out over a period of time, but it was still a cut in pay.

Marcello: Now was all of this taking place while the Utah was at Pearl Harbor?

Lee: Yes. Of course, earlier we had made one trip out there and then had gone back to Long Beach, I believe it was, and then went back out there again. This bombing run that we was on at the time of Pearl Harbor . . . well, my brig time started . . . well, I got out of the brig approximately around the 12th or 13th of November--something like that. Then I was sent back to the deck force. I was kicked out of the gunner's gang. I went back to the deck force in which I became

a mess cook again. I spent the rest of the time on that ship as a mess cook.

Marcello: How would you describe the morale in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Lee: Oh, I think it was great (chuckle).

Marcello: How do you account for the high morale?

Lee: Discipline. I think this was one thing. Like I said, at my age at that time, I was young. Of course, I had been in the Navy almost a year. I had refused to obey this order given by this chief. This was one thing that they just didn't tolerate. It was a good thing, I think, as I look back on it now. Of course, at that time I felt like I was treated unfair. I did learn that they did have discipline in the Navy, and you knew what you were supposed to do and you did it.

Marcello: What sort of alerts and maneuvers did the Utah participate in while you were at Pearl Harbor? Now I think you mentioned some of the functions that the Utah served here. How often would the Utah go out? Let me start with that question.

Lee: Well, we would go into the harbor on the weekends and then stay out to sea all during the week.

Marcello: Oh, I see. You were out all week with the rest of the ships in the Pacific Fleet.

Lee: Well, most of the ships were . . . the ones that were there . . . most of the battleships and so forth were tied up outside the harbor there at a place, I believe, called Lahiana Roads. They had an anchorage out there for them. They didn't allow but a couple of battleships at a time to go inside the harbor. But on our maneuvers, for the most part, we were the only ship that was out there, and the planes were coming in dropping their dummy bombs on us.

Marcello: In other words, when you went out on your maneuvers you normally didn't have the escort of destroyers and cruisers and this sort of thing.

Lee: No.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, you would go out . . . you would be out all week and then come back into port probably on a Friday evening or something of this nature.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: Did this particular pattern or routine change any as one got closer and closer to Pearl Harbor? In other words, did it stay the same?

Lee: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, what sort of liberty did you get when the Utah was at Pearl?

Lee: Well, of course, I didn't . . . I never did get over into Honolulu too much myself. I did go over about . . . I guess all the time that I was in the Pearl Harbor area, I guess maybe I might have went over three or four times, but we had to be back to the ship by midnight.

Marcello: Was there a port and starboard liberty, or did you usually get the entire weekend off when you were in port, or exactly how did the liberty work?

Lee: Well, of course, on mine I don't remember whether we had port and starboard liberty or whether it was one out of three or just what it was. But on the weekend there . . . I mean, all I knew was just what mine was at that time because to me those kind of things . . . I learned more about port and starboard liberty and one out of three and one out of four later on. I never did have a weekend liberty.

Marcello: In other words, you would probably, what, get one day off and then be back on the ship?

Lee: Yes, come back on the ship by midnight.

Marcello: So what was the social life like for a young sailor in Honolulu when you did have liberty?

Lee: There wasn't too much because there was too many sailors in there (chuckle). It was more or less just a matter of going into town and looking around in the shops. Of course, there were lots of sailors that waited in the lines, you know, for the girls, which they were long lines at that time.

Marcello: Did most of this activity take place down on Hotel Street?

Lee: I can't remember if it was River Street or Canal Street that I saw most of it. I might say at that age I did try it once myself (chuckle).

Marcello: Now the Hawaiian Islands at that time had and, of course, still do have a relatively large population of people of Japanese ancestry. Did you or your shipmates ever talk very much about the threats that these people might represent in case there would be a war with Japan? Did the subject ever come up in any of your bull sessions?

Lee: Oh, yes, yes. That was . . . the closer the time of Pearl Harbor came, the more we began to talk about war with Japan. We was always complaining about all the steel we were shipping over there and that they'd be shooting it back at us. Everybody was curious about what the Utah would do in the event of war with Japan

. . . well, if we got involved in the war with Japan or Germany--either one. We had spent most of our time talking about the Utah being a . . . sitting on the West Coast being a training ship, you know. This kind of interested us. Others said that the big guns would be put back on it. It would be a battleship again. Of course, others said we'd just continue on being a target ship and this kind of thing.

Marcello: How secure or safe did you feel at Pearl Harbor?

Lee: Oh, I had no worries about anything at Pearl Harbor. We were surrounded with ships there. We felt like we was completely safe.

Marcello: In other words, if war did come with Japan, the scene of action would probably be the Philippines or someplace in that particular vicinity.

Lee: Right. We felt like it would be away from us.

Marcello: As you get closer and closer to Pearl Harbor, of course, that area was simply a beehive of activity with all the ships coming in and out. Describe your impressions of Battleship Row. What exactly did it look like to you?

Lee: Well, of course, I don't really remember seeing Battleship Row next to the island there with all of the battleships in it because I didn't go on liberty and

didn't go on the other side of the island. The place where we were tied up was on the opposite side of the island from Battleship Row, and later on when they did bring all of those battleships in, well, nothing even occurred to me on it.

Marcello: In other words, the Utah was docked on the opposite side of Ford Island from the actual battleships themselves.

Lee: Right. We were tied up in a place where, it was my understanding, that the Lexington was supposed to be tied up.

Marcello: I assume that during that period that it was quite an honor, was it not, to be assigned to a battleship? At this time they were still considered to be more or less the pride of the fleet, I suppose.

Lee: Oh, yes, and on the Utah we still felt like we were battleship sailors. Of course, there was always the usual friction between the battleships. You know how it is. "My battleship's better than yours," and "Our ship's better than yours," and this kind of thing.

Marcello: Now I also know that in those months immediately prior to Pearl Harbor there was quite an influx of reservists coming into the Navy. Did the Utah ever receive very many of these reservists for training and this sort of thing?

Lee: No, not to my knowledge. I don't believe we had any reservists on there at that time.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to war, were there ever very many alerts or anything of this nature that took place?

Lee: As I remember, we had . . . we would have alerts and battle station drills and so forth approximately twice a week. This was general when we went out to sea and everything. Then, of course, in the mornings we usually had these early morning general quarters--battle stations--rungs where we'd get up in the morning early. They'd sound battle stations, and we'd go stay at our battle stations for fifteen or twenty minutes, till sunrise.

Marcello: I gather that most of these alerts and general quarters drills were rather routine.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: Where was your particular battle station aboard the Utah?

Lee: It was on the 1.1 that they had there.

Marcello: What sort of armament did the Utah have aboard it? Now you mentioned, of course, that the big guns had been removed. I would assume that the Utah probably had, what, twelve or fourteen-inch guns, I guess?

Lee: No, well, they had been, I believe, twelve-inch guns on there at one time.

Marcello: And those were the ones that were removed.

Lee: Yes, but the ones that we had on at that time . . . all we had were a few five-inch antiaircraft batteries. As far as surface guns, I don't know of any surface guns that we had on there. We had these 1.1's and the five-inch and some .50 caliber.

Marcello: Where were your 1.1's located, that is, the guns that were a part of your battlestation?

Lee: Mine was just down from the bridge--just below the bridge on the port side.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese at that particular time, what sort of a person did you conjure up in your mind?

Lee: I didn't . . . I didn't even . . . I never did seem to give it any thought.

Marcello: Did you and your buddies ever talk very much about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy? Was this ever a subject of conversation?

Lee: Yes, but we felt like they . . . as far as we knew at that time, they didn't have anything. We felt like we could knock them out in no time at all with what we had.

Marcello: Okay, I think this more or less brings us up to the actual attack on Pearl Harbor itself. What I want you

to do at this point is to describe to me as best you can what your activities were--what your routine was--on Saturday, December 6, 1941. From that point we will move into Sunday, December 7, 1941. First of all, let's start with Saturday, December 6.

Lee: Well, to start with, a few days before we came into port--I believe it was about Thursday around midnight--the Utah reported a Japanese submarine outside the harbor. When we went into port . . . I went ashore Saturday afternoon for awhile. I didn't stay long. Of course, all the sailors from all the other ships and everything was calling us "night eyes" because we could see Japanese submarines out there at night.

Marcello: How did you know that it was a Japanese submarine?

Lee: Well, this was a report. This is what we had heard that the ship had reported. We . . . as far as the report itself is concerned, it may not ever have happened. I don't really know. We had . . . we was all talking about this submarine out there. As far as who saw it or who reported it, I don't really know about that.

Marcello: Well, when the submarine was sighted were general quarters sounded?

Lee: No. I don't recall any battle stations at that time.

Marcello: Wasn't this rather unusual--to sight a submarine and then not go to general quarters?

Lee: It certainly would (chuckle). Like I say, the whole thing could have been a rumor aboard the ship, but this was the impression we had at that time.

Marcello: When did you hear that the submarine had been sighted? Did you hear it almost immediately after it occurred, or didn't you hear about it until you got into port?

Lee: It was when I got into port, was when I first heard about it.

Marcello: In other words, the submarine was supposedly sighted on a Thursday night, but you didn't hear about it until Friday or Saturday.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: I see.

Lee: They was calling us "night eyes" for seeing submarines at night out there. Saturday morning, after I got into port there . . . see, we went in there . . . I believe it was Friday night when we went into port.

Marcello: Didn't you usually also have an inspection on a Saturday?

Lee: Gee, I don't recall an inspection that morning. It was my understanding that all the ships in the harbor was to have a material inspection on Monday, and all the ships

that was in there had gone in and painted out all their double bottoms and everything in order for the admiral to come aboard and inspect.

Marcello: Now was it not true that when one of these inspections took place that the admiral would personally inspect one of the ships of the line, but you never really knew which one it was. Every ship would be inspected, but the admiral, that is, Admiral Kimmel himself, would usually inspect one of them.

Lee: Well, I wasn't . . . I didn't know this at that time. I mean, with my rank as a seaman second class and a mess cook, I just didn't have that information. I just didn't know what the admiral did.

Marcello: Now when the Utah or any other ship for that matter was in port, what was the state of the watertight integrity aboard that ship?

Lee: Of course, all of the watertight doors and everything were closed--the double bottoms and the magazines and so forth. Everything was kept closed up unless it was being worked on or painted or something.

Marcello: But, of course, the crew's quarters and all the other areas of the ship would have virtually no watertight integrity.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: I guess it was standard procedure, was it not, that even when the ship was in port that . . . like you mentioned, the more critical areas would still have watertight integrity maintained--areas such as the magazines and . . . I guess most things that were below the waterline.

Lee: Yes, they were. Most of your below decks were below the waterline.

Marcello: Nevertheless, those ships were still quite vulnerable, were they not, when they were in port simply because watertight integrity was not maintained at a maximum?

Lee: Right. The only thing, of course, in that harbor there . . . I think everybody felt pretty safe in there because . . . of course, it was a bottleneck harbor, you know, and anything outside the harbor might possibly come in and trap anything in there. Of course, with all the guns and everything we had in there at the time there was no worry about anything like that because they could be blasted out of the way.

Marcello: What ships were tied up near the Utah at that time?

Lee: Well, there was a four-stack cruiser, the Raleigh, tied up forward of the Utah, and the Tangier was tied up at the

stern of the Utah. They had these concrete quays out there at that time that were just concrete blocks with bits on them that ships tied up to. We were in the middle . . . in between these two ships. Of course, my routine as far as that goes on Saturday morning was to take care of the . . . you know, feeding the crew the three meals a day.

Marcello: Then I gather that you stayed aboard the Utah all day on Saturday.

Lee: No, on Saturday afternoon I went ashore for awhile.

Marcello: Okay, what did you do when you went ashore?

Lee: Just walked around. Walked around looking at shops and looking around for whatever there was to look around with. There was a couple of guys and I just out walking around over the town.

Marcello: I would assume that since this was December 6, you probably had a little bit of money left yet, did you not? I think payday was the first and the fifteenth, so on the 6th you may have had some money yet.

Lee: I did. I had \$6 (chuckle).

Marcello: Generally speaking, when the crew came back aboard the Utah on a Saturday night after being on liberty, what sort of condition were they in?

Lee: You name it! Some of them almost had to be carried aboard. Some of them had been up all night. Some of them were in good condition. Some of them had places to sleep over there. If I'm not mistaken, some of them had homes or was living with somebody else over there, had relatives over there. So it would go from one extreme to the other.

Marcello: In other words, it's not accurate to say that everybody who went ashore on that Saturday night came back knee-walking drunk or anything of that nature.

Lee: Oh, no, no.

Marcello: And would it also be safe to say that even those who came back drunk were usually ready to fight the next day or to perform their duties, whatever they might be?

Lee: Oh, absolutely, yes. That was one thing the Navy always insisted in every since I was in boot camp. They would tell us they didn't care how late we stayed out, who we went with, how drunk we got, or anything else, but just be ready for duty when their time come the next morning.

Marcello: Generally speaking, on a weekend would there be very many officers aboard the Utah?

Lee: Most of the time we hardly seen any officers. I mean, there was always a few around on weekends that we could see, but, I mean, they had their officer's country in which . . . and for me to say that there was a bunch of officers ashore or a bunch of officers on board, I couldn't say.

Marcello: What time did you come back aboard the Utah that Saturday night?

Lee: Well, I came back . . . it must have been 3:30 or four o'clock, in time to take care of the evening mess.

Marcello: And then after you had taken care of the evening mess, did you stay aboard the Utah . . . did you remain aboard the Utah, or did you go back into town?

Lee: No, I stayed aboard.

Marcello: What time did you turn in that night?

Lee: It must have been around 9:30.

Marcello: Did you take in a movie or anything like that aboard the ship, or just turn in?

Lee: No.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us up, I think, to Sunday, December 7, 1941. Again, what I want you to do at this point is to go through your routine from the time you got up in the morning until all hell broke loose.

Lee: Well, of course, when I first got up in the morning . . . of course, we had hammocks. We'd have to get up and, you know, and tie our hammock up, and then we'd go down and wash up, you know, and sweep the compartment down. They usually had muster, but on weekends we didn't have the muster. During the week we'd have muster in the mornings, but on the weekends we didn't.

So after we get the compartment swept down and everything . . . get everything squared away, then we went ahead and started setting up our mess tables and benches and getting our plates and all our silverware and cups and everything out, bowls, and setting all this stuff up for the crew to eat. Then, of course, by this time, the ones that were there started coming down to eat. We had to go up into the galley and get out . . . we had these round pot-like tureens that had a handle on each side that would stack one on top of the other. Then they would have a platter for eggs and this kind of thing. We'd bring those down and set them out on the tables out there. Then we'd keep an eye out for whichever ones became empty, and then we'd get a couple of them and take them back up to the galley and get them refilled and take them back down and get the crew served.

Marcello: Now where was the mess deck located?

Lee: It was on the second deck. The one that I was working on was on the second deck, on the starboard side aft.

Marcello: And how about the galley? Where was the galley located?

Lee: The galley was more amidships. It was up on the . . . more or less close to the front on the top deck.

Marcello: In other words, you had to go from one deck to another to get the food.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: And then bring it down to the actual mess deck itself. Okay, pick up the story from this point.

Lee: Well, after feeding the crew this . . . another mess cook and I were getting ready to clean up the mess. We had gotten out dishpans full of water and put soap in them and everything and got ready to start washing our dishes. We were standing looking out the porthole at Ford Island--just battling the breeze. There was no particular hurry, being Sunday.

Marcello: Sunday was more or less a day of leisure, was it not?

Lee: Yes, it was. Yes.

Marcello: And I would assume you weren't serving a full crew on Sunday.

Lee: No, we didn't have a full crew on Sunday. A lot of the fellows were sleeping in. Like I said, some of them were asleep over on the beach over there. But as we was standing there talking and looking out the porthole at the island, we saw high-level planes come over . . . high-level bombers. Of course, we didn't look at them as bombers at that time. He looked at me and he said, "Look at all them planes up there." I said, "Yes, I wonder what they're doing?"

About that time we saw some bombs falling out of them. I said, "I don't know. What are they doing? Having a dummy raid or something?" About that time the bombs hit the hangar over there on Ford Island. Before he could even answer we felt a . . . it felt more like a thud on the ship, you know. It just shook the ship. About this time the bugler on the ship sounded bombing quarters. So we just turned and started going down to the bombing quarters, third deck below.

Marcello: How badly did that thud shake the ship?

Lee: Well, for that size of ship, it was a pretty good jolt.

Marcello: Was it hard enough that it knocked you down or anything of that nature?

Lee: Oh, no. It wasn't that hard. Apparently, it had hit forward . . .

Marcello: Was it a bomb or a torpedo?

Lee: . . . on the starboard side. Well, I always felt like it was a torpedo. My understanding was that we had taken, I think, a total of three torpedoes and two bombs during the attack.

Marcello: Okay, so you were on the second deck, which was where the mess deck was, and when bombing quarters were sounded, you headed down to the third deck.

Lee: Right.

Marcello: Now when you say that bombing quarters were sounded, was this to signify that there was practice bombing taking place, or was this the real thing now?

Lee: I don't think anybody knew. I don't know who gave the order to sound it or what was in their head or anything, whether they just wanted to try to get us in a safe place or just what.

Marcello: The bombing quarters was different from general quarters. Had general quarters been sounded, you would have been out on deck with your gun, right?

Lee: Right, but bombing quarters bugle call was different.

Marcello: Well, this would have been the same thing as a training practice. Isn't that correct?

Lee: Yes. So we went down to the third deck, and for some reason we just kept on going down. We went on down to the fourth deck. This was the magazine ammunition handling room. Then we went on down to the fifth deck which was the compartment that leads into the magazine.

Marcello: Now when you were going down through these various decks, had the ship taken any additional hits at this point?

Lee: Yes, there had been other hits. Also, general quarters had sounded on the bugle while we was in the process of getting down there. By the time we got down to the fifth deck down there, into this compartment that leads into the magazine, they sounded abandon ship. The ship had begun to list real bad. At that point everybody . . . the whole line of men that was going down there turned and started going back the other way.

Marcello: What were your emotions or your feelings at this point? First of all, here was the ship being hammered by bombs and torpedoes, and you were going down below decks rather than going up.

Lee: Well, at that time we didn't know what was going on. It was just a matter of excitement or something that we felt. Of course, when the ship began to list as bad as it did, we began to get pretty concerned and started trying to get out. Everybody turned and tried to get out.

Marcello: How tough was it to get out of that ship? Well, first of all, how tough is it to get out when the ship lists?

Lee: Well, it depends which way you're going. Of course, the ship was listing to port, and we were going up the ladders . . . the ladder was facing . . . coming out of this compartment down below down here. It was just a straight up and down ladder with rungs on it. Get up into the ammunition handling room then and wait till the line gets to the ladder there which had a slanting ladder. You're climbing up those steps, and as we got back up to like third deck, which was also a mess room, where when we had . . . when the ship was having excess number of people aboard, passengers or what have you, they would have to use these extra tables and benches and so forth that they had hanging on the overhead on two rungs that just hung down from the overhead there. Of course, at this point . . . at this place here, too, was lockers all around the bulkheads where we kept our clothes and this kind of thing. It was living compartments. By the time I got back to this third deck, these mess tables that was hanging from the overhead were falling down and trapping guys. They were falling down on the guys. The lockers were falling down from the bulkhead.

Marcello: Are these mess tables fairly heavy?

Lee: Yes, they are. Of course, they had the metal legs that folded up under them to hang them up in the racks above. The lockers were falling down. As I got back to the third deck there, why, we saw a number of guys under these tables trying to scramble and get out.

Marcello: At this point how would you describe the reaction of the men? Was it one of panic at this point, or was the abandoning of the ship taking place in an orderly fashion?

Lee: Well, it was so new to everybody, so I wouldn't say it was panic because everybody seemed to know where they were trying to go and what they was trying to do.

Marcello: In other words, were there any cases of men trampling other men in the rush to get out or anything of that nature?

Lee: No. Everybody was waiting their turn. I mean, when they come to the ladder they'd go right on the ladder. There'd be a line of guys waiting. I never saw anybody trying to push anybody out of the way or stomp on anybody or anything like that. We pulled three guys

out from under tables and lockers there on the third deck, that is, that I was involved in.

Then when I got to the ladder to go up to the second deck . . . my locker was right underneath the ladder. It had fallen down against the ladder. It had sprung open. That's where my six dollars was-- in my locker. All I was wearing at the time was a skivvy shirt and white shorts. That was the uniform of the day.

When my locker had fallen open, my mother's picture that I had just inside the locker had fallen down and was laying down on the deck down there. I looked down there, and I saw her picture. That kind of jolted me a little bit there, you know. I mean, just an instant thought there just passed through my mind.

As I got to the second deck . . . the line of men going up . . . and apparently we had had a bomb hit somewhere in the after section of the ship there. As I got up to the topside, the man in front of me just started to take a step out the hatch there. The hatches had a, oh, I guess, about a forty-five-degree slant to them over the ladders.

Marcello: Was this because of the list?

Lee: No, no, this is just standard on most ships. The hatches would be in such a position that . . . were made so that they could be dropped down for water-tight integrity. This particular hatch was covering the ladder and the men on the ladder. As this one man in front of me just started to take a step out this hatch . . . right in front of my eyes there was this timber that was out on deck because I was down that far on the ladder. The timbers started getting chewed up out in front of that hatch there where planes were diving and strafing. He just ducked back under the hatch there.

For some reason I didn't like that, so I turned around and I went back down the ladder. I passed those other guys up and let them come on up. I went back down the ladder, down the side there--back to the second deck again. Then I went to . . . I looked back there to this hatch going back into this compartment where I was serving my meals--into the mess hall there. I went to that hatch and it was warped. It had been warped out of shape and almost closed. I had a job squeezing through it.

But when I did get through it, I looked over there, and all my mess tables and the mess tables on the starboard of the ship and all over the dish water and all this kind of stuff--dishes and everything--had slid down against the port side of the ship on the inside there. The deck was slick with soapy water and just all kinds of stuff. I remember thinking that this was one mess I wasn't going to have to clean up (chuckle).

I got . . . I went to the hatch then. It was all the way aft, going to the topside. There was nobody else in that particular part of the ship at that time that I saw. I went on to that hatch all the way aft, and then I climbed up. When I got up to the top there, I stuck my head out and looked up at the sky. That was when I got my first look at war, you might say.

Marcello: What were your thoughts or your feelings when you got this first look at what was happening?

Lee: I thought, "This is doomsday! It's got to be!" By this time all of the guns in the harbor had opened up, and antiaircraft fire had just blackened the sky. The planes . . . I would have thought there would have been a thousand planes up there from the looks

of it--the way they were diving around up there. With the antiaircraft fire and everything, it was just something unbelievable. I just couldn't comprehend what it was all about.

So I took a step out on the deck out there, and it looked like one of the officers was standing there. He must have been ten or twelve feet from me. He was standing there, and he had his hands down his side. He was just shaking. He was saying, "G-g-g-g-get below! G-g-g-g-get below! Get below!" Before I could even take a step another plane came down strafing, and he just fell forward.

At this time I saw everybody else heading for the starboard side of the ship. It got to be where it was a pretty good climb up there. The timber itself apparently hadn't started shifting too much. However, it was getting in a dangerous position because it was laying loose up there. It was just jammed, you know, together.

Marcello: Apparently, the Japanese mistook the Utah for an aircraft carrier, did they not?

Lee: This is what we felt because the Lexington was supposed to be in there at that time.

Marcello: And I would assume that from the air, with all those timbers on the decks, it may have actually looked like an aircraft carrier.

Lee: Yes, and with all the big guns taken off of it. Of course, they came . . . apparently came right over that hill there in those torpedo planes. They were low anyhow. It would give the appearance of a carrier.

Marcello: Okay, so you're out on deck now. What did it feel like to come under this strafing?

Lee: That scared me. That's when I got scared. But I ran on to the side of the ship there and jumped in-- jumped off the ship.

Marcello: How high a jump was this?

Lee: Oh, gosh! I'd hate to even have to estimate it. It must have been thirty feet at least.

Marcello: Was the water already full of oil and this sort of thing at this time?

Lee: No, I didn't see any oil at that time. When I jumped . . . just before I jumped in the water . . . of course, I saw everybody else jumping in, and some of the guys were climbing down the lines, I guess the guys that couldn't swim. As I jumped in the water . . . as soon

as I hit the water, there was a motor launch that was picking the guys up. So I just took . . . I got in the motor launch, and then when I got in the motor launch and saw that it was about to sink because there was so many guys in it, another fellow and I . . . well, the guy that was standing there at the porthole talking with me, he was in the motor launch, too. So we decided, well, it was not that far to shore, so we dove out and started swimming towards the shore.

Marcello: About how far was it to shore?

Lee: As I remember, it must have been about fifty or sixty yards. As we got . . . we got, I guess, maybe halfway to the shore when the lines on the ship broke. All the guys that was climbing down those lines . . . it just . . . those lines . . . you stretch a ten-inch hawser to the breaking point, or these inch and a quarter cables to the breaking point, you had men flying through the air.

Marcello: You mean when they were actually hit by these cables that had snapped or simply . . .

Lee: No, they were climbing down the cables and lines, and when the cables snapped, well, it just threw them through the air. The guys that were still up on the

side of the ship up there . . . when the lines broke the ship went on over. The guys that was up there, they started . . . some of them ran down the side and the bottom as it turned over. Some of them jumped and landed on the bottom. They must have skinned themselves up pretty good.

Marcello: Of course, by this time I'm sure the timber started shifting, too, did it not?

Lee: Well, by this time the timber was already in the water. Of course, it was on the other side of the ship. We couldn't see any timber because it was on the other side of the ship.

When I got to the beach over there, there was a big pile of rolls of wire that was stacked up there. I got over and I stood behind that for a minute and kept watching the sky, you know. Then I noticed that there was a big ditch over there. It must have been a hundred yards or so from where I was. I ran over there and there was a lot of guys in that ditch. Of course, not thinking, I . . . this would be a logical . . . well, it would be a bad place to be in an air raid where you have strafing. I think everybody, just about, in that ditch learned that when a plane came in, and it got just

about to a point where it looked like it was lined up right with that ditch. It got just about to a point to where it was going to open fire and it blew up. Antiaircraft fire or some machine gun fire or something hit it and it blew up, and that ditch cleaned out.

It was just a few minutes after that that there was some trucks coming by and picking the guys up. I got in one of these trucks and was taken to the Bachelor Officers' Quarters. When I got there, the Red Cross was there with cookies and coffee and doughnuts and that kind of thing. There was people coming in there in every condition.

Marcello: I would assume that most of them were suffering from burns?

Lee: Well, at that time, no. Not at that particular time. There was a lot of them coming in there that . . . of course, they was wounded in different ways--limping and holding an arm or holding their head or stomach or something like this--and covered with oil, a lot of them.

In fact, one guy I walked up to was a cook on the ship. He was a good friend of mine. He was just black

with oil. He walked up to me, and he said, "Boy, if you don't think drowning is a hard way to die," he said, "lookie here." He showed me six knots on his head. He'd gotten caught under that timber out there. He said, "Six times I tried to come up before I realized that I'd better stick my hands up first and get them in between some of that timber." But he was covered with oil. I didn't even recognize him till he started talking.

Of course, then they told us to go to any of the rooms in the BOQ there and find any kind of dry clothes we could get and try to clean up the best we could and get any kind of dry clothes we could and come back down. So we did and, of course, everybody was down there in all kinds of civilian clothes. Some of them would get up there and dress up in a nice suit and everything and come down and didn't have no shoes on, couldn't find no shoes to wear.

But then after we got back down there--got back down in the area there--by this time there were guys burned and guys being carried in with burns and so forth. They came in and asked for volunteer machine gunners to . . . they apparently set up some planes

that had been damaged or some that couldn't fly and set them up around the field out there with machine guns in them. Then they wanted machine gunners to go out there and man those machine guns.

Marcello: Now would this have been at Hickam Field or where?

Lee: No, this is at Ford Island.

Marcello: I see. You're at Ford Island. You swam to Ford Island, right, okay.

Lee: Well, this . . . when they got to . . . when they got their gunners and machine gunners, then they come in and ask for riflemen to take a rifle and go out and lay around the field and try to pick off them pilots that was diving in so low. Our own planes that could fly and that had tried to take off . . . of course, this is what I heard at that time. I don't know it for a fact, but I had heard that our own planes did not have machine guns mounted in them--our own fighter planes. The pilots that tried to take off in those planes would try to take off with a .45 or a Thompson submachine gun or something like that. Of course, they didn't get ten feet off the ground, and there was a Jap plane right on top of them. But how true this is, I don't know. It's just one of those things that we heard at that time.

Marcello: Now by the time that you had got to Ford Island, had the second attack taken place yet? I'm sure that given all the things that you were involved in, you really couldn't tell when one attack ended and the second began.

Lee: I couldn't tell when one ended and when the other one began. There was no way I'd know because the thing I was doing at the time . . . in other words . . . well, when we got in there to the Bachelor Officers' Quarters in there, the one thing that scared us all was that the rumor got around the Jap fleet was waiting outside to come in and bombard the island. To us, Ford Island was it, see? At this time we didn't know that the Nevada had been sunk out there in the mouth of the channel--that she was sitting out there with her guns point towards the sea in case anything did try to get in. Of course, if they was out there and had anything at all, well, they could have come in and knocked her out of the way. This is where you might say fear really came in the picture as far as I was concerned because I could see no way or nothing that could stop them at that point if they did choose to come in.

Marcello: What were some of the other rumors that you heard? I'm sure that by this time the area was one big rumor mill.

Lee: Oh, yes. We heard that one Japanese spy had come up to the gate there--to the Marine gate of the Navy Yard--and said, "Now you'll see what Imperial Japan can do!" at which point he had, I think, six or eight .45 slugs in him after that (chuckle). Of course, the word got around, too, about the destroyer Blue that had sunk the Jap sub outside the harbor an hour before the attack. Then, of course, the word got around about the radarman that had reported the planes coming in. We were shocked at not having any warning whatsoever. Of course, the battleships, all their guns . . . well, all the ships in the harbor were supposedly to have all the firing pins down in the magazines, taken out of their guns. Nothing was in any kind of state of readiness. In fact, the kind of word we got, everything was a perfect set-up there for this attack.

Marcello: Well, looking back on it, do you think it was deliberate, or do you think that most of this was simply coincidental and indicates a lack of alertness or what have you?

Lee: Well, I've never been able to convince myself that somebody didn't know that they were coming. We heard, too, a rumor that the refrigeration ship, the Arctic, had reported this Jap fleet a week before the attack at Pearl

Harbor. Whether this is true or not, I don't know. I'd say it's probably . . . could have been a rumor.

There were so many things pointed to . . . of course, now I saw this movie Tora, Tora, Tora. It tells about the strategy of the Navy and the Army at that time--the strategy that they were using--and that they didn't feel like old torpedo planes could drop torpedoes in that harbor because of the water being as shallow as it was.

But to go on with the story there, they had a . . . the Arizona, of course, was burning. The West Virginia was burning. After calling for the machine gunners, they came in and asked for people to come over and help fight the fire on the Arizona. This is the one that I went on. I went over there to see what we could do over there.

Marcello: Now by this time had the Japanese planes left? Was the attack basically over at this time?

Lee: Not to my knowledge. I didn't know when it ended.

Marcello: When you went from the BOQ over to the Arizona, were you still under fire? Were there still Japanese planes around at this point, or had they left for good?

Lee: I don't remember seeing any at that time. They could have been. I know there were still antiaircraft guns

being fired and this kind of thing. But actually, whether there was any more planes in the air, I couldn't say. But when we got over to the Arizona over there, there was nothing anybody could do to that fire. That was just something else.

Marcello: Describe what the Arizona looked like and what your feelings were when you saw it.

Lee: Well, I couldn't hardly see the Arizona itself because of the flames and smoke. It was just one, big, monstrous fire. My God, the flames and smoke was going way up into the sky there! It was hard to say how high they were going. Of course, the West Virginia was just right there tied up. I guess it was probably right astern of the Arizona if I got my directions straight.

But with both of them burning like they were . . . there were guys swimming out through all that stuff trying to, you know, come swimming underwater, I guess, under all that oil and everything. Of course, the ones that did get up to the beach there, they'd be vomiting, sick, burning, and everything. All we could do for them was just try to, you know, put any fire out that was on them--roll them on the ground or get

blankets or something on them. Of course, they had ambulances and stuff like that, you know, and they'd put them in and they'd haul them off.

Marcello: Did you actually get out to the Arizona itself--get on board the Arizona?

Lee: Oh, no. No, there was no way anybody could get on that thing for three days. Well, they didn't . . . nobody from the beach would even try to get on it. There were some boats out there . . . outside the thing there, you know, picking up guys out of the water. But like I say, it was so black there we couldn't even see the boats on the other side of the Arizona.

That's just about . . . as far as that particular thing there, that's just about all I did at the time. Of course, after that was over, we went over and they . . . by this time, I guess, the whole thing was over with, and we went over and held muster and everything, and they finally came out with some dungarees for us. They took all of our names and everything. They gave us a card to fill out. Well, we went to some barracks somewhere, and I don't remember just where those barracks were.

This is where they gave us those cards to fill out. They said that these would be airmailed special delivery to our homes to let our families know that we were alright. Of course, it turned out that my mother didn't get hers until February. The why of this, I don't know. But the first thing she knew that I had even survived the thing was on Christmas Day when I arrived in San Francisco aboard the Detroit. I got ashore and sent her a telegram. That was the first she knew I was alive. For three days . . . well, that night . . . you may have heard about the planes that came in that night?

Marcello: You ought to describe that incident if you were an eyewitness to it.

Lee: I was, at least to my part of it. The old Sacramento was a coal burning gunboat. I had been sent over there to spend the night on it. As it turned out, I ended up with the ten o'clock to twelve o'clock dock watch and a Springfield rifle. I was walking up and down the docks out there, you know, just protecting the ship, I guess you might say--catching anything that come along. There was two guys that came up to me there while I was on that dock watch, and they said something about there

being some mattresses or something down on the end of the dock that they wanted to get. Of course, I hadn't seen any mattresses down there. So I just took them aboard ship and turned them over to the officer of the deck because I didn't know who they were. As far as I knew, they was spies trying to get in there and blow the damn ship up.

Well, I got . . . it was . . . I guess it must have been about eleven o'clock. They had this . . . at the end of the dock up there, in the shipyard there, there was a big crane, one of these huge cranes that runs on the rails. I was walking over there by that thing, and I saw three planes come over that had running lights on them. I didn't think nothing about it. But as soon as they got out of my sight there just a little bit, everything in the harbor opened up. I didn't even know that there were two other planes coming in behind them that had turned off theirs--that didn't have their running lights on. But as it turned out . . . my understanding was that these three planes that had their running lights on, they went on in and landed. The other two planes that tried to get out were shot down.

While all of this was going on I had this Springfield rifle there. I couldn't see nothing except, well, of course, tracers and all of this kind of stuff being fired up in the air. I just took my Springfield rifle and started shooting. I got under that crane, and I started shooting up in the air, too. I figured another piece of lead up there wouldn't hurt none.

So there was some shipyard workers up there hollering, "Give us some guns! Let us shoot, too." I told them, "Ya'll go get out of the way!" So I just kept on firing. I emptied that whole clip up there in the sky. There was a antiaircraft gun behind me over there somewhere. Everytime that thing would go off, I'd think, "Oh, God! There's another bomb!" But, of course, I found out later it was an antiaircraft gun back there.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that this was evidence of your frustration, that is, the fact that you were firing away at this plane with your rifle? You had to do something.

Lee: I felt like I had to shoot. If I had something to shoot, I would shoot. I don't know if it was frustration

or just trying to do something to feel like I was helping to do something. With as many shells and everything going up in the sky, if there was a plane up there, maybe mine would be the one to hit it (chuckle).

Marcello: I'm sure there were many trigger-happy servicemen around that night.

Lee: Oh, absolutely! That night they . . . boats in the harbor were particularly in bad shape because they had to go along always identifying themselves because every ship in the harbor had their watches all over the ship, you know, and any boat that passed by would be challenged. Any boat that didn't give an answer would be shot.

Marcello: Did you have any experiences concerning the midget submarines that had sneaked into the harbor?

Lee: I never did see any. I've heard the ones that . . . there was one of the destroyers that ran over one right there in the harbor. If I am correct in saying so, I believe it was right there off to the side of where that ship of mine was--the Utah. I have wondered to myself if maybe one of those torpedoes had hit that ship didn't come from that submarine. I've heard, too,

that there was a submarine that laid under the Solace, the hospital ship that was out there at the time. It laid under the Solace out there for three days before it was discovered. They moved the ship, and I think the torpedo boats were supposed to have sunk it.

Marcello: You mentioned previously that prior to the attack you really didn't give the Japanese very much thought--at least not as individuals. How did your attitude or your opinions change as a result of the attack?

Lee: Well, the next day I was assigned to a burial party. We was in the truck. We got in the truck, and they drove us to Honolulu. Of course, we had picked up just anything that we could throw. There was a lot of stuff . . . some of it was hard stuff, and some of it was stuff like tomatoes, rocks, and kind of thing that we could get. We got in that truck, and we drove through Honolulu, and anything that looked like a Jap we let him have it.

By the next day I hated Japs because by this time I found out, you know, about different friends of mine that had been killed and this kind of thing. Of course, thinking about whether somebody in our command was at fault or not was the farthest thing from our minds at that time.

On this burial party we went out and . . . the first day we went out to the Honolulu cemetery. There they had dozers out there digging trenches. They'd put forty-nine boxes to a trench. They'd bring in these boxes and . . . of course, the blood would be running out the boxes and everything, and the smell was awful. We put forty-nine boxes to a trench, and they'd put the American flag over the boxes. The chaplain would say a few words, and then the bugler would blow taps. Then they'd cover them up with . . .

I guess that was the first time that I heard them do that. The blowing of taps was about the most mournful sound I ever heard in my life. That's one of the things about that whole thing that stayed with me. It hurts me to this day to even think about it. The next two days we went out to a place called Red Hill.

Marcello: Red Hill?

Lee: Yes. Out there they had piles of bodies and pieces of bodies. We had to . . . they had stacks of burlap cut up in pieces. We had to make sure that every piece had a head and a body, to have two arms and two legs, wrap it up and put it in the boxes.

At dinnertime . . . well, at mealtime they'd take us over to a school house over there. They had the food all on the tables and everything. Places was all set out, and food was all on the table--even in the plates. They already had it in the plates. We'd all just march in there and sit down, look at the food, and get up and leave. We couldn't eat a bite there for about two days.

After that was over they assigned me to the USS Detroit, which was another four-stack cruiser that hadn't been hit. I served on it for four months running convoy duty from Pearl Harbor to 'Frisco. One trip we made over there we escorted twenty . . . I believe it was twenty-six ships. It took us fourteen days because some of the ships were so slow. We just had to drag it.

Also, the Sacramento--the one that I spent the night on that night--it had left Pearl Harbor and hadn't been heard from till after the war was over. They didn't . . . my understanding is that that Sacramento--they didn't hear from her anymore until after the war was over. She left Pearl Harbor, and I think a submarine must have got her out there.

Of course, after that four months . . . well, that was another time there in 'Frisco when we got on the . . . when we got into 'Frisco there, the Mississippi was in there. She had come back from Iceland. I think she had been doing duty on the East Coast. She had come back over from Iceland. I put in for another transfer. This time then, because of the brothers that were killed out there on the other ships out there together, they told me, "No, we don't put brothers together." So there went my final hopes of ever getting on the same ship with him, anyway.

I was transferred then to Australia, where I went around out there . . . the convoy I was in . . . I was on the Hugh L. Scott, an Army transport. It was later sunk off of North Africa in that invasion. We had to go around the Coral Sea battle out there when we went out to Australia. We went on around to the southern . . . around the southwestern corner of Australia, which is Adelaide. Then we rode by train from there to Brisbane where I got on a submarine tender. I stayed there a couple of months.

There was an old gunboat out there called the Tulsa. It had been in the China Station since 1927.

It hadn't been back to the States. We got with a bunch of Asiatic sailors out there on that thing. We worked on submarines there in Brisbane for awhile--the submarines that would go out and go up along the coast to Japan. They'd always come in with flags on their conning towers when they'd sunk ships. They was always coming in overdue and presumed lost.

Then after a couple of months there working on those submarines we got with the torpedo boats and started towing them up to New Guinea after the Battle of Milne Bay up there. As soon as it was over, well, we started towing PT boats in there. This Lieutenant Commander Buckley came aboard. We were with some other ships--PT boats--there for a good while. Then later on as we went on around the coast of New Guinea and got back up to Hollandia and places like that, Admiral Carpenter decided that the Tulsa, which had one of the best captain's cabins on it than any ship in that area at that time . . . he decided to make the Tulsa the flagship of the Seventh Fleet, which at that time wasn't nothing but just a few ships. Of course, as the Seventh Fleet built up, well, he went on to the bigger ships.