

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
244

Interview with
James L. Young, Jr.
August 17, 1974

Place of Interview: Houston, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: OPEN
Approved: James L. Young, Jr.
Date: Aug 17, 1974

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

J. L. Young, Jr.

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Houston, Texas

Date: August 17, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. J. L. Young, Jr., 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. Young in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Ford Island during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Young, 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. Young: I was born October 13, 1920, in Texarkana, Arkansas. I attended grade school and high school through graduation in Texarkana, Arkansas. I had some football and swimming scholarships which I didn't take due to the fact that I had a knee injury at the time. I did wind up going to

one year of junior college at Texarkana Junior College, at which time I was pretty disgusted with the whole situation, and I went down to join the Air Corps, and they told me it would be about a six to nine-month waiting period. So then I joined the Navy.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service?

Young: Well, I don't know. I just . . . I talked to my grandfather and talked to some friends of mine. I don't know. I just thought maybe that would be the best route. I'd always been interested in history as far as the military was concerned. I liked ancient history, particularly military battles, and history involvement as far as military regimes was concerned, I guess.

Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Young: Well, I went to Little Rock, Arkansas, and had my physical, and it was June 12, 1940.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the service, how closely were you keeping abreast with current events and the world situation in general?

Young: Not very close (chuckle). I was more interested in flying and, well, girls, I guess you could say, the female species.

Marcello: In other words, the thought that the country might eventually be plunging into war never really entered your mind?

Young: No.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Young: San Diego, California.

Marcello: I think this was probably the place where just about everybody in this particular section of the country took their boot camp. Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think ought to be part of the record?

Young: Well, no, except that it was a pretty long and pretty extensive boot camp.

Marcello: How long did it last at that time? Was it about three months?

Young: Three months, right.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Young: I went to the Aviation Machinist's Mate School at North Island, San Diego, California.

Marcello: And I assume that from there you probably went over to the Hawaiian Islands.

Young: Yes, I was assigned to VP-22. PAT Wing 2 at that time was stationed at Ford Island.

Marcello: Was duty in the Hawaiian Islands a voluntary duty, or were you simply assigned there?

Young: I was assigned there.

Marcello: How did you like the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Young: I thought it was great! I had never been away from home prior to this point, other than a couple of states and going to school. I thought it was real great, personally. I've always been pretty athletic, and I enjoyed that portion of it because over there sports is . . . well, at that particular time sports throughout the Navy was real competitive. Very, very highly competitive.

Marcello: We'll talk about that in a minute because I'm going to ask you about what you did in your spare time and so on. So when did you arrive in the Hawaiian Islands, then? You might have to approximate this date.

Young: Yes, I think I'm going to have to (chuckle) because I believe it was . . . let's see, I got out of boot camp . . . it was pretty close to Christmastime when I got to the Hawaiian Islands.

Marcello: This would have been Christmastime of 1940.

Young: Right.

Marcello: In other words, you were there for just about a year before the Japanese actually attacked.

Young: Right.

Marcello: Did you go directly to Ford Island?

Young: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what Ford Island looked like as you remember it at that time.

Young: Well, I went over on a tanker the very first time. In fact, it was the tanker, the USS Tippecanoe, that had been converted from a coal burner to diesel, and I had the very distinguished pleasure, I guess, of being assigned to the black gang, of which I served most of my time across in the bilges, double bottom, chipping paint, cleaning up, and after a coal burner you had no idea . . . I ruined two pair of dungarees (chuckle). They could stand up by themselves when I arrived.

Marcello: What was your rank at the time that you took off for the Hawaiian Islands?

Young: I was a seaman second class.

Marcello: You were still a seaman second class, and this was after you had already been to school?

Young: That's right.

Marcello: That, I think, just shows you perhaps how slow rank was at that particular time, does it not?

Young: Well, there wasn't any rank to be obtained at that time. It was frozen. I knew later on in life quite a few fellows that become friends of mine, and I became friends

of theirs due to the fact that some guys would ship over for sixteen or eighteen years for a rank that almost didn't exist. In fact, when I took my exam for seaman first class, there was approximately 5,000 other people in the fleet took the same exam. And some people had ten or twenty years in the service at that time.

Marcello: I had always heard, of course, that rank did come very, very slowly at that time. I guess that a petty officer might have anywhere from twelve years in the service on up.

Young: That's right.

Marcello: What did Ford Island look like from a physical standpoint? Describe it as best you can when you arrived there.

Young: It was just kind of a chunk of land out in the middle of the bay, and it had an awful lot of buildings on it. I wasn't greatly impressed. The most beautiful sight, I would say, is when you come around Diamond Head coming in from the States and when you go up through the channel. And then as you enter the Pearl Harbor channel, now that to me is about the same sight as a tourist would have. Except for the high-rise hotels,

it hasn't changed much over the years because I do go back--I'm still in the reserves--I go back about every two, three, or four years since then. The change in the island itself has been tremendous, but not within the Pearl Harbor compound. The Navy has increased their housing and their exchanges and their recreation facilities, but Ford Island is still Ford Island. There's not much you can do with it.

Marcello: And at that time Ford Island was mainly a seaplane base, was it not?

Young: Well, it was a seaplane base where they had tie-ups for your cruisers and your battleships and your aircraft carriers, yes. But mainly on one end . . .

Marcello: But basically, what I was getting at is that you were sent there probably as a part of the operations involving the PBY's going out of there on patrol and this sort of thing.

Young: That's right. That was the only one they had within the area. Kaneohe came up a little bit later. But, yes, that's the only one they had. They did have an airstrip where your carrier aircraft could land, but primarily it was a seaplane base which had what today we refer to as the "barrier hops." The outer perimeter patrols that we had was as far away from anything.

Marcello: What did you call them, the "barrier hops?"

Young: That's what we call them nowadays, yes.

Marcello: I see.

Young: We have barrier patrols. I'm in the reserves now, and when I'm stationed in Jacksonville, Florida, sometimes when I was in the VP squadron, which I just came out of the VP squadron in New Orleans, we would go to Jacksonville and have barrier patrol out of Jacksonville, which is quite a ways out. It's . . . even though this is supposedly a peacetime nation, in peacetime at this particular time the Navy in the reserves is still flying your barrier patrols.

Marcello: And they're called barrier patrols?

Young: Barrier patrols, right. It's just a designated area-- the outer perimeters as far as radar is concerned.

Marcello: What was your particular . . . describe what your particular job was when you arrived at Ford Island. What did you do?

Young: Well, when I arrived at Ford Island I was just a seaman "deuce." So I reported to the squadron, was checked in and everything, and so beings that I was kind of . . . I guess you would call hefty . . . not hefty but, you know, pretty well-built as far as athletics was concerned, they gave me the great honor of assigning me to the beach crew (chuckle).

Marcello: The beach crew?

Young: Right, which retrieves aircraft. At that time we had floating gear that you took out and attached to the aircraft to pull it back up on the beach with because we didn't have heavy amphibious-type aircraft. And they felt that I was heavy enough, I guess, to weight down one of the wheels, and so I was on the forward gear as one of the members. We had two men on each gear and then one man on the tailwheel, so we had a five-man beach crew plus the guy that pulled us out . . . it was a tractor ramp at that point. So I enjoyed it because I like swimming, and that's what you had to do to get up to the airplane. I liked the water, and therefore it didn't bother me. We had a real fine crew. In fact, we were competitive with the fleet there for awhile as far as beach time was concerned in retrieving an airplane.

Marcello: You might want to talk a little bit about this competition that existed between the various beach crews and this sort of thing. I think it's interesting, and I think it's an important part of the record, too.

Young: Well, I don't know whether you're aware of it or not, but throughout the Navy it's . . . after I learned the

Navy and the ways of the Navy, it was very competitive. Tracking . . . at that time it was torpedo runs and tracking and engineering and beaching and launching, and all this was done on a competitive fleet-wide basis through every organization or every squadron of our nature throughout the fleet. And it instilled in an individual the competitive nature of competition which, I think, was real great.

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

Young: Fantastic!

Marcello: To what do you attribute that fantastic morale?

Young: Well, when an individual comes into a squadron, he's cold and he doesn't know anybody. And right away the people there kind of more or less introduce themselves and take a guy under their wing and find out what his likes and dislikes are, and there's very little, if any, jealousy and none in particular in our squadron that I knew of. I contribute this, I guess, to people . . . I'd say . . . well, you have to start at the officer angle and then down through the chiefs. And we had some fantastic chiefs. Then there were the people themselves, I mean, your first and second class. These are your

departmental heads that do the majority of the work under the direction of others, but these people make you really feel at home. We had no petty larceny or no jealousy among the people because everybody was competitive with everybody else, so it kept you on your toes, and I think everybody was in competition with not only their shipmates but everybody within the fleet.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, I think this competition, this inter-fleet competition, had a great deal to do with the maintenance of morale in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy.

Young: Oh, absolutely, yes! It was true, too, within your competitive organizations with athletics, which I eventually . . . a friend of mine showed up out there that I had played softball with. I was on the softball team at the Naval Air Station there at San Diego, which we won the championship there. And he talked me into going into hardball, which a friend of his happened to be one of the coaches at the time. So then I said, "Well, what can I lose?" I liked softball anyhow, and I liked hardball. So I went into hardball and eventually wound up making all-fleet. But I had a lot of knee

problems, too, which I had a buddy of mine . . . he traveled with the squad and all he did was put my knee back in place (chuckle). But it was great, and I learned a lot there because I got to know an awful lot of people and people off the . . . we played with the Arizona and the Oklahoma and the Nevada, and it was quite competitive in fleet competition. Of course, the sub base there, I'd say, had the outstanding ball club because they had an opportunity to spend more time on the beach than we did (chuckle), except for the Naval Air Station.

The competition between the actual forces there-- the battleships and the cruiser divisions and the submarines--was really great and it was strong. Man, I mean, it was like Texas versus Texas A&M (chuckle), or Texas versus Arkansas or something. It was real strong. It was very good, and it was a great bunch of people. I met some fine people, very dear friends of mine. I lost a lot of them, but they were good people.

This factor, I think, had a lot to do with morale. It stemmed from competition. We might lose a ball game, but we'd shake hands and have a couple of beers afterwards, and everybody was great, you know! We'd

reminisce and discuss our errors and our . . . whatever you want to call it . . . what we did good and what we did bad and laugh about it and joke and be sure that we didn't make the same mistake the next time.

Marcello: How would you describe the training that you received here at Ford Island in this pre-Pearl Harbor Navy? Now obviously you must have been receiving some sort of training in addition to going out and helping beach the airplanes and this sort of thing.

Young: Oh, yes. I had quite a bit of training. Of course, I went through "mech" school in San Deigo, but . . .

Marcello: Now you went through what?

Young: Mechanics school. "Mech" school is what we called it.

Marcello: I see. This was Aviation Mechanics?

Young: Yes, Aviation Mechanics School in San Diego there at North Island, which was a fine school. But at the same time, yes, you had to work in the Navy, the way it was back in that period of time prior to World War II. You were competitive not only in your examinations for advancement in rating but also within the departmental competition. They would . . . there wasn't very many openings, and the people would have to kind of work their way up through

the ranks. And this being . . . a man here is assigned to this division . . . this was real great, I mean, this is what you're striking for, what you want to be!

Marcello: Now what were you striking for? Aviation machinist's mate?

Young: That's right, mechanic. Right, aircraft mechanic. My ambition later on was to be a plane captain. And, of course, you take a kid not quite dry behind the ears, and he's looking at one of these big flying birds up there, and at that particular point I had never flown in one, but, man, that was a great ambition. "Someday that bird's going to be mine. I'm going to be the sole master of that bird, find out what makes it tick."

And that's the ambition of the people, whether they're in ordnance or structural mechanics or aircraft mechanics. It doesn't make any difference. They have an ambition in life, and their goal is set, and this is what they want to be. And the people at that particular time were excellent people. They were well-trained. And even within the squadron itself you had people to help you along.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if there was a willingness and an eagerness among the petty officers there to provide you with the necessary on-the-job training.

Young: Oh, absolutely! Yes! The people there were not, I'd say, like they are in civilian life. They were not afraid of their jobs, in other words. They wanted to bring you along because in a squadron of this size everybody had to work together, they depend on each other, and if they can help you along, it makes their job a little bit easier. And you're always striving to get ahead, so therefore I would say, yes, the training is outstanding or it was at that particular time. Everybody just tried to help everybody else.

Marcello: Did you seem to detect that there was really no urgent nature about the training that you received? In other words, there was plenty of time for those petty officers to teach you all of the skills that were required and that sort of thing?

Young: Oh, absolutely! It was kind of a relaxed-type class, if you want to call it that. The guy would show you what to do, and then he wouldn't breathe down your neck. H'd walk off and leave you and let you do it on your own. Then if you fouled it up, which happened in lots of cases, the guy wouldn't come down and really jump on you, you know. He would come down and show you where your mistakes were. It was altogether different than it was in later years. They were always trying to help you, teach you.

Marcello: What did you do in your spare time? In other words, what was the social life like for a young sailor at Pearl Harbor during this period?

Young: (Chuckle) There really wasn't much social life. Just prior to my going there--I believe it was about three years before that--they transferred the fleet--the entire fleet--from Long Beach, I believe it was, to Pearl Harbor. And the natives didn't like it. They didn't like the Navy because the Navy came in, and they were a hard fighting, hard drinking, hard playing bunch of individuals because they didn't know whether tomorrow would ever come or not, so they could care less.

And in so doing it was very restrictive. In fact, your entertainment was made by you or your buddies. I had a bunch of fellows that I ran around with from all phases of life around the world. We attended some dances at what used to be the old Racket Club there--the tennis club, yacht club. It was kind of pre-USO, I guess you would call it. They would invite so many out there. And, of course, I was eager to go because I liked to dance and this, that, and the other. I met some real fine people, but you didn't go back very often because

you're kind of an outcast, really. So a bunch of us would get together, and we used to hitchhike out to Waikiki Beach, which was a long way out there at that time. We played volleyball. If we could get enough of us together, we'd play volleyball or go swimming, body surfing. Well, they used the surfboard, too, but body surfing mostly is what we would do.

Marcello: Did you ever frequent Hotel Street very much?

Young: Well, yes, I'd say we did. It's not to be denied (chuckle). They used to have some very good restaurants on Hotel Street, too, along with their massage parlors and other things. But, yes, they had some real fine restaurants, some good bars, and we'd been in and out of most of them.

Marcello: When was payday in the Navy during that period?

Young: Well, being a seaman "deuce," you didn't get very much pay, so you just . . . it was usually twice a month, if I remember correctly. And you had about ten bucks, I guess, total to do with what you wanted to.

Marcello: So consequently, I would assume that a lot of the entertainment that you did participate in occurred on the base itself.

Young: Well, yes, except at times we'd go over on the beach. We usually went on the beach . . . what we called the beach

was out at Waikiki or over at Kailua or Kaneohe or places like that on the weekends, and that would take a lot of effort among four or five or six guys. There has been times when we'd hire a cab and go out to these places. It would cost you about fifty cents apiece, I guess.

Marcello: What sort of liberty did you receive there at Ford Island?

Young: Oh, very good liberty. People that lived on Ford Island had overnight liberty. The fleet didn't. They had a curfew. But the people that lived on Ford Island, that were stationed there, had overnight liberty.

Marcello: How often could you get liberty at Ford Island?

Young: Well, if you didn't have duty you could get it whenever you wanted it.

Marcello: In other words, every night that you didn't have duty you could be off Ford Island?

Young: Right.

Marcello: How about the weekends? How did weekend liberty shape up?

Young: Well, that was good. Like I say, we . . . well, later on, when I started playing baseball, mine was pretty limited because we usually had games, but other than

that, we used to go out on the beach and . . . well, we played volleyball, like I said. It was real competitive. Then we'd just sit on the beach and watch the girls go by.

Marcello: How often did you get weekend liberty?

Young: Well, usually we would catch the duty about one weekend a month, or if we had flights it might be two weekends a month. But on the average we'd have three weekends a month off.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, did the liberty routine change any?

Young: I can't answer that for Pearl Harbor because at that time I'd been transferred to . . . well, our whole squadron had been sent to advance base at Midway Island. And we were down at Midway from July on.

Marcello: From July of 1941 until when?

Young: Until Friday night, December 5th. And we had flown over the Japanese fleet. We knew that they were there, and the last week of our tour on advance base--we were down at Wake--we knew they were there. We had flown over them, but there wasn't anything we could do about it.

Marcello: In backing up here a minute, why were you sent down to Wake Island in July of 1941?

Young: Well, we were sent actually to Midway.

Marcello: To Midway?

Young: Yes, our advance base. We went down to patrol, and this was an out-perimeter patrol. And also at that time we were sent to commission Midway.

Marcello: To commission Midway?

Young: Commission Midway as a Naval installation. We were what you would call "plank owners." When you're aboard when they commission this base or ship or a squadron or anything, you're commonly called a "plank owner."

Marcello: A "plank owner."

Young: A "plank owner," that's right. You were there and aboard when it was commissioned. We had a real good time there. We flew a lot of hours.

Marcello: Now by this time were you flying quite a bit?

Young: Yes, I was flying quite a bit, yes. I had worked up to just a crew member, not the plane captain that I was destined to be in later life, but as a crew member, yes, like a third "mech" or something. If they had somebody sick or didn't want to go or something, then they took you along with them. But I enjoyed it.

Marcello: Basically then, while you were down at Midway, you were flying patrols or the squadron was flying patrols. That was its primary function in being there.

Young: That's right.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer and closer to December 7th and as relations between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, how much did you talk about the possibility of war between the two countries?

Young: Well, it was quite heavy talk. Well, it was a matter-of-fact, everyday life thing. It was going to happen. It was inevitable but we didn't know when. So like a crazy bunch of people, we just enjoyed where we were and what we were doing and did our job and played as we could. We used to play volleyball at three or four o'clock in the morning. It was too hot to play during the day. We just carried on as normal people would, but we knew the threat was hanging over our heads, and we were at Midway when the ambassador to Japan came through on the Pan American clipper prior to his handing President Roosevelt the declaration of war. We were there at Midway when he came through.

Marcello: Did you see him or did you have a chance to observe his coming and going?

Young: No, we didn't. We knew that he was coming in, but they assembled all the military troops on the base and told them to make like we had a lot of people there, which we

had quite a few. I had the good fortune to run into a fellow that I knew from my own home town in Texarkana there by the same name (chuckle), Young, and we reminisced for awhile. He was in the Marines.

Marcello: What activities were taking place there at Midway to reinforce that island? Were they bringing in any squadrons of planes or anything of this nature while you were there?

Young: No. We were the only squadron there, and we were to be relieved by VP-21, who relieved us on the fifth day of December, and then we left. Well, I mean, it was official. Actually, it was about the third or fourth that they relieved us, and then we left.

Marcello: Even if war did come between the United States and Japan, did you believe that it would occur at Pearl Harbor?

Young: No.

Marcello: Where were most of your eyes turned. If war did come between these two countries, where did you think it was most likely to occur?

Young: Well, in the Asiatics. We had quite heavy equipment, a portion of the fleet, and quite a few squadrons and everything in the Asiatic Fleet. We figured that if it came it would be in the Asiatics.

Marcello: Somewhere around the Philippines, perhaps?

Young: Right. No farther than there, yes.

Marcello: You also mentioned awhile ago that at one point during your stay there at Midway, you did run across certain elements of the Japanese fleet. Now this would not have been the invasion . . . this would not have been the Pearl Harbor striking force, though, because you would have been too far south to have observed that.

Young: As far as we can determine, it was the striking force.

Marcello: Well, that, however, was a great deal north of Midway.

Young: Oh, yes, but you're talking about 1,350 to 1,400 miles from Honolulu to Midway. And if you're steaming that way aboard ship, your average speed . . . I don't know what the Japanese average speed was, but you're only talking a maximum of ten knots an hour.

Marcello: But the point I'm trying to make is--and I beg to differ with you here--that Japanese invasion fleet, that Pearl Harbor strike force that hit Pearl Harbor, started from the Kurile Islands, which are north of the four main Japanese islands, and they were going in a northeasterly direction, and then eventually they came south. So it is pretty hard for me to fathom how you at Midway would have been able to have seen them.

Young: Well, it might not have been that invasion fleet, but like I said, they had aircraft carriers . . .

Marcello: Yes, there was a lot of Japanese activity down around Midway.

Young: That's right. There certainly was. And we got the word from Washington after the notification of what we had found and everything that they were on maneuvers and don't bother them. We just assumed after we got back that this was the same fleet that we passed over. I have nothing to verify this fact.

Marcello: And, of course, the Japanese ships that you saw could have very easily been a decoy. Common sense, for example, would have said, "Well, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and if you look on a map, a straight line from Japan to Honolulu almost comes right through Midway. So that could have very easily been a decoy there.

Young: It could have. But all we were assuming was the fact that we did fly over this fleet, and there was nothing we could do about it. And they said, "Let them alone. They're on maneuvers." So that was it. We just assumed that this was the fleet. We have no knowledge as to whether it actually was or not.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Young: Well, a small individual with almond or squint eyes. And very ruthless-type individual because I didn't really know.

Marcello: Did you or your buddies or any of the old salts ever talk about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy?

Young: Not to any extent, no. We realized what they had but we didn't discuss it any.

Marcello: Okay, now this brings us up to the days immediately prior to the Japanese attack itself. At this point why don't you pick up the story from the time you left Midway and returned back to Ford Island. Why don't you just describe in as much detail as you can what happened from the time you left Midway until you got back to Ford Island.

Young: We left Midway and at that time I was a member of the plane crew. We left there early in the morning and got there late at night. It was a long haul--1,300 miles.

Marcello: Were you flying in the old PBY?

Young: Yes, the old PBY-1's.

Marcello: Which didn't go too fast, did they?

Young: No. Their speed was . . . as the old saying goes that most Navy people understand, they took off at ninety,

flew at ninety, and landed at ninety. So you didn't get very far in a hurry, but you got there. It might be a day late, but you sure weren't a dollar short (chuckle). But anyhow, we did get into Pearl Harbor at approximately 7:10 at night, in the evening.

Marcello: This was Friday, December 5th.

Young: This was Friday night, right. Approximately at 1910.

Marcello: Now during this flight from Midway to Ford Island, I assume, was when you saw these Japanese ships.

Young: No, we saw nothing. This was when we were on patrol out of Midway and also out of Wake approximately two weeks prior to that. And then we only saw them for about three days, and then we didn't see them anymore. No, we saw nothing. We had been gone, as I said, since July. The guys that had families or girl friends there were most anxious to get home. And we were, too, because we had a lot of money on the books (chuckle). We were really looking forward to it.

Marcello: What happened when you got back into Ford Island at approximately 7:10 on that Friday.

Young: Well, they kept the paymaster aboard and he paid us. Like I said, if you take a bunch of guys that have been away from real civilization, haven't seen any females,

and haven't had any booze or anything for, oh, approximately five months, man, they're going to tear it up! No way! They got money to burn! We all had three, four, five hundred dollars because we hadn't drawn anything in months. Mine wasn't really that great because I was a seaman "deuce." But we had to stay and more or less secure the aircraft. But anyhow, we were all anxious to get back to the barracks and get cleaned up and what have you, but by the time we secured, we didn't care to go over on the beach, at least the guys that I ran around with. So we just went on to the barracks, and by the time we showered and shaved and kind of rested a little bit, we decided we'd go over the next day. So that's when we started. We went over about one o'clock the next afternoon.

Marcello: Did you have to stand inspection before you went or anything like that?

Young: Oh, no! No, we were secured until Monday. The skipper secured everybody until Monday morning--muster at 0700 Monday morning. We went over on the beach about one o'clock, I guess it was, on a Saturday afternoon. Of course, we had quite a few drinks and went out on the beach, and we just had a ball. We couldn't decide

whether or not we wanted to go back to the base that night or stay in town.

Marcello: You had enough money that you could stay in town this time.

Young: Oh, absolutely! So it was by the toss of the coin that we lost, and we went back to the base. We used to ride the train back, but this night we decided to take a taxi back. The train was that little narrow-gauge railroad, banana train. But this night we felt really flush, so we decided we would take the taxi back. We took a taxi back to the landing there near the hospital and then took the liberty boat across to Ford Island.

Marcello: About what time was this?

Young: It was about one o'clock in the morning.

Marcello: What was your condition when you returned to the base?

Young: We were in pretty good shape. We didn't drink that heavy, really.

Marcello: Just steadily but not heavy.

Young: Well, yes, but not steadily either because we were on the go most of the time. I mean, we went here, there, and everywhere.

Marcello: In other words, you were not drunk when you came back to the base?

Young: Oh, absolutely not! No. Well, the guys that I ran with didn't care that much about alcohol. One guy was quite a Hercules-type. He was always working out with weights. And the other guy was old "Bo" Bohenstiel from back East. And the other guy was Lockhart, who was from Tennessee. He was a forest ranger before he came into the service. He was the guy who used to travel with us to put my knee back in place with the ball club. Show him a ship and he'd get sick right away. Duke Farragut from Houston was with us. The four of us pretty well ran around together. Then we had another guy we used to call old "Big John" Behney that was from the coal mines. He was quite a guy in himself. He would have made a fantastic boxer, I guess, if he so desired. He was big enough. But we all ran around together. These guys were pretty much athletically inclined, or else they were always working out with weights and not real heavy drinkers. We loaded up on a couple of times but not as a general rule, no. And we would go to the movies when we were in town or go to the beach and play volleyball--this, that and the other. No, I can truthfully say that we didn't get

loaded. As an average, no, absolutely not. Three or four drinks but not loaded.

Marcello: Were you able to observe what the general condition was of the other men who came in that night to your barracks?

Young: Yes, it was the average run.

Marcello: In other words, you had some loud, obnoxious drunks, but the vast majority of the guys came in, minded their own business, and went to bed.

Young: Right. Within our division, no, we didn't have . . . maybe one or two was obnoxious and real loaded. And if they did, we would just tell them to knock it off and they did. It was a real orderly, disciplined bunch of individuals. We had three guys, in fact, that were studying for the Military Academy. And they used to study real late at night, and everybody would help them with everything they possibly could--with their mathematics, their geometry, their "trig" or algebra or whatever it was they needed help with, history. And we really tried to help these three individuals. They had a great respect for their privacy, also, in their request to study. In fact, the chief that we used to have up there had a separate room, and he would ask them if they'd like to use his room for quiet in their study. I thought this was real outstanding. You didn't think of a chief acting

that way during that period of time, I'll tell you. And there was . . . we didn't . . . we had, oh, I'd say, two or three that was what you described as boisterous and obnoxious, but it didn't last very long.

Marcello: This kind of brings us into Sunday morning, I think. So again, I'll ask you to go into as much detail as you can concerning what happened on Sunday from the time you got up until all hell broke loose and thereafter.

Young: Okay, my bunk was out on the lanai overlooking the baseball field.

Marcello: Out on the lanai?

Young: Lanai is what they called it. It was a screened-in portion of the barracks. In fact, all the guys that I had been out with, we were all out there bunking. You kind of do this. You have your own little cliques and this, that, and the other. These people all stick together pretty close after they get to know each other. We were all sleeping out there, and like I said (chuckle), we didn't get into the rack until about one or 1:30. So we were pretty tired.

What first woke me up was not the fact that somebody was yelling, but it sounded like somebody was

hitting on the top of the barracks with a hammer, a sledge hammer or something. I found out later that this was bombs that was being dropped. And then shortly after I was wakened by this, this guy came up there . . .

Marcello: In other words, these were bomb fragments or what that were hitting the roof?

Young: No, these were bombs that were actually hitting then, but it sounded like somebody up there with a sledge hammer. It was like in the room above you when somebody drops a shoe or something. Only these were much more predominant.

The guy came through, and he says, "We're under attack!" Well, everybody was sitting up and said, "What in the hell is wrong with you? This guy's flipped his wig!" So about this time he says, "Get your goddamned heads down," because here was a plane coming, and as the case may be, the plane came but he strafed.

And we had double decker bunks, and the way he strafed was right between the first and second row of bunks. Needless to say, there was a few people that I would say weren't in the same condition that they were

in five minutes before then (chuckle). It was quite slippery around there in other words. Then this pretty well convinced an awful lot of people. So then the word came over the loud-speaker . . .

Marcello: What do you mean when you say it was quite slippery around there.

Young: (chuckle) I'm not going to say it over the tape, but (chuckle) the proverbial stuff hit the deck rather than the fan. But that's how scared we were! We were really scared because we had been taught, as far as the war was concerned, even at La Jolla in San Diego on the range up there, but not with live ammunition. Man, I mean, you just don't do that! Not in peacetime, anyhow. So this kind of frightened everybody, particularly "yours truly."

So they told us to report to our squadron immediately. In between these attacks we got dressed, and I mean these were planes that were coming down one right after another. And they were just strafing the hell out of the barracks and everything that represented it--dropping bombs. We didn't really know what to think. I'll be honest and truthful with you.

Marcello: Did you know at this stage that these were Japanese planes yet?

Young: Well, yes, because we saw one of them turn, and when he turned you saw the rising sun over there (chuckle). Somebody said, "That sun-of-a-bitch! The little bastard!" So that's the way it was. So then we went down to the . . . of course, within the barracks . . . they were heavily reinforced concrete barracks. We went down through the chow hall and out through the little snack bar that we had there.

That's where I saw this old chief, and I'll have to hand it to him. Man, he wouldn't let you go out that door! This was on the opposite side of the building as to where they were strafing. Anyhow, he had one gal there that worked in the cafeteria. I guess she must have been--I don't know--nineteen, twenty, twenty-one years old. She was screaming something fierce. This old chief told her, he said, "Now lady, I told you to shut up. There's no time for hysterics." He was just as calm like it was everyday. And, man, he hauled off and just whacked the hell out of her! He slapped the hell out of her, but she straightened up. And then everybody . . . I think about that time it really dawned on everybody what was actually happening, you know.

Marcello: Up until this time how would you describe the general reaction of the men? Was it one of confusion? Panic? Perplexity? Fright? How would you explain it?

Young: No. It was more of a "What in the hell is going on? Man, the old man said to get to the squadron, so let's go! We got to go!" And here's the guy that . . . they didn't . . . I wouldn't say they were not leisurely putting on shoes and socks and things like this because I put on civilian shoes. I had at that time the big, wide, wing-tipped shoes. No, they just grabbed the first thing they could have and put it on, and we were going to the squadron.

So he would let out about eight or ten of us, depending on the frequency of the planes that were strafing, and we had to go out of this door there at the end of the barracks, around the building, up to a corner, and then from there on down to the hangar was a straight road with a slight curve in it down past what we used to call O and R.

Marcello: O and R?

Young: Yes, Overhaul and Repair. We had a small base there on Ford Island. Well, from there the hangar was a pretty straight shot. Well, there was about ten of

us who started down there. Somewhere back in there, my trousers . . . I got a bullet hole through the leg of the trousers--didn't hit me--but through the trousers, and it shot off one portion of the wing on my shoe.

Marcello: In other words, while you were making this dash across there, you were being strafed?

Young: Yes, we were being strafed, right. And then they dropped a bomb in front of us that threw me up on the side of a building. One of the other guys was hurt. One of the other guys had a couple of holes in his trouser leg, but, of course, we were heap big sailors then. We had the flared bottoms. But a couple of them had bullet holes in them outside of myself, but we didn't get hit. We got thrown up against the side of a building when a bomb hit right in the street, right in front of us there. Only one guy was injured, and I think his was just from when he hit the building. He got his arm and his leg cut, nothing serious.

Finally, we got to the hangar, and there's no windows left in the hangar. See, we had big doors, and half the doors was these little square windows. Well, there wasn't any windows left in the hangar. It was all open.

Marcello: They'd all been blown out, in other words.

Young: Right. They had been blown out. The exec came in, Donahue, I think his name was. But Commander Donahue came in, and I remember that .45 sticking out of his hip pocket, and I figured, "How in the hell can you get that big gun in his hip pocket." (chuckle) But anyhow, we then went out and we started manning the guns on our airplanes, but we couldn't get a damned airplane airborne because didn't any of them have any fuel. We didn't fuel them when we came in Friday night.

Marcello: There was still some airplanes left yet at this time?

Young: Oh, yes, we still had airplanes sitting on the ramp! About this time the carrier aircraft starting coming in and landing. So we were firing at them as they dive-bombed the Shaw coming across in the dry dock. They'd have to come right over us as they pulled out, so then we were firing at them.

I can remember very particularly old John Behney, "Big John," we used to call him. He had a machine gun, but it wouldn't swing around, and his port gun wouldn't work from the way the aircraft was sitting on the ramp. But the starboard gun would, and he just lifted the whole gun and pulled the gun and the gun mount and all right

out of the airplane and turned around and held it and started firing at them. And this was a .50 caliber machine gun.

Marcello: Was it unusual to have those machine guns in the plane? I was under the assumption that a lot of them were taken out when the plane landed.

Young: No, sir, because we had been on . . . like I say, we had been on advance base, and also during advance base we had had not fleet maneuvers but we had had target practice and all this. An aircraft would pull a sleeve, and we'd fire at it from our airplane. No, we were in there, and we were fully loaded, I guess, from being on advance base. No, we had plenty of ammunition in the aircraft and in all of our guns, too. We had the two .50 calibers in back in the after hatches and then the one .30 caliber up in the bow.

Marcello: What damage had been done to the planes that were there at Ford Island?

Young: Some of them were burning at that point, and I venture to say that we had about three out of twelve aircraft.

Marcello: That were left?

Young: That were left, right.

Marcello: And these were the three that you were firing from.

Young: Well, no, we were firing from even the ones that were burning. It didn't make that much difference, as long as we could use the machine guns. It didn't make any difference. At that time they were installing . . . I don't know whether it was a sewage or a water main or what. And then when we would run out of ammunition or something, we'd run and jump in the ditch until we could figure out which airplane we were going to next or which one was burning the least. So then we started carting cases of ammo and guns from one plane to another so we could get up enough guns to fight with.

Then they asked for volunteers, so that's when I volunteered to fly on the carrier squadron to go out and look for the fleet.

Marcello: Could you really tell when there had been a first wave and a second wave, or did it all just seem like one big attack to you?

Young: No, I would say that our first wave, as well as I can remember, is when I woke up on the lanai. To me, this was the most concentrated one. And this was . . . man, I mean there was nothing but bombs! So then between the time there . . . and then it kind of slacked up a little bit right after we got to the hangar. I'd say

no more than about five or ten minutes. And then it looked like just all hell broke loose again. And that's when they got the Shaw in the dry dock.

Marcello: Did you actually see the Shaw blow up?

Young: Oh, absolutely! I was facing it.

Marcello: Describe this because I think it's perhaps the most spectacular explosion that occurred at Pearl.

Young: Well, you could see the planes coming in. They were coming in . . . I don't rightly know the direction, but they were coming in, it looked like, from over the hospital. There was two planes that I remember in particular. These two planes they say we got. I can't verify that, no way. But they came in and we could see them drop the bomb. And then, man, I mean it was like the 4th of July! All hell broke loose. And then we were just . . . I guess you'd call it stunned or amazed that this could happen. I mean it was not real! But that was one of the most fantastic explosions, I think, I ever saw.

Marcello: About how far were you from the Shaw?

Young: In yards I wouldn't attempt to guess, but we were on the end of Ford Island--the entrance end--and they were in the dry dock.

Marcello: Was it less than a half-mile?

Young: I'd say, yes. We were across the channel, which would approximate a couple of lengths of football fields as well as I can remember.

Marcello: Did you perhaps see or observe any of the damage that was done to Battleship Row? Since a great many of the battleships were moored there at Ford Island, or were they on the opposite side from you?

Young: Oh, yes. Not at that point. But when I volunteered to fly with the carrier group who needed volunteer gunners . . . and I volunteered to fly with them because I figured there was nothing else I can do here. Our airplanes were burning, and we only had three or four left, and you're talking about a hundred people trying to man a very few amount of guns, so I volunteered to go ahead and fly with the carrier group.

Marcello: What sort of planes were these carriers flying?

Young: They were flying SBD's then.

Marcello: This was what, a type of dive bomber?

Young: Yes, it was a dive bomber. And the guy I flew with had had his gunner killed on the way in, so then I flew with him.

Marcello: Getting back to the attack itself, what individual acts of bravery did you observe? Now you had mentioned the

case of the man actually pulling the machine gun out of the plane and firing it. Did you witness any other individual acts of bravery--things that were really outstanding to you?

Young: Oh, right. Well, our skipper . . . I'm sorry I don't recall his name. But I do remember our exec, Commander Donahue because I flew with him as his plane captain later on. But these people were calling everybody together, and I mean putting it like it is on the line--telling them just what had happened--and this was during a kind of a lull in the attack. Then he said that he wanted volunteers, that they were going to get planes up and that they'd be working through the night if necessary. They were going to try and find the Jap fleet. They wanted mechanics and ordnancemen and flight engineers. They wanted everything. "We are now in a state or war, and you will be treated as such, period!"

Marcello: Did you really ever witness any acts of cowardice during the raids on the island itself?

Young: No, I didn't. I did not.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that after the initial period of confusion had subsided that professionalism then took over? Everybody knew that he had a job to do and did it.

Young: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Or tried to do it, anyhow.

Young: That's true, absolutely. I will say that. In what I had an opportunity to observe, yes. I would really say that. Not only of our officers but our chiefs as well kept everybody under control, and they realized the situation, and there was no secrets. They made everybody aware of what was going on and what the seriousness of it was. Now our people, we tried to eat in shifts, but nobody wanted to eat very much. There wasn't very much to eat, but we didn't want to eat any. Your water was supposedly contaminated. You'd get a little cone-type cupful of it, and that's about all that you got. Everybody was edgy. We moved to the hangar; we slept in the hangar.

Marcello: This was after the attack was over?

Young: This was after the initial attack, right.

Marcello: And this was before you volunteered for that patrol duty?

Young: No, no, the time that I volunteered for the patrol duty was right after the Shaw got blown up. I'd say it was no more than about fifteen minutes after that. Then we took off, and that's when the other wave came in.

Marcello: Oh, you had actually taken off when the second wave came in.

Young: No, we were taking off during the second wave.

Marcello: I see. Well, let's pick up the story from this point because it seems kind of interesting.

Young: Well, we just went out, and there was three planes in our section. There was three planes that took off. We were firing as we took off in order to try to keep them from shooting us down before we could get off. That's when they'd bank and come back around, and that's when I saw, you know, from an altitude view of actually what had happened. And then it dawns on you, "Man, I mean they just blew the hell out of us!" Here we're trying to retaliate, and we don't really have anything to do it with! So we took off.

Marcello: While you were taking off were you under constant attack? Were they strafing you?

Young: Yes, they were. Yes, they sure were.

Marcello: What'd this feel like?

Young: Like hell! You know, I mean you don't have really that time to be scared. I had a helmet that was too big for me. I didn't even have a flight jacket. I'm in a pair of dungarees.

Marcello: Were you manning a machine gun back there?

Young: Yes, I was. And we were firing at them just as strong as they were firing at us. Well, we finally got airborne,

let's put it that way, through the grace of the good Lord. And then we went out to try to find them, but we never did find them. Coming back in . . .

Marcello: Were these dive bombers armed and ready to go? In other words, did they have their bomb and everything like that aboard?

Young: They had then, yes. This was the ones that got shot up when they were coming in off the carrier before the carrier even got to Pearl Harbor. And they came in during the attack and didn't even know what the hell was going on.

Marcello: So how long did you stay out looking for that Japanese fleet?

Young: As well as I can recollect, about . . . well, I don't even know. Two to four hours. I don't know, except that it was long enough that I was about to freeze (chuckle). I had no flight jacket, and we kept the . . .

Marcello: That was an open cockpit, too, wasn't it?

Young: Yes, it was open cockpit. We had to keep it open. Of course, my helmet that I had on had no earphones in it, and the pilot was having to use hand signals for what he was going to do. I was a PBY-type flight crew member,

not one of the SBD's, and I didn't know what in the hell he was talking about. So he finally turned around, and he'd holler or he'd try to write me a note (chuckle). It was like a Keystone comedy, but we got coordinated, and I knew I had a job to do and he knew he had one to do and we did it.

Marcello: Where were you patrolling? Obviously not to the north where the Japanese fleet was.

Young: I have no idea where we were patrolling.

Marcello: But you didn't see them?

Young: No, we did not see them. We were out to the point that we had to turn around and come back, or we wouldn't get back on account of fuel loss. Then we had a problem coming back because by that time the Air Force came up. They intercepted us, and we gave them the wrong code trying to come back in because by the time we'd been out they changed the code on us. Then coming back in, hell, they weren't going to let us in. We were pretty scared that they would shoot us down (chuckle). We finally had to go through some didos up there that finally got us through, and we landed back at Ford Island.

Marcello: You mentioned that the first real knowledge that you had of the damage occurred when you were initially taking off in the SBD.

Young: Right.

Marcello: Describe what the damage looked like from the air.

Young: Well, you had gigantic fires all over the place. Your battleships are burning. The one that's run aground over there to try to block the channel, we watched him do that and get the hell out of the way after the Shaw went up. But there was just . . . of course, the Utah had already gone over on her side, and the Arizona was burning tremendously. Then over on the sub side they had terrific fires there. Hangars were burning. The hangar next to us was burning there on Ford Island--VP-21's old hangar. The VS squadron's hangar was burning. That was the scout observation outfit. That was all burning, the airplanes were torn up or blown to hell and gone.

Marcello: These were the float planes?

Young: Yes. Well, I guess then you saw terrific smoke coming up from all around different points of the island.

Marcello: What sort of emotions did you experience when you saw this?

Young: It was a kind of a sinking feeling. You just can't believe it. I mean, man, this is not real! What in the world has happened? I don't know. Scared to death, really.

Marcello: What did Ford Island look like that evening when you returned? I assume it was still daylight when you came in.

Young: Yes, it was. Very much so. In fact, we got back about ten or eleven o'clock in the morning as well as I can guess.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Young: The reason I'm saying this is because we went immediately to chow to eat, and we got one piece of chicken and a little Dixie cupful of water, and right behind us they were operating on the table behind us. They used the chow hall also for the hospital. They were operating in there, also. They had certain tables that they set out for people to eat on, and right behind you or right next to you they're going to be operating on somebody and trying to save somebody's life. Well, you don't feel much like eating in a case like that. But when we came back, it was pretty well organized. It was orderly but there still was gigantic fires and smoke going on. There didn't appear to be any mass confusion at all. I mean everybody knew what they had to do, and they were doing it.

Marcello: So what did you do that evening then? Or what did you do after you came back and had had your chow?

Young: I went back to my hangar over at VP-22. We went back to our hangar, and the skipper came down and talked to us. So did the exec and the personnel officer, and they told us exactly about where we stood and what they expected and what we had to do. So then we took it from there. Everybody either volunteered or did it on their own.

Marcello: What did you specifically do?

Young: I was pretty tired. I went to sleep for a couple of hours. Then I got up and we started working on the aircraft, but they wouldn't let us have any lights.

Marcello: When you say you started working on the aircraft, do you mean salvaging what was left of them or . . .

Young: Right, to make good airplanes.

Marcello: In other words, taking parts from the damaged ones to perhaps make one serviceable airplane.

Young: Right. We wound up with, I think, three or four aircraft. But I was destined to go over the next morning again to fly patrol again out of the carrier group. And I was temporarily assigned over there for three days, but I'd rather have stayed back over in my hangar, and that's what I did. I stayed over there and worked with them, trying to get the airplanes up.

Marcello: I would assume that while the attack was going on, that is, while you were down there on the ground, that you saw all sorts of weapons being used against those Japanese planes. In other words, there were the machine guns that you were firing from the airplanes, but I gather that people were firing at those Japanese planes with BAR's and Springfield's and Colt .45's.

Young: As well as I can remember, yes, the 30.06's were prominent and Springfield's like you said, and they were using everything that they had on the ships there as well as I can remember--not your big guns but your other guns. Yes, they were using everything they could.

Marcello: You mentioned the Arizona burning awhile ago. Did you perhaps witness any of the damage done to any of the other ships there on Battleship Row?

Young: Well, just the smoke is about all because when we took off, the smoke was so intense that you couldn't see very much. I just saw the ones that I knew where they were. And like I said, the Utah had taken a couple of torpedoes, and she was laying over on her side. I believe that it was the Utah. And the one that ran on the other side of the island toward Pearl City was laying over on her side because she had a concrete bottom.

Marcello: In the aftermath of the attack, how did your attitude towards the Japanese change?

Young: You mean what did I feel about the whole thing? I hated their guts! And it was like, man, if I'd see one of them I'd kill them!

Marcello: And in having this attitude you included every Japanese, whether it was one who lived on the Hawaiian Islands or wherever.

Young: Well, if he was a Jap that was the attitude, yes, right.

Marcello: Do you have any ideas of how the Japanese were able to pull this off and be so successful?

Young: Oh, absolutely! We found out later . . . when I would have the watch up there. I stood a lot of watches up in the administration building on Ford Island. I used to stand watches up there as a courier or what have you as a seaman would normally be assigned (chuckle). But I understand that one guy that I knew up there--I didn't know his name, but I had seen him around many, many, many times--that he was a very high intelligence officer for the Japanese Imperial Navy. He was photographing--from what I heard--he was photographing the secret documents coming into the admiral's office--this, that, and the other. I don't recall any . . . of course, I don't know,

but I don't recall any really high class stuff coming from the air station. I thought it was all over on the main point of the island there. But they said that everything that came out of the commandant's office, the admiral's office, the captain's office, that he photographed all of it.

Marcello: Did you have very many Japanese civilian workers there at Ford Island?

Young: No, not at Ford Island. We didn't have a great amount, no. That was usually done by Navy people who had been a little bit bad (chuckle), you know, that got caught.

Marcello: Did you ever hold any individuals responsible for what happened? I'm referring now to such people perhaps as Admiral Kimmel or somebody of that nature.

Young: No, I do not. I do not because I honestly and sincerely believe that everybody knew it was coming, but they didn't know when. And what preparation can you actually make for something that's blind?

Marcello: And they probably didn't know where it was coming. They knew that war was imminent with Japan, but they really didn't know where the Japanese were going to strike.

Young: The last place in the world anybody would have thought it had been would have been Pearl Harbor! It's like I said.

I would have bet money, the little that I had, that it would be down in the Philippines, Okinawa, somewhere like that. Well, now you could see that, but right outside the backdoor of the United States, never! No way! I think that thought was pretty common with everybody. It just couldn't happen. You don't face up to reality when you know it's there.