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Interview with

John Kuzma

December 5, 1974

Place of Interview: Anaheim, California

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: John Kuzma
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing John Kuzma for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 5, 1974, in Anaheim, California. I am interviewing Mr. Kuzma in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was on his way back to Ford Island from Honolulu during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Kuzma, 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. Kuzma: Well, I was born in Binghamton, New York, on March 31, 1920, and I attended school there up to and including high school. I stayed in Binghamton up until I left high school. I then went into the CCC camp out in Utah, and that was in 1930. I come out in 1938, and then in

1939 a few of our good friends, we went down to enlist into the Navy. And it wasn't until 1940 that the enrollment was such that they had us be sworn in, and I was sworn in July 6, 1940. I went to boot camp training at Newport, Rhode Island, and the training lasted there until the middle of September, at which time I boarded an ammunition ship called the Piro. I think at that time they had two ammunition ships. One was called the Nitro and the other was the Piro.

Marcello: Let's just go back a minute here. Why did you decide to enter the service?

Kuzma: Well, I think a lot of it would have to do with adventure. At that time jobs weren't too plentiful, and, of course, you see the movies and you see the glamour of the Navy. Of course, it didn't turn out the same way as the movies, believe me (chuckle).

Marcello: Economic reasons are one of the reasons that a great many people of your particular generation give for having entered the service. It was simply a matter of economics. Jobs were still scarce, as you have mentioned, and at least if you were lucky enough to get into the service, you got three square meals a day, and although the pay wasn't great, at least it was steady.

Kuzma: No, the pay at that time was \$21 a month for an apprentice seaman, and your next jump was automatic. You became

seaman second class, and your pay jumped all the way to \$36 a month, and at that time that seemed like an awful lot of money.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the service, did you have any idea that the country might very shortly be plunging into war? In other words, how close were you keeping abreast with world events?

Kuzma: These are things that we discussed--my friends and I--as early as 1939. We were aware of the fact that the situation was such that we could go to war, of course, like . . . well, like you just mentioned, we were aware of it and the possibility of this country going to war was there.

Marcello: And I'm sure that most of you thought of war in terms of Europe rather than in terms of the Far East, though.

Kuzma: Right. The way it looked at that time, war always looked something like it was far away, and the only thing you could think about was the way it was in World War I. You'd have to be transported over there by a ship, and it would take a month and everything else. The feasibility of war was a long ways away at that time.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you went through your boot camp at Newport, Rhode Island, and you went aboard this ammunition ship, the Piro. Pick up the story from that point.

Kuzma: This was in September, and our first . . .

Marcello: This is September of 1940?

Kuzma: Right. Our first port that we reached . . . and by the way, the two fellows that I joined the Navy with that were from Binghamton . . . one of the fellows was my neighbor, and his name was Francis Burke, and I bring in his name because it will come up again. And the other fellow, his name was Tom Miller, and he was from Johnson City, which is a couple miles from Binghamton, New York. So our first port we reached was Philadelphia. That is where we picked up our ship.

Marcello: At this time did you know that you were going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Kuzma: No, sir. We knew nothing until . . . there were all kinds of rumors, naturally, when we boarded ship. Everybody was trying to find out where we are going, and I don't think anybody that we knew actually knew, but we were going eighteen different places that I knew of by the time the rumors got through flying.

Anyway, once we left port at Philadelphia, we then proceeded to Norfolk, Virginia. I remember that I was looking forward to the experience--I'd heard a lot about Norfolk--but the old-timers referred to Norfolk, Virginia, as "Shit City."

Marcello: They still do (chuckle).

Kuzma: They still do (chuckle). And I kind of agreed with their interpretation of the nickname for it. During the first shore leave I had, we went by this one house that had a beautiful lawn, and there was a big sign on there that says, "Dogs and Sailors, Keep Out."

Marcello: I've heard stories of that sort of thing, but it actually was the case. You actually saw the signs.

Kuzma: Oh, yes, there is no question about it. And for some reason, everybody there . . . of course, at that time of the year it was getting a little cooler, and I think we were wearing our blues. Maybe some of the people still were fighting the Civil War because they referred to us as damn Yankees (chuckle) and made me feel a little uncomfortable because I never concerned myself about North or South too much. But whether you were a Yankee or a Rebel, it made no difference. If you were the sailor, everybody seemed to be in some way mad at you down there. It was a little hard to understand this type of feeling, but as I have gotten older, I can understand some of the reasons for it.

But it was quite a town, and I do remember that they had an awful lot of . . . as much as they disliked the Navy, they had an awful lot of gimmicks to get your few dollars.

They had . . . at nighttime everything was lit up with neon signs, and there would be barkers out in front of this . . . "Come on in, sailor" . . . "Come on here, and do this" . . . and anything to take a few bucks you had. Of course, they couldn't take much from me. Like I say, \$21 didn't go far, and if I had more than eight or ten dollars in my pocket, I'd figure I was doing pretty good.

Marcello: At this particular time, were you strictly a deck hand aboard the Piro, or are you striking for some particular rating?

Kuzma: Well, no . . . what it was . . . the groups that came out of the boot training at that time who were . . . by this time, we had found out that we were enroute to the West Coast. We didn't know at that time that we were going to the Hawaiian Islands, but anyway, our destination, I think, at that time was Mare Island, but we hit a few ports . . . well, I'm getting ahead of my story.

But anyway, we were aboard the Piro as passengers to be transported, but we were put in work gangs, and we were directly underneath usually the coxswain, which is a third class petty officer. In this case, the fellow that was in charge of our group, he had been a coxswain, but for some reason of discipline he was reduced back to a first class

seaman. And I do remember that he seemed to have a negative attitude on getting along with our group because it wasn't long before quite a few of the guys were, well, challenging him.

And actually, this one fellow chose to accept the challenge to . . . well, I hate to put it this way, but he was by far the poorest of the lot to challenge him because he just wasn't a scrapper. He was pretty good with his fists, and I guess he felt that if he could make a lesson out of this, the rest of us would take notice and settle down.

But the beating he gave the young lad set a negative attitude, and a couple of the larger guys . . . one Polish guy there, he says . . . I forget just what his words were . . . he says, "Jesus Christ! Why don't you try it on some guy like me instead of picking on some man that isn't man enough to piss in a woman's toilet. Let's see what you can do with me!"

The guy backed off, and I threw a challenge at him, and (chuckle) he didn't accept, but I ended up by being turned into the division officer in charge, and I had to . . . the next morning I had to appear in front of him. He was a very, very understanding guy. He was, I think, a lieutenant commander with his rank. Anyway, he had

been briefed on what went on there, and he was, like I say, understanding, and in a roundabout way he really chewed my fanny out, and he did punish me. He did not let me get away with anything. But he said that in order to keep my name off any records--a young fellow coming in, he didn't want to see him start off on a bad foot--he put me on a work force and, brother, I worked! My ass was dragging (chuckle) because I had to help load ammunition. As I had mentioned earlier, this was an ammunition ship, and, boy, that's no easy job! You handle those big-sized projectiles. They are hooked up by a winch and a cable, and when they load them on these platforms and get them down in the bottom of the hold, you had to hoist them around, and they were covered in grease, and you looked like a grease monkey in a matter of minutes. So while everybody was going ashore on liberty, I was sitting there breaking my (chuckle) hump. It wasn't long before I learned to be tuned instead of broadcasting.

Marcello: How long did you remain there at Norfolk altogether? Was it just long enough to replenish the ship?

Kuzma: Right. We departed within two days, and from there our next port or destination was St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands.

I do remember we hit the real rough body of water . . . what the heck was it called? It starts with an H. I can't think . . .

Marcello: Hatteras?

Kuzma: Hatteras! Oh, boy, that was the first time in my life that I was seasick! And when I say seasick, I was sick! They tell me that that body of water is rough at all times. Even on calm days it's rough. And, boy, I threw up everything but the last three weeks' food I ate! I was pretty sick.

When we arrived at the port of St. Thomas, we had, I think, about a ten-hour liberty. We were supposed to be back aboard our motor launches at eleven o'clock because I think they were scheduled to disembark at twelve o'clock. This is in mainland terms p.m. or 2400 hours, Naval time. Anyway, this group I went ashore with, why, we went to the various places of interest there, and we walked into this one small store, and they had all kinds of drinking wines and rums and whiskeys and all that. Of course, I was just a youngster at the time, and for some reason the other fellows in my group looked to me as a leader who would know something about drinking. I found out very shortly that I knew "balls" about drinking (laughter). Because the price was so low, I thought it was like when I used to buy wine back home. Well, we

could buy a quart of rum for about eighty cents. So I figured this must be like buying wine, and this was good Puerto Rican rum, I found out later, real strong. So we all bought a bottle apiece. We figured, "What the heck! This is great! This stuff is reasonable and probably just like wine." Gee, I took a couple cups out of that, and it took me a little while to get my breath back because it wasn't like wine (chuckle). It was a helluva lot stronger. So then we all went and bought a bottle of Pepsi Cola to kind of offset the strong taste of the rum. Well, I think we all just about drank our quota of rum, and we were a sorry sight, believe me, when we started going back toward our motor launch. In fact, some of the other groups were so high that one group took charge of the motor launch, and they threw the coxswain off, and they were singing and going in a circle (chuckle), and they had to get the shore patrol (laughter) to board this motor launch, and quite a few guys ended up in the brig.

But we never cleared port till two o'clock or 0200, and besides not being able to handle this new experience of drinking rum, about four hours out we hit some rough seas, and here we go again. It was bad enough to be seasick, but when you're tight on top of it, then you're really sick. I was so sick that I went down in the hold

and laid down there on one of the steel decks. And this is a fact. There were many of us on the hatch I was on. There were probably about twenty-five of us. I hate like hell to even discuss it this way, but we were so sick that everything we threw up . . . we wouldn't even move. We just laid right there, and it would roll from one guy to the other, and they'd know . . . I was so dog-gone sick that I didn't give a gosh darn when somebody made the announcement, "Hey, you'd better get up on deck! You're going to get torpedoed!" "Good!" (chuckle) That's how sick I was. I was down there for at least two days. I never went up on deck to eat or nothing. I couldn't.

And the first time I did go up on deck, gee, I looked out there and everything seemed to be swimming. The waves were coming right over the bow. Oh, boy, were they high. And you had to hang on to walk the decks, and, gee whiz, I figured, "I had better get something on my stomach." My hometown buddy, Francis Burke, and I were going by the galley window there, and he said to me, "Hey, 'Kuz,' look at that!" I looked in the porthole, and there was a great big vat of pork that this guy was cutting on, and that was the end of my appetite. I went back to the rail again, and by this time nothing was coming up. It just looked like green saliva. One of the guys says,

"Well, when you feel something coming up, you know what the hell that is." (laughter). I wouldn't have been surprised to see that come next.

I think it was about the third day at sea before I finally . . . the first thing I was able to eat is when I went to the PX and bought a can of peanuts, and that was the first thing I was able to hold down in three days. We sat there watching a movie, and that was the only thing I ate until the fourth day I ate . . . finally, I tried it again, only this time my so-called joker buddy wasn't going to get me to look into the windows. He'd always eat with me because he knew I couldn't eat too much, and that doggone guy never got sick. Everything I couldn't eat, he'd eat, "Hey, give me your butter! Hey, give me this, everything!" All I'd end up with was eating dry bread or something I figured wouldn't be too splashy around down in that stomach of mine.

Marcello: I gather, then, that what you were doing was simply stopping at various ports on your way over to Mare Island on the West Coast.

Kuzma: Right. We stopped at San Diego, and I remember three of us going ashore, and you had to be twenty-one to get a drink. Of course, they asked you for your I.D. card, and

if you don't have one, they quick ask you, "What day were you born," and I couldn't think fast enough. I thought I had given enough years back where I was twenty-one, but . . . "Get your ass out of here! You and your buddies, out!" So we did no drinking because they were pretty strict. You had to be twenty-one, and that was it.

Marcello: Now by the time that you got to San Diego, did you know that you were on your way to the Hawaiian Islands?

Kuzma: Right. We found out then that we had to pick up . . . they completely took off the ammunition that we had aboard, and they loaded up with a different type of ammunition that we were going to take to Pearl Harbor. And that's the first time I've ever heard the word Pearl Harbor in my life. When they told us we were going to Pearl Harbor, everybody said, "Where in the hell is that?" I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was. Some said it was in Australia or other places all over the Pacific, until one of the older sailors told us that it was in the Hawaiian chain.

Marcello: What did you think about going to the Hawaiian Islands? Did this seem to be pretty good duty to you?

Kuzma: At that time, all I could think of was one of the movies I saw. I think Dick Powell was in it, "Follow the Fleet" or

something or other. I can't think of the exact title. Right away, there was the image of all these pretty girls throwing these lais around your neck, flower lais and all that. That comes into your mind, and you think, "Oh, boy, this is great! Hula girls and all that!" Well, it don't quite turn out that way. Like I said earlier, the movies (chuckle) are a little different.

Marcello: When did you finally arrive in the Hawaiian Islands?

Kuzma: Well, it took us ten days to get there because I think the speed was probably around twelve knots, ten or twelve knots average speed of the Piro. Ten days is a long time on a ship, believe me. Before we got to San Diego, one of the engines had problems, and we only travelled four to six knots, and that was very, very long and boring. In fact, we had to be rationed with water, and we could only take a salt water bath between certain hours once a day, and you were rationed water. Every so often you would get to stand in line, and you'd get your water a cup at a time. That was before we hit the West Coast.

But like I say, it took us ten days to arrive at the receiving ship at Oahu. Our groups . . . we had two companies that went through training at Newport. We were given choices of what duty would we care for, and the

San Francisco, the cruiser, was one of the ships you could put in for. The Chicago was another one. Well, I remember those two. Then the other one said shore duty. It didn't say where. Myself and my two friends, we put in for shore duty.

Marcello: Why did you opt out for shore duty as opposed to duty aboard a ship?

Kuzma: Well, that's easy to answer because I got seasick again after we left Mare Island (chuckle). I had enough of sea duty in that short time. I guess there is those people that had, well, for a lack of better words, a weak stomach, and others that it don't bother. In fact, a weak stomach . . . it wasn't I that said this, but I always hear the story about the two guys who are at the rail, and one guy is sicker than heck, and he is throwing his guts up all over the place, and the other guy walks up and says, "What's the matter, weak stomach?" He says, "What do you mean, weak? I'm throwing mine as far as the other guy." (laughter. I'm like that guy. Mine was being thrown as far as anybody else's. Anyway, that is why I put in for shore duty.

Marcello: Did you go directly to Ford Island?

Kuzma: No. We tied up in the channel where Ford Island is, and everybody went to the receiving barracks which is in the

Naval yards across the channel from where I ended up at Ford Island. We spent some time there before we were dispatched to where we ended up. Anyway, I think we spent a day or two there, but my friend Francis Burke, he was assigned to the tug Nokomas, a yard tug. My other friend and I . . . of course, there were others, but I speak of these two because they are the fellows that joined the service with me. We were sent to the fire station, and he ended up after awhile at the boat house. The boat house duty was duty where he would be in charge of the boats, and you would eventually end up as a coxswain in one of them and transport men back and forth across the channel. But originally, he ended up with me at the fire station.

And the fire station down at Ford Island, the duties there were, of course, to take care of any fire on the island or any fire that occurred aboard a ship that was tied up to our island. Ford Island . . . usually, when the fleet was in, it was ringed by the battleships that would come in from the fleet and would tie up. Also, the aircraft carriers usually would tie up alongside, many times right alongside the fire station. There was a long pier, and many times one of the aircraft carriers

would tie up there. Ford Island was a Naval air station, and it consisted of, besides the fire station, and administration building, barracks for the fellows that were quartered and slept there . . . and these fellows usually were assigned to the A and R, which was the assembly and repair for the aircraft. They were serviced and stationed there at the island. Of course, you had your airfield, and on the other side of the airfield was your various squadrons, VT squadrons.

And we also were in charge of protection of the airfield in regard to crashes of planes taking off or landing. At the airfield, we would draw duty away from the fire station with the crash truck. We had two asbestos suits on the crash truck, and usually two men, sometimes three, were assigned to the crash truck. And the crash truck had ten bottles of CO₂ which is carbon dioxide gas extinguishers, and they could be discharged into a long reel, and on this reel you reeled off the hose, and at the end of the hose you had your fiber nozzles with the large opening on a horn which would discharge your CO₂ after you released it from the cylinders. The cylinders were, I think, about 175 pounds apiece. They could be discharged one at a time, and some were hooked up where you could discharge two and if it was necessary, you could

discharge all of them at one time, and you'd have a steady supply of CO₂.

The crash truck duty wasn't a pleasant duty because you were out in the sun. We had a tripod boom that was on the rear end of the crash truck with a winch and a cable, and, of course, this was used to . . . if necessary, you had to lift the plane up to get at the pilot if it was tipped over or gone over or to drag it off the field so you wouldn't disrupt the other planes coming in because many times when they are coming in their fuel consumption was down pretty low. If need be . . . if there was no serious injuries, then the plane couldn't be rolled out, we'd have to drag them out; unfortunately, it wasn't always that way, and many times one of the planes would crash, and sometimes we'd lose the pilot. Sometimes we'd save them from being burned, and sometimes they would be injured, and we'd get them out of there best we could before the gasoline would ignite because you always had that possibility of ignition from ruptured gas tanks because you still had the heat. Fire is a triangle. You must have heat, you must have a combustible fuel, and you must have oxygen. And naturally, when you crash a plane, you've got the fuel,

the combustible article, you have the heat because the engines are warm, and oxygen is always present in the open field. So anytime you had a crash, your chances for ignition of a fire was very, very available.

Marcello: How many people did you have working in this firehouse altogether here at Ford Island?

Kuzma: During our regular daytime tours, we probably had--I think we had three fire engines, and we probably had enough men--I would say maybe about twenty-two men would probably be in the station. And this would give an opportunity to have enough men at all times. Even when you're due your liberty, there still would be enough men for at least five or six guys per apparatus. At night after supper, why, the fellows from the A and R would be detailed to sleep in there, and this would give you an additional number of men. So there was always plenty of men available to man all the rigs.

Marcello: With what regularity did these plane crashes perhaps occur? Were these a frequent thing, or were they infrequent?

Kuzma: Well, no, they . . . it would depend . . . if you had night traffic where you had carrier landings, the chances are you would get some kind of a crash almost every night. Some wouldn't be serious, and others maybe would break a

wing tip or something like that. Others could be serious because these were practice landings, and this was something the pilots weren't familiar with.

Marcello: In other words, when you say carrier night landings, they were using the air fields there at Ford Island as a practice field for landing on carriers at night?

Kuzma: Right.

Marcello: They would probably be doing this sort of training before they actually landed on carriers.

Kuzma: Right. First, they would practice also in the daytime, and then, of course, the most difficult was night carrier landings. Well, it's obvious. It would have to be. You are more apt to have crashes in this period of time than you would during the day period of time, but besides these type of crashes, we would also have disabled planes that would have to make emergency landings for various reasons. One of them would be sometimes the landing gear would not operate correctly. At times the gear wouldn't come down at all, and sometimes only one wheel would come down.

The pilots were given three choices as is my understanding. They could try a landing on the water along the channel, and if they did that, why, then they had a couple crash boats standing by to pick them up after they hit the water. Or they could try landing on the field, and if things were serious enough, they could go out to sea and

parachute out. Some would choose landing on the air-strip itself, but many would choose the water. They would think that this would be soft landing, but I never knew just how hard water was until I had seen some of these crash landings in water. I've seen planes that they would bring up after . . . what the pilot would usually do is . . . he'd almost stall it. He'd come in at a glide, and at the last minute, he would try to bring it up and let it flop down. Usually the crash boat would try to keep up with them, and they would get up on a wing and try to get away from the plane as fast as they could, but many times it didn't work out that way. It could flop over, and this is one of the dangers of it. But I saw a few of the planes they brought up after they used the winch to bring them up with, and you would never believe the damage that was inflicted on this aircraft. It looked like some giant can opener had just ripped panels and everything and peeled big hunks back. Actually, if they had hit a brick wall, it couldn't have done any more damage. I guess you can't compress water any more than you can anything else. Something has to give, and if the water don't give, the plane gives.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, did the frequency of these practice landings increase on Ford Island?

Kuzma: Right. They certainly did and the tempo was stepped up on about everything, and this, of course, was an indication to us swab jockeys that things weren't looking up too good. As the time was getting closer to . . . I don't remember exactly when, but it wasn't long before we started having mock air raids and practice runs and everything else, and we'd even cancel liberties. At one time, there was no liberties allowed. We were on an alert basis, and this would go off and on periodically. Of course, even us so-called people that weren't in the know . . . it wouldn't take much to realize that things were looking bad.

Marcello: How did your own personal routine change as one gets closer and closer to Pearl Harbor? Now you were mentioning awhile ago, of course, that the frequency of these practice landings on the Ford Island increased, so I would assume that therefore the tempo of your routine also quickened quite a bit.

Kuzma: Right. Well, we were busier than we were before, and we had less liberty. We weren't going to shore as often as we were before this. Also, the changeover was getting a lot faster than it was. We were getting newer guys more often. As some of the older guys that were there before I came to be assigned to the fire station . . . these

fellows here had been promoted. Many went to A and R in the aviation end of it, and some of them went out to the fleet, depending on what promotions they ended up with. Like I say, the turnover was getting faster, and then instead of being the young recruit, we that came there a year before were now the old hands, and we were teaching the youngsters. Of course, by that time, we were the big wheels, or at least we thought we were (chuckle). Actually, all we were was a small frog in a big pond, I guess.

But anyway, by this time, of course, I had already gone from apprentice seaman to a seaman second and seaman first class. When you went from apprentice seaman, you automatically went to seaman second. You didn't have to take any promotional exams. But after that, everything was a promotional exam, and, of course, the next one was your seaman first class. And about that time I made seaman first class.

Of course, when we went ashore then, because we didn't go as often, we tried to make each liberty that you made a good one. Well, a good one at that time was to go out and get a few drinks, and, of course, some of the older fellows would go to the houses of ill repute.

Marcello: Hotel Street?

Kuzma: Yes, Hotel Street and some other places like the Service Hotel, Honolulu Room . . . oh, Christ, there were more cathouses there than there were ships in a fleet!

Marcello: What sort of routine did you get there on Ford Island? What was the normal liberty procedure?

Kuzma: Well, at that time they were not as frequent as they were earlier because they stepped up the tempo, and when you went on the alert, why, of course, there was no liberty whatsoever. We split our forces, I think, in three groups, and every third day you would get liberty after working hours. That means that at three o'clock or so, why, you got dressed up, and, of course, then your chief would check to see you were dressed properly. My chief at the fire station at that time was Chief John Burnfin, and reason I remember his name is that later when I went back into civilian life my fire chief that I worked with when I went into the fire department in civilian life, his name was John Burns, so I remember the name. Anyway, you'd get checked out to make sure that you were dressed properly because the American Navy was known for their cleanliness.

Our ships . . . from what I've seen of some of the other ships of the various nationalities, our ships were kept clean. I do remember that they brought in some of the English ships. This is before the war now. I think

one of them was the Warspite, a British battleship, that had been damaged someplace, in some battle. I don't know where they came from. Anyway, they stopped in our port for repairs, and being curious, we visiting there, and by no means were their ships kept up as well as ours. When they went on liberty, their clothing was not as well-kept as ours.

Of course, you're always proud of your own navy. I thought our navy was probably one of the best for cleanliness. The ship was kept clean, and the men were kept clean. If you weren't clean--this went for all our ships, too--your officer of the day, when he checked you out and you weren't up to snuff, he'd take your liberty card, and you went back and that was it.

Marcello: Normally speaking, when you had your liberty, did you have to be back on the base at twelve o'clock that night? I know that normally the guys aboard the ship had to be back at midnight, but I wasn't sure whether this applied to Ford Island or not.

Kuzma: We had to be back, in fact, before midnight, and the only exception was once in awhile when you would get overnight liberty, and then, of course, you slept over.

Marcello: How often did you usually get overnight liberty?

Kuzma: Probably about maybe once a week. It wasn't too frequent unless you got somebody to swap with you or something like that.

Marcello: Well, given the small amount of money you were receiving, you probably couldn't afford to spend too many nights ashore anyhow.

Kuzma: No, that's for sure. At that time . . . well, I was getting thirty-six dollars a month then. I got a few extra bucks because I used to loan money out to my good friends--a dollar for a dollar and a quarter come payday, five for six come payday. Once in awhile I'd get stuck for some money here and there, but it was profitable.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how often did payday occur?

Kuzma: Twice a month. In the middle of the month and the end of the month.

Marcello: So, consequently, let's say, on the Saturday night of December 6, 1941, would most of the men ashore normally have had a substantial amount of money, considering what they got paid?

Kuzma: The money would be flowing freely when the fleet would come in because these fellows . . . maybe they hadn't been paid in a couple of months. They would have quite a few bucks to play with. In fact, when it comes to spending money, they had it and the dollies knew it. They'd usually look for the fleet sailors that had just come in because they figured, "He's the guy that's going to spend the money." But as you said earlier, even if

you could go ashore, you didn't have the money to do it because some of the older sailors that frequented these houses of ill repute, it would cost them three dollars a throw.

Marcello: They weren't throwing too often (chuckle).

Kuzma: Right. If you had a couple of throws, it was six dollars. If you're getting thirty-six dollars a month, there goes a good percentage of your pay (chuckle).

Marcello: Nevertheless, how much money would a typical sailor on Ford Island have had, let us say, on December 6, 1941? Would you have blown most of your pay by that time? Now you would have gotten paid, what, the last day of November or something like that?

Kuzma: Well, I myself would have been more cognizant of the way the money was being spent because, like I say, I used to loan my friends money. Usually, they would be broke just four or five days after payday. They'd be broke. From then on out, they'd be stuck at the base because they just didn't have any money to operate with unless they got some from home or something like that. But your money didn't go awfully far. If you made one or two liberties in a pay period, you were down to counting your pennies.

Marcello: Normally speaking, when you went on liberty, what did you do? You mentioned this awhile ago, but let's kind of draw it all together. What did you personally do when you went on liberty?

Kuzma: Well, when you first got to the islands, naturally you wanted to sightsee. So for the first few months, why, there was a bus tour around the island, or Waikiki Beach was the big thing. At that time they had a fairly good theater called Waikiki Theater. Of course, I always loved movies. Every chance I'd get, I always either went to Waikiki Beach to that movie, or else I stayed at Honolulu itself. They had a few movie houses there. Between sightseeing . . . also, going to the movies.

Once in awhile they would have an open hula show. I remember this one in particular because they had these Hawaiian policemen. They were big fellows. They were probably as good a hula dancer as some of the girls. They had their keys and their guns and everything on. They were good. I got a kick out of watching them.

Then, of course, the big thing that we'd do when we went ashore was try to find friends, you know, from back home. If you met one, then he'd tell you, "Did you hear Johnny Rusnak and Charlie Latonski are up at Schofield Barracks?" These two fellows come from my hometown. They

were in the Army. Then from them we found out that George Puskar . . . I went to school with these fellows here. They were from my neighborhood. Then we found out from him there was a fellow by the name of John Horcott. These all sound like "Irish" names, I know, but I come from the neighborhood where there are Slovaks, Russians, and Polish kids. I don't know how my buddy Francis Burke got in there. But anyway, where I grew up used to be an almost all Irish settlement, but as those people migrated from Europe, why, we slowly began to fill up the space. We would always tell them that we moved them the hell out of there. My buddy Burke, he lived across the street from me. Of course, we were good friends then, and every chance I got, why, I'd go visit him, or he'd visit me. I'd go to the tug, or he'd come over to the air station there. Let's see, where were we?

Marcello: We were talking about some of the activities that you were engaged in while you were on liberty.

Kuzma: Oh, yes. This was a big part of going on liberty. When you found out that some of your buddies were at Hickam Field, Schofield Barracks, or wherever, why, naturally you'd get your buddies and you'd visit them. I do remember we went to see Rusnak and Latonski. They didn't know where

. . . even there at the island. We walked up and Rusnak was taking a shower. Burke and I went and "grabbed ass," and he came storming out of the shower. "What the hell's going on here?" He figured it was some of his buddies. We pulled him the hell out of the shower. Of course, you're happier than hell to see a guy so far away from home. We found out from him that one of our buddy's brother was a bartender in Honolulu. His name was Louie Pratkano. His nickname was "Spider." I don't know if I should tell you why they called him "Spider."

Marcello: If you want.

Kuzma: Well, I didn't find out until years later why they called him "Spider." He had a tattoo on his extremity. I don't know how the hell he did that. It must have hurt like hell (chuckle). Anyhow, that's why they call him "Spider." Anyway, he was a bartender.

Marcello: What did he have tattooed there, a spider or what?

Kuzma: Yes, a spider, yes. (Chuckle) I've never seen the spider, but that's what they told me, anyway. We went to visit him, half a dozen of us from Binghamton. He was glad to see us because . . . although I never knew him personally back home because he was a few years older than us. He had been in the Navy and had left the Navy and was living on shore. He worked . . . I think the first place was the

Lido Cafe. Later on, he worked at the Motor Coach Cafe. I'm pretty sure that's the one (Lido) that had pictures of all of the boxing celebrities--champions. They had a picture of the world's heavyweight--ex-champ--Jack Sharkey. The reason this is interesting to us is that Jack comes from our neighborhood. He comes from Binghamton. He was born a block away from where I lived. We would talk about people we knew. Louie, of course, knew Jack personally. The various places he went to next, I think, was the Motor Coach Cafe. Then he went to the Black Cat Cafe, which was, if my memory serves correctly, across the street from the YMCA.

Marcello: I gather that when the fleet was in that there were long lines of sailors waiting to get in all of these establishments that you're talking about, especially during the weekend.

Kuzma: There certainly were, especially after the war started. The lines were, like you say, down the street, around the corner, and upstairs and . . . they were long. The older fellows told me that, anyway.

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

Kuzma: Well, the morale was a competitive spirit. All of the ships, of course, were proud of their ships. Many times,

you'd have fights break out in the various gin mills, "Our ships is better than your ship," and before you knew it everybody was swinging all over the place. It'd be the California against the world or the New Orleans against so-and-so. It was just personal pride in your own ship.

Marcello: How do you account for this high morale?

Kuzma: Well, of course, the peacetime Navy is a lot different than it was later. You lived a carefree life, and everything you did was for enjoyment. It was a lot different than later on. The tension of the war made things a little different. It was a lot more carefree. There was no real tough day ahead of you. The fellows that came on liberty, they came to enjoy themselves, and that's just what they did.

Marcello: How would you describe the training that you received in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy? Was it good? Fair? Poor?

Kuzma: Well, no, it was good. Your discipline was very, very strict. I don't know how it is now, but from what I hear it's a lot different now than it was in them days. You see these various uniforms now and fellows wearing beards and mustaches and all that and long hair. You didn't have that in the pre-World War II military. You had certain regulations. It was no if's, and's or but's. You didn't

dispute them. You either conformed or else you were in trouble. Maybe that's one reason the morale was so good, because you had discipline. When you were aboard ship, you were expected to do your job. When you came ashore, you left that all behind you, and you went out to enjoy yourself.

Marcello: I gather that rank was very, very slow in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, also, was it not?

Kuzma: It was, right. You didn't move too rapid. You had to take a promotional examination, and you had to wait for an opening. Later on, after the war broke out, if you just passed, chances are you were going to get promoted because they expanded so rapidly after the war broke out.

Marcello: I gather that at the time you were here at Ford Island, just about everybody was a volunteer, also. Isn't that correct?

Kuzma: Right. It was a volunteer Navy then. When I enlisted in the service, there was no draft at that time.

Marcello: I would assume that this would have something to do with the high morale because everybody that was there was there because they wanted to be.

Kuzma: That's right, right. It was a volunteer Navy at the time. The group that I went in with were there because we signed up for it. We volunteered for . . . at that time it was

six years. That was your minimum enlistment. Before that it used to be four years. Just before I went into the military service, they jumped it to six years. Even when you enlisted, it took some time before a quota was opened up . . . they had certain quotas, and when your name came up on the list there, you'd just wait until the opening came. It wasn't one of them deals where you sign up today and tomorrow you're gone. I waited for months before I was called in.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to Pearl Harbor and as the likelihood of war with Japan increased, how safe or secure did you feel there at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands? In other words, if war did come between the United States and Japan, did you even in your wildest dreams expect that war would come there in Pearl Harbor?

Kuzma: No, we didn't. I felt, and it was a feeling of all the fellows I knew, that we had a very, very strong force there. We had many, many practice sessions, air raid drills, everything else. In my opinion, they were keyed to a very sharp point as far as being able to defend themselves. The aircraft . . . they'd have a raid. They'd be up in the air in a very short time. Your guns would be manned. We were the fire department, and we'd have our equipment ready at

all times. When an alert would hit, why, we'd man our equipment and wait for developments. If war had come and we were alerted to the fact prior to it--and this is the way we looked at it--we figured we were invincible because we had the fire power. We had the personnel. There were an awful lot of people. Pearl Harbor was getting built up. They were adding more installations. They were building more areas in the shipyard, the Naval Yard, everything else. The personnel was getting bigger. I thought at that time--I'm sure it was so--that we had to fight . . . what eventually happened . . . and had we known in advance, we would have taken care of anything.

Marcello: Another point I think that we also need to mention is this. The Hawaiian Islands were an awfully long way from Japan, an awfully long way from Japan. I would assume that this, perhaps, would have accounted for a certain amount of complacency. Would it not have? In other words, if war did come between the United States and Japan, it would likely occur in the Philippines. That was close to Japan rather than the Hawaiian Islands, which were several thousand miles away.

Kuzma: Right. You're right there, and maybe it's because of this type of distance that we probably were caught the way we

were. We felt--I'm sure this was from the top people way on down--that being so far away from Japan itself, they'd be able to detect any type of large force long in advance. Under normal circumstances, I guess they would have.

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

Kuzma: Well, of course, you can only go by pictures and movies. All I could think of was a little short guy with thick glasses and buckteeth. That was my picture of a Japanese (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you have any Japanese civilians working on the base there at Ford Island?

Kuzma: Well, there were a lot of them that could have been Japanese. To me, most of those people looked alike. The Hawaiians . . . there was no problem distinguishing them because they had a complete different appearance. Then you had Hawaiian and Chinese mixture, and we used to call them "Kanakies." They had a lot of them working on the base. Whether there were any Japanese, I don't know. The only one I know of is one of the . . . I didn't know him, but one of our officers . . . not one of the mess attendants. One of the civilians that would

clean the quarters and things like that, he was a person of Japanese ancestry. In fact, I heard later on that they figured that he was a partial spy or something or other because . . . how true, I don't know.

Marcello: How much thought did you give to the idea of the Japanese on the islands committing acts of sabotage or acting as fifth columnists in case of a war against Japan?

Kuzma: I didn't give it too much thought because I had a lot of confidence in our military. I always felt that they probably kept this in the back of their minds and probably kept close tabs on people that were of suspicious nature. So I never felt that there was too much concern there. Well, actually, there wasn't an awful lot of sabotage or anything, even that particular night of the attack.

Marcello: Oh, we know that now, of course, The Japanese on the islands, for the most part, remained very, very friendly toward the United States and were very loyal.

Kuzma: Right, but the rumors were that night were . . . the rumors were terrible.

Marcello: We'll talk about this in a minute. We'll keep it in its proper order here and get around to that later. Now I think this more or less brings us up to the day before the attack itself. So what I want you to do at this point is

to go into as much detail as you can remember, and give me your routine on the day of Saturday, December 6, 1941. Then later on, we'll go on into Sunday itself.

Kuzma: Okay, Saturday, December 6. Gosh, my memory isn't as good as I thought it was. The main portion I remember is my friend Francis Burke off the tug Nokomas . . . he and I had on occasions gone to Honolulu. We took dancing lessons at this dance studio. This one pretty Hawaiian-Chinese girl, besides being a good dancing instructor, was pretty, and, of course, we both tried to date her. She took a shine to my buddy Francis, who also was a pretty good-looking Irishman. He had a couple of dates with her. So he made arrangements for one of Vicki's . . . Victoria, that's his girlfriend . . . I think her last name was Aki. She arranged for one of her cousins to go with me, so we went on this date this Saturday, December 6.

Marcello: In other words, you had liberty this Saturday.

Kuzma: Right. The strange part about it is that I think there were no liberties for a long time before this. The fleet came in that weekend. Everybody seemed to have liberty that evening. Anyway, we went on this double-date. We went to this place where they had music, and we were practicing our steps that we were being taught. We had quite a bit of good, clean fun. We enjoyed the evening.

Both of these girls were good Catholic girls. Of course, Frank and I are also Catholic. So they had to get in fairly early. We broke up around 10:30 or so. After the dance I guess we had some french fries and a little snack. I had a room at the YMCA.

Marcello: In other words, this is one of those days that you had overnight liberty.

Kuzma: Right, and I was in civilian clothes. I had a locker at . . . there was a place called Battleship Mack's or something or other that would rent you lockers. I had a locker there rented for months. I'd pay by the month to retain the locker. Of course, by that time, being in a sailor suit, you're just one of the crowd, where if you got into civilian clothes, you felt that you could operate a little better. So everytime I went to town, why . . . of course, I had my civilian clothes in a locker, and that particular night I was in my civvies. Of course, when you went back to the base you had to have your uniform on.

But anyway, after the date, why, I went back to the YMCA. But instead of going to the "Y," I went across the street to Black Cat Cafe where my friend Louie "Spider" Pratkano was working. Lo and behold, there was a couple of guys from Binghamton. So we were fortunate enough to be liked by the bartender. I forget what the drinks cost at

that time, but anyway, if we ordered a round of five or six drinks, he'd probably take out for one drink. So your money went pretty far. You'd get pretty loaded on just a buck.

Marcello: Let me ask you a couple of questions at this point. How crowded was Hotel Street on that Saturday night when you went to the Black Cat Cafe?

Kuzma: Oh, boy, it was crowded! You were lucky if you got in the place! Every place was crowded because Saturday night . . . that . . . well, juke box on Saturday night. Them juke boxes were going, and if you got at the bar, you'd be camped there because if you pulled away from the bar there were about four guys behind you ready to grab the spot you occupied.

Marcello: On a typical Saturday night in Honolulu, when you and your buddy returned to Ford Island, what generally would your condition be?

Kuzma: Well, usually, most of the guys would be . . . I say most of them. A lot of them would be "gassed to the ass." It didn't happen to me too often because I wasn't a two-fisted drinker. I'd get sick too doggone quick, so I couldn't drink as much or have the capacity as some of the other fellows. They'd sit there and they'd have two hollow legs. After a few drinks I'd begin to . . . especially beer. I

could never drink too much beer. I'd start burping up the foam. I'd lose the appetite for beer. Of course, drinking Tom Collins and things like that, you're into a little higher bracket. You couldn't afford too many. A lot of guys would buy a bottle and go sit in the park or something and drink it just to get feeling good. Well, I probably did that once or twice, but I didn't enjoy that too much. Of course, after you've had a few drinks like that, well, then naturally you start looking for the opposite sex. One of the parks that was near the Hawaiian Palace was a favorite spot where the guys would try to pick up some of the girls there.

Marcello: Now, generally speaking, then, what you're saying in effect is that a large percentage of those sailors who returned to Ford Island would probably be inebriated on a Saturday night.

Kuzma: Not a larger percent . . . a lot of them would be. It would look that way, probably, when you'd get a boatload of them coming back and they're singing and yelling and everything else. It looked that way. They'd be in a jovial mood from wetting their appetite with alcohol.

Marcello: But, generally speaking, would even those who did come in drunk on a Saturday night be ready for any eventualities

on a Sunday morning? I think you can see perhaps the point that I'm leading up to.

Kuzma: Well, those that were pretty well-gassed, of course, they're not going to be up to par in the morning. But, of course, when you have liberty off the ships, you have certain portions . . . certain divisions that were given liberty, and certain divisions that weren't. There'd be enough men aboard there that hadn't been ashore, where the capability of handling a situation or emergency wouldn't be that far bad. I see the point you're bringing up. Naturally, over the years, especially shortly after, you always heard the so-called statement, "They were all drunk." Well, that isn't so. They weren't all drunk. You'd probably get the same portion of drinking whether it's a group of college kids or whatever you're talking about. No, I wouldn't say that they were in bad condition where they couldn't handle a job, no.

Marcello: Well, I think this is an important point, and it certainly needs to be a part of the record.

Kuzma: Right.

Marcello: Now let's go back to the Black Cat Cafe again. Here you are back in the Black Cat with Louie the bartender. He's treating you boys from Binghamton pretty well so far as paying for drinks and that sort of thing.

Kuzma: Right. I had probably, maybe, three or four drinks. I think I went up to my room around midnight.

Marcello: Now what time did you have to be back on Ford Island the next day?

Kuzma: Well, I could have been back late in the day, around noon or so, but . . . I can't remember why, but I wanted to get back earlier the next day. Ordinarily, when I had overnight liberty there, I usually slept in late. I went down and had breakfast and all that. For some reason--I can't remember why--I started back earlier that day.

Marcello: Okay, let's pick up the story from this point then. So you spent the night in the YMCA.

Kuzma: Right.

Marcello: What was your condition at the time you turned in that night in the YMCA?

Kuzma: Oh, it was good. Like I said, I probably had maybe three Tom Collins', and I went to bed feeling no over amount of alcohol. In fact, I was sober. I never had been a two-fisted drinker.

Marcello: Okay, let's pick up the story now then, and this, I guess, would bring us into the Sunday morning of December 7, 1941.

Kuzma: Right. Well, in the morning, of course, I woke up, and I had to change my clothes, so I went next door to where my locker was, and then I caught a cab out front.

Marcello: About what time was this?

Kuzma: Well, I'm not too sure. I'm not too sure. It had to be someplace near eight--someplace around there. It must have been someplace around there. I don't think I had a watch. I couldn't afford one in them days at that time. But, anyway, what you usually did is you waited until the cab got a load because then you split the cost of going back to the base. You figure whatever the fare was at that time--75 cents or what it was to get back--and the more guys you had, the less the whack-up was on paying the fare. And we had maybe four guys in the cab, or five--I forget what it was--and it wasn't too long after we hit the road going back from Honolulu that you could hear this sound like thunder. It seemed like it . . . well, I didn't know where it was coming from . . . but it wasn't long before pretty soon we see aircraft in the air, you know.

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

Kuzma: Well, it was a warm day. Now I honestly can't remember . . .

Marcello: Was it clear? Overcast?

Kuzma: I don't know. I honestly don't know . . . I don't know.

Marcello: Anyway, so you're driving back toward the docks, I guess, to get the liberty boat back to Ford Island, and you hear

this noise that sounds like thunder. Pick up the story from there.

Kuzma: Yes, and then, of course, by that time you heard the aircraft diving around, and, of course, the first thing that came to my mind was one of our practice raids which we had frequently, and you never knew when the heck they were going to have them. And this would be an ideal time, early Sunday morning, although I don't remember ever having one on Sunday. It seemed like they were always during the working day, but, anyway, that's the first thing that entered my mind, of course, in talking back and forth with the other fellows in the taxicab.

Then it sounded like we could hear some louder booms, and it wasn't long before we saw smoke billowing up in the sky ahead of us, and by that time we were approaching, I think, Hickam Field, and we were going toward our destination, which would be off to the left. And we could see the planes diving at that area.

Marcello: Now at this stage would you say that your reaction was basically one of curiosity because you didn't know exactly what was taking place?

Kuzma: It was, and it wasn't long before then that . . . things just weren't right. And pretty soon, well, there was too much smoke coming from ahead of us, and, of course, we

were asking questions back and forth, and nobody really knew the answers, and . . . I'm trying to in my own mind picture when I actually knew that we were under attack. But I know that Hickam Field was . . . well, I didn't know at the time, but they were getting bombed, and also ahead of us, Ford Island had really been hit, and the battleships were getting hit.

At this very moment in the cab . . . I didn't know this . . . I knew something was wrong. Now you are getting a little fear as to what the hell's going on. So by this time we were now near the gate of the entrance to the Naval Yard, and, of course, the cabs cannot go past the entrance. So he dumped us out quite a ways from the gate, and now there was no question that we were under attack.

Marcello: Would you have had to go through a gate to get into the Naval Yard to get the motor launch to take you back to Ford Island?

Kuzma: Right. And it's quite a walk. See, you either go to the gate and walk all the way to where you pick up the motor launch, which is not far from where the dry docks are and also near hospital point. Or you go by ferry, which is at a different point.

Anyway, I was headed . . . by this time we got through the gate, and the Marines by this time knew we were under

attack, and of course, you were trying to get information and everything else, and we were running by this time, you know, because your adrenalin was up and your . . . well, you're scared. There's no question about that.

Marcello: What was your first reaction? What do you think you have to do, now that you realize that you're under attack?

Kuzma: Well, I think I have to get back to my fire station. This is where I have to go, and this is the only thought in my mind. And so by now, of course, I'm with nobody I know, so I'm running by this time, and I . . . it seems to me there was a bunch of Marines with their rifles firing at the planes as they're coming down there, and they're firing in volleys, you know, and I don't know if they hit anything or not. And, of course, you hear these shots, and you hear all the booms and everything else, and you hear the staccato of ack-ack (sound) . . . well, believe me, it was nothing like the movies that I'd seen previous to this. In the movies everybody knows what he's doing and is a big hero and all. Going to war at a young age, suddenly after . . . well, I've discussed this many times, and I always say that a fellow grew out of boyhood into manhood in a month.

And by this time I got into the area where the large dry dock was, and the dry dock had the . . . of course, at that time, I didn't know which ships were in there, but later I found out. The Pennsylvania was in there, and forward of the Pennsylvania was the Cassin and Downes, two destroyers. And these were burning when I got there, and in my way I was trying to help any way I could, and I helped drag equipment, and, of course, they were trying to get the fire lines onto the fire.

Marcello: In other words, there was no way that you could get back to Ford Island.

Kuzma: Well, I didn't know if I could or not. But, of course, everybody was asking, "Help get this done! Get that done!" So you naturally fall into the spirit of doing what you can, and although you yourself don't know what the hell you're doing, you're helping with everything that you can. And by this time in here, I'm beginning to look around, and, oh, everything is burning. It seems like the whole place is burning up. It looks like my . . . I'm wondering if I have a station to go back to. It looks like a mass of flames everywhere I look, and smoke was billowing all over the place. And

you had your motor launches cutting across the channel, and by this time they were bringing wounded men off some of the ships and everything else. And not too far from the dry dock where the battleship Pennsylvania and the Cassin and Downes, destroyers, were there was a floating dry dock that had the destroyer called the Shaw in it, and . . .

Marcello: Did you see that spectacular explosion that occurred aboard the Shaw?

Kuzma: Yes. I not only saw it; I got caught in it. When I left the area where the Cassin and Downes were . . .

Marcello: How long did you remain in that area working on damage control there in the area of the Cassin and Downes?

Kuzma: It seemed like an awful long time, but maybe it wasn't. Everything seemed like a long time. I don't know.

Marcello: Now when you were working there with the Cassin and Downes, were those vessels still under attack, or had the attack now passed by the two destroyers?

Kuzma: I think by this time they were . . . no, they . . . well, there was machine gun fire and things like that . . . that was going on all the time, it seems like, but while I was there, there was no further bomb hits on them.

Marcello: What sort of damage had been done to the Cassin and the Downes?

Kuzma: Well, there was a lot of fire, and that's what they were trying to combat at the time there. I guess . . . I don't know just when they started, but they tell me that later they flooded it purposely to help put the fire out. I don't remember if they were flooding it when I was there or not.

But, anyway, a group of men were yelling to give a hand to some of the wounded guys who were coming in off these motor launches. And then they also said that some of the fellows aboard the Shaw needed help or something. So a few of us started running towards the bow, which was where the gangplank was, and that's when this explosion occurred.

Marcello: Now how close were you to the Shaw . . .

Kuzma: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . when it occurred?

Kuzma: I'm glad I wasn't closer than I was. I was close enough to where it threw me in the air. It felt like . . . the only thing I could think of was a hot blast of . . . somebody breathing a hot fire at me, heat at me, and the only thing that I could think of was that when we were kids we used to grab the arms and legs when we were swimming and take a guy and sail him through the air, and that's the only thing I could think of . . . it's kind of like going through the air . . .

Marcello: In other words, you were spinning topsy-turvy through the air.

Kuzma: I was off my feet then. I don't know how long I . . . I knew I blacked out for a period of time. How long, I don't know, but when I . . . the first thing I remember was that I was on my hands and knees getting up and . . . it's possible that I must have landed on the back of my head because I had a . . . felt a good-sized bump there. I thought I was doing an awful lot of perspiring, and what it was was that the blood was coming out of my nose and it was . . . because evidently I must have been laying down . . . it flowed back toward my eyes there, and I thought I was sweating.

Marcello: Now was this caused by the concussion?

Kuzma: Yes. That, and I did have a little abrasion or cut that I nursed for a few days after that, but it wasn't bad. It was in my hair. The hair covered up the scab up there, but, anyway, by this time I . . . well . . . many times people ask me, well, "Were you afraid?" You're goddam right I was afraid! Many times now I give lectures to various groups that are interested in Pearl Harbor, and when they ask me the question was I afraid, I always give them a pat answer. I hesitate and say, "Well, no, but I outran two other guys that were." (chuckle) This is

probably the way it was . . . you are afraid, but yet you had an inner exuberance within you that makes you drive and do things you wouldn't ordinarily do because I didn't know if I was hurt or what, but here there were some guys that were really hurt, and I and another guy helped this one guy . . . he was really hurt . . . it looked like part of his leg was busted wide open, and he was bleeding badly from two or three spots, and we took him to the Hospital Point which was . . . well . . . it wasn't too far. It was a fairly good distance when you're doing what you're doing under those conditions. And we took him . . . and by that time there was an awful lot of other badly injured people, so when I seen how bad these people were, I felt I was in real good shape.

Marcello: Okay, so you were near the Shaw when the explosion occurred. You were thrown through the air, you were knocked out for a certain period of time, you came to . . . what did you do at that point?

Kuzma: Well, that's when I got up, and I was a little dizzy, and that's when this other fellow and I helped this other wounded sailor to Hospital Point.

Marcello: In other words, you never did make it to the Shaw at this point. You had been on your way toward the Shaw . . .

Kuzma: No, I never got there.

Marcello: I assume that you never really saw that explosion. You just heard something, and that was it.

Kuzma: Right, right. I've seen pictures of it since, and I often wonder, you know, just how the hell I even got the heck out of there.

Marcello: What is amazing to me is that they put a plywood bow on that ship and floated it back to the West Coast, and it lived to fight another day.

Kuzma: Right. They put a false bow on there, and it is my understanding that they . . . they had the blueprints of the bow, and they already had that being assembled while the Shaw was going back to the States. All they had to do was put it into dry dock, hook it up, and she came back to fight many a battle.

Marcello: Now by this time had the second wave come over?

Kuzma: Yes.

Marcello: Generally speaking, they say that there were two waves of Japanese planes . . .

Kuzma: Yes, well, I don't know where one left off and the other . . . I . . .

Marcello: This seems to be the concensus of most people.

Kuzma: Yes. From what I've read, yes, this is the way it was. I don't know. I couldn't tell you, and . . .

Marcello: Well, this is good because this is what I want you to tell me--what you remember, not what you've read.

Kuzma: Yes. Yes, I don't know how the waves were . . . at that time it seemed like to me that there was no pause. It seemed like there was something going on all the time. And by this time, like I said, I wasn't in too bad of a shape when I looked around the seen the other fellows that were real bad.

So I got back to the area which is . . . well, the landing dock was not too far from where the dry dock where the Shaw was, and there we picked up a motor launch and loaded it up with all us fellows that were waiting to get back to our own stations. And we started back across, and it was pretty well-filled up with sailors.

And I remember hearing an airplane coming, and . . . I don't know whether the plane was going to strafe us or what the heck, but some of the guys went over the side to get the heck out of there. I found out later that . . . what probably it was . . . I think they were after the Nevada. The only reason I didn't go over the side is that I was in the middle of the motor launch. I think it was about a forty or fifty-foot job.

Anyway, it went directly straight across instead of going to the landing, which would be just forward of the

California. We went directly across and went on the seaplane landing area where the concrete dips into the water and the seaplanes go out from the hangar. In fact, the hangar was burning at this time.

Marcello: In other words, you did not come under any direct attack when you were in the motor launch and going over to Ford Island.

Kuzma: Well, this one aircraft was coming down, and, like I say, I thought like everybody else--that he was after us. Possibly, he was after one of the other ships.

Marcello: What did the harbor look like from that motor launch?

Kuzma: Well, off to the right of us, the . . . I don't know if it . . . it might have been the Helena. I think she was . . . there was an awful lot of smoke coming out of her. She had been hit. I can't in my mind remember now whether the Oglala . . . whether she was already turned over or whether she was listing and they had ropes on her or not. I can't remember just what position she was in. It seems to me--I remember this--I remember both parts of her listing and also of her being over. Anyway, there was a lot of fire coming out of that area, and, of course, the biggest fire was from where the California, the West Virginia . . . and right on back to the Arizona because the Arizona by this time was really burning.

Marcello: What did the surface of the water look like?

Kuzma: Well, in the area where the battleships were, it was nothing but heavy black smoke and flames coming from that area. The smoke seemed to be all over. Like I say, we went directly across the channel. One of the hangars had been hit. I understand later, after talking to the firemen that I worked with shortly after the point I'm talking about right now, that the first bomb that was dropped dropped on the hangar at Ford Island. They responded to that fire. Some of my friends received citations for the work they did at that first few minutes of the attack.

Marcello: What sort of emotions did you have when you looked around you and you saw these ships burning and the water black with oil and the general damage that had been done?

Kuzma: Well, it was hard to believe. I couldn't believe that this could happen to us. I'd find myself wondering if it actually was happening. Then, of course, the next thing that came in mind was . . . I was wondering if my friends were still alive because at that time I was still a ways from my fire station there, and with all of that heavy smoke in there, I figured everything was burning and hit. But I worked my way back to the station there. Of course, by that time they were really busy there.

Marcello: By this time had professionalism taken over?

Kuzma: Oh, yes. It wasn't long after the initial attack. It wasn't long before the guns were going and everything else. They responded and fought back rapidly. Like I say, under normal circumstances I don't think that they could have caused much damage because the men had the training and they could use it. They were using it. It seemed like no matter where you looked, you had fellows by now that were organized and were doing what had to be done. Of course, when I got back to the fire station, I was naturally happy to see many of my friends. Of course, you asked, "Did you see so-and-so? Did you see so-and-so?" Then when they see you they say, "Gee, we heard that you got it," you know, because I wasn't there at the very beginning at Ford Island. So naturally everybody was wondering--we that weren't there--what happened to us. As far as they knew, everything over there was also hit because Honolulu itself . . . bombs fell and killed civilians in the city. They were strafed. Moving cars were strafed. So naturally they thought that a lot of us who had gone ashore were killed, also.

By this time I went back to my locker, and my clothes by this time were in pretty sad shape. But many, many of the fellows that were on these various battleships come off

without clothes and everything else. We were giving them anything we could give them. We recruited them to help us with fires and things because by now we could use all kinds of help. Many of these battleship sailors who were fortunate to come off the battleships without serious injury were placed to help the fire department. I had charge of refilling extinguishers.

Marcello: What rank were you at this time?

Kuzma: I was a seaman first class. Of course, being one of the older ones, a lot of work that was delegated, you took on yourself. The chief was busy, and his assistant had things to do. So a lot of things you took on yourself. I had crews of men, and I showed them how to recharge the extinguishers because we had practically an assembly line of extinguishers going to the California and back. It was really burning. The California was listing already.

Marcello: I assume you had an adequate water supply and things of this nature there at Ford to fight fires.

Kuzma: No, no. Now, I didn't know this at the time, but one of the bombs had broken a water main, and we were without water. So any firefighting we did, we did it with salt water. We pumped from the docks. Also, we were getting water from the swimming pool, which was just across the

street from where I was stationed. In fact, they put a Marine guard on the swimming pool because this was going to be the only source of drinking water. Before that day was out, that water that I wouldn't drink ordinarily because there were people swimming in there looked like gold.

Marcello: I'm sure that just because of the excitement of the day that you were parched . . .

Kuzma: Oh, boy!

Marcello: . . . so far as wanting a drink of water was concerned. That's usually one of the reactions, I think, that people have under these circumstances.

Kuzma: Right, I was very dry. The first drink I had of liquid that day . . . I didn't have anything for breakfast that day--nothing that day. By now I was dry. What I did, I grabbed a couple of the other fellows that I knew--old buddies that knew about fire trucks--and we went . . . we had the chief's pickup--little pickup car, half-ton truck there, open back end. We went to the area near where the oil usually is pumped from the tankers. I remember there were either two or three fire trucks that had been placed there for further delivery to some of the other outer islands. We went down there, and we put these trucks into commission. We put them to work fighting fires.

Marcello: How long were you fighting fires that day?

Kuzma: We fought fires right into the night. We didn't stop. We went in this area and got these trucks working, operating. We were using them for firefighting. During the course of the fire, well . . . I'm getting ahead of myself.

Later in the day when things died down a little bit, the heat was so hot from the Arizona burning that . . . the BOQ--the Bachelor Officers' Quarters--was a wooden structure. The heat was so hot, even that long distance from where the Arizona was, that it began to smoke. So we had to put water on this building to keep the heat from igniting this wooden structure.

It was during this course of the fire fighting that we went into the building. They had Coke machines in there. Cokes at that time were a nickel. Wouldn't you know it that none of us had any change. So we forced the doggone things open, and that's how we got our first drink of liquid--was from the Coke machines there. But getting back to . . . I jumped ahead of my story there.

But anyway, getting back, we got a call to take one of the fire trucks to the hangar where they wanted some fire put out that was around some of the important equipment in this hangar. So I jumped on the side there, and lo and

behold the driver started driving, and pretty soon he had no control over the wheel. It's a wonder we didn't get killed. But anyway, what happened is that previous to that, this fire truck had gone to a fire, and they hit a bomb hole, and it ruined the front axle or something. The steering mechanism was shot. So the steering mechanism had been damaged, but nobody knew anything about it. They found out later that this was the case. That's why they weren't using that particular truck.

By that time we got down to the ramp where the seaplanes usually were. Most of them, by that time, had been hit, and PBY's and everything else were burning. But anyway, we started on the ramp with the fire truck and here comes a plane. The machine gunner on the side by the ramp there, he's training to fire against this plane coming in. To this day, I don't know whether it was ours or theirs. But anyway, I'm not driving but I could see what's happening. We're traveling towards the plane, and the gunner is training, and we're coming right across his line of fire. I figured, "Holy Christ!" And the driver, he don't see it. I thought we'd get chewed in half. But somehow or other he didn't fire. I don't know whether his buddy or something stopped him. I

figured we were going to get it there. It probably would have been unnecessary, really, because I think it was one of our own planes that had been up and was coming back or something.

So anyway, by this time they needed help along the shore where all the battleships were, so we went down to help any way we could in getting the people out of the water and everything else. It was an awful thing to see. I went to . . . we had a small little sickbay on Ford Island there. I went to that area there.

Previous to that a bomb that probably was dropped to hit one of the battlewagons overshot, and it went in the open court. The outer area had wounded men all around it. Luckily, the bomb fell at an angle where it went underneath the concrete. All the center of this court was all raised up. If I remember correctly, I asked around and miraculously nobody was hurt from that bomb that hit in the center of this court here.

By this time, the men were beginning to come back that were ashore. It was something to watch these fellows come back in awe. They couldn't believe what they were seeing, you know. They were coming back from shore leave where they'd been the night before and all of that.

The devastation . . . although we didn't know it, by this time the attack was over. Of course, we didn't know this. Every once in awhile you'd hear a gun go off, and then everybody's all uptight again, you know. This went on the rest of that day, all night long. In fact, during the night there, at one time they were supposed to have some type of signal as to when to start firing. We could hear airplanes, and all of a sudden it seemed like the world was going to come to an end. Everything in that harbor opened up.

Marcello: These were the returning planes coming off the American aircraft carrier, were they not?

Kuzma: From the Enterprise, and a real good buddy of mine was on the Enterprise, and I thought about him. His name was Peter Maruschak. He and I went on the police department after we got out of the Navy together. We didn't know this. We thought we were under attack again. Everything was opened up and firing throughout the whole harbor. The Army installations from back in the hills--everything they had was opening up. It looked like the whole sky was lit up with tracers and everything else. We found out later that they were our own planes, and, of course, this makes you feel bad to think those poor guys come back to this, you know, and then get fired

on by their own people. But this is one of the tragedies of war.

At the time, we think that we're under attack again. Big bull-headed me, during all this going on there, I stepped out from . . . well, previous to this I figured we were going to get bombed. To tell you how your mind thinks, you have a lack of reasoning when there's a certain amount of fear. We had this metal cage with an opening in it. We had a locker room where the tower was where we'd hang our fifty-foot lengths of fire hose when they were wet. I straddled the doorway with my feet--one foot in the tower and the other in the station there. I figured if a bomb hit on one part, I was going to jump to the other part and vice versa. Well, later on when you collected yourself, you figured how dumb this was. If it hit anyplace, you weren't going to go anyplace but up. But this is the way you think.

Even later on, after this happened, I went outside to see what was going on out in front by this palm tree in front of the fire station there. Where I was standing . . . the next morning I started looking around where I was standing, and there was hunks of shrapnel all over the place. The concrete was gouged out, and there were big hunks where it got buried in the grass. You could see where it hit the palm tree that was standing there. How the hell

how come I didn't get hit by falling shrapnel from our ack-ack, I don't know, but it was all over the place like confetti.

Marcello: In the aftermath of the attack when you had time to collect your thoughts a little bit, how did your attitude toward the Japanese change, or what was your attitude or what emotions did you have toward the Japanese?

Kuzma: Well, at that moment a couple of my real good friends Daniel Daugherty from Massachusetts . . . and the other guy's name was Milligan. Of course, we discussed this. Naturally, at this time we'd do anything we could to fight back. The hate is still within you because of what you see, what they did. From then on out, it's a personal thing between you and the enemy. At that time I would have no qualms about destroying them in any way I could. Of course, over the years this has mellowed, and naturally I don't feel the same way because chances are most of the people I'd be running into of Japanese ancestry may not have been born then, so I don't have this animosity. But at that time I sure . . . all the men felt the same way. They just had the anger in them.

When you describe your feelings, it probably starts when you found out you're under attack. Shock is what

hits you first. You didn't understand it. Then fear sets in. Then it's anger and anger to retaliate. This is probably what made the military personnel, who reacted the same way, fight as they did. They ended up that these were the nucleus of the fighting spirit. Your new construction . . . these guys here were the . . . everything was built around them. There's no question in history's mind that they certainly proved themselves afterwards. As you asked me, "How do they feel?" Well, they felt anger and they felt hatred. Maybe that's what gives that fighting spirit.

Marcello: Did you ever have a chance to get a meal of any sort during this entire day?

Kuzma: No. The first opportunity we had was late, late, late that evening. They finally brought some sandwiches to the fire station. There was some kind of a cheese spread or something. Anyway, as hungry as I was, it just didn't taste good to me. I don't know what the hell it was. But it was something foreign that I hadn't ever had before. As hungry as I was, I just . . . maybe it was my emotion. I just couldn't seem to eat. I was thirstier than anything else. Fortunately, we were able to draw certain amounts of water for our extinguishers from there, and, of course, we'd drink this dirty old water. It tasted great.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors that you heard in the aftermath of the attack? You started to talk about some of those earlier when I cut you off to keep the story in proper sequence.

Kuzma: The rumors we had were that the island had been invaded. Schofield Barracks had fell. Hickam Field was overrun.

Marcello: Did you believe all of these rumors?

Kuzma: Gees! You believed anything after awhile. You hear all of this shooting and everything. You figured, "Who the hell else is shooting?" But we felt that we on Ford Island were going to be the last holdouts. We'd have to fight them coming across the bay or the channel there. A lot of us were just prepared to battle right there to the end. Not by choice, but this is what we felt was going to happen.

Marcello: Had you ever been issued any small arms or anything of this sort?

Kuzma: Well, there were rifles available and things like that, yes. But, of course, we there with the fire department were told that we were there for putting out fires, and this was just as important as anything else. So at that time we didn't come under using firearms. There were the others that had other duties that didn't involve

anything in emergencies as we were using small arms, but we weren't. In fact, I don't think I fired a shot myself.

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that the water main had been damaged. You also mentioned this one fire truck had been evidently damaged. Did the rest of the fire-fighting equipment remain intact? In other words, were they usable?

Kuzma: Well, yes, the same one that we spoke of earlier . . .

Marcello: Same truck?

Kuzma: Right. There was a good hunk taken right out of part of the housing where your controls were, where a piece of shrapnel had gone through there. It's a wonder some of the firemen weren't hit with that. I wasn't there at the time, but they tell me that one of the guys that was near and getting under the truck for cover during the attack there, the water line or the radiator was hit, and the hot water hit him, and, of course, he thought he was hit by a bullet. He was very happy to find out it was just hot water. Your mind plays an awful lot of tricks on you.

Marcello: Usually, in a situation like this, as serious as it was, there are some funny things that occur. Can you think of any funny things that perhaps occurred at that time?

Kuzma: Well, yes, there are some things that . . . well, one of them was during that night, right after we thought we were under attack again. When the all clear sounded again there, I remember one of the guys asked the other guy, "What do you think?" He said, "Jesus, I hope them damn mosquitoes don't bother us too much tonight." He said, "Last night they were a bitch." This sounded funny, you know. Here the guy's mind is on . . . whether it's through normal instinct or you block it out in your mind, but he was worried about the damn mosquitoes. But I remember this, now that you ask me. It's funny. I never thought of that since. I just thought of it now. He was worried about the mosquitoes.

Of course, everything sounded funny. Drinking this water from the swimming pool there, of course, like I say, it tasted like a million bucks. One of the guys said, "Jesus Christ! How can you drink that? You should see that dirty old guy that was swimming in that earlier today." Dirty or not, it tasted great.

Marcello: How about acts of heroism? Did you witness any particular or specific acts of heroism?

Kuzma: Well, there was a awful lot of it going on that day. A lot of it was along Battleship Row there. You saw men helping each other. You saw men stay right there under

conditions that were impossible. They were right there with their ships. Of course, our crews and the people from the shore were getting right down in the water to help these guys out of the water. Of course, you didn't know at the time when these other ships were going to blow up because the fire was all over them, and all you kept thinking about was that the Arizona had blown up and how bad she was. But when you say acts of heroism, well, you look at it that way now, but at that time it was just something you normally did. You just tried to help the other guy. I don't think anybody was doing it . . . figuring they were doing anything heroic. They were just doing it because it just came natural. You just did it. Like I say, some of the fellows I worked with received citations and promotions and everything else from the fire department. Some of the fellows' names that I mentioned received citations.

Marcello: Is there anything else you think we need to get as a part of the record?

Kuzma: Well, I think I've pretty well covered a lot more things than I remembered doing because, like I said earlier, some of these things I didn't even remember until right now. Well, I can say that it was a day that I'd hate

like hell to live again. I'm happy that I lived through it. There's many that were unfortunate and didn't live through it. Hell, I'm glad to be around here.