

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

300

Interview with

John Darst

March 3, 1976

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Terms of Use: *Open*

Approved: *John E. Darst*
(Signature)

Date: March 3 1976

COPYRIGHT © 1975 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 Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203.

Oral History Collection

John Darst

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: March 3, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing John Darst for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 3, 1976, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Darst in order to get his experiences and impressions while he was aboard the minelayer USS Sicard during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Darst, 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--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Darst: Well, I was born at Terrell, Texas, on July 31, 1915. I went to school in Terrell, and after I was . . . my folks was farmers, and then they became . . . my father became a grocery store owner, and I worked in the grocery store part-time up until 1939. On February 9, 1940, I went and joined the United States Navy.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service?

Mr. Darst: Well, at that time I was in the Texas National Guard. I was a sergeant in the National Guard. The war with

Germany was going on, and I decided, well, I didn't want the Army, so I went to the Navy. I decided that I would join the Navy.

Marcello: Could you simply transfer out of the National Guard and then join the Navy, or how did that work?

Darst: I had to really join the Navy. After I joined the Navy, why, they gave me a discharge out of the Texas National Guard and into the Navy.

Marcello: Why did you decide that you didn't want to stay in the Texas National Guard?

Darst: That's hard to say. I really don't know. Nearly all of my folks were Navy men.

Marcello: Well, of course, looking back on it now, it's probably a good thing that you didn't get in that Texas National Guard because you may have been one of those guys that was captured on the Island of Java and spent the rest of the war in various prisoner-of-war camps.

Darst: Most of the boys that I was in the Texas National Guard with in Terrell--Company C, 144th Infantry--went to Europe. And most of them were killed over there in . . . there were mighty few of them that got out.

Marcello: Well, that's true. The bulk of that division did go to Europe and fight in Italy.

Darst: They were in Italy, and most of them went to different places and different things, I understand. But I

decided I'd go to the Navy, so I just went to the Navy and went to San Diego and went through training in San Diego, California. After my training in San Diego, why, I was transferred to Honolulu, Hawaii.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your boot camp experiences at San Diego. At the time that you went through boot camp, was the training being hurried in any way? In other words, was there a sense of urgency about your training? I know that sometime prior to the war they cut back on the number of weeks that one spent in boot camp.

Darst: Well, to look back on it at this time now, yes, they cut my boot camp training from, oh, a couple or three months, I think it was, and gave us thirty days' leave home at that time and then transferred me to Hawaii.

Marcello: Was the assignment to the Hawaiian Islands a voluntary one, or were you simply sent there?

Darst: No, it was not voluntary. They sent me there.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Darst: Oh, I was happy! I was very glad. I had never been out of the United States, and I was all up for it.

Marcello: At that particular time, that is, at the time that you got word of your transfer to the Hawaiian Islands, did you ever think about the possibility of war between the United States and Japan?

Darst: No, it was the farthest thing in the world. I hadn't given no thought whatsoever of war. Now the war in Europe was going on in Germany, but I was way over in the Pacific. I was way away from the war.

Marcello: Okay, when you got to the Hawaiian Islands, were you immediately assigned to the minelayer, the USS Sicard?

Darst: Yes, we went on our flagship, the USS Oglala, and they transferred the ones that was supposed to be assigned to the different ships there. I was assigned to the USS Sicard, which was a DM 21 at that time.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being assigned to a minelayer? Did you have any preference at that particular time?

Darst: Yes, I wanted a heavy cruiser.

Marcello: Why was that?

Darst: It was a bigger ship, and a brother-in-law of mine had served on the USS Houston. I wanted a heavy cruiser, but I didn't get it. They refused me, so I had to go on the one I was assigned to.

Marcello: Describe what the Sicard looked like.

Darst: Well, it was an old destroyer built back in the First World War, and it was converted into a minelayer with tracks and things for these mines. And it was an old, old ship--very old ship. I don't think it could make over thirty-five knots.

Marcello: How large a crew was there on the Sicard? You would probably have to estimate this, of course.

Darst: Yes, I'd have to estimate that. I'd imagine there was close to 150-200 men.

Marcello: What sort of armament did the Sicard have in addition to the mines?

Darst: It had three-inch guns and some antiaircraft guns.

Marcello: In other words, it was a relatively lightly-armed ship.

Darst: It was lightly-armed, very lightly-armed. It wasn't no heavy-armed ship. It had three-inch guns, I believe, on the forward deck and afterdeck, and about midship, too, there was one or two on each side. It was very lightly-armed.

Marcello: What were you striking for after you got aboard the Sicard?

Darst: Well, I stayed on it for quite awhile and had to make up my mind to see where I wanted to go, so I finally went to the black gang.

Marcello: In the meantime, I guess that you were probably on the deck gang, were you not?

Darst: Oh, yes, I was first a seaman . . . and mostly KP duty.

Marcello: Why did you decide to become a member of the black gang?

Darst: Well, I figured it was a job that I could do after I got out of the Navy. I wanted something where I could

go to work when I left the Navy, so I went to the black gang--go down there and be a machinist or something.

Marcello: How would you describe the on-the-job training that you received on board the Sicard during this period?

Darst: I got very little training. I turned out to be a boiler-maker, but--I don't know--machinist work did fascinate me, and they did have some lathes down there, and we fooled around with them for a little bit, but we didn't get no training, actually training, on them.

Marcello: Were there quite a few old salts aboard the Sicard during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Darst: Yes, there was quite a few men there, and it was old men that had been out in Hawaii for years. And they had their family, and they lived there in Hawaii. Some of them married Hawaiian women. While we were in port there, which was our port, why, we went ashore every night and everything, and they had . . . they lived on shore.

Marcello: And from what I gather, rank came very, very slowly in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy.

Darst: Very, very slow. Up till the wartime, it was very, very slow. It had taken me several years before I could ever make first class.

Marcello: What rank were you at the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Darst: I believe that I was a fireman first class. Let me see. I made fireman first class on October 28, 1941.

Marcello: So you would have been a fireman first class at the time of the Japanese attack then?

Darst: Well, yes. I made fireman second class on the sixteenth of December, 1941. That's when I made second class . . . White was ensign at that time. Kramer was one of them. E. J. Kramer was one of the division officers and Ensign N. W. White was another one.

Marcello: During that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what kind of routine or maneuvers did the minelayer engage in? In other words, I do know that the ships of the line would go out usually on a Monday morning, and in many cases they wouldn't come back in until Friday or something of that nature. Now what sort of a routine did the Sicard have?

Darst: We patrolled up and down the beaches of Hawaii and around the islands there. In 1940, we made one or two trips taking Marines to Midway Island, which so happened that the Marines that we carried to Midway Island . . . when the war broke out, the Marines was on that island and were captured and things.

Marcello: Now were they taken to Midway or to Wake Island?

Darst: Wake Island and Midway, too. We made both of them. Of course, they didn't take Midway, but they had taken

Wake. I'm pretty sure that all the Marines that we carried to Wake Island . . . I've often wondered if they weren't the ones that was on there on December 7th.

Marcello: Now in the patrols and cruises and maneuvers that you were engaged in at this time, were they daily things, or did you go out sporadically, or just exactly how did they operate?

Darst: Well, they had maneuvers. We went out and practiced--target practice. Other ships would pull targets, and we would shoot at them, and it was a regular routine or schedule. It was mostly target practice, laying mines--dummy mines--and then we had our minesweepers to go out and practice picking them up.

Marcello: Did your routine begin to change any as December 7th approached or as relations between the United States and Japan continued to worsen?

Darst: No, we never did know nothing about it. On board ship, our routine was the same all the time. In fact, we came in, oh, I'd say a month before December 7, 1941, and tied up at 1010 Dock there. We'd taken all of the guns off the ship, moved the men up to the barracks. We were all living in barracks, and our ship was sitting there next to the harbor with the guns off, with the boilers out. We were there for an overhaul. And on December 7th morning, why, that's where we

were. We was sitting there next to the dock with not even a gun on the ship.

Marcello: We'll get back to this a little bit later on, but I still have a few other questions that I want to ask at this particular point. What was the morale like aboard the USS Sicard?

Darst: Oh, the morale was wonderful. I have pictures and things of beer parties or luaus, and it was wonderful. The morale of the men was perfect. They all got along swell together, and we just had a wonderful time of exploring the island, going swimming, going beaching on Waikiki Beach. We spent quite a bit of time in Honolulu, Hawaii, which happened to be ten or fifteen miles from Pearl Harbor, and we had a wonderful time over there.

Marcello: How do you explain the high morale aboard the ship?

Darst: Well, the boys all seemed like they was happy. Nobody didn't care whether they'd come home or not at that time. The morale was very high. It was good.

Marcello: I'm sure that the fact that everybody was a volunteer helped, also.

Darst: Yes. See, it was the old Navy, and they all volunteered to go to the Navy, and they were there.

Marcello: They were there because they wanted to be there.

Darst: That's right--like I was. I was very happy there.

Marcello: What were your quarters like aboard the Sicard?

Darst: Quarters were very crowded, but yet we had good chow, good food.

Marcello: Were you sleeping in the hammocks or did you have . . .

Darst: No, we had bunks. It so happened that I had . . . not at that time, but later on, after the war started, I had a private room because I . . . up on topside I had a little room because I would take care of all the mail that came aboard ship and left aboard ship. I was what you called a postmaster and also a first class fireman.

Marcello: During those pre-Pearl Harbor days, did any of the old salts talk very much about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy? Was the Japanese Navy ever discussed?

Darst: No, it was never discussed that I know of. It was the last thing in my mind--Japan attacking the United States. We never thought about it. I don't think that there was any of them on board ship that would give it one thought that they would ever have a war with Japan.

Marcello: Do you think this was because the Hawaiian Islands were so far from Japan?

Darst: No, I don't believe it was that. I just don't think they even gave it a thought that they even would attack.

Marcello: Did you keep abreast with world events through the newspapers or the radio or anything of that nature at that time?

Darst: No. Of course, we had our own radio and things like that, but we never kept up. We kind of kept up with the war and how it was going in Germany at that time, but that was way over across the world to us.

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

Darst: Very nice people. We had a lot of Japanese there in Honolulu. In fact, on December 6, 1941, a little Japanese woman cut my hair and shaved me.

Marcello: Well, that's interesting. Here again, that's something that we will talk a little bit about later on when we get down to December 6, 1941. When was payday aboard the ship? Do you recall?

Darst: No, I really don't recall. I know we weren't drawing very much pay. I had most of mine sent home to the bank here in Dallas--what little I could afford--and I had insurance coming out of that, too. Cigarettes was a nickel a package, and we didn't need very much money at that time over there. So money really wasn't no concern to us.

Marcello: Do you recall when payday occurred?

Darst: No, I don't.

Marcello: Do you recall whether you had, or most of your fellow shipmates had, very much money in those days immediately prior to Pearl Harbor?

Darst: No, they were broke half the time, borrowing money from one another from one payday to another. We got along because if one run out of money, why, he could always get money from another one till payday. Of course, at that time none of us were drawing very much money.

Marcello: What was the liberty routine like aboard the Sicard during this period right prior to the Japanese attack?

Darst: Liberty aboard ship was very free when we were in port, which was . . . we stayed in port most of the time. All of the married men went every night. We had a station wagon there that picked them up in the afternoon and carried them home every night and went and got them in the morning. Every one of them that was married lived on shore with their wives, and they had liberty every night. The ones that lived aboard ship, we had liberty about every other night.

Marcello: Now you had to live aboard ship, did you not?

Darst: No, I didn't have to live aboard ship. I could have went over and lived in a hotel or something, but, of course, that was expensive. Most of us single boys lived aboard ship, and our friends who was the family men, why, we would go over and have supper with them at night and spend a lot of time with the married men in their homes.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that during the week you would have liberty every other night. Did you have to be back

aboard the ship at a particular time when you had liberty?

Darst: Yes, we . . . on that ship we didn't have no strict regulations. We could come and go as we pleased. If we didn't have duty, why, we could come and go anytime we wanted to.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't have to be back aboard that ship at midnight or anything of that nature?

Darst: No.

Marcello: Just so you were back for roll call the next morning?

Darst: Just so we was back for roll call and go to work the next day. We had our working hours just like the civilians and working people and everything else. We worked aboard ship painting it and repairing it--first one thing and another.

Marcello: What sort of liberty did you usually get on the weekends? Did you get off the entire weekend or every other day or . . .

Darst: No, we got the whole weekend. We'd leave on Friday and didn't have to come back till Monday.

Marcello: That is, if you didn't have the duty?

Darst: That is, if you didn't have the duty.

Marcello: Normally speaking, on a weekend what percentage of the crew had the duty?

Darst: I'd say about one-third. Very few of them had duty.

Marcello: And I would assume that there were very few officers aboard that ship on a weekend?

Darst: No one except the ones that had the duty--maybe two or three.

Marcello: Normally, how many officers did you have aboard that ship?

Darst: Well, as far as I remember, it was around twenty.

Marcello: And on a weekend, you might have two or three or four officers . . .

Darst: Three or four officers aboard ship.

Marcello: When you went on liberty, what did you usually do? What was social life like in the Hawaiian Islands for a young sailor in those pre-Pearl Harbor days?

Darst: (Laughter) Well, it was . . . usually, we went ashore, and as quick as we got ashore, why . . . we had lockers rented on the beach. I had a locker rented. When I went ashore, I got out of my blues and got into civilian clothes, and we'd either go swimming or to picture shows or to the bars.

Marcello: Down on Hotel Street?

Darst: Yes. It was just a regular routine.

Marcello: Generally speaking, when the crew members came back aboard the ship on a Saturday night after having been on liberty all day, what sort of condition would they probably be in?

Darst: Oh, they was in pretty good condition. They never did . . . there was quite a few of them that got drunk, but you didn't see too many. People would say they was drunken sailors, you know. I think that's all hogwash because they never did too much out of hand.

Marcello: This is a rather important question that I have just asked you because many people assume that a Sunday would be the best time for an enemy to attack Pearl Harbor mainly because everybody would be hungover after a wild Saturday night. This really wasn't the case.

Darst: No, I don't think it was too much the case. I think they attacked us on December 7th, on Sunday morning, on account of everybody being asleep and it being Sunday and a holiday.

Marcello: It was a holiday routine.

Darst: Well, it was a holiday routine, and most of them was ashore or at parties, and very few people were back aboard ship and things.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that for about a month prior to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, the Sicard had been tied up and was undergoing maintenance and repair and major overhaul.

Darst: Major overhaul is what it was going through, see.

Marcello: Well, again, describe exactly what was taking place aboard the Sicard. What I am trying to establish is the fact that the Sicard was in no condition to do anything in case of an enemy attack.

Darst: Well, I don't think they was expecting no attack or nothing like that, and so they was getting the guns and things ready and getting the ship all ready to go back out to sea if we did need to go back to sea and things.

Marcello: But now you did mention awhile ago that the guns had been removed from the ship, and boilers weren't lit or anything of this nature.

Darst: No, they was taken off the ship and set over on the docks and went to the gunnery to be overhauled. They had to be overhauled very often, you know, cleaned up and readjusted and all. Just like the boiler and the brickwork and the stuff in the boilers, it has to all be repaired just like an automobile has to be repaired every once in awhile. A ship has got to be painted and cleaned up. The living quarters has got to be cleaned up to make it liveable.

Marcello: And I would assume that during this period, then, you were probably drawing your power from shore.

Darst: Oh, yes. We drew our power from shore everytime we came in and tied up to the dock. Why, we cut our

boilers and everything off and took our fresh water and our electricity and everything from shore.

Marcello: You mentioned that after this time you were tied up at the 1010 Dock. What ships were you near at that particular time? In other words, what I am trying to establish is how close were you and what sort of a view did you have of Battleship Row?

Darst: Four ships were tied up between the two docks there. Each one was tied up.

Marcello: Were these all minelayers?

Darst: Yes, these were all our division. The Pruitt, the Sicard, the Schley, and the Grebe was tied up together there. On the other side of the dock--and which it so happened there was a railroad track down on the dock there--was four more ships tied up, which were the Tracy, the Preble, the Cummings, and the Rigel.

Marcello: Now what sort of ships were they?

Darst: They were the same kinds of ships.

Marcello: They were minelayers, also?

Darst: Part of them was; part of them wasn't. The Cummings was a destroyer. The USS Cummings was a pretty late destroyer--almost new construction. But they were in there to have something done to the ship--repairs--or something like that. I don't know why it was. Now behind us on the same dock, right behind us, was the

Honolulu, which was a light cruiser. The Honolulu, the St. Louis, the San Francisco, and the New Orleans were there.

Marcello: What sort of a view did you have of Battleship Row from where you were on the Sicard?

Darst: I had a perfect view of them.

Marcello: In other words, you had an unobstructed view?

Darst: Unobstructed view of the Oklahoma, the West Virginia, the Arizona, and Nevada. Now the Pennsylvania was in dry dock.

Marcello: About how far away were you from Battleship Row? You would probably have to estimate the distance.

Darst: A quarter of a mile or less.

Marcello: This brings us up to the period immediately prior to the Japanese attack, and what I want you to do at this stage is to describe to me--and go into as much detail as you can remember--what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941.

Darst: I had shore leave. On December 6th, I went ashore and got my hair cut like I mentioned awhile ago. Little Japanese woman cut my hair and shaved me. But I had to be back aboard that night for duty--a fire watch.

Marcello: What time did you have to be back?

Darst: I don't remember, but it was that afternoon, late that afternoon, because I'd taken . . . I'd volunteered, I think, to take someone's duty. I had the weekend off,

and I volunteered to take someone's fire watch. There was no one living aboard our ship, but we kept a crew on there for fire watches and stuff like that to see that no fires broke out and that nobody came aboard ship. It was a routine thing.

Marcello: What did you do while you were ashore other than get a haircut? Do you recall what the rest of your routine was that day?

Darst: No, I don't recall what I really done on December 6th. I probably went swimming or something down on the beach or went to a picture show or something.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had a fire watch. Were you up most of the night?

Darst: Yes, I had the watch from twelve o'clock midnight to four o'clock in the morning.

Marcello: Did you observe anything unusual taking place that night?

Darst: None whatsoever.

Marcello: How about the crew members who were coming back aboard ship? What sort of condition were they in that Saturday night?

Darst: They didn't come back aboard ship. Like I said, they were living in barracks up at the main gate coming in from Honolulu. They were living up there. Our clothes and everything was off the ship. We had taken everything off the ship, and we were living and eating and everything up in the barracks.

Marcello: How far were the barracks from the ship?

Darst: Nearly a mile.

Marcello: Now this more or less brings us into that fateful day, December 7, 1941. You mentioned that you had the fire watch aboard the ship, and you evidently did not get off the fire watch until four o'clock in the morning.

Darst: Four o'clock in the morning.

Marcello: What happened at that point? Describe what happened.

Darst: We had cots aboard there that we layed out, and we stayed there on board ship. Now I could have went up to the barracks, but that morning I just got me a cot down in the after compartment where I usually slept and laid down on the cot and went to sleep.

And the next thing I knew, why, the boatswain's mate came through, and he was hollering that we're under attack. Being so early in the morning and sleepy and everything, I told Dick, I said, "Oh, get out of here and leave me alone because I'm sleeping!"

About that time, I heard the explosion. I just had on a little pair of shorts, is all I had on; and when I came up from the afterdeck, I looked out and I seen the Oklahoma and the Arizona and them on fire and turning over. They had already been hit.

Marcello: What sort of thoughts or emotions were going through your mind when you saw the destruction that was being done to these particular ships?

Darst: Well, I knew that we was at war. I still didn't know by who or from what outfit until I seen some of the planes come over with the rising sun on them. By that time, why, everybody was in a commotion.

And as I said, we didn't have nothing to fight with, but they did give some of us . . . I remember one man especially whose last name was Miller. We had put our gas masks and stuff down in a boxcar that was setting there on the railroad, so one of the officers told us to go down and get the gas masks out of the boxcar. Well, we run down there and he, Miller, went into the boxcar there and was throwing out the gas masks and getting stuff. I don't know why they wanted the gas masks. I guess they thought they were fixing to have a gas attack or something.

Anyway, one of their planes came down and strafed us. I dove under the boxcar there, but he come down and riddled the side of a boxcar there. But this old boy, he ran and wanted to know where we were, and about that time, why, this bullet come right over his head and he ducked down. Well, we went back down and carried what gas masks we could back down to the ship.

Marcello: How far away was the boxcar from the ship?

Darst: Oh, it was just a little ways. I imagine it was four or five hundred yards, something like that. It was setting right there on the dock nearly.

And so one of them hollered to go over and help fight on one of the guns.

Marcello: Aboard one of the light cruisers?

Darst: On one of the other ships. Things was happening so fast that one of the firemen first class said, "Let's go below and get these ships underway!" Me and a guy named Burns, we went aboard the USS Cummings, which was a new destroyer. I didn't know too much about the fire rooms in new destroyers because I had been trained for an old one, but we went down there and got the boiler started and got the thing going, see. It didn't take us too long, either, but by that time their crew was back aboard ship.

Marcello: How much time had elapsed at this point, that is, from the time that you were awakened in the morning until you went aboard the destroyer?

Darst: Less than thirty minutes. I'd say it was less than thirty minutes. We went down there and had the boilers ready to go, and their crew came back aboard ship, and, of course, they took over. And when we came up, one of the officers asked us, "We're fixing to leave out! Do you boys want to go with us, or you want to stay? We're getting the hell out of here!"

Me and that boy said, "Well, maybe we can get somebody else underway, or we can do something else! Forget it! We'll just stay here in the harbor!" So we got them underway.

Marcello: In the meantime, is the attack still going on?

Darst: The attack was still going on. The bombs were still falling, and the machine guns were still going off. I looked out to the Honolulu, which was a light cruiser. I believe she was a light cruiser, or she might have been a heavy cruiser.

Marcello: I think it was a light cruiser.

Darst: I believe the Honolulu was a light cruiser. She was getting underway, and she was backed out into the harbor. I happened to be standing there watching--scared to death--but I was watching her back out, and she was under full power backing out.

This PT boat was setting over there, and this plane came down the harbor . . . this Japanese plane came down there. He dropped his torpedo, and it was headed for the Honolulu. This PT boat without no doubt whatsoever knew what was happening. He turned in front of this torpedo and it exploded. He saved that ship, but they were killed. The whole bunch was killed that were there.

Marcello: During the initial stages of the attack, how would you describe the reactions of the men that you saw? Was it one of panic? Professionalism? Confusion? How would you describe it?

Darst: No, it wasn't no panic to it. The ones that I seen was trying to do their best to get to the ammunition, trying

to get to the guns, and trying to get the ships underway--get them out of there--trying to help the wounded and trying to get them up to the hospital. And yet they were carrying ammunition and doing everything they could.

In fact, the men were taking over from the officers. They didn't need no officers. They knew what they were doing. They took fire axes, I understand . . . I wasn't one of them, but I did go to the ammunition locker on one of the ships. I don't remember which one it was now. But they taken the fire axes and just knocked the locks and things off because they were all under lock-and-key.

Marcello: Now you did mention awhile ago that you witnessed the destruction of the Oklahoma and the Arizona?

Darst: Yes, they were on fire and turning over.

Marcello: Describe what you remember of the sight that you saw.

Darst: It was a terrible sight, very terrible! What I couldn't understand is that they had brought those battlewagons in there the day before the tied them up two abreast. It was the first time in United States history that two battlewagons had ever tied up two abreast, and they brought them in there on December 6th and tied them up two abreast.

Marcello: But describe the explosion aboard the Arizona, and describe the Oklahoma turning over.

Darst: Well, I couldn't tell you that because I quit watching. As quick as I seen they was afire, I went to my other duties of trying to get guns ready and trying to help what I could of getting ships underway. Since we could not get underway, why, that's the only thing I could do. The time was lapsing there, and I seen a few planes that was shot down. I seen them fall, but you don't pay no attention to that. You try to do your duty and try to get what you can done.

Marcello: In other words, what you're saying is that you really don't have time to observe the big picture.

Darst: No, you do not have time to observe everything. Now you'll catch a glimpse of it, and you'll catch a glimpse of a bomb falling and hitting a ship, but you don't pay no attention to that.

Marcello: In other words, you have your own particular job to do.

Darst: You got your own mind on what you're going to try to do next. Now when this plane come down and was strafing us was machine gun bullets, I dove under a little old canvas awning and felt completely safe, and that bullet could have riddled it all to pieces.

Marcello: Now was this at the time that you were over there at the boxcar?

Darst: Yes, back later on. Now sometime during that attack . . . I can't remember, but we were away from that dock

someway--me and another boy. We were either going to a ship, or we were doing something. I don't know. It's vague. But anyway, they had been digging a ditch, and there was water and mud in it, and when this plane came down strafing, I dove in that mud and water. It didn't bother me to get out of the way.

Marcello: Now this was another plane that was strafing you?

Darst: Yes. Oh, yes, they were coming in fast and furious at that time.

Marcello: How low were those planes flying?

Darst: Oh, they were low. You could see the men in them.

Marcello: What did they look like?

Darst: They just look like Japs to me (chuckle). I knew what they looked like. They just looked like Japs. We knew what they looked like.

Marcello: In other words, were they close enough that you could observe the outlines of their faces and features?

Darst: Yes, I seen two or three there that came down. Now that plane that came down and whose torpedo was running toward the Honolulu and would have hit broadside if the PT boat hadn't have been there, why, he was very plain to me because, see, he was coming right down on the edge of the water.

Marcello: I was wondering if you could identify the Japanese pilots any closer than that.

Darst: They was very plain. Like I say, you see the fires and explosions and the other ships and this all around, but you don't have time to observe or wonder or nothing like that. All I've got to say is that I was scared as hell (chuckle)!

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you helped put the Cummings underway.

Darst: Yes.

Marcello: What other activities did you engage in after getting off the Cummings?

Darst: Well, by the time we got the Cummings and things underway, it was about over with that morning. I mean, the fighting was just about slowing up.

Marcello: How long did it take to get the Cummings underway?

Darst: Oh, I'd say around twenty or thirty minutes.

Marcello: A relatively long period of time.

Darst: Yes, it seemed like a long period of time. Yet it wasn't because by the time you get a cold boiler going from a cold boiler up to steam enough to get a ship underway, it's supposed to take quite a bit of time. And if you go by the books, why, you would never get one underway. But that morning, we just threw the oil and stuff in there and got it underway just as fast as we could. It's a wonder we hadn't blowed it up, but it'd be blowed up anyway, so . . . and by that time, their crew was back and ready to take over.

Marcello: So what did you actually do, then, after you left the Cummings?

Darst: I went back and reported to the officer aboard my ship, and he sent us to the other ships down the other way. And as we was going up the gangway of the Helena, I believe, why, this torpedo came under the Oglala and hit the Helena and blowed her up, and so we never did go aboard her. We just run the other way because there was too much fire and stuff going.

Marcello: Did you actually see the torpedo hit the Helena?

Darst: No, no, no. It was under the water.

Marcello: In other words, that had occurred . . .

Darst: It was under the water.

Marcello: But what I mean is . . .

Darst: I heard the explosion. We did have one or two men aboard who were carrying ammunition and working on that thing, and they were killed.

Marcello: But did you actually witness the explosion?

Darst: No.

Marcello: Were you there at the time?

Darst: Well, I heard it when I started up on the dock there almost to her. I was fixing to go up on the gangway when the explosion occurred.

Marcello: What did it sound like?

Darst: Oh, it was a terrific explosion, that's all. It just split the Helena wide open, and there was fire

and everything else. Well, it was no need of going aboard and getting killed yourself, so you turned and started to do something else. So by that time, we went back to our ship, and it was letting up. By that time, it was all letting up.

Now I did have men killed pretty close to me by bullets and strafing first one thing and another, but you didn't have time to . . . the medics was taking them up to the hospital and picking them up and carrying them, so we had other duties.

Marcello: What did you do in the aftermath of the attack?

Darst: Well, after there wasn't no more planes and stuff like that, why, we went back up to the barracks and done the best we could and tried to get something to eat.

Marcello: Did you have very much of an appetite?

Darst: Well, when you're standing around for eight or ten hours, you got a pretty good appetite.

Marcello: That's how long you had to stand in line?

Darst: That's right. Because most of the cooking stuff was knocked out, see, and the lines was . . . they was feeding them in like a soup line. They was feeding . . . they started cooking dinner early in the morning at breakfast, and they had long lines of sailors that they were feeding because there was no way to go or no nothing else for several days there until they got back organized again.

Marcello: What sort of tasks were you doing, let's say, that evening or the next day and things of that nature?

Darst: Mostly fire watch. We went back to our regular duties. We were expecting a land invasion, though.

Marcello: I'm sure that in the aftermath of the attack there were all sorts of rumors floating around.

Darst: Oh, yes, and a lot of them weren't rumors. A lot of them were the truth.

Marcello: What were some of the things that were rumors? What were some of the rumors that you heard? Do you recall?

Darst: Well, the rumor was that the Japanese had taken Wake Island, Midway Island, all of Guam, and all of the whole thing, and they was fixing to come in on the shores of the United States.

Marcello: Were there a lot of trigger-happy servicemen around that night?

Darst: Yes, there was quite a few. It was blackout and you dared not to light a cigarette or anything else after dark out there anywhere because if you did, why, the Marines would shoot your head off. A lot of them was killed by just forgetting and trying to light a cigarette. I expect that some of them was killed doing that, see.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that some of the things you heard turned out to be true. What were some of the things that turned out to be true?

Darst: Well, they had taken Wake Island and . . . but they . . . I don't . . . they hadn't taken Midway, but they had taken Wake Island and Guam and the Philippines was hit, too, at that same time.

The USS Houston, the one that I put in for, she left Honolulu, oh, a month or two before, and she was sunk down close to the Philippines. The Japanese sunk her, so I guess I'm better off that I didn't get transferred off on to the . . . but I put in for it, and I was refused. So I've been happy ever since then because . . . but some of the destroyers that was with the Houston came in later, and they were beat up. They had been out running and dodging the Japanese fleet, so they were in bad shape when they came into harbor, oh, a month or two later.

Marcello: What did the harbor look like in the aftermath of the attack? In other words, describe the destruction that you saw as best that you can remember it.

Darst: Everything was tore up. The dry docks was tore up; the ships was blowed up and was turned over into the dry docks; and the ships that had turned over, of course, they couldn't do nothing with them at that time. Everybody went to work cleaning up.

Marcello: What did the surface of the harbor look like, that is, the water?

Darst: Oh, it looked like a garbage dump.

Marcello: In what respect?

Darst: Men's bodies were floating, and there were pieces of board and lumber, and it was filthy. Oil, it was plumb full of oil, and it was just a filthy place. It was a really dirty, nasty place until they got everybody organized and got to cleaning up again, which wasn't very long.

Marcello: How did your opinions of the Japanese change now in the aftermath of the attack?

Darst: Well, I couldn't put it on tape what I thought about them because . . . we didn't like them, I'll tell you for sure, and nobody else did. Of course, we didn't have much to do with the Japanese that was living there in Hawaii at the time, but I don't guess that they had too much to do with it. Things kind of changed after the war there in Honolulu because people kind of looked down on the sailors before the war started, and after it started, it had a different turn to it.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Darst, I can't think of any other questions. I think we have kind of covered the attack pretty well. Is there anything else that you think that we need to talk about or that should be a part of the record?

Darst: Well, the airplane carriers were due in on December 6, and they didn't make it. When they usually came in, why, they would send a bunch of us that were sailors

over to help tie them up and this, that, and another. And they didn't make it in on December 6, which was a very, very good thing that they didn't. But now the plane from the States, the passenger plane, the big clipper that was carrying passengers, they came in and landed in Pearl Harbor there on the water during the attack, and they weren't shot down.

Marcello: Did you see that?

Darst: No, no, I didn't see it, but I happen to know that they did. They came in because there were so many of them talking about how wonderful it was . . . the pilot didn't have enough gas to turn around and go back. He couldn't land nowhere else, so he brought it on in and landed there in the harbor.

There was planes that came in off the carriers and things. They had no ammunition. They sent all the planes in off the carriers onto Ford Island and then brought the carriers in. Well, these planes was coming in Sunday morning, and they run into this Japanese attack, see. Well, they turned around and went back to their ships and got their ammunition and got fuel and got loaded up. By that time, they tell me, the Japanese task force had already left and gone back.

But I will say this. If the Japanese had made a landing with a big army, they would have taken Pearl Harbor because they had us whipped.

Marcello: Well, I want to thank you very much for taking time to give me your observations and experiences from Pearl Harbor. You said some very important things, and I'm sure that scholars will find them valuable.

Darst: Well, I hope I have. I hope that I've contributed something and brought it to light more or something.

Marcello: I'm positive that you did.