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Interview with
Jack J. White
June 3, 1976

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Jack J. White

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Jack White for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 3, 1976, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. White in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the cruiser USS New Orleans during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Jack, to begin this interview, 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. White: I was born on August 20, 1921, in Fort Worth, Texas. I graduated from the University of Texas after World War II. I've been in the purchasing profession for approximately twenty years, both in Austin and here at North Texas State University.

Dr. Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Mr. White: February 9, 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

White: Well, I had enrolled here at North Texas State University. I was a youngster at that time--eighteen, I guess. I saw the world around me and in Europe going up in flames, and I thought that I wanted to be a part of it instead of being buried here in Denton.

Marcello: Why did you decide upon the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of service?

White: I can't really give an answer to that. It seems that a lot of people that are born inland have a certain feeling or a romantic idea of the sea, the ocean. The Navy was the only thing that I ever considered. I enlisted in Fort Worth in November and was finally inducted in February, 1940.

Marcello: I would assume that you took your boot camp at San Diego.

White: Yes, that's correct. I was there sixteen weeks for basic training and then four months at one of their schools.

Marcello: Now at the time that you were there, as you mentioned, your basic training lasted for sixteen weeks. Obviously, by this time things were getting to the point where they had cut back on basic training. Is that correct?

White: Not at that point. I think that some of the incoming units they were cutting down. Mine or maybe a few . . . one or two later on still had the full sixteen weeks of basic training.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you remained at San Diego after your boot camp was completed there. What did you do during that period?

White: There were basic schools that the Navy had that you could go to. You took an examination, and your standing on the examination plus your proficiency in boot camp training had . . . the Navy considered your aptitude in both areas, and the ones that scored the highest marks on these were given their choice of various schools to go to--radio school, electrician school, machinist school, etc. I chose the electrician school which was there at San Diego.

Marcello: Why did you decide to select the electrician school?

White: Well, frankly, I don't know. I felt that my interest probably was more towards the electrician than the machinist or radio or whatever the others they offered. It was just kind of flip a coin. "Well, I think I'll take this one."

Marcello: How would you rate the training that you received here at San Diego while you were in electrician school? In other words, was it thorough training? Was it done

very quickly in order to get you out to the fleet as soon as possible? How would you describe the training that you received here?

White: Well, I have nothing to compare it with as far as rating it. Of course, we were impressed when we were selected for the school. It was one of the best in the nation to give you a grounding in the basic fields that they were trying to teach you. Four months, of course, isn't a long time. But they did . . . we went to school day in and day out without any time off for a full eight hours each day. I guess they crammed into us in four months what would be normally an academic eighteen months or two years.

Marcello: In other words, you were going to be getting the fundamentals here at the electrician school, and then obviously you were going to get a tremendous amount of on-the-job training when you were in the fleet. I'm sure this was what they wanted to do.

White: Yes, well, the Navy emphasized this. Of course, they wanted to train you and, if at all possible, keep you in the Navy. But they also had a big deal about when . . . if you go out, if you leave the Navy, you have a trade or something to help you in civilian life. So it was, I feel, a good basic grounding in the fundamentals of electricity.

Marcello: While we're talking about the academic aspects of the Navy, was it still true at this time that the Navy was being highly selective in terms of the recruits that it accepted?

White: Oh, yes! Yes, in fact, when I was inducted in Fort Worth, I took . . . they had the general education . . . oh, I forgot the name of the form or what they called the test that you took. You had to make a certain score on that before you could go on, and then they'd give you a physical and take you in.

I remember the Navy recruiter. He was amazed . . . oh, I think I only made 88 or 90 or something on the test. He said, "Boy, that's the highest score we've had in months here!" So I felt pretty good about that.

I don't know what the minimum was that you had to make on it to be accepted, but some of the boys even that passed it couldn't pass the physical. In the Navy at that time, they wouldn't take you if you had flat feet. They wouldn't take you if your teeth . . . if you didn't have a perfect bite--these things. Of course, later on, they relented on those, but at the time that I went in they were still being very selective.

Even after we got to our basic training, one of the requirements was that you had to pass was a swimming

test. You had to swim, oh, at least twenty-five or fifty yards. I've forgotten what it was. The boys that couldn't pass that were discharged. They didn't keep you.

Of course, along later there were boys that never did pass it actually that they kept in the Navy, and there were boys that I know that had flat feet and boys that didn't have the minimum number of teeth and didn't have the perfect bite that they initially had to have to get into the Navy. So they did. They dropped some of the strict interpretations of who they would take later on. Well, I guess that was about the time the war started or probably before it started when they saw the need and started trying to build up their armed forces.

Marcello: Did you come out of the electrician school as a third class petty officer?

White: No, no. The basic schools that you went to at that time, they didn't automatically give you a rating or promotion. This had to be earned. You had the background and the fundamentals, and when you were assigned to a ship, you went automatically into that area. But this is the only thing that happened.

Marcello: Rank in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy came very, very slowly, did it not?

White: Yes, it did. I was one of the last ones . . . and I guess the people that enlisted at about my time still felt we were a part of the old Navy, even though we were at that transition point of the old Navy and the new Navy. Most of us were regular Navy as opposed to the USNR boys that were later inducted just for "the duration." At the time I went in, the minimum enlistment period was six years. You either had to sign up for six years or you didn't sign up.

Marcello: That old Navy must have been an interesting place in a great many ways. I've heard some of the other interviewees mention that some of those old salts spent their entire career upon one particular ship. In other words, some of them had twenty years or however long they stayed in on one ship.

White: Well, prior to the war, the fleet wasn't very big. This is true. Some of the old-timers, which they called "plank owners," they commissioned a ship, and they stayed with it for years. Oh, there were several on the cruiser I went to, the New Orleans, that were "plank owners" that had commissioned it and had been with it ever since. Of course, they had a certain advantage, and they felt that any new person coming aboard just didn't quite belong until they'd been on a few years. This is a natural thing,

I guess. I don't know whether it was right or whether it was wrong, but we all accepted it--the newer ones that came aboard.

Marcello: Did you go from electrician school directly to the New Orleans?

White: Yes. Oh, I don't remember how many there were of us that graduated from electrician school. We had a choice. They posted a list of the ships and where they were, the type of ship, etc., and you had a choice. Of course, they had received openings. There were a certain number of openings on this ship, etc., etc. We all made our first, second, and third choices. My first choice had been the heavy cruiser Houston, named for the city in Texas, but I didn't get it. My second choice was any heavy cruiser. Fortunately, I went aboard the New Orleans. It was stationed at Pearl Harbor. It was in the Hawaiian Detachment at that time. Since I had joined the Navy to be a part and see the world, I certainly wasn't going to try and select a ship that was based at the time in the United States. I wanted to get out and see what was going on in the rest of the world.

Marcello: Why did you select a cruiser, let's say, as opposed to an aircraft carrier or a battleship or a destroyer?

White: Well, I guess a lot of the idle time of recruits . . . they all had tried to get an idea of what the Navy was

all about--the pros and cons of serving on this type of ship or that type of ship. Some of the boys had an idea that a destroyer, a "tin can," was the only kind of ship to serve on. Others said the battleship was the only kind to serve on. So it came down to basically just a personal choice based on who you have talked to or some of the old hands at the training station, or if someone that you liked and admired had served on a cruiser, possibly this would be the reason that you would chose a cruiser. It might have been someone that you had seen and admired. "This is a typical Navy man. He's a battleship man." Then you would select a battleship. But there was no rhyme or reason for a recruit selecting any type of ship other than a subjective idea of what he felt would be the best for him and he would like the best.

Marcello: Where did you pick up the New Orleans?

White: It was at Pearl Harbor. I got out of electrical school at San Diego, and I finally was advised that I would go aboard the New Orleans. I guess there were, oh, a half-dozen seamen that were assigned to the New Orleans, and several--oh, I guess, maybe 100 or 200--were assigned to ships in Hawaii. And we all went aboard tankers that were going to Hawaii.

Marcello: Was it the Neosho?

White: Oh, I've forgotten what tanker it was. My god, I was seasick for two or three days, and I (chuckle) didn't know what . . . the smell or the fumes from . . . I remember it was a tanker, and to this day I dislike smelling oil fumes. But I wasn't alone.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't particularly care what the name of the ship was (chuckle)?

White: (Chuckle) No. Most of the 200 recruits on the ship that they were taking to Honolulu were seasick, too. So I didn't feel that I was alone in my misery. In fact, I wasn't.

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

White: Well, again, this was part of the romantic idea of the Navy. I was delighted. I had an idea of where it was. I'd heard people talk of it, etc., and I just thought that was the best thing that could have happened to me--to be assigned to a heavy cruiser in the Hawaiian Detachment. It's still part of that young, romantic idea.

Marcello: In other words, you still had visions of a tropical paradise.

White: I still did. I was still enthused with the Navy. Everything had gone, well, perfectly for me. I had gone through a school which I felt would be of benefit

when I went aboard the ship. So everything was fine until we got to Honolulu.

Marcello: What happened at that point?

White: Well, we were all impressed. I had . . . well, I don't know what I'd envisioned. But when we were coming through the channel there . . . of course, all of us were topside and looking and seeing the first palm trees I'd ever seen in my life. I saw the palm trees over on the beach, and this channel that looked rather remote to me and actually was not what I had envisioned. I had heard that there was a Navy base and a Navy yard, but I had kind of envisioned it to be similar to San Diego. But it wasn't. Goodness, the palm trees were coming right down to the harbor's edge. It was very impressive to me.

Marcello: Now by this time had Roosevelt ordered the Pacific Fleet to Pearl Harbor, or was it still for the most part based in San Diego yet?

White: It was still based in the United States. The New Orleans was part of the cruiser scouting force. At that time . . . of course, now being at that time only a recruit, I wasn't too involved with the overall picture, but to my recollection, the cruiser scouting force was the major capital division of ships in Pearl Harbor at that time.

Marcello: Let's talk a little about the New Orleans. What was the morale like aboard that ship? I'm referring now to that period prior to December 7, 1941.

White: Well, after I left the tanker that had taken us across . . . when I first boarded the New Orleans, I got my first taste of, "Well, golly, maybe it isn't as romantic as I thought it would be." I think four, five, or six of us were assigned. We left the tanker, and we were taken in a motor launch to the New Orleans. If we didn't think we were raw recruits before then, we certainly did when we boarded that ship because we were treated exactly like the things that we were--raw recruits. It was the first time we'd been on a capital ship. We didn't know hardly forward from backward, portside from starboard side. Someone led us to our quarters. We were assigned to the different divisions that each of us were to go to. And at that time, in that era, the morale was very high.

Marcello: How do you account for the high morale aboard the ship?

White: Well, number one, I think most all of us felt that . . . now I'm sure that the few raw recruits that were coming on at that time got this impression from the others on the ship. They had volunteered for the Navy. A lot of them were career men, and they had a pride, I believe, in what they were doing and in being a part of something.

A lot of them had gone in because of the depression. They had found what they called "a home" in the Navy. It was something that they could contribute to. At the same time they got what they felt was a good allowance and pay, three meals a day, which a lot of them hadn't experienced on the outside. So all in all, I think the morale on that ship at least, and throughout the Navy so far as I could see, was very high. In the peacetime Navy at that time, of course, to keep morale up there was a lot of inter-rivalry in sports. They had big smokers for boxing. They had boxing championships involving this squadron or that squadron. Eventually, they had a heavyweight of the whole fleet.

Marcello: I was going to say that it was ship-against-ship, and then it was inter-fleet competition and so on.

White: Exactly. Boxing, rowing, sailing, and just any of the sports that you could engage in. Believe it or not, they had, particularly on the capital ships--I guess cruisers and battleships--they had what we have today at the universities. All athletes had special meal tables. We still had that in the peacetime Navy. They ate at their own training table--the groups of boxers and the ones that were sports-minded.

Of course, the recruits . . . when you first went aboard ship you got the most menial jobs. Even

I, who thought I was going to be an electrician right off and start working on the electrical parts of the Navy, was assigned as a mess cook (chuckle).

Marcello: Now this is something that you might talk about a little bit because I think mess cooking in that particular period is quite a bit different from what a mess cook would be in the present service. This was a case, was it not, where you were actually serving a particular table and this sort of thing?

White: This is true. At that time none of the ships, as far as I know, had what they called cafeteria-style cooking. We had the mess tables, and we'd be served the food family-style. Each division of the ship had to contribute a certain number of mess cooks to the total number of mess cooks to serve all the people on the ship. You worked at it three months.

I and another boy from the E Division, which was the electrical division, were assigned as mess cooks together. And we had four tables, I believe it was-- eight men to a table, thirty-two men. They had dumbwaiters. The mess hall was on the second deck. They had dumbwaiters coming down from where the cooks prepared the food. We went up to the dumbwaiters and got the tureens of all the food, carried it to the tables for our people. We served our people in the

division. Then we had, of course, to take up the dirty dishes. We didn't have to wash them. We did have dishwashing machines. But we had to stack all the dirty dishes and take them to the scullery.

Then we had to clean and scrub the tables. Those tables were folding tables. They had metal legs on them. You hung them to the overhead. Lord Almighty, those things were heavy! If you weren't careful, you just couldn't get them up to those hangers on the overhead, and you developed your shoulder muscles and arm muscles and muscles that you'd never used just mess cooking. And we swabbed down the decks in the mess hall and kept it clean for the next meal.

Marcello: Wasn't it also true that the people that you were serving would provide special incentives for the mess cooks? In other words, come payday, didn't they always slip the mess cooks a little bit of money or something like that if they had done a good job during that particular pay period in times of serving? I know this was a practice on some of the ships. I don't know if it's a practice on all the ships or not.

White: No. Ours didn't do that. I don't remember us ever having a . . . in the first place, I don't think I would have taken it. We were there serving our own people. It might have been different if we'd been mess

cooks for another group that we weren't a part of. But we knew that we were going to this division, that we were going to be working for and with people who we were serving. Consequently, we didn't think that tips or whatever, a kitty, would have been something that we would have been looking forward to. Frankly, I don't remember any of them getting additional money. This could have happened, and it could have been something that they did on other ships quite regularly.

Marcello: We were talking about the morale aboard the New Orleans awhile ago, and I think you mentioned some of the things that most of the interviewees say as being responsible for the high morale, that is, everybody was a volunteer, they were there because they wanted to be there, and . . . well, I think this was probably the main reason why the morale was so high. How was the food aboard the New Orleans?

White: It was good. I had been surprised. Of course, when I left home and went to the Navy, my mother, as all mothers would, said "Oh, I hope they feed you good and you get enough to eat." I had never seen so much food in plentiful amounts. It was very good. I had no complaints.

Marcello: Well, I think this would have been another one of those factors that would have been responsible for the high morale, also, that is, the good food.

White: True. I'm sure it was--good food. At that time there was lots of food, good food, lots of liberty. In those days, of course, instead of being divided in two sections, the ship was divided into three sections. One section had the duty aboard ship, and two sections got liberty. We had liberty, of course, every day . . . well, I don't remember--three or four o'clock, I believe it was. Then liberty was every Wednesday at one o'clock, and then if you didn't have the duty, you got off the weekend. You had Saturday and Sunday off. So you had more liberty than you could afford to take, actually. It did cost when you went ashore, even for taxis to go into Honolulu.

Marcello: Now did this liberty routine that you've just described continue this way right up until December 7th, or did it change somewhat when the rest of the Pacific Fleet was moved out to the Hawaiian Islands?

White: Well, it changed. I think this was one of the things that affected not only the people who had been there in Hawaii . . . just like my going onto the New Orleans. There was a little faint resentment of older hands on this ship. "Here come these new recruits!" Well, I think possibly this affected the whole cruiser scouting force of six or eight ships. When all of the battleships came out there, they were ruining a good thing. They

cut out overnight liberty first. They would give only special liberty to some of the men aboard who were married and had their wives. If you had your wife, you could still get overnight liberty, but for no one else. You had to be back aboard ship . . . I think curfew was midnight.

Marcello: Why was this done? Was it because there simply wasn't enough room in Honolulu to accommodate that many people overnight?

White: No, I don't feel that that was the reason. Of course, the Navy, like any other organization, is slow to move even though it sees events that may be coming. It is hard to put into force any actual preparation or . . . you prepare for it, but you can't put it into effect at that time. We all felt, oh, six months or a year before the actual Pearl Harbor attack that war with Japan was imminent. We didn't know when. Back when they started cutting down the liberty, we were all issued gas masks. We carried gas masks ashore on liberty in Honolulu. When we went out to sea, we had darkened ship. We were operating actually under war-time conditions. I think we did this for a full year before the attack came.

I think this was what was so frustrating to so many of us--to have actually gone through this wartime

condition anticipating and preparing for it and then to be caught completely by surprise, unprepared as it were. This was what saddened and disheartened not only me, but I imagine anyone who would have any feeling at all about the service and the war and the part that we would eventually play in the war.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that for several months prior to the actual attack there was this feeling that war between the United States and Japan was inevitable. It was imminent. Did you ever hear any of the old salts talk about capabilities or the prowess or the quality of the Japanese Navy?

White: No, not really. Now most of the old salts that I knew that were on the ship were from, at that time, the Asiatic Fleet. We had a few of those aboard. They didn't talk a whole lot about the Japanese Navy. In fact, I don't imagine they'd ever seen too much of it. In the Asiatic Fleet they were on little scows in China. Actually, not many capital ships were in the Asiatic Fleet. Most of them were patrol or auxiliary craft. The sea stories that they could tell would curl your hair, but not much about Japan because at the time that they served in the Asiatic Fleet, probably, there was no talk of Japan's building an army or a big navy.

Marcello: I think you were going to mention something earlier before I asked my last question. I'd been talking about the fact that you believed that war . . . there seemed to be a feeling that war between the United States and Japan was coming. I think you were going to comment on that statement.

White: Well, I think we all felt that with the blackout regulations, darkened ship, the carrying of gas masks . . . after all, we could see the war in Europe and how it was going--badly for the Allies. I think it was a foregone conclusion that Japan was going to come into the war. It was just a matter of when. This, I think, was the feeling among all of us. We accepted it as a fact, not from anything that we knew definite. It was just there for all to see.

Marcello: And I guess all you had to do was read the newspapers to see that relations between the United States and Japan weren't at their best.

White: Exactly.

Marcello: Were you keeping fairly well abreast with world events and so on during that period?

White: Oh, yes, goodness! We had felt rather isolated at Pearl Harbor with everything going on in Europe. Here we were, well, in a manner of preparing for the eventuality. But this is all. You can prepare only so

much and so long. It's like an athlete in training. You train him, and maybe he peaks too soon. This may be what happened to us. We peaked too soon and then felt that nothing was going to happen, which is exactly, I think, what did happen. We were ready, nothing came for several months, and then "bang." On December 7, it did come.

The New Orleans had been operating in Honolulu for some time before I went aboard. In those days in the peacetime Navy, particularly ships that had been stationed out of the United States, all of the men looked forward to an annual overhaul. A ship would go back to one of the major Navy yards for an overhaul of the main engines, and we were slated to go back the summer of 1941, which we did. We went back to the Bremerton Navy Yard to install new radar, which the British had developed and put on their ships. We were one of the first ships, I guess, in the cruiser scouting force to go back and have this new radar put on. And it was a general overhaul of our turbines, main engines, and new sound power telephone equipment--everything. We were there a little over three months in Bremerton Navy Yard. From August to November, I believe it was, that we were there.

Marcello: Let me ask you this question since you brought up the business about this overhaul. Were you getting any

additional antiaircraft armament aboard ship during this period?

White: Well, yes. Now when we went back to Bremerton Navy Yard, we got new radar. We got new sound power telephones. We got new light antiaircraft guns. It was a Swiss gun, Oerlikon, they called them, a .20-millimeter. This is what I understand. It was developed by the Swiss. I don't know what the American Navy was doing with it. They were .20-millimeter, fast-shooting machine guns, which was the largest. Prior to that, I think .50-caliber were the largest that we had on the ship.

And we also got what we called pom-poms, which was a 1.1 millimeter that shot . . . I believe it was four or six projectiles at once. It was mounted where it shot in sequence four shots and then four shots "pom, pom, pom, pom"--like that. That's why they were called pom-poms, I suppose.

We also got a new type of anti-magnetic degaussing gear. The Germans had developed mines to a high degree. The British Navy, of course, was the first to experience this. I imagine a lot of the improvements that we got in the Navy in those early days were things that the British Navy had developed to counteract what the Germans were doing.

Marcello: I think these pom-pom guns came from the British. I believe they were the first to use those pom-poms.

White: The pom-poms and probably the .20-millimeter, both, came from the British, as well as the radar. We had nothing in those days, probably, that we had developed, even though we thought we were one of the major forces in the world at that time.

This anti-magnetic degaussing gear was put on the topside around the gutters of the main deck of the ship. Oh, I guess it was five or six inches in diameter--electrical cable. You start at the generator and fed through electricity and create a magnetic field to offset the metal of the ship. The Germans had been quite unique in developing their mines. The first ones were the old horn-type. You had to bump against the horn, and it bent over and closed a circuit that exploded it. Then they had the acoustic mine detonated by the ship's propeller. They could lay a mine under the water or on a shallow harbor bed. It would be set to detonate by the propellers of the screw. They got a little devious, and they would set it not to detonate at the first action of the propeller screws, but let several ships pass over. Then it would detonate. Then they got this magnetic mine that would explode just from the magnetic field of a metal ship passing over. So

they were always trying to develop new means of warfare, and, of course, we were trying to counteract them.

Marcello: So, in other words, the New Orleans underwent a rather extensive overhaul here at Bremerton during this period.

White: Yes, it sure was. Of course, in that period I think that everyone felt that things were coming closer to a head because everything was rush, rush, rush. Well, at that time the Navy yard worked around the clock. There was not a time when there wasn't someone on that ship working on it.

Under normal conditions, when a ship goes in for repair, then you have a two-week or a three-week period of a short shakedown cruise to take the ship out with some of the Navy yard men aboard to iron out any wrinkles or something. We didn't even have time for that. They didn't give us that. They said, "Take your shakedown cruise going back to Pearl Harbor," which we did.

Oh, my! When we left Bremerton going back to Pearl Harbor, the radar wouldn't operate. It wouldn't work. We found a lot of the junction boxes where the wiring, either through neglect or on purpose, looked like it could have been done deliberately. One of our main turbines broke down going to Honolulu. They found filings in one of the propeller shafts.

So when we got back to Pearl Harbor, we pulled into the Navy yard. The scuttlebutt on the ship was that they were going to have the Navy intelligence to come aboard to inspect the ship to see if indeed there had been something that happened to the ship in the Navy yard that was not just negligence, but rather that had been done deliberately--sabotage. So this was why that we were in Pearl the morning of December 7. We'd been sitting tied up to the dock. Whether they ever did complete or make a thorough investigation, I don't know. But after the attack on Pearl Harbor the question was moot, I imagine, at that time.

Marcello: Let me ask you a few more general questions before we get to the actual Japanese attack itself. During that particular period before the Japanese attack, when you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

White: Well, of course, I'd been stationed at Pearl Harbor eighteen or twenty months before the attack.

Marcello: So you would have come into contact with Japanese civilians on the island.

White: Yes. In the town of Honolulu, where most of the Navy went on liberty, Chinese and Japanese were the major elements of the population. They outnumbered the Hawaiians and everyone else other than the American

servicemen. You take the servicemen out of Honolulu, then the Chinese and the Japanese were the predominant population of the Island. I have no doubts. At least they were in the downtown portion where the sailors circulated.

So I guess my idea of what a typical Japanese was or is was rather ambivalent. We'd see them everytime we'd go on liberty in the bars, driving the taxi cabs, running all the markets. But I don't think we looked upon them as the same people or the same type of people that we would eventually be at war with.

I've seen the people on the West Coast. I've never lived on the West Coast, but in some of the Japanese communities or settlements there, I don't believe that the people felt that the Japanese there would be the same ones. They didn't look upon them as the future enemy until later, of course. No, unless a Japanese . . . now if I had seen one in an Army uniform or a sailor's uniform, I'd say, "Ah, that's the enemy!" But to see one in civilian clothes running a meat market or in a barbership or serving drinks behind a bar, you didn't look at him and say, "Ah, he is the enemy!"

Marcello: How safe and secure did you feel in the Hawaiian Islands?
In other words, you could observe and you could read that

relations between the United States and Japan were deteriorating. But if war came, did you think it would come directly to the Hawaiian Islands? Was there any talk during that pre-Pearl Harbor period about the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

White: Well, there was always talk of the possibility. Even though they talked a lot about it, I don't think anyone really believed it. I don't think that the higher echelon believed it, and certainly I don't believe that the enlisted men, the rank-and-file, believed that they would ever attack Pearl Harbor. I don't believe that any of us felt that they could get that close to Pearl Harbor without being detected. What most of us, I would assume, would have imagined is a great sea battle approaching Pearl Harbor rather than what it was--shooting ducks in a barrel at Pearl Harbor. So in that respect I think we felt pretty secure being there in Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: And at the same time, as you mentioned earlier, this pre-Pearl Harbor Navy was a pretty confident outfit.

White: That's true.

Marcello: In other words, suppose war did come between the United States and Japan. It was the belief, was it not, that this country could defeat Japan pretty handily?

White: Well, after the fleet was moved to Pearl Harbor with all the battleships, they'd enlarged all of the capital ships rather than just the cruiser scouting force that had been there previously. I think that we all felt that we were the bulwark between the United States and Japan with the fleet there at Pearl Harbor--that nothing could happen. We would be able to handle anything that came up. And I'm sure that if things had been different, we probably could for a time. I don't think Japan would ever have gone ahead and occupied as much territory as they did had our fleet not been wiped out when they attacked.

Marcello: Let me ask you a little bit more about the liberty routine. I do have a particular purpose for asking about the liberty routine. I think you'll see what I'm driving at as the discussion proceeds. What did you personally do when you had liberty in Honolulu during this pre-Pearl Harbor period?

White: I think when I first arrived in Pearl Harbor, sight-seeing was the main thing that I did. I wanted to see what it was all about, go to different places just like any tourist. This is primarily what I did. Later on, as you become, well, broken in, as it were, to what is there, liberty was just a thing of going ashore. Some of the younger boys, as I was at that

time, would go in and take in a movie, go and eat somewhere, and have a couple of drinks.

This was primarily it other than . . . of course, the peacetime Navy, again . . . when you speak of recreation, it is something that the civilian population can't understand. Back in those days in all of the foreign ports where they'd get out from under the scrutiny of the people in the United States, the service had houses of prostitution for the sailors. They were restricted to only servicemen. You could go there. Of course, I imagine this was a part of liberty like anything else.

But by-and-large, it was a case of going ashore, catching a taxi or a bus in Honolulu. Nearly all of the buses from the Navy yard or from Pearl Harbor, they went to downtown Honolulu to the Navy Y.M.C.A., which was the focal point, I guess, for all the sailors and servicemen. There you also caught the buses and cabs back to your ships or bases, as it were. So anytime that you made arrangements to meet some friend or acquaintance from another ship or something, the Y.M.C.A. was the meeting place. You met there, and then whatever you decided to do later on, you went from the Y.M.C.A. That was a nice place. I've always had a soft spot in my heart for the Y.M.C.A. But that was

probably the best one that I have ever seen anywhere in the United States or out of the United States, was there in Honolulu. But eating, drinking and carousing probably were the main things on liberty for a sailor at that time.

I think the people of Honolulu were a little better in certain respects than a lot of the people back in the United States. I'd heard stories that sailors and servicemen actually weren't looked upon as a better part of the society. Some of the better eating places and restaurants and bars, they just didn't want their business. They didn't even want them to come to these places. But Honolulu was altogether different. I guess it was because of the type of population that was there. After all, the Japanese and Chinese . . . they couldn't hardly look down their noses at the servicemen. Of course, the old families, the old white families of Honolulu, that was a different thing. But by-and-large, the average sailor and soldier and Marine didn't travel in those circles anyway.

Marcello: What was your pay at that particular time? Do you remember?

White: Well . . .

Marcello: I know the recruits were only getting twenty-one dollars a month.

White: Yes, it was twenty-one dollars a month, and then the pay went to thirty-six dollars a month, then to fifty-four. I guess fifty-four dollars a month was my pay during that period.

Marcello: Which would have made you what rank? What would you have been at that time?

White: I was just actually in the engineering group as a fireman first class as opposed to a seaman first class. When I got out of boot camp . . . of course, a recruit's pay was twenty-one dollars. Then when you make seaman second class or fireman second class, your pay then was thirty-six dollars. And then when it was first class, it was fifty-four dollars, I believe it was. So by-and-large my pay was fifty-four dollars. Then I made electrician third class during the stay in Bremerton Navy Yard. Good heavens, I think my pay jumped to seventy-two dollars or something like that (chuckle)!

Marcello: In other words, you were a third class petty officer then at the time of the Japanese attack?

White: Yes. Now, of course, on capital ships everyone is assigned a battle station from the mess cooks on up. The newer people on the ship and the lower-ranked ones and the seamen, they were assigned battle stations which, in the opinion of the hierarchy, were less

demanding, of course. My battle station at that particular time was the secondary battery, which is the five-inch antiaircraft guns. You would think this was kind of odd for an electrician to have a battle station at the five-inch antiaircraft guns.

But the guns had three types or three different methods of firing. They fired by an electrical device. This was your main method. Your secondary firing device was also electrical, but by battery. And the third firing method was by percussion or by foot pedal. You kicked it and fired it manually. So my duty as an electrician . . . if something went wrong with one of the guns in the electrical system, then it was my job to try and repair it and get it firing electrically.

Marcello: Which particular five-inch gun were you on aboard the New Orleans? Can you remember? In other words, so far as its location was concerned and this sort of thing.

White: Well, my battle station wasn't a station as such. My job was for all of the five-inch guns.

Marcello: I see.

White: Any that needed help. We didn't have enough men to have an electrician at each one. So actually my job was to stay out of the way of the firing of the guns,

but if something went wrong, then it was my job to try to locate immediately what the fault was and get it repaired.

Marcello: So when general quarters sounded, where would you normally go?

White: When general quarters sounded, I would normally go to topside to the well deck. We had . . . I believe it was six five-inch guns, and I'd just kind of circulate. No, I think it was eight five-inch guns.

But the frustrating part of it was we were tied up, of course, at the dock. And when you go in, and if you're going to be there any length of time, you cut out all of your boilers, all of your machinery, and you take dockside electrical power, etc. And this is what we had done. And when you take dockside power, you cut down all of the power on the ship and just operate on what is necessary--the lighting and some of the auxiliary pumps and equipment, etc. So actually all of the circuits for all of the power on the ship were cut out when the attack started.

Marcello: Before we get to that point, I have one more general question about liberty that I need to ask you. It's a rather important question, and I want you to think about it and answer it as carefully as you can. There is the general impression among most people that if the Japanese were going to select a day for a surprise

attack, a Sunday morning would have been the best time. The assumption is that Saturday nights in Pearl Harbor were simply nights of drunken behavior and debauchery and things of that nature. Consequently, the sailors would not be in any sort of shape to fight the next morning. Now can you set the record straight on that from your observations?

White: Well, I believe that the premise there is a little in error. Now, of course, there was a lot of drunkenness and debauchery among certain elements of the Navy. But to pick a Sunday morning just for that reason, I think, was totally inaccurate. I think that the main thing, not that any great number of the men would have hangovers and not be able to do their duty, but in the fleet at that time if you didn't have the duty, if you weren't the duty section, on Sunday mornings you didn't get up at eight o'clock. You got to sleep in. You didn't have to get up for mess call or go and eat if you didn't have the duty. So consequently, fully two-thirds of all of the fleet personnel were not on duty even though they were on the ships. Most of them like myself were sleeping in. Not that I was drunk, but it was just a Sunday morning, so I will get an extra hour's sleep. This was primarily what it was.

Marcello: This is more or less the point that I was hoping that you would elaborate upon. In other words, again, there

were drunks who would come in on a Saturday night, certainly. But in many respects the service was really a mirror of society, I suppose.

White: Curfew at that time was at midnight. Even the few . . . and I'm sure that there were only a few. You had to be awful drunk not to have been able to get up at eight o'clock the next morning. My goodness, I don't think that this had any effect at all upon the alertness of the Naval base.

Marcello: Well, this has been the general impression that I have received from the hundred or so other people that I've interviewed, but nevertheless, I think it is an important question to ask just to set the record straight in this respect.

Now you mentioned that the New Orleans had gone to Bremerton for the overhaul, and then it had gone back to Honolulu again, and you went straight to the Navy yard in order to straighten out the wrinkles and so on that had been found as a result of the overhaul. I assume that you were in the Navy yard from November until the time of the attack. You stayed there in the Navy yard?

White: Yes. This was the later part of November.

Marcello: Yes.

White: I don't remember exactly how long we had been in there. My impression is that we hadn't been there

long enough for them to go in and do anything to the ship. In other words, we were operable. We were just there for a preliminary inspection to see how much was wrong and what would be required. At the finger pier next to us was another heavy cruiser, the San Francisco, I believe it was. My recollection is that they were undergoing some pretty massive overhaul. They had scaffolds and yard workmen all over that ship from the time that we pulled up along there. But our ship, more or less, was rather clean. We hadn't gotten into having a lot of workmen on the ship or this thing. Of course, when you pull into a Navy yard like this, your ammunition ready boxes . . . you take all the ammunition and put it into the magazine. This we had done. Consequently, we had no ammunition (chuckle) on topside or anywhere close to the guns when the attack started.

Marcello: Where was the New Orleans located with regard to Battleship Row?

White: Battleship Row was . . . they had big concrete piers sticking out of the water that the battleships tied up to on the east side of Ford Island. Now the Navy yard was east and southeast of Ford Island right across the small channel. Ford Island sat kind of in the middle of Pearl Harbor. Actually, you had kind of an east channel and a west channel going around the island

to the main channel. So the Navy yard . . . the pier that abutted the east channel was called 1010 Dock. And then alongside 1010 Dock they had several little finger piers, and we were in one of the finger piers. I guess probably we weren't, oh, three or four hundred yards from Battleship Row.

Marcello: Then you had a good view of Battleship Row from where the New Orleans was docked.

White: Only from the stern of the ship. When you tie up in those little finger piers, then if there's anything on either side of you, it obstructs your vision. On our starboard side the oil tanker Ramapa, I believe, was tied up. And then right across on our portside the San Francisco was tied up. Also, to our starboard side there was . . . at a finger pier, oh, twenty yards from us or thirty yards, there was a great big hammerhead crand the Navy yard used for lifting heavy things off of ships. So from the stern of the ship you could see what was kind of the East Loch of the bay.

This is the area that the torpedo bombers came in. Right in the back of the stern, we could see them coming in and pass us and going right to the battleships. It's kind of a helpless and frustrating thing to see those planes coming in and flying so low, actually ignoring you. And you can't do a thing. You can't fire

your five-inch battery guns. Some of the people were trying to use rifles and pistols. I think that we did . . . immediately after the attack small arms is all that we could mount (chuckle) any kind of counter-offensive with. There were several BAR's that some of the boys had, and some of the old .30-30 rifles. (Chuckle) This doesn't do much to stop a torpedo plane.

Marcello: Okay. This is getting a little bit ahead of our story. We'll get to that in a minute. I think we're up to those days immediately prior to the actual Japanese attack. What I want you to do at this point is to describe to me in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941. Then from there we'll go into the seventh when the actual attack occurred. Let's talk about December 6, first of all. Can you remember what your routine was on the sixth of December?

White: Well, I had gone on liberty on Saturday, December 6. I had gone into Honolulu. As I remember, I didn't stay very long. I went in in the middle of the afternoon and ate. There weren't any movies that I cared about seeing. I went to a bar, had a couple of drinks, and I guess I was back on the ship at eight or nine o'clock that night. Again, in those days with

the curfew being at twelve o'clock, just the idea of getting off the ship a little while and going over is all you could do. If you didn't have anything important to do, you didn't normally stay until the last minute to come back.

Marcello: Do you remember if downtown Honolulu was wall-to-wall sailors on that particular evening?

White: At that particular time and on a Saturday night, I'm sure it was because it had been that way for, oh, several months since the major portion of the fleet had moved to Pearl Harbor. And there again, I had been there when you could go and it wasn't that crowded. My goodness, with the sailors just lining the streets and everything, it had actually gotten to be kind of a rat race. It wasn't any pleasure to go on liberty into Honolulu anymore. So you'd just go and do what you wanted to do--if you had something to do--or go in and eat. If there was a movie to see or something, you'd go to that and then leave. It wasn't even any pleasure to go in the bars and have a drink anymore because, my goodness, they were lined up at the bars three and four deep, particularly on Saturday night.

So I had gone ashore and came back to the ship relatively early. I played a few games of acey-deucy with some of the boys and turned in, I guess, oh, around ten or ten thirty or eleven. But since the

following morning was still . . . I wasn't in the duty section, so I'd kind of planned to sleep in. I didn't have any particular reason to get up on Sunday morning.

Marcello: Where were your quarters located?

White: It was in the forward crew's quarters on the second deck of the ship. Well, the E Division, electricians, they slept here. It was--I felt and we felt--one of the better quarters for the ship. There weren't any particular things wrong with it. We had the bunks, the tiered bunks, of course. Ventillation was adequate, and we weren't cramped as it got later on during the war. Not knowing any better, it was as good as, and better than, a lot of the crew's quarters.

Marcello: And I'm sure this would have been another factor that would have contributed to the high morale for you aboard the New Orleans. The quarters were fairly good.

White: Well, yes. I suppose that you could say that. Capital ships are notorious, of course. The crew's quarters are the last thing that a naval architect plans for a ship, I would imagine, after the main batteries and the armament and all the other things. "Well, now where can we put the crew's quarters?" (chuckle). This is the last thing. But they were adequate. I don't have any complaint on that. I

suppose, yes, it did contribute to the morale of the ship.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that fateful Sunday morning, then. You turned in relatively early, as you mentioned, and I assume that there was really nothing out of the ordinary that happened that particular Saturday night that you can remember.

White: No, not to me. I don't have any lasting memories or any idea about what was going to happen. I guess maybe some people are clairvoyant, and maybe they felt that something was imminent. But to me it was just another dreary, if you will, Saturday night, another weekend, or whatever. Nothing exceptional happened to me. I had no visions or whatever of what was going to happen. In fact, the next morning around eight o'clock, when the general alarm sounded, I still didn't have any idea. I acted like many others, I'm sure. "My God! What is general quarters doing, going off at eight o'clock on Sunday morning?"

Marcello: In other words, when Sunday morning does come, you were still in bed and, I assume, in your skivvies and had not gotten up yet.

White: Right, exactly.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from that point because we're getting into the actual attack itself. So let's start

again from the time that you were in bed and general quarters sounded until all hell broke loose.

White: Well, I was asleep, and I heard general quarters as well as those of us that were still sleeping in. I don't mean that everyone was sleeping in. This was something that was optional to you. But I imagine that, oh, there were six or eight of us, at least, in our division quarters that were still sleeping in. When I, as well as they, heard general quarters, I don't think that we actually jumped up and dressed the way we would under an anticipated drill for general quarters. Then you do everything at double time. But I think my thinking was, "Well, there must be something wrong. Surely it isn't what it seems, that it is general quarters!" But it was enough to wake us. And I think while we were not dressing at double time, but at least dressing, it finally came over the loud-speaker then that it was actually general quarters, that there wasn't a mistake, that it wasn't a drill. So when we heard the imperative voice, then we started doing things and acting accordingly.

Marcello: But in the meantime, you had not heard an explosion or anything of this nature yet?

White: No. No, to my knowledge I hadn't heard a thing prior to that. So as I have already said, my battle station

was topside at the five-inch battery. So I dressed and ran to topside. Well, you can imagine what happened. There wasn't panic, but when a ship is tied up in a dock, some of the battle stations that you would normally have and that people would be assigned to at sea, they weren't actually battle stations for them--for a ship tied up at dock. So I think that there were a lot of people topside who had no business being there, and they wouldn't have been there had we been at sea or even tied up and anchored in the harbor.

But nonetheless, they were there, and, of course, all of the gun crews . . . the Marines manned the two forward five-inch batteries, I believe it was, and the Navy personnel manned the other four five-inch batteries that were back towards midships. This was the first thing when . . . well, in those early days everyone, of course, that had topside battle stations had your helmets and the life preserver that you put on, not only if you got knocked into the sea but to stave off shrapnel--the big kapok life preservers that they had at that time. They were always stored around the ready boxes and around the five-inch mounts.

But there was no ammunition. For crying out loud! All of the circuits, of course, to the ammunition hoists for opening up the magazines of the ship

had been cut off. But finally--I don't know how long it took--they did get ammunition up to the five-inch guns.

Marcello: In the meantime, what are you observing out in the harbor taking place?

White: I was so excited and nervous I was shaking, and I imagine that . . . well, I guess I was scared, but probably more excited than scared because when I did get to topside, then the planes were coming in and . . . but actually even just still seeing the planes, you can't believe . . . the reality hadn't sunk in yet until you actually then saw and heard explosions of the battleships being hit.

Marcello: Describe these planes coming in. Where were they coming from, and what tactics did they use coming in? Describe what you saw as best you can remember.

White: Well, as I remember it firstly, there were some horizontal bombers, if you will. They were relatively high, and they came through dropping bombs. At that particular time, the only thing that we would have had to shoot at them with would have been our five-inch antiaircraft batteries. But we didn't have any ammunition available for them. So as I remember it, the wave . . . I don't know whether it was one wave or two waves or the number of high flying planes overhead. They passed by and dropped bombs, and we didn't fire a shot.

The next thing that came to my attention, then, were the torpedo bombers that came in. My gosh, they were, I guess, making their final approach. They must not have been fifty yards astern of our ship coming into Battleship Row. So this was kind of hair-raising to see that plane come in that close to you and totally ignoring you.

He could make just a small angle of his ship and open up with a machine gun, and probably a lot of us that were standing there gawking and gazing at him would have been killed.

Marcello: Now were you somewhere near the stern of the ship?

White: Well, at that time, yes. You could get a better view. I had gone back to the stern of the ship momentarily, trying to get the full impact of what was going on. And sure enough, here were those torpedo planes coming in and laying their torpedoes. Again, this was kind of surprising. Actually, you could see the torpedoes launched, and then the explosion of the battleship. Well, some of the people in the Navy at that time, some of the old hands, had said--and I'm sure that this was the thought of the higher Navy people--that a torpedo attack in Pearl Harbor couldn't ever happen. According to the Navy tradition and documents, torpedoes from a plane had to be launched at, what, fifty or

seventy-five feet or something? There had to be that much water for you to actually launch a torpedo attack.

Marcello: And Pearl was just about forty or fifty feet deep. Isn't that correct?

White: Yes. It wasn't the minimum depth that they thought that a torpedo attack could be launched. But nonetheless, the Japanese were launching them and being quite effective in doing it.

Marcello: Well, let me ask you this. Since you were at this finger pier, and you mentioned that there were ships on both sides of you, could you have brought your five-inch guns into play anyhow, even had there been ready ammunition there?

White: Not for the torpedo planes.

Marcello: Just for the high-level bombers or the horizontal bombers then.

White: In port that way and tied up, your line of fire was restricted. For any surface target at sea, of course, you can use your five-inch on more of a horizontal for a ship coming in on you, or firing at the water or firing at a ship. But the only thing that our five-inch battery would have been useful for would have been to fire at the horizontal bombers.

Marcello: So in the meantime, like you mentioned, people were becoming so frustrated aboard the ship that they're even firing small arms at these planes.

White: Right. To my recollection, I think that they probably got maybe one or two 20-millimeters operating at the stern of the ship. The ones up forward or at midships couldn't fire at the torpedo bombers because this line of fire was restricted. So frankly, we were sitting there, a capital ship with nothing but small arms fire to be effective on the Japanese Air Force that was just bombing the hell out of . . . torpedoing our battleships.

Marcello: How long did you stand back there on the stern observing what was taking place?

White: Not very long. I stood there . . . of course, there had been . . . I don't know how many planes had . . . you could hear them, and you knew where they were coming in relation to your ship. So I ran back there hearing the planes, and I stayed back there long enough just to see one. It was not fifty yards from the stern of us. You could see the pilot's head in the plane that close. That was enough. So then I came back amidships then. They were still trying to get some ammunition up to the five-inch guns.

Marcello: As I recall, they had to use fire axes to smash the ready ammunition boxes on some of the ships and so on.

White: Well, I imagine that they did. Again, who is going to . . .

Marcello: . . . wait around for authorization and this sort of thing.

White: Right. When we finally got all of the men on the batteries, all of the battle stations, and they started testing the guns, they found out they didn't have any power, no electrical power.

Marcello: Now as you mentioned, you were drawing power from shore or from the dock. Was this that particular incident where you were trying to make the ship ready to move out and somebody accidentally cut the cable or something--the power cable to the dock?

White: No, I don't think . . . when we tie up to the dock and get power from shore, then down in the main engine room at the electrical distribution panels, you cut off all power circuits that aren't required to save overloading the power coming from the dock. And I think this is what happened initially. There was no power. The main switchboard had cut out the power to all the gun mounts, etc. They wouldn't be used, of course! When you're taking power from the ship, there's no one on duty down in the engine room. You don't have any generators running.

Marcello: When you're taking power from the ship or taking power from the shore?

White: When you're taking power from the shore, I mean. There's no generators running or anything. So they had no primary

electrical power, and they had no auxiliary electrical power.

Marcello: In the meantime, what are you as an electrician doing?

White: God Almighty! I was trying to go down to the battery lockers to get a crew. Again, when you're at battle stations, you can't just organize a crew of people to go down and get batteries. They have their own battle stations. I was trying to get some volunteers. I finally got a couple of other electricians. We were going down and getting those batteries and having to take them up and put them in the gun mounts.

Marcello: How large are these batteries?

White: Oh, I guess they weighed around forty or fifty pounds apiece.

Marcello: No easy task to get those batteries from the battery locker up to the gun mounts.

White: No, it certainly wasn't. It wasn't any easy task at all.

Marcello: Was there a certain amount of distance involved here? Were the battery lockers a fairly long way from the gun mounts?

White: Well, the battery lockers actually weren't . . . the batteries for the auxiliary power at the gun mounts weren't on the gun mounts themselves. They were under the first deck of the five-inch guns that were along

the well deck, and they were in the officers' quarters of the ship in the overhead--sealed overhead. There was a compartment that you went in and took out the batteries and connected them up. It was a chore to take them out and put them back in. So this was what we were trying to do. Finally . . . I've forgotten now who was the secondary battery officer. He said, "Forget it! We'll fire manually on the ship!"

Marcello: Normally, how long would it have taken you to get these batteries from the battery locker and take them to the gun mounts and get the whole thing operating?

White: Well, it had taken us close to half a day to take all the batteries out and put them down in the battery lockers to charge to begin with. And it would have taken several hours had we done it.

Marcello: So in other words, it really wasn't a tough decision for that officer to make.

White: Right. He said, "Forget about it! We'll fire manually!" Well, actually, the reason that they have the electrical firing on the five-inch mount . . . you just have a key. You just pull your trigger just like firing a rifle, actually. Whereas, with percussion you've got a foot pedal there, and you kick that thing. Well, that can jar you, and theoretically it means that you might miss a good sight when you are trying to sight

the gun or something. But nonetheless, this is what they had. I think that they . . . now if I'm not mistaken, after the torpedo attack--I don't know how long that lasted, frankly--but apparently there was a second wave of horizontal bombers because they did actually get to firing the five-inch batteries. Oh, boy! I think they made up for the initial wave that came over and not being able to fire at all because that five-inch ammunition is in these big shell cases--steel shell cases. My gosh, those things were just strewn all over the deck from the firing.

Marcello: In the meantime, is that ammunition being brought up to the guns manually?

White: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, you had human chains, you might say, just passing the ammunition along here on the New Orleans?

White: Right. We finally got work crews, and they got the magazines open, and they were passing it up. Now I think that later on that they did energize the main circuits to the ammunition hoist. Now they weren't passing up all of the ammunition, but the initial ammunition they got up was actually passed up manually, by hand.

The biggest scare that I had . . . I thought for sure that the ship was hit. A lot of these

ammunition cases had stacked up on the deck, and the ladder going down from the well deck to . . . they had gotten too many of these cases around the gun, and they were trying to get rid of them. They started pushing and shoving those, and a bunch of those came rattling down one of the ladders. Oh, it made a terrible noise! My back was to it, and I didn't realize what was happening. I'm sure not only I but several others that didn't know what was happening at that point . . . all of those empty five-inch shell cases came rattling down that ladder, and I thought that surely we were hit.

Marcello: Now all of this time are you mainly on the outside of the ship or . . .

White: Yes, the topside of the ship. Finally, after the frustration and everything, when there was a lull in it, I went down to my chief electrician, whose battle station was down in the interior communications room, which is, oh, about three or four decks in the bow of the ship. I told him about what had happened and about the frustration that I and everyone else had. He says, "Well, just don't worry about it. Do the best you can." And he says, "For God's sake, be careful and stay under cover! Don't get hit!" (laughter)

So I went back up on topside, and this second wave of horizontal . . . apparently, we had a near miss.

It was in the starboard bow of the ship. A piece of shrapnel from a bomb . . . well, it was more than a near miss because it didn't hurt the ship at all. But a piece of shrapnel or several pieces did hit the ship. One of the pieces of shrapnel, oh, hit up on the starboard side near the forecastle and actually knocked a hole in the ship, which was the only damage that was done to us during the whole attack.

That incident of someone . . . of course, the first thought was to get underway on the ship and not to be caught dead ducks that we were or dead in the water. Someone did give a command, I believe, or at least someone undertook to cut or disconnect the cables from the ship. But my god! We didn't have our fire rooms fired up or anything. If a command was given or someone undertook it on themselves to do it, it was foolhardy. They weren't thinking--to try to do it.

Marcello: And you just don't get up steam in five minutes.

White: No. No, goodness no. You've got to fire up the boilers. You've got to have steam. It takes a couple of hours or so at a minimum to do that. You can't do it if you disconnect all of the electricity from the ship (chuckle). Even our main generators on the ship are run by steam turbines.

Marcello: In the meantime, what were you doing during the second attack?

White: Since the antiaircraft guns were being fired by percussion, actually I didn't have anything to do. I was just kind of looking and watching and shaking, I guess. Occasionally, I'd help with some of the ammunition that was coming. They had the gun crews, of course, that did all of this. But all of those of us who didn't have a demanding job . . . we wanted to do something, and just helping to pass up ammunition is better than standing and wringing your hands.

Marcello: It released some of those frustrations.

White: Right. It certainly did. Actually, this is all that I did to participate in that--pass a few pieces of five-inch ammunition.

Marcello: Now by this time were you still being able to observe what was happening to the rest of the ships?

White: Yes. But I don't know . . . I had a . . . something peculiar came over me. I didn't want to watch the ships, the smoke and everything. I don't know. I felt kind of ashamed to see all of the destruction that was going on and had happened in just a relatively short time, and not being able to do anything about it after working and training for two years. Here I felt my entire military life had been pointing up to this one moment. And when the moment came, what did I contribute? Not a damn thing except for passing a

few pieces of five-inch ammunition. I wanted to do more. I felt that I had been deprived of my opportunity to do more. I'm sure that this wasn't an isolated feeling on my part. There were others.

Oh, we had an old master-at-arms, Jacobs. Everyone called him "Jake"--Mike Jacobs. He was one of the ones firing a .45. But I saw him with . . . he was in a crying rage shooting. "They can't do this," or whatever. And this is the thing. Of course, it affects different people different ways. You never know how you're going to react to something until it actually happens.

But oh, goodness, I guess the whole thing didn't last forty-five minutes or an hour, as far as I can remember. But I think that night was probably one of the trying times for me probably because we stayed, of course, at battle stations all day. And then some planes . . . I don't understand . . . I can't understand why this happened. We had two aircraft carriers out, fortunately, at the time. But some of the planes off of one of the carriers were coming in to land at Ford Island. Surely, they had been in communication and had known what happened and known the destruction on Ford Island. But to send those planes in, and to send them in at night, I think, was certainly something . . .

whoever issued the order for that probably wished that he could take it back.

Marcello: You might describe this incident because I think it is important to the story of Pearl Harbor. Certainly it's one of the important stories in the aftermath of the attack.

White: Well, to me that was the wildest incident in the whole attack on Pearl Harbor, when those planes started coming in. It looked like every gun, even those that couldn't get ready to fire at eight o'clock at the Japanese, finally got ammunition and were ready to fire that night at anything. And fire they did! When those poor planes came in, it looked like the whole of Pearl Harbor were firing at them. I don't know whether any were hit or if any of the pilots were killed or not. I don't know what happened.

But at night . . . again, it's a little different being in a barrage at night than at day . . . even later on during the war, this still affected me. Something is always different about the daytime from the night. But at night to see and hear all of that firing and all the tracers going up and the explosions, you think that hell has opened. It was really something. Finally, the word was passed that those were not Japanese and to cease firing. Most of the people still in Pearl

Harbor stopped firing, but there was sporadic firing from then on, I guess, for the rest of the night.

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

White: Yes, there certainly were. And I'm sure that if I had been on a gun mount or something that it would have been all that I could have done to have kept from firing.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about some of the emotions you experienced during and after the attack. What sort of an appetite did you have by the time it was over or that evening? Or maybe I should ask if you had an appetite?

White: I don't even remember eating anything. I'm sure I did. Normally, when you're at battle stations or something like that, the cooks will make up sandwiches or something. This happened later on. Now whether there were sandwiches and coffee made up and passed around to the men at the battle stations and coffee . . . there's always something that is done. I'm sure that it was done then. I don't remember it, and I don't remember drinking any coffee or eating anything. Whether I did or didn't (chuckle), frankly, I don't know. But I was still so nervous and excited, I would probably say that, no, I didn't, rather than, yes, I did, if I had to make some type of positive response to that question.

Marcello: You know you were talking about being nervous and excited, and I'm sure that this was something that was experienced by everybody else aboard that ship. But at the same time, would it be your observation that most everybody on the ship was still acting in a professional manner after that initial perplexity when general quarters sounded?

White: Oh, yes, goodness! The people who had battle stations, particularly the Marines and the sailors whose battle stations were the secondary batteries, the five-inch guns, they were manned, oh, certainly in time to have been effective had we had ammunition in the ready lockers. There was no . . . well, goodness, I can recall . . . I think there were only four or five men whose battle stations . . . plus the ammunition handlers, to each five-inch battery. Well, this is only a small percentage to the total complement of the crew, and most of the rest of the crew had no effective battle stations to go to. So even if there had been a man short on one or two of the batteries, there were plenty of volunteers that were right there ready to step in and fulfill any shortage of men that they had. No, it wasn't the effectiveness of the crew or of the men as it was not having anything to do with. So in that respect I think that

the crew as a whole certainly demonstrated their capability and their willingness to make a fight, if they had something to fight with.

Marcello: In the aftermath of the attack, I'm sure the ship was one big rumor mill.

White: We left the next morning. We and . . . I think it was a light cruiser--maybe the Phoenix or the Honolulu--I'm not sure--with two or three destroyers. We pulled out of the harbor. We were supposed to scout a sector south of Oahu down towards Christmas Island and Palmyra Island. As I remember it, pulling out that was . . . of course, we didn't know when we left where we were going or what we were going to do. And here we were, just two ships, cruisers, with eight-inch guns and this light cruiser . . . I think it had just five-inch guns or maybe six-inch guns, and then there were the two or three destroyers. "My gosh, what if we do run into the fleet?" (chuckle) This was the thought, you know. "What will we do?" But fortunately, or unfortunately as the case may be, we didn't see anything. I guess we stayed out for a week or ten days, or maybe two weeks, in that sector. The only thing we ever found was a piece of . . . one of the destroyers stopped and picked up a piece of floating debris or garbage or something.

We heard later that there had been a destroyer that had sunk a Japanese sub. I think that they were

taking some supplies or something to Christmas Island, and they had run into . . . not one of the midget subs that was sunk at first, but apparently this was a large Japanese submarine. The destroyer, we heard, sunk it, which I think raised everyone's spirits a little bit. "Well, at least someone found something and got to fire a shot!" (chuckle)

Marcello: Did your particular group of ships experience any submarine scares or anything of this nature when you were out during that two-week period or however long it was? When I say submarine scare, I mean real or imaginary.

White: It had always been operating procedure months before Pearl Harbor at sundown and sunrise that you had general quarters. It was the Navy's belief that this was the prime time for a submarine to make an attack--right at sunrise or right at sundown. Of course, we always had had general quarters for a year prior to that when we were at sea, so it was nothing new.

I don't remember any . . . I'm sure that we probably did have not only submarine scares but probably several other type of scares, even a lonely sea gull or something out flying. We had just experienced the worst devastation that any major fleet had. We didn't know what we were looking for; we didn't know what to expect. So I'm sure that we did have scares. Whether

they were false alarms or actual alarms, I don't know. It didn't stick in my memory that much or just how many times we were called to general quarters for supposedly submarines being located with our sound gear or from an airplane or something that someone might have seen.

Marcello: On that morning of December 8, when you left Pearl Harbor, what sort of a scene did you see before you? In other words, describe what the destruction looked like as best you can remember it.

White: Well, I didn't see it. Now your regular battle station is one thing, but your regular operating station, your watch station, is another in the Navy. So actually, I was down below deck when we went out. Now, of course, when we came back in, I made a point. I was off watch, and I did go topside when we came back in. This was about two weeks later. I think then the full impact of what had happened finally struck me when we came in and saw all of those . . . of course, the Oklahoma had capsized and was bottoms up . . . and all those ships . . . oil and debris was still all over the harbor. This, to me, brought home the destruction because the whole harbor, the water, had a thick scum of oil all over it. It just looked like a desolate graveyard, is what it looked. Oh, it was disheartening! It certainly was.

I think at that time I started maybe having a doubt or so, "Well, what are we in for? What is in

store for the country and the Navy? Does anyone or do even the Japanese know what they have actually done?" Oh, I think even at that late date, a week or two later, I just remember the time now from that.

But I think there was still some talk there that the Japanese would try to invade the island, and certainly they would have had a golden opportunity to have done so at that time.

But we didn't stay long. We were ordered back to San Francisco. What we were in Pearl Harbor to have repaired, we had to go back to Mare Island Navy Yard in San Francisco then and get it repaired.

Marcello: In the meantime, did your attitude toward the Japanese change any? Now you mentioned that prior to the attack you really didn't think about the individual Japanese to any great extent. Did your attitude change any?

White: No, frankly, it didn't. I guess it was too impersonal. I still didn't look at the population at Honolulu, even the people of Japanese descent, as being anything other than they were--a part of Pearl Harbor and Honolulu. And I had no . . . well, I had felt, of course, that we were going to fight the Japanese, and now that we were actually in it to the fullest extent, I don't think my feelings had changed any on a personal note.

Marcello: I have one last question. Did you know, or were you acquainted with, Chaplain Howell Forgy of "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" fame?

White: No, I wasn't personally acquainted with him. Of course, he was the chaplain on the ship. How good a chaplain he was, I don't know. Or how good a Navy man he was, I don't know. There were certainly other officers on the ship that I had a closer relationship to and admired more, and I feel they probably contributed more than Chaplain Forgy did. Yes, I remember reading an article or something about this. Whether he just happened to be there for someone to interview and told what had happened, I don't know. No disrespect, but I think it probably was overplayed more than actually had happened. I don't know what his actual . . . all I remember is that he was the object or the one that the song was actually written about or something--his experience during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: I suppose it made pretty good wartime propaganda in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

White: Probably it did, yes. I'm sure that it did. But an incident, whether it is heroic in the truest sense of the word or whether it is propaganda, the people who are actually there seem more to play it down than someone who wasn't there and reads about it or hears about it. I remember after Pearl Harbor and after we were ordered back to San Francisco to have the ship worked

on that several times on the ship's loud-speaker the captain and the executive officer came on and told everyone, "Don't talk about what has happened. The people don't know, and the enemy, we don't feel, knows what has been done--the damage to Pearl Harbor." And since we were one of the first ships, probably, that came back from there, they certainly didn't want any rumors to be spreading or anyone to talk about it.

Marcello: And at that particular time, I don't think anybody did know the extent of the damage that had been done there, that is, the American people.

White: Well, true. But I can imagine . . . when we got back to Mare Island, and one of the first days that I went ashore, there was a Life magazine that had a picture of . . . of course, it didn't give the extent of the damage, but if I remember correctly, it showed the Oklahoma capsized and another battleship, possibly. So at least they knew that there had been some destruction. But I don't believe that anyone knew the total amount of destruction that happened.

Marcello: Well, Jack, I can't think of any more questions. Do you have anything else that you would like to add as a part of the record?

White: No. So far as I can remember . . . I remember Pearl Harbor as it used to be. I didn't get back there to

go ashore, oh, maybe one or two or three times during the rest of the war. So I haven't even seen the shrine of the Arizona or whatever that they made. So what little that I observed and the things that happened there probably don't mean a great deal to anyone but me.

Marcello: Well, I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk with me. You have said some very interesting and, I think, some very important things. I think it certainly is a contribution to the total picture.

White: Well, you're quite welcome.