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Interview with  
Leslie Le Fan  
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Place of Interview: Austin, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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(Signature)  
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Oral History Collection

Leslie Le Fan

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Leslie Le Fan for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 16, 1976, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Le Fan in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at the Marine Corps Barracks at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack there on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Le Fan, 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. Le Fan: I was born in Temple, Texas, on September 7, 1921. I attended public school in Temple, Texas, graduating from Temple High School in June, 1941. I joined the United States Marine Corps on July 23, 1941, finished eight weeks of boot camp, and went to sea school. I attended sea school and was assigned to the aircraft carrier, USS Saratoga.

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

LeFan: All my life, while I was in high school prior to going into the Corps, I had a great admiration for the Marine Corps. It was something that I admired and respected. It wasn't the glorious uniform. It was the Marines as a body. They had always fascinated me. And at that particular time, my father couldn't afford to send me to college anyway, so with his permission, and being only eighteen years old, he did give his permission, along with my mother's, for me to join the Corps because it was such an obsession with me that I would have been very upset if I had not gone. I think I would have waited until I was of age and have gone anyway because it was something that I wanted to do, an ambition of mine that I insisted upon fulfilling as soon as possible.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the Marine Corps, did you give very much thought to the possibility that the country would very shortly be getting into war? After all, by mid-1941, things were getting a little tense in several areas of the world.

Le Fan: Well, war talk in Texas and in Temple was just like war talk everywhere. Adolph Hitler had started his big move in Europe, and Mussolini and . . . at this

time the conquering of Europe had been taking place. The draft had started, and as I explained to my parents when I wanted to go in, "Look, my time is coming up sooner or later anyway. Why not give me a choice of what I want to do? If I want to go, I want to be first class." And I thought the Marine Corps was first class, and today it still is. There is no such thing as an ex-Marine. We're former Marines. Once a Marine, always a Marine.

When I joined the Corps, in boot camp, I told myself many times that I had made a drastic mistake because boot camp in those days was serious business and was really a boot camp--tough. And I made up my mind that if the D. I. could do it . . . Sergeant John Giles, I'll never forget him. And the old saying is, "You may forget your mother, your father, your wife, your children, but you never forget your D.I." And as long as I live, I'll remember Sergeant Giles. That's where the slogan first came to me, "The more you sweat here, the least you will bleed out there!" Yes, we anticipated getting into this conflict, and we were trained in boot camp in a minor way that . . . we knew that sooner or later we were bound to get into this mess.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if there was a certain sense of urgency during that boot camp period when you went through San Diego?

Le Fan: Yes, there was. As a matter of fact, we often talked about the case . . . of course, we didn't realize --I didn't personally realize--at the time that it would necessarily be with Japan, although, I recall back in the 30's when my father would tell me . . . we would see a freight train loaded with scrap iron going to Japan, and he said, "Les, one of these days we may get that all back in little pieces." I laughed it off. And I recall the famous China Marines aboard the aircraft carriers and battlewagons going into the Yangtze Patrol when they had the Jap fleet bottled up, and the admiral wanted to sink them all, which we couldn't do. It would make us the aggressor. But this was all in the back of my mind, and I did realize that sooner or later we would be into this conflict, and if I had to go, I wanted to go first class with the best.

Marcello: Now had the Marine Corps boot camp been reduced in terms of time? I knew that by 1940, the Navy had cut down their boot camp considerably from three months to, I believe, six weeks.

Le Fan: In 1940, we were told boot camp in San Diego for the

Marine Corps was twelve weeks. When I got in, it was a little over nine weeks. They had cut it down. The recruiting had picked up its tempo until there were more platoons coming in every day. Along with other people, I was in Platoon 101. The oldest man in our platoon at that time was nineteen years old. We had young people in our platoon, and we gave as much as we got, believe me.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you volunteered for sea school. Why did you volunteer for sea school?

Le Fan: Well, I had always wanted to go aboard one of three ships: an aircraft carrier, a battlewagon, or a cruiser. And when I entered sea school, I was given not exactly a choice, but my preference--if you wanted embassy duty, or would you rather go sea duty--and I selected sea duty, preferably an aircraft carrier. I'd always admired them, and so I was asked, "Well, why didn't you join the Navy then?" And I said, "Well, I wasn't interested in joining the Navy, and besides, I might be on a 'tin can' or a cargo ship or something, and I wanted to be in the Marine Corps."

And I was lucky enough to get the USS Saratoga, an aircraft carrier. Our patrol was from San Diego to Bremerton, Washington, and back, patrolling the West Coast. And the way I wound up at Pearl Harbor . . .

Marcello: That was going to be my next question, so I'm glad you're going to tell me.

Le Fan: Yes. We reported into San Diego and had orders in November to report to Pearl Harbor. Well, we went to Pearl Harbor, which was my first overseas duty per se.

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

Le Fan: I thought it was wonderful. I could see the swaying palm trees and the native girls in their grass skirts. I could see Waikiki Beach and a wonderful liberty port. I had visions of nothing but a big time, and my only concern was how I was going to do all these things on \$21 a month. That was our base pay as a private in the Marine Corps at that particular time.

We landed in Pearl Harbor on December 1. Of course, we anchored out in the harbor, and our detachment of fifteen Marines from the port watch was sent to the Naval Barracks, detached duty.

Marcello: Now why were you given detached duty?

Le Fan: We were sent there to help select and train . . . I was the junior member of the organization, you might say. We were going to find out what other Marines there at the barracks would like to have sea duty or embassy duty or something like that. I went



along more or less for the ride, being more or less a boot myself, and we were assigned to the Marine Barracks at the Navy Station, Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii at that time.

Marcello: Let me ask you a few more general questions. What was the morale like in that pre-World War II Marine Corps?

Le Fan: It was very rigid. It was very tough. It was spit-and-polish that we learned. We stood inspection before we went on liberty, and we stood inspection as we came back in. Many of them changed uniforms from time to time. We were taught in sea school that you would wear . . . at that time in the tropics, we wore what we referred to as "undressed blues," blue trousers, khaki shirt, white cap, and if you got into a cooler climate, you put on your dark blue coat.

I stood admiral's watch at his cabin, I stood gangplank watch, and I stood gun mount watch. My battle station was a quad .50 on the fantail. The only shot I had fired at that time was during the towing of a sleeve. Of course, we weren't in war at this time, but I was fortunate enough the second time to actually fire the quad .50 to knock the sleeve down by cutting the cable, which put a feather

in my cap. It was a sheer streak of luck really, but I did cut the cable.

When we did get ashore, we took our packs, our clothing, and our sea bag, our rifles for which we had no ammunition, bayonet, uniforms, and so forth. We left our dress blues aboard ship and took only khakis, which we were instructed to change twice a day to look the part and to assist our officers and senior NCO's in finding if there was anyone who wanted to go into embassy duty of something like that. I was more of a "goer-alonger," I guess, than anything else.

Marcello: Let me ask you this question. Did you detect that most of your shipmates and so on were happy in the Marine Corps prior to World War II? This is what I was getting at awhile ago when I talked about morale. Now obviously, there would be a certain amount of griping and grumbling like there is in any military organization, but generally speaking, was this a happy group?

Le Fan: Generally speaking, yes. We all griped. We all complained, and I was often told that if you find a Marine that doesn't gripe, leave him alone because there is not much to him. The Marine Corps is like a bunch of brothers in a sense of speaking, in that

a Marine can cuss the Marine Corps all he wants to and sing his little ditties and joke about it, but he doesn't want anybody else to do it. It had esprit de corps, it's gung-ho, it's hang in there, and the morale as such was very high in our particular organization because we had one thing in common--we had all volunteered.

There wasn't a draftee among us, and you're here because you asked to be here--not necessarily at Pearl--but we were all thrilled when we got aboard the Saratoga because we got the ship we wanted, and it was very good duty. I'm sorry to say I never did get back aboard her again, but when we went to Pearl, we had the opportunity to see the lovely Hawaiian Islands that we had all dreamed of, and none of us with the exception of lieutenant in charge, whom I can't remember his name now--I'm sorry--had ever been to Hawaii before. This was my first experience, and I couldn't wait to go on liberty that first night.

Marcello: Well, let's talk a little bit about your liberty routine here at Pearl. Now you obviously had not been, and were not to be, in the Hawaiian Islands too long before the Japanese actually attacked.

Le Fan: One week.

Marcello: Let me start by saying, what was the liberty routine that had been established at that time?

Le Fan: Liberty started at five o'clock in the afternoon, which would be 1700 hours. We must be back aboard on base at roll call at seven o'clock the next morning. We had liberty every night unless we had some special duty such as main gate security guard, which I only pulled one time before the war started. I went on liberty only three times--the first night I was there, one time in the middle of the week merely to go to a movie, and the night of December 6. Saturday evening I went on liberty. I was flat broke, to tell you the truth about it. Twenty-one dollars a month didn't go very far.

Marcello: We'll go back and talk about your liberty on Saturday evening, December 6. When was payday in the Marine Corps at that time?

Le Fan: Payday in the Marine Corps was on the first and fifteenth--every two weeks.

Marcello: Which would mean that by the time of December 7, as you mentioned, most of those Marines would not have had too much money left.

Le Fan: Right. We got \$10.50. Twenty-one dollars a day once a month (chuckle).

Marcello: I've heard several others use that same saying on several occasions.

Le Fan: Of course, we did realize after we had been there-- I believe it was thirty days--you automatically got an overseas pay increase of thirty dollars. Then we were getting a dollar a day, but at that time room, board, medical, clothing, and everything was free. After all, your \$21 was cigarette money, liberty money, and whatnot. And \$10.50 had just . . . I had drawn my \$10.50 aboard ship before we left on December 1, and I went ashore that day.

Marcello: When you got to Pearl Harbor, which, as we've mentioned several times, was just a week before the actual Japanese attack, did you detect any tenseness and so on among the military personnel with whom you came in contact? In other words, relations were obviously continuing to get worse and worse between the United States and Japan, and it looked as though war might be imminent, but what was the general attitude or sense or feeling of the personnel there that you could detect?

Le Fan: Well, the only thing that I could really detect myself . . . and the scuttlebutt was going around in the Corps as in the Navy. You can hear anything you want to hear. At the barracks, upon our barracks

window, we could see Battleship Row, and the remark was made, "Well, those boys are ready to go get them any time they want to jump on us." After all, we were taking a very optimistic viewpoint. "Why should a little country like Japan, as small as it is, start a fracas with a country as mighty as the United States? They would be a fool to start it, and it would only last a week if they did start it. There would be nothing to it. With those battleships and a handful of good Marines, we'll wipe them out in a week." We were very optimistic, much to our amazement what did happen later on.

The attitude as far as the troops were concerned that I came in contact with was an attitude of optimism. They were afraid of absolutely nothing. They were young people with an eye for the future and spending their time in the Corps and the Navy, whom I was with at this particular time.

Morale was very high. You had your normal griping and fussing about the food, the chow, reveille, getting up, rehearsal, troop inspection or what we used to refer to as "troop-and-stomp." We had our normal routine at the barracks of raising colors every morning and a very formal guard mount. Taking

the colors down was our chore at the Navy station, and we did our little drills and manual of arms. We were scheduled to go to a rifle range that we never did make the week after the attack started, and it was what we referred to as barracks duty, more or less. I was in a barracks. It was kept immaculately clean, and as I mentioned before, we were instructed to change our khakis at least twice a day. We stayed in full uniform all the time, and it was spit-and-polish, which we were quite used to, being on the "Sara" and in boot camp.

We were supposed to be at this time setting an example. And our senior officers were selecting some people to possibly go to embassy duty, but the morale at the base at that time to my recollection was very high. Nobody was afraid of anything, and Japan certainly wouldn't be an upstart little country to start anything with us.

Marcello: When you saw those typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of an individual did you usually conjure up in your mind?

Le Fan: In our own mind we would conjure a little short fellow with a rifle and a long bayonet, buckteeth,

slanted eyes, that would run at the thought of facing one of us. I later learned never to underestimate your enemy because he has ideas, too. The conception of a Japanese soldier at that time was a little, short, brown, slant-eyed, buck-toothed soldier that didn't know which end of a rifle to use, which we found out we were sadly mistaken.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us up to the days immediately prior to the actual Japanese attack itself, so what I would like you to do at this point is to describe for me in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941, from the time you got up in the morning until you went to bed at night. Now you mentioned while ago that you had liberty sometime in that period, but let's from the time you got up in the morning until you went to bed that night.

Le Fan: Well, to the best of my recollection, reveille went about 5:30. We got up, fell out for roll call, went back, made up our bunks, straightened up the barracks, went to chow immediately. After breakfast, we returned to the barracks and prepared for colors at eight o'clock, which was our detachment's job. We fell out with khakis, barracks hats, rifles, cartridge belt, bayonets. We were wearing white gloves. We



still had our chrome bayonets and white slings because of our sea duty. We had the band, a Marine band, play the march as we went over to raise colors. We raised colors to the tune of "The National Anthem" at exactly 0800, at the end of which time the colors were up. We then had a small short drill, manual of arms, and drilling for approximately twenty or thirty minutes, returning to our barracks and preparing for inspection at 8:30.

Inspection came. We were given the job then of maintaining the barracks and going over to the quartermaster and drawing clean linens for the next day and so forth.

Liberty went at 1200. Not waiting to eat chow on the base, my friend and I by the name of Jack Thorpe, Elwood Jack Thorpe from Kansas City, Missouri . . . we called him Jack, and his name was Elwood Jack Thorpe. He and I went on liberty together. We took a bus to downtown Honolulu, which we had been to on two previous occasions, and we decided that we wanted to go swimming. We had our bathing suits with us. We went to Waikiki Beach directly between . . . I believe it would be east of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. We went swimming, and we swam in the surf of which I was very disappointed because I found out

later on they haul the sand in there at night because it all washes away. Beautiful Waikiki Beach wouldn't exist if it weren't for the trucks bringing in the sand, and ten feet out into the water the coral would cut your feet up. I tried surfboarding for my first time, only to find out I was riding it backwards. I abandoned that idea as a total failure, and we swam around for, oh, approximately an hour, laid around the beach, talked to various and sundry people, got dressed, and went back to Honolulu.

When at Honolulu at about--I'm going to guess --five o'clock in the afternoon, we met some friends who asked us if we were interested in going to a luau. They were two sailors who we were in the barracks with. We told them fine. We'd like to go to the luau. "Where is it?" They said, "Well, we've got a cab," and the four of us together paid the cab fifteen cents each. That's the way . . . of course, fifteen cents out of \$10.50 is pretty good money. We paid a total of sixty cents to be driven toward Diamond Head to a little village--here again, I can't remember the name of it--and it cost a dollar to go to the luau.

It was the only luau I ever attended in my life. But we had a ball that night. There was plenty to drink.

They were celebrating some Hawaiian festival occasion that I also don't recall either. I ate my first poi that night, trying to use two fingers, and I think I had more on my uniform than I had in my stomach. We had a few drinks.

At approximately eleven o'clock, we left the luau, went back to Honolulu in a car. We didn't have to pay any cab fare, thank goodness, because we were just about broke anyway. From there we took a bus to the main gate. I checked in with the sentry on the post along with Jack Thorpe and the two sailors. We were still together. One was a pharmacist's mate, and the other was a yeoman. I don't recall their names. I'm sorry. We were both in the same barracks.

Marcello: Were the four of you in pretty good shape when you got back to the barracks that night?

Le Fan: Oh, yes, we were in pretty good shape. Everybody had had a few drinks. There wasn't anyone that was drunk as such. Number one, we couldn't afford it, really, but we did have a few drinks, yes. When we got in, we sat around and chatted for a few minutes, and the foyer down on the lower deck . . . we were topside in a two-story barracks. And because the other people in the barracks were in and were asleep in their sacks, we didn't want to interrupt them too much, and we went topside, and all of us hit the sack.

Marcello: Let me ask you this, and this is a question you may not be able to answer because you weren't there that long. Many people have the opinion that a Sunday morning would have been the best possible time for the Japanese attack because everybody would be hung-over from a wild night in Honolulu the night before. How would you answer that particular observation?

Le Fan: Well, my personal observation is, I don't think the Japs could have pulled a better time to do it except on a Sunday morning because normally, as you said, a lot of the troops--Army, Navy, Marine, Coast Guard, and what have you--were going to be a little bit tipsy from the night before. Some of them had overnight liberty, of which we had overnight liberty, also. We didn't necessarily have to come in, but we did, although I wasn't even on the flag raising detail the next morning. The flag went up as usual, but I wasn't on this particular detail. We didn't have to be in until Sunday evening at midnight.

Marcello: Isn't it also true that Sundays were more or less times when there was actually light duty? In other words, even the duty section didn't "turn to" as intensively as perhaps they would have during the week?

Le Fan: Right. In our barracks, for example, we made our bunks up and swept the decks, shaved. . . our normal

routine. We were preparing to go to church. There was no duties per se. Some of the people were going to a football game that afternoon. Others were going to take it easy. Others were going on a fishing trip. Others were going to get out on the playground and throw a ball around. You were more or less on your own unless you were specified duty. I was off-duty. I had no duties for that day. I could have gotten up as late as nine o'clock a.m. because everybody had to be up by then according to regulations, and make up your bunk. An officer merely walked through the barracks to see if everything was ship-shape and somebody hadn't walked off with half of the barracks during the night. I had no particular routine. I didn't even have to be there necessarily.

Marcello: Okay, I think this takes us in, then, to the morning of December 7, 1941, and once more I'm going to ask you to give me a blow-by-blow account of your routine from the time you got up until all hell broke loose. Then we'll talk about what happened during the attack itself.

Le Fan: Reveille did not go, at least I did not hear reveille that morning. On the morning of December 7, I awoke at approximately seven a.m. I made up my bunk, put on my trousers, and went to the head along with thirty or

forty other people, both sailors and Marines. I took a shower and was chatting with my friends. Jack said, "Are we going to church this morning?" I said, "Yes, I think we'd better. I promised the chaplain we'd be there." He said, "Fine. I'll just go along, too, and then we'll go on over to the mess hall and have a bite of breakfast after while." Normal breakfast in the Marine Corps, as in the Navy, on Sunday morning is beans and cornbread and coffee, and that's about it. So we knew that this particular Sunday morning we didn't want any beans and cornbread and coffee, so we were going outside the post to get some coffee and possibly a doughnut or a roll or something that we could afford.

I was shaving at approximately five minutes until eight o'clock. We heard the planes, and we heard the explosions. The first thing that went through my mind was that the stupid Navy was holding maneuvers on Sunday morning. They couldn't do it any other time. They had to do it on Sunday morning (sarcasm).

Marcello: Were the explosions close enough that they shook the barracks or rattled the windows or anything of that nature?

Le Fan: They certainly did. We even felt the concussion. We were that close. I thought, "Well, they're sure

playing rough." Well, the sailor down from me says, "No, that can't be the Navy. That's got to be those stupid jar heads. They're holding maneuvers." He said, "They don't have any better sense anyway."

We were all friends, and it was pretty much of a joke.

I finished shaving. In fact, I was almost through when it started, and I had on khaki trousers and a T-shirt, my shoes. All I had to do was put on my shirt and field scarf, or tie, and go to church. General quarters sounded. We ran outside. We started running down this corridor in the barracks.

Marcello: When general quarters would sound here, what were you as a Marine to do? Obviously, you know, you weren't on the Saratoga, so you didn't have a battle station to go to.

Le Fan: Fall out and find out what's going on. You're supposed to fall out with a rifle, and as I passed, I grabbed my rifle. Jack Thorpe was with me. He grabbed his rifle. The sailors didn't have rifles. And we were running down this corridor as a Zero strafed this particular barracks. The sailor approximately six feet in front of me fell. He was hit in the back of the head with what I think was a .50-caliber because his face completely exploded, and he fell. I thought, "Well, if they're playing war games, they're sure

playing rough." I stepped over him, and I remember thinking to myself, "That's the first dead man I have ever seen," and I was scared. I didn't know what to think. We saw the holes in the overhead or the ceiling, and we heard the planes. We ran outside, and the first thing I saw was a low-flying torpedo plane.

Marcello: How low was the plane?

Le Fan: The plane was low enough that I . . . I would say it was less than 100 feet off the ground because they were making the run at Battleship Row.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. What sort of a view did you have of Battleship Row from where you were standing or . . .

Le Fan: From where I was standing outside the barracks, I could see the superstructure of all battleships. They were lined up, and I could very easily see all the superstructures. From our barracks window, I could actually see the battleships themselves, being another twelve or fifteen feet off the ground.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from this point. You do observe this torpedo bomber that's obviously very low.

Le Fan: Very low. I could see the red circles under the wings. We called them "meatballs." "There's the 'meatball!'" And the lieutenant was standing outside



and dressed the same way I was, except he did have on a khaki shirt. He said, "We're under attack by the Japanese Imperial Air Force! Get your rifles!" Well, I already had my rifle.

Marcello: Did you have your ammunition?

LeFan: I had no ammunition at all. So the sergeant in charge --and whom also, I'm sorry to say, I cannot remember his name--told us to fall in. Then he said, "Disregard that order! Don't fall in! You'll make too big of targets! Scatter!" So we began to scatter.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, I gather that you have not come under any more attacks since that initial plane strafed.

Le Fan: There were some planes coming over us, but at this time they were either the torpedo bombers, or they weren't firing at us. They were firing over our heads. This sergeant put us behind a retaining wall approximately four feet high facing the harbor. He somehow got hold of about six bandoleers of '03 ammunition that was in '03 clips. We were all armed, and there was ten of us with M-1 rifles. That's the M-1 Garand, semi-automatic, .30-caliber. It would fire the same ammo, but we had to have a special eight-round clip to go into it, and we were given bandoleers of '03 ammunition for the Springfield that held five rounds.

I opened it up, and I put one round in the chamber and closed the rifle. The number of that rifle is 351735. I've wondered many times where it is today. I carried it until 1944. It made some good Japs out of some bad ones.

We were given orders at that time that when the planes would come over us from the back, that following the sergeant's instructions, "Ready, aim, fire," that we would get off some shots, which we did. I recall one Jap pilot coming over, and he waved at us as he did. He was very low--I think less than 100 feet high--because he was going into Battleship Row to drop their torpedoes and then go over the battleships and make another run. And they would wave at us, and we were throwing .30-caliber rounds at them as fast as we could, firing single shot because we could not fire semi-automatic.

On one occasion, there was a Marine officer and a Naval officer that walked out of the barracks. They were undoubtedly going skeet shooting that morning. They both had Browning automatic twelve-gauge shotguns, and were carrying satchels of, I'm going to say, four boxes of ammo each. They stopped right in the middle of the parade grounds or in front of the barracks, loaded their shotguns, and began to fire. The

thought went through my mind, "What do they expect to do to a Zero or any of these planes with a shotgun?"

But a man had to do something. There were other people shooting .45 pistols. One man got hold of a BAR and began to fire it. We were firing our M-1's.

Marcello: How many rounds would you estimate that you fired?

Le Fan: I fired sixty rounds because I recall in this particular . . . I got a bandoleer that had sixty rounds in it. Today I still have three of the hulls. As I left this particular spot, I grabbed three of my hulls . . . five of my hulls . . . empty hulls, and put them in my pocket.

Marcello: Why did you do that?

Le Fan: I don't know. I'm glad I did now. At the time, I don't know except it was my military training that when we were on the rifle range, you'd get off the line and pick up your brass. That isn't exactly the terminology that they used, but that's the way we'll leave it right now. And we were taught, so I think it was just more or less automatic to pick up the brass. Well, I grabbed a handful, put them in my pocket, and after I got back, I thought, "What'd I get those things for?" Just hunks of brass. Didn't mean nothing.

Anyway, everybody was shooting, and I've often wondered what the Japs thought when they got back aboard the aircraft carrier, looked at their plane, and saw all of those number nine shots that probably didn't even penetrate. They may have in the thin skin of a fighter plane.

Marcello: You're referring to the buckshot that they were putting up.

Le Fan: The bird shot . . . number nine shot . . . I wonder what they thought when they saw all of those dimples in it. "Well, what are they doing to us? Are they sending bees or kids or throwing rocks?"

On one occasion when we were back of the wall, a machine gun had gotten in operation to our left. A BAR was in operation, a Browning Automatic Rifle, to our right, and this one plane came over real low. We were given the order, "Ready, aim, fire," and we all fired at the same time. The machine gun opened up, and the BAR opened up. The plane exploded. Of course, we all hollered, "We got him! We got him!" Until this day, God only knows who hit the plane. I don't know. We may have, and . . . somebody set off a bomb. It burst into flames and fell right into the harbor.

That was one of the . . . I saw several planes go down. That day I saw a Zero crash into the ground.

I saw a torpedo bomber go over the ship and burst into flames, and a couple or three dive bombers. I believe they were Mitsubishis--Mitsubishi dive bombers with the fixed landing gear, the way they were so prominent.

During the attack there was a lot of confusion, very muchly so, and I had fired all of my ammo and was watching everybody else fire. We could see smoke and flames coming from Battleship Row.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if you had a chance to observe what was taking place over at Battleship Row, or if you were able to feel the after-effects of any of the explosions and so on taking place over there?

Le Fan: We could see the smoke and the flames. There was sirens going off, and everybody was hollering. There was an awful lot of confusion--a terribly lot of confusion. Our sergeant was trying to maintain as much order as he could. The lieutenant came over and fell behind the wall. He was the one with the pistol. He was firing, also. But you had to do something. The two shotguns that were firing . . . the BAR . . . more guns were getting into operation as the attack went on. "What's going on?" "What's happening?" Scared? Yes. Excited? Yes. But we were trying to stay as organized as possible. There was a terribly lot of

confusion.

I went back into the barracks and grabbed a shirt and put it on. I went outside and was given a steel helmet. It was the first time I had ever had a steel helmet on in my life--what we called the "Steel Kelly." It was the old British helmet, the flat ones, before we had the new-type helmet now. I was given a gas mask that I slung over my shoulder, and having a little bit of gas training, I knew at least how to put it on in the event we had to have it. I filled up my cartridge belt with a hundred rounds. But here again, I only had the '03 clips.

We were waiting outside when the attack ended abruptly. Our lieutenant came up and said, "Let's get to the water's edge and see if we can help those people in the water." We ran as fast as we could--I'm going to guess and say 200 yards--to the water's edge, to the dock area. The oil on the water, much of it was burning. Some of the sailors and Marines in the water were trying to get out. They were covered with oil. Some of them were obviously dead . . . that had been blown off the ships or had jumped off. Some of them were badly burned. Some of them had limbs missing. For the first time in my life, I thought I was going to get sick.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what sort of feelings or emotions you experienced when you were able to see this death and destruction in front of you.

Le Fan: I was more scared than ever; I was more mad than ever. I was mad at the Japanese; I was mad at the situation; I was mad at the world in general. But we were told that we had been attacked by the Japanese and that they'd quit now. They were going to come back any moment. Scuttlebutt was flying high and heavy. You could hear anything you wanted to hear.

But we proceeded then to try and pull as many men out of the water as we could. Some of our men got into some boats that were tied up alongside and rowed or paddled out to pick up people out of the water. They were covered in oil. Many of them were burned beyond recognition, it looked like. Some of them were wounded. Some of them had limbs missing. It was an awe-inspiring sight in a sense, but it was devastation. We're beat, you know. But nobody wanted to give up.

Then, as we took these people out, we were laying them on the dock and making them as comfortable as possible. Now some few that we pulled out were in shipshape condition. They were swimming like mad, and they began to wipe the oil off of them. I remember one

sailor that I pulled out of the water, and I took my own handkerchief and wiped the oil from his face. I couldn't tell if he was a black man or a white man or a Chinese or what. But I did wipe it off, and he said, "Thanks," and then he jumped up. I always wondered what happened to him. I've never seen him since. Then there was another one that we pulled out that had a leg missing. Obviously, the man was dead. I think the man had bled to death. I'm going to guess and say we had twenty-five or thirty laid out on the dock, and ambulances were coming up, and corpsmen were trying to get these people to aid as soon as possible. Now how many of them were alive and healthy and just scared and full of oil, I don't know.

Marcello: Now by the time these rescue operations are taking place, is everybody more or less acting in a professional manner?

Le Fan: We are trying our very best to. Now the ten of us were under this lieutenant's charge, and he said, "Get those people out of the water! Get them out of the water! Lay them up here!" And I said something about, "What's going to happen to them then?" He said, "That's up to the corpsmen and the doctors!" He said,



"Let's get them out of the water before they drown!"

We knew that they were badly burned, mutilated, and hurt, and some of them were even dead. We knew that.

There was this one medical corpsman that was in our detachment that was living in the same barracks with us. He was down there. He was giving first aid to the best of his ability. He had his first aid bag with him, and he was wrapping wounds and putting on tourniquets and this, that, and the other thing. I never did see these people again.

In the confusion, time passed very fast, and the second attack started. This time the high-level bombers came in--what we referred to as the "Betty Bombers." And they were at high level, dropping bombs, and they dropped them in our area. We were ordered back to the retaining wall. We hesitated leaving the wounded on the beach, but we had no alternative. We were ordered back. This time we fired some more. We were even firing at the high-level bombers.

Marcello: Obviously, you're firing with guns that would be even more ineffective in firing at the high-level bombers.

Le Fan: Very muchly so, but there is also some torpedo bombers coming in at that time. Whether it is a first or

not--other people saw it--I did see the Oklahoma when she turned turtle. When it flopped over, I saw it roll.

Marcello: What sort of a feeling did you have when you saw that?

Le Fan: A horrible feeling! I thought to myself, "If she's going to roll over, that's the end! There's people in there! What are we going to do?" I could feature all of these sailors and Marines in that hull when she rolled over, and I thought, "Well, I've seen the top of a lot of battlewagons. This is the first time I've ever seen the bottom of one." And the Utah . . . and Nevada went aground. I saw the last torpedo that slammed into the side of the Arizona, and she just buckled right in the middle.

And the dive bombers were coming down pretty thick and heavy in the second attack as much as in the first attack. The high-level bombers were laying their "eggs" right down Battleship Row, hitting the sub base, which is out of our sight. I didn't know what was going on at Hickam Field or Schofield Barracks. At that time I was trying to keep my composure of what was going on where we were. I heard of the devastation there later on, but not that day.

Marcello: You mentioned that you did observe some of the events that were happening over where the Arizona was anchored. Describe what you saw there with regard to the Arizona.

Le Fan: The Arizona . . . there was people on deck of the Arizona running around and trying to get some guns into operation. Now whether they got any into operation, I don't know, because they took the brunt of the attack. The other battleships, such as the California, New Mexico, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania were all tied up there, and they were hit, also. But you could see the sailors running around. Many of them were in their whites, some of them were in their skivvy drawers and T-shirts, and some of them were stark naked.

They were given the order to abandon ship. Some of them dived off the side; some of them tried to go down Jacob's ladders. But the flames were getting to most of them. I could tell that very vividly. The flames were leaping up out of the forward compartments and the after compartments, and the superstructure was completely aflame. I personally believe there was many people killed on the ships by flames as much as there was by shrapnel or bullets or anything else.

Marcello: You mentioned that you did actually see the Arizona buckle when it was hit.

Le Fan: When she took the last torpedo, we saw it. It was so vivid in my mind. It just quivered, buckled, and then settled. It looked like . . . well, that killed it. You know, it was the final shot--the coup de grace, so to speak. It was so devastating, but that was one of the ships that was very obvious to me.

They were trying to get other ships underway-- fire them up and move them as quickly as possible. It also went through my mind, "Our Navy is sitting on the bottom; we've got a double handful of people. What are we going to do?" And that was one of the first questions I asked one of my officers, and he said, "I don't know. We'll wait and see." After the last attack, we were ordered back to the harbor to help get out as many as possible.

Marcello: In other words, you were back to the rescue operations.

Le Fan: We went back to the rescue operations where we were told we weren't needed there. What we needed was ammo. We needed ammo, and we needed ammo quick.

Marcello: Incidentally, while the "Betty Bombers" were coming over, how close were the bombs falling to where you were located?

Le Fan: Approximately 150 to 200 yards. We could feel the concussion from them and could actually hear the shrapnel

hitting our barracks, either burying itself into it or bouncing off. There were bullets flying everywhere--some ours and some theirs--because in the second attack we were also being dive-bombed and strafed. We lost only one man out of our ten. He was hit in the leg by strafing. That's the only man we lost. He survived but he was wounded at that particular time.

So when we got down to water's edge, we laid our rifles down, and we were told that this operation was being taken care of, and we were ordered to an ammo dump. So we went aboard a truck, a Marine Corps truck, and went to this ammo dump. We loaded up .50-caliber, .30-caliber, .45-caliber, hand grenades --small arms ammo--and went back to the harbor and started distributing it as fast as we could. Not only our truck, but also other trucks were involved because ammo was very scarce and locked up, and . . . it was the idea of security and . . . no ammo was leaking out or anything. On one occasion, a friend of mine said they had to shoot the lock off of a door in order to get into the magazine. I wasn't with this particular party, but where we were, we were picking up small arms ammo and grenades and getting back.

Marcello: About how long were you on this particular detail?

Le Fan: It took about an hour and a half to go to the dump, the magazine, get the ammo, and get back to the harbor, of which time our men had already set up three machine guns. The Navy was getting their guns into operation. There was no attack going on at this time, but they were loading up, and they were ready in case they came back because we were definitely expecting another attack. By this time they did get some M-1 clips. We formed our ammo so that we could fire semi-automatic and were sticking around the wall.

Marcello: About what time of the day is this?

Le Fan: This was transpiring approximately at ten o'clock a.m. Now this is a guess. At that time a watch was the last thing on my mind. The attack started at five minutes till eight, and it finished a little after ten o'clock--the final attack. But time is irrelevant at this particular point.

We were sent . . . our detachment then was sent to the main gate to keep out everyone, and no one was to enter. Some of them went to the ammo dump; some of them went to a fuel depot. We were trying to protect the ammo dumps, the fuel depot, and the main gate to keep anyone out. Civilians were trying to get in; civilians were trying to get out.

There was an awful lot of confusion. There was still some spasmodic shooting. Now where it was coming from, I don't know. I didn't fire a shot after the attacks.

We were reformed that afternoon at approximately ten o'clock and were sent to Oahu Cemetery. Oahu Cemetery is located near the town of Honolulu. At this time we were fully armed. Each of us were given plenty of ammo. We were given a pistol. We were given four hand grenades.

We could hear anything that we wanted to hear. We heard, for example, that the Japs had landed paratroopers in the cane fields. We had heard that they had made a landing at Waikiki Beach. We heard that they had already taken Diamond Head. We heard that they were at Aiea. You could hear anything that you wanted to hear.

Being a Marine and being a rifleman, there were a lot of the sailors there that didn't know anything about rifles because it wasn't necessarily their job. Each Marine was given three sailors to go with him if we had to evacuate to the hills.

Marcello: Why were you sent to Oahu Cemetery?

Le Fan: Well, I got a little ahead of my story there, if I may back up for just a moment. I was given these

three sailors--one boot, one sailor that had been in approximately five years, and one sailor that had been in twenty years. He came over to me, and he said, "Will you show me how to load one of these things?" He had a Springfield rifle. I looked at him, and he said, "I fired one of these twenty years ago in boot camp. I haven't fired one since. I'm a cook. Now what do I do?" So I showed him how to load it. He said, "Well, I've got orders to stick with you. If anything happens, we're supposed to fall off to the hills where there's ammo, clothing, medical supplies, and we're going to fight guerrilla warfare. Is this right?" And I said, "Chief, that's my orders. Now if you want to stick with me, fine." I said, "This is the blind leading the blind, but we're going to head out."

The Navy sailors that were in whites were dipping their whites in coffee in order to camouflage them. That's all they had. They didn't have time to get any blues. They didn't have time to get any khakis or anything. They dipped their whites in black coffee, put them on, some of them still wet. If the Japs couldn't see them, they could sure smell them. They camouflaged themselves that way.



Going back to my original story, after awhile they came back and said, "Well, obviously that was scuttlebutt. You sailors go this way, and you Marines come with me." We got on a truck, and we went to Oahu Cemetery. They were beginning then to bring in the bodies of the dead. We were gotten together. It was ten of us, and a corporal was in charge. There was no higher ranked NCO than that and no officer. The corporal said, "We have our orders. We are here to keep everybody out. Now we're going to spend the night here, and we're going to spend the night in this morgue." There were bulldozers digging trenches at this time.

Marcello: Already?

Le Fan: They were digging trenches in this afternoon. And he said, "We have been given orders to keep everyone out unless they have a special ID.

These trucks were bringing in these boxes. They had crude, makeshift, wooden boxes approximately seven feet long, 2 1/2-by-2 1/2. They were the dead soldiers, sailors, and Marines that were killed during the attack. We were given orders that the Japanese were going to try and count the casualties and to shoot anything that moves, was our orders. "Don't ask any questions.

Shoot anything that moves." We walked post in pairs.

They brought in bodies all afternoon. The bulldozers were digging two long trenches. I'm going to guess, Doctor, and say they were 150 feet long each. The trenches were going down . . . here again, I'm going to guess and say five feet, maybe six feet. They were laying the boxes side-by-side. They were beginning to smell pretty strong. Blood was running out of the boxes.

One flat-bedded truck came up, stopped abruptly, and a box fell off. It hit the concrete and burst. There was a trunk of a man, three arms, and one leg in this particular box. The Navy man, who had on face mask, put the remains back in the box, sealed it up, and laid it into the ground. They were laying them in there as fast as they possibly could, side-by-side, with identification marks as best they could make them. We walked post that night out of this morgue area. We had no food; we had no coffee; we had nothing. We couldn't burn a light.

Marcello: Did you have very much of an appetite?

Le Fan: Actually, my eating was the last thing on my mind. I wasn't hungry. I wasn't thinking about food. I kept thinking about what my mother must be thinking, knowing I was at Pearl, because the week before when I first

got there, I sent some mail home that I was at Pearl Harbor, and we were having a big time on liberty. I sent some canned candy home . . . some Hawaiian candy home for Christmas. That just about depleted my supply of money. That's one reason I was broke, also.

That night in the morgue, I watched my first cremation of the civilians who were killed in the attack in Honolulu, of which I later learned many of them were killed by our own shells that didn't go off and landed in Honolulu. Of the people there with me that day, I can remember a Raymond Langlois from New Orleans, Louisiana, Raymond Jones from Arkansas, Jim Harvey from Kansas City . . . and I'm trying to think of the name of someone else that might have been there. I can't. We weren't supposed to keep any diaries. This was a "no-no," although I did keep a small one that my son here in Austin has now--just a notebook that I took a few notes in. But I remember Raymond Jones, Langlois, and Harvey very well because we walked the post that night together.

It rained that evening, and while walking around, we each had our rifles loaded, we had our pistols loaded, and we were given orders to shoot at anything that moved. On one occasion, there was a car that came by, and we

were at the main gate of the cemetery. They had their lights on. Raymond Jones and I were together at this particular time. Raymond said, "Turn off your lights!" And they told him in no uncertain terms to go to hell. He walked in front of the car, and with his rifle butt, knocked out both lights, and they proceeded on their way cussing us at every step.

The next morning there was another occasion where there was a carload of youngsters--I want to say teenagers--who drove by applauding and waving Japanese flags. I never wanted to fire a shot so bad in all my life, but I couldn't pull down on kids. Anyway, they were of Japanese origin and were probably trying to change sides real quick. I don't know this. They just drove by and were applauding and waving the Jap flags. The more "meatballs" I saw, the madder I got.

Marcello: If I may just back up here a minute, on that Sunday evening, were there a lot of trigger-happy servicemen around? Did you hear sporadic shooting anywhere on the island?

Le Fan: There was shooting going on all night, Doctor. Now the only shooting that I know of that was authorized . . . two of our men were put on the side of a hill. Below the cemetery and approximately four hundred yards away, there was a bridge. They were given orders to spasmodically

fire at that bridge to keep anyone from crossing it. "Do not set a pattern. Fire a burst. Wait a minute. Fire another burst. Wait five minutes. Fire another burst. Sweep this bridge all night." There was shooting going on everywhere, and I was more afraid of my own people shooting me than I was a Jap shooting me at this particular time. People were scared; they were excited; they were confused. They were shooting at shadows. If something moved, they'd fire at it. I didn't fire a shot that night. But this machine gun fired all night long, from dark until daylight the next morning. We later saw the bridge, and believe me, there wasn't a spot that you could put your thumb that there wasn't a pothole where some of that ammo had hit. But nobody crossed it that night.

The next morning there was a couple who lived at a florist shop across the street from the cemetery. They came over. Well, we stopped them immediately, and they asked us if we wanted breakfast. Well, this was a real delight. We had no coffee. We had nothing. So we went over two and three at a time and ate breakfast and came back to stand at our post. I'm going to guess and say about eight o'clock, we were selected . . . six of us were selected as an honor guard. We had our rifles, and we were given three rounds of

blank ammo which we loaded into our rifles, and the chaplain, who I think was a captain in the Navy, gave a prayer. His words were, at the very end, with tears in his eyes . . . and believe me, there was grown sailors and Marines standing there, big men, that were crying, unashamedly crying. They had lost buddies; they had lost friends; they had lost their ship; they had lost everything they had, more or less. The scuttlebutt was still so thick that we didn't know exactly what was happening. You could hear anything you wanted to hear.

The chaplain said when he wound up that, "We are beat to our knees, but we shoot pretty good from that position." He said, "With God's help we'll win this war." He said, "It's going to be a long war. It's going to be a short war. Your guess is as good as mine, but we'll win eventually because God's on our side." It was a very inspiring speech. I was privileged to be on the six-man honor guard that fired as they covered the graves up.

We had to get these people below ground. I learned later on that at Red Hill Cemetery the same thing was going on. This was at the Oahu Cemetery. And to say how many were buried there that day, I don't know. There were several hundred, I'll put it that

way--these boxes laying side-by-side. And today I can smell fresh pine plywood, and the memory comes back of the day at Pearl when you'd see these . . .at Oahu Cemetery to see the blood and the oil seeping out of these boxes and knowing that yesterday at this time these were live human beings. "Those Japs aren't going to get away with this!" Now this was foremost in our minds right then.

It was confusing, but the next night, Monday night, we were ordered back to Pearl, and I went to Ford Island to guard and take care of the oil depot and the ammunition depot because we just knew that we were going to be invaded, and this material was essential. We must have this. At Ford Island, I stayed there for approximately three days and then went to a place near Aiea, Richardson's Recreation Center. There was a swimming pool. Below us they had stripped the superstructure off of a lot of these battleships and piled it up there. We often wondered what we'd do if one bomb were to hit in the middle of this. It would throw shrapnel for a mile in every direction. But nothing ever happened.

And to the best of my knowledge, the rest of it was routine until December 15. On December 15, I

boarded the USS Tangier and was on my way to Wake Island to relieve the garrison there. They was beat to their knees. We had the aircraft carrier Enterprise with us. I think it was the Enterprise. We had three cruisers, nine destroyers, the hospital ship Solace, and a tanker. We were going to relieve this garrison. We had already been given orders that we were going to beach the Tangier to reinforce the garrison who had held out all this time. They were taking an awful beating.

We were ninety miles from Wake Island when we got their last message. We could see smoke rising from the island off in the horizon, and their last message that we received, which they put on the PA system, "The enemy has landed, and the situation is in doubt." The radio went out.

We had orders from Pearl to return immediately. I was on the bow of the ship. We were fired at with a torpedo that night. Luckily somebody spotted it first, and they threw all the screws in reverse, and the torpedo passed in front of us. The tanker that was with us was sunk. It caught two fish and went down immediately with all hands, as far as I know. We had to protect the Solace, hospital ship, because



it was the slowest ship in the convoy. The aircraft carrier was being protected. I saw my first depth charges being dropped by destroyers, and supposedly we sunk two subs. Now whether this really happened or not, I don't know. You'd hear anything. We were fired at by torpedoes. I saw this one. It went in front of our bow.

And when we finally did return to Pearl on the evening of January 1, a full moonlight night, we cruised up the harbor. To look at those battleships still sitting just the way they were on the seventh, and the full moonlight night, it's a night I'll never forget as long as I live.

As soon as we got ashore, we were told by the rest of our detachment that they had heard rumors that the Tangier had been sunk and we were gone. Well, we fooled them and got back.

I stayed at Pearl with this detachment until March, at which time I went to the Hebrides Islands aboard the USS Crescent City to the little town of Efate. From there I was transferred to another island, the forward island under Allied control, Espiritu Santo. I made the landing on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1941, with the 1st Marine Division. The rest of it's pretty much history, Doctor.

Marcello: Well, I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk with me.

Le Fan: It's been a real pleasure.

Marcello: You really have a vivid memory, and I'm sure that scholars are going to find this information quite valuable when they use it to write about Pearl Harbor.

Le Fan: Well, there are so many things. Everybody's got a different viewpoint. We all did different things, and for fear of exaggerating, I try to tell it as I remember it. And to say I wasn't scared is a gross, gross exaggeration. I was a scared nineteen-year-old kid wondering what was going to happen next. Scuttlebutt was high and heavy. You could hear anything you wanted to hear, and, yes, I was scared--scared to death. I finally did get one message off to my mother, a cablegram. All I could forward was two words--"Am safe."

Marcello: I think that's probably a good place to conclude.

Le Fan: She cherishes that today--"Am safe," those two words.