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Interview with
Albert L. Fickel
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Albert Fickle

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Date: May 14, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Albert Fickle for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 14, 1976, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Fickle in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS Pennsylvania during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Fickle, to begin this interview, would you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself? In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education-- things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Fickle: Well, I was born in Lueders, Jones County, Texas. I attended school in the primary grades and high school there in Lueders, Texas. I finished school on the twenty-eighth of May. I went to Abilene and enlisted or signed up for the Navy on the sixth of June, and I was called on the sixth of September.

Marcello: Now what year was this?

Fickle: This was 1939.

Marcello: When were you born?

Fickle: I was born in 1920--the eighth day of December, 1920.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy?

Fickle: Well, I had a real good friend. His name was Roy Ronroy, and by the way, he was still in the Navy when World War II started. He was a first class boilerman on the old Richmond, one of the old four-stacker cruisers in Pearl. Of course, he was one of my idols. There was another fellow who lived in Leuders that was . . . his name was Moorhead. I used to watch him when he came home from boot camp, marching up and down. I guess I got a little bit of military background in me. My grandfather was in the German Army.

So anyway, I joined the Navy in Abilene and signed up. They called me in September of '39 to report to Dallas. I passed my physical and so forth and was sworn in in Dallas. The funny thing, though, is that on the way from Dallas to the training station in San Diego is when President Roosevelt declared the first national emergency, which I believe was on, what, about the tenth or twelfth of September? But, of course, this in itself speeded up our military progress as far as our boot camp was concerned. They cut us from

three months to six weeks. I was up at five o'clock in the morning, and then you went until you couldn't see.

So at the end of that time when we graduated from boot camp, usually they always gave the recruits--I don't know--two or three weeks off to come home and visit mama and to tell them what it was all about. Well, I didn't get a chance to come home and be a hero. They sent us right straight to the ship.

Marcello: What particular ship were you sent to?

Fickle: The USS Pennsylvania.

Marcello: Was this voluntary duty, or were you assigned to the Pennsylvania?

Fickle: No, I put in for it. They gave us a list of the personnel that they needed on the different ships. They let you volunteer for these or put in for the one that there was availabilities on. And, of course, there's an old saying in the Navy that you never got the first thing you put in for. You always got either second or third choice. Well, I was fortunate. I did get the first choice. I felt--and I still do--like that I was fortunate that I got that ship.

Marcello: Why did you want to go aboard the Pennsylvania or a battleship in particular?

Fickle: Oh, that was the biggest thing afloat (chuckle). That was the biggest thing afloat other than an aircraft carrier. Of course, I wasn't familiar with the aircraft carriers. When you saw movies, you always saw the big guns roaring and the old "wagons" in their majestic lines going down through the ocean. I don't know, it's . . . you know, being a country kid from Lueders, that was just about the biggest thing that you could think of to get on, you know.

Marcello: What did you plan to strike for once you got aboard the Pennsylvania?

Fickle: Well, I really didn't plan to strike for anything because I'll guarantee you what, they move so fast I was completely confused. I've always leaned toward mechanics, and I've always taken things apart and been able to build things with my hands and so forth. So consequently, after I got aboard ship and I found out . . . well, one of the things that really convinced me that I was in the wrong racket when I was on deck force . . . but you had no choice.

Marcello: I guess everybody, when they went aboard, was automatically put in the deck force.

Fickle: Automatically put in the deck force, and at that time they had a standing rule that you had to stay in deck

force for a year before you could put in for anything --schools or anything else. Of course, in those days they didn't promise you schools to get you to go in. You took what they gave you, and somewhere along the line maybe somebody took a liking to you, and you could get wherever you wanted to go.

But anyway, after about a year . . . the one reason I got in this engineering department--the idea more than anything else--was that they used to hold reveille on us at 5:15 in the morning; 5:30 was coffee time; and at 5:45 when it was still dark outside, they'd turn on the lights, and you were out scrubbing decks. Well, I never was too much for that--that deck scrubbing--because I always felt like I was doing the same thing twice. Anyway, after about six months of that, I went down below, and we had cleaning stations down on the ammunition conveyors where they took this ammunition out of the magazines and conveyed it throughout the ship to your different guns where it went up to your gun stations. These were part of our cleaning duties, and when I was assigned to that, I'd go down there, and all of these engineers were still laying in bed, you know, at six o'clock, 6:30, seven o'clock in the morning. They'd just get up in time to put their

clothes on, wash their face, and go to muster. Well, I figured this was for me.

So I started putting in for the engineering department and worked real hard at it to get it. I forget when I did go to the engineering department. Anyway, I had over a year in the Navy when I was finally transferred, when they accepted me down there. So they called me down to the log room, told me that I had been transferred. I got my transfer papers, and they gave you a long slip that you had to go sign out with everybody.

Well, I went up to the division boatswain's mate. He said, "I see you don't like the deck force." He said, "Okay, I'll tell you what. You've got five minutes to get all of your crud out of this division and get it down below with the rest of them black . . ." He called them bilge rats. Well, anyway, that was my start into engineering.

But backing up, talking about this boatswain's mate, he was out of the old Navy, and he was pretty tough. He wasn't very big, but he sure was rough. When I first went into the military service, I had bad tonsils. They'd swell up on me when I got my feet wet or my clothes wet or damp and I got chilled. I

used to wear my shoes . . . of course, we had these old heavy shoes we wore out at boot camp, and they had double soles on them. They were heavy and everything else, so I really didn't care if I ruined them or not. So I was out on deck one morning, and this boatswain's mate told me to pull my shoes off. I said, "No, I'd rather keep them on because if I get my feet wet and I get chilled, I'll get tonsillitis." He said, "Well, I'm giving you an order. If you're going to be a sailor, you've got to be a sailor all the way. I'm giving you an order to take them shoes off." So I told him, "They're my shoes. I paid for them. I see that it's none of your business." He said, "Well, I'll say one more time that this is an order. Take them off."

So I took them off, and I put them in what they called a swab locker. They kept all these sticks . . . mop sticks and bricks and stuff that you use to clean the deck. I put them shoes in that swab locker, and when I did he reamed me right in the butt with this big number six, and into that swab locker I went. Well, when I come out of there, I come out of there with one of those sticks in my hand, and I was going to rap him on the side of the head with it. He said, "Okay, I'll tell you what you do, 'Whitney.'" I used to be cotton-headed. He said, "I'm going to let you hit me,"

and he says, "When you hit me, I'm going to get you a general court-martial that'll put you on Mare Island!" But he says, "On the other hand, if you don't hit me with that stick," he says, "I'm going to give you one of the damnest beatings you ever got!" So I didn't hit him with the stick, and I took my raps, believe me (chuckle)! But this was just one of the sea stories that you run into. I know a million of them, but you probably wouldn't want to hear all of them because I would be here until six o'clock tonight.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were transferred down into the engineering section, and I assume the training you received there was on-the-job training.

Fickle: On-the-job training completely. At that time they had schools for electricians. They had schools for the fire controlmen. They had the navigation schools. But I really don't know whether they had any Class A schools for just straight machinist's mates or not. But practically everything that you got was because you worked. . . you would always work from second class or first class people down there in the engine room that had been down there for years themselves. Of course, each engine room had a chief in charge of it. They were always down there looking over your shoulder

to see that you were doing everything right, and if you didn't do it, you did it over.

Marcello: How would you describe the on-the-job training that you received during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? Was it good? Fair? Poor?

Fickle: It was the best. It was really the best because in these places you had nobody else to call on. You fixed it yourself, or it didn't run. If it didn't run, that old chief and first class had to answer to the chief engineers, so it behooved them to teach you everything that they knew because it made their job easier.

Marcello: Most of these petty officers had been in the Navy for years and years, too, had they not?

Fickle: Eight, nine, ten years, and they was all second class. Some of them was even firemen. I worked with a fellow that had been in the Navy . . . and he wasn't stupid by any part of the imagination. He had got in a little trouble here and there and had been passed over as far as his rates were concerned. But he had ten years in, and he was only a fireman.

Marcello: Rates and promotions were simply slow during this pre-Pearl Harbor Navy.

Fickle: You'd better believe it. For instance, the complement of the USS Pennsylvania in 1939, '40, and '41 was 1,100

men. After they had modernized it, put new guns on it, new this and new that, new radar equipment and so forth, it jumped from 1,100 to 2,750 men. So you can just see how much. Of course, after the war started, now this is when your ranks opened up because they started spreading them out and going everywhere, and they took people like myself . . . I made chief in four and half years, where under normal peacetime conditions it would probably take me about twelve or fourteen years to do the same thing.

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

Fickle: Good, good, good! The thing about these people then, we had a set of rules and regulations to live by. It didn't make any difference whether you were the lowest rated man in the Navy or whether you was the highest rated man, you lived by those. They was the rules and regulations of the United States Navy. We called it "Rocks and Shoals," is what it was named. Each day, or at least one time every week, the leading petty officer stood before the mob there, and he read at least one to two articles or four or five articles or a chapter of "Rocks and Shoals." This is something that started the day I got to boot camp with the rules

and regulations and disciplinary actions and so forth that went along with this every day. So there was never any doubt about where you stood.

We used to always have a saying that there wasn't but one man that had more authority in this world than a captain aboard one of those capital ships, and that was God. He was the only one that could overrule him really because he actually had the power of life and death over the people aboard ship.

Marcello: What was the chow like aboard the Pennsylvania?

Fickle: Good. It was good. There was only one law that they had, and the master-at-arms enforced it with an iron fist. "Take all you want, but eat all you take." That's the way it was.

Marcello: What were the living quarters like aboard the Pennsylvania?

Fickle: The living quarters in the deck force . . . in the first year that I was in the Navy, I slept in a hammock.

Marcello: How did you like sleeping in a hammock?

Fickle: Well, they're not bad, but they're sure hard on the kidneys (chuckle). There was a trick. Of course, in boot camp we didn't know this trick. Well, you didn't have access to it if you'd have known it. But that thing wrapped up around you like a blanket. You know, you tie up both ends of a blanket and pull

it real tight and get there in the middle of it, and it wraps around you. That's the way a hammock fits you. Of course, it keeps constant pressure on your kidneys, and they're not the best thing in the world, and then you're laying in like a rainbow turned upside down or in a kettle. I don't know which way you want to put it. But after we got aboard ship, you look around and you see all of these . . . what they called a "hammock stick." You take these sticks, and they're about, oh, three feet long, and you run them under the lashings of your hammock or the . . . let me see. What's the name of that?

Marcello: I believe they're called the lashings, aren't they?

Fickle: No, the lashings are the parts that you tie it up with. The other one is lanyards--something like that. Anyway, you put these sticks underneath it, and it opens it up. So it gives you more room to breathe. But the funny thing about it, when you first start sleeping in those things, you fall out of them and everything else. But after you've slept in them, especially aboard ship with these ships rolling and rocking . . . and, of course, they always stay level. After you sleep in them, shoot, you can sleep with one leg hanging over one side and an arm over the other one and a head hanging out here. It seems like

you never fell out. You always was unconsciously conscious of your balance of where you was in those things.

Marcello: But after awhile you do get used to sleeping in one of those things.

Fickle: Oh, yes, yes. Well, this is another thing about the engineering department. See, they didn't sleep in hammocks. They slept in bunks. This was another thing that didn't pass me. Their bunk was made up in the mornings when they got up. Of course, you had a mattress cover that you put on. You didn't have any sheets to cover with. You had a mattress cover that covered your mattress, and you kept it clean. You changed that twice a week whether it was dirty or not, and you had a blanket to cover with, and you had a pillow case to cover your pillow. This was it. If it was too hot for the blanket, then you slept without it. If it was cold, then you slept under your blanket. Each man was issued two blankets in boot camp. But this was all you had. In the mornings when you got up, you folded up your blankets and knocked the wrinkles out of your mattress cover, put on your clothes, and you was ready for whatever the day would give you.

Marcello: Well, I guess all of these things that you've mentioned helped contribute to the high morale aboard the Pennsylvania. You mentioned the fact that you were kept busy all the time; you mentioned that you knew where you stood at all times; you mentioned that the food was good; you mentioned that the living quarters were fairly good. I think all of these things would have probably contributed to the high morale aboard the Pennsylvania.

Fickle: It did. And another thing that contributed to the high morale of the military service in those days was that nobody was forced to join the military service.

Marcello: Everybody was a volunteer.

Fickle: You was a volunteer, and you made your own bed, and if you contributed to it, then you got ahead. If you came in there as a dead head or a sore head that you wasn't going to make it, then you didn't make it. It was just that simple. It was a simple way of living. It really was.

Marcello: When did the Pennsylvania go to Hawaii? Would this have been in mid-1941?

Fickle: No, the first time that . . . let's see, I got out of boot camp in October or in the first part of November,

and we left for Pearl Harbor on our first cruise out there in March, I believe, of 1940.

Marcello: And then was the Pennsylvania in Pearl from that time forward?

Fickle: She was in Pearl Harbor in 1940. We came back . . . we was out there . . . at that time they were still rotating the fleet. You'd go out there for six or seven months, and while you was out there, you was steaming here and there on maneuvers and training and all of this stuff. Of course, we all felt like this Japanese business was in the wind, you know. So we were training and steaming in formations and having gunnery practice and antiaircraft practice and all this.

But what we did at that time. . . we had an admiral and his name was Admiral Richardson. Admiral Richardson was from Paris, Texas. Being that the USS Pennsylvania was the flagship of the Pacific Fleet, the old four-star admiral himself that was in charge of everything that floated in the Pacific was aboard that ship. So, consequently, we were in a position as the crew on that thing to see and hear and observe lots of things that the rest of the fleet never did get to see or hear about because, you know, scuttlebutt travels, you know. But I can say that that old man

was one of the finest men that I ever knew. I used to work out on topside in the Third Division, which took care of the side of the ship where his quarters was down below. And he'd come up every morning in his bath robe. He smoked a big old stone black pipe. He had on a pair of these house shoes that you just slide your feet in, and he'd get his exercise up there in the morning when it was just flat dark yet.

But it was Admiral Richardson's idea or his ways of doing things that kept the fleet at that time scattered throughout the Pacific. He always had part of them in the United States and Long Beach and San Francisco and Bremerton. Some of them were even maneuvering up around Aleutian Islands. He kept some of them down south, and he kept some of them at Pearl. But he never, never, never allowed any ships to be in there more than one or two at a time because it was his idea that Pearl Harbor was a death trap for a fleet because there wasn't but one way in and one way out.

Marcello: When was the Pennsylvania assigned to Pearl on a more or less permanent basis?

Fickle: Well, we never was just assigned. We'd go out there for six or seven months. Like I said, we went out there in March, and keeping in mind that I went in

the Navy the sixth of September, when I left Abilene, Texas, the first time that I got leave that I came back home was in November of 1940. So we went out in February, and it was November before we came back to the States that I got home for the first time because I'd already been in . . . see, I'd already been in for over a year . . . well, nearly two years already.

Marcello: Okay, during this pre-Pearl Harbor period, describe what your training routine would be like. In other words, why don't you begin by mentioning when the Pennsylvania would leave, how long it would stay out, and when it would come back into port again.

Fickle: Well, usually what you did, you'd have different places that you would anchor. Now most of the times we'd stay underway about five days, and then we'd anchor somewhere. We'd anchor at Lahaina Roads out there, or we'd come into Pearl, or maybe we'd steam for two weeks at a time. It was according to how the rotation was. But you never came in there with a bunch of ships. It'd just be one or two ships to go in there. At Lahaina Roads, which is off the Island of Maui, we just anchored out there off the island.

Then they'd give the men a chance to get suntans and go ashore. We had motor launches that took us ashore. Of course, it's just a little place in there, and they'd be overrun with more than just a few people in there at a time. But in those days, see, we never got overnight liberty because the facilities there wasn't enough of them where people could find a place to sleep. If they was on the beach . . . of course, out there in that country, it never gets very cold, so, heck, you can lay down on the sand and sleep. But that doesn't look good as far as the fleet's concerned or the sailor's concerned, so consequently we never got overnight liberty. Our liberty was always up at midnight. We always got back.

But getting back to what you asked me about our training, you had a number of training drills that you went through. You never knew when they was going to sound general quarters. Well, the things that we had . . . we had drills where . . . and everything was done on a bugle. You had a bugle that told you what to do.

Alright, you can be laid up there sound asleep, and all at once the bugle comes on, and they sound watertight doors. Every man on there either had a place to be within a certain few seconds or minutes,

or he had a door that he was responsible for on there. So these watertight doors, they all had either fast-closing wheels on them or they had "dogs" on them that you dogged them all down. So when these sounds sounded, you went to that station. In three minutes they'd come on the loud speaker and say, "Close all watertight doors! Close them!" And at that time you'd close them down, and you'd better have a damn good reason if you wasn't where you was supposed to be when those doors was all secured.

Another one that we had . . . we had antiaircraft drills, and that was done on a bugle. They'd have an airplane somewhere on the horizon, and they'd sound . . . of course, it'd be friendly. It might be a plane pulling a sleeve behind it for antiaircraft drill, which they'd fire at. They'd sound antiaircraft practice, so everybody would man their antiaircraft stations. The ones that didn't have stations on topside, they had places down below where they had to be. They had to be on the ammunition conveyors that I spoke about before that we used to keep clean. But everybody had a job to do.

So another one that they used to have . . . they had torpedo attacks. Here again, you stood by your watertight doors. They made you close all unnecessary

hatches and all these things to . . . but it all amounted to one thing. This was for the protection of the ship.

Then the big "jobber" that made your hair kind of stand up on end when they sounded it was general quarters. When that was general quarters, that meant just what it was. Everybody had a battle station whether you was black, yellow, green, or blue or what you did or what your rate was--from the old man, the admiral, right on down to your lowest mess boy. He had a place that he had to be, and he had a job that was assigned to him, and, believe me, they did nothing but drill you until you knew that to be exact --till you were perfect at it.

Marcello: Where was your battle station?

Fickle: Well, when I was in the deck force--1940 and 1941--I was the phone talker in turret three, the fourteen-inch guns. See, we had three guns in there, and I was the turret talker. I took all of the orders from the bridge and from the fire control center and relayed them to the turret officer. That was my job. Of course, I've always been a blabbermouth. I can talk when most people should be listening, and I should be, too. But before that I passed powder in the powder magazine. This stuff all came up in separate trays and separate

places, so if something happened and they caught on fire, it wouldn't burn nobody but you up, see.

(Chuckle) So you went in those things either with sneakers on or bare-footed. You never wore shoes, and you never wore a pair of shoes that had a nail in it. You had to leave those shoes out on topside, or you pulled them off when you went in those turrets because when you got to firing rapid fire and start throwing that ammunition around in there . . . the old smokeless powder, it looked, oh, about like chalk. If you took chalk and broke it all up, that's about what it looked like. But your black powder was in grains just like shotgun powder that you see today. That stuff there, you could step on it with a shoe that had a nail in it or something like that and rake it across the deck, and it would actually explode. So it was very dangerous. But this black powder was the powder that they fired the primer into start the reaction that causes your gun to fire. The smokeless powder wouldn't ignite without the black powder.

Marcello: Where was your battle station at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack?

Fickle: My battle station was in number two engine room, and I was on watch in number three engine room when it actually started.

Marcello: I gather from what you've said that your training routine in those days before the attack was a more or less constant thing.

Fickle: It was a constant thing, and it didn't make any difference whether you was aboard ship. They could sound different drills--fire drills and different drills--and if you was just aboard ship and you didn't even have a place, you still . . . if you was aboard ship, you was on duty. So you stayed on duty twenty-four hours a day when you was aboard ship. And even in port they'd hold these drills just to see whether they had enough training in these people that they could carry on with part of the crew ashore.

Marcello: As relations between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate and get worse, did your training routine change any?

Fickle: We trained continuously. Like I say, I mentioned earlier that when the national emergency was first declared, the first national emergency in 1939, is when actually the training started. Of course, from then on then in . . . when was it, 1939, 1940, somewhere along through there, when they chopped off the selling of scrap iron to Japan? I forget when it was. I think it was 1940. Well, in 1940 when the relationship between Japan and the United States started deteriorating,

that's really when our training started.

This is also about the time that Admiral Richardson said that he wasn't going to give the Japanese a plum to pluck, so he put some of these ships up in one part of the United States, some of them in another part, some of it overseas, some of it in the South Seas, and so forth.

Actually, this is one of the things that has never really been brought out, and maybe I'm going out on a limb by saying it, but it's still the truth. Back during World War I, there was a treaty signed by Germany and Japan and all of your major countries that no one would cross the International Dateline with a gun larger than eight inches. Now don't ask me what the treaty is, but it is a treaty that was signed, and you might know about it. So consequently, this was the time that the United States started building six-inch cruisers. Most of our cruisers either had eight-inch guns or five-inch guns on them. So the United States, to stay within the treaty bounds, built cruisers with six-inch guns. The old Houston, the old Marblehead, and all of those old cruisers that used to go to China all the time had these guns on them.

In 1940, in July, when we crossed across the

equator--that's when I was initiated as a "shellback"--when we crossed across the equator down there in July in 1940, Admiral Richardson caught the Japanese fleet down there with battleships and cruisers and the whole mess down there holding maneuvers on our side of the 180th meridian. According to the . . . I know the name of the treaty, and somewhere along the line you might want to insert it in there. But anyway, it was a direct declaration of war. I saw not the original message but the one that was sent to Washington, D.C., asking for permission to open fire on the Japanese fleet. He was told to get himself back up on the other side of the 180th meridian and back up on the other side of Pearl Harbor or on the other side of the Hawaiian Islands and forget the Japanese fleet was ever down there. The Japanese at that time was already primed, see. They come down there with all their guns loaded, and the United States backed down out there.

Marcello: On your maneuvers and so on prior to December 7, how much emphasis was given to practice against aircraft? In other words, were there very many antiaircraft drills as compared to the other types of drills in which you participated?

Fickle: No, no, there wasn't because for the simple reason that we didn't have the guns. You take on that old

ship. We had what they called old five-inch .25's. You could get about . . . oh, if you really worked at it real hard, you could probably get ten rounds a minute out of it, which modern guns put up ten times that much. Our aircraft armament was four five-inch .25 guns and probably ten or twelve .50-caliber, and I think that just before the war started --the last time we were in the States--they put on two or three of these 20-millimeter guns. This was it. This was all we had. Now we practiced with what we had, yes, on sleeves and so forth, but I don't believe that they really put too much emphasis on aircraft as a war instrument.

Marcello: I don't think they really knew at that stage just how effective airplanes could be against ships.

Fickle: That's right.

Marcello: The Japanese taught us a pretty good lesson, I guess, in a way at Pearl Harbor.

Fickle: Yes. Of course, they used to take the old Utah. She was tied up there in Pearl. In fact, she was sunk at Pearl. The old Utah, they had twelve-by-twelve timbers on top of her decks, and they used to steam her out and drop sand bags--these dummy bombs--on the old Utah. They were practicing dive bombing. This is what they used to do, and also with dummy

torpedoes. They used dummy torpedoes on her to practice on these things.

Marcello: What was the liberty routine like when the Pennsylvania came in off these extensive maneuvers?

Fickle: In Pearl, you got liberty one out of every . . . let's see.

Marcello: Was it one in four?

Fickle: No, no.

Marcello: Or was it port and starboard?

Fickle: Port and starboard.

Marcello: Port and starboard?

Fickle: Port and starboard was all it was, and on port and starboard liberty you usually left the ship about four o'clock, except on weekends. On weekends you could leave the ship after the watch changed at eight o'clock. But if you left at eight o'clock, you had to be back at midnight. That's when we was in Pearl. Now when we was in the States, if we had our full complement of crew members, our liberty was two out of three. We had three-section liberty.

Marcello: When you were in Pearl what did you personally do when you were on liberty . . . when you had liberty?

Fickle: (Chuckle) You really don't want to know that, do you? Let me say it like this (chuckle). One of the things that I did learn out there, I learned to ride surfboards.

I spent many, many hours at Waikiki Beach. At that time, the biggest thing in Waikiki and on Waikiki Beach was the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

Of course, believe it or not, Honolulu and Oahu--the island of Oahu--and all of that was a possession of the United States and had been. But the wahines out there would not have very much to do with the sailors.

Probably somewhere along the line somebody told you this before. There was houses of prostitution, one right next to the other, up and down Hotel Street and River Street and Canal Street. These gals, they was in the circuit. If you met them out in Pearl Harbor or out in Honolulu, the chances was that if they disappeared out there and if you come back to the States, you'd run into those same faces either in Bremerton or Seattle or Vallejo or San Francisco or Oakland or somewhere like that. But they didn't have too much of that in Long Beach, and they didn't have too much of it in San Diego. I only made a few liberties there when I was going through boot camp. But later on, after I went back and on further down my military service when I was transferred to the destroyer fleet, that was their home port, and I got familiar with San Diego. But

by that time, all of them old gals had either gotten married or they wore out, so they wasn't in it anymore (chuckle).

But I'll tell you, that's a funny thing to see one of the old gals come out there, and they'd be about twenty years old and fresh and eager and look like a dreamboat. You walk back in there about three months later and look at them. They looked like they had aged fifty years. That old saying that a woman can wear a man out can go the other way if you get enough traffic in there (chuckle).

Marcello: (Chuckle) When the crew had liberty on a Saturday night, let's say, after being out on maneuvers all week or however long, what would be the normal condition of the crew when they would come back aboard the Pennsylvania at midnight?

Fickle: Most of them were pretty well bent out of shape, pretty well bent out of shape, because really . . . you know, that's one of the things that always kind of chapped me about the American people. You know, a serviceman is a damn detriment to the taxpayer. He's a . . . well, he's a parasite on progress and everything else until war starts. Then overnight you become a hero. I can remember . . . and keeping in mind the Hollywood Canteen, you know, it was

broadcast and ballyhooed all over the world.
Everybody knew where the Hollywood Canteen was.
I can remember before World War II started, if you went to Hollywood, they had signs up there for the sailors and the damn dogs to keep off the grass. Now that's what they thought of military people. Of course, I'm an old hardheaded German. I've always been hardheaded. This is one thing that I never one time ever accepted, was a handout from the Hollywood Canteen. I wouldn't go in it. I walked up there one time and looked in the door. I went to the Palladium a lot, which was right down the street from the Hollywood Canteen, but . . . I went in there and I just told the old gal in there just right to her face . . . she wanted to take my hat, and she wanted to introduce me to the movie stars and everything else. I said, "Lady, you didn't recognize me before war started." I said, "I'm not a damn bit worse or any better than I was before this war started, so I don't want any damn charity because when it's over with, you're going to feel the same way you did before it started. I'm going to be one of the people in this world to say that I never did take a handout from you." And I never did. I never was too much on that. I mean, there were people that believed in

it, but there were a lot of the young fellows that come into the military service after the war started that didn't know these situations, and there's a lot of them that was in it that kind of overlooked it and went on about their business. But I always felt like this. If I'm not good enough then, I'm not good enough now.

Marcello: When you mentioned that a great many of the crew members would come back aboard the Pennsylvania more or less drunk after being on liberty, what sort of condition would they be in the next day to fight, man their stations efficiently, and things of this nature?

Fickle: Oh, they'd make it. They'd make it. We had an old . . . we had a commander aboard the Pennsylvania that . . . the vice squad used to pick them up in Long Beach and bring them back aboard in motor launches--fifty, sixty, seventy of them, and all of them on report because they'd been over there shacked up with the gals on the beach. They'd been caught by the vice squad for immoral this and immoral that. Of course, I didn't see anything immoral about sleeping with a woman, but that's the way they looked at it. Old Commander Duke used to stand up there, and he'd tear them damn slips up and throw them right down there on that patrol officer. He'd say, 'I'm going to tell you one goddamn thing. A man that

won't drink and won't screw won't fight. I've got the fightingest ship in the Navy!"

So, no, really, under the circumstances while we was in battle zones or anything like that, there wasn't any drinking. There wasn't any drinking. Now when you wasn't aboard ship or in the States, well, you could let your hair down. Sure, you could go on over and get bent out of shape and come back sick as a damn dog. But really, as far as . . . I can't actually say that I know of any one single incident all during World War II that I've ever seen a man lay down on a job because he had been drinking. If you take anybody and you train him to the point to where he's as keen as a razor, he could practically . . . he gets to the point where he can do his job nearly as good half asleep as he can awake and half drunk or anything else.

But this is one thing about the Navy. When I was in it . . . I don't know how they are now, but when I was in it, there was never any doubt about what your job was and whether you could do it or not because if you couldn't do it, you didn't stay.

Marcello: When was payday aboard the Pennsylvania?

Fickle: Payday on the Pennsylvania was the first and the fifteenth. We got paid every two weeks. That was one of the things the Army hated about the Navy, because we got paid . . . and

all them girls loved a sailor with lots of money, you know. So consequently, we always made out a little bit better than a soldier did. Of course, when they got paid on the first or on the thirtieth of the month, they was king of the road. But we was always twice a month, and they was king once.

Marcello: If you got paid on the first and fifteenth, how much money would you probably have had in your pocket around December 6 or December 7?

Fickle: December 6 and December 7, I would have probably had . . . well, I would have had more than I usually would have had for the simple reason . . . when I was talking about these gals and them cat houses there in Honolulu, I had a date with a little old gal by the name of Ginger. I had one of the rare things that a man didn't get very many of out there in Pearl Harbor. I had a three-day pass. Over on the north side of Oahu they used to have a resort over there where a lot of these gals that worked in cat houses went. I knew about it, and I got together with a little old gal down at the New Senator love parlor, and I had a date with her, and we were going to leave that morning just as soon as I could get from the Pennsylvania down to the New Senator cat house to pick her up. We were going to the north side of the island for three days.

Marcello: Now this was on the weekend of December 7?

Fickle: December 7. See, I got off watch that morning. My birthday is on the eighth of December, which was on a Monday--the following day. But I got off of watch, and I had two days of liberty coming, plus one day of duty, and I had a standby for the day of duty. In fact, that Sunday I was actually standing by for another man when I could have been ashore. So I was to get off duty. In fact, I was already off duty when the war started. In fact, I got relieved at 7:30, and I sat down there and passed time with what was going on and what was running aboard ship and what was turned off and what was to be started and who the duty engineering officer was and all these things--passing on just routine requirements and orders and so forth to my relief.

I was down in there when I first heard the bombs start, and I thought it was dynamite. They used to have a . . .well, they still do. Ford Island over there and . . . Ford Island . . . back in on the back side of it was shallow water. So that they'd get these ships to where they could go around that island instead of passing close to each other in the main channel, they was dynamiting all of the coral out of this back channel over there in Pearl Harbor. They dynamited on the weekends, and during the week they would dredge this

stuff up and pump it over on the beach and build the beaches with it.

Marcello: So you heard the noises outside and thought they were dynamiting.

Fickle: Yes, I thought it was dynamite.

Marcello: Let's just go back here a minute before we get to this particular point. I have a few more general questions to ask you before we actually get to the Pearl Harbor attack itself. When you thought of a typical Japanese in those pre-Pearl Harbor days, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Fickle: Oh, really, I never did give the Japanese too much thought. One thing you always thought about them was being a little short, banty-legged, slant-eyed man, and the women . . . of course, Honolulu, the Hawaiian Islands . . . at that time I think that about 35 or 40 per cent of their population was Japanese, and they had inter-bred and inter-married with the Hawaiians even back in '39 and '40. I don't think there were more than about two or three or four pure-bred--what you would call pure-blooded--Hawaiians even at that time because most of them had all inter-married a Chinese and Filipinos and Japanese. So really, after you've been over there awhile, you'd pass them on the street, and you didn't pay any attention to them. They all looked alike. But as far as the Japanese

in the homeland in the home of the rising sun, you usually thought about them about like pictures you see of the Tojo, you know--little banty-legged guy with the big sword and so forth.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any of the old salts talk very much about the capabilities or the quality of the Japanese Navy? I'm sure there must have been some old-timers aboard the Pennsylvania that had served with the Asiatic Fleet.

Fickle: You know, this is one of the funny things about it. These people never came really in contact where they could make an evaluation on that. You know, the Japanese people stayed pretty much to themselves. There were not too much people that knew what they were thinking and what they were doing, and the same way with their fleets. When you'd talk about going to war with Japan, the old people and the old admiral . . . I'm not going to say admiral because I didn't come in contact with him. I was an enlisted man. The enlisted people would say, "No, they're not going to go to war with us. They haven't got anything to fight with. They ain't got nothing but a bunch of scrap iron we gave them. They ain't got anything to fight with." And this really came as a blow because we were led to believe . . . you asked this question and I started thinking about it. We were

led to believe that we were the mightiest, the biggest, the toughest, and we had nothing to fear from the Japanese fleet, so consequently, we never did really get down and question why. Why did we train? Why did we train? Why did we fire? Why did we do this? Why did we do this constantly for two or three years there before the war ever started? If we had have, we probably would have put it together. "Well, there must be more to it than this," because the powers of the military as far as the Navy is concerned never one day let us even think that we was in any position to worry about the Japanese fleet whatsoever.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us up to the days immediately prior to the actual Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. What I want you to do at this point, even though we've talked a little bit about it previously, is to go into as much detail as you can remember about what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941.

Fickle: Let me back up a day to the fifth. The Arizona was the Pennsylvania's sister ship, and consequently the hull characteristics of the Pennsylvania and the Arizona was identical. The Arizona was in the dry dock in Ten-Ten Dock there in the Navy yard. So they had finished with her. They had scraped her bottom. We'd painted it, cleaned the screws, checked everything that needed to

be checked below water, and had flooded the dry dock, and she was afloat. So there was a toss-up whether the Pennsylvania should go into the dry dock on a Monday morning or whether we were to go into the dry dock on a Friday. Well, it was still around about 1:30 or two o'clock in the afternoon, and so the skipper got together with the skipper on the Arizona. The skipper said that he would like to get out of that place and get tied and get kind of berthed down to where he was going. The skipper aboard the Pennsylvania wanted to get into dry dock because we had a lot of work to be done down in the engine rooms on leaky steam lines, and our strut bearings and our underwater bearings and everything was worn real bad, and we had a lot of vibration, and the old hull was all dirty and everything, which we had to do about every two or three years to clean it.

So the powers finally decided that we would just shift, so consequently they opened up the dry dock. They tugged the Arizona out of dry dock, moved her to the Fox piers and took the Pennsylvania from the Fox piers. Where the Arizona is sitting today is where we was tied up. They moved us in from the Fox piers into the dry dock. They put the back end into the dry dock and pumped the water out and put us down on keel blocks, and set us down high and dry. As soon as the

water started going down there, of course, all of the deck force was over the sides, and they had the scaffolds rigged. As the water dropped in that, they scrapped it and wire-brushed that big rascal all the way down--all the way to the keel blocks. As soon as she was out and the scaffolds were rigged, the engineers came out with their scrapers and their wire brushes, and they started on them big bronze screws that weighed ten tons, and the rascals was, I think, around fourteen or fifteen feet across from one end to the other, and there was four of them. The engineering department . . . the engineers in engine rooms cleaned those. After we had cleaned the screws and scraped the sides, then it was turned over to the . . . the bearings and stuff was pulled by the yard force . . . by the civilians that worked in the yard. At the same time that this was done, the deck force started putting on the anti-fouling paints and primers that they use for painting the bottom. It was all done by the crew. There wasn't none of it done as it is now by sandblasting and this. Except for the Arizona getting through with all of her underwater work and flooding that dock at about one o'clock and being moved out of Ten-Ten Dry Dock down to the Fox piers, and moving the Pennsylvania to Ten-Ten Dry Dock, except

for the grace of God and probably the matter of three hours, we'd be sitting where the Arizona is today.

Marcello: Now when that Pennsylvania was in dry dock, it had no power at all, or virtually no power. The only power you were getting was from shore, right?

Fickle: Right, shore power, right. We were still running our lights and our blowers and our ventillators and our fans and stuff that run all the time. They were still being run from the dock.

Marcello: Now what were you personally doing during this period when the Pennsylvania was being worked on in dry dock?

Fickle: Well, at that time . . . when we first went in on Friday, I worked . . . they cancelled all liberties when you first went in because the quicker you could get all of these barnacles and stuff off of these big bronze screws, the easier it was because the drier it gets the harder it got. It got like cement. Consequently, all liberty was actually cancelled in the engineering department until those screws was cleaned. That usually took about four hours with all the people that we had to do it. Of course, they'd be all over just like rats on cheese. Consequently, our liberty was cancelled. When that was over with we got in dry dock . . . I don't know. We got on those screws probably around six o'clock, and we was through with them by ten.

Marcello: Now this was on Friday?

Fickle: That was on Friday night, yes.

Marcello: You've got this big weekend planned now, right?

Fickle: Oh, yes! This big weekend's coming up on Sunday, though. Well, Friday that I actually rated liberty, I didn't get any liberty. But Saturday then, that was on December 6, and it was one of my liberty days, so at one o'clock on that day, on a Saturday, I went ashore. Of course, I came back . . . I don't know. I think I came back around four o'clock--somewhere during that time. I knew that I had to be back to take this other guy's watch on Sunday morning. I had the watch from four . . . our watches run on a four-hour basis--from twelve to four and four to eight. I knew I had to be back that morning to take that four to eight watch because he was taking my duty on a Monday. So consequently, that was one of the reasons why I was down in the engine room on December 7. It was because I was taking his duty. It really wasn't one of my duty days. It was his duty because he was standing by for me, and the only way that I could get three days was to get somebody to take my duty.

Marcello: So you mentioned that you did take liberty on Saturday, and you went ashore and came back at four o'clock. Four o'clock p.m.?

Fickle: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do while you were ashore that day?

Fickle: If I remember correctly, I never did get off the base. We had a lot of softball diamonds, and this is one of the things we did a lot in the fall because it was so dadgummed hot. It was about seventy-some-odd degrees --sixty-eight, sixty-nine, seventy degrees in the daytime. If I remember correctly, that's what we was doing. We was playing ball. Of course, then, see, I was only twenty years old, and I couldn't buy a bottle of beer, see. There was no way that I could buy a drink over there because you had to be twenty-one years old before anybody would sell you a drink. So consequently, if you were still a minor, that's about all that was left for you to do, was to . . . or either get somebody to buy you a can of beer or play ball or go to the cat houses, and dance.

Marcello: So anyway, you came back at four o'clock, and what did you do at that point?

Fickle: I probably went to the movies. We used to have movies every night on topside, and after the movies you went down to the engine room and sat around and drank a little coffee and batted the breeze. If there wasn't anybody coming back with a good sea story to tell you to get you all revved all up, then you went up and went to bed or you read a magazine because the only time

that you could stay out of your bunk past taps was to be down in the engine room where you was out of harm's way as far as the master-at-arms force is concerned because . . . well, once they sounded taps, that meant lights out, and you was either in bed or you was in some nook or corner where you could read a book or have a bull session going.

Marcello: In other words, your evening of Saturday, December 6, 1941, was a relatively routine evening.

Fickle: Routine evening watching a movie or shooting the breeze, playing acey-deucey or playing penny ante somewhere or something. That's just about what it was all about.

Marcello: Were there just the usual number of drunks coming in that night, or did you even take notice?

Fickle: Usual number, usual number. The biggest part of them . . . they had an enlisted men's club over there, and if a guy were loaded and he had five dollars, he usually went into town and spent two or it for cab fare or bus fare and three of it in the cat houses. If he didn't have that, he bought his nickel beers over at the EM Club. Of course, keep it in mind that when I went in the military service in '39, my base pay for one month was twenty-one dollars a month. And then I really got uptown. I made seaman second class, and it jumped to thirty-six dollars a month. But when it jumped to thirty-six dollars a month, your insurance came out of that.

So that dropped you back to thirty-one dollars a month. This was the last thing that the Navy gave you, and after that the pay was twenty-one, thirty-six, fifty-four, sixty, seventy-two, eighty-four, and ninety-six dollars a month. If you was a chief, your base pay, not counting your four-year enlistment, your longevity, your base pay was ninety-six dollars a month.

Marcello: Okay, this more or less takes care of your routine on Saturday, December 6, 1941. Before we move into Sunday, December 7, 1941, let me turn over the tape because we're just about out on this side (tape turned over).

Now let's talk about your routine on Sunday, December 7, 1941, and once more I want you to go into as much detail as you can remember from the time you woke up or from the time that you went on duty until all hell broke loose and everything that happened subsequently.

Fickle: Well, to start out with, the messenger called me for my watch in the engine room at about 3:30. It was standard routine that they gave you about five minutes to get up, put your clothes on, five minutes to wash your face, five minutes to get down there and get on watch. Usually, the man came out, oh, twenty minutes after the hour or something like that, calls you, comes back to check and make sure you're up, and you usually always got up and got going by . . . if you had the four to eight

watch, you got up about 3:30.

I don't remember anymore just who it was that I relieved, but it seems to me like . . . looking back on my duty section, it seems to me like it was a guy by the name of Gray that I relieved that morning at 3:45. I remember very definitely that the fellow that relieved me . . . his name was Robert. I forgot what his first name was. But anyway, he was the one that relieved me. But I relieved Gray, and, of course, Gray went up and went to bed.

You check, make your telephone calls, make out your log sheets, see that everything is up to date, drink coffee, sit down there and answer the phone when somebody wanted something, and answer questions. If somebody wanted something started, you sent your messenger to do it, or you call the different engine rooms--your auxiliary engine room, your auxiliary electrical switch board--and you tell them what was to start and who was requesting it and so forth.

The watch that I was on was what they called the power watch. Of course, at that time there wasn't too much power. Of course, keep in mind that we was in dry dock, and we was taking all of our power from the power station over in the yard. So anyway, from 3:30 up until 7:30 it was just routine, just things that come and go--somebody getting up at six o'clock and coming after a

cup of coffee and one thing or another.

So I sent the messenger up at about twenty after seven to call my relief and make sure he was up and that he was on his feet. I was looking forward to my three days off because I was going to turn twenty-one the following day, and that was one of the greatest highlights of my life, to think that I was twenty-one and could belly up to the bar and holler, "Give me a beer!" I knew that they was going to ask me for my ID card, but still and all, it was going to be a damn good feeling to just lay it out there and say, "Okay, buddy. Serve me!" I'd been waiting a long time for that.

While we was down there talking there in the engine room, I heard these explosions. Well, they was just rumbles, me being down in the bow of that ship. Also, sitting in the dry dock there was a lot of vibration. So I asked Rotert, "What the hell is all of that damn noise that's going on?" He said, "They must be really dynamiting the hell out of that damn coral over there on the back side of Ford Island." Then I said, "Well, there ought to be quite a sight," because when all of that dynamite would go off, it'd blow that old coral up out of there. There'd be water geysers going up everywhere else.

So I still had a little while before liberty started. Of course, it was Sunday morning and everything was pretty

slow. I wanted to get me something to eat before I went down and took my bath and packed my clothes and got my leave papers and everything. So I come up out of the engine room, and the engine room, keep in mind, is right down on the bottom of the ship. We came up the ladders out of the engine room. When we came up, we came out on the third deck. Then you had to go from the third deck to the second deck, from the second deck up to the main deck. I think that they had already felt like a lot of this business was coming up, so there was a lot of the hatches that was closed. So you just had a certain route that you had to go.

And so I went up and I walked out on topside. I looked over there and hell's fire! It wasn't dynamite that was going off. All I could see was Japanese planes, and all of Ford Island was just a mass of flames and everything else. Of course, as I sit here and think about it, it looked . . .you'd think that it would take quite awhile. I think everybody was as stupified as I was because an attack by the Japanese fleet was the last thing in the world we expected. In fact, we thought we was impregnable in Pearl Harbor. We had warning systems and everything else.

I was standing there in amazement. I was watching these bombs fall on Ford Island and the damn planes

being bombed and tore up and scattered all over everything, and the buildings on fire. You could look across there, and there wasn't more than about a couple hundred yards and see these sailors running everywhere. Of course, the Tennessee and the California and all of these ships was tied up alongside of Ford Island over there. These sailors, they were all standing around wondering what the hell's going off.

About this time, they finally realized that we had a war on our hands, and they sounded general quarters. At that time, when I was on topside at that time, it was about 7:45, 7:58, eight o'clock, somewhere along through there, because the war hadn't even gotten going good except that those planes came in. The first thing that they did when they came in, if my mind serves me right, was to bomb Ford Island and Hickam Field. They knocked out all of the planes that was on those islands. After they had did that, then they had everything the way they wanted it because they didn't have anything to worry about.

Marcello: What was the weather like that day?

Fickle: Clear and sunny. Just as clear and sunny in the world.

Marcello: Did you have a good view of Battleship Row as well as Ford Island?

Fickle: Oh, like sitting here looking out this window over there at that house.

Marcello: In other words, you may have been, what, 100 yards away?

Fickle: A hundred yards, just the width across the channel there. You could look right across there.

Marcello: What was your first thoughts when you saw what was going on?

Fickle: I didn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. I actually thought that there had to be something other than what I was seeing. It was, what, stupifying, would you say, would be the word for it? But after you stand there and you look for a minute and you see these "eggs" falling and you watch them hit and you hear the explosion and you see the debris flying, you know that there's more to it than what's there.

Marcello: At this stage did you know that they were Japanese planes yet?

Fickle: Yes. I didn't really when I first looked, but when I saw the red ball on their wings, then I realized what they were.

I left the topside, and I headed down. We had to go through the Marine compartment. The Marine compartment put you down on the second deck, and you had to go aft on the second deck and down to the third deck, which was just outside of the engine room, across midship, in

through a hatch, and down into the engine room. As I turned and went from the second deck down the ladder to the third deck, I went through the hatch, and as my head went below what we called a splinter . . . if my mind is still that good, I believe they called it a splinter deck. Anyway, it was the casings of thick metal that protected the bowels of your engine rooms. No, it wasn't the splinter deck. That was your protected deck. Your splinter deck was where your wooden deck was on topside.

As I turned and went below this protective deck, a 500-pound bomb hit in the Marine compartment right above me. It was just forward, and when it came down, it came all the way down to the third deck and then blew straight up. All of this concussion just went right over my head. There was just the rush of air. If I'd been, oh, ten or fifteen seconds later as I came down that ladder out of that Marine compartment going to the engine room, that bomb would have got me.

Marcello: Did the concussion knock you over or anything of that nature?

Fickle: No, because I was below the deck. All I felt was the wind rushing by and a helluva explosion. I couldn't hear anything for three days--the concussion from the thing. But as far my feeling any effects other than

the concussion and the noise, it didn't . . . of course, immediately the bugle went off up on the bridge.

By this time everybody that was aboard ship . . . taking in mind that we had a lot of people aboard that was off the ship. We had a lot of people at church. The sailors used to go to church pretty faithfully. They might get drunk at night, but they all went to church on Sunday. They had to have some way to get their sins off their conscience, I guess. But anyway, we had a lot of our crew members at church that morning because the Catholics had six or seven o'clock mass and the all Protestants . . . they usually had one duty chaplain that preached the word of all of the faiths, whether you was Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, or so forth. We had a lot of the crew that was at church. Of course, when this thing started, there was a lot of them that started back to the ship that was wounded and shot from low-flying, strafing guns off the Japanese planes.

But that particular bomb that hit up there in that Marine compartment wiped out our whole Marine detachment except for just two or three sergeants that was up in the chief's quarters--fifty-eight men, I believe . . . fifty-eight or fifty-nine men that was killed in that one bomb blast. But that was the only bomb that actually hit the ship.

Now they dropped another one . . . when we went into dry dock, that dry dock was big enough to hold one battleship and two destroyers. So consequently, we had two destroyers that was in the dry dock ahead of us. The second bomb that they dropped missed the Pennsylvania and landed right between or right on one of those damn destroyers. That was the Cassin and the Downes was in that dry dock ahead of us, and the bomb just flipped both of them off their damn keel plates and just dumped them. In fact, they was a mass of scrap. I don't believe that they ever got them out of there. They cut them up and took them out of there in pieces.

Then just forward of us, across . . . one of the pictures that I still have in my mind was that this sailor on that . . . I've forgot what the name of the destroyer was, or DE or whatever it was. It was in a floating dry dock right off our starboard bow. And he was the only man aboard that ship that fired a gun. He had an old .50-caliber gun back on the back of that thing, and they tell me . . . of course, I wasn't on topside to see this, but all during that war, even after they had sunk that damned old dry dock, that boat of his was sitting in the water like that with just the back end . . . he was still hammering away with that .50-caliber machine gun. And I think they give him credit for two or three planes that he fired on.

Marcello: Okay, so anyhow, what happened to you after the bomb hit?

Fickle: After the bomb hit, it was just a matter of sitting in a damn hole with no place to go and nothing to do because we were in dry dock, our steam lines were all pulled out, and our screws had all been cleaned. They had been taken off the shafts; they were laying down in the dry dock; they had been pulled out of there by the cranes. Our shafts had been pulled out of the ship, and all of the bearings had been sent to the machine shop to be rebushed and rebored to be put back in there. So actually, for all practical purposes, the Pennsylvania was completely dead.

Marcello: What sort of a feeling do you have to be in this situation? Here you are, at your battle station, which is quite a few decks down.

Fickle: When we started getting the reports of what those torpedo planes and everything was doing to those ships that was surrounding Ford Island over on them Fox piers, the feeling and the word was, "Thank God, we're in dry dock! Thank God, we're in dry dock!" Because the only way that they could have hurt us--and they couldn't have hurt us very much--was to bomb us because there wasn't any way that they could get any of those torpedoes into us, and the torpedoes is what actually wrecked havoc with all of

those big ships. There was just one right after another.

You can feature . . . like you've got a big T here, and you're on the crossbar here, and the leg of that T is sticking down through that harbor like that (gestures). Those planes just had a perfect setup. All they had to do was just peel off over there and get a run, and there wasn't anything where they dropped them because them ships was tied up just fantail to bow, fantail to bow, and they was tied up two abreast all the way down through there. There wasn't anyplace that they could miss. All they had to do was drop it.

Marcello: How long did you stay down there in your battle station altogether?

Fickle: We stayed down there from eight o'clock to about one o'clock.

Marcello: Is that when you finally came up on deck?

Fickle: That's when I finally came up. When I came up out of that engine room is one of the sights that, if I live to be 1,000 years old, I'll never forget.

Marcello: What did it look like?

Fickle: Well, the Arizona . . . well, alongside, right behind us the old USS Helena--the old, original USS Helena--was sitting in the mud, upright but sitting in the mud with the mud practically awash of her decks. The old Oglala was tied up outside . . . the old Oglala was an old

minelaying ship. She was laying outside of the Helena, turned upside down. Up on the bow of us, the Cassin and Downes was laying in that dry dock. Off the starboard bow was the destroyer or DE over there, and the dry dock had been sunk underneath it, and it was catawampous in that dry dock or that floating dock. Then looking on up the channel was the USS Nevada sitting on a mud bank where she had got underway and tried to leave the harbor. She was on her way out. The word was--and I don't know whether it was the truth or not and never did really find out--that it was the chief quartermaster that started her out to sea. At one time I could have told you what his name was, but I don't remember anymore. But anyway, the Nevada was aground at the mouth of the harbor coming out of there, and then looking down Battle-ship Row, here set the California and the Tennessee and . . . what were the other ones? The old cage mast ships. I've even forgotten now.

Marcello: The Tennessee and the West Virginia were there.

Fickle: The West Virginia, yes, and the California, the Maryland. The Maryland was tied up at Pier Eight.

Marcello: She was inboard of the Oklahoma.

Fickle: No, the Maryland was at Pier Eight. Now she wasn't inboard of the Oklahoma, I don't believe.

Marcello: The man that was in here awhile ago, Epps, was aboard the Maryland. He said it was inboard of the Oklahoma (chuckle).

Fickle: Alright, then there was another one of them that was tied up down in the docks below us. I don't remember whether it was one of the cage mast ships.

Marcello: The California?

Fickle: No, the California was sunk. The Tennessee was sunk. The Maryland didn't receive too much damage because she was inboard of the Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma . . . this is another thing that was in my mind. The Oklahoma was upside-down with men walking around on top of it and wondering where they were going to cut into it so they could get the people that was trapped in there out. I went into the Oklahoma after they pumped her out . . . filled her full of concrete, turned her over, and pumped her out. It's an eerie feeling to walk down through there and see all the skulls and bones and skeletons laying here and there where those people had drowned and where they was laying, where their bones had actually settled after it was turned back up and pumped out.

And the old Arizona with her big tripod mast already broke in two, and the both of them had collapsed together and the fire belching out of it.

And that harbor had three or four inches of fuel oil floating around on it--damnest mess you ever seen.

Marcello: What kind of emotions or feelings did you have when you saw this?

Fickle: The emotions I had . . . I really thought that the damn world had come to an end and was all over with except the shouting. That's just the way you felt. You looked out there, and you looked at ships that you had been trained and led to believe that there wasn't no way that these things could happen to them. And to think this happened within a short period of a couple of hours! Now all of this had gone on in an hour or an hour and a half--that all of this damage had been done. Then to come up and see this, it just really cut the bank out from under you, and you just felt like that you'd be lied to, that you'd actually been lied to--that you'd done all of this training and listened to all of this stuff, and here saw the very things that they'd told you couldn't happen but had happened. It does leave you with a sinking feeling.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors that you heard in the aftermath of the attack?

Fickle: Oh, the rumors! Well, they floated like drops of rain that the Japanese had banded together, that they had made invasions over on the other side of the islands, that there were snipers throughout everywhere that you looked. In the cane fields and on all of the high towers there were so many snipers that it was practically unsafe to show yourself, you know.

Another thing was that, hell, we didn't have any toilet facilities aboard ship at first because we was in dry dock, so we was using the damn toilets over on the beach. Hellfire, the way those "jar heads" was operating over there, I was afraid to go take a leak, afraid the damn "jar heads" would shoot you, you know (chuckle). And if you don't know what a "jar head" is, I'm talking about the Marines. There for awhile they were shooting at practically everything that walked or talked. Them yardbirds was working over there, and they was down in that dry dock working down below in there with big tarpaulins over them doing their welding, getting this ship put back together. They said, "Damnfire, you got to have three Marines guarding you to keep some sonuvabitch from shooting you!" (Chuckle)

But it was a mess. I mean, it didn't slack off. Of course, the rumors was that there was midget submarines in the harbor. In fact, there was. They actually saw some of the little midget submarines. That night there were fires going over on that old Arizona and fires still burning all over everything, and everywhere you looked there was smoke coming out. There were rumors about Japanese with high-powered rifles shooting everybody that walked and the "jar heads" shooting at you with guns and everything else. It was a "SNAFU." There's no

doubt in my mind that if the Japanese had of brought twenty, thirty, or forty thousand soldiers along with them they could have took the damn islands.

Marcello: What sort of an appetite or thirst did you have during all of this commotion?

Fickle: None, none. I don't remember that I was even hungry. I really don't. Now this is one of the things I don't recall, whether I was hungry or what. I just know that the time seemed to me like it went fast. It didn't drag. One of the reasons why it didn't drag was because we had been working down there in the engine room Friday night and Saturday, and we'd taken a lot of the steam lines apart and a lot of the stuff that we had to take care of ourselves, and these was the things that we were working on when all of this was going on. So really, looking back on it, we didn't have too much time to think about what was going on. We was just trying to get our own damn hide put together to save it.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Fickle: From then . . .

Marcello: Were you trying to get the Pennsylvania as seaworthy as possible?

Fickle: Yes, this is what we were doing. We were trying to get that ship. . . from then until . . . I think that from December 7 until we left out there somewhere around the

20th or 21st, I went ashore one time. Of course, they let everybody have four or five hours of leave to go ashore and just to walk around and and take a cab and do whatever you wanted to, to go around just to see what damage was really done.

Really, when you get right down to it, except for the military installations, there wasn't too much that you could see that was tore up or burned up or anything anymore than what it was before this all happened because they took out . . . they concentrated their strike force on the military installations. They really did.

Marcello: I think most of what fell on Honolulu just happened to be shrapnel and so on from the antiaircraft weapons.

Fickle: Right. A lot of it could have been because, really, I never did talk to anybody that . . . oh, I imagine there were some of those pilots that strafed the civilian population and stuff. Now I know that they strafed a helluva lot of them damn sailors and soldiers over there on Hickam Field and Schofield Barracks and there in Pearl. Kind of like I said awhile ago, those guys that had been to church, when they found out what was going on, they was all coming back to the ships, and the Japanese strafed the dickens out of a lot of them. But I don't know.

We left Pearl Harbor . . . we stayed there, and, of course, as soon as we got our ship back in operation, we got out of dry dock and tied up to the pier and got our groceries back aboard and got back on our own power and kind of got things settled down and everything . . . you got used to looking across there and seeing all of those old big ships sitting in the mud. Of course, a lot of them they'd already started working on and closing up the holes in them and started patching them up and pumping them out. One of the things they had to do, they had to pump them out and drag them out and get them away from the ones that were still good so that they could get them out, see. All of it put together, it was so much activity and things going on that you just really didn't have time to get real excited about anything that was going on.

I know that, myself, we was permitted to send one postcard home. The only thing that we could put on that postcard was, "Mother, I am well. Don't worry." Of course, my mother was at home at the time that this all happened, and, of course, she knew that we was in Pearl because they didn't censor any of our mail at that time. Somebody come running over to my mother's there in Leuders --still old dear old Leuders--and wanted to know whether

she heard the news. She said, "What news?" She said, "Well, the Japanese are attacking Pearl Harbor." Of course, there wasn't no such thing as television in them days--nothing but radio. Consequently, the radio went on, and I guess she sat in front of that radio from then on.

One of the things that I remember also was that we had been back to the States just before the war started, and while we was back in the United States, I come down with an appendicitis. They'd cut out my appendix over on the old Helena that was the same ship that came back out there with us and that was sitting right behind us when all of this thing started. I was just still actually recuperating, so really I wasn't in position where I could do much straining. Of course, I did a lot of pushing and pulling and carrying, but I couldn't strain anything because I'd just had my darn old stomach cut open. Of course, back in them days they told you not to strain and don't do nothing for a month or so after you've been operated on.

Marcello: Well, you evidently were recuperated enough, though, that you had that hot date on the weekend.

Fickle: Oh, yes. Yes, well, of course, that didn't have anything to do with that, you know. That was a horse of another color (chuckle). Besides that, I was twenty-one years

old. I didn't give a damn what happened, you know.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Fickle, I think that's probably a good spot to end this interview. We'll leave the rest to everybody's imagination.

Fickle: Yes, okay.

Marcello: I want to thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting things, and I think that scholars are going to find it very valuable some day.

Fickle: Well, I appreciate it, and I'm glad that I had a chance to talk about it.

Marcello: So am I.

Fickle: Thank you.