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Interview with
Nick L. Kouretas
June 8, 1976

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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OPEN
Nick L. Kouretas
(Signature)

Date: June 8, 1976

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Oral History Collection

Nick L. Kouretas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Benbrook, Texas

Date: June 8, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Nick Kouretas for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 8, 1976, in Benbrook, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Kouretas in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the cruiser USS Raleigh during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Kouretas, 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. Kouretas: Right. Well, I was born in Sacramento, California, on June 27, 1919. I graduated from Sacramento High School, and naturally in 1937, those were depression years. I attended for three months Sacramento Junior College. I had goals that I wanted to attain; I wanted to study law. But because of the Depression and financial circumstances, my family couldn't provide me with

this particular education. I seeked employment. I went to work for Fredrikson and Westbrook highway contractors and worked in highway building at that time. So we were building highways throughout the states of Nevada, California, Idaho, and Oregon at that time. I had started as a laborer and then finally worked up to where I was an assistant time-keeper, with the concern.

Then, if you recall, the first Army draft was in 1940, and, fortunately, when they drew those numbers out of the fishbowls, I was one of the original draftees to get drafted into the Army. My young brother Jimmy, Jim L. Kouretas, was graduating from high school that particular year, and he had a scholarship to Washington State University to play football. He was quite an athlete. He decided that he was going into the service, and he was going to join the Navy.

So in the meantime, we were building a road just out of Roseville, California, which is about twenty-eight some-odd miles from Sacramento, where my parents and my sisters and brother live. And in visiting with them and coming down on weekends, I would take my brother to the recruiting office. He stated that he was going into the Navy, and I said, "Well, I'm being drafted into the Army," and I says, "I've got a one-year tour of duty to do with

that draft."

So finally . . . I gave credit to this old Naval recruiter because he was pretty shrewd. He said, "Now look, you don't want to go in the Army." He says, "Why don't you join the Navy with your brother?" He says, "We'll keep you together; we'll put you through training; you'll go aboard the same ship," and this and that. I thought, "Well, you know, why not?" So I finally consented to enlist in the Navy, and we did.

We both joined the Navy on February 11, 1941. In San Francisco, we took the oath, and we were transferred to San Diego to the training station where we went through training. As they said, they kept us assigned together, and we were both assigned to the USS Raleigh, CL-7, four-stacker, light cruiser.

Marcello: Let me just go back a little bit and go into some more background details. At the time that you enlisted in the Navy, did you give any thought to the possibility of war with Japan, or were your eyes turned mainly toward the war in Europe at that time?

Kouretas: No, no, it was mainly with the war in Europe. I had no idea that Japan would ever enter the war. Joining on the Pacific Coast and being sent out to the Pacific Fleet, I felt, "Well, until Hitler gets things going over there,

we're not going to have to go over and start any fighting or anything of that nature." I had no idea whatsoever.

In fact, like I say, I didn't have any idea until, as I told you earlier . . . finally, we came to Pearl Harbor. We were assigned aboard the USS Raleigh as seamen. I became a yeoman striker; my brother became a carpenter's mate striker. His original plans . . . he wanted to get in the "V" Division. But because of the "V" Division was a small division--we only had two planes--I told him . . . see, I'd already made third class and was preparing to go for second class yeoman, and he was still a seaman first class. I said, "Now Jim, rates are important, and money is important." I said, "You can wait forever and never get in 'V' Division." So he began striking for carpenter's mate, and he began to make his rates. He became third class, then second class carpenter's mate, and he started catching right up with me, and I was proud of him for that.

But at any rate, I recall that we were on patrol the week prior to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Okay, this is getting ahead of our story now because I have a lot of questions before we even get anywhere near December 7, 1941.

Kouretas: Right, right.

Marcello: Let's back up once again. When you were in boot camp, I would assume that the boot training was speeded up quite a bit. In other words, by this time, they had cut down on the amount of time that one spent in boot camp.

Kouretas: Right.

Marcello: As I recall, at one time, it was something like twelve weeks, was it not? And how long was it when you went through? Do you remember?

Kouretas: I can't recall exactly, but it was shorter than twelve weeks, I remember. I don't know if it was eight weeks or something in that area. I recall that we completed boot camp, and they gave us a leave, you know, to go home, visit our parents, a short leave. We reported back, and . . . I forget the carrier that carried us over to Hawaii, over to Pearl, but we arrived on the receiving ship at Pearl Harbor. There was many men that were displaced at different ships and things of that nature. I recall that my brother and I were sent over to the USS Raleigh, you know.

Marcello: What were your first reactions when you learned that you were going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Kouretas: Well, you know, only having read and studied in school about the islands and the hula girls, I thought, "This

is going to be a beautiful situation." You know, sunny sands and palm trees and hula girls and everything of this nature (chuckle). Then I discovered that that wasn't what we had when we got there. You know, for a long time, we were restricted as recruits aboard ship. When we began to make liberties, I found Honolulu very different from what I had expected, you know.

Then I found our society--and this disturbed me--you know, the wealthy people during the Depression that were at the Ala Moana Hotel, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, thought, "Those dirty sailors! Look at them!" You know, we were never given any type of respect--by merchants, by society, by anybody in total. This is what really turned me, you know, afterwards. Now I'm getting a little ahead. We'll come back to it. But after Pearl Harbor, and then finally after restrictions and everything finally when we were able to make a liberty and go back over to Honolulu, I remember walking up past the Royal Hawaiian, the Ala Moana Hotel, by the Benson-Smith Drugstore there . . . this was a big drugstore, you know, like Eckerd's or Skillern's, right on the beach. And then right behind there I had a little one-room apartment that I rented, you know, because we had liberties, and we spent time ashore. I remember everybody waving, you know, "Give 'em hell boys!" and waving flags, and I thought, "Oh, boy! Isn't this something!"

Marcello: Now this is after the attack that they were doing this?

Kouretas: Right, right. Before that, you know, "We don't want you sailors out here on Waikiki Beach!" You know, "We don't want you looking at our pretty girls in bathing suits! We don't want you walking along!" The Hawaiians, you know, said, "Leave the 'wahine' alone," you know, the girls. "Don't bother the 'wahine,'" you know. So we just went all through that, but I seen a total change after the war. But I'm getting way ahead of my story here again.

Marcello: Okay, so you were assigned to the Raleigh. What'd you think about the idea of going aboard a cruiser, and the Raleigh in particular?

Kouretas: Well, I don't know anything about the Raleigh. They said, "Well, you're assigned to a light cruiser; the Raleigh is a four-stack cruiser." I finally went aboard, and I see, you know, all these nice, modern ships, like the Curtiss and the Argonne and different ships in the harbor. I saw this old four-stacker sticking up there, and I thought, "What the hell is that?" you know (chuckle). Then I discovered she was commissioned, I think, back in World War I, you know. I thought, "My, land!" No bunks, you know. When they built it, they forgot to put bunks aboard her. They had tracks for dropping the mines and everything

down the main deck. We had our mess tables and our benches tied up above deck, and mess attendants would lower them to feed us, and this and that. We swung hammocks, and I slept in a hammock until 1942.

Marcello: Did you have very much trouble getting used to one of those hammocks?

Kouretas: Oh, I sure did! And rats! Like I wish Jack Moser could be here to tell you because we had rats the size of dogs, you know, running along the pipes and everything, you know. It just scared me to death, you know, trying to stay in the hammock and the ship rolling and those rats running alongside, and I wanted . . . jeez, you know, I just couldn't believe it. I said, "This isn't so!"

Marcello: Well, this evidently was not something that was common in the Navy. I've never heard any of the other Pearl Harbor survivors talk about rats aboard their ships.

Kouretas: Oh, we had rats! I wish Jack Moser was here to tell you. We used to have bounties on rats, you know (chuckle). We had rat guards on the lines when we tied up. These rats that we had were so big that they would go ashore, make a liberty, and come back. They'd jump the rat guard and come back, you know (chuckle). That's what they used to say, that the Raleigh had the biggest rats in the fleet.

Marcello: This may be leading into my next question (chuckle), so I might as well ask it at this point. What was the morale

like aboard the Raleigh in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Kouretas: Well, we had good morale. I forget the exact complement of the crew and the officers. I think we had somewhere in the area of 450-500 men. I don't know exactly. But we had . . . like I was just last month up in Oklahoma City and talking to . . . well, I don't know what he retired at . . . but Don Korn . . . we used to call him "Popcorn" because his name was K-o-r-n, and they still call him "Pop," you know. He's in the tank business up in Oklahoma City or something. So at any rate, I had a lot of admiration for young Lieutenant Korn because we had a very small aviation force aboard ship, with two scout planes. He was very congenial; he was very outspoken to the crew. We had a real good thing.

Now there was some officers that there was a personality clash, you know. We had a lieutenant commander that was the executive officer that we used to call "Bly," you know. I'm not going to mention his name (chuckle), but at any rate, he was just one of those strict Naval personnel that believed by the book. When we'd sound general quarters, if he found somebody that just ran to his general quarters station and he had the strap loose on his helmet, he would pull the helmet by the forehead and put the back of it into his neck and kind of choke him, you know. He'd say,

"Now if a bomb hit, that's what would happen to you." He was trying to impress upon them the importance of different things that we had to do to survive.

But as a rule, we all got along real well together, and I think this is what made it for us, you know, kept us all together.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Raleigh?

Kouretas: Well . . .

Marcello: The rats must have liked it (chuckle), but what was the food like?

Kouretas: Oh, gee! Well, boy, you know . . . at the present time, I'm a narcotic specialist. I consult to the Department of Justice, to the Bureau of Prisons. I consult to the United States Air Force in relation to drug abuse and narcotic addiction. I work for the City of Fort Worth in narcotics. I've been in many prisons within our system, you know, and I eat prison food. And I says, "How beautiful! If we only had this during the war!" See, it was many times, like when we were finally up in Attu . . . I'll get to that in a later part of the program here.

But when we were up in the Aleutians for ten, eleven months, you know, taking supplies aboard ship at sea, we never had fresh fruit and we never had vegetables. I won't eat Spam today or will I permit my wife to bring a can of

Spam in this house, you know, because it was Spam, powdered eggs. Well, they tried. I will say this. They tried in all respects. Now we didn't starve. We had sufficient diet to sustain ourselves, but many times you would think of mother's food at home and think about the different restaurants in San Francisco or Seattle or San Diego or Los Angeles, where you'd . . . "Boy, I wish I was eating a Mexican dinner there," or something of that nature.

So the food wasn't all that too much, but I think fortunately, being in the Navy, we were extremely lucky because after having heard from fellows that were in the Army and in the Marines with K-rations and things of this nature, I think that we bettered by far, as far as the food was concerned, even though it wasn't, you know, the best (chuckle) that we'd have liked to have been served.

Marcello: Well, what was it like prior to the actual Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor? What was the food like prior to Pearl Harbor?

Kouretas: Oh, well, prior to that, we were getting fresh fruit-- oranges, apples, you know, bananas. Many times, like on weekends, we'd get regular eggs, you know, sunny-side, bacon--real good meals--pork chops, things of this nature. But then after we got into serving at sea and more or less during patrol and battle . . . and then just coming along for that oil supply, we would rendezvous with a tanker,

and they'd bring aboard the mail and food and that, and they'd ship it over with breaches buoy. We were finding that, you know, we weren't getting all these things that we were getting before (chuckle). And it was understandable. It was understandable.

Marcello: So generally speaking, the food was pretty good prior to the coming of World War II.

Kouretas: Right, right.

Marcello: And I think this in part would have probably attributed to the high morale in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy.

Kouretas: Right.

Marcello: You had good food, a fairly congenial crew, and everybody was a volunteer. I'm sure that was important. . .

Kouretas: Right, right . . .

Marcello: . . . so far as morale was concerned.

Kouretas: And we were like brothers, you know. When we made liberties in different ports, like at San Diego or San Francisco or Seattle or Honolulu or the Fiji Islands, wherever we made a liberty, you know, they were always right there, you know. You needed a ten-dollar bill, you saw a shipmate and he'd give it to you, you know, or vice versa. It was just one big happy family. Everybody kind of stuck together. You know, it's really something to let so much time elapse in life, and then it's only through this Pearl Harbor Survivors Association that I'm renewing acquaintances that have so much meaning and purpose. Like Jack Moser, you

know, he's coming down Friday; he's attending a wedding, and so my wife and I invited him and his wife and his children to stay with us. We're glad to welcome them. Like Charlie Knapp, you know, it's just wonderful to hear about these people, you know. You can mention the movies that he was in.

Marcello: Okay (chuckle).

Kouretas: Chinatown, with Jack Nicholson, and . . . I forget the other one. But at any rate, we were very close. And, you know, one thing that we've always had is a lot of pride.

You know, we were the first ship at Pearl Harbor to get torpedoed--USS Raleigh. As they came in from the west over the mountains, the lead commander . . . see, we were tied up at Fox 12 off Ford Island. In front of us was the USS Detroit at Fox 11, the same class, Marblehead cruiser. Behind us was the battleship Utah, USS Utah. Now when he seen the Utah, he thought that was Battleship Row. He peeled off and he dropped a torpedo.

It's very funny . . . I talked to Pat Duncan, who was a bugler on watch at that time and also a boatswain's mate, and to Lieutenant Korn, the aviator, one of the aviators aboard ship, who was the officer of the watch, standing watch on the quarter-deck. And the boatswain's mate of the watch says, "What's that guy doing?" And

he had dropped down on the water. Korn says, "Oh, he's practicing a torpedo attack!" So finally, the boatswain says, "Well, what'd he drop in the water?" Korn says, "I don't know!" (Chuckle) Then they saw this "fish" coming. Well, at that time, like I said, I was down on the main deck . . .

Marcello: We're getting way ahead of the story again. I'm not anywhere near to get to the attack yet.

Kouretas: Okay, all right, all right.

Marcello: So, let's back up again. We're going to keep this in some kind of chronological order, if we can.

Kouretas: Okay, good.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned the fact that you were assigned to the Raleigh with your brother, Jim. Now what advantages or disadvantages came about with the two of you serving on the same ship? How'd that work out?

Kouretas: Well, I think it was a tremendous disadvantage to a great degree. Because he was a younger brother, he was dependent on me in many areas. Now I would always get him out of trouble, you know. As you know, as Greeks, we have a tremendous gambling instinct. I was a good gambler; he was a poor gambler, see. (Chuckle) So he would lose money.

Naturally, like after the war started, after December 7, we were at sea, and, of course, they were paying full pay, you know, until they started paying for health and comfort,

you know. You had to keep so much of your money on your books because . . . like we went up to Alaska, and I saw Seabees carrying bankrolls, you know, \$40,000, \$30,000, \$20,000 in a bankroll, you know.

So, where I would go aboard . . . the different games . . . there'd be a crap game like at a fire room number one or a crap game in the laundry room or a dice game here or a card game or a poker game here, and whoever was running the game would say . . . well, I'd sit down, I'd say, "Well, give me a hundred dollars worth of checks," you know. They'd say, "Well your brother lost eighty-five. You gotta pay for that first," you know. I'd say, "Well, hey, man, I'm not taking care of his!"

So finally, after we were up in the Aleutians, Attu and Kiska, when the Japanese took the Ray Islands, we bombarded . . . we were one of the ships that bombarded to take that back. We broke a hole in the shaft alley, and we filled it up with cement at sea. I forget if it was the port or starboard shaft alley. But we came in on one prop into Bremerton Navy Yard for repairs.

So we were going to be in there quite some time for repairs, and they gave us a leave, you know, to go home. I had money, you know, and my young brother was totally indigent, you know, had nothing. So I says, "What are you

going to do with your ten days?" You know, I think we got ten days' leave. I said, "I'm flying back to Sacramento to visit Mom and the folks." He says, "Well, I'm going to hitchhike, but when you get there, tell them I'm on my way." So I said, "Okay." So I played like, you know, "It's your fault." I says, "Now aren't you sorry you gambled and lost your money and everything? You'd have money to go home on." He said, "Okay."

So I know we were on liberty together in Seattle that morning, and I went up to the airlines office and bought two tickets. He was outside. I called a cab, and I says, "Take me to the airport." I was all packed. I said, "Jim, I'll tell the folks you're coming." I said, "I'll see you later," and I jumped in the cab. I told the cab driver, "Go around the corner," you know. I came back around the corner, and he was sitting on the curb, you know, crying. Now he was nineteen years old, just a kid. So I said, "Get in here!" you know. So I put him in the cab, and we went out to the airport, and we flew home. We had that leave at that time, you know, with the family.

Then finally, if you recall when the Sullivan boys were killed aboard the destroyer, the five brothers . . .

Marcello: Yes.

Kouretas: Okay, now an order came out from the Bureau of Personnel

in Washington that only brothers had to be separated. So the commander called us down to his quarters and asked us, "Are you the only brothers in your family?" I said, "Yes." He says, "Well, we have an order that we have to separate only brothers aboard the same ship." So he says, "I'm going to leave it totally up to you. Now whichever one of you decides to be transferred," he says, "we'll transfer him." So I started talking to Jim, and I thought, "He's younger, this is his home; we've been on here for a few years; he's got friends; and wherever I go, I'm going to make it." So I said, "Jim, you stay aboard, and I'm gonna go." So they transferred me from up in the Aleutians in '43 aboard a tanker. On a breaches buoy, they dropped me in that cold Aleutian water taking me aboard.

I came back to the receiving ship in San Francisco for assignment. I got assigned to shore duty with the Twelvth Naval District in the discipline office. That's when I changed my rate from yeoman second class to boatswain's mate master-at-arms second class, and then I made first class upon my discharge.

Then, finally, the Raleigh, from the Aleutians, went down to South America and got patrol duty down in Valparaiso and Chile and Santiago, and my brother kept writing all

these beautiful letters about the beautiful liberties.

I thought, "Oh, boy, I got beat," you know.

Marcello: So there were more disadvantages than there were advantages to having your brother aboard that ship?

Kouretas: Right. Right, to a degree, yes. See, and another thing was the fear. Like the traumatic experience . . . and I thought I was going to become psychotic at Pearl Harbor from missing my brother.

Marcello: We'll talk about this story a little bit later on because I think that is a really important story.

Kouretas: Yes, yes.

Marcello: I'm referring, of course, to one you told me in our pre-interview conference. Let me ask you just a few general questions now about that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy. How difficult, or how slow, or fast, was rank at that particular time?

Kouretas: Pre-Pearl Harbor?

Marcello: Yes.

Kouretas: Oh, it was very difficult, very difficult. You had to have certain time in certain ranks, you know, ratings, before you were even eligible. Competition was by testing, etc. Then afterwards, they started rating and ranking people, you know.

Marcello: How was it that you decided to strike for yeoman?

Kouretas: Well, I was pretty good. . . like in high school, I took typing and business courses, etc., somewhat preparing myself for studying law and all that. I wanted to know . . . I was good in legislating letters, formulating letters, I might say, or forms or things of this nature. I thought, "Well, this is a rating that I could excel at better because I'm not mechanically inclined. I'm not going to be a carpenter's mate or a shipfitter or a fireman." I didn't know anything about an engine room or a boiler room (chuckle). So I thought, "Well, I'll strike for a yeoman," you know, because it seemed appropriate for me. The opportunity came up, and I did . . . and I made my ratings right along with the best of them.

Marcello: I assume that most of the training that you received here was on-the-job-training, since you really hadn't gone to any yeoman's school, is that correct?

Kouretas: No, right, no. It was on-the-job training. In fact, as the executive officer's yeoman, I was in charge of the plan-of-the-day. I would go down to the executive officer every evening . . . now plan of the day--5:30 a.m., reveille; 6:00 a.m., breakfast; 6:30, this particular training; or 7:00 a.m., practice of the quarters of whatever it was. We'd write out this whole plan-of-the-day, and I was in charge to see that plan-of-the-day was handled throughout

the ship by the different officers and the different boat-swain's mates of the division, etc.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little about the maneuvers and training that the Raleigh participated in prior to the actual attack at Pearl Harbor. First, let me ask this question. What was the function of the Raleigh? In other words, what was its primary duty as a World War I vintage, four-stacker cruiser?

Kouretas: Okay. We had Admiral Theobald. He was the commander of Destroyer Flotilla One of the Pacific Fleet. We were a flagship, you know, and his title was, as I said, commander of Flotilla One of the Pacific Destroyer Fleet.

Marcello: So you were flying the admiral's flag?

Kouretas: Right, right. We had Admiral Theobald and Captain Simons, who was our skipper. Primarily, we would get out with the destroyers and rendezvous and go through different training sessions, and the admiral would send messages, etc. Naturally, being a low-class petty officer, I had no knowledge of what was going on within the fleet orders, etc., but we were in training. I do recall specifically, as I said, that week prior because I thought this was very unusual.

Marcello: Now up until this time, the training had been more or less routine, I gather.

Kouretas: Right.

Marcello: And then about a week before December 7, the routine changes. And even you, as a young yeoman, were able to discern that change.

Kouretas: Right. Because, see, prior to that the planes would take off, and they'd pull a sock behind them. Well, we'd practice antiaircraft battery; we'd have targets floating out there. We had six-inch guns that was our main armament; we had three-inch antiaircraft guns and .50-caliber machine guns and one-pounders. We would practice different target practice and things of this particular nature. But up until that time, I thought it was strictly routine, you know; it's part of our job, you know; it's part of the Navy.

But, as I say, the week prior to the attack was very unusual because we could almost anticipate when these different drill practices would come up, you know. They weren't too unscheduled to cause discomfort or anything of that nature, but this particular general quarters session came up like two o'clock in the morning or something, which was very unusual. Everybody manned their general quarters station that particular evening, and we were at general quarters a longer time than we were during drill practices or something of that nature.

Marcello: Normally, how long were you at . . . how long did you

remain at general quarters, that is, prior to this one that was called at two or three o'clock in the morning?

Kouretas: Oh, maybe like a two-hour session or three-hour session or something of that nature.

Marcello: But how long did you remain at your stations during this general quarters that was called early in the morning?

Kouretas: About five to six hours, and I thought "What's happening? Something's happening." Then I saw that they were unloading all the ready boxes and taking the target ammunition out of the ready boxes and putting it on and sending it down into the ammunition rooms and bringing up live ammunition and filling the three-inch ammunition boxes with three-inch antiaircraft live ammunition. I saw the aviation ordnance crew out there on the deck where the catapults were with the two planes; they were mounting the .50-caliber machine guns. At that time, they only used the planes to go, like, in to pick up mail or something of that nature. They really weren't mounted with any type of armament. So they put the mine racks on, and I thought, "Well, hey, something's up. Something's up." Then, finally, we were . . . I think we went to a certain condition because up until that time we were at like a ready condition, and then we went to a four on-four off condition, which was almost like wartime.

Marcello: That's four hours on duty, four hours off?

Kouretas: Four hours on, four off, you know. They kept half the ship always alert, you know. So I said, "Something's wrong," you know. I could see the morale, you know, and I mean the scuttlebutt aboard ship. "Hey, something's up," you know. Everybody's talking. "What the hell's happening?" you know. Of course, we knew that Hitler was attacking over there, and we thought, "Well, maybe their forces are coming out into the Pacific or something." We had no idea it was Japanese at that time.

So then I knew that we pulled in, like I say, that Friday morning early.

Marcello: Okay, you pulled into Pearl Harbor on Friday, December 5, 1941.

Kouretas: Pearl Harbor, December 5, right.

Marcello: Okay, let me ask you another general question at this point. Let's talk just a little bit about your liberty routine. Now normally, in those pre-Pearl Harbor days, how did your liberty routine work when you were in port?

Kouretas: Pearl Harbor?

Marcello: Yes.

Kouretas: I caught the duty one in thirteen.

Marcello: Which meant what?

Kouretas: One night in thirteen nights, I had to stay aboard ship with the duty.

Marcello: Now was this unusual for you, or was this generally the case throughout the ship?

Kouretas: No, no, no. Everybody went on liberty. Of course, like, you know, at the end of the working day, like, your job is over at college and you go home, in the morning you have to show up. So liberty expired at 7:45 or eight o'clock in the morning, and you were back aboard ship, see. But then this one particular duty night, you stayed aboard.

Marcello: Now let me ask you this. Normally, it was true on most of the ships that even when one had liberty he had to be back aboard his ship at twelve o'clock midnight unless he had some place to stay in town. Now how about aboard the Raleigh? Did you have to be back at midnight there, or could anybody have overnight liberty under any circumstances?

Kouretas: Oh, yes. Well, we had what we called "Cinderella liberties" --the midnight liberties. That's what they call "Cinderella liberties."

Marcello: I'd never heard that term before.

Kouretas: Yes, "Cinderella liberty," you know. At twelve o'clock you had to be back aboard, but now if you had a place of residence, if you could show where you were staying and this and that, then you had an overnight liberty.

Marcello: But in your case, then, you had an overnight liberty because you mentioned awhile ago that you had an apartment.

Kouretas: Right, right. And then you had weekend liberties, and then you had seventy-two-hour liberties, you know, and forty-eight-hour liberties.

Marcello: How hard was it to get the weekend liberties?

Kouretas: Well, it wasn't too hard. It was a matter of if you did your job, and your chief boatswain's mate of your division and your division officer saw to it that you deserved it, they would go along with it. You put in for it, see. You would have to apply for this, see. "I want a forty-eight-hour or seventy-two-hour liberty or a seventy-two-hour pass on this particular weekend," and then it had to go through the chain of command and be approved, you know, by the boatswain's mate of your division, by the division officer, by the executive officer, and then it would come down approved. Usually, like, if you planned that for the following weekend, you would make application like Monday or Tuesday, and by Thursday or Friday you would know if you were going to receive it.

Marcello: Was it very hard to get one of these weekend liberties?

Kouretas: Not really, not in the pre-war period. Afterwards, yes. Nobody got ashore afterwards.

Marcello: I would assume, however, that there was a certain limit to the number of these weekend liberties that they would give, wasn't there?

Kouretas: Oh, yes. They tried to watch. See, we had what we called the port and starboard watch. They divided the ship into equal . . . many times we'd pull into ports, and we'd pull in, like, at seven or eight o'clock in the morning in port. We're going to take on supplies, ammunition, oil, etc., whatever. So we're going to be in there until ten o'clock in the evening or eight o'clock, nine o'clock, whatever. So finally, they decided . . . well, they were very lenient as far as that goes, you know. They believed in health and comfort for the crew, and they said, "Well, the port watch has the liberty." So that half . . . like in San Diego, instead of rigging the gangplank, they'd just rig a Jacob's ladder and drop the Jacob's ladder over. They'd go aboard a launch, and they'd go into shore, and then they'd come back at midnight, see. That's what we call a "Cinderella liberty."

Marcello: And this sort of thing did operate prior to Pearl Harbor, also?

Kouretas: Right, right, right. I recall one time we were in San Diego. I happened to have the port watch, which was restricted aboard ship, and my brother was on the starboard watch. They let them all go ashore because they knew we were going back out into the Pacific. This was after the war had started. So like all crazy sailors . . . and I don't know why, but they had an unconscious thinking of being

destroyed, I think. See, Pearl Harbor was very traumatic, and to think that you were going to survive it was unbelievable in itself. But then even after Pearl Harbor, as we went into 1942 and 1943, we kept thinking, well, you know, this is why sailors became insane during World War II. They would make liberties in San Francisco; they would be rolled by prostitutes and by barmaids for thousands and thousands of dollars. Being with the discipline office, I used to get these reports, and I used to think, "How could you be such a chump to let some gal take you for all that money?" you know, and things of this nature. But I think that because of the time and the conditions that the nation was in and what was happening to us, we all sort of had a feeling of eventual destruction, you know, that we were going to be annihilated, that we weren't going to live. So they began throwing their money away and throwing . . . I think this hurt a lot of that particular generation in their thinking. I remember many of them became psychotic. I visited many of the Veteran's Administration hospitals and saw some of these kids that I knew that at one time had all their facilities. I can understand how a man could break under such tension and pressure.

Marcello: Now this was all a condition that existed after Pearl Harbor.

Kouretas: Right, right.

Marcello: Let me ask you this question. It really has me curious. How was it that you were able to maintain an apartment in Honolulu prior to December 7, 1941? I don't know what your rank was, but whatever it was, you weren't making very much money.

Kouretas: I was a seaman first class making \$36 a month. But now when I went aboard ship as an apprentice seaman making \$21 a month, being of Greek extraction and being very sharp, as I say, I noticed everybody, you know, and I began to become aware of different little things that were happening aboard ship. I saw some of these chiefs being in the loan racket, the "four-for-five".

Marcello: In other words, loan four dollars and get five back.

Kouretas: On payday, every two weeks. And if you couldn't pay the five, pay the dollar interest, see. You'd loan out . . . if I give you four dollars, now I want five in two weeks' payday. Now if you can't pay me, that's okay. Give me that dollar, but next week, two weeks from now, you still owe me five. You know, it was legal and they permitted this. Now the paymaster sat here, and the boatswain master-at-arms, ship boatswain master-at-arms, the first lieutenant . . . and I sat down . . . you know, these were mess tables. They would drop them on payday, and they would have this cash and pay them off. At the end, I would be there with my cigar box and my little book,

you know.

So when I saw this--I observed this--I immediately wrote . . . and I had a little cash that I had saved from the construction job, and I asked my folks to send me . . . they sent me a thousand dollars, which I loaned out in two weeks. So, you see (chuckle), being a thirty-six dollar a month seaman second class, I was making during those bad depression years . . . I was making \$300 to \$350 a month.

Marcello: Which was very good money.

Kouretas: Very good. I was living high on the hog. I wish Jack Moser was here because he used to say, you know, that the Greek racketeer (chuckle) had everything going aboard ship, you know. I was in the "four-for-five" racket; I run a couple of crap games; and I could make money. Well, my brother was just the opposite. You know, he'd lose money (chuckle). So I had more or less taken care of him. But this is the way I maintained my apartment.

Marcello: What sort of an apartment was it?

Kouretas: It was just a little one-room, you know, a little kitchenette, you know, a little bachelor apartment. It wasn't a high, exclusive apartment, but it was in a nice location. I could walk across the street to Waikiki, over to the beach by the Royal Hawaiian and the Ala Moana Hotel, and lay out there in my bathing suit and see these pretty

girls. Even back then, they were pretty.

Marcello: Why, I bet there couldn't have been any more than ten people in the whole Pacific Fleet of your particular rank that had an apartment in Honolulu, though. I mean, a single man. I just don't think many people had apartments.

Kouretas: No, no, I don't think there were too many at that time.

Marcello: What did you normally do when you went on liberty?

Kouretas: Well, you know, I always, you know, sort of felt myself as a young, debonair playboy, free life, freelancing. You know, like say, even after the war and I got out, I was in the nightclub business; I was in the gambling industry in Nevada for many years; and I was somewhat like a playboy. I loved being with the girls, having fun. You know, they used to tell me, "You got an ego that a Beacon's truck couldn't move," you know. I had to be praised; I had to be made to feel like everybody would say, "Hey, they all know Nick. They all know Nick off the Raleigh." When I'd go, I'd spend my money. I just wanted everybody to have a good time. I just had to have that feeling, you know, that I was being able to provide this. It made me feel good to make other people feel good, you know. So I guess (chuckle) you'd just call me a Navy playboy. I guess that's what you'd call me.

Marcello: I've got another general question concerning liberties.

It's kind of an important question, and I want to get your observations on it. Most people like to say that if the Japanese were going to attack Pearl Harbor, a Sunday would have been the best time to do so because everybody would be hungover from a rowdy Saturday night previous to that Sunday. How would you reply to an observation of this nature? Is it an accurate statement? Is it inaccurate? Can you expand upon it?

Kouretas: Well, I think that to a degree I would say that was so because having been in Honolulu for all those years making liberties and along River Street . . . I know you know what River Street is, you know--tattoo shops, beer joints, houses of prostitution, etc. I remember that during week nights you could fairly well walk down the sidewalk. But like on a weekend, man, you'd have to get out in the street!

Marcello: It was just wall-to-wall bodies on those streets.

Kouretas: All the way. If you were going to a house of prostitution, like, to have an affair, on a Saturday or a Friday night, forget it, you know. Because those girls never even put their clothes on. They had two rooms, you know. She'd come in and check you here--fine and dandy. She'd turn a trick with you and then run through this door into the next room, and this guy's already undressed and

examined by the maid. She'd turn a trick, and it was just back and forth, back and forth. That's the way they were. It was just a cold meat transaction. The bars were full. I think that's a true assumption--that Sunday would be the best day. I think that the Japanese were smart enough that they had pre-advanced information as to what was happening, you know, at that particular time in Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the Japanese. When you thought of an individual Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of an individual did you usually conjure up in your mind? Now you probably had contact with them on the West Coast, and obviously there were many, many Japanese on the islands themselves. But when you thought of an individual Japanese, what sort of a person came to your mind?

Kouretas: Well, like being born in Sacramento and California having a great populous of the Japanese extraction, I went to high school with many of the Japanese. My brother did, also. My brother played football with many of the Japanese that were great athletes. I think there was a great many of true Japanese-Americans, you know, that were unduly crucified because of the attack that was made by the Japanese. I remember those camps and sending them up there in northern California.

I recall that my brother used to correspond with . . . oh, what was his name? Kawashiba or something. He was a very dear friend of my brother's. They played football together; they got scholarships together. Then, finally, he was called upon not to correspond with this boy because he was of Japanese extraction. In censoring his mail, they told him not to correspond with him.

But up until that point, I didn't think of them in any other term, actually, like I say, being a first generation born of Greek parentage. I grew up with Italians, Latin Americans, Polacks, Finlanders, Norwegians; I came from the melting pot, you know. In fact, our neighborhood was called, during the depression years, the "Alkali Flats." We had everything down there, you know. We all got along fine, so naturally I didn't have any feelings about being against these particular people.

But then I remember getting letters from some of my, you know, high school girlfriends and etc., and they'd say, "Ooh, I don't know how you can stand those yellow crawly things coming over the side of your ship," and that, and gave the impression of something, you know . . . I remember in corresponding with my parents . . . and

my mother used to, you know. . . well, I'm sure you're very aware of how emotional the old country people are, and my mother would cry in her letters and say that "Your father threatens to take a gun and kill every Japanese on Broadway," you know, where they had fish markets and everything in Sacramento on Broadway. I'd say, "No, Mom, tell Dad, gee, don't do that. He'll get in trouble," you know, and things of that nature.

But up until that point . . . and then even I had a sort of a bad feeling about firing at them, you know. I didn't know this guy, and here I'm trying to kill him, you know. It really got to me at a point. But then I knew he was trying to kill me, so naturally survival is of great importance. I knew that in order to survive I had to fire back.

Marcello: Now did any of the old salts aboard the Raleigh ever talk about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy? In other words, maybe some of them had come in contact with the Japanese Navy while serving in the Asiatic Fleet or in China or something. Did they talk very much about the Japanese Navy?

Kouretas: No, they never did talk too much about the Japanese Navy. We never felt that the Japanese Navy was that far advanced, that they would ever even think of making such an attack

on the United States Navy! But then we always knew--like I've talked to some of the old Asiatic Fleet--that they were good sailors, that they would go with a minimum of survival. The most important thing within their naval structure was their duty and their dedication to country. As you recall, the kamikaze fleet, you know, the Japanese, they scared the hell out of us because them guys are . . . hey, (chuckle) they know they're going out to die. Hey, I was going out there to fight, but I wasn't going out there to die! You know . . . (chuckle) and that's the difference.

Marcello: Did you feel pretty safe and secure at Pearl Harbor even as relations between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate as one got closer and closer to December 7, 1941? Did you feel safe and secure there at Pearl Harbor?

Kouretas: Prior to December 7th?

Marcello: Yes.

Kouretas: Yes, I felt secure at that point. I felt, "This is the United States, Territory of Hawaii, and it belongs to our country. This is our part of the Pacific Ocean. Nobody's going to attack us here. And how stupid, you know. Here we put all our nest eggs in one blanket. Now I felt that way. You can imagine what people in authority felt when Washington had the entire Pacific

Fleet in there at one time. Now, see, we don't do that anymore, thank God. Through Pearl Harbor we learned. But I've always felt . . . in taking an analysis of past as I've grown older, I look back upon it, and I say, "How could they have been so dumb?" I never could understand how we could have that much of a . . . but I think because we were a nation that was proud, and in my own estimation --I could be totally wrong--I've always felt that we were trying to project to the world how important, how big, the United States Naval fleet was. We could show pictures of Pearl Harbor and all those ships in there and "You don't dare strike us," we were saying. And they said, "Hey, here you are, all the eggs in one basket. We're going to take care of it."

Marcello: In other words, would it be safe to say that most of the sailors were rather confident if there ever were a showdown with the Japanese?

Kouretas: Oh, definitely! Yes, we were confident. It was unbelievable when they said, "The Japs are here!" "Why, them dirty bastards! How could they do that?"

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the fleet, the entire fleet, was in Pearl Harbor, naturally, on December 7, 1941. Was it usual for the entire fleet to be in there on the weekend?

Kouretas: It was the home port for the Pacific Fleet. Now there was carriers that were still out on patrol--the Saratoga, I think, and some others--but as a rule they usually tried to provide . . . you know, go out on patrol on training sessions and etc. But on weekends the admirals and the captains and the officers, they liked their liberties as well as the enlisted personnel, so they tried to get back in, you know.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us up, I think, to the days immediately prior to the Japanese attack, and what I want you to do at this point is to reconstruct, as best you can remember, what your activities were on Saturday, December 6, 1941, from the time you got up until the time you went to bed. Now the Raleigh . . . let's take it back to the Friday. The Raleigh came in on a Friday. Now I want you to pick up the story at that point and go into as much detail as you can remember.

Kouretas: Well, I think it's very difficult because it's a long time ago, as I say. Those days prior were "everydays" of my life, you know. So I think it was a general, routine thing. I think, when we pulled in, I made a liberty that Friday. I went to my apartment. Of course, being a peacetime Navy, we could wear civilian clothes. I changed clothes; I got into a sports outfit or something; and I

went carousing and "barring." I don't know, I might have got lucky that night. I can't look back that far (laughter). At any rate, I used to fairly well. But I know Saturday morning, I came back to the ship.

One thing I'm very proud of is the fact that during my entire Naval career . . . I enlisted on February 11, 1941; I was discharged after the war, on August 28, 1945. Up until that point, through my entire Naval career, I had a 4.0 conduct rating. I was never put on report. I never got into trouble. I had a 3.89 proficiency rating in leadership of men. So I learned discipline, and it was sort of interbred through my family, and I tried to play the game by the rules, you know. In other words, I wasn't going to fuck up, you know, like a lot of guys that just don't know. But at any rate, I was proud of that, so I always made it a point, when my liberties were up, I would get back aboard ship.

So that Saturday morning, I remember I came back aboard ship, and I knew it was my turn to catch the duty. So everybody made liberties, and I just went about my daily routine--work in the office, had dinner--and I think that evening was a regular routine evening aboard ship. I went down and chit-chatted with the sailmaker and one of the boatswain's mates and maybe played some

dominoes or something and then retired for the night.

I knew I was on call, but as a yeoman nothing ever comes up.

Marcello: I assume you didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. In other words, were there just the usual number of drunks coming back aboard . . .

Kouretas: Right, right.

Marcello: . . . or were there less than usual or more than usual?

Kouretas: No, just about average. Yes, the usual amount.

Marcello: Had the tension more or less worn off from that alert you had had?

Kouretas: Yes, totally! That's what amazes me, because I even forgot it, you know, like, "Hey, that was a nothing thing, just a farce." By Saturday afternoon, it was totally forgotten.

I know that Sunday morning I knew that as of eight o'clock, I was off duty, and I was eligible for liberty. Now liberty started for regular people at ten o'clock, but being a "gamer," I says, "I'll take the eight o'clock church boat." Now I wasn't going to go to church. I have to be honest about that. But that'll give me two hours to get over ashore, get to my apartment, clean up, and go downtown and see what's happening (chuckle). So at any rate, I remember I went down for breakfast,

and we had sunny-side eggs. I'll never forget it--bacon and sunny-sides and hashbrowns--because, boy, they were spread out. Those yellow yolks were looking up at you. Everybody was running down those decks. So I had eaten breakfast, and I headed up to put on my uniform, because I had already shaved and showered.

I felt that I had a bowel movement coming on, and I thought, "Well, I'll go down to the head and go take care of business." I went to the head, and I sat there, and I noticed a funny book, like, sailors bought these comic books because there were a lot of eighteen, nineteen-year-old sailors aboard ship. At that time, Superman and Black Marvel and all those were very popular, you know, them comic books. So I picked it up, and I was kind of looking at this comic book. All the sudden I heard this BAA-WOOOOM, you know, and, Jesus, it blew me out of my underwear, you know, over the top of this bulkhead. Because, see, like on this side (gesture) you walk into the head like this (gesture), and then there'd be two rows of crappers over here, and then there was, oh, maybe a five-foot bulkhead. On this side were stainless steel urinals, you know, where you would just urinate here or you do "number two" over here. So it blew me--I was sitting on this side--it blew me over the top of this

thing head first into the urinal, you know.

And I got up, and I thought, "Holy Christ, the ship blew up," you know. I said, "How in the hell can the ship blow up? We're tied up," and the engines were secured (chuckle). And I thought, "What in the hell happened?"

Then I thought another ship had rammed us, so I ran to the portholes because at that time we had portholes open when we were tied up. I looked out the porthole, and I saw this plane that dropped the torpedo pulling up out of its dive. I saw this big rising sun, and by then I said, "Holy Christ, the Japs!" Everybody started hollering, "The Japs are here! The Japs are here!" and screaming. So with just a T-shirt on and nothing else on, I started running, you know, to get up topside.

Marcello: Did you have skivvies on at this time?

Kouretas: Just my T-shirt. No, I had nothing on below. I fought the war with nothing on. Yes, nothing on, barefooted and just a T-shirt.

Marcello: In other words, when you saw that Japanese plane, you didn't even stop to put your skivvies back on?

Kouretas: Hell! I couldn't even find them, you know. (Chuckle)
I wasn't even looking for them! I was trying to get out of there!

Marcello: So where was your battle station? I assume that's where you were heading.

Kouretas: Yes. I was on the well deck on the three-inch antiaircraft gun, so I started running back to get to that three-inch.

Marcello: Now where was it located in relation to the head?

Kouretas: Well, the head was just aft of the midships, and . . . now there was three hatches up, and I went up the after hatch and then the midship hatch and the forward hatch. I went up the after hatch, climbed up on the main deck, and then climbed up and then went up on the well deck because that's off the fantail. We were on the after three-inch antiaircraft guns. The others were lined up on the port and starboard sides and on the forecastle.

So I got up there, and the crew was almost there. You know, the funny thing about it was that everything was secured. We pulled in and the gunner's mates that were on liberty had the keys to the ready boxes. We had the awnings, you know, because with the tie-ties, you know, shade the ship and everything. So everybody . . . they broke into the butcher's room where they carved the meat, and they got cleavers and knives, and they just cut these tie-ties--they just run along--and cut the awnings down. With big sledges, they broke off the locks and got into the ready boxes, you know, where we couldn't get keys.

Some of the gunner's mates that were there with the keys opened the ready boxes. So we started firing . . .

Marcello: How much time has elapsed from the time that you left the head and got to your battle station?

Kouretas: Oh, I would say . . . oh, a good six or seven minutes.

I think all the torpedo planes had dropped their torpedoes by that time. In fact, I recall that this torpedo plane that had dropped the torpedo and knew that he had hit us . . . and when we pulled into the dry dock and they measured it, it was a foot and a half off dead center of that total length of that cruiser. Now he and his radioman, they circled the ship at least . . . I think it was two times. I recall the radioman laying out there and his shiny teeth, and he was giving us this handshake (gesture).

Marcello: In other words, he more or less had his hands together . . .

Kouretas: His palms together right above his head and just waving them back and forth, you know, as they rounded the ship.

Marcello: In other words, he was that low that you could see him.

Kouretas: Yes, right. Oh, a telephone pole height, you know. Maybe seventy-five to ninety feet in the air. They circled the ship twice after they dropped the torpedo.

Marcello: In the meantime, what damage had that initial torpedo done to the Raleigh?

Kouretas: Well, it hit between the number-one and number-two fire

room and the forward engine crew. Now fortunately, because we were tied up, we had no engine crew down below decks, or we'd have got men killed. But it had made a hole in the forward engine room and the number-one and two fire room where you could drive an Army dump truck into it, you know. When I saw that in dry dock, I couldn't believe it myself.

Marcello: I don't think most people realize what damage a torpedo can do to a ship.

Kouretas: Oh, oh, gosh! So immediately she started to list to port. See, we're tied up at Fox 12 this way (gesture). She started to list over.

Marcello: What did you do for power? Did you have any power as a result of that torpedo hitting?

Kouretas: No, we were tied. We weren't under power, so there was no way to start power or anything. So immediately, when she started to turn over and stretch her ties off Fox 12, off the pier that we were tied to, the first lieutenant in charge of damage control immediately ordered to flood the starboard compartments.

Marcello: In other words, he wanted to counter-flood the vessel.

Kouretas: Right. She started . . . she filled up on the starboard side and came down in the water. You know, she just leveled down on the water. In the meantime, they had

called, and tugs brought over two big buoy tanks--these buoys. Divers went down and tied cable around her, and they put two buoy tanks alongside of her and kept her afloat.

Marcello: Now was all this taking place during the actual attack?

Kouretas: No, after.

Marcello: This was after the attack?

Kouretas: Right, after the attack.

Marcello: In the meantime, where is your captain? Now this is Simons, right?

Kouretas: He had come back. Captain Simons, right. Right, he had come back, and now he was . . .

Marcello: Now when you say he had come back, he had come back after the initial attack, or was he on board when all hell broke loose?

Kouretas: I believe he was aboard, you know, when it started. I'm not really positive about that, and I couldn't really say. But I remember him being up on top of the bridge with his helmet and screaming orders, you know. I know that between the first attack and the second attack--you know, the high-altitude bombers came over--because of our listing and that, he had gave orders from the bridge because it was listing. You know, "Stand by! Prepare to abandon ship!" And we were to pass the order

along. These are vocal orders coming down from the bridge down to the deck off the forecastle, and then by the time it got to midships and by the time it got on back . . . you know, when it got to the fantail, it was "Abandon ship" and everybody was diving off into the water, and swimming to the island or something.

Marcello: Okay, let's take it back now to the initial attack. You had gone to your battle station, which was a three-inch antiaircraft gun.

Kouretas: Right.

Marcello: What happens at this point? You mentioned that you had to break into the ready boxes and get out some ammunition.

Kouretas: Right. Right. Right.

Marcello: So what happens at this point?

Kouretas: So we started firing at the torpedo planes because after they dropped their torpedoes, they were strafing from that first attack. We started firing. I checked with Jack Moser tonight when I called him tonight in Oklahoma, and our ship was credited with knocking out six planes that morning--six Japanese Zeros. Then the entire United States fleet that was at Pearl Harbor, only six planes is claimed to have gotten into the air, and "Popcorn" got one of these planes up, one of our scout planes. We lowered the catapult off, and he was able to take off

and get up in the air. But they sent him north, and, like he told me up in Oklahoma a couple of months ago, he was glad they sent him north instead of south because that's where the carriers were. The Curtiss was tied up . . . she was a seaplane tender across from us . . . and the Argonne . . . and we got one Japanese that was diving down to drop a bomb on the Curtiss, but we were credited with six planes. I can't say that my particular gun got any credit for them. I know I was scared as hell. Then on the second wave, the high-altitude bombers start coming over, and we got hit again with a 500-pound, delayed-action bomb.

Marcello: Now this is the one that went completely through the ship, isn't it?

Kouretas: Right, right!

Marcello: And it actually sunk after it . . .

Kouretas: Out the bottom!

Marcello: Came out the bottom . . .

Kouretas: And then blew back.

Marcello: And then blew up, yes.

Kouretas: Now imagine, these are two-inch steel plate decks. I saw this plane coming in--and I was firing at them--and I thought "Holy Toledo!" I saw them drop that bomb, and it came on a slant, like on a forty-five-degree angle,

and I thought, "It's coming right for me!" It's just a natural reaction. Now it wouldn't have done a damn bit of good, but I stopped firing and I ducked my head (gesture), you know, tried to cover my head with my arm. The bomb hit from about here (gesture), which is about seven feet, right on the edge of the ready box and knocked the shield off, went through the well deck, down through the main deck, down through three or four two-inch decks, and then finally down through the fuel tank, and then blew back and made a hole in the fuel tank, you know. Fortunately, if it wasn't a delayed-action bomb, I wouldn't be here talking to you today (chuckle). But that was another thing.

Marcello: What did that feel like when that bomb exploded? Now the first one--the torpedo--knocked you off the crapper (chuckle), but what did this bomb feel like when it hit?

Kouretas: Well, it just shook me up until where . . . I don't know if I got myself back together. And then I remember there was a lot of commotion. And then I remember leaving my battle station because they told me that the first lieutenant wanted me up on the bridge. The planes had sort of slowed down; a lot of them had left out to sea again; there was very few in the air; and the antiaircraft fire had slowed down.

So I ran from the back off the well deck back up towards the main deck, running alongside the ship, and yet there was a plane strafing, machine gunning, you know. I thought, "Oh, jeez!" I could just hear those things chipping paint, you know. I dove under for shelter at times, and then finally I remember when I got up on the bridge, the first lieutenant telling me, "Kouretas, the .50-calibers have stopped firing up on the tripod." We had a tripod mast with a deck with three .50-caliber machine guns up there. So he says, "Climb the tripod and see what's happened." So I start going hand-over-hand up that ladder, up that tripod, and these machine guns, you know, are coming around, and I just felt like "Oh, they're gonna get me! They're gonna get me!"

(Chuckle) I finally got up there, and it was very unusual because . . . I don't know how we have such disorganization to that degree, but these were all young seamen that didn't know how to operate the .50-calibers, and they had jammed them all. None of them were hurt, but the machine guns were jammed. So they were trying to read the manual, how to un-jam the machine guns, and then I was helping them and got them un-jammed, and then I came down below decks. Then finally we started to get oriented somewhat.

Marcello: Let me ask this question. Why did this lieutenant call you, a yeoman, off your battle station to get up there and un-jam those guns?

Kouretas: Because I was trained in .50-calibers, see. That was part of my training, in .50-caliber machine guns and antiaircraft.

Marcello: Wasn't there anybody closer than you that he could have sent up there?

Kouretas: Well, I guess so, but, you know, he just had . . . well, no . . .

Marcello: Maybe you had a name that he could remember (chuckle).

Kouretas: Yes, (chuckle) possibly. But he just happened to, you know, "Get Kouretas up there!" you know. It just came to his mind, you know. So that's how I got sent up there.

Marcello: Maybe he (chuckle) owed you a gambling debt and thought he might be able to get rid of you that way.

Kouretas: Yes, possibly. Anything (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, so you got those guys straightened out up there in the tripod mast. Now is this between the first and second waves, or when exactly did this take place?

Kouretas: This was just at the end of the second wave, you know. The war was about over with them at that point.

Marcello: Okay, now let me ask you this question. How would you describe the initial reaction of the crew aboard the

Raleigh? Was it one of professionalism? Panic? Confusion? Chaos? How would you describe the initial reaction?

Kouretas: No. I would say they acted totally in accordance with training, but then after it was over, it was shock. They couldn't believe it was real, you know. That's the way I reacted. I knew my training; I knew what I had to do. I wasn't scared during the initial attack or anything of that nature, but after it was over with, I started coming apart, you know--after. And I recall that when the attack ceased, the planes were gone, and there was no more firing, and then I, because of the damage, you know, with the torpedo and the 500-pound bomb. . . and then orders came out--I don't know how--that we were to abandon ship and get over on the island.

Then Captain Simons got on the bridge, and I recall he said the Japanese were landing troops on the other side of the island. He ordered the first lieutenant to break open the armory, pass out the rifles and the ammunition as far as they would go, and for everybody to get on the island and shift for themselves and give them hell and go down fighting, you know. I recall that so plainly.

I remember that I got all shook up, and then it was at that point that I realized that I didn't know where my brother was, you know. But in the meantime, I had gone

down, and I was one of the first ones to get my share of bandoleer of rifle bullets and rifles and .45. I went by Paduca, a Filipino mess boy that was the captain's cook. He gave me a big butcher knife, a cleaver about this long (gesture), because at that time black people and Filipinos were mess stewards; they weren't rated people or anything aboard the Navy. I thought, "Well, now where am I gonna go?"

Marcello: Now the "abandon ship" order has been given?

Kouretas: Right. Yes.

Marcello: What are you going to do with all that ammunition and stuff if you've got to jump overboard?

Kouretas: Oh, well, we were tied to Ford Island.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Kouretas: I could get over to Ford Island, see, so I'd get over to land. We were tied up right up there on the pier.

Marcello: Incidentally, were you tied up at your normal berthing area that day?

Kouretas: Right, right, right. When we pulled in, that was our berthing area--Fox 12 off Ford Island, on that particular side of the island.

Marcello: I also understand that after that initial torpedo hit the Raleigh, there was an effort made to save it, in that a great many things topside--in other words, a lot of the

weight topside--was thrown over. Do you know anything about that?

Kouretas: Oh, jeez, yes! And it's unbelievable! Do you know how much a catapult weighs, you know, that you shoot a plane off of? I've seen men, you know, with those big wrenches-- I forget--diagonally maybe six or eight inches. Those big bolts that hold the catapult. . . and with mute strength they lifted those catapults and threw them overboard. Torpedo tubes--lift them up, throw them overboard.

Marcello: Now we're talking about hundreds and thousands of pounds.

Kouretas: Thousands of pounds! Right! And they said, "Throw everything overboard! Lighten the portside!" So I thought, "Jesus Christ!" I thought, "Hell, this is a good time to get rid of some of these records that I haven't been kept up on!" Typewriters and everything out of my office, you know, and records, filing cabinets --threw them overboard.

Marcello: In other words, you went back to your office and were throwing . . .

Kouretas: After we threw the catapults and everything else off, we just kept throwing everything away--trying to lighten the ship.

Marcello: I've seen it written in my research that the captain actually had a yeoman standing by him who was duly plotting

where these major pieces of equipment had been dropped overboard, so that they could perhaps later be salvaged. Did you ever know anything about that?

Kouretas: Oh, yes! Yes! In fact, when we started to do salvage procedure, you know, like the following week, after we had pulled the bodies and everything out of the water, they had volunteer divers. Now I made one particular dive, see. I'm not a diver, but you could volunteer for it. So I put on a diver's suit, and I've never been down in the water like that. When they start lowering me down in that water, and it got dark and green and pitch down there, boy, I start screaming, you know, "Haul me up! I can't see nothing down here!"

But they knew approximately where the catapults . . . they would go down and tie up and bring up different things, yes. And they had salvage work going on for some days after that. But I made one volunteer dive, and that was it. That's the only time I ever dove in the Navy.

Marcello: In a situation like this, that is, while you were firing away at these Japanese planes from your three-inch mount, are you able to see the whole picture, or are you simply concerned with your one specific, individual task?

Kouretas: Oh, no, you're just concentrating on that one target. Now there might be two or three planes coming in this way (gesture), but, see, you're on one particular target. This is important. "Get this guy!" you know, and you start leading him, you know, and bringing your antiaircraft fire into him, you know. You're hoping that you can get him, you know. But I know a lot of times they were coming at us from all angles, and you just couldn't concentrate on the whole, total spectrum.

Marcello: Were you able to observe the Japanese plane that crashed into the Curtiss?

Kouretas: Yes, yes, I saw that--very definitely.

Marcello: That must have been quite a sight to see that. Can you describe it?

Kouretas: Well, yes, it was a sight. I know that at the time we were pointing at another craft, and I saw this one coming down. I thought the Curtiss was doomed when I saw her crash on there, you know, and just the fire and everything, bedlam going out of there. But then, of course, I turned my attention to what I was doing, you know, in firing at this one particular plane that was coming down.

Another thing . . . I never saw it to be a fact, but, you know, we had those two-man submarines that were coming in. Then on the starboard side, up forward, they were

telling me that the fellows there were turning the three-inch antiaircraft guns down in the water, shooting antiaircraft bullets into the water, at these two-man subs, you know. Oh, there was a lot of bedlam. It's been so long (chuckle).

Marcello: I gather that when the attack initially occurred, you saw a wide variety or assortment of clothing running about that deck there going to their battle stations. You mentioned that all you had on was a T-shirt, I guess we'd say.

Kouretas: T-shirt, right. Usually, you know, a three-inch anti-aircraft gun has a tremendous crack, more so than a six-inch or a sixteen-inch gun on a battleship, you know. But that crack . . . and I know that we used to . . . during training we would plug with cotton to protect our ears. My left eardrum was bleeding quite a bit, you know, just the blood coming out of it. Of course, fortunately, I have good hearing. At least I think so. Sometimes my wife doesn't think so. But at any rate, I know we didn't have a chance. All I had on, as I say, was a T-shirt, no shoes, no pants, no nothing. I ran about the deck . . . I think I was that way until Monday afternoon. I didn't realize I didn't have any drawers on, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, now when the attack was over, can you all of the sudden notice the silence?

Kouretas: Yes, yes. There was silence. Then I recall that the Marines

and somebody would get itchy fingers at night. Nobody slept that night. There would be somebody "pup-pup-pup-pup-pup," you know. Then BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! I don't know what the hell they were shooting at. I guess they were shooting at the tracers of these other bullets, you know. But everybody was just going crazy through the night, you know. I'm sure . . . I know it's recorded that we shot down some of our own planes (chuckle) and things of that nature.

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that the "abandon ship" order was given, and since you were tied up to Ford Island, you moved over to Ford Island.

Kouretas: Right.

Marcello: Before we get to the Ford Island, though, let me ask you this question. Were you able to observe any of the damage being done at Battleship Row from where the Raleigh was tied up?

Kouretas: Oh, yes, yes. You could see all the fire and everything-- the Arizona, the Pennsylvania over there. Of course, like I said, the Utah was behind us; she got hit with a torpedo; she turned completely over on her back, you know. We knew there was men in there, and we sent some fellows over there with cutting torches to try to cut the bottom out because they were pounding on the bottom, you know, to get out.

In the meantime, I had left. I had gone to Ford Island, and it was just total confusion, you know, trying to muster the crew, trying to find out who you were, where you belonged, this and that.

Marcello: Now all this time, you hadn't seen your brother, and you had no idea whether he was on the ship, off the ship, or if he'd been killed or what had happened to him.

Kouretas: No.

Marcello: When did you start to think about your brother?

Kouretas: I didn't really think of him until late that Sunday afternoon.

Marcello: Describe this particular affair because I think it's important.

Kouretas: We started mustering the crew, and then his name came up as "missing-in-action." Then I remember there was an ensign that was in charge of his division who came over and asked me when was the last time that I seen him. I says, "Well, I didn't see him this morning because I knew he got up early and took Captain Simons over for some errand over to this fort and brought him back." But in the meantime, what happened was that when he came back . . . yes, well, then I realized that he was gone.

Marcello: What were your reactions?

Kouretas: I thought, "Gee! Where is he?" you know. Then I realized how many had been killed, how many dead. "Where do I

look? What do I do?"

Marcello: And being from a Greek family which, I'm sure, is very close-knit, this bothered you quite a bit, also.

Kouretas: Right. Oh, tremendously. This is where I was beginning to go into somewhat of a shock at that point. Up until then, I handled the war up until that point. But the shock now set in. I began to think of my parents, my sister, my family. "What am I going to say? What am I going to do? How can I explain this?"

Then, finally, when I was questioned about his whereabouts and I had no idea, we were assigned to different assignments, you know, for clean-up after this and that. So I was assigned to this boat crew to pick up . . . we had a crew--I forget how many were aboard this motor launch--and we picked up the bodies. We would take them over to Aiea Landing, and the hospital corpsmen would jump in the water with sheets, you know, tied, and scoop up the bodies. Now what we did, we didn't bring them aboard the launch; we would lasso a leg, an arm, a head, and maybe tow four or five or six bodies behind us slowly in the launch over to the landing.

Marcello: What does the water look like?

Kouretas: Well, it was dirty from the oil, murky, real dark green, you know. It was very mystic-like looking water, you know,

not like the bay that we'd always pulled into or not like the Pacific or anything or not like it looks today or anything of that nature.

So I know that everytime that we brought a load over to the landing, I would jump up and run up the landing because they were laying them like cordwood, you know, a body here and a body here, with a walkway down the center where they would try to identify them by their dog tags with the heads pointing into the walkway. I would run along the aisle and, like you know your brother's characteristics--his fingernails. My brother chewed his nails. I knew where he had a wart; I knew every little mark on his body. I would get so far, and I'd say, "Well, this guy looks like him," you know, but I couldn't see a face. I'd pick up a hand, and I'd say, "No, that's not him," and then go on. By the time our launch was ready to go, I'd take off again, and then the next crew . . . I knew where I'd left off, and I did this for a couple of days, you know, Monday and Tuesday.

That Wednesday, about 10:30, I was at Ford Island at the mess hall getting something to eat. Like I say, there was no such thing as rank or rate. You know, there might be a captain in front of you at that time, or a commander behind you or seaman second class. You

stood in line. They didn't use protocol and let officers go first. I was just about ready to turn into the mess hall when I seen this fellow walking across the runway, and I recognized the walk, you know. It was that of my brother. But he had on a sailor's cap and a lieutenant's blue coat with gold stripes and a pair of shorts--you know, just a mixed uniform, you know, anything they could hold of.

So I broke the line, and I ran out there, and I hollered, "Jim! Jim!" He said, "Nick! Nick!" And I said, "You son-of-a-bitch!" and I hit him, you know (smacks fist into palm). That was my first reaction. I now look back on it, and it's kind of stupid. So he didn't raise a hand towards me. I said, "Where in the hell have you been?" He told me, "I was on the Blue, the USS Blue!" He says, "You think they're going to break radio silence to tell you where the hell I'm at?" He says, "We've been out there chasing the carriers!"

Marcello: What had happened. How did he get aboard the Blue?

Kouretas: Well, when he was coming back in the launch to get back aboard the Raleigh, as I said, the last bombing planes had dropped their bombs, and they were strafing, machine gunning. So there was maybe forty or forty-five men in the launch, so they all jumped overboard to make smaller

targets. He looked up and he saw the Blue, the closest thing to him, and he swam over to the Blue, which was a destroyer that took off because she wasn't hit, and she took off out into the Pacific chasing the carriers. She didn't come back in until Wednesday. So he had been gone in the meantime. So finally we got back together.

Marcello: What steps had you taken in the meantime to try and run him down and to find out what had happened to him? What administrative steps did you take?

Kouretas: None. There was administration; there was nobody I could ask. Everybody was too busy; the officers were too busy trying to get the ships back together. Are they going to worry about Jim Kouretas, you know, a seaman second class? We've got thousands laying out there in the bay, you know. So there was really nothing I could do.

Marcello: Now during this entire period, that is, from the time you went over to Ford Island until you actually found your brother, were you on these details picking up the bodies and this sort of thing the whole time?

Kouretas: Monday and Tuesday, I was. Right, right.

Marcello: Well, what did you do Sunday evening?

Kouretas: Sunday evening? Well, we abandoned . . . and then we came back aboard ship. That's where we mustered, you know, back aboard ship. Right, we mustered back aboard ship. I guess all I did was stay in shock. I didn't sleep.

Marcello: Did you have to go back to your battle station again?

Kouretas: No, no. They stood us on alert, you know, but we didn't have, like, hourly, you know, duty on the battle stations, but everybody was near their battle station. Yes, I'll put it that way. You know, I wasn't down amidships or anything like that. I was at my battle station but was not on true alert or anything of that nature.

Marcello: Did you have any sort of an appetite or thirst in the aftermath of the attack? Do you recall?

Kouretas: No, I can't say I was hungry. Then, you know, everybody was saying, "Jesus, we haven't eaten since Saturday!" Like it was Tuesday or Wednesday. I thought, "Well, hell, I'm not hungry," even then. Going to the mess hall that Wednesday was just a routine thing because people were going there. But I think the shock and that just suppressed the appetite and everything of that nature. My biggest feelings was trying to control my emotions, what was going to happen. "What am I gonna say? What am I gonna do? If I survive this, how can I come home and tell my parents that I'm here but Jimmy's gone?" Then I was thinking, "Well, if all this havoc has been wreaked in one day, it's inevitable that we're not going to see another Sunday." This was my feeling. So I had destined myself to doom at that point.

Marcello: Had your attitude toward the Japanese changed in the aftermath of the attack?

Kouretas: Oh, yes.

Marcello: In what way?

Kouretas: I was very bitter--to the degree that they would do something like that, you know. "Let us know. I'll fight you fair and square." But a sneak attack and to do that, it had lowered my feelings toward the Japanese people. For many years after, many years after, when I returned home, even though I had, as I said, many close friends of Japanese extraction prior to the war, I was very cool to them. I know they suffered, and they probably were as good or better Americans than I was, you know, within their own right--these American-born Japanese. They were educated in California, and they didn't know anything about it, but it happened. But because of their slant eyes and their extraction, they were persecuted for it. There's no doubt in my mind. I had ill feelings for a long time.

But I look back upon it, and I can see that it's a shame that any type of human race or any type of individual has to be controlled by mass leadership. Like Hitler, with his Third Reich, he couldn't have done that if he wasn't as dominating. German people are fine people. I had the same feelings about Germans, and I never fought the Germans. But now I have good feelings about a lot

of fine German people that I know, you know. But I guess as time goes on, we're going to have to understand these things.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Kouretas, I want to thank you very much for taking your time to talk to me tonight. You've said a lot of very interesting and, I think, very important things. I think that historians are going to find it valuable someday.

Kouretas: I hope so. Thank you very much, Dr. Marcello.