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Interview with
James A. McClelland
July 8, 1978

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

James McClelland

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Corpus Christi, Texas

Date: July 8, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing James McClelland for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 8, 1978, in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. McClelland in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the cruiser USS Helena during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. McClelland, 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. McClelland: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, on August 17, 1921.

I lived there until I went into the Navy in June, 1939.

Dr. Marcello: Did you take most of your schooling there in Detroit?

Mr. McClelland: I did.

Dr. Marcello: How hard was it to get into the Navy in 1939?

McClelland: It was very difficult. It took me six months from the time I first decided until I was accepted. It was many weeks of running down to the recruiting station and after many physicals and background examinations. Only about two of us out of thirty-some were finally taken into the Navy.

Marcello: What seemed to be the stumbling block? Was there simply a great many people that wanted to get into the service at that time?

McClelland: That's true. There were just so many that wanted to get in that, through physicals and background information and whatever else the criteria was, they narrowed us down two out of thirty-some applicants.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy in 1939?

McClelland: Probably because of the Depression. Getting a job at that time was very difficult, and having a discharge from the Navy was considered better than a degree for obtaining employment. It was a very high goal, I thought.

Marcello: You know, a great many people from your generation give economic reasons as one of the primary reasons for having entered the service at that time.

McClelland: It wasn't the sole reason, I had a great deal of desire to travel, and there was a great deal of desire on my

part to see the world and to obtain an education with some value to it. I tried real hard to get in (chuckle).

Marcello: Was the travel aspect the main reason why you selected the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

McClelland: It was one of the primary reasons. It was really the number one reason . . . the adventure and the education aspect and travel. It was all part of my decision.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast with current events and world affairs at that time?

McClelland: Very well. I recall the instance in China--the bombing of the Panay--and Germany's arming for conflict. I would say I was aware of what was going on in the world at that time. I was concerned,

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

McClelland: Newport, Rhode Island.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record, or was it simply the normal Navy boot camp at that time?

McClelland: My recollection of Newport was that it was considered the toughest camp to go to, and I felt kind of proud having gone through Newport.

Marcello: How long did boot camp last at that time?

McClelland: I think it was three months--June, July, and August--and

we graduated in September.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

McClelland: We were transferred to Brooklyn, New York, and I was assigned to the USS Helena, which had just gone into commission at that time. We were the original crew members on the Helena.

Marcello: Would you be considered a "plankowner" on the Helena at that time?

McClelland: I could have been if I had put it out of commission, but I didn't do that (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe what the Helena was like from a physical standpoint. Talk a little bit about the ship itself. It was a cruiser, of course.

McClelland: It was a cruiser, of course, a light cruiser. It had all the latest equipment aboard. We were very enthused about getting a new ship and having the best equipment available. We really looked forward to our first day at sea and our first gunnery practice. In fact, I think we kind of looked forward . . . well, I think we considered that we were going to go to war, and we were glad we were on the best we had at the time.

Marcello: I know that in a lot of cases, when a person right out of boot camp went aboard a ship, he was still literally treated like a "boot." Would you have possibly escaped

that treatment since you were more or less going on that ship as new crew and putting that ship in commission?

McClelland: There were so many of us that were recruits . . . I think possibly a half to two-thirds of us were new crew.

Marcello: So did you escape a lot of the harassment that a new crew member would normally receive?

McClelland: I think we did, yes.

Marcello: What were your living quarters like aboard the Helena?

McClelland: Rather nice. Of course, we had no way to judge but listen to the old salts and what they described to us, and this sounded pretty good. We had air conditioning, which was considered something new for that time. The only thing that I recall that most of us complained about was the food.

Marcello: What was wrong with the food?

McClelland: Well, I think the food that we purchased was high quality, and what happened to it from that time until it was put on the tray was something else. I think we all felt that a better job could have been done in cooking (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you have to do any mess cooking when you went aboard the Helena?

McClelland: Yes, that was part of our . . . well, I think every new man had to serve four months; every new man had to serve four months and that's all. I decided that I would like to get that out of the way early, and so I volunteered

for it and immediately went into mess cooking.

Marcello: Now at that time, I assume that they were serving family-style aboard the Helena.

McClelland: No.

Marcello: They had the ship in the cafeteria-style?

McClelland: Cafeteria-style, yes. It was a new method.

Marcello: So when you were serving cafeteria-style, what exactly would the mess cook be doing?

McClelland: Either serving food or setting up tables and cleaning up and that sort of thing.

Marcello: All in all, how would you describe the morale aboard the Helena during that period before Pearl Harbor?

McClelland: Extremely high.

Marcello: What do you think accounted for that?

McClelland: The fact that we were sort of chosen. We felt that each of us had passed a rigid examination to get in. We had a great deal of pride in the Navy and in ourselves. I felt very good, and the morale was very high. We felt that we were the top service.

Marcello: The fact that all of you were volunteers probably would have contributed toward the high morale, too. You were all there because you wanted to be there.

McClelland: Right, It also took a great deal of effort on our part to get in.

Marcello: There was a great deal of competition between ships and so on during this period, was there not?

McClelland: Yes, there sure was.

Marcello: As I recall, on the maneuvers the various ships would compete for the "E" and so on.

McClelland: Absolutely. As we began to train as a crew on the ship, I recall our gunnery officer saying that we had very good equipment, and we probably could come in first in gunnery in the fleet in the first year. But we were not out to do that; we were out to become a fighting ship. Therefore, our method was more toward training us for combat rather than getting an "E", and he said that we would probably come in second.

Marcello: Athletics also played a very important part in the activities of the Navy during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, did it not?

McClelland: Yes, it did. I recall our division officer rounding up and choosing up baseball teams, and we would go ashore and have beer and a ball game.

Marcello: Evidently boxing was a very big thing at that time.

McClelland: Yes, boxing and wrestling. One of the members in our division, a fellow by the name of Don Brown from Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania, broke his leg in a wrestling match. *Football game*

Marcello: When did the Helena move on to the Hawaiian Islands? Now you mentioned that you picked it up in the Brooklyn Navy Yard,

I assume.

McClelland: We stayed attached to the East Coast during our trials. Our shakedown cruise was to South America, and that was a very high point in the life of our ship. We came back and we were stationed in Norfolk, and we were operating out of Norfolk when we got word that we were being transferred to the West Coast. We left for the West Coast and picked up aircraft and more crew on the West Coast.

Marcello: You say that you picked up aircraft. Would these be your search planes and so on?

McClelland: Four search planes. We used to use those planes in spotting our gunfire. We had some antiaircraft guns installed at that time--1.1-inch--and then we went to Pearl Harbor and joined the fleet.

Marcello: Do you recall when that was that you left for Pearl Harbor to join the Pacific Fleet?

McClelland: It was about a year before . . . I can't recall the exact date.

Marcello: Was it late 1940?

McClelland: Possibly. I think it was probably summer or fall. We were out there for Christmas of 1940. We were out there for ten months and came back and had a overhaul and went back out again.

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

Islands?

McClelland: It was very exciting. Of course, I had heard a lot about Hawaii, and we could hardly wait to get there.

Marcello: Were you looking forward to a tropical paradise?

McClelland: Yes, we were. Pearl Harbor sounded very exciting. Of course, it was nothing like the name implies (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess the islands were not overrun by tourists, obviously, at that particular time.

McClelland: It was overrun by natives (chuckle).

Marcello: What was your particular function aboard the Helena?

McClelland: Upon going aboard in New York, I wanted to be in gunnery, and so did everyone else, I guess, because when I got aboard, all the gunnery divisions were filled. At one table a lieutenant was sitting there, and he saw that I was disappointed that I didn't get in the gunnery division, and he said, "Why don't you try fire control?" I thought, "Oh, my God! Fire control!" (chuckle) I asked him what fire control was, and he said, "Well, it's gunnery and I think you would really like that--what we have to do with gunnery." Of course, it turned out to be the very thing I wanted.

Marcello: So specifically what did you do in fire control?

McClelland: Specifically, I was a director-trainer in the main battery.

Marcello: In the main battery?

McClelland: Yes. The director controlled the training of the turrets, the elevation of the guns--actually, putting the guns on target. I was the main battery director-trainer. The guns followed the telescope that I put on the target. The pointer--the fellow that sat next to me--put the guns on an elevation. Between the two of us, we would point the guns.

Marcello: Now when you went into fire control, were you automatically assigned as a trainer, or did you have to work yourself up to that position?

McClelland: I had to work myself up to that position.

Marcello: This is what I thought, because that's one of the positions in the turret that, I assume, requires a certain amount of experience.

McClelland: I had some minor jobs before this that I felt rather useless in doing them, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: Would these possibly have been down in the powder room or the magazine room or something?

McClelland: It was in the main battery director also, but it was in an operation that was a secondary operation. We would only go to it in the event that our automatic system would go out. I was just sort of a standby-type of person.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about the training and exercises and so on that the Helena undertook after it got to Pearl

Harbor. Describe what a typical training exercise was like for the Helena. In other words, when would it go out; how long would it stay out; what would it do when it went out; when would it come back in? I've asked you a series of about four questions here. When would it normally go out?

McClelland: Usually, on a Monday. We would go out with other units of the fleet or operate with the whole fleet. I recall an operation with the entire fleet, and it was very impressive with the battleships and the maneuvers. I can recall that in very specific detail because it was a great sight to see. We operated with units in our cruiser division--our small operations,

Marcello: Do you recall what other cruisers were in your particular division?

McClelland: The Boise and, I believe, the St. Louis . . . I'll recall it in a minute. I can't think of the other ones.

Marcello: Okay, what would you do when you would go out on these exercises?

McClelland: Gunnery practice and practice against aircraft. We'd shoot at a sleeve being towed by a PBV. It was a continual repetition of gunnery. We worked day and night at it.

Marcello: What was the main armament aboard the Helena?

McClelland: Fifteen 6-inch guns.

Marcello: Fifteen 6-inch guns. What were there--three turrets forward and two aft?

McClelland: Right, and we had a secondary battery of eight 5-inch guns, and they were also used as antiaircraft guns as well as for surface-type fighting.

Marcello: You were on one of the main batteries forward?

McClelland: I was the main battery director forward, and we had a main battery director aft as well in the event that we wanted to split the battery or in the event that the main battery forward director was knocked out.

Marcello: Now in the firing of those guns and so on, how often did you use live ammunition as such?

McClelland: Never that I can recall. It was always target ammo. The only time I recall an order to use live ammo or, as we call it, service ammo, was during the raid and a time about a week before the raid when we discovered some ships at night out there that didn't belong out there. We loaded service ammo and steamed into the area, but we didn't fire anything.

Marcello: The service ammunition, I assume, is kept down in the magazines, is it not?

McClelland: Right.

Marcello: How much time was devoted to antiaircraft practice?

McClelland: Quite a bit of it was. I wasn't in the antiaircraft part

of gunnery, but I observed quite a few of the practices with targets--sleeves--and that sort of thing.

Marcello: I would venture to say, however, that the Helena probably had many more antiaircraft weapons aboard it after Pearl Harbor than it did before Pearl Harbor.

McClelland: Very much so. And we went to the 40-millimeter. The 1.1-inch didn't prove out to be very effective an anti-aircraft weapon. After Pearl Harbor, and after my being released from the hospital, I made one trial run with her and observed the firing of the 40-millimeters, and I was tremendously impressed by the difference between that and what we had before. It was a very effective weapon.

Marcello: How long would the Helena normally stay out on one of these cruises?

McClelland: Normally five to ten days, I recall a period of three weeks one time, I recall that because it was a long trip.

Marcello: Would you normally come in on a specific day of the week, or could this vary?

McClelland: It could vary. It seems that we would try to make it in for the weekend.

Marcello: They usually did try to get in on the weekends. Would it be safe to say that it didn't really take a genius to figure

out what ships would be in and when they would be in in that period prior to Pearl Harbor?

McClelland: If they were basing their decision on what normally happened, I think so. But things weren't normal right at that period of time, because negotiations were going on between the United States and Japan. We were very uptight at the time, and I recall the two Jap envoys being in Honolulu and leaving for the States; and we assumed that the next few days would be for negotiations, and we could relax.

Marcello: You brought up the subject, so I think I will pursue it farther. As conditions between the two countries continued to deteriorate, and as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, did your training routine change any?

McClelland: I think it intensified.

Marcello: Intensified in what way?

McClelland: Longer hours. Our training involved four hours on and four hours off. You would become very tired; it was a tiring experience. We thought that things were coming to a head.

Marcello: You mentioned that you would be working four hours on and four hours off. What had been your schedule previously?

McClelland: This was during gunnery practice maneuvers that this happened.

We would simply have more daytime practice than we would nighttime practice. This was four hours on and four hours off; it was a twenty-four-hour alert sort of thing.

Marcello: Did you seem to have more general quarters drills?

McClelland: Yes, we did.

Marcello: And could they occur at anytime of the day or night?

McClelland: They did. I was not surprised when the general alarm went off.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that on one occasion when you were out there--and I assume this was in that period not too far before the actual attack--that you did run into some unidentified ships. Why don't you describe that incident?

McClelland: It was about a week before we went in before December 7th, and it was a period where we would be four hours on and four hours off, I recall everybody being up and around and alert . . . and evidently this happened while I was off, because when I came on watch we were steaming into an area after having brought up service ammunition. They brought me up-to-date when I went on watch, that radar had picked up four unidentified ships--either destroyers or submarines. They didn't belong there, and we were going in to check it out. When we got into the area, we couldn't find anything.

Marcello: The crew was not brought to general quarters, though?

McClelland: The crew was brought to general quarters, yes.

Marcello: I see.

McClelland: That's possibly why I was on watch at the time. It came up at that time. Looking back now, I feel almost certain that it had something to do with the raid--either the arrival of the subs or something.

Marcello: It would seem to me that if there were Japanese ships out there, they probably would have been those submarines that more or less took up positions before the actual carrier force got into position.

McClelland: That's what I assumed.

Marcello: What was the scuttlebutt going around among the crew as a result of these unidentified ships being out there?

McClelland: That they were probably Jap subs (chuckle).

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

McClelland: A distrustful person.

Marcello: Even prior to the war?

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: Why did you have that particular attitude toward them?

McClelland: Because of the attack on the Panay and from all of the news we were hearing at the time and all the tales told to us by the old salts. The Japanese merchants in Honolulu who we would come in contact with constantly . . . we distrusted

them. I've heard this many times. . . . of course, all they were interested in was our money, and that was all. Every Jap was a spy and that sort of thing. I recall, too, in training--this was in 1939--one of our chiefs told us . . . we were discussing a possibility of going to war. We had assumed that we were going to be fighting Germany, but he said that our number one enemy was Japan, so that sort of turned us around a bit.

Marcello: Suppose it did come down to war between the United States and Japan. Did you and your shipmates feel rather confident as to what the outcome would be?

McClelland: Yes, very much. We felt that they were inferior in all aspects of warfare to us.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any of the old salts aboard the Helena talk about the Japanese navy or anything of that nature? I'm referring now to old-timers that had perhaps served on the Asiatic Station or something of that nature.

McClelland: Nothing in the form of an evaluation. I don't really recall much that being said about the kind of fleet they had . . . oh, yes, I do, too. There were some tales about their battleships being top-heavy. The picture we got is that they didn't know how to build them (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you have very many of those old Asiatic sailors aboard the Helena?

McClelland: Oh, not a great number of them, but enough that we sat around and listened to them.

Marcello: They were quite a group, were they not?

McClelland: We considered them something special because of the duty that they had had. They seemed to be a little bit "off." (Chuckle) We called them "Asiatic." I don't know how to describe them. They sort of had a lackadaisical attitude about many things--sort of a happy-go-lucky group. There was a point where we considered them just a little bit "off."

Marcello: I understand that a great many of them were tattooed, were they not?

McClelland: They were. They were a rugged group of people.

Marcello: And I've heard it said a lot of them would wear one gold earring.

McClelland: Right, right. Their uniforms were highly decorated on the inside. They would have dragons and that sort of thing on the inside of their uniforms. Their GI buckets would be highly engraved and embossed.

Marcello: What are the GI buckets that you are referring to?

McClelland: Each man aboard was issued a heavy, steel bucket for doing his laundry, taking a bath, and that sort of thing. This was a tradition that simply followed onto the Helena, but it wasn't needed really.

Marcello: In other words, you had showers and so on aboard the Helena.

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: And a laundry, I suppose?

McClelland: Yes, and a laundry,

Marcello: But they still issued everybody one of the steel buckets.

McClelland: Everybody had a steel bucket and camp stool. The buckets . . .
I recall where they could have them . . . in China they could have them engraved for a very small amount of money in a very elaborate way. We looked forward to going to China ourselves.

Marcello: I'm sure they could spin some pretty good sea stories.

McClelland: They did,

Marcello: How old were you at the time?

McClelland: Oh, I was seventeen when I went in and . . .

Marcello: I'm sure that a seventeen-year-old could have been very impressed by sea stories that those Asiatic sailors told.

McClelland: I was, I was very much impressed. Of course, that was the way we spent our evenings, you know, listening to the old-timers. Old-timers--I guess they were thirty or forty years old.

Marcello: When you and your shipmates sat around in your bull sessions, was the possibility of an attack at Pearl Harbor ever discussed? Did this enter your head?

McClelland: No, I don't recall.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us up to those days immediately

prior to the attack, so let's talk about that weekend of December 7, 1941. Let's start with that Friday. Did the Helena come in on Friday, or had it been in for a while?

McClelland: I believe it came in on Friday--Thursday or Friday--because I had gone ashore on Saturday.

Marcello: Where did it tie up when it came in?

McClelland: We took the Pennsylvania's berth. The Pennsylvania had gone into dry dock. Our normal berthing location was farther in. We would tie it to a mooring buoy with possibly two other cruisers. But this was an unusual opportunity for us to be docked, and we sort of enjoyed the thought that we wouldn't have to take liberty boats back and forth.

Marcello: It was much easier to get on and off the Helena since it was right alongside a dock. Do you remember what particular dock this was?

McClelland: 1010,

Marcello: Were there any ships around the Helena when it came in?

McClelland: We had the Oglala tied up outside of us. It was a minelayer.

Marcello: It was an old minelayer, too, was it not?

McClelland: Yes, it was.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work aboard the Helena? You mentioned that you did go ashore on Saturday. How did the

normal liberty routine work?

McClelland: I think it was what we called a port and starboard liberty.

Marcello: In other words, half of the crew would go one day, and half the crew would go the next day.

McClelland: Yes, I think our liberty was up at midnight or one o'clock.

Marcello: Why was it that liberty expired at midnight?

McClelland: There just wasn't the facilities in Honolulu to accommodate the fleet overnight.

Marcello: You probably wouldn't have had that much money to stay overnight, anyway, would you?

McClelland: I don't think so, but I don't think that deterred us (chuckle).

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

McClelland: Of course, the first thing we would do, we would go to a bar and then get a good meal. And, of course, with the fleet being in Honolulu, the women were very scarce except in the red light district. Of course, it usually included a trip there while on liberty.

Marcello: I guess, when we get into that period immediately prior to the attack, that downtown Honolulu was wall-to-wall white hats on a weekend.

McClelland: It was. And keeping a lid on it was a mighty job for the Shore Patrol (chuckle).

Marcello: From what I gather, there were long lines for everything,

whether it was to get into the restaurants or the bars
or the houses of prostitution.

McClelland: Right,

Marcello: Did you have a particular place that you would frequent
more than another?

McClelland: The bar was the Rialto Bar, The other places I don't recall
particularly,

Marcello: Most of these, I guess, were down on Hotel Street or Canal
Street,

McClelland: Right.

Marcello: I guess that's where all the tattoo parlors and all that
sort of things were,

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: Now normally, when the people came back off liberty, what
sort of condition would they be in? What sort of shape
would they be in?

McClelland: Anywhere (chuckle) from slightly inebriated to being carried
back.

Marcello: What sort of condition would these people have been in to
fight in the next morning?

McClelland: Well, not wide-eyed and bushy-tailed, that's for sure. I
recall my particular condition that morning.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about that Saturday since you said you had
liberty in Honolulu. Describe your liberty on that particular

Saturday. Do you recall what you did and where you went?

McClelland: Probably my usual places. I came back . . . I recall having a pretty good liberty (chuckle) that Saturday and getting up Sunday morning with a hangover, but I wasn't totally sick or anything of that nature. I can recall going in and having breakfast and looking for a cigarette. I don't think I was in really bad shape.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about that Sunday morning. You mentioned that you came off liberty, and you went to bed. I assume that it was a relatively uneventful Saturday night back aboard ship. Sunday is also a day of leisure, is it not?

McClelland: It is.

Marcello: What does this mean when we say that Sunday was a day of leisure aboard the Helena?

McClelland: It was a day to read or do laundry, if you choose to do your own, and quite a few did. Mostly you'd catch up on letter writing.

Marcello: You could even sleep longer and so on, could you not?

McClelland: You could usually turn back in after muster or breakfast or whatever. Just to lay in in the morning was one of those things that wasn't done.

Marcello: Okay, so you get up and you go to breakfast. Pick up the story from that point, because we're ready to have the bombs start falling, I suppose.

McClelland: Well, I went to chow rather late, but I managed to get in before the door was shut and had breakfast--the mess hall was on the third deck--and then I went back to my compartment, which was forward, to get a cigarette out of my locker. I found that I didn't have any, so I walked across the compartment to a friend that had some. I recall lighting up when the general quarters sounded.

Marcello: Approximately what time was it?

McClelland: It was getting very close to eight o'clock.

Marcello: Okay, general quarters sounds. Now the Helena had not been hit at this point yet, is that correct?

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, general quarters sounds. What's your reaction when you hear general quarters on a Sunday morning?

McClelland: "Damn! They're having another drill!"

Marcello: Was this unusual to have to have a drill on a Sunday morning?

McClelland: Yes, I think it was, but drills had come so frequently that we accepted it as another damn drill (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you double-time it to your battle station?

McClelland: I was off in the usual hurry. Whoever announced it . . . it seems to me it was the quartermaster . . . no, the boatswain's mate . . . I don't recall who announced the raid, but they said, "Japanese planes are attacking! Use service ammunition!" Then we really took off. But we

didn't go very far.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens at that point, then? General quarters sounds; the PA system announces that these are Japanese planes, that it's not a drill. What happens at that point?

McClelland: By the time general quarters sounded, I was in a position where it was best to go aft; the quickest way was to go aft. Where had I been on the other side of the compartment, I would have gone forward and gone up. But having crossed the compartment, I went aft, which was a mistake.

Marcello: Okay, so what happened?

McClelland: A terrific explosion.

Marcello: Okay, if you were going aft, you must have been heading more or less toward midship, is that correct?

McClelland: That's correct.

Marcello: This is, of course, around the area where the Helena took a torpedo.

McClelland: Yes, in the forward engine room.

Marcello: Okay, describe the torpedo slamming into the ship as you're going aft.

McClelland: I didn't know it was a torpedo. I thought we were hit with a bomb because the flames seemed to come down, and the ship heaved in the water.

Marcello: Did it knock you off your feet and so on?

McClelland: No, I heard some screaming, and I knew we had been hit bad,

and somebody was hurt bad.

Marcello: But you say that you did see flames and so on?

McClelland: Yes, the passageway was filled with flames.

Marcello: The passageway that you were in?

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: Were you burnt any?

McClelland: Yes, I was. My impression was that it was a bomb, you know.

Marcello: How badly were you burnt, or didn't you realize at the time?

McClelland: I didn't realize at the time, because I was still trying to get to my battle station.

Marcello: Were you burnt to the extent that your clothing was singed or anything of that nature?

McClelland: Yes. My T-shirt was burnt off; all I had was the rim of the collar and sleeves and front part of it, was all that remained.

Marcello: Were you in shorts?

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: How about your legs and so on? Were they burnt, also?

McClelland: Yes, my legs were severely burned. I recall looking down at my shoes, and my shoestrings were burnt off (chuckle), and my socks were partially gone.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you were burnt as a result of the explosion of this torpedo. Were you burnt all around or just

in front?

McClelland: Mostly in back.

Marcello: Oh, you were burnt mostly in the back.

McClelland: Yes. I think that was because I had just passed a hatchway to the engine room, and I think that flame probably came up through the hatch. Of course, it followed all the open areas, you know. I think that having just passed it, I caught it as I just passed through.

Marcello: Were you experiencing a great deal of pain at that particular time?

McClelland: I knew I was hurt, but I didn't realize it until . . . I didn't feel I hurt that bad. As I say, I thought that way was blocked. The lights were out, and it was pitch-black; so I felt that by going forward I could get out through the forward hatch. It seemed that everybody in the passageway felt the same way, because we all seemed to turn at once and go forward.

Marcello: Now at this point, is there a great deal of panic and chaos, or has professionalism taken over?

McClelland: Professionalism had taken over--no panic. We all seemed to know that way was blocked, and we all seemed to turn at once. Everybody'd say, "Here's a hatch! Step high!" Everybody was helping the guy next to him, you know.

Marcello: So you had to grope your way back to that next hatch.

McClelland: That's right.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story at this point. So now you reverse course, so to speak.

McClelland: Light was shining down through the hatch, and it lighted the area so that we could find the ladder. I got up to the second deck, and our first lieutenant was standing on the second deck at the hatch directing traffic, so to speak. When I got up there, he said, "Get back to the sickbay!"

Marcello: He could see that you were injured rather more severely than what you had thought.

McClelland: More than what I assumed. I think all this drill and training just seemed to take over, and I tried to go around him, you know, and he stopped me and said, "You'd better take a look at yourself and get down to the sickbay!" I did (chuckle).

Marcello: Were you blistered and so on at this point?

McClelland: Yes. I had skin hanging down from my arms. Of course, I couldn't see all of it; I wasn't really looking. But I could see that I was burnt pretty bad, so I did go back to sickbay then.

Marcello: I assume that everything was happening so fast at this point that you did not have a chance to survey the activity that was taking place out in the harbor itself.

McClelland: No, none whatsoever.

Marcello: Okay, so you make it back down to sickbay. Now are you feeling any worse or about the same, or how would you describe your condition?

McClelland: I did feel a little weak. I was more concerned and shocked at the sight of people coming into the sickbay. There were very severely wounded people coming in. It was a very depressing sight.

Marcello: Were these mainly burn victims, also?

McClelland: Some were badly cut and bleeding profusely.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens when you get to sickbay?

McClelland: The corpsmen are overwhelmed with the number of patients that they had to take care of. They were trying to give some first aid to everyone and also trying to determine who needs it the most.

When I came in, he said, "Sit down and wait; we'll get to you." I could already see that my legs were badly burned, so I sat on the edge of the chair. I seemed to be so concerned with . . . I could see other people--how bad they were. That seemed to concern me more than anything else.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if perhaps by this time you were beginning to become a little bit fearful for your own situation.

McClelland: I did. I thought, "I want to see what happened to my face," (chuckle) so I started making my way over to a mirror. He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I want to take a look at myself." He said, "You'd better not. Go back and sit down." I said, "No, I'm going to have a look," and that was a shock (chuckle).

Marcello: Had you been burnt around the face and so on, also?

McClelland: My face was black. My hair was burnt off. I was a pretty sorry-looking sight (chuckle).

Marcello: It was almost amazing that you weren't in more pain than what you've described so far.

McClelland: No, I wasn't . . . well, I was in pain, but not to the point where I was incapacitated. Pretty soon I began to feel . . . I began to have chills--uncontrolled chills--and then they began to administer aid to me. They wrapped me in blankets, and my condition began to go down rapidly. They ran out of room, of course, in the sickbay, so they took a compartment in the next deck below, and they put us in there. I went down and got into a bunk down there, and then I began to feel pretty rotten by that time.

Marcello: You began to feel pretty what?

McClelland: Pretty bad. This Donald Brown that I mentioned--the one that broke his leg in football--came by and wanted to know if he could do anything. I told him I could use a cigarette.

Marcello: Now by this time, that is, by the time he came by, was the attack over?

McClelland: No. I could feel the ship firing on aircraft. I felt a huge explosion, which I knew was a close hit.

Marcello: Was this a bomb that had hit on 1010 dock?

McClelland: Yes. Of course, I was very concerned about my brother at the time. He was on the ship at the time, too.

Marcello: Oh, he was on the Helena, also?

McClelland: Yes. I was trying to find out what happened to him, but no one knew. I knew he was on watch at the time, but there was no one that could tell me about him. Of course, this cigarette that I had got brought a great deal of relief (chuckle); I took very deep drags on it. They also gave a shot of morphine, but the cigarette did more than, I think, the morphine did.

Marcello: Is there also a certain amount of fear in that you are injured, you are incapacitated, and at the same time there's all sorts of firing going on outside the ship? There's a possibility that the ship might go down, and how are you going to get out?

McClelland: No, I wasn't concerned about that. We were tied to the dock. I was going to rely on my shipmates; in fact, we had complete trust in them . . . helping each other. I wasn't concerned. My main concern was that I was not able to do anything about

it. It was a very frustrating feeling. I really wanted to be up there on deck.

Marcello: Now was anybody coming by to look after you or so on while you were down in this compartment below the sickbay?

McClelland: Yes, one of the corpsmen came by and gave me a shot of morphine.

Marcello: How long did you remain there?

McClelland: For what we thought was the duration of the raid. Time ceased to matter for a period of time there. It was someone's decision to get us to the hospital, so all those who could walk got up and walked. We made our way topside. We went through the mess hall. I recall going through the mess hall.

Marcello: That was in shambles, wasn't it?

McClelland: It was in terrible-looking shape. I recall meeting a gunner's mate--a friend of mine--and I can recall the expression on his face as he saw me. He looked extremely surprised at the condition I was in, I guess.

Marcello: I guess that didn't make you feel any better, either?

McClelland: No, I thought, you know. "It's not that bad." (chuckle)

Marcello: So you get on topside, and what happens at that point?

McClelland: They had taken cars and trucks of yard workmen . . . any vehicle that was on the dock was used to transport people to the hospital. I recall meeting another friend of mine--

another fire controlman at the gangway--and he left just ahead of me. He got into a pickup truck. I think another fellow and I got into a coupe, and we started for the hospital.

Marcello: Did you say you got into the coupe or into the pickup truck?

McClelland: Into the coupe, The fire controlman's name was Mayo.

Marcello: So you go the hospital. Now by this time is the raid over?

McClelland: No, there was still some strafing taking place.

Marcello: Can you describe this, or did you have other things to worry about?

McClelland: I think I wasn't concerned . . . I don't recall being concerned at the time about it. But in getting to the hospital, I recall someone saying that Mayo was killed on the way over,

Marcello: And he had gotten in the pickup truck.

McClelland: Yes. He said Mayo was still sitting there in the seat. I think it was through strafing.

Marcello: Did your vehicle come under any direct strafing while you were going to the hospital?

McClelland: I don't recall that it did, no.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens when you get to the hospital?

McClelland: It was almost complete chaos there, too (chuckle). The wards are filling up rapidly, and the nurses are directing the injured into the wards and so on. They were doing their

best for each one that would come in, but they had to cover so much, you know, so they had difficulties in looking after everyone.

Marcello: Now what particular hospital did you go to?

McClelland: It was the Naval hospital there.

Marcello: At Pearl Harbor. What did they do for you when you got there? Did they assign you and put you in a bed?

McClelland: They put me in a bed, yes. I think there was very little they were able to do other than to cut off wrist watches, rings, get your clothes off, and get you under the covers. That's about all I recall at the time.

Marcello: Were you still experiencing the chills and so on?

McClelland: No, I was in a considerable amount of pain, and I think I was less concerned about what was going on around me or unable to comprehend all that was going on around me. I recall them removing our wrist watches and our clothes and that sort of thing and getting us into bed. For some reason or other, I didn't want to lay down. I don't know why I was fearful of laying down, but she finally made me lay down. Now I recall that something seemed to be between my head and the pillow, you know, and here it was two huge blisters on the back of my head. That, I recall.

Marcello: How long did you remain in the hospital?

McClelland: Seven months total.

Marcello: Right there at the Pearl Harbor hospital?

McClelland: No, no, I came back in January on a troop convoy. I came back on the Henderson; it was an old World War I transport that they used to bring us back. I recall some long nights out there when I couldn't sleep.

I recall a doctor's evaluation shortly after things got organized and under control, and it listed my condition as extremely serious. But it seemed to me like I was going to be out in a week or two. I felt like I was only going to be here another week or two.

Marcello: Were you concerned about what your physical appearance would be like after you recovered?

McClelland: Yes, but the burns on my face seemed to heal up rather rapidly. My lips and ears were the two tender spots that seemed to take quite a bit longer to heal, and they remained tender for a long time.

Marcello: Did you have trouble eating or drinking?

McClelland: Yes, I did. I couldn't use my arms or my hands. I had to be fed. I couldn't shave. Of course, I knew I was a mess (chuckle) with the burns and the beard, and trying to get help with everything.

Marcello: How soon was it before you found out your brother's situation?

McClelland: Well, men from the Helena would come over, and they would check on us every now and then, and I would have them look

for my brother. Well, they found him in the hospital there, and he had a broken hip and a broken leg, but I couldn't see him, of course. Everytime someone would come over to see either me or him, why, we would have them check on the other. So while we couldn't see each other, we kept in contact that way.

Marcello: I'm sure this was quite a relief to know that your brother was still alive and for him to know that you were still alive, despite the fact that both of you were injured.

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: How shortly after the attack were your parents and so on notified as to your condition, do you recall?

McClelland: I think it was almost immediately . . . within days . . . within a few days, I know. I saw a telegram that my mother had received shortly after the attack, informing her that we had both been injured or wounded, I guess it said. But they didn't express how badly or whatever-- just that we were wounded. Of course, she was extremely concerned about us. I can recall writing letters and trying to explain to her that everything was fine and we were all right and wondering why I wasn't hearing from her, you know. Weeks went by and I hadn't ever heard from her because there was such a disruption of the flow of mail and so on. I didn't understand it at the time (chuckle).

Marcello: Now obviously you were injured quite severely there on December 7, 1941. Do you have any lasting scars or anything from that experience? Again, I'm looking at you here in 1978, and you look perfectly normal in terms of appearance.

McClelland: Yes, I still have some scars on my back and my arms and legs.

Marcello: From the burns?

McClelland: Yes.

Marcello: Well, Mr. McClelland, is there anything else relative to the Pearl Harbor attack that we need to talk about and that we haven't mentioned at this point?

McClelland: Just about a year ago, I was out there for the thirty-fifth reunion, and it was the first time I had been back. I was a little disappointed in what I saw.

Marcello: Disappointed in what respect?

McClelland: Pearl Harbor was no longer the strong Naval base it used to be.

Marcello: In other words, there weren't as many ships and so on there any longer?

McClelland: It was a mere shadow of what it used to be.

Marcello: Well, I suppose that's perhaps a good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to participate. You have said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars will find

your comments most valuable when they use them to write
about Pearl Harbor.

McClelland: Thank you,