

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

437

Interview with

S. H. Emerson

July 31, 1978

Place of Interview: Richardson, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Terms of Use: Open

Approved:

S. H. Emerson
(Signature)

Date:

7-31-78

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Oral History Collection

S. H. Emerson

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Sydney H. Emerson for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 31, 1978, in Richardson, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Emerson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the cruiser USS San Francisco during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Emerson, 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.

Mr. Emerson: Well, I was born in Canada. My mother and father met and married in Canada, and I was born in Canada. My folks moved to Texas in 1923, I believe it was.

Dr. Marcello: When were you born?

Mr. Emerson: April 28, 1922.

Dr. Marcello: Now, were your folks American citizens, or were they Canadian citizens?

Mr. Emerson: My mother was a Hungarian, and my dad was an Englishman

(chuckle), so when we came to the States, my youngest sister and I became citizens after my dad took his papers out. That made us become citizens. The rest of my brothers and sisters had to take their papers out.

Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Emerson: I joined the Navy on July 3, 1940.

Marcello: Now, where did you join the Navy?

Emerson: I was sworn in in Houston.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service in 1940?

Emerson: Well, I lived in the Valley, and there wasn't a whole lot to do for a boy. My dad had passed away, and it was just my mother was at home, so I decided to get a little adventure and join the Navy and see the world like they advertised.

Marcello: Were there still Depression times in the Valley during that period?

Emerson: It was rather slow. You know, it wasn't booming too much.

Marcello: So economic factors, then, did play somewhat of a reason in your deciding to enter the service?

Emerson: Yes, it did. It was just my mother and I, and I wanted to get away from it all after school.

Marcello: It's interesting in that a great many men of your generation entered the service for economic reasons. The service didn't offer very much in terms of pay, but there was a certain amount of security there, was there not?

Emerson: Yes, there was. Twenty-one dollars a month wasn't much to offer (chuckle), but I enjoyed the Navy, and that was what I was looking for--adventure.

Marcello: Why did you join the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service? You talk about adventure and travel, but possibly you could have gotten that in one of the other branches, too.

Emerson: Well, a friend of mine . . . actually, we had talked about the Navy, and why we selected the Navy over the other branches of services, I don't know. We talked about the Navy, and I had forgotten more or less about it until one day he came by the house and said, "Well, are you ready to go?" And that surprised me, but off we went.

Marcello: Now, were you a high school graduate at that time?

Emerson: I didn't finish high school, no.

Marcello: How hard was it to get into the Navy in July, 1940?

Emerson: It wasn't any trouble, as far as education was concerned. But my getting into the Navy was delayed, because I didn't have anything to show that I was a citizen. I had to have my sister write to Canada and get verification of my entry into the country and to try to get some verification of citizenship. I had my dad's naturalization papers, but it didn't state a thing on there about us being citizens.

Marcello: Did this process take very long, considering how slow the

bureaucracy usually moves?

Emerson: I think it was three weeks or something like that before I left. He left three weeks ahead of me.

Marcello: At that time, how closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs?

Emerson: Well, not very much, really. We didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it. Of course, when I finally got in the Navy, why, we kept up with the news and what was happening in other countries. Actually, we were trying to . . . we thought, "Well, we may as well get in, too, and let's get it over with." Everyone was eager to get into battle, really. There was a lot of talk in the Navy at that time.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Emerson: In San Diego, California.

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

Emerson: No, it was more or less routine. I can't say much about it except it was just routine, and San Diego was a different place, and being away from home and everything, you know, it was an experience.

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

Emerson: No, I don't believe . . . it seems to me like it was two months or six weeks or something like that. It wasn't too long of a

time.

Marcello: In other words, it was not as much as twelve weeks.

Emerson: I don't believe so. It could have been, but I don't think so. I did come home on boot leave after my training for ten days. We had a ten-day boot leave.

Marcello: After your boot leave had been completed, where did you go then?

Emerson: Well, they sent us to . . . we boarded a tanker and traveled down the coast to San Pedro and was stationed at an air base there in San Pedro for a few days. Then they put us aboard the Argonne, which was a supply ship and repair ship, and that's what we used for our first trip across the ocean to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Now, when you boarded the Argonne to go over to the Hawaiian Islands, did you know at that time that you would be going aboard the San Francisco?

Emerson: Yes, I did.

Marcello: Was this duty in the Hawaiian Islands voluntary duty, or were you simply sent there?

Emerson: We were just assigned to that ship, and it was stationed in that area at the time.

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

Emerson: Well, we were looking forward to it, and we wanted to get the experience out there and see the islands. We were anxious to

get aboard the ship that we were assigned to.

Marcello: Did you have visions of a tropical paradise and all that sort of thing?

Emerson: Well, we did somewhat at that time, yes (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so you go to the Hawaiian Islands, and it's there that you pick up the cruiser USS San Francisco. What sort of a reception did you get when you went aboard the San Francisco? After all, you were still "boots," so to speak, certainly as far as "old salts" aboard the cruiser were concerned.

Emerson: Well, I want to say this. I think that I was probably one of the very few that actually boarded the ship where the ship was anchored out on Honolulu. We didn't go aboard ship in Pearl Harbor. At that time, some of the warships were anchored out of Honolulu.

Marcello: Was it called Lahaina Roads? Is that where it was?

Emerson: No. . . well, it could be. I'm not sure about that. I remember Lahaina Roads, but I know that when we did go aboard the ship, why, the swells out there were about six foot, and if you didn't step fast, you'd get your feet wet on the gangway. That's where we boarded the ship and went aboard the San Francisco to begin with. Of course, being a "boot," in the Navy, why, you got all the dirty work and anything else that came up that the "boots" got.

Marcello: I assume that you were assigned to the deck force when you first

went aboard?

Emerson: No, I really didn't do anything on the upper part of the ship and on the deck force. I was assigned to a fire room--the number three fire room--which is down in the . . . the ship had eight boilers and four fire rooms, and I was in number three as a fireman third class.

Marcello: Now, were you simply assigned there, or somewhere along the way did you indicate your preference for working in the engineering section?

Emerson: No, I believe that's where they needed men, so they just assigned you there. I don't believe you had a choice at that time.

Marcello: Would you have preferred to have been somewhere else, or were you relatively satisfied in going into the fire room?

Emerson: I was satisfied. I was always looking for the experience, you know, and wanting to see what was happening. I also wanted to meet the other fellows in the fire room. Anyplace aboard ship would have been fine with me, but that's where I ended up.

Marcello: What sort of work did you initially do down in the fire room?

Emerson: Well, first of all, I think the first job you have is to make coffee. As soon as you learn to make coffee, you get all your other duties. As a fireman, you have to change the burners in the boilers and clean the burners and clean up and fire the

boilers and keep the steam under control and such as that.

Marcello: When we talk about firing the boilers, what are we talking about?

Emerson: Well, the boilers at that time were fired by oil and in that particular ship--I forget when it was built-- your fire room is under air pressure. The whole fire room is under pressure, and you have air locker doors going down to the fire room so that your . . . when you run your blowers, you're putting pressure on the fire room so that air is forced into your burners on your boiler. That makes your fire burn better and hotter and keeps your smoke down. But that's the type of boiler it was; it was a B & W boiler. The ship had twelve burners in it and two boilers in each fire room. We carried 300 pounds of steam; that was the maximum steam pressure. You took turns on the boilers and also watching the steam gauge when you were under way.

Marcello: Did you find that most of the senior petty officers in that particular fire room were quite willing and able to teach you all the functions that you might run across there in the fire room?

Emerson: Oh, yes. They were anxious to show us what to do and help us in any way they could. Of course, you had the Navy "A to N Manual," which was available to you. You had to study it to make an advancement. All the petty officers were willing to

help you. And, of course, like any other job, you try to get ahead so that you can get a better job and get out of the bilges.

Marcello: How slow or rapid was advancement in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Emerson: Well, at first it was rather slow, but, of course, as the time went by, it increased and you could get advanced rather fast. It depended on the individual.

Marcello: I think it also depended upon both test scores and the availability of openings within the fleet.

Emerson: That's right. A lot of times, when a petty officer took his exam and made good scores--they had so many of them making good scores--unless there was an opening, he didn't get a chance to get advanced.

Marcello: What were your living quarters like aboard the San Francisco?

Emerson: Well, we had fairly good bunks, which, as tall as I am, wasn't long enough for me (chuckle). My bunk was right over one of the propellers; we slept in the second deck down and right over the propeller, and I could hear the swishing of the water all night long. But the living quarters weren't bad.

Marcello: Did this create any problems in terms of sleeping?

Emerson: Not really. Cold weather was a little more difficult, but I used an extra blanket and such as that. I hung over both ends of my bunk (chuckle), but outside of that I did pretty

good.

Marcello: How were your living quarters in terms of space? Were they cramped as they are aboard most ships?

Emerson: Well, when I first went aboard the ship, I think we had about 650 men, but later on the complement was increased to around 1,200.

Marcello: And consequently there was a corresponding decrease in space.

Emerson: Right, yes. Of course, they made a little more room and raised the amount of bunks of one on top of the other so they could get more people in there, and it was a little more crowded.

Marcello: Where did you keep your clothing?

Emerson: We had lockers. Of course, you were supposed to keep them rolled in the Navy tradition and keep them in these lockers. They had spaces for your winter coats--peacoats --and I think we had two lockers to keep our clothes in. Other than that . . . we only had a certain amount of clothes, so each man had enough space to keep them.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the San Francisco?

Emerson: Well, when I first went aboard the San Francisco, why, we had family-style meals, where each man was assigned a plate and a place at the table. Being a "boot," why, you got the very end of the table, and the petty officer got the other end; that's where the food was placed in the containers, and it

was passed down, and by the time it got to you, sometimes it was a little thin. But we didn't do without food.

Marcello: Did you get mess cooking when you went aboard the San Francisco?

Emerson: Well, later on, when the complement was increased, why, they went to cafeteria-style serving. I was fortunate to get mess cooking in the chiefs' quarters, so I mess cooked there for about three weeks, and due to my status of being a fireman--the other sailors were seamen--they transferred me to general mess, and I was on the cakes and pies and the bread detail.

Marcello: What does the cake and the bread and the pie detail do?

Emerson: Well, we had to cut the bread every day for 1,000 men. We had to cut quite a few loaves of bread. Well, for enough pies to go around, it took quite a few pies, and we had to cut those and then wash the plates and the pie pans after each meal and serve the cake and such as that.

Marcello: When you say you had to cut the bread, I am assuming that the bread was actually baked right aboard the San Francisco.

Emerson: Yes. Each ship had a bakery and, of course, a butcher shop and a galley. They would make the cinnamon rolls and bread and cakes and the whole works right there. We had a little slicing machine, and we just ran the loaves through there and sliced the bread just like you buy at the store today.

Marcello: Generally speaking, did you like the Navy chow aboard the San Francisco?

Emerson: It wasn't bad. We had a little hard time getting used to beans for breakfast on Saturday and Wednesday (chuckle). But all in all, it wasn't bad food at all. Also, back to the bread, when we were at sea and a destroyer came by and they didn't have a bakery, we had to supply them with bread, too, and so sometimes we ran a little short when we had to give them bread. They was always looking for a handout (chuckle)

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about a routine training exercise in which the San Francisco might engage. Generally speaking, when would the San Francisco go out on one of these exercises; how long would it stay out; what would it do when it went out; and when would it come back in? I've asked you a series of about four questions.

Emerson: Well, I think the longest time stayed at sea would be . . .

Marcello: I'm referring now to that pre-Pearl Harbor period, of course.

Emerson: Right. We'd go out for exercises which would be gunnery and maneuvers and such as that. Also, you were participating in an efficiency run toward the other ships in your group.. We would try to cruise and get by on the least amount of fuel we could and save fuel and such as that. We would go to sea for probably six days, which was probably the longest time. They would send one of the airplanes in to pick up our mail probably every third day or something like that. We would have gunnery practice, where an airplane would pull a sleeve and they'd fire

at it. Such exercise as that.

Marcello: I gather that there was a great deal of emphasis put upon getting one of the so-called "E's" which stood for efficiency?

Emerson: That's right. We managed to get the white "E". . . I think I'm correct in saying the white "E" paid ten dollars, where the red "E" only paid five dollars. Now, that was one bill of ten dollars; you didn't get it every month. It came just one time around.

Marcello: In other words, you got a ten-dollar bonus one time if you got the white "E." What was the difference between the white "E" and the red "E?"

Emerson: I think that the white "E" was possibly the best--the top; you were more efficient. Now we received the white "E" for engineering, which was operating on the least amount of fuel. It stood for efficiency in engineering. And the red "E" was probably the next rating--I'm not sure. But we did manage to get it on the San Francisco, and it was painted on the stack--the big white "E."

Marcello: How long did you keep that "E?"

Emerson: I don't remember.

Marcello: Was there a certain amount of time, however, that you were allowed to have the "E" painted on the stack or whatever?

Emerson: Right. You had a certain amount of time, and it was possibly for a year or so. I don't know; I don't remember. I do know

that it was painted on, and we had to paint it back off because it showed up too much at night in our night exercises. Airplanes could spot it, so they had to take it back off and paint it grey again.

Marcello: Was there a set day when the San Francisco would normally go out on one of these routine exercises during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Emerson: No, I wouldn't say that it was a set day. We did carry the admiral on there--on the ship--and we got better docking facilities by having the admiral aboard. I don't think that we had any special time to go out. It was probably three or four days in port unless we had a little work to be done--a little extra work to be done aboard ship--and then other than that, we went to sea for our exercises with the same group of ships and task force. I don't believe it was called a task force then. I don't remember what it was.

Marcello: Was it called the cruiser squadron or something like that?

Emerson: Yes, right. I believe that's what it was.

Marcello: Do you recall what other cruisers you would normally work with?

Emerson: Well, it was probably the New Orleans and the Vincennes and the Quincy and the Astoria, which was all the same class of ship. I think they were all the San Francisco class of ship; they were all built around the same time.

Marcello: What sort of antiaircraft armament did the San Francisco have

aboard during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Emerson: Well, we had the nine 8-inch guns, and then we had eight 5-inch guns.

Marcello: Now, the 8-inch guns could not be used for antiaircraft operations, could they?

Emerson: No. No, that was for ground fire or surface fire. We had eight 5-inch guns, and we carried . . . I believe it was four 3-inch, two aft and two up on the bridge, and that was about the size of it.

Marcello: In other words, is it safe to say that the San Francisco had many more antiaircraft weapons aboard it after Pearl Harbor than it did before Pearl Harbor?

Emerson: Well, they changed from 3-inch to 1.1's, which was a new gun, and each one of those had four barrels to it; it was more or less a 1-inch machine gun, you might say. But the eight 5-inch remained aboard, and they might have increased it by some machine guns and such as that.

Marcello: I'm sure you probably got some 20-millimeters and 40-millimeters aboard after Pearl Harbor.

Emerson: Yes, I believe they did put some 20-millimeters on there.

Marcello: I guess at that time nobody really knew the role that the airplane was going to play in future naval warfare?

Emerson: No, but still again, they did a lot of practicing on shooting sleeves down, so they practiced toward the airplane or against it.

Marcello: Would there be any particular time when the San Francisco would come in off these maneuvers, that is, any particular day of the week?

Emerson: No, I don't believe so. Sometimes we would come into port possibly on a Friday, and other times it would be on Monday or during the week. We were in enough to where you could go ashore and be in Honolulu on the weekends. Of course, you had to have special permission to stay overnight at that time. A lot of the officers and men aboard there had their wives in Pearl Harbor or Honolulu.

Marcello: Where was your battle station aboard the San Francisco?

Emerson: Well, my battle station was in the number three fire room, and I tended the boiler.

Marcello: Did you notice that your training routine changed any as one gets closer and closer to December 7th and as relations between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate? Could you detect any change in your routine?

Emerson: Yes, there was a routine change, because at sea we operated with blackout. We had to turn out all the lights. There were no more lights on topside, and we discontinued movies aboard the ship on topside at night. We had more drills, so there was somewhat of a readiness made toward any hostilities that might come up.

Marcello: What sort of scuttlebutt did this cause aboard the San Francisco?

Was there speculation among the crew as to what was happening?

Emerson: Well, we had news of what was happening to the British and what battles were going on. I think the Germans were involved in the war with the British, and this kind of made us jumpy, and we wanted to try to get into it. That's the only thing I could add to it.

Marcello: Did you and your buddies in your bull sessions ever talk about the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor or the surrounding military installations?

Emerson: I don't remember any stories on the Japanese. I'm sure we were concerned, but I don't remember any.

Marcello: In other words, even if war came between the two countries, you and your buddies probably felt relatively secure there in the Hawaiian Islands. War with Japan might come, but not in the Hawaiian Islands.

Emerson: We didn't think they would attack us at Pearl Harbor. I'm not sure, but I believe it was a British ship that came in there before Pearl Harbor. It had got shot up over in the Mediterranean or someplace, and, of course, we seen it and what had happened to it. We thought we were pretty well-prepared to fight off anything that came our way.

Marcello: This more or less leads into my next question. What was the morale like in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy? I'm referring now more specifically to the morale aboard the San Francisco, I guess.

Emerson: Well, I think the morale was good. The men were ready to do their duty, and their morale was high, and they were ready to go any time that duty called.

Marcello: Was there an air of confidence?

Emerson: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: Now normally when the San Francisco would come in off one of these training exercises, where would it dock?

Emerson: Well, like I mentioned before, we carried the admiral aboard ship, and so that gave us a little better docking space, and we docked usually . . . we tied up at the dock where we could just walk over the gangplank and go ashore. Where if we tied up out in the harbor to a buoy, we had to ride a boat, and we would rather have the docking facilities. We tied up there at finger piers or on the long dock on the side of the harbor.

Marcello: When you mentioned the long dock, are you referring to Ten-Ten Dock?

Emerson: Yes.

Marcello: What was the liberty routine like aboard the San Francisco?

Emerson: I believe we had starboard and port liberty, and you could go every other day. Then when you got your duty on the weekend, of course, you missed the weekend.

Marcello: But would you get every other weekend?

Emerson: Yes, something like that.

Marcello: Would you get a full weekend?

Emerson: Well, we couldn't go over and spend overnight without special permission. You had to have a place to stay due to the amount of sailors--military--and the hotel facilities at that time. But if you had a place to stay and got special permission, you could go over on Saturday night, and you could stay over two days. Other than that, you had to be back and then go back ashore the next day.

Marcello: I assume the San Francisco had what was called at that time the "Cinderella liberty." In other words, you had to be back at midnight.

Emerson: Right. I believe . . . it seems to me like on Saturday night it was probably extended to maybe two o'clock or something like that. Other than that, it was midnight.

Marcello: I guess that given the pay that you were getting, you couldn't afford to spend too many entire weekends in Honolulu.

Emerson: No, but if you missed a few liberties and stayed at sea for a few days, your money accumulated, and you'd end up with thirty or forty or fifty dollars rather than twenty-one (chuckle).

Marcello: Normally, what would you do when you went ashore?

Emerson: Oh, we visited different areas on the island. And, of course, we always drank a beer or two and looked the place over and tried to meet somewhere where we could have a good time.

Marcello: I gather that Hotel and Canal and Beretania Streets were scenes of a lot of activity. Is this correct?

Emerson: Right. We went to Diamond Head and on Waikiki Beach at the hotel out there and visited those places fairly often. I never did get to the pineapple factory.

Marcello: I see you don't have any tattoos, so evidently Hotel or Canal Streets didn't get to you in that way.

Emerson: No, I wasn't a tattoo person. I didn't care for that.

Marcello: Did you have very many Asiatic sailors aboard the San Francisco at that time?

Emerson: Yes, there was quite a few. I talked to a lot of them, and, of course, they had stories about when they were in China.. Speaking on China, I had an opportunity--another fellow and myself--to put in for duty in China. The cruiser Houston was docked in Pearl Harbor at the time, and it was going to foreign duty to China, and they were looking for people to go. So we put in for China duty, and after thinking about it for a day or so, I scratched my name out. The other fellow got called and made the trip on the Houston to China. He left a week or so later, and I never did see him again. But I missed the ship; I never did go.

Marcello: Well, I think it's perhaps a good thing that you didn't make that transfer to the Houston. You might recall that the Houston was sunk very shortly after the Battle of the Java Sea, and then the survivors off that ship spent the rest of the war in prisoner-of-war camps, and many of them didn't fare too well.

- Emerson: That's right. I often thought of that ship. Then, of course, I might have been assigned--reassigned--to something else when I would have gotten there. I think the Houston was probably the biggest ship in the area at the time. The Marblehead was another ship that was there; it was an old four-stacker cruiser. I believe it was also in a battle, but I don't believe it was sunk, though.
- Marcello: We were talking about tattoos awhile ago, and I guess that's the reason why I thought of those Asiatic sailors. I understand that most of those guys had quite a few tattoos.
- Emerson: Right. They all had quite a few tattoos and stories to go along with them.
- Marcello: I guess in many ways they were kind of the outcasts of the Navy at that time, were they not?
- Emerson: Well, yes, but then they had a lot of interesting stories, so they made the recruit or the "boot" anxious to go ashore and see the tattoo parlors or possibly go overseas or go to Asiatic duty. They made them anxious to look for foreign duty.
- Marcello: Many people like to say that if an enemy were going to attack the Hawaiian Islands, the best time that could have been selected would be a Sunday morning. In other words, what many people assume is that Saturday nights were a time of a great deal of partying and drinking and hell-raising, so to speak, and that consequently the personnel wouldn't be in too good a shape

to fight the next morning. How would you have replied to an assertion of that sort?

Emerson: Well, I don't know about parties and the hell-raising, but the Navy gave the married people an opportunity to go ashore, so they would be staying with their family in Honolulu. And then I would say that in the Navy at that time, the personnel aboard would probably be more relaxed on a Sunday morning. You had your inspections--your routine inspection--and such taken care of. Your duties for the week--your cleaning the ship--was all taken care of on Saturday, and that was all over with. Sunday was a day of relaxation, so therefore it would possibly be the best time to attack.

Marcello: In other words, and again to go back to my question, it wasn't necessarily that everybody was hung over on a Sunday morning, but rather it was the fact that Sunday was a day of leisure, so to speak.

Emerson: Right. I believe so more than any hangovers. Of course, there was the routine hangovers from the night before. But the complement aboard ship--the men aboard ship--a lot of them were ashore with their families, like I said before, and so that just eased the tension, and everybody was relaxed. A lot of fellows didn't get up on Sunday morning unless they had duties to perform, and therefore they were not available to go to their battle stations immediately.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us up to that weekend of December 7, 1941, Mr. Emerson, and let us now go into that weekend in a little bit more detail. When did the San Francisco come in that particular weekend? Do you recall?

Emerson: Well, actually, we went in the yard for a three-month overhaul which occurred every eighteen months.

Marcello: When did you go into the yard? In other words, how far before December 7th?

Emerson: We were probably . . . I'm not sure but we were probably in the yard for a period of several weeks--two or three weeks--before December 7th.

Marcello: What did going into the yard mean to you and your shipmates in the fire room?

Emerson: Well, when you went into the yard, all the work that was planned to be done over the period that you were in the yard took place in the period that you were in the yard. So during the eighteen months prior to the yard, anything that needed to be repaired--any leaky valves or anything that needed to be repaired--was all turned in so that that could be taken care of while you were in the yard. So when you were in there, why, your boiler was secured, and all your steam was secured and your boilers cooled off before you could do any work that was necessary to be done on it.

Marcello: In other words, a lot of the apparatus and machinery would be torn down, so to speak, while you were in the yard?

Emerson: Right. A lot of the boilers were disassembled; valves were disassembled and repaired. Some of it was taken care of by civilian yard people--civilian people--and a lot of it was done by us.

Marcello: Now, when you're in the yard like that, is most of the ammunition removed?

Emerson: Yes, all the ammunition is removed except possibly some clips of .45's. All magazines are cleaned out because they may do work on the magazines or the lifts--shell lifts--on the big guns. All kinds of welding are going on, and at that particular time we were putting on the degaussing cables aboard ship for mines. They made a degaussing cable which is made of probably hundreds of wires, and it was sewed in a canvas bag, and it looked like a long snake. When it was brought over from the yard, there was probably a hundred men carrying it, and they just slipped it through the ship and welded it on brackets.

Marcello: This was a British innovation, I think, was it not?

Emerson: It could have been--could have been. It was to detect mines or degauss the ship so the ship wouldn't set off magnetic mines.

Marcello: Do you recall what was being done in the number three fire room--the fire room at that time where you were stationed?

Emerson: Well, I think the degaussing cable that I spoke of was possibly cut up due to the fact that it wasn't as good as what

they came out with later, and so they were putting in another degaussing cable, and it was right in the bottom of the ship. They had civilian people burning holes in the bulkheads and inserting this cable. And then we had to disassemble the valves and overhaul valves--leaky valves--and repack them. We had to take all the fronts of all the boilers out and replace the fronts, which is a job that's done every so often. It was just the routine work, and then, of course, all the manhole covers had to be removed from the oil tanks and the voids, and they had to be cleaned out--water tanks. They had vacuum tanks on the dock which sucked all the sludge out and such as that.

Marcello: The number three fire room was in a helluva shape, so to speak, at that time.

Emerson: It was. It was torn up and everything was open, and it took us awhile to get it into shape to operate again.

Marcello: I would assume that you and your buddies didn't look forward to going into the yard.

Emerson: No. Of course, we had our routine work to do, and it had to be done. But we thought we were in better shape than the seamen and the men on the topside, because they had to go over the side and clean the hull on the outside. So we did our work, and they did theirs.

Marcello: Are you in dry dock?

Emerson: No, not at that time.

Marcello: In other words, they were just cleaning the hull of the ship that was out of the water. Do you get any better liberty when you're in the yard?

Emerson: No. Things don't improve because you had to do all your washing and showering and save water while you're aboard ship. Now, we had all our welding hoses and leads and such as that.

Marcello: Do you get liberty every night or every other night or something like that when you're in the yard?

Emerson: Well, your liberty may have improved some, but conditions were such that a lot of times you didn't want to get cleaned up and go. They gave you the opportunity to go over into the yard, and they had a place over there called the Tin Roof, which was a beer parlor.

Marcello: I've heard of the Tin Roof.

Emerson: Then we played softball and football and such as that over on the dock area and visited the Tin Roof.

Marcello: Was the Tin Roof a very big place?

Emerson: No, it was a small (chuckle) beer parlor, and it wasn't very elaborate--just a tin roof that served beer, and that's where we drank it.

Marcello: Do you recall what you did that Friday or Saturday evening of either December 5th or December 6th while the San Francisco was in the yard?

Emerson: No. We were at such a point in our overhaul that the ship had planned to move away from the dock and go into dry dock. It was scheduled to go into dry dock on Saturday, which was December 6th. But we didn't go into dry dock, and so it was just a routine of inspections and doing our routine work.

Marcello: Were you getting ready to clean up and so on down in that fire room? In other words, had most of your repairs and maintenance been done by that time?

Emerson: No, actually we were working on the water tanks, and we had all the manhole covers off. We had to wire-brush and clean out all the water tanks which were on the very bottom of the ship and repaint them with a metallic red paint. We had been working on those, and I think that the yard people had cleaned out the oil tanks. We had the covers off the voids, too, which is in between the oil tanks and water tanks. We still had a lot of leads and cables and one thing or another down in the fire room that had to be removed before we moved to dry dock. But we didn't go, so they remained in place at that time.

Marcello: When you go into dry dock, does everybody work on the bottom of the ship, or is it still just mainly the deck force?

Emerson: Well, mostly the deck force, but I'm sure that some of the boys got an opportunity to work that were in the black gang, as they called it in those days, or the engineering force or

the firemen.

Marcello: That's a nasty job, is it not--cleaning the hull of the ship?

Emerson: Yes, it is. Of course, a lot of it is done right on the bottom of the ship with sandblasting, but a lot of it is just scraping and wire brushing which no one looks forward to.

Marcello: Okay, what did you do that Saturday evening?

Emerson: Well, I didn't go ashore, and I don't remember now whether I had the duty or not. But I didn't go ashore, and another fellow and myself played cribbage. In fact, we played cribbage until two o'clock in the morning, and that was the activity for the evening.

Marcello: Incidentally, what sort of a view of Battleship Row did you have from where the San Francisco was docked at that time?

Emerson: Well, we were tied up to the finger piers at this time--I don't remember whether it was starboard or port side--and we could look across the harbor and see all the battleships tied up at Ford Island.

Marcello: I guess that was a pretty impressive sight, was it not?

Emerson: Oh, yes. Well, even at that time some of the battleships on Sunday had boat races and one thing or another competing among themselves, and you could view that from where we were at. And then also the sub base was up in there in that part of the harbor, and the PT boats were in there, and we could see them come and go.

- Marcello: Approximately how far were you from Battleship Row? You would have to estimate this, of course.
- Emerson: I would say it would be possibly a half-mile or three-quarters of a mile across the harbor.
- Marcello: Did you have an unobstructed view?
- Emerson: Yes, from the very stern of the ship, we could see most of the battleships tied up at their mooring.
- Marcello: Did anything eventful happen that Saturday evening that you can think of?
- Emerson: No, it was a routine evening. We had a routine meal and a routine evening. Like I say, a lot of the men had gone ashore, and so it was quiet. The yard work or the work aboard ship had quieted down for the evening, so it was just routine.
- Marcello: Were there very many drunks that came back aboard that night, do you recall?
- Emerson: No, I don't recall any drunks. Like I mentioned before, this old fellow and myself sat in the boilermaker's shack and played cribbage until two o'clock in the morning, and that was how the evening was spent more or less.
- Marcello: Okay, this brings us into the Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. Once more, I'll ask you to pick up your routine on that day from the time you woke up until all hell broke loose.
- Emerson: Well, since I stayed up late on Saturday night, why, I hadn't planned to get up early on Sunday morning. Usually, they woke

us up about six o'clock--reveille was at six o'clock--but a lot of times on Sunday there we just turned over and went back to sleep. That was the plan of the day for my Sunday. I just stayed in my bunk, and I would say that . . . I don't remember when the attack was.

Marcello: It occurred about 7:55 or 8:00.

Emerson: Well, I was in my bunk when the general alarm went off. I would say that in . . . something just told me that this was not a drill; this was the real thing. I had to jump out of my bunk and put my clothes on and go up one flight of stairs or a ladder and go forward all through the ship to the number three fire room which was my battle station.

Marcello: What sort of clothing did you put on?

Emerson: I had a white T-shirt on and my blue jean pants, and I slipped my shoes on, and then I raced through the ship. I had to go all the way through the ship and through the mess hall; and by the time I had reached the hatch to go down into the fire room, the fellows had already come down from topside and said the airplanes were attacking . . . the Japanese were attacking, and they had already bombed some of the battleships, and this was the real thing.

Marcello: What were your thoughts or reactions when you heard that news?

Emerson: Well, I don't know what my thoughts were. I was surely scared like everyone else and didn't know what to do next. We went

down to the fire room . . . and the ship was taking electricity from the dock, and we lost electricity, so we were in a black-out. We just talked amongst ourselves and really didn't know what to do because we really didn't have any leadership at the time; our chief petty officer had gone ashore, and he hadn't returned.

Marcello: Now, in the meantime, can you hear noises and explosions and so on outside?

Emerson: I don't remember whether we could hear anything or not, although I'm sure that we talked to some people that had come down from topside and we could discuss what was happening.

Marcello: Was it rather disconcerting to be down several decks where you couldn't see the action and at the same time to be in a situation where there were no lights? In other words, you were in the dark figuratively in terms of what was happening outside, and literally because you had no power inside the ship.

Emerson: Yes. We were helpless because we didn't have any power aboard ship, and we couldn't fight back in the shape that we were in. We didn't have any lights to work by, and it kind of got to the point where we used our battle lanterns to do what we thought was best to do. One of the petty officers said, "Well, let's put all the manhole covers back on. We need to close up these water tanks and close up all the holes and tanks." We started working on this, and that's what we did and it only

took us a few minutes to get those on.

Marcello: When you mentioned that you used a battle lantern, what sort of illumination are we talking about?

Emerson: It was just a dry cell flashlight with possibly a four-inch lens in it. It didn't give much light; it was a flashlight affair.

Marcello: How long were you in this particular situation?

Emerson: Well, we stayed down in the fire room until we got the manhole covers on, and finally someone said, "What are we doing down here? We can't do any good down here! Let's go up and see what's happening!"

Marcello: About how much time had elapsed by now, that is, from the time you heard general quarters until the decision was made to go topside?

Emerson: I would say possibly forty-five minutes.

Marcello: So by this time, a great deal of the action outside was already over.

Emerson: Right. I know that when I did get on topside--and we went all the way to the top or main deck--the only thing that I seen was three airplanes flying off in the distance, and they were still firing at them with possibly 5-inch guns. You could see the bursts and see the airplanes way off in the distance. Anymore of the attack, I didn't see.

Marcello: Were you scared while you were down there in the dark?

Emerson: Yes, we were scared and nervous. We didn't know what might happen anytime, and we thought that in the condition of the ship with everything being open, one hit and they would sink it.

Marcello: Is this the sort of topic that you were conversing about down there? Was there any joking or anything of that nature going on to try to relieve the tension?

Emerson: I don't believe there was any joking. It was more or less serious talk as to we didn't expect the attack or we didn't know it was coming or we didn't have any indication that it was coming. They just caught us by surprise, and they really did.

Marcello: I am assuming that the San Francisco was in no shape to get up steam to get out of there.

Emerson: No, it wasn't. It took us ten days to make the ship ready before we could move away from the pier and tie up to the mooring.

Marcello: What sort of scene did you see when you went topside?

Emerson: Well, there was columns of smoke from the Arizona and possibly from a couple of the other ships that were burning. The Oklahoma was sunk, and boats were going back and forth across the harbor picking up men out of the water. There was all kinds of oil on the water and just mass confusion.

Marcello: What did you do when you got topside?

Emerson: Well, this part of the story . . . we ran out on the dock, and the cruiser New Orleans was tied up on the other side from us--on the other side of the dock--and someone on the bridge of the New Orleans said, "Throw off the lines! We're going to get underway and get out of here!" So we threw all the lines off the bits on the dock, and the ship started drifting away from the dock. And an officer ran up about that time and said, "What are you doing?" And we said, "Well, someone on the bridge said to throw all the lines off, so we did." And he said, "Well, half the people are not on the ship! They're over there in Honolulu, and so let's tie it back up!" The only thing holding the ship to the dock was a rag water hose, and it was stretched tight enough that you could have walked on it, and that was the only thing that held the ship to the dock. They threw the lines back over, and we pulled it back up to the dock and tied it back up.

Marcello: When you say you pulled New Orleans back, I assume it was getting at least close to the dock under its own power.

Emerson: No.

Marcello: This was all hand power?

Emerson: It was all hand power. There was probably thirty or forty men on each line pulling the ship back to the dock, and there wasn't any wind or anything that resisted, so we just . . . it's a 10,000-ton cruiser, and we pulled it back up to the

dock and tied it back up.

Marcello: How many lines would there possibly have been thrown over?

Emerson: Well, there was probably four lines--two going in each direction.

Marcello: So we're talking about 120 men or 130 men that were doing this?

Emerson: Right. And more men were coming on the dock. A lot of the men that spent the night in Honolulu were coming back about that time, and they were coming down the dock to the ship.

Marcello: Was this an extraordinary feat, or could this be done even under normal circumstances if you had enough men like this?

Emerson: It possibly could be done, but I'm sure everybody exerted a little extra to do this.

Marcello: So you did bring it into the dock in virtually the same position that you had found it before you had thrown off the lines.

Emerson: Yes. We tied it back up. I don't remember what happened to the gangway if there was one . . . what happened to it. It was tied back up and stayed tied up alongside the dock until possibly the next day or so.

Marcello: What did you do after you got the New Orleans tied up again to the docks?

Emerson: Well, a lot of the petty officers and officers came back to the ship that were ashore. We eventually got electricity back aboard ship from the dock; we were taking water and electricity from the dock, and we got it back. Then we started to work

in the fire room, and our petty officers decided what needed to be done.

Actually, in our fire room, like other ones, we started to put the fronts in our boilers. It was a process of crawling inside the fire box and driving all this . . . what you call plastic chrome ore. In the front of the boiler are anchor bolts secured to the front of the boiler, and then you take a wooden mallet and drive all those plastic chrome ore in amongst these anchor bolts, and this is what holds it on there. It's kind of a cement-looking stuff, real heavy. You pound that into the front of the boiler and smooth it out, and this is what remains to be the front of the boiler, Of course, we had two boilermakers aboard the ship, and they usually supervised the job.

Marcello: Am I to assume that the work was now taking place at an accelerated rate?

Emerson: Yes, it was. We worked all day, all night, and into the next day and never did stop until we finished those two boilers. Then we lit the burners off, and what you have to do is bring your temperature up on your fire box real slow with small burners and dry this chrome ore. If you heat it too rapidly, why, it will crack on you, so we had to dry it out slowly and bring the steam up; and we brought our own steam up in our own number three fire room so that we could use our own power.

Of course, the engine room was putting the turbines back together so that they could use the generators and be under our own power. The yard people put in the other boiler fronts, which was six more boilers. They started work on it and they worked around the clock putting that in.

Marcello: What sort of an appetite did you have that day?

Emerson: Well, (chuckle) I don't remember, but we . . . of course, everything was real . . . everybody was real touchy, and rumors were flying. We tried to listen to the radio whenever we could. There were reports of paratroopers landing and Japanese landing on the beach. Everybody was trigger-happy. They sat machine guns up on the back of the ship with sandbags. There were stories of shooting our own airplanes down that didn't identify themselves properly. Things were in bad shape.

Marcello: Did you believe all the rumors that you heard?

Emerson: Well, no, we didn't to some extent. Some of them we weren't sure about, because we didn't know and everybody was confused. The position that we were in, really, we were down in the fire room working, so we didn't have a whole lot of time to discuss what was going on. We did have periods when we had breaks, but we kept pretty busy.

Marcello: Did you perchance have any guard duty that night, or were you working down in the fire room the entire time?

Emerson: We worked in the fire room the entire time. Now, when it got

dark, all the yard workmen that were civilian people that were aboard ship . . . if they couldn't leave the ship and be off of it by dark, then they stayed aboard ship, because due to all the trigger-happy people, some people did actually get shot.

Marcello: I'm sure it was actually much safer to be down there in the fire room where you were than it was to be out on the open deck or on the dock.

Emerson: Absolutely! A lot of people didn't go on topside at night. In fact, for the next--I would say--week they were real cautious about going on topside at night.

Marcello: Could you hear sporadic gunfire while you were working down in the fire room, or was that well-insulated in there?

Emerson: We were pretty well-insulated in the fire room. Once in a while an airplane would fly over, like I say, and there would be a little gunfire. Somebody would . . . it would possibly identify itself, but still again there was somebody that would shoot a machine gun or something and kind of start a little action.

Of course, there was all kinds of rumors about where our carriers were. They weren't in Pearl Harbor, and I think they were coming back from the States' with a load of planes. Because I do know they sent up a group of planes--a squadron of planes--when the ships got close enough that they could fly in, and

they flew in and identified themselves where they could come in and land.

Marcello: Do you remember the situation on that night of December 7th when some of the carrier planes came in and were shot at by the ships in the harbor?

Emerson: Yes, I remember that. That's what I was referring to. Some of them were shot at when they didn't identify themselves. Of course, they were probably looking to see what kind of damage had been done and such as that.

Marcello: I assume that you did not get topside to witness that scene, however.

Emerson: No, I didn't. I stayed in the fire room, and we worked around the clock.

Marcello: How long did you say that it took before you got the San Francisco shipshape once again?

Emerson: It took us ten days as well as I can remember to get it back to where it was under its own power. We pulled away from the dock and went to the mooring in Pearl Harbor. We tied up to the mooring. We didn't get to go into dry dock because the battleship Pennsylvania and the Cassin and the Downes was in the dry dock, and they didn't come out so we didn't get to go in there.

Marcello: When did you finally leave Pearl?

Emerson: I don't remember. It seems like it was probably a week or

two weeks later.

Marcello: Where did the San Francisco go from Pearl Harbor?

Emerson: I believe it formed a task force which included a carrier, a heavy cruiser, several destroyers, a tanker, a supply ship, and an ammunition ship. We started toward Wake Island, I believe. I'm not sure but I think we started toward Wake Island. We got within several hundred miles of there when the Japanese made an attack, and we turned around and came back. We didn't finish that trip, and the tanker went elsewhere, and the supply ship went somewhere else. The cruisers and the carrier and the destroyers came back to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: What was the morale like now?

Emerson: Well, we were anxious to get into it. We wanted to see action, and we thought we could probably whip anything that came our way, you know.

Marcello: Was the attitude one of anger and revenge, perhaps?

Emerson: Yes, I believe it was.

Marcello: Fear wasn't a factor.

Emerson: No, I don't think so. We were anxious to get into battle. Of course, there were times . . . there were tense moments when the alarm would go off at midnight when somebody detected or thought they detected something on radar. Radar was a new thing, and they had just put it on the ship, so it was new to us. We had it installed over in the harbor.

Marcello: I guess the harbor was one helluva mess, so to speak, was it not, in the aftermath of the attack?

Emerson: Yes, it was. It was in quite a mess, and after we had got the ship to where it was under its own power and had moved back over to the mooring and had tied up at the mooring, there was another exciting moment when they discovered one of the Japanese two-man subs was in the harbor. It was supposedly close by or under a hospital ship tied up to a mooring. They moved the hospital ship, and the PT boats came out and dropped depth charges while they were in the harbor. It was not far from us, because we could see the whole thing happen. Of course, we had to close all our watertight doors just in case something did happen.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Emerson, that exhausts my questions relative to the Pearl Harbor attack. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that we haven't gotten as part of the record?

Emerson: No. We came back from that first trip and came back into Pearl Harbor and tied up again. And, of course, they had cleaned up some of the mess. I believe the Nevada . . . when it tried to get underway during the attack and go out of the harbor, they had torpedoed the bow, and it had backed down and beached itself out of the channel, which was a real good thing on the part of the navigator or the man on the bridge. They had moved out some of the ships--battleships. I don't remember

which ones were in there. Life was probably getting back to a little bit better routine at the time.

We came in and tied up to the mooring again and stayed in there for a week or two until we formed another task force and started down south then. This time we went down to Pago Pago, Samoa. The Japs had a sub that had fired on the island, so we went down there. I believe we were by ourselves. I don't remember, but maybe there might have been a destroyer with us. We went down there and circled that island for a given amount of time. I don't know how long it was. We finally ran low on oil, and we went into Pago Pago, Samoa, and took on oil and stayed down there for a while and then finally came back to Pearl Harbor again.

Marcello: Well, this is probably a good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having participated in our project. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that the scholars will find your comments most valuable when they use them to write about Pearl Harbor.