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Interview with
KENNETH CREESE
December 7, 1978

Place of Interview: Las Vegas, Nevada

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Kenneth R. Creese
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Kenneth Creese

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

Mr. Creese, 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. Creese: Well, I was born on April 7, 1924, in San Diego, California. I went through the school system there, and I didn't finish school. Of all things, I just like English very much, and I quit school in the twelfth grade to go into the Navy. I went in on what they called a "baby cruise," which at that time was for four years from your seventeenth birthday to the twenty-first.

Dr. Marcello: I've also heard this referred to as the "minority cruise."

Is that correct?

Creese: Yes, that's true. But I think the popular name was the "baby cruise."

Marcello: When did you go in?

Creese: I was seventeen on April 7, 1941, and it was two weeks later, on approximately April 21, 1941, that I went in. I went through boot camp at San Diego Naval Training Center.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Creese: Possibly because I lived in the San Diego area, and the Navy was predominant in that area. I kind of liked the sea. I had an uncle that was commodore of the yacht club there at San Diego, and I went to sea with him quite often.

Like I was saying, I went into boot camp on April 21, 1941. The training period during that time was roughly two months.

Marcello: In other words, they had cut it back by at least a month?

Creese: Right. I went on special training, which at that time was a special project. I was a telephone operator for the switchboard there, which took me into two more months at the training center.

It was approximately the middle of August that we shipped out for Pearl Harbor and the Honolulu area. They

sent us over on the Worden, and when we arrived in Hawaii, they put us aboard the Dixie, which was a tender, and we were aboard there for approximately a week.

Of all things, I was shipped over and put aboard the USS Detroit. The funny part of that is that I could never really fathom or figure it out. The Detroit had been in San Diego harbor when we shipped out on the Worden, but evidently this was the common practice to send you aboard a ship and then be reassigned to the fleet. This is what happened.

Marcello: Let's back up here a minute. At the time that you entered the service in 1941, how closely were you keeping abreast of the current events and world affairs?

Creese: Quite a bit. My father died when I was thirteen, so I was very close to my mother. She had to give approval of me going into the Navy and sign off because I was seventeen. The comment when we were going to school at that time was that one of these days we were going to have a conflict or war with Japan. Being in the San Diego area, you could go down to the docks and see them shipping out tons and tons of scrap iron and metal. Little did I realize at the time, and probably a lot of other people, was that it was eventually going to be used against us. I think it was common knowledge to us kids in school.

How the older people felt, I really have no recollection of that. I think that we felt that one day we were going to have a conflict with Japan.

Marcello: What did you think about the prospects of being assigned to the Hawaiian Islands on a more or less permanent basis? Were you kind of looking forward to that particular duty?

Creese: Yes, because I had never really traveled. The old slogan in the Navy then was, "Join the Navy and See the World." Little did I realize we'd see it as we did. After the war, of course, there were no glamour spots like Spain or Italy with all those places in the South Pacific or the Aleutian Islands. But I was looking forward to going to the Hawaiian Islands. It was the paradise of the Pacific, supposedly.

Marcello: Describe what the Detroit looked like from a physical standpoint. Now, from our pre-interview conference, you mentioned that it was one of the old four-stack cruisers.

Creese: Right. It was of the Omaha class. There were ten of them. She was commissioned in 1923, I believe. As we said, she had four stacks. The reason they built this type of cruiser was because they had this agreement with Japan that the tonnage of certain ships wouldn't be over so many tons. So I know that the reason they built it was to let the Japanese think it was just an old four-stack "tin can" rather than a cruiser. She was somewhere--I don't know exactly--between 500 and

600 feet long. Her complement was approximately 700 to 800 men. She had four main batteries; these were 6-inch guns. Then the secondary armaments, or the antiaircraft guns, were 3-inch. That's about it.

Marcello: Was it in fairly good shape at the time that you went aboard? Like we pointed out, it was one of the older cruisers.

Creese: I'd have to say, yes, because I'd never been aboard another ship in the United States Navy--the newer ones--so I really couldn't make a comparison. I do know that after the war started that they went back--the first time we could get back--to Mare Island in the San Francisco Bay area, and they went into the Navy yard, and they chipped off all that thick paint. This was one thing that did so much damage when the war started. When the ship caught fire that paint would sit there and burn, because it was on so thick on the bulkhead. I guess that's it.

Marcello: I assume that the Detroit did not have its wartime complement of personnel when you went aboard?

Creese: No, they did not.

Marcello: But I assume they were probably trying to build up to a wartime complement.

Creese: I believe so.

Marcello: Were there others that went aboard with you at the time?

Creese: Yes. At the time, if I remember correctly, I think there was probably thirty to forty people that went aboard at the same time. All were assigned to different divisions throughout the ship.

Marcello: What sort of reception did you get when you went aboard the Detroit? After all, you were still basically a "boot" yet to the "old salts" aboard it.

Creese: Really, that's hard to say. I can't really say it was bad or good. I know that you were treated like a recruit, and you were given certain duties to do.

I do remember one thing. Wednesday afternoons was the recreation time, and you'd go on liberty. I was only seventeen at the time and didn't drink, so usually, on my off periods, I'd go and play baseball or football or whatever was happening at that particular time in sports. I believe it was toward the end of the baseball season and the beginning of football season. I have to say I was treated fairly good.

Marcello: Where were you assigned when you went aboard?

Creese: When I first went aboard, I was assigned to the First Division, which at the time had control of the three forward 6-inch guns. The main battery, which was on the forecastle, was the area that I was in.

Marcello: In other words, you were a part of the deck division when you

first went aboard?

Creese: Deck division, right.

Marcello: What sort of duties did you undertake as a member of the deck division in that forward section?

Creese: There was a lot of chipping of paint (chuckle) with chip hammers, swabbing the decks, and then work parties. Like, if they needed stores, we would go over in the whaleboats and pick up stores and bring them back. If there was ammunition loading, we had no automatic hoist for bringing the 6-inch or 3-inch ammunition aboard; so usually a lighter would pull up toward the fantail, and we'd have to carry these 6-inch shells all the way from the fantail clear up to the forward gun room. These things weighed approximately a hundred pounds apiece.

So it was pleasure, and it was work when there was work to be done. I know that after I got in the Navy, I wondered why I had joined because I thought, "I'm not going to like this sort of thing." But the longer you were in, the more you got used to it. You learned to like it,

Marcello: Did you find that the petty officers, that is, the senior petty officers, made every effort to make good sailors out of you, or did they ride you pretty hard? Was it a combination of both?

Creese: No, I think it depended on the individual. If you weren't a

smart-aleck kid and did what you were told, they treated you decently. I know that I was very fortunate. My boatswain at the time was Ed Rastin, and I think he treated recruits as kind of like a father, looking out for his youngsters. Especially after the war started, they seemed to watch the younger kids and take them under their wing,

Marcello: I gather that in that pre-Pearl Harbor period most of those petty officers had quite a few years in the Navy?

Creese: Well, Ed, I believe, went aboard the ship in 1929, and he was a seaman first class then. When I went aboard the ship, he was first class petty officer--boatswain. I think, to go back a little bit, that the boatswains in charge of their division had a tendency to treat the younger guys like a father-son relation. It was probably the petty officers under them, like, the coxswain's and the second class, third class . . . these guys probably would have a tendency to give you a little more rough time, more than the petty officer in charge of the division,

Marcello: Those guys probably hadn't had their authority that long, and they wanted to show it.

Creese: That's right. Correct.

Marcello: I assume that you were still in the deck division at the time of the actual attack?

Creese: Yes. I was still in the First Division on the deck crew.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Detroit?

Creese: Well, I could take some of it, and some of it I couldn't take (chuckle). I'd have to say overall that the food was good. I learned probably more than anything . . . and this could have been because I came through the Depression era, and you didn't have a lot of food, and you were fed a lot of beans when we were kids. The main breakfast on Saturday mornings in the Navy was corn bread and beans, and I always seemed to make that chow-down. There were other meals, like I said, that I didn't care to participate in, so I wouldn't eat.

Marcello: How about your quarters? Describe what they were like aboard the Detroit.

Creese: When I first went aboard, I was kind of shifted around from pillar to post, because, being a recruit, the older hands got the better bunk spaces. I was in the forward gun room. That area had to be clear during the working hours during the day, so we slept in sleeping bags. Then it was not too much later after I went aboard that I was assigned to a bunk. Usually, the bunks were down a passageway. In part of the ship, there are no really separate rooms or areas until you got below decks. They were two or three decks down. Then they'd have maybe quarters where it was part of the

sleeping area.

Marcello: Where did you store your gear and so on?

Creese: We had lockers. Then a lot of it was in our seabags, too,

Marcello: In other words, they had a seabag locker and a peacoat locker?

Creese: Right.

Marcello: Plus the locker for your personal things?

Creese: Right. Most of your clothes that you weren't wearing every day, you kept them in your seabag because you didn't have to pull them in and out. So the things you would wear every day, you'd keep in your locker, like, your toilet articles, T-shirts, dungarees, and maybe one set of blues for liberty. We did have whites, which we did wear a lot in the islands. The few trips which occurred after the war had started, when we went back to San Francisco, we'd wear blues. At that time, the Navy would not let you wear whites on liberty. They hadn't authorized it yet, and you had to wear blues unless you were in a tropical zone or area. So most of the stuff we had in our lockers was stuff we wore every day.

Marcello: Talk a little bit about the training exercises in which the Detroit would engage during that pre-Pearl Harbor period. Describe what a typical training exercise was like. In other words, when would you go out? How long would you stay out? What would you do when you were out there?

Creese: Before the war started--and this is one thing I think that most survivors over the years have tried to figure out why-- the fleet was continually out on maneuvers. At that time, as you have probably heard from your other interviews, there was no radar aboard the vessels in those days. The Detroit would be out with half the fleet. The way they worked it then, half the fleet was out at sea on maneuvers, and these were considered war maneuvers. The other half of the fleet was in the harbor. Usually, the transition period of coming in and going out to sea on maneuvers was about a two-week period. We'd be out for two weeks and then in for two weeks.

This started and went on as soon as I went aboard the Detroit. I'd have to say it started in September of 1941. You went through the general practices of gun drills, and, like I said, I was assigned to the upper port 6-inch gun on the upper deck. You'd go through dummy loading practices, and this is what I originally was--a loader. Shortly after that, maybe they didn't feel I was big enough because they had some pretty big, strapping boys in the Navy in those days, so they put me in on setting the sights for distances and this sort of thing.

These are drills we'd go through, and then we had . . . the Detroit had the paravanes. If you're not familiar with that, these are what they put over the side to cut mines

loose. So we'd go through these sort of drills, and I think probably the crew hated this more than anything because it was controlled by wire cables, and it was rough. You'd cut your hands, and then when you'd pull these things in, you had to grease them down. This is what we in the First Division considered the dirty work.

Then, like I said, when we'd come into port, we were usually low on fuel and provisions, so your work duties during the day there were going over and getting provisions and replenishing the ship. Then when you had your time off, it was fun time.

Marcello: How much emphasis was placed on antiaircraft drills and so on when you were at sea?

Creese: None, as far as aircraft, that I can remember. I can't really remember ever going . . . let me clarify that. I would not call those drills. We did go through antiaircraft practice, and we would shoot at towing targets of airplanes. So I guess in a sense you could call that a drill.

Marcello: But probably nobody actually realized how important the airplane was going to be.

Creese: They didn't emphasize that so much. Of course, as I said, I was not part of the antiaircraft portion of the First Division. Between the two upper 6-inch guns, we had one 3-inch antiaircraft type of gun. Most of our antiaircraft

battery was down on the main deck on the sides of the ship. I would really have to say that there was not too much emphasis put on aircraft.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned that you would go through the dummy firing drills. Am I to assume that the Navy was very cost-conscious at that time and that you actually did not fire the guns that often or that much?

Creese: That's right. Most of our practices with the 6-inch battery and the others was dummy loading and no actual firing.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, could you detect any changes occurring in your routine? Now, again, I realize that you were just a deck hand, and you simply did what you were told; but I wondered if changes could be detected by the people at your level.

Creese: Not that I can remember right offhand. I do remember one instance. The week before the attack, a majority of the fleet . . . like I said, it used to be that half the fleet was in, and half was out. But that weekend before the attack, it seems like most of the fleet was out at sea on maneuvers. It was not uncommon to see a destroyer or a light cruiser with a bow cracked in from colliding out on maneuvers because, as I say, we had no radar then. You would see a tug towing it in for repairs,

I do remember just a week or two, I believe, before the attack, a Japanese ship pulled into the harbor. The only reason I remember that is because we were over getting stores that day, and we were standing on the dock at the warehouse. She had a sentry and a guard on the gangway going aboard the ship. It seemed to me, if I recollect, we did make a few comments to the effect, "Well, I wonder what she's doing in Hawaii with relations between the two countries like they were." Being a low class deck hand and an apprentice seaman at the time, I figured that the powers-that-be must have the reasons for letting her in that area.

Marcello: Did you seem to be having more general quarters drills than usual?

Creese: That's a hard question. I'd have to say, right now thinking back, no. I don't think we did have any more than we generally had.

Marcello: So, essentially, you would say it was kind of business as usual right up to the time of the attack,

Creese: Right. That's correct.

Marcello: When you and your shipmates got together in bull sessions, did you ever talk very much about the possibility of an attack at Pearl Harbor as conditions between the two countries continued to deteriorate?

Creese: No, not with the people I associated with. I'm not saying this

didn't go on or happen. I think the biggest controversy in those days was FDR--Roosevelt (chuckle). He seemed to be a controversial person at that time.

I remember we had a Texan aboard, by the way, and he was a staunch Republican. Of course, the only way he could get this feeling, I would have to say, is a reflection of what his father felt. He just detested and hated FDR, and I know he'd get in several and quite a few heated arguments, because at that time I had been raised a Democrat with my father and mother. We felt he was a good man. I have changed my opinion since then.

I can't really say, to answer your question, that there was as much talk between particular buddies and anything about Japan,

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind at that time during the pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Creese: You know that there was a lot of Japanese descendents on the island, and a lot of them were of mixed blood. Being young, I did go to a lot of the high school football games every chance I had. I'd have to say that what I thought of the women is that they were very beautiful.

I guess maybe my opinion and feeling of the Jap was like we felt right after the war started--that they were a sneaky

little bunch of characters. I guess I'd have to say that's how I mostly felt.

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

Creese: We had a few but not really that many. I know the Marblehead was over in the China Sea at that time when the attack started. I'd have to say probably, as I did in the first part of the interview, that the first class and the older sailors had been there, but the second and third class were fellows that hadn't been in the Navy that long.

Marcello: I gather that those Asiatic sailors could really spin some sea stories. I was wondering if they brought back any stories about the Japanese and so on.

Creese: No. I do remember that some old four-stack "tin cans" came in from the Asiatic Fleet, but they weren't around the area or vicinity of the Detroit. They tied up usually next to a tender. We did go over one day to look at one of the old four-stack ships, but I right offhand can't remember talking to any of the sailors.

Marcello: When would the Detroit normally come in off these two-week maneuvers? Would it be, like, on a Friday?

Creese: Right. Usually, it was just before a weekend, and then the other section of the fleet would go out. We had come in from sea, and if I remember correctly, this was on a Friday. Everything

was really relaxed that weekend, even on the 6th. We were getting ready to have . . . over at the fleet center or the Navy center they were having a "Battle of the Bands" that night. I believe the Detroit, the California, and the Argonne. I can't remember the other one, but there were four bands participating. I had basically gone over there because of the Detroit band being involved.

Marcello: Let's back up here just a minute because we're getting just a little bit ahead of our story. Is it safe to say that the Detroit going out on a Monday and coming back on a Friday after a two-week stay at sea was kind of common knowledge? In other words, it would not have taken a genius to figure out when the ships were going out and when they were coming back in.

Creese: That's right. Anyone could figure this out. It was routine, and it wasn't like in the middle of the week. Like you said, it was just before a weekend, and it was common knowledge.

Marcello: And you could count on it, that is, going out on a Monday and coming back on a Friday?

Creese: Right. Two weeks later, yes. Very true.

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

Creese: Like I said, I was young at the time, and I didn't drink. I was too young to drink, really, so I couldn't go to the bars. So if I went into town or into Honolulu, I would usually go to the YMCA or go to a movie, to a theater. If I didn't go

ashore and didn't have liberty, I would usually get off the ship and go over to Hickam Field or over to one of the bases and play baseball or football. This is usually what I would do at that time.

Marcello: On a Saturday night, would you have very many drunks that would come back aboard the Detroit? I'm sure you'd have a few.

Creese: Yes. I'd have to say that we did, but these were the older sailors because, as I said, they were pretty strict over in the islands about anyone drinking underage. You couldn't get into a bar. I would say probably the second class officers and above did come back this way. They also had a rule and regulation over there that nobody, unless he was a first class petty officer or above--chief or one of our ship's officers--could have all-night liberty. So everybody had to be back, if they were first class and under, by twelve o'clock midnight. But that doesn't mean that they didn't come back drunk.

Marcello: I guess they established that twelve o'clock curfew because of the lack of hotel facilities in Honolulu.

Creese: That's true. And the citizens in town used to have signs on the lawn, "Sailors and dogs, keep off." I'm sure you've heard that expression before.

Marcello: I assume that Sunday would have been a good time to attack mainly because it was a day of leisure.

Creese: That's true and plus the fact that everybody was getting ready

for church services.

Marcello: Some of the officers probably would not have been aboard, They'd have been gone for the weekend and this sort of thing.

Creese: That's true. They would have had all-night liberty and weekend liberty. Usually, on Saturday nights, if they belonged to clubs or if there were any social functions going on, this was the night they would go--on Saturday evening.

Marcello: Did the Detroit have a port and starboard liberty system set up?

Creese: Yes. Just to speak of that, I was on the port watch.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, so let's go into that weekend in a little bit more detail. You mentioned previously that the Detroit did come in as usual on a Friday.

Creese: That's right.

Marcello: Where did it tie up?

Creese: Fox 13, which was our docking area. This is right across the other side of Ford Island from Battleship Row. Behind that was the Raleigh, which was the same type ship as the Detroit--a four-stack cruiser. Behind that was the Utah, and then usually behind that was the carrier docking area. The Lexington had been in on a Friday and left early. The reason she left was to take aircraft down to Midway and then down to Wake Island. This was our area on the . . . I don't know whether it was

either north or south, but it was at Ford Island opposite Battleship Row.

Marcello: So in other words, everything up to this point was the way it had always been. You'd come in on a Friday, and you'd tied up at the same place that you always did.

Creese: Right.

Marcello: What did you do that weekend? Let's say on Saturday, for example.

Creese: I really did nothing. On Saturday, I did not have liberty; I had the watch. On Saturday evening, I watched a movie aboard ship. They had movies every night for those that didn't go on liberty.

Marcello: Out of curiosity, do you recall the title of the movie?

Creese: No, I don't (chuckle). It was a good movie--I do know that--but I can't remember.

Marcello: That's asking a lot for you to recall thirty-plus years later, and it was a very unfair question.

Creese: I do remember we watched a movie, and as soon as it was over, I hit the sack and went to bed. I had planned the next morning, a Sunday morning, which was my liberty day, to get up and take a tour of the island, which I hadn't done since I'd been there from the middle of August to December. I never did take that, by the way.

Marcello: So I assume that Saturday evening was very routine and normal

as far as you were concerned.

Creese: Right.

Marcello: This brings us into that Sunday morning. Again, I'll let you go into as much detail as you can remember concerning the activities of the day.

Creese: As I said, I got up that morning and anticipated getting ready to go ashore and go into Honolulu and take a tour of the island.

Marcello: What time did you get up?

Creese: Usually, reveille on Sunday morning was at six o'clock. You usually got up and got dressed and kind of lounged around and took it easy until you had chow-down. Usually, chow was over by the time we had the raising of the flag ceremony--posting colors. This took place every morning at eight o'clock. I had not yet dressed for liberty.

I was just kind of lounging around waiting for the colors to be raised and do small duties because liberty was not allowed until nine o'clock. I figured I'd go down and get ready and go ashore. I didn't eat breakfast that morning because, as I said, I was kind of particular about certain foods that didn't appeal to me; and if I wasn't really hungry, I wouldn't eat.

Just about the time of the attack, I'd been down in the head . . . and all the ships that particular week were open from

stem to stern and from topside to lower deck because we had had fleet inspection, Nothing was closed up, About that time, I heard this rumbling noise. Some guy looked out and said, "There is an airplane flying over the harbor with a Rising Sun on the wing!" We didn't have what you'd call loudspeakers completely throughout the ship. What the buglers would do is . . . we had three main hatches down on the main deck, down into the inner part of the ship, and he would run from one hatch to the other blowing whatever bugle call he had to do to call us to quarters.

This has been a real controversy. In fact, I even asked him today about it . . . Mr. Rastin is here at the convention. I swear that at that time, the bugler sounded fire and rescue station. My fire and rescue station was up on the forecastle, and I ran the full length of the ship from the head, up to the forward hatch, and up to the main deck. To get there I had to go through a small portion of the passageway of the officers' quarters and then through the forward gun deck and out onto the forecastle.

As I ran through this one section of the officers' quarters or passageway, here were four or five officers laying on the deck. I thought at the time, "Well, that's awful funny. What's the matter with them?" As everyone was trained in the service, you just acted automatically and did things without

really thinking about it because this was the way they trained the service personnel,

Well, when I got up to the forecastle, which was my fire and rescue station, there was no one there but me. I looked over to Ford Island, and there was a lot of smoke coming from the hangar area, which was quite a distance from where we were tied up. About this time that I reached there and saw the smoke, they sounded general quarters.

There was a ladder going from the forecastle to the upper gun deck, so I ran up this ladder, and just as I was about to the top of the ladder, this one plane came across the harbor. He was skimming across the water machine-gunning the ship. I got to the upper gun deck before any of the shells got in my area or vicinity. The upper gun deck was surrounded by metal, so there was no danger of me being hit by strafing bullets..

Naturally, being on the 6-inch battery, we couldn't use those in an air attack. So they took both the 6-inch crews and had them passing ammunition from the hoist to the 3-inch gun. My deck captain, or gun captain, which was Hans Beherman and at that time a second-class, took over being the captain of the 3-inch gun, I guess it was more or less because he was second in command of the division. So that's what we did, and we didn't get ammunition right away because our ammunition down below was all locked up.

Marcello: That's one part of the ship that's always locked up?

Creese: That's right. So how they got that open, I don't know.

Whether they tore it open or shot the locks off the door to get it up into the hoist, I don't know. Once we started . . . I try to think back on the different phases during the attack, but all I really remember right then is just passing ammunition as fast as we could and they could fire. On our first firing . . . they have time setters on these 3-inch shells, and we were shooting way up in the clouds like we were having a high aerial bomb attack. I did hear Hans say, "Hey, set those things for three seconds! Let's get them down!" I did hear the gun crew cheer one time when they had shot down a plane, and there was some argument later as to whether we had shot it down or the Curtiss. This is the ship or the aircraft which did hit the Curtiss, which was anchored out in the channel across from us.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that in a situation like this, as you mentioned just awhile ago, that you really don't see the "big picture," so to speak?

Creese: Right. It's all hazy. Unless it was an outstanding incident or an action that happened right at the moment, it really seemed like a dream.

Marcello: In other words, you are virtually in your own little world? You have a specific function to perform, and that's all you're

doing. And you're hoping that everybody else around you is doing what they're supposed to do,

Creese: That's right,

Marcello: What sort of a day was this in terms of weather and climate and so on?

Creese: I would have to say it was a typical Hawaiian day. It was cloudy, but not cloudy enough that you could not see the harbor. The sun was out, and I figured, "Hey, it's going to be a beautiful day to be able to tour around and go around and see the island." As you get farther into the interior of the island, it is quite cloudy and you can run into rain. You could be right down on the harbor, and a cloud could come over and drench you for two or three minutes, and the next instance it is completely clear. So I'd have to say it was a typical Hawaiian day.

Marcello: To the best of your knowledge, did it appear that everybody was acting in a very professional manner all during this action?

Creese: The people I saw and worked with, yes. The boatswains and the people who were in charge of the crew seemed to know what they were doing and took over right away. There didn't seem to be any hesitancy on anyone's part to do what they were told to do.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that unless one did notice something that was really particularly outstanding, one could not observe

what was happening all around the harbor. Did you see anything outstanding that does particularly stick in your mind?

Creese: No, because, as I said, being up on the upper gun deck, we were surrounded by metal from the 6-inch guns. And then we had the bridge directly above us, so if we did see anything, it would be like shells bursting in the air and hearing what the crew on the 3-inch gun was yelling or saying. The only thing I can really remember is when they did say they hit that one airplane, and it came down and crashed into the Curtiss,

Marcello: Is there very much talking among the crew while all this action is going on?

Creese: No, I think we were just too busy trying to get that ammunition out of the hoist and passing it on to the 3-inch battery and the gun. We were firing quite rapidly, so it was get a shell, get rid of it, and give it to the next guy.

Marcello: Did the Detroit come under any specific fire itself during that period? You mentioned the one plane that was strafing.

Creese: Yes. We were strafed. I think there was one slight casualty; a fellow did get nicked with a machine gun bullet. We had no casualties to the ship. There was a bomb dropped and a torpedo shot at us from across the harbor, but they went between us and the Raleigh and didn't hit us. The same kind of attack was made on the Raleigh, although she was hit.

Marcello: What did the sky and the surface of the water look like as a

result of the attack?

Creese: After the attack, it was . . . the only really clear area out in the island is when you are going in and out of the harbor. This happened before I arrived at the islands, but it used to be that the bigger ships could not come into Pearl Harbor, like the carriers and the big battlewagons. But they dredged the entrance to the harbor, and they were able to come in and out at the time I was there, or just before I had arrived in the islands. It was beautiful going in and out of that channel. You could see the bottom. But in the harbor itself, it was always hazy. I remember talking to a diver one time, and he had said, "Hey, when you get down under the water, you couldn't see three or four feet in front of you." After the attack, it seemed like the whole harbor was covered with a solid coat of oil, and from that time on, for me the beauty of Pearl Harbor had gone. It was just a filthy mess.

Marcello: How long did you continue to handle ammunition?

Creese: Through the first wave of the attack. Both attacks lasted about an hour and fifty-five minutes. Time-wise, I have no recollection of what that first attack was, but after the first attack, all the ships in the fleet . . . it was hot in the summer months there, and they all had canvas over the decks to shade the areas. So to prevent fires, they had us crawl over the sides and cut down the canvas.

I have a recollection . . . and this is one thing that does come back to me, I think this is the first time I really realized what was going on and I was scared. Up until that time, I don't remember being scared; it was just a natural reaction to do what you were told. Everything was happening so fast that I don't think we had time to be afraid. I do remember standing on the side and wondering, "I wonder if those guys will come back and start machine gunning. Here I am, standing out in the open." We cut that thing down pretty fast. Then after we had gotten it cut down, I recollect or remember the second wave,

Marcello: What occurred during the second wave?

Creese: We were back changing and passing ammunition, and it seemed to me at the time that the second attack didn't last as long, and there wasn't the strafing runs and the low-level attacks. This was all high-altitude bombers. It seemed to me at the time that it didn't last as long as the first one. But, then again, it might have. Maybe we were getting used to it by then. I don't know.

Marcello: This is probably an unfair question, but I'll ask it anyway. How many shells would you estimate were expended by the 3-inch mount where you were located? In other words, was the deck littered with brass and so on?

Creese: Well, some of it was. But then the crew or whoever was standing

around . . . they had people throwing it over the sides. So there really wasn't that much ammunition in the deck area, because this 3-inch battery was really kind of an enclosed area, and if they would have left it there, it would have been a hindrance to the men standing around the gun. My recollection was that the majority of it was thrown over the side of the ship.

Marcello: That was rather unusual in itself, wasn't it?

Creese: That's true. It would be a guess on my part as to how many rounds we expended. I do know that we put a lot of shells in the air. You figure that if we were firing maybe one every ten to fifteen seconds, you had to be putting up a lot of ammunition . . . a lot of shells..

Marcello: What did you do in the aftermath of the attack?

Creese: After the attack, this was the first time that I had ever seen our ship get underway and turn around at the Fox pier where we were moored by itself. Usually, you had a tug that would ease us out. We did get underway and turned around and then came back and tied up.

The reason we did this is because we had the admiral aboard. The admiral was not there and the skipper was not aboard, and we were waiting for them to get back aboard so we could get underway and get out to sea. We got underway and got out to sea, and I think we cleared the harbor at just about twelve

o'clock or a few minutes before twelve o'clock.

Marcello: And where were you when you were clearing the channel?

Creese: When we were clearing the harbor, I was back at my station at the 6-inch battery on the port gun deck.

Marcello: I know a lot of the ships were cheered as they went out of the harbor.

Creese: If I may interject a little humor here . . . well, at the time it wasn't humorous. There was never really a friendly relationship between the crew of the Raleigh and the Detroit. That is the one and only time that I can remember the Raleigh cheering us during the war, because after we got into the war, the Raleigh and the Detroit usually traveled around together in the fleet. That's the only time that I can remember that crew standing around and cheering us as we sailed out past them. Of course, the crew on the Curtiss . . . and I imagine it was the same way on the other side of the island when the Saint Louis and the ships that got out on that side. The ones on the battlewagons and at the dry dock area stood and cheered, too.

Marcello: So what did you do when you cleared the harbor then?

Creese: This is a little story that I had learned afterwards. Our skipper, who is now Rear Admiral Wiltse and retired, told this story at one of our reunions. I do remember the ship taking a hard starboard turn when we cleared the channel. He told

this story himself, that when we cleared the harbor and he gave the order, "hard to starboard," that the ship keeled over so much that he fell flat on his pants and slid across the deck. That was a little joke that he tells. I guess it was quite undignified.

Another thing that made it so difficult for us is that we were very light in the water. We had very little fuel aboard, so when we did get to sea and had cleared the channel, we took water aboard into our tanks to stabilize the ship.

When we got out to sea . . . we had the admiral aboard, so we were the flagship for the task force that was out there. The ships we rendezvoused with were the Phoenix, the Saint Louis, and the Detroit. Those were the only three cruisers. Then there were several destroyers, and I couldn't really name which destroyers they were. We headed out to sea and headed in a southerly direction.

Then there came reports that the Japs were landing in one portion of the island. It seemed that we had to back up the other way to check these reports out. I think there was even a report of a submarine off the entrance to the harbor when we cleared. That could have been the reason the command was given, "hard to starboard."

Toward that evening, there were some aircraft spotted, and the task force did open up on them. We found out later that

they were friendly and that they were planes off the Lexington,
Toward dusk that evening, we did rendezvous with the Lexington,
and she became part of the task force.

I think the next instance, if I'm not getting ahead of
my story, was that night when I had to watch from eight until
twelve o'clock. They put me on a headset and put me right
out on the very tip of the forecastle. I was supposed to be
out there looking for the Japs. Thank God, we never did find
them.

Marcello: I'm sure the ship must have been one big rumor mill by that time.

Creese: It was. There were all kinds of rumors. The Japs were landing;
they were going to take the island; the Japanese fleet was
to the south of us. All of it was untrue and unfounded. We
didn't find anything.

Marcello: Did you have very many submarine scares while you were out
there thrashing around?

Creese: Not so much after we cleared the harbor. The one submarine
report we did get was right after we cleared the channel. Like
I said, that could have been the reason for that hard starboard
maneuver that we made.

Marcello: When did you come back in?

Creese: It was three days later when we came back into the harbor. We
had heard reports as soon as we got in that they had shot down
some of our airplanes that had come in from the carriers that

night.

Everybody was trigger-happy, and I know that the days immediately following the war, especially after we got back in the harbor, if you'd be below decks and something would hit deck above, everybody took off running. It was just a natural reaction. Although there was no general quarters, they figured somebody was dropping another bomb on us, so they'd take off running. Of course, when you wouldn't hear anything more, you'd feel like an ass, you know. There was a lot of tension in the days following the attack.

Marcello: How long did the Detroit stay in before it went back out again?

Creese: It wasn't over a week. The exact number of days, I really can't remember. Our first duty after we got in was to fuel, replenish the ammunition, and restore the ship as far as food was concerned; and then we were put on convoy duty. On the Lurline and Matsonia and the other Matson Line ships, they were taking families and getting them off the island back to San Francisco. We made, I think, three of these runs.

On one of the runs, we had two or three submarine scares and went to general quarters. We would continually during the day launch . . . we had two aircraft aboard, and we would launch those off the catapults.

On this one particular day, we launched just one, and for some reason the radioman didn't go along. They took a

mechanic. He'd been out for about an hour, and we got a radio message that she was landing down on the water. We looked for them for about a half a day, and we couldn't find them. We still had the Matsonia and the Lurline with us, but this time we were within a hundred miles or so of San Francisco. The Matsonia and the Lurline were both passenger ships--luxury liners--at that time. We let them go on into port by themselves, and we stayed out and looked for three days for the pilot and the crewman, but we never could find them.

I felt at the time it was awful funny, because this is what the United States government would do to save a person or a serviceman. We were out there searching with submarines supposedly in the area with our searchlights on and everything looking for these two. We looked for three days, and we never did find them. I guess the report finally just went in, "lost in action."

Marcello: Mr. Creese, is there anything else relative to the Pearl Harbor attack that we haven't talked about and that you wish to discuss?

Creese: No. You know, I really had qualms about this interview, because I've looked back in the past, and the action on our ship wasn't as great as it was over on the other ships. There were no acts of heroism because we didn't have to do it--no saving of lives.

I do remember that one of the whaleboats was taking people

to church and so forth over to the fleet landing. They did get strafed coming back, so they came back and made several trips, naturally, to bring the crew people back like officers and some of the petty officers that had all-night liberty. The last time they came back from the landing, we were underway, and one of the coxswains on the whaleboat yelled, "Hey, wait for us!" Somebody yelled back, "If you want to come with us, start swimming!" So they jumped off the whaleboat and let it go adrift and swam over toward the ship, and we hauled them aboard. No, right offhand, I can't think of any other incidents.

Marcello: I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things. You did go into a great deal of detail, and that's the sort of thing we're looking for in these interviews.

Creese: Thank you for having me.

Marcello: I'm sure that scholars will find your comments very valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.