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Interview with
R. N. ISACKSEN
May 9, 1979

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: R. N. Isacksen
(Signature)

Date: May 9, 1979

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Oral History Collection

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing R. N. Isacksen for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 9, 1979, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Isacksen in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the seaplane tender USS Tangier during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

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

Mr. Isacksen: I was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on December 14, 1918. I joined the Navy in June, 1941.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service in 1941?

Mr. Isacksen: To escape the draft.

Dr. Marcello: In other words, the Navy was an alternative to the Army.

Mr. Isacksen: Right, and the fact that I had . . . I went to the

University of California for two years, and with that education I was able to get a third class storekeeper's rate, whereas, if I had gone into the Army, I would have been a buck private. And I always loved the water, so that was my choice.

Marcello: When you said that you were able to get a third class storekeeper's rate, was this kind of unusual?

Isacksen: At that time, yes. See, the war hadn't started yet, but I also had an accounting background. I had graduated with a business degree, so with my background of accounting they were very glad to have me in the Navy.

Marcello: Why was it that you didn't want to go in the Army?

Isacksen: I never particularly cared about marching, you might say.

Marcello: Did people around that time still talk a lot about the trench warfare and the miseries of fighting in France and World War I and things of that nature?

Isacksen: Not really. The thing that bothered me most was . . . I went down by . . . I lived in California at the time, and I went down by Camp Ord and Camp Roberts and saw that heat and saw them dropping, and that more or less convinced me I'd rather be in the Navy.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that you were born in Iowa, but you enlisted in the Navy in California. How did you get from Iowa to California?

- Isacksen: When I was six years old, we moved to California, and I had all my education outside of first grade in California. I lived in Oakland, and I attended high school there and elementary school and then went to the University of California. At the University of California, I went two years, and it was a case of working and going at night and getting courses that way.
- Marcello: So you were essentially then raised in California rather than Iowa.
- Isacksen: Right.
- Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast with current events and world affairs at the time that you decided to enlist in the Navy in June, 1941?
- Isacksen: I was single, and I'm sorry to say that I was very, very vague on it. I kept up on all the sports, but I didn't keep up with the current affairs.
- Marcello: When you heard talk of war at that time, do you recall whether or not people were thinking very much in terms of war coming in the Far East with Japan, or were most eyes turned toward Europe at that time?
- Isacksen: I think most eyes were turned toward Europe. I had a liberty in Pearl Harbor prior to the seventh, and some of the people on the bus made remarks about the fact that the Japanese might have an attack. We more or less just laughed it off

and never even gave it any thought. It was within a week of the Pearl Harbor attack. People that were in the bus were, I believe, Japanese-oriented, but I'm not sure.

Marcello: I assume that you took your boot camp at San Diego.

Isacksen: No, that was one thing that happened. When you got a rate . . . I went straight I got my uniform on one day and boarded the ship the second day--no training.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up a minute then. Where did you actually enlist in the Navy?

Isacksen: In Oakland, Mare Island. I was assigned a ship at Mare Island two days after they issued my uniform.

Marcello: And was this the USS Tangier?

Isacksen: Right.

Marcello: So you picked it up there at Mare Island.

Isacksen: Right.

Marcello: How long was it after you enlisted before you actually got to Pearl Harbor?

Isacksen: Approximately three months.

Marcello: What was the Tangier doing in the meantime?

Isacksen: First, we went up to Washington to pick up torpedoes and stuff like that, and then we came back and went into San Francisco again and had the liberty. Then from San Francisco we went down to San Diego, and from San Diego to Long Beach and got degaussed, and then we went to Pearl.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that you went aboard the Tangier as a third class storekeeper. What sort of reception did you get when you went aboard the Tangier? After all, I'm sure that there had probably been people on that ship for years that perhaps didn't even have a rating yet.

Isacksen: Well, the Tangier was just commissioned, and it was a mixture. Most of the people aboard that ship were retirees that had been called back, and the rest were what we called reservists that were brought back to duty. I had some resentment, the fact that I came in as third, but it was quickly diminished because of the fact that they put me in charge of the storekeeping office. I was able to handle all their supplies and take care of that very efficiently, where the person that had been there didn't know . . . didn't have the background I had and wasn't able to do it.

Marcello: Did it take you very long to get accustomed to all the Navy's forms and paperwork and all that sort of thing?

Isacksen: Not really. It's pretty self-explanatory, except that they wanted so many copies of everything at that time that it was kind of . . . well, I don't know the exact words, but it makes you nervous, and I thought it was a waste because everything always had to have so many copies, and everything always had to have so many copies, and everything had to be done according to the book. Our captain was an Annapolis

man, and he was very, very strict on rules.

Marcello: Just exactly what kind of material and so on were you in charge of processing and so on and so forth?

Isacksen: My memory is kind of vague, because during the five years I was there, I did a little bit of everything. Most of the time I was ordering and requisitioning and keeping track of all the different parts we needed. Also, I oversaw the payroll. Being that this was a seaplane tender, we had all kinds of extra parts for airplanes that had to be kept separate. We had to inventory everything, and we had to order food from the commissary. All that came under our jurisdiction.

Marcello: In our comments off the tape before we started the interview, you mentioned that the Tangier had a crew of about 1,600.

Isacksen: It seems to me that's what it was. It is either 1,600 or when we had the squadron on board, it was 1,600. I believe it was 1,600 with the squadron. A couple of times we were used as a transport, and we had at least 2,000 on board at that time. They were sleeping everywhere,

Marcello: Now, at the time that you boarded the Tangier, was it more or less up to its full wartime complement, or were they in the process of building up to that point?

Isacksen: I believe they were in the process of building up to it.

At that time I wasn't really that familiar with everything, and I didn't really analyze it too well.

Marcello: That was going to be my next question. Since you had gone aboard that ship as a virtual landlubber, I'm sure that it perhaps took you awhile to get your sea legs, did it not?

Isacksen: Well, yes. I did a lot of fishing when I lived in California, but that's completely different. A big ship is completely different. I did get seasick the first time out.

Marcello: Plus, you would have had to learn all of the nomenclature and things of that nature that one would normally get in boot camp.

Isacksen: Right. I did a lot of reading (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that on occasion the squadron would be aboard. What are you referring to when you talk about the squadron?

Isacksen: Well, the seaplane tender usually anchors in a cove or in a bay, and then we tend the different squadrons. In other words, a squadron of PPY's is what we took care of mostly. At the end, we were taking care of some Marine bombers. Now, the PPY squadron would have maybe ten or twelve planes, and they would anchor on buoys off of us. Then all of their people would stay aboard.

Marcello: I see.

Isacksen: And when they would get shot up or needed repairs, they would

taxi to the ship, and we would pick them up with a crane and lay them aboard our ship and repair them. We did have one interesting bunch. We had a squadron of Australians, which we called the "Black Cats," and they went out at night and laid mines. Their PPY's were all painted black, and they did everything at night.

Marcello: Now, did you have these Australians aboard prior to or after the war actually started?

Isacksen: This was quite a bit afterwards.

Marcello: Okay, when did the Tangier move out to Pearl Harbor on a more or less permanent basis? Do you recall?

Isacksen: I want to say it was around August, but I would hate to be pinned to that. But we were there for, I think, a month or so before Pearl.

Marcello: Well, if you went out in August, you would've been there several months before the actual Pearl Harbor attack.

Isacksen: I can't put it together. I went in in June. It's possible, though, that I signed up in June, and they didn't call me to active duty for maybe a month. That may have been it. I'm not sure; I'm very vague on that part.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands?

Isacksen: Well, I liked it. My dad had been there earlier, and I knew about it. I had friends on the island, and I enjoyed going

over and seeing them.

Marcello: Now, when the Tangier got over to Pearl Harbor, where did it normally tie up?

Isacksen: Normally, we tied it up . . . I'm not sure of the directions, but it was on the opposite side of where the Arizona was. We usually tied it up in the bay.

Marcello: In other words, Battleship Row was on one side of Ford Island, and you were across on the other side from Battleship Row.

Isacksen: Right. If you were coming into the harbor, it would be on the left side of the harbor as you come in.

Marcello: Now, does a ship like the Tangier have all sorts of specialists and so on aboard it? For some reason, I'm in a sense associating the Tangier with a ship such as one of the repair ships, where I know you have all sorts of specialists aboard there. I was wondering if the Tangier was a similar type of operation.

Isacksen: Definitely. We had one of the finest doctors on board our ship, I guess, that they had in the Navy. I do not remember his name, but I know he had performed open-heart surgery to remove shrapnel from one of the people's hearts.

Marcello: But again, now, all this occurred after Pearl Harbor.

Isacksen: Yes, sir.

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

- Isacksen: About like any other place in the Navy. You had, I guess you could say, one big room with a bunch of bunks that folded up and dropped down by a chain, and I think we slept three high or two high. We did have lockers. We didn't have to live out of seabags as a lot of them talk about. We didn't necessarily have to sleep in hammocks. We had some people who would never go below because they were scared, and they would sleep on topside in cots.
- Marcello: So you missed the experience of sleeping in a hammock altogether then.
- Isacksen: Yes, sir.
- Marcello: You mentioned that you did have lockers, but I would assume that they were rather small, though.
- Isacksen: Yes, they were small, but you didn't have to have very much . . . I don't even remember how I did it, but you can get everything in a seabag, so you can get everything in a locker pretty well.
- Marcello: And I guess they had special spaces where you could stow your peacoat and things of that nature, too, did they not?
- Isacksen: No, it all went together. It all went in one place.
- Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Tangier?
- Isacksen: We were lucky. We had a good chef, and we had good food. In fact, I gained quite a bit of weight. We had a very good chef. The fact is, one of our chefs used to cook for one

of the hotels in New York, so we were pretty lucky,

Marcello: Now, how was the food served aboard the Tangier--family-style or cafeteria-style?

Isacksen: It was served cafeteria-style, where you got a plate and then sat down at rows and rows of tables. You went through it once and ate, and then you went through the line and had your plate put through a dishwasher and so forth. Not a plate, it's a big metal tray.

Marcello: I guess having gone in as a third class storekeeper, you also missed a tour of mess cooking.

Isacksen: Yes, sir, I never did do that. I also was very lucky before the war in that they had a division called the Ship's Service. Consequently, the officer that was in charge of that didn't know anything about books, and he found out I was an accountant. So I was given that job of taking care of the books, and all the people on Ship's Service was under me. I was paid an extra \$60 a month for taking care of the books, and I got all my laundry and "geedunks" such as ice cream and haircuts free. Everything was free for me, so I was lucky in that sense. It also helped me with the different people, because they always were wanting certain favors.

Marcello: How long did you remain a third class storekeeper? Were you still a storekeeper at the time of the attack?

Isacksen: That I was trying to remember. While we was in Pearl, there

was an opening for a second class. I had the qualified time according to the rules of how long you had to be in the service as a third class. It was a competitive examination at that time of the whole fleet, and I took it. I did make second class, but I don't remember now if I got the second class rating after the war started or before.

Marcello: As a third class storekeeper, then, after having received that extra \$60 a month in pay to keep the ship's books and so on, you were paid fairly well, so far as the service was concerned at that time.

Isacksen: As far as the service was concerned, definitely. I sent most of my money home, because I didn't smoke and there's no place to spend it. I was single, so my mother put it up for me.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were in a position to do all sorts of special favors for the people aboard the ship. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Isacksen: It would be, like, possibly somebody wanting their paycheck ahead of time or getting their uniforms pressed down at the press shop when they were not supposed to press anybody's but the officers. I'd do little things like that. You'd take it down . . . I worked for them, and they pressed it on their off hours or whatever, you know.

Marcello: I gather that as a storekeeper it was always sometimes convenient

to suddenly lose somebody's pay records, too, and things like that. There are occasions when that sort of thing would happen. Maybe you didn't do it, but I know that could happen on occasions.

Isacksen: It has happened quite a bit, although not on our ship. But there's a lot of people that had records that didn't catch up with them until many years later.

Marcello: All in all, how would you describe the morale aboard the Tangier in that pre-Pearl Harbor period? Was it a happy ship?

Isacksen: No, it was a very unhappy ship, because of the simple reason that most of the people there had retired. They were being called back against their will, and they didn't like it. And then they were having to put up with the people like myself and also the officers that came aboard that were what we called "ninety-day wonders." These officers didn't really know anything about the Navy, and these retirees were frustrated. So it was not very happy.

Marcello: And you mentioned that these people had been retired from the Navy, so I would gather they were fairly well up there in years.

Isacksen: Right. Most of my personal friends . . . I got to know two or three real good friends, and both of them had twenty years prior to the time I went aboard ship, and they were

called back. So anyway you look at it, they had to be forty years old or better when the war started.

Marcello: On the other hand, I would gather that in terms of seamanship and things of that nature, these men would've been fairly knowledgeable.

Isacksen: Very knowledgeable. The fact is, during the attack, the commander ordered all the officers below--get out of the way--and let the chiefs run it.

Marcello: Okay, what did the Tangier do after it got to Pearl Harbor? What were its functions after it got out to Pearl?

Isacksen: I think most of the time we were trying to get our sea legs and get our orders together and all that. We went out and had practice and tried to get our radar working and getting different things functioning right and getting to where the people knew how to use them. We went out and had target practice at least once or twice a week--just sort of like a training situation. Other than that, we didn't have any specific duties in Pearl as such. I do not know what the plans were for the ship or anything. I didn't really ever hear.

Marcello: Well, you mentioned awhile ago, of course, that you would service the seaplanes. Am I to assume that in most cases the seaplanes would actually come to you, that is, they would taxi up to the Tangier itself for whatever servicing was

to take place?

Isacksen: That would be right, but they wouldn't do it in Pearl because of the fact that they had the island there with the regular airplane base. But it would be, like, in some remote island where they would put buoys out and land there, and then they would anchor. If they needed to be serviced, we would . . . if it was just gas, we had a boat that was equipped to carry the gas to it, and then we also had whaleboats that went and picked the crew up. But if the plane actually needed to be fixed and needed new rivets or anything like that, then they would taxi it on up, and we would pick it up and work on it. We could completely overhaul the engine or anything they wanted to do.

Marcello: Now, generally speaking, when you went out and conducted target practice and things of that nature, were you basically working alone rather than in conjunction with some of the ships-of-the-line, so to speak?

Isacksen: We were alone.

Marcello: I assume you were going out and coming back in perhaps on the same day?

Isacksen: Right. We did not stay out.

Marcello: And how often would these training exercises take place during that period prior to the war?

Isacksen: Really, it's vague. I couldn't give you an answer to that

truthfully. It seems to me that we would go once or twice a week.

Marcello: What was your battle station aboard the Tangier?

Isacksen: At one time I was supposed to work with what they called the 1.1 guns. Then they switched me over to where I worked with machine guns. Then they switched that, also. Well, during the Pearl Harbor attack, all I did was belt ammunition, because all the airplanes needed that .50-caliber machine gun ammunition. Their guns were water-cooled. They needed belts. We didn't have electric belts, so we did it by hand. We were belting it as fast as we could, trying to keep the right number of . . . every third shell is supposed to be a tracer-type shell. I did that for pretty close to thirty-six hours without stopping at Pearl Harbor. The minute we would get a bunch of ammunition belted, somebody would come over from another ship and pick it up and take it, and we would go on again.

Marcello: So, even as a storekeeper, you were actually assigned to various gun positions aboard the Tangier during that pre-Pearl Harbor period.

Isacksen: That is correct.

Marcello: You started out on the 1.1's, and then you went to the .50-calibers.

Isacksen: Right.

Marcello: Do you remember what specific .50-caliber you were assigned to? Do you remember where its location was aboard the ship?

Isacksen: It was on the starboard side, but I can't remember whether it was up as high as the deck where the officers were or one deck below. It's where the officer is up there--where the captains stand. I can't even tell you the name of the decks anymore, but I was on the starboard side up there.

Marcello: During that pre-Pearl Harbor period, when you went out on these training exercises, how much emphasis was given to antiaircraft practice?

Isacksen: That's what we did all the time, was antiaircraft practice. There would be airplanes pulling sleeves and stuff like that for us to fire at, and that's when we found out that we weren't able to use that 1.1 too well. It jammed all the time.

Marcello: But I am to assume that at that time the Tangier didn't have any of the antiaircraft armament that would later be mounted aboard most of the ships, that is, the 20-millimeters and the 40-millimeters.

Isacksen: No, we did not have them at that time. We had a cannon that we shot. We didn't even have a . . . I can't even think of the names of them now . . . but there's a bigger cannon that they use now on the destroyers. It's a . . . I want to say a 50-millimeter, but that's not right. I know that it was all completely changed right away. We got 40-millimeters

and 20-millimeters replacing the machine guns,

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the Tangier had radar aboard. This was kind of unusual, was it not, because there wasn't too many ships at that time that had radar yet?

Isacksen: I think most of them had the type of radar . . . well, in fact, the 1.1 was worked off radar. So I think they were pretty well-equipped. The radar we had was for scanning, you know what I mean. It wasn't the sensitive radar that they have now. We went into San Diego with our radar and without a pilot, using it on the different shores. We got ate out for it, but we did do it.

Marcello: Now, as one gets closer and closer to December 7th, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, could you detect any change in your training routine or the type of functions that the Tangier was performing?

Isacksen: No. It seemed to be the same all the time I was aboard, I didn't see any increased activity or anything like that, I don't remember any of it.

Marcello: Basically then, right up until December 7, 1941, it was more or less business as usual aboard the Tangier,

Isacksen: Right. Now, we were one of the ships that still got up at six o'clock in the morning; whereas, on some of the ships they could sleep in on Sundays. We could not. We had to

get up at six o'clock everyday.

Marcello: And this was everybody in the crew that had to get up at six o'clock?

Isacksen: Including the officers.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about the liberty routine that you had there at Pearl Harbor during that period prior to December 7, 1941. What sort of liberty routine did the Tangier have?

Isacksen: Well, the best I can remember, I don't believe any of the enlisted men could stay after dark. They had to be back by five o'clock or something like that. I don't recall what the officers' routine on the Tangier was--whether they could stay over later or not. In other words, we could get off as early as eight o'clock and spend the whole day, but we had to be back by five o'clock.

Marcello: Now, when you say you could get off as early as eight o'clock, would this be on a weekend?

Isacksen: Well, whenever your liberty day was.

Marcello: What sort of liberty did you have--port and starboard?

Isacksen: I don't recall that, but I think that would probably be about right.

Marcello: I know that on a lot of the other ships, in fact, on most of the ships, the men could stay out until midnight, but that wasn't the case aboard the Tangier.

Isacksen: No, we had to be back before dark.

Marcello: I wonder why that was? Why was it, in other words, that you had to get up at six o'clock everyday of the week, which wasn't true on the other ships, and then I wonder why you also had to be back by early evening?

Isacksen: We had a commander that had come through Annapolis or whatever, and he lived by the book. He was very, very strong. He was similar to what Halsey was.

Marcello: That, it seems to me, would have been another reason for the low morale aboard the Tangier. You could have, I'm sure, seen all of the other ships' crews that rated much better liberty than you did.

Isacksen: It didn't help. It didn't help any.

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

Isacksen: Well, I just kind of walked around town, and I'd spend some time over at Waikiki and things like that. Then on Sunday, whenever I could go, I went over there . . . I belonged to the Christian Church at that time, and I had friends that were working over there; and they belonged to the Christian Church, and I went to their church with them quite a bit. On the seventh, in fact, I was on deck waiting for the liberty boat to go when the Japs came.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that your father had some friends who lived in the islands.

Isacksen: No, What I meant, my father was a brick mason, and at one time he was . . . he came over and put the pier together that was in the Honolulu harbor. He built it, and he spent maybe six months over there working as a contractor, He talked about it so much, that that's why, I guess you might say . . . I wasn't familiar with it, but I was kind of wanting to see it.

Marcello: I gather that on weekends, especially as one gets closer and closer to December 7th, that downtown Honolulu was just wall-to-wall bodies. The downtown area was packed with servicemen from all branches.

Isacksen: It always had been while I was there, right. The servicemen were definitely the majority. Definitely they were resented by the people that lived there.

Marcello: Now, when you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of an individual did you usually conjure up in your own mind? What sort of person did you usually think about?

Isacksen: Really, I hadn't done any thinking about it, because to me Japan was the farthest place from my mind. I really, like I say, didn't even dream that they would attack. I didn't think they had the guts to attack us.

Marcello: Did you or your buddies in your bull sessions ever discuss the possibility of a Japanese attack in the Hawaiian Islands?

Isacksen: No. I think in most of our bull sessions we talked about girls.

Marcello: Suppose war did come between the United States and Japan. Did you and your buddies have any doubts as to what the outcome would be?

Isacksen: No, I don't think so. I'm going to have to go on assumptions, because I don't ever even recall even having talked about it. But I don't think anybody ever had any doubts that we weren't the greatest.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us up into that week of December 7, 1941, Mr. Isacksen, so let's go into as much detail as you can remember concerning that weekend. Now, as usual, I would assume that the Tangier was tied up on the side of Ford Island opposite from Battleship Row.

Isacksen: That is correct. We had moved . . . the Lexington was there the day before, and they left that night, and we moved over into Lexington's berth. We were to pick up supplies, I guess, or something to go to Guam or some other island, I don't know which. So we were scheduled to leave Monday. I knew that was the case, because I had been told I could have liberty on Sunday. I was on deck expecting to go over to go to church.

Marcello: Let's just back up here a minute now. When did the Tangier come in that weekend? When was the last time it had been

out on maneuvers before it came in?

Isacksen: I'm going to say we was out Saturday practicing.

Marcello: Again, this was the routine type of exercise that you had been engaging in all along.

Isacksen: Right.

Marcello: Do you recall approximately what time the Tangier came back in on Saturday?

Isacksen: No, sir. The only reason I remember that we was out on Saturday was because we came in, and we had not gotten our ammunition stored below. That's a strict rule, and he ran the ship by the rules. We still had some ammunition on top-side by the guns.

Marcello: Why was it that this ammunition had not been stored below?

Isacksen: Possibly because we had not gotten in in time to do it. That's my only recollection on it.

Marcello: And this ammunition was still on deck on Sunday morning?

Isacksen: Yes.

Marcello: That was highly unusual, was it not?

Isacksen: Right.

Marcello: I would assume that under normal circumstances you would've been working to get that ammunition below regardless of how long it took, especially when you came into a port,

Isacksen: I don't know. I'm not used to the Navy that much to be able to say. It's possible that there was a reason, but I didn't

give it any thought.

Marcello: Did anybody get liberty that Saturday night?

Isacksen: No.

Marcello: Do you recall what you did that Saturday night?

Isacksen: No. No, I don't. I might have watched a movie. We had a movie on topside every night.

Marcello: I would assume that from what you said, that is, that everybody had to be back aboard the ship by five o'clock in the evening, that you would not have had the usual number of drunks coming back aboard like you might have had, let's say, aboard one of the other ships where the crew had liberty to midnight.

Isacksen: They could still come back pretty drunk.

Marcello: Is that right?

Isacksen: They can stow it away pretty quick. But I don't recall anybody coming back real drunk in Pearl. Now, later I could, but not then.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7th. What I want you to do at this point is to give me a blow-by-blow account of your activities on that day from the time you got up until all the action began.

Isacksen: Well, my recollection isn't real good on the first part. I know I got up and ate breakfast and then put on my dress whites. I was on the deck waiting for the liberty boat,

because I was going to go to church. I don't remember what time it was, but I happened to look up, and I said something to an officer. I said, "Boy, they're sure getting these war games very real," because we had been playing war games, I remember saying that to him, and he looked up, and he said, "War games, hell!" He hit the GQ alarm, because that was a Japanese plane up there. Then I remember just running for my battle station.

Marcello: Describe this particular incident in more specific detail. You mentioned that you do see these planes, and your first impression was that these were realistic war games. Describe in more detail the Japanese planes. How low were they? What were they doing?

Isacksen: The first group came over a little high, and then they dive-bombed, and they were . . . the ones that I noticed were after the Utah.

Marcello: How far were you from the Utah?

Isacksen: Maybe fifty yards.

Marcello: And you had a clear, unobstructed view of that ship, isn't that correct?

Isacksen: That is correct.

Marcello: Okay, so describe these Japanese planes coming in on the Utah.

Isacksen: Well, they were diving down on it, and, of course, everybody was running.

Marcello: But when you initially saw them diving, nobody was running or doing anything. Isn't that correct? I assume you didn't know they were Japanese planes right away.

Isacksen: Well, when he hit that GQ horn, I know we were running. I didn't just stand there and look at them, because I had a job to do. That was to get to my station and get our gun going.

Marcello: But at the time the general quarters sounded, I assume that the Japanese planes, from what you said, actually had not yet hit the Utah.

Isacksen: No, they had not. I think our general quarters were sounded before, but I don't believe anybody was at a gun by the time they hit.

The second wave that came over was lower ones, They hedgehogged, is what they were doing. They came in low. I do remember them going over the ship. We could almost look them in the eye. You could see their white teeth when they laughed at you.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up a minute. Let's not get to the second wave yet. Let's continue with the first wave. You see these planes dive-bomb on the Utah, and these are definitely dive bombers. They are not torpedo bombers.

Isacksen: That's right.

Marcello: Okay, general quarters sounds almost right away, and you're

on your way to your gun, and this is one of the machine gun position?

Isacksen: Right.

Marcello: So what happens now when you get to your machine gun position?

Isacksen: Well, two people that ran the machine gun were going, and the best I remember, I grabbed for the ammunition. Of course, we didn't have enough belts, and I started belting right away.

Marcello: But there were people there to actually fire the gun, though.

Isacksen: Right. I did not fire the gun, no.

Marcello: And you mention there were two people there who were firing the gun already,

Isacksen: Yes. I don't know if they were firing before I got there, but they were firing about the same time. Everything went so fast that it would be awful hard to say. I could kind of keep my center right there, and really you're numb. You don't really think; you don't know what you do.

Marcello: Is everything more or less instinctive at this time? I mean, you've been trained to do a particular job. General quarters has sounded, so are you functioning in a rather instinctive sense at this time?

Isacksen: Definitely. I don't recall anybody panicking. One time we ran out of ammunition, and I went below, and I don't remember

whether it was two or three decks down. They had this ammunition in wooden boxes, and they had wire across them, zigzagged across. I remember that I went down there and grabbed one of them, put it on my shoulders, ran up the ladders with them, and didn't think anything about it. The fact is, I didn't even wait for anybody to clip them with the pliers. I tried to break them with my hands. I know that a couple of days later, I couldn't even pick one of those boxes up with two hands, let alone put one on my shoulder. It definitely is . . . you did things you . . . I don't know what the source is, but you just did things you normally ^{couldn't} didn't do.

Marcello: Now, I would assume that during this first attack that the Tangier was not one of the primary targets of the Japanese.

Isacksen: No, sir. I don't think we ever were. I think we had some strays that, when they realized they didn't have anything to go for, that might have been too late, and they missed us. The best I can recall, I think there was one or two torpedoes that went completely under us, and that was because of the fact they were looking for somebody else. I don't believe they ever tried to hit us. We were not important to them. In fact, I think the whole war was that way with us, and I'm very glad.

Marcello: Now, I gather that the Utah was one of the primary targets

mainly because they thought it was an aircraft carrier.

Isacksen: No, the Utah was a battlegon, and it was an experimental one.

Marcello: But it had the railroad ties and so on on its upper decks, did it not?

Isacksen: I don't recall what it had up there, but it had all the new antiaircraft weapons. It was experimental, and it had all the new types of antiaircraft weapons. The reason I thought they were a primary target--I could be wrong; it's just my own opinion--was because they wanted that out of the way before it could do any damage with its antiaircraft guns. It had all the new types of guns, all the radar and everything, and they used it as a new or experimental ship for antiaircraft attacks.

Marcello: Did you witness the Utah turning over?

Isacksen: I heard it. They yelled, and I looked over, and saw it. I did not actually see it turn over myself, because I was busy.

When I looked over there, I also saw the Raleigh, which was on the other side of the Utah. It was sunk down, and they were standing in water and still shooting. It went straight down and didn't turn. That was quite an experience.

Later, like I say, I understood that one of our sheet metal people went over and cut it. I did not see them doing that, either, but I heard about it.

Marcello: Now, again, let's back up here a minute. What were your reactions or feelings when you saw the Raleigh going down and when you heard about the Utah turning over? Do you have time to think about something like that? Do you have time to have any emotions or reactions to something like that initially, right at the moment?

Isacksen: It may not sound true to you, but my reaction was that I was worried how my mother and father were taking it in the States, not my own personal being at the time. I think I was numb. Anybody that says they were not scared, I just can't believe them. It's a different type thing. Really, I guess things were happening so fast you didn't have time to think. Like I say, you were working automatically.

Just like our captain . . . they were trying to get ammunition passed and in place, and we had people working, and the officers were trying to . . . some of the officers that were just out of college were getting in the way, so the captain ordered everybody below except "exec" and himself. Of course, the chaplain refused to go below. He said his place was up there with the men. The fact is, he sat in the line where they passed ammunition, and he was right in the middle when they were passing it.

Marcello: Now, awhile ago you mentioned that you were going to go ashore for church services. How come you weren't necessarily going

to stay for church services aboard the Tangier?

Isacksen: Well, like I say, I had these friends over there, and I liked going there. And, of course, on the Tangier our chaplain was Catholic.

The services on board ship are not like a service in a church. They definitely had their place. You don't really get anything out of it. You don't get the music and all that that you get when you go over there. The Christian Church that they have over there in Honolulu is a beautiful church. I really enjoyed it.

Marcello: Could you detect a lull between the first attack and the second attack?

Isacksen: I couldn't. I was too busy.

Marcello: And all this time, you were actually belting the ammunition.

Isacksen: Right. I don't think I ever remember stopping. The fact is, they even brought sandwiches to you. You didn't go down and eat.

Marcello: Now, you did mention, however, that you did notice that the Japanese were using a different type of plane in the second attack, at least from what you could observe. You mentioned that you saw mainly torpedo planes, or at least they were flying low.

Isacksen: Right. I think I was using their method of attack to describe what they were. I was not that familiar with the different

types of planes.

Marcello: And how low were these planes flying?

Isacksen: I would guess they wouldn't be much more than twenty or thirty feet above your head when they were coming over, because you could see . . . they actually . . . some of the people said they could hit them with a potato if they had it in their hand. But that's an exaggeration possibly. I don't know. But I know the captain was shooting at them with a Browning Automatic Rifle when they came. We shot with everything we had.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that these planes were actually flying so low that you could see the pilots or the crew members. Describe them again as you remember them.

Isacksen: Well, I guess the only thing that impressed me was the fact that the one that I noticed come over had tilted his plane a little bit, and he just had a big ol' grin on his face looking down at us. I guess that rubbed me wrong--I don't know--but I remember that. It's kind of vague, but I remember that.

Marcello: When you're on a gun crew, like this .50-caliber that you were on, is there a lot of talking and yelling and so on and so forth while all the action is going on? What sort of activity is taking place there at that gun?

Isacksen: Well, mostly they talk to each other because everybody there

is looking, and the minute they spot a target, well, then they yell, and they work together on it. One of them is standing by, and one of them is feeding . . . and one of them is running the thing, and the other one is feeding the belts into the gun. It's sort of a teamwork. Boy, it's been so long I don't remember all the details.

Marcello: As you look back upon it, did you have the impression that everybody was acting in a rather professional manner?

Isacksen: I think our ship did--professional or automatic. I think we did very well. I still say that if I had to go back through it again, I'd rather be on my ship because of the fact that they did perform as well as they did. They did not have the equipment that the fighting ships had. Now, if that made any difference or not, I don't know.

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

Isacksen: The best I can remember, it was clear.

Marcello: Good day for an air attack?

Isacksen: Good day for anything. I think it would've been better if it had been cloudy. They could come out in the clouds. But they came in clear. They dived at us, and the best I can remember, we were looking into the sun at the time. I'm not sure.

Marcello: Now, was the Tangier ever strafed any time during the attack? Do you recall?

- Isacksen: No, sir, I don't recall. I know we had shrapnel from bombs that hit close and burst and come across, But I do not recall having seen any strafing.
- Marcello: Could you observe any of the action that was taking place over on Ford Island itself?
- Isacksen: No. We didn't have time. You didn't look around, The only time you did any looking around was after it was all over with.
- Marcello: Now, you mentioned that at one point you did get sandwiches and coffee and so on. Was this actually during the attack, or was it after it over?
- Isacksen: No, quite awhile afterwards. No, during the attack, nobody moved except on the guns.
- Marcello: What did you do during the aftermath of the attack?
- Isacksen: I stayed right there and belted for twenty-four hours, Every time we would get a supply set up on our ship, one of the aircraft carriers would send some planes in, and they'd pick up all the belted ammunition and take it back out. So I stayed right there and didn't move. The best I can remember, I stayed there for maybe two days. I'm not sure, but I think it was for about twenty-four hours,
- Marcello: What sort of rumors did you hear in the aftermath of the attack?
- Isacksen: The only thing I heard was . . . we'd scuttlebutt ourselves, you might say. Of course, our concern was the damage that

was done to everybody else. Like I said, I had one friend who had two brothers on the Arizona, and he wanted very badly to find out what happened to them.

We could see the fires and everything, and we heard that we were wiped out. We went to sea within two days,

Marcello: Now, that night, that is, the night of December 7th, did you ever hear the rumors that the Japanese had landed or about to land or anything of this nature? That seemed to be one of the common rumors going around.

Isacksen: We heard that they might be trying to land, but really at that time, I don't think any of us realized how much damage had been done, and we didn't figure they had a chance. So we didn't buy that one too well. At least the people that I talked to did not.

We went to sea within two days. They loaded Company B, I believe, Marines, on board our ship. Then we went to sea, and we were joined by one of the aircraft carriers, or two. We had a couple of "tin cans," and we headed out to Guam.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up to the night of December 7th again. Did you hear any sporadic gunfire or shooting that night?

Isacksen: Once in awhile. Of course, the sad thing that happened was that there were three planes coming in. They were coming into Ford Island, and they gave the signal. The best I can

recall, they gave the signal that they were friendly. They came down to land, and for some reason they all pulled up again. When they did, every gun on the island and every ship opened fire, and they shot them down. They were our own planes.

Marcello: Did you actually see this?

Isacksen: Yes, I saw it.

Marcello: Did the guns on the Tangier fire at them, too?

Isacksen: Every gun fired.

Marcello: How about your particular position?

Isacksen: I don't recall whether it fired or not. I wasn't on the gun then. The gun that I was supposed to be attending probably did, but I don't recall.

Marcello: Where were you at the time when all that took place?

Isacksen: Still at my battle station.

Marcello: But wasn't there a gun there at your battle station?

Isacksen: Right. But, like I said, I was belting ammunition then. It may sound funny, but we had about three of us lined up there with these hand belts, and we just kept belting ammunition. The guns were firing right beside us, and they'd grab a belt as fast as we did it. When they'd quit firing . . . we'd just keep belting, and when we'd get up a load, somebody would come and take them, and we'd keep on going.

Marcello: When was it that these planes off the carriers were getting

your ammunition? Would this have been the next day?

Isacksen: The next day, right. The best I can recall, I don't believe anything was done the first day other than to pick up survivors and things like that. That's what I heard mostly. The seamen would come by and talk a minute. They were out picking up people, and they were telling their experiences of it.

Marcello: Now, previously in our interview, you had mentioned the fact that certain sheet metal workers off the Tangier had actually climbed up on to the hull of the Utah and, I guess, were cutting a hole in the side for those trapped men to get out. Do you know anything about that. Did you observe any of that?

Isacksen: No, I did not. I did not see it. I heard about it. The chief that did that, I know him very well. He was a big man. He was very quiet, and he wouldn't talk about it. He used a blow torch.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to collect your senses and your thoughts and observe the damage that had been done by the next day, that is, by Monday?

Isacksen: No, I don't think I ever realized the total damage until we came back, after we had gone out awhile. Like I said, we went to sea and made a tour. We went to Guam, and then, of course, it fell just as we got there; and then we went up

to Midway, and then we came back. I guess we were gone almost a month, and then when we came back, we saw the whole damage. That was the first time I realized how much damage was done.

Marcello: Was there still a lot of oil and so on on the surface of the water, even a month later, when you came back in?

Isacksen: The best I can recall, there was. There was lots of oil, and ships were still where they were and in bad shape. I even think the Arizona was still smoking. I can still see it smoke now.

Marcello: What did you and your shipmates talk about that night, that is, the night of December 7th, while you were there belting the ammunition and so on?

Isacksen: I don't recall, really, to be truthful. If I said anything, it would be an assumption, and that wouldn't be right.

Marcello: What was the morale like in the aftermath of the attack?

Isacksen: I think the morale at that time would possibly have picked up from what it was before the war, because they had a purpose now.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of people say that their immediate reaction was one of anger.

Isacksen: Well, definitely, all of us had the anger, because of the fact that we understood that there was a big party going on, and all the officers were over on the beach. Of course,

enlisted men hated officers, anyway. Everybody took an oath that they would some way or other, if they ever had a chance, get to Admiral Kimmel and General Short. Of course, we had that hate for years. We never knew anything else until, I guess, after the war about what really happened.

Marcello: In other words, a great many of the enlisted personnel did hold Short and Kimmel personally accountable for what had happened.

Isacksen: Absolutely. And it's a shame, because I know now that I was wrong. I had the same feeling until after I've seen and read some of the articles and seen the movie Tora! Tora! Tora! I think it gives us the best view of what happened in Washington that anybody could see. I don't know if we were sold short or whether they were trying their best to save the peace. I don't know. We took an awful beating.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Isacksen, is there anything else relative to the Pearl Harbor attack that we haven't covered and that you think we need to talk about? That exhausts my list of questions.

Isacksen: Really, when you get into Pearl Harbor and the attack, the only thing I can say is that it was a horrible thing. The attack itself was not as bad as some of the other skirmishes we had later, but we went in prepared. What made Pearl so

bad was it was such a surprise. Some of the things you saw when they picked up these men that had been in the water--burned, holes in their cheeks and trying to smoke and things like that--it just set an image on you that is everlasting.

Marcello: I guess there's something that I neglected to ask you earlier. Did the Tangier get involved in any rescue efforts before it got out of Pearl?

Isacksen: Yes. Immediately after the Tangier crew did the . . . in other words, all of our liberty boats, whaleboats, and that were put in the water, and the seamen that were there manned them and went out and worked with them and tried to pick up people. They worked constantly. To the best of my recollection, after one would go so long and get tired, they would come back, and another crew would take it. But the boats stayed in the water all the time.

Marcello: Now, where did they take those survivors? Did they take them over to shore, or did they bring some of them back aboard the Tangier?

Isacksen: They did not come back to the Tangier. They took them probably over to the hospital or whatever. There was a hospital ship there, if I recall right. I'm not sure. Of course, there's a big hospital over there on Ford Island. I don't know if it was on Ford Island or where. Anyway, they took them . . . they had a place for them.

Marcello: Now, I assume that you actually didn't get involved in any of this. You were still belting ammunition.

Isacksen: That's my problem. I didn't get to see too much. I think I'm glad I didn't, because some of those people were pretty sick.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Isacksen, I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that historians will find your comments very valuable when they use them to write about Pearl Harbor.

Isacksen: Well, I hope they do. I really don't think I had much to do with it. My job was a small one, but everybody had to have a job. I wouldn't want to go back through it again.

Marcello: Well, again, I want to thank you very much for having participated.

Isacksen: Thank you.