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Interview with
STEVE P. WARREN
May 16, 1982

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Interviewer: R. E. Marcello

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Approved: Steve P. Warren

(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Steve P. Warren

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Date of Interview: May 16, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Steve Warren for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 16, 1982, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Warren in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the converted yacht USS Elyda during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Warren, 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. Warren: I was born on July 29, 1921, in Lubbock, Texas. I was raised on a farm at a little town south of Lubbock, about twenty-five miles from Meadow. I graduated from the Meadow High School system. I went to college at Texas Tech for a very brief time and then dropped out of college due to the economic factor and worked on the farm for about a year. I then went in the Navy in August of 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy?

Warren: Primarily economic, I was a farm boy and just never had any money (chuckle), and it looked glamorous.. That \$21 a month looked like a fortune. I never at any time had \$21 until I went in the Navy,

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

Warren: Really and truly, I don't know why a West Texas boy would take the deep-water Navy over the Army, but it just seemed the thing to do at the time (chuckle). I really can't tell you why.

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

Warren: Well, I read the paper, and I listened to the radio, and I believed that war was imminent and that we would soon be coming involved. Of course, I felt like the Navy would be better than the trenches, and I was at the right age to go. That would be the main reason I chose it. And then I did keep abreast of current affairs fairly good--Hitler's invasion and so forth.

Marcello: When you thought of the country getting into the war, were your eyes turned mainly toward Europe or toward Asia at that time?

Warren: I was thinking primarily of Europe, although the Japs had sunk the Panay, and I believe it was Life magazine or Look--one of them-- that showed pictures of it. We were shocked and so forth. My family unit, as such, was a deeply patriotic-type family--conservative, of course, and very patriotic.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Warren: San Diego.

Marcello: And how long did it last at that time?

Warren: Approximately three months.

Marcello: So you did get into the Navy at a time before they had actually cut down boot camp in an effort to rush the men out into the fleet?

Warren: Yes.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen in boot camp that you think needs to be a part of the record? Or was it a normal Navy boot camp?

Warren: Normal Navy boot camp. I thought it was the easiest work I ever did for the least money (chuckle). Some of them complained about how hard we had to march and all that, but it was very easy for an ol' farm boy.

Marcello: Where did you go from San Diego?

Warren: I went on the USS Pinola; it was a seagoing tug in San Pedro.

Marcello: And where did you go?

Warren: To San Pedro. The USS Pinola was stationed in San Pedro. The only action we saw, or ever remotely saw, on the Pinola was...if my memory serves me correct, in about April of 1941, we seized two ships in the harbor at San Pedro. We seized one, and the Coast Guard seized the other one. The government, through some quirk, said that the German ships, or ships that the Germans owned through conquest, some way or other, belonged to the U.S. government. We seized one of them. It was a Norwegian ship, and they were more than glad to surrender, thank God (chuckle).

Marcello: Through all this, you were aboard the Pinola there working out of San Pedro several months before you were sent to Pearl Harbor?

Warren: Right,

Marcello: Okay, describe the process by which you got to Pearl Harbor.

Warren: The U.S. government purchased a yacht, the Elvida, in San Diego, I believe. It was a wooden ship, a very small ship, a beautiful little ship made for safe, smooth waters. The government intended to make a yard patrol craft out of it and send it to Honolulu or Pearl Harbor for conversion into a yard patrol craft. The ship then went to San Diego, and we were escorted across--the records show--by the Ramapo, and the official records show we arrived on December 5. My recollection is not that; my recollection is that we arrived on December 6 and that we were escorted by another ship. I think the official records are in error, but we did,,.if my memory serves me correct, we arrived December 6, late in the afternoon.

Marcello: And this was in 1940?

Warren: 1941,

Marcello: 1941,

Warren: Yes,

Marcello: So you were at Pearl Harbor, then, a day before the attack took place, is that correct?

Warren: That's my,,yes, sir. If my recollection is correct, I was there approximately,,we got there about five or six o'clock, December 6, 1941.

Marcello: And when you got into Pearl Harbor, where did you dock?

Warren: At Section Base, Bishop's Point, It's right at the mouth of the harbor, next to Hickam Field,

Marcello: And what was going to be the purpose of this ship after it arrived in Pearl?

Warren: They were going to make a yard patrol craft out of it and arm it and redo it, I suppose it was to be used in the Pearl Harbor area,

Marcello: What did you think about,,going aboard a ship of that nature, as opposed to a battleship or a cruiser or something along those lines?

Warren: I was disappointed, I wanted to get on a cruiser, or I thought I did, I couldn't imagine getting on a small craft like this.

Marcello: What kind of a crew did it have, what size crew?

Warren: It was a very small crew originally because we had to stand "four-on and four-off" watches all the way across. We just didn't have enough men. I think there was just one officer,,we were escorted by larger ships, of course, that furnished us food and so forth,

Marcello: Okay, so you dock over at Bishop's Point. What did you do that evening of December 6?

Warren: We gambled, played poker, That was one of the lucky days of my life, I won, I reckon, ten or fifteen dollars, all of it in change (chuckle), Then we sat there and looked at the scenery. We didn't get any liberty or anything like that at that time.

- Marcello: What kind of scene did you see that evening as you looked out over the harbor? Describe it.
- Warren: Well, I noticed going in...I saw Diamond Head, which was very impressive, I was just thrilled to be in Hawaii; I just couldn't imagine anything that glamorous, and I just looked everywhere, I suppose, It was just a pretty place.
- Marcello: As you look back upon your life in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, how would you describe the morale of you and your buddies?
- Warren: Extremely high, We were a very patriotic group and felt we were the best navy in the world, the best fighting men, We were very arrogant and probably overbearing, We were very proud to be Americans in the Navy.
- Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that time, what kind of an individual did you usually conjure up in your mind?
- Warren: (Chuckle) A little, insignificant, pip-squeak type of guy that jabbered a lot, that really didn't amount to anything, We knew that one American could whip two or three hundred of them every day, I'm being facetious, of course, but we just couldn't imagine that the Japanese could stand up to an American in any way.
- Marcello: I guess Pearl Harbor must have been an impressive sight that night, with the running lights of the ships and all that sort of thing.
- Warren: I do not recall that, We were at the mouth of the harbor, and, of course, we could not see all the battleships and things or any of the large craft, I do not recall that.
- Marcello: Okay, this takes us into that morning of December 7, 1941, and what

I want you to do is to describe for me, in as much detail as you can remember, what you experienced that particular day. Let's start with your getting up in the morning.

Warren: I was asleep, Our officer was asleep, We were all tired. One of the men ran into the compartment there where I was sleeping and said, "We are being attacked by the Japanese!" Well, of course, by then I could hear the bombs, and I jumped up and grabbed my dungarees to put them on, I picked them up by the bottoms; all my money fell out on the deck, I left it laying there and took off to get out of that wooden ship.

I ran up topside, and a Jap plane with a pilot and a gunner was making a run on Hickam Field and came right by our ship. We were tied up right at the entrance of the harbor, and the Japs made their runs on Hickam Field right by our ship. I always will remember that the pilot was looking forward on his plane, the gunner was looking right at me, and they couldn't have been fifteen, twenty yards from me. They were very low. The gunner had his gun pointed aft on the plane, and before he could swing them,,,if he wanted to swing them,,,as I came charging out of the hold, I did a flip-flop and dove back, and this other man with me did, too.

Then we ran over,,,we saw that we were on a death trap on this little wooden ship, with no guns, We didn't even have a pistol. We were tied up next to the USS Ash, and it was a steel ship, and we ran over and got on the Ash, and I always will remember

running down the deck of the Ash trying to get into a compartment. A bullet hit just right ahead of me--it wasn't two or three feet-- and fell to the deck, and I picked it up and put it in my pocket. Why, I do not know, I ran on to the Ash, and by then all of our crew, the seven or eight men on our ship, was on the Ash. We begin to help the Ash people prepare their ship for battle.

Marcello: Now what kind of a ship was the Ash?

Warren: This was a,,,I'm not,,,my memory gets away from me. It would be a,,,I just forget, It was a fairly large ship, compared to ours, It wasn't a big ship,

Marcello: Was it a destroyer?

Warren: No, sir, it was some kind of auxiliary-type, I forget what the terminology,,,I mean, like, a ship at that time was named after trees or fish or whatever, I'll have to look it up. My memory... they had a 3-inch gun that was on--I believe it was a 3-inch gun-- on the Ash that had probably solid cosmoline in it, and the ready boxes were empty, of course, So some of our people helped the Ash gunners clean the cosmoline out, and I, along with some other people, went down into the ammunition storage room and started carrying some 3-inch ammunition up to it. We got it going.

Marcello: In the meantime, were planes still flying over?

Warren: They were flying over real bad, and, of course, everybody claimed they got a Jap plane (chuckle). They claimed one for that ship, but I don't know, I didn't see it, We were still under intense attack at that point,

Shortly after that, I was standing on the fantail of the Ash and watched an American destroyer make a break for the ocean, out through the mouth of the harbor. It seemed like that every Jap plane in the sky--or a whole bunch of them, anyway--hit this destroyer, right at the mouth of the harbor. It couldn't have been fifty yards, I don't believe, from where I was standing. They were strafing and bombing, and the destroyer, all its guns were just shooting right straight up. That destroyer made a dash and did get out of the harbor. The Japs, of course, wanted to sink somebody in that channel and block the fleet.

Marcello: In the meantime, are they ignoring your ship?

Warren: They strafed us slightly. They just just completely ignored us. We were just too small to fool with. They were after Hickam Field primarily--the ones in our area--and, of course, the battleships down on Battleship Row and the Ford Island area. They blasted Hickam real bad.

Marcello: How low were these Japanese planes generally coming in?

Warren: I would say not over fifteen or twenty feet high there. They may have been maybe twenty-five feet. They were just very low, about telephone post high. They just made a very low approach on Hickam Field. Now the ones that hit the destroyer, of course, were coming in at higher level. They were trying to hit this destroyer there that was trying to make a break for the sea.

Marcello: Were you basically handling ammunition?

Warren: That's what I did on the Ash until we got all kinds of ammunition

to the stern--solid, shrapnel, whatever we could grab. We didn't pay any attention. We just carried it up and dropped it. The gunner, I'm sure, in the excitement was shooting whatever we'd dropped on the deck there. We'd cram it in there, and he shot it.

Marcello: How many rounds do you think you got off?

Warren: I don't know. I imagine we carried up sixty or seventy rounds. If my memory serves me right, there was three rounds to a box, and I know I fell,,a bomb went off or something, and it knocked me down a flight of steps with a box of ammunition, and I hurt my knees at that time, but I was a young man, and it didn't,,I was crippled and hobbled around for about a week, but I was all right then.

Marcello: Now did this bomb hit on the ship, or was it on land or water or what?

Warren: It must have been in the water or something. I don't know. I was below decks when it happened, and so all I know is that I lost my footing, and I suppose I just got knocked down.

Marcello: How long did the Ash continue to put up resistance?

Warren: All during the raid, because they never were hit or damaged, in other words.

Marcello: About what time did you cease fire?

Warren: Well, when there just wasn't any planes around to shoot at, I suppose.

Marcello: Well, about what time of the morning was that, do you recall?

Warren: No, sir. See, I did not stay on the Ash during the whole raid. Then several of us were in the Ash mess hall because that was all the

protection we had. Word came down from the section base to stand by to send some men over to someplace over yonder--I do not know where, and I wouldn't have known at the time because I'd never been there--because the Japanese were landing troops at some mysterious place on the Hawaiian Islands or Oahu. This section base commander sent word down that he wanted a crew of volunteers to go over and help repel the invasion.

Several of us volunteered. It wasn't through bravery or anything of that sort; we just needed to get our hands on a gun. We thought that if we could at least get a gun, we could at least do some help. Well, they were getting a truck to haul us to this place, wherever it was, and then they confirmed it back, and there wasn't any invasion, so we didn't go.

Marcello: In the meantime, did they arm you and things of that nature?

Warren: No, sir, we never did get a rifle or anything (chuckle). Then Hickam Field was hit so hard that they needed some help with the wounded. I went over--it was just a block or two from where I was at--and helped with the wounded. To the best of my recollection, we had one Navy doctor and one corpsman. They were helping with the wounded, and some seamen like me were helping. The doctor and corpsman were working only on the wounded that the doctor thought he could save. The light wounded were completely ignored, and the dying were completely ignored by the doctor. I helped with the dying at first until they died off.

I never,,,of course, there are some things that are vivid in

your mind. One man was laying there with a sheet up over his chest, kind of, and was grinning and joking, and he looked like he wasn't hurt at all, but all his intestines had been blown out. Another man wanted me to take shorthand. He took a letter to his wife and mother and father.

I helped with another Hickam Field man. One of the other dying told me that he had picked up an incendiary...lighted incendiary bomb to throw out a window--it fell in a barracks or hangar or somewhere--and the bomb evidently went off in this man's face just about the time he brought the bomb up to eye-level. It burnt his fingers until his hands was just charred. His face was, oh, I imagine, a half-inch to an inch deep with burns, solid. His ears were burned off, and his eyes, of course, were gone, and so was his nose, etc. He could evidently hear me, and I tried for a good while to get his name because I couldn't find his dog tags or any identification on him, so at least his folks would know it. I put a pencil in the stub of his hand, and he tried to write his name, but I never could interpret it. I'd tell him he was doing real good, to try one more time, and I never did get the man's name. He died.

We lost,,well, all the men we were working with died, of course, and then we began to help the doctors with the others the best we could,

Marcello: Exactly what kind of work were you doing here?

Warren: I was just a plain seaman. I was just trying to make it comfortable

for the dying, that's all. I had no medicine,,no medicine,

Marcello: Basically, what kinds of injuries and wounds did these people have?

Warren: Shrapnel, burns,,,bad burns, Hickam Field took a real heavy plastering, a bombing-type thing. They dropped bombs on them, and they strafed them, and there was lots of shrapnel there.

Marcello: And this makeshift hospital was more or less out in the open?

Warren: It was just out on the ground, They just laid them out, kind of, in rows. We had one row for the dying, one row for a batch of the heavily wounded--the doctor was trying to save their lives--and then the lightly wounded were making more racket and screaming than all the others together. They were being completely ignored by me and everyone else; we didn't have time to fool with them at that time. But they were feeling all of their shrapnel wounds, where the dying were not complaining and the seriously wounded weren't complaining. I learned something at that time I didn't know.

Marcello: How long did you continue to do this activity?

Warren: Oh, I don't know. Well, I probably did it until we got got everything done that we could do, That's about it, We stayed there, I imagine, thirty or forty minutes.

Marcello: Now while you're there, is the attack over?

Warren: No, sir, I think another wave came in, The second wave that hit us was,,,of course, they came in at a higher level, and some of the antiaircraft guns were in action and so forth, and the Japanese did not get down to a lower level. The second wave didn't

seem to be very effective. Then I went back on the Ash then,

Marcello: Well, when the second wave came over, were you anywhere near the action, or were you kind of out of the way from the action?

Warren: Well, they didn't bother us any down where we was at. I know that some of them came over the harbor, but I didn't know if they did any damage particularly or not. They didn't do anything like the first wave. I noticed the antiaircraft fire there. I think our antiaircraft fire was keeping them at a higher level, and they just didn't seem to be as effective,

One incident I remember is the B-17's,,the B-17's were coming in at Hickam Field during the raid, and we saw some of them.

Marcello: Describe that action,

Warren: Well, (chuckle) I just remember one of the big planes coming in, and there was a Jap plane right on his tail, just chewing away. Of course, all I saw was just a,,it couldn't have been over fifteen or twenty seconds that that,,the big plane had to land, I understand, and that Jap just had him a lot of fun. Of course, I heard later that the big planes were not armed, etc,

Marcello: What was the fate of the B-17 that came in?

Warren: I don't know, He was on the landing approach there at Hickam Field, and I couldn't see over the barracks, He was shot up for sure. But someone told me the pilot escaped, I do not know from my own knowledge, though,

Marcello: Then you say that you went back to the Ash again?

Warren: Yes,

Marcello: Why did you do that?

Warren: Well, there wasn't anything to do where I was at, so I went back to the Ash. We were working mostly without any kind of orders or supervision. We just went anyplace we felt like we could help. We went there to do the best we could,

Marcello: And what did you do that evening once you got back aboard the Ash?

Warren: We moved our little ship around to another place there at the section base and started painting it,

Marcello: That evening?

Warren: I believe so. We were white; we were a yacht; we were a beautiful little ship. We pulled it around to another place, and we got some battleship grey, and before night we had a ship that was battleship grey (chuckle). It was an awful-looking thing when we got done because we just smeared the paint on it...nothing pretty about it,

Marcello: Now did you still not have any small arms or anything of that nature?

Warren: No, sir, we didn't even have a pistol. We never did get a gun on that ship until...I believe it was about April when we finally got a gun,

Marcello: What'd you do that night?

Warren: I slept. I was so tired after all the battle and then the painting. I do recall some planes coming in around seven o'clock. It was dark, and everything in the harbor opened up. Of course, we all knew that they were Japanese, but they weren't. I remember just

crawling on the mess table and going sound asleep during all the shelling--I was so tired. I didn't have anything to fight with, so there wasn't much I could do, anyway.

Marcello: I understand that was quite a fireworks display.

Warren: Yes, sir. I looked out, and it looked to me like the situation was well in hand. I didn't even have a rock, so there was nothing I could do about it (chuckle).

Marcello: Could you hear sporadic shooting all night?

Warren: Yes. For about a week, everybody that had a gun was very trigger-happy. We ate at the section base, and at night they would whisper the password to us, usually a state, like "Texas" or "Utah" or something like that. That was the password for that night. If you went anywhere the least bit after dark, you'd better be saying... if the password was "Texas," you'd better be saying, "Texas, Texas, Texas," because if you was challenged, you'd better come back with that password, or you might be dead.

Marcello: I guess it wasn't too safe to walk around at night, was it?

Warren: No, sir, I did not make a practice of walking around at night (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you do in the days following that attack--the next day and the days after that?

Warren: Well, I don't remember just a whole lot--just cleaning up our ship and things of that sort, you know, just shipboard duties, and talking about it and things like that. Nothing in particular.

Marcello: Describe the damage that had been done at Hickam that you remember it.

Warren: Well, I remember some of the men were eating in a mess hall or

barracks that had a U-shaped front to it, with double doors going out on this U-shaped area. A small bomb evidently was dropped on the roof of the barracks or dining hall. The men rushed out these double doors into this U-shaped area, trying to escape, and the Japanese planes just strafed and bombed the heck out of them and killed a whole bunch of them right there.

Marcello: You actually saw that?

Warren: No, sir. I saw the damage afterwards. I was not up there when it happened. Then I saw, of course, the hangars and so forth and so on.

Marcello: What was the state of the hangars and the runways?

Warren: Very poor. They'd been all damaged, and I think all the airplanes were pretty well destroyed.

Marcello: Was there still a lot of smoke and fire when you saw it?

Warren: I don't remember that so much as...the whole harbor area was smoking, and our ship was just covered with soot from the oil burning in the water. I do not remember particularly Hickam Field smoking.

Marcello: What did the water look like?

Warren: Oily and nasty. Of course, I was in the mouth of the harbor, and that was a little bit better than down around the Ford Island area, I'm sure.

Marcello: So what kind of work, then, were you doing in the days following the attack?

Warren: Well, we moved our ship over to another place in Honolulu there.

It was called the Inner-Island Dry Dock Company at the time. They started converting it to a "YP."

Marcello: Now what is a "YP"?

Warren: Yard patrol. While we were there, there was a merchant ship that came in, and it had an old Browning water-cooled machine gun on it, and I was assigned to man that gun during the attack or raids that might come in. It had several tanks of water, a lot of hoses, and to tell you the truth, I was afraid to shoot it. I think the thing was made for the Spanish-American War (chuckle). It was really an antique. I thank the Lord I did not fire that gun (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, Mr. Warren, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. I've never interviewed anyone off the Elvida, so we get a different slant on the Pearl Harbor attack. You've said some very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars and students will find your comments most valuable.