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Interview with
HAROLD MERRILL
October 21, 1983

Place of Interview: Rusk, Texas

Interviewer: R. E. Marcello

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Approved: Harold E. Merrill
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Harold Merrill

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Date: October 21, 1983

Place of Interview: Rusk, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Harold Merrill for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 21, 1983, in Rusk, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Merrill in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the target battleship USS Utah during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Merrill, 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. Merrill: I was born in Orangefield, Texas, on December 22, 1923.

Dr. Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.

Mr. Merrill: I finished the tenth grade and later got my GED after I got out of the service. I went to Lamar State University and then to North Carolina State University for two years.

Dr. Marcello: Your university education occurred after you got out of the Navy, I gather?

Mr. Merrill: Yes.

Marcello: When did you join the service?

Merrill: I enlisted in the Navy on July 17, 1941.

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

Merrill: Well, I just always liked the sea, and I just decided that the Navy would be for me. I joined the Navy on a minority cruise.

Marcello: What prompted you to join the service at that time?

Merrill: Unemployment, mostly.

Marcello: Can you explain that further?

Merrill: Well, I was just out of high school. I'd been in the CCC camp for a year. When I got out, I got a 25¢-an-hour job at the Pig Stand in Beaumont. That just wasn't enough money. I decided I'd join the Navy. The Navy didn't pay as much as the 25¢ an hour, actually.

Marcello: What was the "pig stand"?

Merrill: It was a sandwich shop--a barbeque stand--where they served, like...you don't see very many of the drive-ins anymore, where you drove in and the waitresses came out to the car.

Marcello: At the time that you joined the Navy in July of 1941, how closely were you keeping abreast of world events and current affairs and things of that nature?

Merrill: I wasn't keeping up with them too well, but my father was. He tried to talk me out of going in. In fact, he wouldn't sign the papers for me for quite a while. He finally relented

and signed the papers, so I went in on July 17.

Marcello: You mentioned that you went in on the minority cruise. For the record, explain what that meant, when you talk about the minority cruise.

Merrill: Well, anyone in between the ages of seventeen and eighteen could go in until they were twenty-one years old. In other words, then, the regular enlistment was for six years. On a minority cruise, you went in early, but you were supposed to get out when you were twenty-one.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the Navy, did you have any thoughts about making it a permanent career or anything of that sort?

Merrill: No, not really.

Marcello: It's interesting that you mention the importance of economics in influencing your decision. This seems to be true for most of the people who joined the service during that period of time. The Depression was perhaps winding down, but jobs were still tough to find.

Merrill: It was still economically depressed, we'll say that.

Marcello: I assume that Orangefield was over here in East Texas?

Merrill: Orangefield is between Orange and Port Arthur--a little oil-field town.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Merrill: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp at that time that you think we need to get as part of the record?

Merrill: Well, not really, but it was tough.

Marcello: How long did it last at that time?

Merrill: We spent twelve weeks there.

Marcello: You mentioned that it was tough. Can you elaborate on that?

Merrill: It was mostly the physical education on the "grinder," as they called it, and the hot sun, and no leave, no liberty, until you were out of boot camp and into what they called the T-Unit, which was Transfer Unit. After you got out of boot camp, they put you in a T-Unit and assigned you to a ship.

Marcello: You mentioned that boot camp lasted twelve weeks at that time. That must have been just right before they began to...

Merrill: I could be wrong. It could have been sixteen weeks. I can't remember whether it was twelve or sixteen weeks.

Marcello: Well, even so, whichever one it was, that's kind of interesting because I do know that later on they cut back on boot camp to eight weeks, and then I think even back to six weeks.

Merrill: Yes, that was after the war started.

Marcello: What happened when you got out of boot camp? Where did you go from there?

Merrill: I went into the T-Unit, the Transfer Unit.

Marcello: How long did you remain there?

Merrill: Only a few days.

Marcello: And then what happened?

Merrill: I went aboard the USS Utah.

Marcello: Was your assignment aboard the Utah voluntary, or were you

simply put there?

Merrill: I was placed there.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going aboard a battleship, even though it was the USS Utah?

Merrill: Well, I didn't really know it at the time; I mean, I didn't have any preferences.

Marcello: Describe your first thoughts when you got your first glance at the Utah.

Merrill: Well, I thought it was mighty big, which it was, and I knew that all our gun turrets and everything were covered up because it was a target ship. It had timbers on the decks and everything for practice bombing--our own air force and Navy air force. I don't know...I was just there.

Marcello: Where did you pick it up?

Merrill: San Pedro.

Marcello: Describe the initial reception that you got when you went aboard the Utah; I mean, after all, you were still really a "boot."

Merrill: Well, we took a lot of kidding and a lot of "Hey, Mac, where're you from" and all this stuff. I was assigned to a deck division, which I was in all the way through my stay in the Navy. I was in the deck division. After we got underway, I was never seasick, but I never seen so many sick people in my life as there was in...after we got underway, we hit some rough water.

Marcello: How long did the Utah remain there at San Pedro before it took off?

Merrill: I don't remember exactly, but it was just a short while. It wasn't long. I'd say it was three or four days.

Marcello: Describe exactly what your function was when you initially went aboard the Utah. You mentioned that you were in the deck division.

Merrill: Right.

Marcello: What sort of functions were you performing?

Merrill: Mainly swabbing decks and scraping paint, painting, and learning to tie knots. That's where you get most of your knot-tying training. Of course, we were introduced to the guns and all that, which was covered up...and just general deck duties.

Marcello: Did you have a battle station aboard the Utah, and, if so, where was it?

Merrill: No, I wasn't assigned a battle station on the Utah.

Marcello: At that time or never?

Merrill: Never.

Marcello: That's kind of odd, isn't it? Aren't most people usually assigned a battle station?

Merrill: Yes, they are on a ship where their guns are in operation, but as far as I remember, I wasn't assigned a battle station. I could be wrong. It's been a long time ago.

Marcello: What did you do normally, then, when General Quarters sounded?

Merrill: The Utah didn't sound General Quarters before the war.

Marcello: Describe what your living quarters were like aboard the Utah.

Merrill: Well, we had bunks, and we also had hammocks. If we were in rough water, we had to suspend our hammock and sleep in a hammock. Of course, we had a mess hall where we had to line up to eat.

Marcello: I know that in some cases the mess halls were actually in the sleeping areas. Was that the case aboard the Utah, or did you have a separate mess hall?

Merrill: No, we had separate mess halls.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Utah?

Merrill: To me, used to home cooking, it wasn't too hot. I didn't care for their (chuckle) creamed ground meat on toast and...

Marcello: You're referring to "SOS," of course.

Merrill: Right.

Marcello: A lot of the men also mentioned the beans for breakfast.

Merrill: Oh, yes, baked beans on Saturday morning. That was a Navy tradition. We had baked beans on Saturday morning, and corn bread.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that it varied as to whether you slept in hammocks or bunks, and this was usually influenced by the weather. I guess you'd slept in a hammock in boot camp, hadn't you?

Merrill: Yes, we slept in hammocks. We had to learn to suspend the hammocks where they was tight enough to keep from turning over with you when you got into them. Of course, once you got used to a hammock, it was the most comfortable bed you

could get.

Marcello: Describe what it was like sleeping in a hammock during rough weather.

Merrill: Well, you really didn't feel any sensation of the ship rocking. Of course, your hammock stayed still while the ship rocked. If you happened to look down at the deck, then it would kind of make you dizzy a little bit. But other than that, they were very comfortable, more so than the beds, actually, than the bunks, which were upper and lower bunks.

Marcello: The bunks were two high?

Merrill: Two high.

Marcello: How much space did you have down in your living quarters? In other words, was it cramped or was space adequate? Describe what it was like.

Merrill: We had a locker apiece where we kept our personal stuff, our clothes and all. We had plenty of room. We had heads adjacent to the living quarters. We was fairly comfortable.

Marcello: I know that when most people initially went aboard a ship, especially if they were right out of boot camp, they had a tour of mess cooking. Did that occur in your case?

Merrill: Oh, yes. Sure, mess cooking and scullery duty.

Marcello: Describe what mess cooking involved.

Merrill: Well, it involved taking out the "Joe" pots, putting them on the tables. In other words, you were a waiter, you might say, only the people went through the line and picked up their chow,

but they didn't pick up their drinks. Their drinks was put on the table--on that ship, anyway--with a big kettle. When the meals was over, you picked up and took them to the galley and started cleaning up the trays. You washed the trays by hand and run them through a big machine. They had a washing machine at the time--a dish washer. It sprayed them with hot water, and that was about the extent of it.

Marcello: So, when you went aboard the Utah, then, they were serving cafeteria-style as opposed family-style.

Merrill: Oh, yes. I never did get served family-style, not unless I was on a...well, no, not even when we were in the barracks, after the other ship I was on got hit. We wasn't served family-style. That's the new Navy.

Marcello: Did the Utah go directly from San Pedro to Hawaii after you got on it?

Merrill: Yes, we went directly to Hawaii. They had come in, I understand, from Bremerton, Washington, via San Francisco and on down to San Pedro. When we sailed, we went directly to Pearl.

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

Merrill: It was pretty. I remember my first impression of it. After we got there, of course, we got leave and everything...we got liberty, rather. It was nice, but I never was too impressed with the...like, the advertisements of the Hawaiian Islands are now and the beautiful hula girls and all that stuff...it didn't

impress me as having that many pretty women there, if that's what you mean.

Marcello: I guess what I was referring to was this. When you initially found out that you would be going to the Hawaiian Islands, were you excited at that point, and what were your feelings then, that is, before you even saw them?

Merrill: I was glad to be starting on my adventure, yes. I really would've been glad to be going anywhere after boot camp. It really wouldn't have mattered.

Marcello: Once you get to Hawaii, and again we're talking about late summer, 1941, describe what the training routine was like for you and your buddies aboard the Utah. In other words, take me through a typical training exercise in which the Utah would engage from the time it left Pearl until the time it got back.

Merrill: Military exercise, you mean? You mean the regular working routine or the...

Marcello: I mean the training routine, when the Utah went out and performed its function as a target battleship.

Merrill: Well, we didn't have any target practice until we reached the Hawaiian Islands, and then we started going out.

Marcello: Describe one of those training routines when you got to Pearl Harbor.

Merrill: Well, of course, the decks was covered with timbers, and they bombed us with fifty-pound water bombs and five-pound

water bombs. The control rooms was all below decks. It was controlled from below the decks, in other words. There was no one on the bridge, no one on the topside. Everyone was below decks. They practiced dive-bombing us, and after that we'd go out and pick up the old bombs that they'd dropped on us. In fact, I had one of the water bombs as a souvenir that I kept for quite a while until the Utah sunk.

Marcello: How could they tell which particular pilot had made a hit?

Merrill: I'm sure they had their ways. I don't really remember. Like I say, I'd only been on the Utah about a month then and only about two months before she was sunk. I really don't know.

Marcello: How often would one of these training exercises occur?

Merrill: Almost every day.

Marcello: In other words, would go out and come back in the same day, or would go out and stay out for a length of time?

Merrill: We'd go out and maybe stay two or three days, come back in for a day or two, and then go back out. It was almost continuous until the Friday evening before the Japanese attacked on December 7.

Marcello: Was there a pretty set routine? In other words, would you and your buddies know pretty much ahead of time, or could you predict when you would be going out and when you would be coming back, or would this routine vary?

Merrill: It would vary. The only way we'd know was when we was told to get ready to get the ship underway.

Marcello: How about on weekends? Could you ever expect to be out on training exercises on weekends?

Merrill: No, we never were out on weekends. That was liberty time.

Marcello: So if the Utah were out, when would it normally come in, then, for the weekend?

Merrill: Normally, on Friday afternoon.

Marcello: What would be the routine at that time then? What would occur after the Utah came in and docked on Friday afternoon?

Merrill: We would tie up to our pier, which varied. Sometimes we was at Fox Eleven, sometimes Fox Eight. Fox Eleven was the Enterprise's berth, and when the Enterprise was out, the Utah tied up to her berth. Otherwise, we tied up to Fox Eight (F-8). It was two big concrete piers, one on the bow and one on the stern, where we tied up right off Ford Island.

Marcello: Am I to assume that the Utah was kind of an ugly ship in comparison to the other battleships?

Merrill: Yes, it was (chuckle). In fact, it took a lot of ribbing. It was an old battleship. It still had all of her primary batteries and all her secondary batteries, but they were all covered up. In other words, it was in mothballs for all practical purposes.

Marcello: You mentioned that the ship had timbers aboard. How large were these timbers? Describe what they were like?

Merrill: I would say they was at least six-by-twelves. They were

thick timbers, and all the vital parts of the ship's deck was covered up with those timbers.

Marcello: I assume that they were simply placed upon the deck unsecured. In other words, they weren't tied down or anything of that nature. They were just stacked on the deck.

Merrill: Not that I can remember. I really can't remember whether they were tied down or secured in any manner. I can't remember that.

Marcello: When one of these training practices with bombs occurred, where would you normally go or what would you do?

Merrill: We'd normally go down to our living compartment. Each division had their own place to go.

Marcello: How long would one of these bombing practices last?

Merrill: Sometimes as much as an hour, forty-five minutes to an hour.

Marcello: What did you do to occupy your time during that period?

Merrill: We sat around and played cards, talked, or whatever happened to come to mind.

Marcello: Could you feel any impact of those bombs?

Merrill: Very little. You could hear them when they hit. Of course, the ship didn't shudder or anything because the biggest one was only a fifty-pound water bomb. But you could hear them.

Marcello: Was the ship normally underway when this practice bombing occurred?

Merrill: Oh, yes, they were maneuvering, you know, to the best of their ability. Of course, I don't really know what the

top speed of the old Utah was. I'd say it was somewhere around twenty knots probably. But she was maneuvering all the time. You could feel and tell that the ship was zigzagging and maneuvering because you could feel it when it turned--when it listed over when it made sharp turns.

Marcello: You mentioned that when you first went aboard, you were a member of the deck division, and you remained in the deck division for your career in the Navy. Did you enjoy work in the deck division, or would you have rather been doing something else in the Navy?

Merrill: No, I liked the deck division. The deck division manned the guns, and they took precedence over all the other divisions, the deck division did. We were first off the ship.

Marcello: When you say you were the first off the ship, do you mean in terms of getting liberty and that sort of thing?

Merrill: In terms of liberty, yes. The deck divisions went first, then the gunner's mates, and right on down the line of precedence.

Marcello: How would you describe the on-the-job training that you received in the deck division in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy? Again, we have to remember that you weren't exactly on that ship too long, but I guess what I'm saying is, did your boatswain's mates and so on seem to take an interest in teaching you the intricacies of the ship and what you were supposed to do and that sort thing?

- Merrill: Oh, sure. Your training started then. You got your Blue Jacket's Manual, and if you expected to get a rate, you studied that Blue Jacket's Manual. You also had classes in knot-tying and how to make up the hawsers and how to properly scrub a deck and everything else that apprentice seamen do, in other words.
- Marcello: I'm assuming that on the Utah you didn't get involved in holystoning the deck, considering what kind of a ship it was.
- Merrill: No, not on the Utah. Painting and maintenance, yes. Each division was assigned a certain section of the ship to maintain, paint, and...of course, we scrubbed our own living quarters and things of that nature.
- Marcello: Which particular section of the ship was your group responsible for?
- Merrill: I was in the Second Division, and it was almost midships on the starboard side of the ship.
- Marcello: How slow or rapid was promotion in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?
- Merrill: Very slow. There were a lot of fifteen-year--three and four hash mark--men who were still seamen first class.
- Marcello: When you say they have three or four hash marks, does that mean they would have either...well, assuming they were in for six years that could be eighteen or twenty years, then, perhaps.
- Merrill: Well, they got a hash mark every four years.
- Marcello: Four years?
- Merrill: Right.

- Marcello: I'm sure things changed quite a bit after the war started.
- Merrill: Well, they did, but not immediately after the war started. It was still pretty "regulation" and pretty tight.
- Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the social structure aboard the Utah. For instance, what sort of relationship developed between people of your rank and, let's say, the petty officers, first class or second class petty officers?
- Merrill: On the ship there wasn't much socializing. Of course, we was the "peons," you might say. There wasn't much socializing between the petty officers and the apprentice seamen and seamen second class, especially. Now from first class seamen on up, of course, they was in a different category.
- Marcello: How about when you went ashore on liberty? Would there be much fraternizing at that point?
- Merrill: Oh, there could be. It was according to if you had a friend that was a petty officer. When you was ashore, it wasn't like the enlisted men and the officers.
- Marcello: What kind of a relationship was established between the officers and the enlisted men aboard the Utah in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?
- Merrill: None. They was the elite. When we saw an officer on the deck, we saluted him. No matter how many times a day we saw that same officer, if we passed him, we still saluted him.
- Marcello: And I assume that officer's country, for the most part, was out of bounds unless you had some specific purpose or order for being there.

Merrill: You bet. Yes, sir. There was no fraternization between the officers and the enlisted men at all, not even the chief petty officers and the officers.

Marcello: Let me ask you another question. We're talking about the personnel aboard the Utah. Did you have very many of the old Asiatic sailors aboard the Utah?

Merrill: Yes, there was quite a few of the old old-timers.

Marcello: Describe in general what those guys were like.

Merrill: To me, then, when I was just a kid, they were something else with all their tattoos and their...of course, then no sailor wore a beard or a mustache, but still they were rugged-looking individuals. Of course, their ol' skin was leathery and... well, they was something to look up to for a kid.

Marcello: Were you perhaps fascinated by the "sea stories" that they could tell?

Merrill: Oh, yes, of course. There's a lot of them that had China duty and all over the Asian section, and they had quite a few tales to tell. Mostly, what fascinated me was how some of them had had their bodies tattooed all over (chuckle). As you can see, I got one small tattoo, and that was it.

Marcello: Did you get that one when you were in the Navy?

Merrill: Oh, yes. I got it in Honolulu.

Marcello: How shortly after you got to Honolulu did you get your tattoo?

Merrill: About the second liberty, I'd say. I was supposed to have "Homeward Bound" under that bluebird. I never did go back

for the "Homeward Bound" (chuckle).

Marcello: So what we're looking at is a bluebird in flight on your forearm.

Merrill: Right, and it's supposed to say "Homeward Bound" under the bottom of it.

Marcello: Since we're talking about tattoos and so on--and I want to get back to that again; it sounds like a interesting story--let's talk a little bit about the liberty routine for you there in Pearl Harbor or Honolulu. How was the liberty routine set up aboard the Utah?

Merrill: It was set up by divisions. So many divisions went ashore, and they were to be back at 0800 the next day, or on a weekend liberty sometimes you got a forty-eight-hour pass. It was according to where you stood. And as far as...you mean, as far as getting ashore?

Marcello: Well, I was just wondering what kind of section liberty you had aboard the Utah first of all.

Merrill: It was by divisions. Each division officer worked out his own liberty schedule, in other words.

Marcello: What was the probability of getting a whole weekend in Honolulu?

Merrill: Well, for apprentice seamen and seamen second class, there wasn't much chance of getting a full weekend liberty,

Marcello: I understand that, in most cases, to stay overnight you had to have a place to stay. Is that correct?

Merrill: That was right.

Marcello: You had to give an address.

Merrill: Right.

Marcello: How much money were you making at that time?

Merrill: Twenty-one dollars a month.

Marcello: When did you get paid?

Merrill: We got paid once a month.

Marcello: Do you recall when payday was during the month?

Merrill: It seems to me like it was on the first of the month...
around the first of the month.

Marcello: And you would receive your full \$21 minus whatever deductions they took out?

Merrill: If we went to the "gedunk" stand, as we called them, the ice cream thing and all that when we had it, well, then they'd take your serial number, and you could charge, you know, your cigarettes and...ship 's stores, in other words. Anything you bought, they'd let you have until payday, and then you had to go in there and clear it up.

Marcello: So, normally, by the time this was all done, how much money would you have left?

Merrill: Not very much. I'd say \$8 or \$10 maybe. Things were cheap then.

Marcello: At that time you wouldn't have had very many deductions, would you? In other words, they didn't take Social Security out...

Merrill: No, they didn't take anything out--no allotment or anything.

Marcello: In other words, when you got paid you got the full \$21 minus whatever debt you owed to the ship.

Merrill: Minus what you owed. That's right.

Marcello: How were you paid? Cash or check?

Merrill: Paid in cash.

Marcello: Describe how the payday routine would work.

Merrill: Well, you lined up for payday just like you lined up for chow or liberty or anything else. You went through the line. They had your pay number there. They just forked out the cash, and that was it.

Marcello: And then you had to sign, did you not?

Merrill: We had to sign, yes.

Marcello: And it was usually someone there either to counter-sign or at least to watch the whole procedure. I think this guy was armed usually, wasn't he?

Merrill: Yes.

Marcello: Describe your liberty routine once you got ashore. What would you do?

Merrill: Usually, we'd head for downtown Honolulu--the beer joints, cocktail lounges, and the other part that I'm not allowed to say.

Marcello: Oh, you can if you wish (chuckle).

Merrill: I got children (laughter).

Marcello: Describe what Hotel Street was like, since that was a favorite haunt of most of the sailors--Hotel Street, Canal

Street, and some of those places.

Merrill: Well, the main one I can remember was the Utah Rooms. In fact, it was named after...I mean, it was a coincidence, of course, but that was the name of the hotel, the Utah Rooms. I can't remember the names of some of the rest of them, but it was one solid brothel.

Marcello: In other words, Hotel Street was essentially there to take a sailor's money.

Merrill: Right.

Marcello: Is this where you also got your tattoo?

Merrill: No, I got it at a tattoo parlor off of...I can't remember the main drag, but it was on the main drag.

Marcello: Describe how this came about, that is, how you decided to get a tattoo.

Merrill: I was drunk, really (chuckle).

Marcello: I think you'd have to be.

Merrill: Yes. I went in this parlor, and there was a couple of guys that was tattooing. It wasn't busy. I just sat down, and he got out his little needles and started outlining the thing. I decided right then that was enough of that, but he went on. I let him go ahead and do that, but I didn't let him do the "Homeward Bound." So that was about it for the tattoo parlor. I never did go back.

Marcello: How dangerous was getting tattooed at that time?

Merrill: Well, it was against regulations, really. It was against

Navy regulations. They preached that, you know, you could get an infection and everything else from the needles, especially in one that wasn't a clean shop. Actually, that was the main thing. You tried to keep it hid until it scabbed off, you know, until the scab came off of it--which it did. It scabbed up just like a sore of any kind. That's exactly what it is--a sore. Of course, it's not a deep sore.

Marcello: It did hurt.

Merrill: It does hurt, yes.

Marcello: You knew it was there.

Merrill: You bet. You know, if you've been drinking, you can still feel it.

Marcello: Is it not true that one really wasn't considered to be very "salty" unless one had a tattoo?

Merrill: Well, that's the whole thing. You were really "salty" if you had a tattoo. And some of them, you could believe, was "brine" from the tattoos they had on them, but I never did care to go that far. I had some friends that had several big eagles on their back and on their chest and several other things that I won't mention--you know, these little rats and little mice, and I'm sure you've heard some of them tell about them.

Marcello: Yes.

Merrill: Then, of course, there's always a girl--their girl's name tattooed on it.

Marcello: I guess that worked okay as long you kept that same girl, but it would be kind of embarrassing if you ever switched.

Merrill: Well, a neighbor of mine now was in the Navy...of course, he wasn't at Pearl Harbor, but he was in the Navy during World War II. He had another girl's name tatooed on, and when he married the girl that he's married to now, she made him go down and take that name off and put her name on it. He's got her name on it now. I'm not going to mention their name, but they live next door to me.

Marcello: Did you ever do much touring of the island or picture-taking or things of that nature?

Merrill: I never took any pictures. I didn't have a camera at the time. We did take a tour of the islands, where the king was supposed to have jumped off the cliff and all that stuff. Of course, I was more interested in the downtown action than I was in taking tours. I wished I had later. I really do. I wish that I had toured the whole island because I haven't been back since. I plan to go back for the next reunion. I haven't been back since.

Marcello: Just out of curiosity, how much did a trick cost at that time?

Merrill: Anywhere from a dollar to two dollars, and they gave you a little chit, a little token. Of course, that was another line. I don't know if we ought to be talking about this or not (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, that's part of the real Navy at that time, a certain

part of the social life.

Merrill: Is that a part of history? That was certainly a part of life. Anybody that don't believe me was not in the Navy.

Marcello: Normally, when people came back off liberty on a Saturday night, after having been in Honolulu, what kind of condition would they be in? Now I want you to answer this carefully because it's kind of an important question.

Merrill: Well, before the war...

Marcello: And I'm referring to that period before the war.

Merrill: ...I would say that most of the sailors were in pretty good shape. You could tell most of them had been drinking, along with myself, because most of the men that I took liberty with drank. They drank pretty heavy. Of course, by the time liberty was up, all they had was a hangover. Later on in the war, it was a different proposition.

Marcello: Okay, this more or less brings us up to those days immediately prior to the attack. Let me ask you this. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, could you, even in your position, detect any changes in the routine aboard the Utah? I'm referring basically to the training routine in terms of going out and what you did and that sort of thing.

Merrill: None whatsoever.

Marcello: In other words, it was business as usual right up to the time of the attack.

- Merrill: Well, right up to Friday evening before the attack, when the Ward sank a Jap sub, a midget sub, off of our sub net outside the harbor. That was relayed to Washington.
- Marcello: Now was this on a Friday night or Saturday night?
- Merrill: It could have been a Saturday night. I believe it was the Saturday night before the attack.
- Marcello: You did mention awhile ago, did you not, that you really never had any General Quarters drills aboard the Utah?
- Merrill: No, not on the Utah, that I can recall, because there was no guns. The guns was covered up. There was no reason...you was assigned a battle station. If it had been any other ship, you'd have been assigned a battle station either on the main battery or on the secondary battery or on the antiaircraft guns. But to the best of my knowledge, I cannot remember being assigned to a battle station like I know after the war started. I was never called to General Quarters and went to my battle station on the Utah, that I can remember, but remember that this doesn't apply to all the Navy. This is just of the Utah because of the type of ship that it was being used for. We knew what was going on, and, of course, the word came over to go below decks, that there was fixing to be an attack; but as far as going to a gun mount or a battle station, we couldn't because everyone had to clear the decks.
- Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during this pre-Pearl

period, what kind of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Merrill: I really hadn't had much thought about the Japanese, except that I knew that we was squabbling back and forth with the Japanese at the time. I don't know, really, if I'd have known a Japanese from a Chinese at the time.

Marcello: Suppose war did come between the two countries. Did you have any doubts as to the outcome of such a war?

Merrill: Not really. I never had any doubts after Pearl.

Marcello: Did you think it would be a short war?

Merrill: I really did, yes. I remember that word was passed, "Well, we'll have them whipped in a year-and-a-half...a year" and all that stuff.

Marcello: When you and your buddies sat around in bull sessions during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, did you talk of a possible attack at Pearl Harbor ever come up in your conversations?

Merrill: No, never. Never, to the best of my knowledge, do I remember talking about an attack by the Japanese.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about that weekend, then, of December 7, 1941. I assume from what you said awhile ago that the Utah came in on Friday.

Merrill: We came in on Friday and berthed in the Enterprise's berth, which was Fox Eleven.

Marcello: And you did that because the Enterprise was out?

Merrill: The Enterprise was at sea. She'd left Friday afternoon, I

understand. I didn't see the ship leave.

Marcello: Why would you necessarily dock at the Enterprise's berth?
Was it more convenient?

Merrill: Well, we weren't on Battleship Row--what was known as
Battleship Row--where all the other battleships anchored.
We were assigned to this pier off Ford Island. Now why, I
don't know. We pulled in Friday afternoon.

Marcello: I was just wondering if it perhaps were any more convenient
than, let's say, where you normally tied up.

Merrill: Well, the only place I can remember the Utah being tied up
was either at Fox Eleven or Fox Eight, which was a pier off
of Ford Island.

Marcello: How would you get ashore?

Merrill: Liberty boats.

Marcello: How often would they run?

Merrill: Well, they usually left thirty or forty-five minutes ahead
of the time the liberty party was supposed to be back, and
they usually left at whatever time liberty started. The
liberty boats was standing by the gangplank, and you just
went out and got in the liberty boat, and it took you over
to where you could catch the bus to Honolulu.

Marcello: Let's talk about your routine, then, that weekend of December
7. You mentioned that the Utah came in on Friday afternoon.
Pick up the story at that point and go into as much detail
as you can remember as to your activities.

Merrill: Well, I don't remember too much about the Saturday before the attack. But on Sunday morning, I had relieved...I was on watch on the quarter-deck.

Marcello: Had you been ashore on Saturday?

Merrill: No, no, I didn't have liberty on Saturday. I had the watch the next morning.

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

Merrill: No, I don't, other than go to bed. I do remember going to bed.

Marcello: What normally would there be to do aboard ship on a Saturday evening, let's say, if you were aboard?

Merrill: Just whatever recreation you could find. We didn't have pool tables and all that kind of stuff. You could go to the ship's store, or you could read or write home or whatever you wanted to do. It was just kind of a monotonous time, really.

Marcello: Things were usually always pretty quiet aboard ship on a Saturday evening?

Merrill: Oh, yes, yes, they generally were.

Marcello: What were you intending to do on Sunday, or did you have duty the whole weekend?

Merrill: I had the duty the whole weekend.

Marcello: Okay, so you've mentioned you were aboard that Saturday evening. Did you notice very many drunks coming back aboard?

Merrill: No. Actually, liberty wasn't up until the next morning, until

Sunday morning. In other words, half our crew was ashore.

Marcello: What time did you go to bed that night?

Merrill: I don't really remember. It wasn't late. I wasn't in the habit of sitting up late, unless I had the watch. I imagine it was around ten o'clock probably. I still pretty well follow that routine.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and once more I'll ask you to describe your routine, as best you can remember it, up until the time that all hell broke loose. Describe your routine that morning.

Merrill: Well, I was awakened about six o'clock, I suppose, because I had the watch. I went down and ate breakfast. I went up about a quarter to eight.

Marcello: Were there very many people down eating breakfast?

Merrill: No, very few. Most of them were still sleeping.

Marcello: If you didn't have the duty, did you have to get up at a particular time on a Sunday?

Merrill: Not unless you wanted to eat breakfast. They served breakfast at certain hours, and if you weren't there, you didn't eat.

Marcello: Theoretically, you could stay in the sack for as long as you wanted on Sunday.

Merrill: On Sunday morning, yes. Of course, they had church services. You could go to church services or do whatever you wanted to do on Sunday.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had this messenger watch. What does that involve?

Merrill: Well, you was the officer-of-the-deck's messenger, in other words. If he wanted to send a message to the commander or the captain or whatever he wanted to do, you delivered this message for him.

Marcello: Where did you stand that particular duty?

Merrill: On the quarter-deck.

Marcello: So you go down and eat breakfast. Just out of curiosity, do you recall what you had for breakfast that morning?

Merrill: Sunday morning? I imagine we had "SOS." We had baked beans on Saturday mornings, and they didn't serve leftovers, so I imagine we had "SOS."

Marcello: Describe what happens, then, after breakfast.

Merrill: Well, about a quarter to eight I relieved the messenger that was on watch because I had the eight to twelve watch, along with the bugler and the officer-of-the-deck and the boatswain's mate.

Marcello: Was everyone just more or less just minding their own business there on the quarter-deck at that time?

Merrill: Everyone had just relieved the watch, including the officer-of-the-deck.

Marcello: So this was a fresh group?

Merrill: It was a fresh group on the quarter-deck.

Marcello: Did you know any of the people there?

Merrill: No, not really. There's very few people I remember off the Utah. I wasn't on the Utah that long.

Marcello: Pick up the story at that point.

Merrill: Well, I remember "Red"--the fellow's name was "Red"--that was the bugler. He was a big, tall, redheaded fellow. He'd had about sixteen, eighteen years in the Navy, and he was getting ready...we were all getting ready to raise the colors, in other words. He was getting ready to blow the bugle, and about two minutes to eight is the first plane that we saw from the quarter-deck. I really didn't know it was a Jap plane. All I can remember is seeing the big red emblem under its wing.

Marcello: Was this plane coming toward the Utah?

Merrill: The plane was coming in on a torpedo run, yes.

Marcello: Describe this in as much detail as you can remember. So he's getting...

Merrill: Well, I remember "Red"...

Marcello: ...this man "Red" is getting ready to blow the bugle for colors.

Merrill: ...blow the bugle for colors, right. We was getting ready to raise the flag.

Marcello: You actually didn't do the raising of the flag. You weren't in on any of that, were you?

Merrill: Not at the time. We hadn't raised it. It was two minutes until eight o'clock when they attacked.

Marcello: But were you personally involved in raising the flag?

Merrill: Well, yes, you stood there and saluted the flag.

Marcello: Well, I know that, but did you actually stand by and raise the flag? That was not part of your duties.

Merrill: No, that wasn't part of my duties. And at two minutes until eight o'clock, the first plane came over. The first one hit us with a torpedo. This was the plane I saw--the first plane I saw--and I didn't know who it was. I knew it wasn't no practice. I knew it wasn't our plane, but I really didn't know at the time what the Japanese emblem looked like.

Marcello: Describe what it felt like when the torpedo hit the Utah.

Merrill: Well, it rattled your teeth. Of course, the ship started listing because all our double bottoms was open. We'd come in Friday afternoon and opened the double bottoms for cleaning.

Marcello: When that torpedo hit, was there a loud noise?

Merrill: Oh, yes--loud noise, fire, screaming, and everything else.

Marcello: Did it knock you off your feet?

Merrill: No, it didn't knock me off my feet. It staggered me. Then, of course, we took two or three more torpedo and two or three bombs. The only reason I can figure they bombarded that ship so hard was because it was in the Enterprise's berth.

Marcello: From the air it may have looked like an aircraft carrier, too.

Merrill: It could have, with the wood deck. Well, all I can remember is that "Red" started to blow General Quarters, and he'd thrown his bugle over by that time, and we all headed... they had what they called a forecastle. It was covered. The

forecastle was covered on each side just like a tunnel, and the ones that was on the deck got up under this forecastle because we didn't have a battle station, like I said before. There was no need to man our guns; we couldn't get them uncovered anyway.

Marcello: Did he actually get to sound General Quarters completely?

Merrill: No, he never did. That torpedo hit close by to where we were, and that's when we all went up under the tunnel.

Marcello: This was the first torpedo?

Merrill: Right. And by then we was being pretty well plastered. It was beginning to list heavy to port.

Marcello: Can you remember when the other torpedoes slammed into the Utah?

Merrill: Oh, yes! I remember feeling every one of them, and the bombs, too.

Marcello: Describe what the rest of them felt like and what impact it had on you.

Merrill: Well, of course, I was terrified at first. I wouldn't say I was terrified; I was scared because I really didn't know what was going on. I didn't know who was attacking us or what. And, of course, we weren't afloat long enough to do much speculation. In eight minutes we were sunk.

Marcello: Okay, so you get back under this tunnel-like cover upon the forecastle...

Merrill: The forecastle, yes.

Marcello: ...and what happens at that point? What do you do back there?
Do you talk about anything, or what are you doing?

Merrill: We was all talking and wondering what was going on, and, of course, by that time we was listing over, and all we could do was hold on to something until we could get back out on the deck where we could get over the side.

Marcello: Who all was back there? Just the four of you?

Merrill: That's all I remember, is the ones that was on duty.

Marcello: What was the officer doing?

Merrill: He was running up under the forecastle just like I was.

Marcello: In other words, he wasn't taking charge or necessarily giving any orders?

Merrill: No, the best I can remember, he wasn't.

Marcello: When do you come out from under that cover?

Merrill: I would say about three to five minutes after the attack started. It was listing heavy. It was almost ready to roll over. I remember that you had to kind of pull yourself up on the deck in order to get over to the side of the ship. The ship was listing...I guess the deck was about like that (gesture).

Marcello: At about what angle would you say it was listing?

Merrill: I'd say that when we left the ship, it was leaning at...let's see...from straight up...I'd say sixty degrees probably, when we actually started climbing over the side and sliding down. You couldn't walk down none. We had to slide down.

Marcello: So you would slide down and then just simply slide into the water.

Merrill: Into the water and swam to Ford Island.

Marcello: About how far away was Ford Island?

Merrill: I'd say a hundred yards.

Marcello: How was the abandon ship order given?

Merrill: That I can remember, there was no abandon ship order given. Our captain was killed, and the commander was ashore, so I don't think the officer below, that was in charge, ever got to topside. It happened that fast.

Marcello: By the time that you hit the water, what was the condition of the water? Was it still fairly clean, that is, as clean as Pearl Harbor could be before the attack?

Merrill: Well, there was oil. There was burning oil. Of course, they was strafing the water. I can remember the "zips" in the water. I didn't get hit, luckily.

Marcello: When you went into the water, were you fully clothed?

Merrill: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Long trousers or shorts?

Merrill: I had on the white uniform-of-the-day because I had the watch. I had on my regular white uniform.

Marcello: You slide into the water. Pick up the story at that point. You say you swim to Ford Island. How far away is Ford?

Merrill: I'd say a hundred yards, probably. We all just started and struck out swimming. Everybody in the Navy had to swim.

You didn't get out of boot camp until you swam. Of course, I'd swam all my life, so I was a good swimmer. I didn't have any trouble swimming to where I could wade onto the shore. Then, of course, they was strafing. I didn't see anyone get hit, but I was looking mostly straight ahead, looking for a path to get to shore myself. I didn't really see anyone get hit when the strafing was going on. We all went over to the administration building on Ford Island. Of course, the attack was really in full swing then.

Marcello: How come you decided to go to the administration building?

Merrill: Well, that was the first big building we saw. It was almost directly across from where the Utah was moored.

Marcello: About how far was the administration building from the shore?

Merrill: It was a pretty good way. I wouldn't say in yards how many.

Marcello: Was it out in the open?

Merrill: Yes.

Marcello: Was it more than a hundred yards?

Merrill: I would say probably around a hundred yards, as best I can remember.

Marcello: How did you procede from the shore to that administration building? Did you run?

Merrill: As fast as I could go.

Marcello: What happens when you get over there?

Merrill: To get under cover. Well, they all milled around a little while, and then they broke out some .50-caliber machine guns,

We took them up on the roof of the administration building.

Marcello: Where did you pick up those machine guns?

Merrill: Out of the armory there in the administration building, I guess.

Marcello: Okay, there was an armory up there.

Merrill: They came up with the guns. Now where they got them, I don't really know. But he hollered at a bunch of us to come on up on the topside. Of course, we went up on the roof of the administration building.

Marcello: Did you know anything about the operations of a machine gun?

Merrill: Not really, I knew how to pass the ammunition.

Marcello: Was the ammunition and so on already belted?

Merrill: Yes, it was belted.

Marcello: Describe what happens, then, when you're up there on the roof of the administration building.

Merrill: Of course, they was firing at planes. I wasn't manning a machine gun, myself. The men who was was shooting at Jap planes--shooting at them. Now whether or not they hit anything, I don't know.

Marcello: Were these the old water-cooled machine guns, or were these air-cooled?

Merrill: They was the .50-caliber air-cooled.

Marcello: Describe the Japanese attack itself, that is, the airplanes in terms how low they were flying, the speed, and all that sort of thing.

Merrill: Well, the dive-bombers, of course, came just like...they just came out of the sky, and I'd say they dropped their bombs probably at two hundred feet. They were low; I mean, you could see the pilot.

Marcello: Describe what the pilot...

Merrill: And the torpedo plane came in low over the water and dropped it. You could see that he pulled out of his...released his torpedo probably two hundred yards from the ship.

Marcello: Describe what those Japanese pilots looked like.

Merrill: Of course, they had the helmets on and the earphones and everything, and he was leaning over his controls. You could see him just as plain as I'm looking at you. When he banked, you could see him.

Marcello: How would you describe your emotions and so on during this period, that is, while the attack is going on?

Merrill: Well, I was scared...

Marcello: Scared? Excited? Angry?

Merrill: Frightened and excited, not angry until later. Mostly scared.

Marcello: While you are up there manning the machine gun, do you talk about anything? Is there much talking?

Merrill: No, there wasn't much talking except orders to...you know. Of course, the firing was going on, and it was a mess, in other words.

Marcello: Approximately how long did you remain up there firing at those airplanes?

Merrill: Maybe an hour. Probably an hour. We stayed up there awhile after the attack--probably an hour-and-a-half. Of course, while I was on the roof, that's when I saw the Arizona blow up.

Marcello: Describe that in as much detail as you can remember.

Merrill: Well, I remember seeing a huge ball of fire and debris. Of course, we were probably a quarter-of-a-mile or farther from where the Arizona was, but it was a huge orange ball of fire and flying debris. Everywhere you looked, there was flying debris and ships on fire. So actually, at the time, I didn't know which ship it was that had blown up because the Oklahoma was hit, and the West Virginia was hit, and the Pennsylvania was hit, and the Maryland was hit, and the Nevada was hit, and the Tennessee...the Tennessee didn't take any damage at Pearl, I don't believe. She was on the inside.

Marcello: Approximately how many rounds do you think you fired up there on the roof that day, that is, you and your crew?

Merrill: Probably a thousand.

Marcello: In other words, that roof was littered with the empty shells and so on.

Merrill: With casings, yes.

Marcello: Was there anybody up there taking charge or giving orders?

Merrill: Oh, yes, there was first class petty officers up there. In fact, one of them was off the Utah. As best I can remember, it was a boatswain's mate or a gunner's mate that took us up

there. I don't remember which.

Marcello: What was the visibility like while the attack was going on? We know it was a pretty clear day prior to the attack, but during the attack what was the visibility like in terms of you being able to see the Japanese planes clearly and that sort of thing?

Merrill: Of course, there was smoke that obscured a lot of the vision, but they'd come out of the smoke, and you could see them. Then they'd go back into the smoke again, and then they'd ...of course, they had high-altitude bombing going on all at the same time, too, as well as the dive-bombing and torpedo types and fighter planes.

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

Merrill: Yes, I sure could.

Marcello: What happened during that lull? What were you doing?

Merrill: Well, we were getting more ammunition, making more preparations in case they did attack again, which they did. I can't remember the interval, the time interval, between the first wave and the second wave. We stayed up on the roof until the attack was over.

Marcello: What kind of planes were in the second attack?

Merrill: About the same as there was in the first, as best as I can remember. Then they had some high-altitude bombers, too.

Marcello: I would assume your machine guns weren't too effective against

the high-altitude bombers?

Merrill: No, and neither was any of the rest of the guns, as far as that goes. Half of the old ammunition wouldn't fire. I think we shot holes in the water tower in Honolulu. The old shells wouldn't explode. In other words, we were unprepared, totally.

Marcello: Okay, what happens once the attack is over? What happens at that point?

Merrill: Well, we went out to the airstrip on Ford Island, and the planes that wasn't damaged...we manned the machine guns on the planes. Of course, no other attack came after that, but we stayed out there probably three or four hours. No, we stayed out there longer than that because I remember we had an alert at about dark, which happened to be our own planes trying to get back in. I think we shot down two or three of them.

Marcello: Did you actually witness that?

Merrill: I actually witnessed the alert, yes.

Marcello: Did you see the firing and so on?

Merrill: Yes, I saw the firing, but I never saw the planes.

Marcello: Describe what the firing looked like.

Merrill: Well, it looked like a Fourth of July. All the ships that was able to fire was firing. In other words, it was just like they was firing at the Japs.

Marcello: Was it a case where possibly one person fired, and all the

rest of them just kind of opened up?

Merrill: More than likely. I can't document that, but that's what I would say. It was more of a jittery alert. Of course, everybody was jittery, and undoubtedly, when the planes came in, they didn't get a clearance or something. Well, you know, I heard that they had shot down at least one of our own planes. I don't know if they did or not.

Marcello: You mentioned that you went out to the airstrip where you were manning the guns in the undamaged planes. Describe the damage that you saw there at the airstrip, that is, to the planes and that sort of thing.

Merrill: All the planes practically that weren't total wrecks couldn't have got off the runway. They wasn't flyable. It was a total mess.

Marcello: These were the old PBVs, weren't they?

Merrill: PBVs and they had some of the other scout planes. I believe it was the PB-2Vs. It was later than the PBV. Most of them was the old PBV scout planes--the ones that took the dawn patrol, that went out every morning on what they called the dawn patrol.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were out there for about three or four hours. Does the impact of the attack begin to really sink in at that point?

Merrill: It sure does, and you then really begin to feel it emotionally. You're still jittery, but some of your fear's gone, and you

can start kind of thinking about what happened and, first one thing and then another. Then's when you start to get mad.

Marcello: Are you thinking about any of your buddies and so on at this point?

Merrill: Oh, why, sure! You're wondering, you know, who survived and who didn't.

Marcello: And this is one of the things, I assume, you're talking about there among the group.

Merrill: Sure. Of course, we had men from other ships, too, that were out there. The Utah wasn't the only one that survivors got over on Ford Island.

Marcello: So this is a mixture out there at the airstrip.

Merrill: It's a mixture, yes. Of course, by then I knew who had attacked, and I knew more about it, in other words, by then from the conversation.

Marcello: Describe what it was like that night. Were you still there that night, or did you move off the airstrip?

Merrill: Right at dusky dark, after this alert, well, then everything was secured, and we went aboard the old Argonne. We stayed on there...well, while we were down below in the living quarters, somebody let go with a .50-caliber armor-piercing bullet. It went through one man's shoulder and killed another. It went through his chest and embedded in the bulkhead on the other side.

Marcello: Now was this in the quarters where you were?

Merrill: That was on the Argonne.

Marcello: But it was in your quarters aboard the Argonne, where you were.

Merrill: Right.

Marcello: And you actually witnessed and saw this?

Merrill: Yes.

Marcello: What was an armor-piercing...what was a weapon doing down in the quarters?

Merrill: It wasn't. It came from another ship.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Merrill: It came from a ship in the harbor. It would have had to be armor-piercing, see. In other words, you had your tracer bullets, your high explosive, and your armor-piercing all one right behind the other in the clip, in other words. This went through the hull of the Argonne and through two men, so you can imagine the power of one of those things.

Marcello: Now by that time is everything blacked out?

Merrill: Oh, yes. We had lights below in the living quarters, but everything topside was blacked out.

Marcello: What functions did you perform aboard the Argonne that night, if any?

Merrill: That night we just mostly sat up all night. The next morning, of course, then that's a different story. The next morning we went on a burial detail.

Marcello: What were the rumors going around that night while you were aboard the Argonne?

Merrill: I don't remember any, you know, what I'd say was rumors. How do you mean that? What do you mean?

Marcello: Well, did you hear that perhaps the Japs had landed someplace or paratroopers had been spotted or anything of that sort?

Merrill: Well, yes, we thought that they would try to invade the island after we'd talked to the petty officers and people that had been in the Navy a long time and knew what was going on. I think everyone thought the Japanese would try to invade or would have invaded. They could have invaded.

Marcello: Were you still in the same clothing that you had worn when you went ashore?

Merrill: Yes. I didn't get any new clothing until I went on another ship.

Marcello: What was the condition of your clothing by that evening?

Merrill: It was pretty scroungy--pretty dirty.

Marcello: I guess everybody was in the same situation.

Merrill: Everybody was in the same boat. There was no way to get any stores until things settled down.

Marcello: Did you get much sleep that night?

Merrill: I didn't get any. I maybe dozed.

Marcello: Do you think this was true of all your shipmates, too?

Merrill: I'm sure it was.

Marcello: Were there very many trigger-happy people around that night?

Merrill: Well, you could hear bursts of fire every now and then, and, of course, there was that incident that I mentioned, where somebody cut loose with that .50-caliber machine gun and a bullet went through the hull.

Marcello: Did you have any second thoughts about sleeping down below decks in quarters as opposed to up on deck?

Merrill: I always had a phobia of being below decks. I did. In fact, after that I never slept below deck if I could get out--unless we were in a friendly territory. I'd take my blanket and go up topside and sleep on the deck.

Marcello: Had you eaten any at all that day?

Merrill: Yes, we ate...

Marcello: Other than breakfast, of course.

Merrill: I don't remember how or when, but, sure, they fed us. It was late that evening. We got something to eat on the Argonne. We sure did. I remember that now. We went through their mess line.

Marcello: Did you have an appetite?

Merrill: I never did have much appetite all the time I was in the Navy. I'm not a heavy eater. I just took what I thought I'd eat and ate it. I mean, as far as it bothering me to eat, I wasn't nauseated or anything where I couldn't eat.

Marcello: I've heard it said that on many occasions that under battle conditions one gets cotton mouth or dry mouth. Did you experience it that day, that you recall?

Merrill: Oh, yes. I sure did. In other words, it's where you feel like you need a drink of water or something--liquid--all the time.

Marcello: You mentioned that the next day you went on burial detail. Describe this routine.

Merrill: Well, we went out in motor launches and motor whaleboats and patrolled the harbor picking up bodies, pieces of bodies. Anything that looked like a human, in other words, we picked it up and put it in a big sack.

Marcello: How would you get it aboard ship? Would you tie a rope to a body or a piece of body?

Merrill: We would pull it over the side of the motor launch, in other words, the motor whaleboats and motor launch. They was fifty-foot motor launches.

Marcello: Yes. But you wouldn't really bring them in the boat, would you? Would you just drag them...

Merrill: Yes.

Marcello: ...you'd bring them in the boat?

Merrill: We brought them in the boat and put them in a sack.

Marcello: That must have been worse than the duty on December 7 in many ways.

Merrill: It was. It's something that I'll never forget.

Marcello: What was the condition of the water like--the water itself--by Monday, December 8?

Merrill: Well, it was pretty oily and had a lot of debris and stuff.

We'd search all in it, the debris and through that oil and everything else, for wherever we could find a body or see anything that looked like a body. We'd go to it. Of course, they had several boats doing the same things all over the harbor. We'd pick up whatever we got and take it in, and they'd put it on a big truck. We took it out to what they call Red Hill Cemetary now. I believe they call it Punch Bowl--the Punch Bowl, I believe. But it was Red Hill Cemetary then.

Marcello: Were there any fires and so on still burning on that day?

Merrill: No, not at that time. Some of the ships were still smoldering. Most of the fires had been brought under control by the next morning.

Marcello: Did you ever get over close to the Arizona during this duty?

Merrill: Yes, we got close to all of them. We went in as close as we could to see if there was anything there.

Marcello: Let's see if we can have you describe the damage that you saw to some of the more prominent ones. Let's start with the Arizona. Now you mentioned that you'd seen it blow up the day before. When you got up close to it, describe what the Arizona looked like.

Merrill: Well, all you could see of the Arizona was part of her stacks. She was completely submerged.

Marcello: How about the Oklahoma?

Merrill: The Oklahoma wasn't completely submerged, but it was on its

side, laying on its side.

Marcello: Did you ever in your wildest dreams think you would ever see a battleship turn over?

Merrill: Never! Never! Of course, later on, I realized that they were vulnerable the same as anything else. Of course, with their armor plate and all that, you wouldn't have thought that they could have been sunk that easy.

Marcello: How long did you remain on this particular duty?

Merrill: Two days.

Marcello: I'm sure that you were glad to get off that duty.

Merrill: Oh, yes, I sure was. The only time I'll probably ever get the opportunity to see it in my life...I saw a human cremated. They had a Chinese that they were fixing to cremate. Of course, we were in Red Hill Cemetery, but they had this building where they cremated...the civilian cemetery there. They were just fixing to cremate this fellow, and three or four of us stood there, and they let us watch it.

Marcello: He'd been a civilian?

Merrill: He was a civilian, yes. He was killed in the attack. Now what the circumstances was, I never did find out. I never did ask, really.

Marcello: After you got off that burial detail, what did you do?

Merrill: I went on the Honolulu--the USS Honolulu. I believe I went on there the morning of the tenth.

Marcello: That was a light cruiser, was it not?

Merrill: Yes, light cruiser.

Marcello: Did you leave Pearl on the Honolulu?

Merrill: Yes. I stayed on the Honolulu the rest of the war.

Marcello: When did the Honolulu get out of Pearl?

Merrill: Sometime in January. We took a convoy back to San Francisco. But the Honolulu had damage, too. A bomb went through the dock where she was tied up and exploded under the water and ripped some of her seams. So when I went aboard her, she was in dry dock. It seems to me like it was in the early part of January. Maybe it was the middle part of January that we took the convoy--the nurses and a lot of the wounded and things--back to the States, to San Fransico. From then on out, we picked up a convoy of troops and went to...well, that's another story. Do you want that?

Marcello: I think this is probably a good place to end the interview. Let me ask you this. We're talking about the Pearl Harbor attack almost forty-two years later. What is it that prompted you to become a member of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association?

Merrill: Well, I don't really know. I'd shut everything out of my mind for all the years, and I just happened to see an ad in the Houston paper where someone...well, not an ad. It was a question, actually, to the Houston Chronicle, I believe, asking if anyone knew anything about the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, if there was such an organization. I clipped

it out. I really didn't get in until 1978.

Marcello: And that was mainly because, among other things, you really didn't know about the organization?

Merrill: No, I hadn't known about the organization. I would more than likely joined the organization earlier.

Marcello: And why did you decide to join it after you found out about it?

Merrill: Well, I just thought it would be nice to kind of--then-- to rehash some of the things and meet some of the fellows that was there. It's a fraternal outfit. I've really enjoyed it since I've been in it.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Merrill, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that students and scholars are going to find your comments quite valuable when they get to use them.

Merrill: Well, I hope they can use it. I've enjoyed talking with you, Dr. Marcello.