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Interview with

LAWRENCE VARNELL

November 12, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Lawrence H. Varnell
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Lawrence Varnell

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date: November 12, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Lawrence Varnell for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 12, 1987, in Kenner, Louisiana. I'm interviewing Mr. Varnell in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the battleship USS Maryland during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Varnell, 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--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr Varnell: Okay My name is Lawrence Varnell, and I was born on November 13, 1922, in New Orleans on Pier Street (that's one-half of a block off Canal Street).

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

Mr. Varnell: Well, I went through grammar school and high school.

I graduated from Samuel J Peters High School; it was a commercial high school in New Orleans.

After I graduated from there, as you know, times were a little tough, and you couldn't get a job. My father had been injured, and he couldn't work at the time. I took a job carrying groceries out. I was making, for starters, about ten cents an hour and tips, but eventually it wound up to where I got pretty good money with the tips. But the Red Cross had to take over our family because without my father working we had nothing. They made me quit that job and go to a job paying five dollars a week because it was regular (chuckle).

Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your decision to join the service. How did that come about?

Varnell: Well, times were tough at that time, and I had wanted to join at various periods of time. At that stage of the century, we could get in the service when you were seventeen if your family signed for you. My father was all willing to sign for me, but with my father being ill, I couldn't go right away. When I reached eighteen, I just wanted to get out and travel and to get away from .there was no future at that time, the way it looked.

Marcello: You know, the reason for your joining the service is one that is probably most frequently given by other people that I've interviewed for this project.

Times were tough, and the service offered a certain amount of security

Varnell: And you could get around and see everything and have a good time.

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

Varnell: Well, my father had been in the Navy during World War I, and I just didn't care for the Army. I just wanted to travel by sea and go on big ships and see the world.

Marcello: And when was it that you enlisted in the Navy?

Varnell: April Fool's Day, 1941. I joined the service that day

Marcello: How easy or difficult was it to get into the Navy at that time?

Varnell: It was not difficult at all. You had to pass certain examinations--educational and physical. In fact, at the time I didn't weigh quite enough, so I ate about three or four pounds of bananas before I went in there to get over the 115-pound mark or whatever it was at that time.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Varnell: In San Diego.

Marcello: I'm assuming that that was as far away from home as you'd ever been?

Varnell: That was it (chuckle) The farthest I'd been before that was up to Shreveport, Louisiana.

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

Varnell: Oh, no, not really. It was just the regular boot camp.

Marcello: Do you recall how long it lasted at that time?

Varnell: Six weeks, I believe it was.

Marcello: If it only lasted six weeks, that means they probably were wanting to get you "boots" out into the fleet as quickly as possible because I think in previous years the length of boot camp was longer.

Varnell: Right. I imagine so. At that time, I think that the government knew what it wanted, and the people didn't know what they wanted, really. If my memory serves me right, I think the President thought we should be in the war helping the English out. But the public--general public--didn't want to go into the war.

Marcello: At the time that you joined the service, you were shy of your nineteenth birthday. How much thought did you give to the possibility of the country going to war?

Varnell: I didn't give it any thought. Even throughout our training, including the amount of gun training we did before Pearl Harbor, I just thought that was the regular way in the Navy--to have something to do.

Marcello: Okay, describe for me how you eventually got aboard the USS Maryland.

Varnell: All right. After boot camp we had, I think, a twelve-day leave. I came home by bus on my way across--no windows--and it was cold as hell in the desert at night,

although it was hot in the daytime. Then I went back to San Diego, and from there I was sent to Bremerton, Washington, around the first of June. I think that's when we got there, and that's where I boarded the Maryland. I was assigned to the USS Maryland. I was in the Fourth Division.

Marcello: I'm gathering from what you said that you really had no choice.

Varnell: Well, no. I had no choice whatsoever. I didn't put in for any special schools or anything. I just wanted to go to sea.

Marcello: What was the Fourth Division?

Varnell: You divide the ships up by decks, and this was the Fourth Division section of the deck on the quarterdeck. The back left side of the deck was the Fourth Division. That was where they had the seamanship ratings, gunnery, and .you started as an apprentice seaman and worked your way up.

Marcello: What were your first impressions as a young "boot" when you saw the battleship Maryland?

Varnell: Well, I was astonished. When I walked up to it, I had to walk over a platform--the ship was in dry dock--and I could see how huge it was. I couldn't believe it, and it just made me chilled to think that I was going to be on that ship and out at sea.

Marcello: Describe your first greeting that you received when you went aboard.

Varnell: I really don't think I can remember that! We were just lined up and sent. I'm sure they must have given us a speech or something, and then they assigned us to our division, but I don't remember.

Marcello: Am I to assume that you were a part of the deck crew when you initially went aboard?

Varnell: Right. I was a part of the deck crew--seaman. Every division takes care of that portion of the deck or that area. From there eventually I branched off into a gun turret. I was in the number four gun turret.

Marcello: So if you had stayed in the deck crew, you would have probably been striking for boatswain's mate.

Varnell: Boatswain's mate, right.

Marcello: But you decided eventually to go into the gunnery section and, in essence, would have been striking for gunner's mate.

Varnell: Right. But you don't do that right away unless you get there and there's no one there. Then they can put you there. You are more or less selected to go in there if you get along with all the other people in there.

Marcello: Okay, describe what your quarters were like aboard the Maryland there in the Fourth Division.

Varnell: All right. When I first got on the ship, the petty officers would sleep in cots, but all the seamen would sleep in hammocks. It was a hammock that you tied to a hook on each end. You'd get a piece of wood and put it in there to spread the lines out on each end, and then

you would just climb up in there--swing up in there--from the top of the ceiling there and sleep in it. I thought I would have problems, but I never did. I slept right over a hatch when I went in.

Marcello: How high off the deck were those hammocks?

Varnell: I would say five-and-a-half feet, six feet--enough height for people to walk under them. Every morning when you'd get up, you'd have to wake up, jump out, wrap it up, and put it in the storage area.

Marcello: They had a regular hammock locker aboard the ship, did they not?

Varnell: Yes, right. There was no cover on it. It was just built on the side, on the outside of the room.

Marcello: Why was it that the hammocks had to be put up and stowed away once you got up in the morning?

Varnell: So that people could walk through during the day. Anybody over five-and-a-half feet would be hitting them, so you'd have to be walking with your head down. The area was also used for eating. They'd have to set up the mess tables, and at that time the mess cooks would bring the food to the table--put it on the table--and the plates would be passed around as though you were home. Food was served family-style.

Marcello: Where were the mess tables stored?

Varnell: The mess tables were stored at night, I think, where the hammocks were during the day.

Marcello: In other words, they were pulled up into the overhead.

Varnell: Not into the overhead, no. They were loose. They were just regular tables.

Marcello: I see.

Varnell: I can't remember exactly where we put them.

Marcello: But you were served family-style.

Varnell: Oh, yes. In fact, I had some of the duty where I had to bring it down. You'd have mess duty for a week, two weeks, or three weeks--whatever it was. Everybody had their turn serving the food.

Marcello: How did you like mess cooking?

Varnell: Well, I just considered it a part of my duties. It wasn't no problem. We just had to serve the food. I didn't like the cleaning-up portion too much.

Marcello: What advantages might there be to mess cooking come payday?

Varnell: No different advantage. You still got your same pay

Marcello: I guess what I was implying is, I know that in some cases, if the mess cook did a good job, the people at the table would tip them.

Varnell: I don't think we had too much of that. Nobody was making any money (chuckle). We were making about \$30 a month.

Marcello: I guess when you first went aboard you were only making \$21, weren't you?

Varnell: We made \$21 the first three months.

Marcello: Well, since you had the hammocks in there and the mess tables in there and so on, I guess we can assume that

quarters were a little cramped.

Varnell: They were sort of cramped, but when the tables were down, you had plenty of room; and at night it was not really that cramped. There wasn't no air conditioning; that was the only thing.

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

Varnell: We had lockers. You have about an eighteen-inch by two-and-a-half or three-foot locker to store your clothes, and you would just fold them up in there, and that's how they got pressed.

Marcello: Describe what the food was like aboard the USS Maryland.

Varnell: The food was very good. I liked it. I was kind of particular about what I ate when I went in, and the chipped beef with the white gravy, I could never eat. I can't to this day. But the "stuff-on-the-shingle" wasn't too bad. It wasn't too bad. But the food was very good. Very seldom did we get bad food.

Marcello: By "stuff-on-the-shingle, you were, of course, referring to "S.O.S. (chuckle)

Varnell: Right (laughter)

Marcello: Okay, describe what a typical day was like for you as a young seaman aboard the USS Maryland. Take me through a day's routine.

Varnell: All right. Well, when I was a seaman, I would get up at the six o'clock reveille and put the hammock up and go brush my teeth, shave, and wash up. I did not shower because I'd do that at night. Then we'd eat breakfast.

Then you had to go out on deck, and we'd do exercise. Everyone would come out for exercise. In the division each person had an assigned duty other than the regular duty of taking care of the decks, like, holystoning the decks. My duty .I was a bow hook in the motor launch, and the motor launch carried the fellows over to the shore for a liberty and leave, and it picked up mail and all different things like that.

Marcello: You mentioned a couple of things that I want to follow up on. You mentioned holystoning the deck.

Varnell: Right.

Marcello: Again, as we mentioned off the tape, that's a part of the Navy that is no longer in existence. Describe for me what was involved in holystoning the deck and how it would take place.

Varnell: Okay. Well, you'd get about ten or twelve men lined up, and you had a little square stone--about a five-inch square stone--with a hole in the center. It was an indent, not a complete hole. You had a broom handle, and you would put that broom handle inside the hole. Somebody would be sloshing down saltwater on the deck, and you'd put that broom handle up between your arm and your shoulder, and you would just go left, right, left, right. What it was, the stone was smoothing the wood deck. We'd get them so clean you could eat off of them.

Marcello: You mentioned the wood deck. What kind of wood was that? Do you recall?

Varnell: Well, I remember from what you said. I think it was teakwood. I know it was a very special wood.

Marcello: Then after you were done with that particular procedure, would it be wet down again with freshwater or something? Or more saltwater again?

Varnell: Yes, just rinse it down with water that you are pumping or freshwater. It depended on wherever you were at. In port you would get the freshwater.

Marcello: What color would that deck come up after that process was finished?

Varnell: White, solid white. It was beautiful.

Marcello: There's something else you mentioned here. You said that one of your functions was.

Varnell: Bow hook.

Marcello: I know what it is, but for the record what does the bow hook do?

Varnell: Well, it's usually three men in the motor launch that had the regular duty--the coxswain, the bow hook, and the . . . I forget what you call the other man, but he's in the back to catch the line and the rear. You stand there, and when you're getting close to the dock, you have the rope in hand that tied to the bow, and you jump off and hold it so that the coxswain can swing the boat back in. It might be just two men. I might be thinking that there was three, but I believe there was only two. Then he would swing it back in. I'd have the front line tied up, and then I'd just run back and swing the back

one in.

Marcello: Describe the process by which the USS Maryland went to Pearl Harbor.

Varnell: Well, when I got aboard, it was in Bremerton, Washington, and it was in dry dock being refitted. I guess it was a general overhaul. After we finished the overhaul period, we went out and tried it for a week, I believe, and then we came back in. From there we just went out to sea and went on to Pearl Harbor and Honolulu.

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

Varnell: Oh, I thought it was wonderful. I thought it was great just to be traveling. I know my folks were happy for me. Of course, they missed me, but they were happy that I was getting along good.

Marcello: Up until that point, did you feel as though you had made a good decision?

Varnell: Oh, yes. I still feel I've made a good decision. I think I was fortunate all throughout all the actions that we were in. I was there in the action, but there was no real problems specifically for me, you know.

Marcello: Now when the Maryland goes to Pearl Harbor on more or less a permanent basis, did it usually have a particular place where it berthed or docked, or could that vary?

Varnell: Well, all the battleships, unless they were going into the dry dock, would tie up to the quays. They had a

quay--a cement platform--in the water. The quays were about fifty feet or so away from the land. You would not necessarily have a specific spot in there, but you'd be in the area for the battleships altogether. You would be in that area, but not specifically in one spot where you'd have to be.

Marcello: And those quays were over close to Ford Island.

Varnell: Right. They were within fifty feet, I'd say, of Ford Island.

Marcello: What were your first impressions when you saw all those battleships lined up there in that area that was usually called Battleship Row?

Varnell: Well, just after six months or eight months of being around all of the ships and everything, it was just amazing to see how they all could be in there. I didn't have any specific thoughts, you know, except that, gee, I was enjoying myself.

Marcello: I assume it must have been a pretty awesome sight to see them all lined up there.

Varnell: Yes, it was very awesome. My biggest thought--and I'm going ahead in this--was right before we invaded Okinawa. That was where I was really amazed at the amount of ships that we had. You could look, and just as far as you could see were ships.

Marcello: At that time--now I'm referring to that period before Pearl Harbor--did most people still consider the battleship to be the backbone of the Navy, or was there

a feeling that carriers were eventually going to be the primary striking power?

Varnell: I think they weren't sure, because they built about six or seven extra brand-new battleships at that time. I think they were still relying on the battleship, but they just didn't know or weren't far enough advanced to know what the war was going to be like. Planes turned out to be the thing--aircraft carriers. They must have realized it because afterwards they were converting a lot of the transports into carriers so that they had enough of them. They had a rush job on them.

Marcello: Obviously, you had some antiaircraft armament aboard the USS Maryland, but is it safe to say that after Pearl Harbor those ships had a lot more antiaircraft weapons on them than they did before Pearl Harbor?

Varnell: Right. Before, all we had was a few 20-millimeter guns, and we had five-inch/.25 guns. That was the old-style. As the war went along, we increased the number of antiaircraft guns--both types and locations. We added locations and just put them all over. We even put them on top of a turret.

Marcello: I guess anyplace there was an open space they put something on there.

Varnell: Right. But that was done throughout the war. As we went back into action each time, we would get. .we never had a 40-millimeter gun on the ship before Pearl Harbor, and it was a good while afterwards before we had them on

there.

Marcello: And I guess those 40-millimeters became the backbone of your antiaircraft armament, did they not?

Varnell: Right. Then I think we also put on 5-inch/.51 guns. We replaced the 5-inch/.25 guns with 5-inch/.51 guns, and those were more advanced guns and could shoot more ammunition.

Marcello: During that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what was the morale like among you and your shipmates aboard the USS Maryland?

Varnell: I thought the morale was great. Everybody was getting along; you had your chances to go ashore and have a good time; and you worked together. I didn't know of anybody who wasn't enjoying themselves or having a good time.

Marcello: From what I gather, people had a lot of pride in their ship.

Varnell: (Chuckle) Definitely.

Marcello: How would this be shown or demonstrated?

Varnell: Well, wherever you were at, you always talked, "I'm a battleship man. The next man that comes along would say, "I'm a cruiser man. If you got in an argument, whoever you were, the battleship men would stay with the battleship men, and cruiser men would stay with the cruiser men, and the "tin can" men would get by themselves. Later on, during the war, we were on some island out there where we'd all go on liberty, and they'd get over there and get two beers apiece--that's

what you were allowed--and then when you'd go back to go to the ship, that's when you'd have some arguments--the cruisers against the battleships and "tin cans" against the cruisers--and you would have some big fights (chuckle)

Marcello: What role did athletics play aboard ship in the pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Varnell: I don't think I had any athletics during that time.

Marcello: However, was there athletic competition between ships and so on?

Varnell: No, no. I was only in during peacetime for about six months, and there was no sports that I know of. I can't remember any I know I've read about some people boxing and things like that. We probably had a few teams of softball or something like that, but you were very seldom around each other. You moved around so much.

Marcello: How about the band?

Varnell: They had a band. They were a very good Navy band. They'd get out there and play the "Star Spangled Banner" everyday

Marcello: And I gather that most of the battleship sailors always had a real amount of pride for their band, also.

Varnell: Yes, very much. We enjoyed our band.

Marcello: Did you ever attend any of the "Battle of the Bands" that were held over at Bloch Arena?

Varnell: No, I never did hear them there.

Marcello: Okay, after the Maryland moved to Pearl Harbor, it obviously went out on exercises on a regular basis.

Take me through one of those exercises in which the Maryland would participate during that pre-Pearl Harbor period. Let's start, first of all, with your going out. When would you normally go out?

Varnell: Well, you'd normally leave in the morning most of the time, and you'd go out. In the pre-Pearl Harbor period, we would go out, and you'd do the normal things like I said before. You'd get up, eat, do a little exercise. But every morning and every afternoon, you would have gun drills. General Quarters would be blown, and you would go to your battle station. I was in a 16-inch gun turret. You had your shell--2,000-pound shell--but they wouldn't ram the shell in. Your powder would come up, and you'd put the powder in. It was just continuous; over and over you would do this.

Marcello: Now this would be when you were out at sea?

Varnell: Out at sea. We'd do it in port, also.

Marcello: Was there a particular day of the week when the Maryland would normally go out?

Varnell: No, I don't think there was any special time.

Marcello: Normally, when it went out, how long would it be out?

Varnell: Oh, it would stay out probably about two weeks, and then you'd come in for a week or a week-and-a-half, and then you go back out. In other words, it was just constantly in and out, in and out.

Marcello: What other battleships would be going out with the Maryland?

Varnell: Well, we were in the Seventh Fleet, so you had the Colorado, California, West Virginia, Nevada. There were seven or eight battleships. Then you'd have cruisers. It all depended on what you were going to do. You might have some carriers going out with you if you were going to.

Marcello: Now was it called the Seventh Fleet at that time, or was it called the Pacific Fleet?

Varnell: I think it was the Pacific Fleet. After Pearl Harbor is when it became the Seventh Fleet.

Marcello: I need to find out a little bit more about your functions on one of those 16-inch rifles. Tell me a little bit more about it. You mentioned awhile ago that you eventually decided to strike for gunner's mate. How did this come about?

Varnell: Well, by being in a turret. I couldn't see myself being a boatswain's mate. I became friends with the men in a turret, and when you were in the turret, you could more or less. You brought yourself a cot, and you spread your cot at night to go to sleep. You had a bunch of privileges. If you didn't like what they had for the meal, you normally had a little extra food that you carried, and you could do your own cooking in there. You had assigned work in there. You were given your duties, and you just did them, and nobody really pushed you.

Marcello: So when you went into this 16-inch turret, you actually also moved your quarters.

Varnell: Right. I moved my sleeping quarters. We'd still go inside to eat, but if you were sitting up and talking, we had our own coffee pot, and we could do whatever, you know. You were a more compact group, and you became really good friends.

Marcello: How rapid or slow was promotion or advancement in that Navy before Pearl Harbor?

Varnell: Well, I was only in it for six or eight months before Pearl Harbor, but I don't think it was progressing that great, unless things were changing because of the amount of people that were soon brought into the Navy.

Marcello: And I would assume that promotions and advancement were slowest in the boatswain's mate rating.

Varnell: Well, you had to have a lot of experience to become a boatswain. It was, again, how they placed you to do the work, and the boatswain's mates wanted the best people under them, so they would change.

Marcello: More than time or seniority was involved in promotion at that time, too, was it not? Didn't you have to take tests?

Varnell: Yes, you had to take tests. You had to study, and you had to know how to make all your knots for the boatswain's mate rating. I knew all of that, but I just thought I was progressing to better myself.

Marcello: Is it not true that you had to take what was called a fleetwide examination, and then, assuming you passed, there still had to be an opening, correct?

Varnell: An opening, right. You would take the examinations for a rate, and then it might be four or five months before one would open up and you'd get it.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you were a seaman or a seaman first class at the time of the attack.

Varnell: I was a second class seaman, I think, at the time of the attack. Then after that, when I became a seaman first class, then I went in the turret. I don't even remember what year it was when I went in, but it was right after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: But you were in the turret at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, is that correct? In other words, that was your battle station.

Varnell: That was my assigned duty, yes. Each division had their quarters, and our general quarters station was in the number four turret. The whole turret, seamen and everybody, had their battle station in the turret.

Marcello: And where is the number four turret located?

Varnell: It's on the aftermost part of the deck, where the guns are located.

Marcello: When you first went into that turret, what was your function?

Varnell: When I was a seaman, I was the elevating and training pointer--both of those--and when I went in my duties also were to keep all the brass shined and clean. They could come along and see that everything was all right. Then when they had big jobs, all of us would work

together. But each man had a certain section assigned to him, and he had to keep that clean. They would rotate you, also, after you get in so that you learn everything about it.

Marcello: I'm assuming that where you started is where just about every rookie started that went into one of these turrets.

Varnell: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Then what kind of assignments might you possibly get after you had been in there for a while?

Varnell: Well, no matter how long you were in there, you still had your station to keep, but you would just start moving. Like, you would start taking care of the hydraulic motors and things, which you didn't know anything about. Then you'd have to learn them. So they'd move you around from certain areas. Then you had the powder room downstairs--down below--that you would go into and then keep that clean and secure. So that was your duties.

Marcello: At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, what was your specific function?

Varnell: I was a seaman at the time.

Marcello: And what was your function in that turret?

Varnell: I was the elevating trainer-pointer. But during the attack, you couldn't shoot those guns. We just sat there and prayed (chuckle)

Marcello: We were talking about your routine when you would go out

on one of these exercises. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the two countries begins to get worse, could you--even as a seaman--detect any changes at all in shipboard routine during those exercises at sea?

Varnell: Yes, I could. I remember. .I feel we stepped up our training. It became more exact and more hectic. They were trying to get us to do better. Every now and then, when we were out, we'd pick up these signals of submarines or something around. We didn't know whether it was ours or someone else's, but we assumed it was ours because we would just get rumors that they picked up a submarine. Evidently, it might have been the Japanese. But you could feel. .but you still didn't have the feeling of war. You just knew that they was doing something. Something was being done.

Marcello: Were you still more interested in what was happening in Europe than what was taking place over in the Far East?

Varnell: I would say yes. We didn't get newspapers every day, so you couldn't find out what was happening. And there was no television. You would just mostly talk about what you heard on the radio. I don't think anybody really had a concern that a war was going to start.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical or individual Japanese-- again, I'm referring to the period before Pearl Harbor-- what kind of person did you usually conjure up in your mind? After all, you probably had seen bunches of them

there in the Hawaiian Islands?

Varnell: Well, I thought they were an all right people. I didn't have any ill feelings toward them. In the mixture of all the Hawaiian people, I thought--and I still think--they are the most beautifully-proportioned people in the world. I really thought they were really .you know, everything was right about them.

Marcello: If war did come between the two countries, did you have any doubts as to what the outcome would be?

Varnell: (Chuckle) No, I thought we'd always win. I didn't know what to think right after what happened.

Marcello: Okay, the Maryland came in off of one of these exercises. Describe for me what the liberty routine was like.

Varnell: Well, that's a long time ago, and I didn't get too many of them there. You would come in, and you'd have, say, half go one day and half go the next day; and then someone got the weekend. You'd go ashore about nine o'clock in the morning, and you had to be back before six o'clock. There was no overnight liberty unless you had a special pass to stay out.

Marcello: You had to be back at six?

Varnell: Six o'clock, yes. There was no normal liberty like in the United States when you'd go on leave or on liberty, where you would just go and come back the next morning. Not here. You had to be back at night, except for special ones that might have family there or friends

that they could stay with.

Marcello: You could not stay out on any night until midnight, let's say?

Varnell: No, you had to be back in. I think it was six o'clock, possibly eight o'clock. But I think it was six o'clock.

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

Varnell: Well, you would go over there, and it was all strange and new to you. You'd go over there and get a couple of bottles of beer and walk around looking, seeing the sights. I wasn't too much of a person to go out and see Diamondhead or. .one time I went up in the mountains. I wasn't a good tourist, in other words. We would go together--several of us--and go to see what the beach was like, go through the town and see the people--just walking around.

Marcello: What significance does the Black Cat Cafe have for you?

Varnell: None whatsoever. I was young at that time (chuckle)

Marcello: Was the Black Cat simply a beer parlor?

Varnell: I don't remember it at all. I don't remember the Black Cat.

Marcello: I guess the reason I brought it up is because evidently it was the one right across from the YMCA, which was where all the taxis and so on usually brought people.

Varnell: No, I don't remember that.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into those days immediately prior to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. So let's talk a little bit about that weekend of December 7 Do you

recall, first of all, when the Maryland came in?

Varnell: I believe that we had come in that Friday, but I'm not sure--the Friday before the attack. We were going to have. .we knew we had an admiral's inspection coming up. We might have been in there three or four days prior to the attack. But we had an admiral's inspection--fleet admiral's inspection--which was to be held Saturday.

Marcello: And what did that entail?

Varnell: The fleet admiral had to come on and inspect the whole ship. All the ammunition was supposed to be brought down and put in the storage areas and kept nowhere near the guns. Another thing is, we holystoned the deck until we were blue in the face. He came and inspected it, and evidently something was said about the decks because we had to go out Saturday afternoon on the sixth and reholystone the deck.

Marcello: What was the reaction of you and your buddies when you had to go and do that?

Varnell: Well, we wasn't too happy (chuckle) We said it was already good enough to eat off of, but then the next morning is when all the bullets were hitting it and scuffing it up (chuckle).

Marcello: When one of these inspections would occur, am I to assume that most of the doors and hatches and so on would be open?

Varnell: Not to the ammunition areas. That would be closed. I think that when they went there, there would be someone

there to open it. Everything would be open.

Marcello: And was that normally true when you were in port, anyhow?

Varnell: Yes. Oh, yes. You would leave all the hatches open.

Marcello: What did you do that afternoon and that evening?

Varnell: Well, we holystoned the deck, and when we got through with that, we just ate supper and mainly "shot the bull around some coffee there in the turret and went to sleep. Then the next morning was going to be. that was the first time I was assigned to the "honey box" watch. "Honey box, do you know what that is?"

Marcello: Go ahead and explain it for the record.

Varnell: The "honey box" is where. .after you get through eating. .all the mess that's left. there is a big metal casing on the side of the ship that you hang there when you are in port, and you just throw all the garbage in there. Well, I had the four-hour watch there, starting at eight o'clock, to make sure that everything went in the "honey box" when they threw it in. If they messed it up, they had to clean it up.

Marcello: I'm sure that you were probably not necessarily looking forward to that on Sunday morning.

Varnell: No. It was my first time, too. I thought the guy didn't like me (chuckle). The fellow that assigned me was a reserve. He had just come on the ship. I said, "Maybe he don't know who I am. I thought I was getting by with things, you know (chuckle)

Marcello: Where was the Maryland tied up that weekend?

Varnell: We were tied up at a quay right behind the California. The California was at a quay right in front of us, and the Tennessee and the West Virginia were tied up behind us.

Marcello: Were you tied up alone?

Varnell: We were tied up alone until about four o'clock in the evening. The Oklahoma came in and tied up alongside of us. They were the last ship in.

Marcello: In other words, the Oklahoma then would have tied up outboard of you?

Varnell: Right. We were closed in, thank the Lord.

Marcello: That meant--at least that day--that also perhaps some of your fresh air might have been blocked off, too (chuckle), was it not?

Varnell: Right. Well, it wasn't that bad. You tied up with big lines and put a gangplank across, so we'd use their ship to go across to the boats tied up alongside of their side. It was no problem. It was part of the deal.

Marcello: You might probably have to guess at this, but approximately what percentage of the crew might be ashore on a Saturday evening?

Varnell: I would say about 30 to 40 percent on a regular Saturday afternoon. Now some of those would probably be staying for the whole weekend, but the majority, I would say, would be coming back to the ship that night.

Marcello: Which ones could be staying for the weekend?

Varnell: Whoever had families or something on shore that they could go visit. It wasn't a general routine to go overnight, you know.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen that night that you remember?

Varnell: No, nothing eventful, no.

Marcello: Would there be very many drunks coming back aboard?

Varnell: No. As a rule, there wasn't very many people who would go out and get drunk.

Marcello: Was this mainly because there wasn't a whole lot of money around? Were there other reasons?

Varnell: No. You were really under good scrutiny by the Shore Patrol and MPs. I don't know. .at that time you just didn't do it. You just didn't go over there and get drunk. If you did, you were put in the brig.

Marcello: On a Sunday morning, did you still have to be up at a particular time, or could you sleep in on a Sunday morning?

Varnell: You would have reveille at six o'clock in the morning, and you'd get up. Sometimes the person who had the twelve to four o'clock watch might be able to lay there and sleep a little longer.

Marcello: What time did you get up that morning?

Varnell: I got up about six o'clock.

Marcello: Okay, describe your routine that morning as all these events unfolded.

Varnell: All right. Well, I got up, and I made up my hammock and

helped get the tables out, I guess, so that we could eat.

Marcello: Were you still in the Fourth Division, or were you in the turret?

Varnell: Well, I was still in the Fourth Division in the seaman's department, but you could still be in the Fourth Division and still be in the turret. In other words, it's just another section of the Fourth Division.

Marcello: And you were in the turret?

Varnell: No, at this time I was in the Fourth Division seaman's section.

Marcello: Okay But your battle station was in the turret.

Varnell: My battle station was in the turret, yes.

Marcello: And when did you begin living in this turret then?

Varnell: Well, that was later on, after the war started--after the bombing.

Marcello: Oh, okay. All right, so you are down in your normal seaman's quarters.

Varnell: Yes. I ate breakfast, and we hung around. Then about ten minutes to eight, I said, "Well, I may as well just go ahead and relieve the man and let him go get his breakfast. So I go up on the boat deck, as they call it, where the "honey box" was hanging, and there was several other fellows standing around. It was about ten minutes until eight.

Marcello: What kind of a day was it in terms of climate?

Varnell: It was a beautiful day--mild, about sixty-five or

seventy degrees--and the sun was up. Everything looked fine. All of a sudden, one of the fellows or all of us just spotted all these planes. They were coming in through the mountains, and the mountains had a little blue haze up there like always. As they came over, we just watched them--they were way up. All of a sudden, they started diving on Ford Island, and they started dropping bombs. We said, "Gee, they're really practicing today. They're dropping bombs and everything!"

Marcello: About how far away is this activity taking place?

Varnell: Well, when the planes were coming in, I guess they were five or six miles up in the air, but when they started diving and dropping the bombs, I would say they were within three or four blocks. We were that close to it.

All of a sudden one plane passed right through between our masts. You know how the masts stick up? They passed through there, and we could see that red ball on it. Also, as that fellow passed through, he was pumping his machine gun--firing it. I think they shot at the lights. If I saw that sucker today, I think I would know him; that's how close we were to him. He passed, I would say, not forty yards from where we were standing. You could see him smiling, and he had a little moustache--just like you see in the pictures, always. When we saw that, we ran inside. We saw something was happening. Of course, we ran inside for

protection. Just as we get inside, then the word comes over, "All hands, man your battle stations! The island is being attacked by the Japanese!

Marcello: Do you remember whether or not a bugler at one point blew General Quarters over the PA system?

Varnell: I don't know if he did or not. I don't think he did. I think we just had someone come on the PA system, and he didn't use proper language.

Marcello: Tell us what he said for the record.

Varnell: I don't know. It was something about: "The goddamned Japanese are attacking us right now!

Marcello: What do you do at that point?

Varnell: Well, I was inside, so then I had to run outside again and go down to the turret. See, I was up on the boat deck, which is one section higher--half-section higher--and I had to run down the ladder and go out to the turret and go into the turret. To get into the turret, there's only one way. The turret swings around over the ship, and it's got levers there and trapdoors in it. So you had to go under the turret and climb up into the turret.

So we ran out there. .well, I can remember myself. I had to get to the turret, and so I had to run across the deck. I ran as fast as I could, and I slid just like I was going into third base or something.

I got into the turret, and then I went down on my battle station, and I stayed there, oh, I'd say, until

about ten or ten-thirty, when it was over or when the attack stopped. At that time, being in the boat crew-- you know, as my assignment--we were told to send boats over there to get the people back that were on shore.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute. General Quarters sounds, and you go to the turret and get to your battle station. Once more for the record, where was your battle station at that time? Where were you located?

Varnell: I was located right underneath the 16-inch gun, where you train and elevate it--the elevating trainer and pointer seat. I had a spy glass in there where I looked out. You can either go by the instruments or by vision. I had a spy glass, and I could look out of those now and then.

Marcello: What did you see when you looked out?

Varnell: Well, all I could see was smoke and fire, and our ship was just bouncing up and down in the water because of the explosions--all the bombs being exploded--and what was happening to the Oklahoma next to us.

Marcello: Could you feel those torpedoes that slammed into the Oklahoma?

Varnell: I'm sure that was part of it because our ship was just jumping up and down from all the explosions. We could feel it very much, but we didn't know what was going on.

Marcello: The Maryland also caught at least two bombs. Do you remember when they hit?

Varnell: I couldn't tell one explosion from the other. Well,

those of us that were in the aft part of the ship. One bomb dropped on the front, and one went in the water right alongside of the ship.

Marcello: You have a very good memory because that is the way that they did take place. What thoughts are going through your mind while you are in that turret and at your battle station? All this action is taking place outside. What are you and your buddies talking about and thinking about?

Varnell: Well, when I'm down on my battle station, there was nobody I'm the only one there, and then there is a wall, and between that wall over there, there's another man. One would elevate, and one would train, or one man could do both. But there was talk on. You had a little earphone set that you would talk on. I think all of us were so scared and frightened that we didn't know. I can't remember what I was saying. I can tell you this-- it was the best laxative I ever had, and I'm serious about that (chuckle) Either that evening or the next morning, whenever we secured the quarters in there, we had to take out the garbage cans because of being down there so long. I mean, there were barrels full of waste. So it was a good laxative. We were just frightened and wanted to know what was going on.

The first thing I heard then was after ten o'clock when everything started to simmer down. We had to get the people from shore.

Marcello: Since you were inside this turret, would it be safe to say that to some extent you had a feeling of helplessness?

Varnell: There was nothing we could do. We were not part of anything that had something to do. We were just in there for protection. When you're in a turret, you got five inches of steel on top plus eight inches all around. Of course, that probably wouldn't have did any good if a bomb had scored a direct hit (chuckle)

Marcello: How long did you think you'd been in that turret before you came out?

Varnell: I thought, I guess, about four or five hours. But not everybody came out. I left a little early because I had to go do my duty in the boat to get the guys back from shore.

Marcello: Who came and told you that you were supposed to do that?

Varnell: Well, I got word from the man in charge--the chief gunner's mate--that they wanted me out there on the boat crew. He had gotten the word from the boatswain's mate.

Marcello: Okay, when you stepped out on deck to perform this function, describe in as much detail as you can remember what you saw.

Varnell: Well, when I came out, I was shocked. The Oklahoma was turned over completely in the water; the bottom was sticking up. All of the water was on fire. There was oil on the top of the water burning. I looked to the rear, and the West Virginia and the Colorado, I believe

it was, were back there sitting down in the water. It just looked like they were just resting on the bottom, and they were burning.

Marcello: Excuse me for a second. It would have been the West Virginia for sure, but the Colorado wasn't there. It would have been another one. The Tennessee was tied up.

Varnell: The Tennessee! The Tennessee! That's it. The Tennessee!

Marcello: I'm sorry for interrupting.

Varnell: That's all right. But both of them were. .all you could see was smoke coming up, and the water was on fire. You had a few guys floating around in the water--dead.

Marcello: Did you have time to think about the Oklahoma having turned over? I'm sure the last thing you ever thought about was one of those huge battleships turning over.

Varnell: Oh, no, we never thought of anything like that. We just thought they'd hold up. I guess it was a perfect situation for them to torpedo--to come in the way they came in. The water was extended out because that was where they made a little inlet there for us to get to the dock to transport people back and forth. That's where they started coming--right in from there.

Marcello: Okay, so you come out on deck, and you see this carnage, I guess we can call it. What do you do at that point?

Varnell: Well, I wanted to go back inside, but we went on down. I got together with the coxswain of the motor launch,

and we went on in and made two or three loads bringing people back in.

Marcello: You're closer to the water now, since you're actually in it. Describe once more what it looks like.

Varnell: Well, we got through the water, but there was so much oil. The whole harbor was just filled with oil on that water.

Marcello: And this is a thick oil, too, is it not?

Varnell: Oh, it was very thick, and a lot of it was on fire. We were able to get through, and I think we made two or three trips bringing people back, going back and forth. Of course, I was always looking up, thinking, you know, "Man, they're coming back" or something like that.

So after that, when I came back--maybe it was about one or two o'clock--they had secured general quarters in the turrets. We all came out, and we went on what they called "four on and four off. On your four-off hours, you were expected to load antiaircraft ammunition onto the ships because evidently they was running low. For the four hours off, you did that; then during the four hours on, we were to relieve the antiaircraft gun crews. So the guns were manned all the time, and for three solid days we did "four on and four off.

Marcello: What kind of appetite did you have that day?

Varnell: Not good. I may have ate sandwiches or something like that, but I don't think we were hungry because we were afraid and excited. I don't think we ate too much.

Marcello: When you are in that kind of emotional state, do you kind of get dry mouth or cotton mouth or anything like that? Do you recall?

Varnell: No, I don't recall. All I know is that I was frightened--very frightened. Not even, you know, having thought about something like that happening, it was a shock. I would say everyone was in shock. You were just doing things automatically because we had been trained so much that we could have fired the guns even under those conditions. We just automatically could do things like that.

Marcello: Did you ever think about how lucky you were, in a sense, because the Oklahoma came in and tied up outboard of the Maryland?

Varnell: Many times. It's one of those things; they just happened to come in. We were blessed. The Maryland was under the Lord's help at that time. But we thought about that very much. I still think we were very lucky

Marcello: What took place that evening?

Varnell: Well, that night after dark, we were doing that "four on and four off. Evidently, on my "four on, I was standing back to clear the shells. As the shells came out of the 5-inch guns, my portion was just to get rid of the shells, get them out of the way. All of a sudden some planes or something came over, and we were shooting at it. We believe now that it was our own planes.

Marcello: These were planes off the Enterprise, I think.

Varnell: Yes, right, or something that came in. I think we shot them down. It was a frightening experience. I was there waiting for the shells to come back, and, man, I was crunched up. All you could hear was just "POW! POW! POW! POW! POW!" as them 5-inch guns were going off. It was like being .you talk about a Fourth of July, that would have been it.

Marcello: I guess, evidently, if it had not been so serious, it was actually kind of pretty in a sense.

Varnell: Yes, exotic.

Marcello: How long did that firing go on?

Varnell: Oh, I would say for about ten or fifteen minutes. I think it happened twice if my memory serves me right. I think it happened on two different occasions that night. But after that, they made some sort of arrangements for incoming planes. We was going to shoot at anything flying over, so they made arrangements with new signals so that we would know if it was our own planes or not.

Marcello: I'm sure that everybody was very jumpy that night.

Varnell: Touchy (chuckle) Yes, we were all frightened. We didn't know what was going on, and I think a lot of us were thinking, "Gee, they're going to come back and come in!" That's the biggest mistake they ever made.

Marcello: What rumors were going around that night? Did you hear any rumors?

Varnell: I guess I heard a lot of them, but I don't remember them. It was just that we were amazed, and we were just talking about all the ships. I don't remember any

rumors.

Marcello: I should have asked you this earlier, so I'll ask it now. Did you, perchance, observe any of the rescue operations that were taking place aboard the Oklahoma?

Varnell: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

Varnell: As you know, they were tied right alongside of us, and they turned over right by us. I don't remember if it was that first day or the same day, but I do know that people out of our ship--pipefitters and all--worked on the Oklahoma. They cut holes in the bottom of the Oklahoma, and they went in; and as many as seven days later, they still found people alive in there. I think we got every person. They would go on the ship, and they would knock. If they heard something, then they would cut a hole.

Marcello: Maybe use a torch?

Varnell: A torch to cut a hole in the bottom of the ship. I can't say how many people, but we got quite a few people out after we thought they were dead.

Marcello: Did you actually see any of them coming out?

Varnell: Yes, but not real close. From the ship, I was maybe a hundred feet or so away

Marcello: What was the reaction of the witnesses when one of these guys would come out?

Varnell: Oh, everybody would clap and howl. Oh, yes! I've told that story many times--watching those people come out of

there. Everybody was waiting, and when they found somebody, they would be so happy to get them out.

See, there were people floating around in the water--dead. They had some of the boat crews gather up the bodies, but these were special crews. They didn't use people like me, you know. Some of the coxswain's and boatswain's mates went out, and they were picking them up. They would pick up a person--grab him by the arm--and when they would, everything would come off his arm. They would have nothing but the bones because he was all burnt up. But those fellows could handle. they just had more courage, I guess, than what most of us would have had.

Marcello: Well, I guess that's not necessarily the kind of thing you would assign an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old kid to do.

Varnell: No.

Marcello: What did you do in the days following. .well, let me ask you this. How well did you sleep that night?

Varnell: I didn't sleep. Like I say, when we were off duty, we would start getting ammunition. We might catnap maybe. We didn't have no thought of sleeping, and I don't think I could have slept. But I think the second night it kind of eased up, and we got a little sleep. We probably got about four hours, if we got that. After we had enough ammunition, well, you can only put so much there. But we were still four hours on and four hours

off--everybody.

Marcello: And did that routine continue for the next couple of days, did you say?

Varnell: I would say for two-and-a-half days. The third morning, the smoke had sort of died down. It was still smoking quite a bit from over at the Arizona and the West Virginia and Tennessee. But at eight o'clock an admiral--I can't remember his name--came on our ship, and he got going halfway up to the pilot house up there. He stopped and he made a speech, telling everybody just what happened and calling the Japanese lowdown so-and-so's (as they are). Our band then played the "Star Spangled Banner. Pilots used to live on Ford Island, and they had houses--not right next to each other, but a lot or two away. And at that time, when the band started playing--playing the "Star Spangled Banner"--that's the first time those people came out of those houses, and everything just brightened up.

Then from then on, you started looking about at what you had to do to get out of there. They raised the bow with underwater torches and all and fixed the bow so we could get over to Ten Ten Dock, and then they really fixed it over there. We came back to the States. We were back in the States at Bremerton, Washington, by about the 23rd, I believe, of December.

Marcello: Describe the damage that had been done to the Maryland.

Varnell: It had a hole in the bow where a bomb had exploded just

outside, and it pierced and blew a hole. It had let a lot of water in, and so it was kind of sunk there. A bomb had hit in the bow of the ship and went on through the deck, and it caused a little damage. We only lost, I think, two men.

Marcello: Did you see the damage that either of those bombs did?

Varnell: I'd say I saw both of them eventually, but the one that was on the outside was already repaired. They did that underwater. They didn't put us in dry dock to do that. You could go up and see where the bomb had exploded in some locker up there. I forget what it was, but it was a boatswain's locker, I think they call it, where they have a lot of seagoing tools and stuff that they use. But there was only two people that got killed.

Marcello: What kind of damage was done? Describe what you saw.

Varnell: Well, everything was torn up. The metal was twisted, and everything was blown up. Everything was messed up. They had some lockers in there that were knocked down or torn up. There was just plenty of damage.

Marcello: Describe what you remember from the damage that had been done to the Arizona.

Varnell: Well.

Marcello: Obviously, what you would have seen would have been the aftermath. What did you see?

Varnell: All we saw was the tripod--the mast--sticking up, and that's about it. There wasn't anything else. It had settled down in the water.

Marcello: What about the smoke and the fire?

Varnell: Oh, the smoke and the fire was still going on after three days. Also from the West Virginia and the Tennessee. They had set down, but they weren't all the way under the water. Their bow was up above the water. In other words, they weren't submerged.

Marcello: I think the harbor was just about forty feet deep there, was it not?

Varnell: Probably so. I don't know.

Marcello: Three days later, you have probably calmed down a little bit. Maybe the next time you could see things just a little bit more objectively. What were your impressions or your feelings when you looked around and you saw the West Virginia sitting on the bottom, the California sitting at the bottom, the Utah turned over, the Oklahoma turned over, the Arizona completely destroyed, the smoke, the fire, the oil in the water, the dead bodies? What kind of impressions did you as a nineteen-year-old have?

Varnell Well, at that time I was still frightened. At that time we started hearing rumors about this one man up on the radar duty who had picked up the planes coming, and they told him forget about it. Then things came around about the people in Washington and that they were meeting at the time this happened. I would say rumors came that the President and other people knew that this was going to happen or knew where they were, anyway, because the

whole fleet. there was just rumors running rampant. We believed that evidently it was Roosevelt's idea that the people didn't want to go into war with Germany, and this was our way to get into it. Then again, that was just guessing. But I still believe right now that they had to know about it.

Marcello: What kind of attitudes did you have toward the Japanese three days after the attack?

Varnell: Well, I don't think I would just have gone up and killed one of them, but I sure didn't respect them or have any feelings for them. I thought that anything that could happen to them would be the best thing in the world that I could think of--happen bad.

I can tell you about my father (chuckle) My father was home, and they knew where I was because at that time you would write letters. They knew I was in Pearl Harbor. Of course, my daddy got half-loaded or fully loaded, and he picked up his shotgun, and he was roaming the streets looking for Japanese. Seriously, that's the honest truth.

I was not the type of person like my father (chuckle), but I just hated them. It was one of those things; it was already there.

I could tell you another instance (chuckle). I used to work for Coca-Cola before I retired, and a lot of times we'd have people coming in from out of town or foreign countries. The Japanese do a lot of business

with Coca-Cola, and they were here. We were at a cocktail party, and one of the Japanese asked me. I said, "You son-of-a-bitches, you all blew me out of Pearl Harbor! Now you're coming over here, and we're taking care of you all! (chuckle) Well, I was "feeling pretty good" then, too. Afterwards, well, we had no trouble. It just turned out good.

Marcello: There is something else I should have asked you a moment ago. When was it that you were able to send word home that you were alive and okay?

Varnell: About two weeks later--two weeks after the attack--we were given a card, and it had, "I'm well"; "I'm doing okay"; "I'm sick"; "I was injured, but I'm all right. You would just put an "X" mark on what you wanted to say, and you were to address the card and sign your name to it. I guess Mother and them got it about three weeks later--a little over three weeks. Then when I got back to Bremerton, Washington, right before Christmas, I called.

Marcello: You did mention this awhile ago, and I didn't catch it. When did the Maryland finally get out of Pearl and go back to Bremerton?

Varnell: I think we were the first ones to go out of there, or one of the only ones, really. They backed us out, and we went over to Ten Ten Dock, and that's where they repaired us. I can remember that we were over there being repaired, and all of a sudden, word came over the

loudspeaker: "All people working for the shipyard, off the ship! Throw the lines off! So anybody who was on shore, they had better get back on right quick because that's how quick we pulled out of there. I guess it was about the 18th or 19th of December. We backed out slowly and threw the lines off. We may have left some people there. I can't remember--not for sure--if they were on shore and all. They had gotten orders to get out of there. We backed out, and as we were going out, they were dropping depth charges all around us in case there were any submarines.

Marcello: I guess it took awhile for you to get away from that quay because of the Oklahoma. Did the Oklahoma have you pinned in?

Varnell: Yes, but they were able to get us out. The distances between the quays are. .you figure the ship is about two blocks long--a battleship--a little over two blocks--and there is at least that much difference between the two after they are in there. We welded it underneath, raised the bow, pumped the water out, and they just backed us out. It took about half-a-day Then we got over to Ten Ten Dock, and they finished repairs. Then all of a sudden--it just came to my mind; this is the first time I thought about it--I can remember them saying, "All the employees of the shipyard off, and everybody better get on board! Back it out! That's the way we did.

Marcello: And what happened when you get back to Bremerton?

Varnell: Well, first of all, coming from Pearl Harbor, we rode out a storm--the worst storm I'd ever been in--all the way, about three or four days. I never did get seasick-- I never have been seasick--but I wasn't too hungry (chuckle) Then to get into Seattle and Bremerton, Washington, you have to go through the Straits of Juan de Fuca. That's about a hundred miles of water. While we were coming through that whole hundred miles, there were ships that were dropping depth charges all through there because they didn't know if the Japanese were in there with their submarines. It was very cold, but it was beautiful. You could stand out there on deck and look at the snow up on top of the mountains. It was beautiful and good to be home. I was one of the first ashore because I was in the boat crew. The first thing we'd do is take the mailman over to land and get the mail at the post office. So I was one of the first ones off the ship to get back on land, on American soil. I just thought of that, too!

Marcello: How long did you remain aboard the Maryland?

Varnell: I was on the Maryland until we put it out of commission in 1946.

Marcello: You were on the Maryland for the whole war?

Varnell: The whole war. I was in all the battles.

Marcello: Even though this is not a part of what we are talking about, just identify some of the battles that you were

in. Don't describe them, or we'd be here all night (chuckle)! But what were some of the battles the Maryland participated in?

Varnell: Well, first we went to Tarawa; then we were back-ups and all for the Battle of Midway. We were on duty up at Wake Island. We went down into the Solomon Islands, Kwajalein, Saipan, and Okinawa. The only one we missed was Iwo Jima. We had gotten hit by a torpedo in Saipan. It took ninety feet of the bow off, and that's the reason we were back in the United States getting repaired. That's why we missed Iwo Jima. Back in Pearl Harbor is where we repaired it. We got ninety feet of the bow shot off. President Roosevelt came over to see us. He came to Honolulu and rode by the ship, and that was a big thrill in my life. He was in that big, open car he used to ride in.

Marcello: Where was the Maryland when the war was over?

Varnell: We were just coming out of Bremerton, Washington. We had come back to Bremerton to be repaired. We had taken a kamikaze plane, and it had done a lot of damage, and we were back in for repairs. The guns needed new sleeves put in them. But that's where we were when the war ended. In fact, we were just finishing, and we were on our way out, and we just went right on down to Long Beach and San Francisco rather than. .we were on our way back to the war zone. I guess we thought we were going to Japan then. That was the next stop.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Varnell, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to speak with me. You have said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that students and scholars will appreciate your efforts this evening.

Varnell: Well, I appreciate you doing this, and all I want to say is that I've enjoyed it. Our Pearl Harbor survivors has an organization called Pearl Harbor Survivors, and we want to keep America alert. That's the purpose of our organization. We're getting more organized. Even the federal government is now starting to recognize us.

Marcello: Well, again, thank you very much.

Varnell: Okay, thank you.