

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
743

I n t e r v i e w w i t h
L E S T E R R O B I N S O N
A p r i l 2 3 , 1 9 8 8

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: Open
Approved: L. E. Rumsen
(Signature)
Date: 4-23-88

COPYRIGHT



1988

THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203.

Oral History Collection

Lester Robinson

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello Date: April 23, 1988

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Lester Robinson for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 23, 1988, in Austin, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Robinson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a member of VP-23 at Ford Island Naval Air Station during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Robinson, 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, and that sort of thing.

Mr. Robinson: I was born on March 4, 1920, in Breckenridge, Texas. My father was a tool pusher in the oil fields. I have never been back there. I left there when I was an infant, and I've never been back. I'd like to go back there sometime, I guess. We left there and went up into Oklahoma, and I was more less raised in

Oklahoma--Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Marcello: What is the extent of your education?

Robinson: I graduated from the University of Houston with a B.S. degree, after a whole lot of "going and blowing."
(chuckle)

Marcello: Okay, in other words, at the time that you enlisted in the Navy, what was the extent of your education?

Robinson: High school education.

Marcello: And when was it that you joined the service?

Robinson: I joined the service in April of 1941.

Marcello: Why did you decided to join the service?

Robinson: I wanted to join the service in around November of 1940. I was roughnecking in Wyoming, and my father and mother had separated. My father lived in Oklahoma, and my mother lived in Texas. My father was talking war and more war and that it would be a good thing to get into the service as a volunteer before I had to go in as a draftee. I thought about it and thought about it, and finally he kind of convinced me about going into the service. I was not twenty-one at that time, so I went home into Texas, and I told my mother what I'd like to do, that I'd like to join the Navy. This was in the end of November, 1940. Mother told me that she would like for me to wait until I was twenty-one years old, that she would give me her blessings at that time, but that I was grown and that if I wanted to go into the service,

that was up to me. But she would give me her blessings if I would wait. And I did, because it was only a few months. I got a job with a construction company working for Exxon down there in Baytown, Texas. Anyway, I went into the service. I was twenty-one on March 4, 1941, and I went into the service on April 11 in Houston.

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

Robinson: I don't know. The Navy just kind of appealed to me. The Marines didn't, and the Army didn't. I never even thought about the Coast Guard, and the Navy just kind of appealed to me.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Robinson: San Diego.

Marcello: How long did it last at that time?

Robinson: I went in in April...it must have been somewhere around...it was close to, I guess, three months because we took a little test, and I went to a trade school at Alameda Air Base, aviation metalsmith school. We were the class of July. So from April to July, it would be right about three months. It must have been right close to three months.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen in boot camp that we need to get as part of the record, or was it the normal Navy boot camp?

Robinson: Just the normal boot camp (chuckle). I wouldn't give

anything for it--I'm like everyone else--but I sure wouldn't want to do it again. But it was an experience, and a good one.

Marcello: How was it that you managed to get the training at a technical school over at Alameda? Did you mention that you had to take certain tests and so on?

Robinson: Well, I don't know. These were more of an aptitude test, I think, than anything else. Some of us was given aviation machinist school; some of us received aviation ordnance school. I really don't know. They didn't discuss that with us, really. We had this draft, and they just put your names up there and where you're going and the school, if you made a school. Some of them didn't [go to a school]; some of them went to sea. They didn't discuss that with us, really.

Marcello: And how long were you at Alameda?

Robinson: Well, I must have been there about three-and-a-half months.

Marcello: So you got over to Pearl Harbor just before the attack.

Robinson: I got over there around November 6--somewhere in there. As you will find out, my memory is not too good.

Marcello: So you were there approximately a month before the attack.

Robinson: Just about a month, yes.

Marcello: Describe what the training was like there at Alameda.

Robinson: Very good. It was a brand-new base. In fact, it wasn't

even commissioned when we arrived. We were the first class to go through there, and there wasn't many people there. The chow lines were very small, and everything was brand-new. It was really great; it was really nice. And the school was very good. They had good instructors, and I thought I learned quite a bit, you know, for that period of that.

Marcello: What sort of rank did you have when you came out of that school?

Robinson: Seaman second class. After four months, you automatically received seaman second.

Marcello: Okay, and I assume, then, that you went from Alameda directly, more or less, over to Pearl Harbor.

Robinson: I did. Yes, sir.

Marcello: What was your method of transportation from.

Robinson: As a passenger on the USS Chicago.

Marcello: Okay, so when you get over to Pearl Harbor, you are assigned to Ford Island?

Robinson: Assigned to Ford Island and assigned to VP-23.

Marcello: What exactly was Ford Island's major function there within that military complex? What were located there?

Robinson: Well, we had about five PBY squadrons. They had a CASU squadron (Carrier Aircraft Service Unit) that was over on the strip, the actual strip. They had A and R (Assembly and Repair) there--a big shop, a nice one. I don't know. .that's all I can recall that was there at

Ford Island at that time.

Marcello: How many PBYs would be in each of those squadrons?

Robinson: About twelve.

Marcello: And what was the purpose of those PBYs? What were they being used for?

Robinson: Patrol and search.

Marcello: When you got over there to Ford Island, where were you housed?

Robinson: Housed?

Marcello: Yes, where were your quarters?

Robinson: In the barracks. They had large barracks about three stories high, and the top two stories were the quarters, and I was quartered there.

Marcello: Describe what those quarters were like on the inside.

Robinson: Very good, very nice, very clean, spacious, very nice shower rooms and heads. They had lanais on them--porches. They had bunks out there. People slept there, too. It was nice.

Marcello: What was the quality of the food there at Ford Island?

Robinson: Good. It was very good.

Marcello: When you go into VP-23, what was your initial responsibility or function?

Robinson: Not much, Doctor. I was seaman second, and I was in the squadron about two weeks when they sent me back up to the barracks, and I was assigned to mess cooking. So then my responsibility became "heavy."

Marcello: What exactly did a mess cook do there?

Robinson: Everything in the galley that the cook didn't want to do. We did numerous jobs. We peeled potatoes; we cracked eggs; we served food during the chow time; we cleaned up the galley; we made coffee. We did everything but the actual cooking.

Marcello: Was the food served family-style or cafeteria-style?

Robinson: Cafeteria-style.

Marcello: How long were you on mess cooking?

Robinson: Not very long because I went down to the squadron. A lot of our planes were damaged, and they needed metalsmiths--all that they could get. I went down to the squadron pretty quick. I wasn't up there too long. I'd say that altogether I was probably up there four weeks approximately.

Marcello: Okay, so you were up there when the actual attack took place?

Robinson: Oh, yes. I was mess cooking when it took place, yes.

Marcello: Although you were only there for about a month, as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, could you, as a result of scuttlebutt and maybe working there in the mess hall, detect any changes in the training routine or the patrolling routine of those PBVs? Did you hear anybody say anything about how their routine was being affected by the strained relations between two countries?

Robinson: No. The only thing I recall or remember was that there was an ambassador, a Japanese ambassador, if I'm correct--I think he was an ambassador or some VIP--who had gone to Washington, and he was at the White House to see President Roosevelt and talk with him, I think, and discuss some of our differences that I assume we had. I didn't know of any differences. They hadn't discussed any of those with me (chuckle). But, no, I didn't know of any differences or any change or anything.

Marcello: How did your liberty routine work there at Ford Island?

Robinson: Good. Real good. In fact, we had so much liberty, and good liberty, too, that usually when the fleet was in-- we called it a fleet...if there were several ships in-- we wouldn't go ashore at that time because we thought that crowded up Honolulu. Little did we know how crowded it was going to be a little bit later on (chuckle).

Marcello: During that pre-Pearl Harbor period, when you went on liberty, what would you usually do?

Robinson: What did I do?

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

Robinson: Get drunk, I guess (chuckle). I was young--twenty-one-- and I did quite a bit of drinking back then. I didn't do what I should do. I didn't sight-see and all those things a person should do. I guess I just went in town and drank most of the time. I didn't go to town too

often--not too often.

Marcello: I guess being so close to Honolulu and not being aboard a ship, you could have liberty every night if you didn't have the duty.

Robinson: You know, I don't really recall, but it seems to me like we could. I know that a lot of times we didn't go ashore because, like I say, when the fleet was there, we wouldn't even go ashore. But we had beer gardens on our base, which was as good as going into town.

Marcello: And probably much cheaper.

Robinson: Much cheaper, yes.

Marcello: Okay, I guess this more or less brings us up to that weekend of December 7, 1941, and, of course, we want to go into it in as much detail as you can possibly remember. Let's talk about that Saturday, December 6, 1941. What was your routine that day?

Robinson: Well, you know, I really can't tell you, except it was just mess cooking. Our routine was to...we would get a meal ready, and then we'd clean up after the meal. Then when we had all that finished, we were through, and we'd go on up to our bunks or do whatever we wished to do.

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

Robinson: I sure don't. I couldn't tell you, Doctor.

Marcello: Do you know whether you stayed on the base or whether you went into Honolulu?

Robinson: I stayed on the base.

Marcello: And what would you usually be doing on a Saturday evening there on the base?

Robinson: Oh, sitting around and talking or. .the California was tied right up. .her bow was just right there in front of our barracks, and their band would come out in the evening after chow, before dark, and the band would play past dark. A lot of times we'd lay out there and listen to this band play. They had a beautiful band.

Marcello: You don't remember if they played that night, do you?

Robinson: No, I don't.

Marcello: I don't think it did. I believe it was at Bloch Arena for the "Battle of the Bands. I think they used to have a thing calle the "Battle of the Bands" at Bloch Arena, and all the bands would go over there.

Robinson: I don't recall that night. I really don't.

Marcello: I'm assuming, then, that it was rather uneventful so far as you're concerned.

Robinson: Evidently, it must have been. Yes, as far as I'm concerned.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that morning of December 7, 1941. I'll let you pick up the story from the time you wake up until all the action starts.

Robinson: Well, actually, you're going to get bored with my story. I got up at the regular time. I didn't know what time it was that they would wake us up, but we got up a little bit earlier than most of them because we'd have

to go down and get things ready for the chow.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. If one didn't have the duty, was there more or less what's referred to as "holiday" routine? In other words, did one necessarily have to get up at a particular time on a Sunday?

Robinson: No, no. No, Sunday was a relax day, in a sense, because there wasn't too many people there on base. A lot of them had gone and stayed overnight and didn't have to be in. We didn't serve as many on Sunday morning as we normally did.

Marcello: So anyway, you get up and you go to the chow hall?

Robinson: Right. It's in the same building. And that's what I did. A fellow by the name of Rickard, who was a friend of mine, was a metalsmith--seaman second class. We had gone through school together. He was down in the squadron, down at the hangar, and he had the duty that morning--the guard. And I told him that as soon as I got through cleaning up, I would come down and play ping-pong with him to while away the time. And there's where I was headed.

We'd got through serving, cleaned up, and I'd gone out that backdoor of the galley and had walked about a block when I heard the first explosion. I didn't connect it with a bomb or anything, and then there was another explosion right after that one--just shortly--and it was somewhere up around...if I'd been looking

that way, I still wouldn't be able to see which ship it was, but it was somewhere up around the West Virginia or Arizona, in that area. There was two explosions pretty close together, but it still didn't bother me. I really didn't know. .but it didn't bother me. Planes were flying in the air. There were not too many real close, but I could hear a few. That didn't bother me because we were on the airfield, and I was used to that.

Then I heard about two or three more explosions. And then I knew. You know, "Dumb Me" knew something was wrong. It was unusual, and I knew that something was wrong. Then there was a plane banking right above me. I could hear it, and I looked up, and he was lower than the water tower. He was down below the water tower, and it was a Japanese plane. I could see the two men in it, and it had the rising sun on each wing tip.

Marcello: You did know that it was the Japanese plane?

Robinson: Oh, yes, but the only way I knew it was by the rising suns.

Marcello: Could you distinguish the physical characteristics of the two crewmen?

Robinson: No, no, but they had flying helmets on. I could see that. No, I couldn't. I could see them, but not their faces or anything.

Marcello: Okay, so what do you do at that point then?

Robinson: Well, I'm about a couple blocks from the hangar, and

about that time, I guess. .at the A and R there was a curve in the road, and part of a building goes up, and I could see it past the A and R building. The A and R building was cutting me off from seeing it until it gets up in the air. I can't see the bottom of it, but I see it when it gets up in the air. It's the building past it. It's part of the hangar of the PBY squadron.

Marcello: What is the A and R building?

Robinson: That's the Assembly and Repair shop--a big shop. It wasn't hit, but the building just past that was hit.

Marcello: We're talking about a huge hangar that you saw being hit, are we not?

Robinson: It was hit, yes. I didn't see it hit, but I could see parts of it go up in the air. So I turned to go back to the barracks, and I really didn't know where I was supposed to go, except I assumed that's where I was supposed to be.

Marcello: You had no battle station, obviously.

Robinson: No, no, not that I knew of. I wasn't assigned one. But anyway, I went back up to the barracks, and I got back up to the barracks. Before I did that. .there was a swimming pool outside of the barracks for us, for the men, right by the beer garden there. And as I got up to the swimming pool, there were some planes dive-bombing over at Hickam Field. I've always heard about these planes laying eggs, and, honest to goodness, the planes,

when they would pull up, it looked like little oval white eggs coming out of those planes. This was across the harbor--a good little ways from me--and it looked like just eggs coming out of there. And I stood there. I wasn't fascinated or anything, but I stood there and watched that, and then I went on into the barracks. I don't remember even the directions there, but I went in one end of the big barracks, and there was a big, long hallway there. I started walking down toward the galley, and there was five or six men there--sailors. And they said, "What's going on?" And I said, "Hell, man, we're getting the hell bombed out of us!" I said, "What do you mean, 'What's going on?'" I said, "Look all around you!" And by that time there's fires that had even started out in the water, right there in front of us.

Marcello: What kind of a view do you have of Battleship Row?

Robinson: Well, the California is sitting right in front of us, and she's right...now you couldn't throw a rock and hit it.

Marcello; But you do have a good view of it?

Robinson: Oh, yes, of the California. Then the sickbay cuts you off from the Oklahoma, kind of. You could see the top of the mast of the Oklahoma (could see it until she went over). You could walk around, and you could see all of them, but at certain places that you were, the sickbay

and some of these other things would block your view. But we were right there at the harbor. They were tied up right to our island, so we had a real good view. However, they were down from us, most of the battleships were. The California wasn't. She was sitting right in front of us. She went straight down, where the Oklahoma turned over. The California just went straight down.

Marcello: So back at the barracks, then, there is a certain amount of disbelief.

Robinson: Everywhere. There was disbelief everywhere. I don't want to say there was havoc, but we didn't know what was going on. I mean, no one did. We wasn't ready for any of that stuff, as you know.

Marcello: So what happens next?

Robinson: Well, I get on down to the mess hall, and I'm standing there. There's a boatswain's mate who came in, and he said, "I want twenty volunteers. He didn't say what for. He just said, "I want twenty volunteers. I go with him, and we go across the road. You just go out the door, and there's a sidewalk and little bitty road there, then more sidewalk and then the Administration Building. It's just a short way. We went over there, and they was getting rifles out. There were three in a case, and they were packed in this cosmoline. It's thick. You could almost rake it off. And they gave us some bandoleers with shells, and they were Springfield

'03s. And I just came off of the firing range in boot camp not long before that, and I showed about eight people how to load those '03s. They didn't even know how to load the gun. I mean, we just wasn't trained.

Marcello: In the meantime, is the attack still going on?

Robinson: Oh, yes!

Marcello: Even right there at Ford Island?

Robinson: Right, right. And we went up on top of the barracks like a bunch of idiots. We wasn't hit with anything, but, boy, had we been hit with something, why, we would have been in trouble on top of those barracks.

Marcello: So there are approximately twenty of you up there on top of those barracks?

Robinson: Right, yes.

Marcello: What did you do when you went up there?

Robinson: (Chuckle) We had these rifles up there. We were all up there talking to each other, and one guy said, "Well, you gotta lead 'em! You gotta lead 'em!" I said, "Yes. I said, "Man, I duck hunted. I said, "You gotta lead those ducks. Well, we didn't know anything about leading an airplane, you know, and they flew fast. When they came down through there--those Zeros--we thought we were hitting them. There was kind of a little vapor, but we thought it was gasoline coming out the end from the wing tips.

Marcello: So you thought you were hitting every one of them?

Robinson: We thought we were, yes.

Marcello: Were you firing at these randomly, or was the firing organized?

Robinson: Whenever we could, we'd fire at them. And we were hitting, I guess, more people over there in the shipyard, you know, across the way, than we were Japanese planes. We were doing more harm, I imagine, over there. We weren't doing good.

Marcello: How many rounds do you figure you squeezed off?

Robinson: Oh, I imagine probably about...I know I got one clip fired, and I put another clip in. There's five in a clip, and I had another clip in there. I imagine maybe eight, probably.

Marcello: So you really didn't fire that much at them?

Robinson: Oh, no. Well, you don't fire a Springfield too fast, anyway, and those planes came through there pretty fast. And when it's coming straight at us, you didn't fire at them, anyway, by God! You hid (chuckle)! You got on the other side of that...they had these little parapets up at the top where it looked like they had added on to the barracks or something. They were built up, oh, about two-and-a-half feet high, I guess, and we'd get on one side of them parapets.

Marcello: Did you come under any direct strafing or anything while you were up there?

Robinson: No, not direct. I could hear shells hit the barracks--

it was stucco barracks--and they would splatter. It just, "Splat, splat, splat, splat, and then glass would break.

Marcello: How long did you stay up there on top of that barracks?

Robinson: Until that first wave was over.

Marcello: Then what happened? So this boatswain's mate is up there giving instructions?

Robinson: Nobody was up there giving instructions. The boatswain's mate didn't even go up there with us. No, no one was giving us any instructions.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you're up there until the first wave passes.

Robinson: Right.

Marcello: And then what?

Robinson: Well, we didn't know what to do, and everything calmed down for a good little while. Boy, things were burning and smoking, and guys was coming up out of that water with oil all over them. Some of them were burning when they were coming through that fire. So we came down, and we went over by the California there. Those guys were coming up out of that water there. A lot of them. .they was pushing that oil and stuff. They would come up out of there, and most of them were naked. I guess they'd taken their clothes off. But they had that oil--diesel, I guess it was--all over, and it was just lucky that they wasn't burned.

Marcello: I think it was even worse than diesel oil. I think it was bunker oil, which is what they used as fuel.

Robinson: I don't know what it was, but it was on those ballast tanks or whatever it was.

Marcello: So anyhow, they just looked in terrible shape when they came out of the water.

Robinson: And they were in shock. It happened so fast to me that I never did really go into shock or anything like that. I never even got scared until that night. But I know a lot of them that was on those ships did go into shock. Those guys on those ships got the devil blasted out of them.

Marcello: Okay, so you come down off the...no, you actually see these people coming out of the water and so on off the California.

Robinson: They come to shore, yes.

Marcello: When was the decision made to get off the roof, or why did you decide to get off the roof?

Robinson: Oh, not all of them did. Doctor, not all of them did. I don't know if there was any decision made. Like I said, there wasn't anyone up there to tell us to do this or tell us to do that, and there wasn't anything going on. We had the guns, and we went on down. Like I say, there was no one there to guide us or lead us or instruct us or anything. I don't remember seeing any officers or anyone that knew what they were doing.

Marcello: So what do you do then when .why did you make the decision to come down off the roof?

Robinson: I don't know. There just wasn't nothing going on up there.

Marcello: So what did you do then when you came off the roof?

Robinson: We came down and we went down by the Administration Building--this long kind of deal--by the California there, and we was kind of helping these guys up off that bank that were coming up out of that water. They would go into the barracks there, and they were trying to muster them there at the barracks. They also used the mess hall tables for the wounded. The doctors were using them. And they had a whole lot of wounded in there--a lot of them. We had a little sickbay there. It was just too small to even attempt to be of much good.

The officers had some homes there on Ford Island, and their wives and their daughters came down there and volunteered. They worked as long as those doctors wanted them to work, and they did exactly what those doctors asked them to do. They stayed right in there and worked in that mess hall with those wounded and hurt sailors.

Marcello: What did you do the rest of that morning and the rest of that afternoon, then?

Robinson: Well, I got on back to the mess hall, and we started

serving a meal. It wasn't much of a meal. I think it was a half of an apple and one piece of bread and some kind of a spread. It was kind of a sandwich spread. And that was lunch. That was all. We had people off of all those ships. Well, not all the ships. I mean, they were off of all the ships, but we didn't have all the sailors because they were scattered everywhere. But, I mean, it wasn't a question of, "You don't belong here, because they did. They were sailors, and they were hungry. But, gosh, we weren't offering them anything, anyway. But we offered them what we had, and I was serving the food there then.

I guess by that time they had already cleared all those tables out. Those doctors worked fast. I'm not going to say they were rough, but they worked fast. If they came to a person who was dead, they'd roll him off there. Then they'd holler for a stretcher, and they'd come and haul him off; and they'd bring another man in there and put him on there.

Marcello: So you were actually serving chow at the same time they were working on the sick and the wounded in there?

Robinson: That was on the other end. But then, like I say, I don't know just when they finished up, but it wasn't too long. I guess they probably took them all over to the Navy hospital. I'm not sure.

Marcello: What did you do after the chow was served?

Robinson: Well, we had another chow that evening--one more. Then, like I told you, I wasn't never scared until that night. We heard all kinds of rumors. Doctor, we heard everything. We didn't know what was going on. You know, when you're a seaman second class, nobody comes first to you. You hear all that scuttlebutt, you know, that the Japanese have landed, and they're coming across the cane field there and all that stuff. Of course, you don't hear any shooting or anything, but you still hear all that crap.

Marcello: And you certainly believed it at the time.

Robinson: Sure, sure. And we hear that all the water was poisoned, sabotaged. Man, I'm telling you, we heard some weird stories. But later that night, when we got through. .we got everything all cleaned up and everybody served that night, and when we got through, we stayed down in the galley. We got our pads off of our bunks and our blanket, and we brought it down, and we got underneath these tables. That's where we're going to sleep.

There's an ol' boy there, and he was from England. He wasn't in the service, but he was over there in London when they was being attacked by the Germans bombers, and he started telling us about all these bombs and everything, you know. Goddarn, it scared the devil out of us--him telling us all that crap and everything.

It was dark, and we all laying down in there. And about that time, a siren was going off and everything--an air raid. It's these planes of ours coming in. Of course, we don't know it's our planes. We think it's the Japanese planes.

Marcello: These are those planes off the carrier Enterprise?

Robinson: Right, right. I think it was about five or seven of them or something like that. We thought it was heavy bombers coming in. Now, see, that doesn't make sense-- heavy bombers. If we'd stopped to think, they couldn't have gotten heavy bombers over there. I mean, they didn't have enough fuel to fly them that far. We didn't think or anything, so that's what we'd heard--heavy bombers coming over. Then we opened up with 5-inch antiaircraft guns and a bunch of other stuff, and, man, you couldn't tell if that was a 5-inch gun going off or a bomb hitting or what (the concussion and everything)

Marcello: What did the sky look like?

Robinson: I didn't look. I was underneath that table, man. (Chuckle) I was underneath that table.

Marcello: Did you still have your Springfield rifle?

Robinson: No, no. They got that long ago--long ago.

Marcello: Did you turn it back in or what?

Robinson: They asked for it. They asked for it, you know. They got it with my blessings.

Marcello: Did you get much sleep that night?

Robinson: Well, yes and no. After a little while. Well, I wasn't too young. I was twenty-one years old. I shouldn't have been that scared. But, of course, I'd seen quite a bit that morning, and I was pretty shook up that night--and especially at night--when you can't see something. Of course, I wasn't looking, either. Like you asked, "How did the sky look?" I wasn't looking at the sky. But that bothered me worse than anything--that night.

Marcello: Could you hear other scattered gun fire during the night?

Robinson: No. A lot of these ships was still firing some of their guns--those that wasn't completely destroyed or completely down. I think the California was still firing some of hers--I believe. I don't really remember it, but she wasn't all the way down.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Robinson: Well, I worked there at the mess hall, and when we'd get some free time, we'd go down to the hangar. They'd built a bunch of pillboxes up and had machine guns all set up. Boy, they were waiting for them to come across the channel there out of that cane field. All those rumors were still going.

Marcello: Describe the damage that you saw down there at the hangars and relative to the planes.

Robinson: We didn't have much; we didn't have much. I don't know how many bombs the whole Ford Island got. I really

don't know. We got one bomb in the sickbay. If you're looking at it from the top, it had a little patio right in the center of it. There was a bomb dropped right in that thing, and it was a dud. I didn't see this, but I heard this. It was a dud, and all it did was pushed up the concrete walkway that went around that little patio.

Marcello: How extensive was the damage to the hangar down at the airstrip?

Robinson: This one hangar was the most extensively damaged of all the buildings I saw--this one hangar. Now our planes and other planes...there was a couple of bombs that hit and...all this is concrete ground. We were bringing those planes in that came in from the water. We'd go in and put wheels on them and pull them up with a tractor--pull it up on the ramps and take them over to wherever they wanted to take them, And the bombs would raise up this concrete--pieces of shrapnel, concrete shrapnel--up in the air and then come back down. It came back down through the wings and through the fuselage of the plane and made holes or dents in them. And that's what damaged our planes.

Marcello: Did you have very many flyable planes?

Robinson: Oh, yes. All of ours was brand-new. They were brand-new. We had one after we got it fixed back up again. We called it the "Flying Patch. It had a whole bunch of patches on it. But they could all fly. They just

had a bunch of holes in them, and that added a little bit of drag, you know, but they'd fly

Marcello: Did you ever get involved in any work using your skills as a sheet metal specialist here?

Robinson: Did I ever get involved?

Marcello: Yes, right here in the aftermath of the attack.

Robinson: Oh, no, it was about two weeks after that, and then I worked like a helper. See, I was still. .well, I took a test and became a seaman first class. Then when I got a year in, I believe it was, which would be April, I took a test, and I became a third class petty officer--aviation metalsmith. But when you're a second class seaman and a first class seaman, you work normally as a helper.

Marcello: Describe the damage that you saw down at Pearl Harbor itself, that is, to the ships and so on. Describe what you saw when you had a chance to look at it after the attack was over and so on.

Robinson: I saw the Nevada. I was up on the barracks when the Nevada left. When she took off, I saw her make that curve down there. She looked like she was trying to go around over here on this left side, and then she backed up, and she put her stern in over here (gesture). Now I don't know what those directions are, but you come in the channel here, come in to Pearl Harbor, and there's a "Y" right here, and you go around Ford Island

(gestures). I don't know what those directions are. I really don't. Do you know where I'm thinking about? Right down here at this "Y"?

Marcello: Yes.

Robinson: I saw her leave. I read a book about her later, and I felt kind of good when reading that book. I didn't know a soul on that Nevada, but just seeing her go out of there made me feel close to that book for some reason or another. But the West Virginia..

Marcello: Well, let's talk some more about the Nevada. You see the Nevada going out. Describe the attention that the Japanese were giving to the Nevada. Did you see that?

Robinson: No. She was hit, but I didn't see it when she got hit again. I mean, she had already been hit, but I think she got hit with a torpedo, and then she got hit with some bombs. I didn't see her getting hit with either the torpedo or the bombs. I saw the Shaw blow up.

Marcello: Describe that.

Robinson: Well, there wasn't any describing to it. It was just a big blast, you know, and then we didn't see anything. I didn't know it was the Shaw. I didn't know it was a destroyer. I just saw the blast, and then later I heard what it was and what had happened. It blew the whole bow off her. And then I saw her when she left. I saw her when she left the harbor going back to the States, and they had a little ol' false bow on her--the funniest

looking thing you ever saw in your life. That thing didn't stick out there five feet, that bow didn't.

But getting back to this damage, everywhere you looked there was damage. And the ships were the ones that were damaged. We didn't get hurt. Ford Island didn't get hurt. We got bruised a little bit, but we didn't get hurt at all.

Marcello: You were going to describe the damage you saw at the West Virginia before I interrupted you. What did you see there?

Robinson: Well, I just saw the damage, I mean, all the twisted structure and the burnt structures and twisted metal and this and that. The ship was torn all to hell, same as the Arizona was. Of course, the Arizona was blown, I guess, in about three pieces. I think they finally decided that that's what happened. It damaged so much they didn't even really know how much it was. But the West Virginia was tore so bad.

And the fellows on the Oklahoma, they tapped for days. I don't remember how many days, and I didn't hear it. I was on Ford Island when all the tapping was going on. I was told about it. I could have gone down there and listened to it, but I didn't. Those guys was still alive down there in the bottom of that Oklahoma and were tapping on that metal.

Marcello: Did you observe the people trying to cut them out?

Robinson: Cutting them out?

Marcello: Yes.

Robinson: I saw the welders cutting holes, but I didn't see them come out. I saw them working up there cutting holes.

Marcello: When did that operation begin? Do you know?

Robinson: I don't remember when it began, but it was real quick, real fast. It wasn't too long before they had her setting back up again. They hauled her around to where they had the Nevada, and they took her right past the Nevada and brought her up to a little ol' kind of lagoon or something, and they set her there for a long time.

Marcello: I've seen pictures of those winches and so on that were used to turn the Oklahoma right side up, and that was just a fantastic operation. I don't know if you ever had a chance to see it or not.

Robinson: No, I didn't.

Marcello: How long did you remain there at Pearl Harbor before you left?

Robinson: Well, I don't know. All the PBYS left there and went over to Kaneohe, and we formed our Fleet Air Wing Two. I don't know when that was, but when they did that, that's when we left.

Marcello: And then you never returned to Ford Island?

Robinson: No.

Marcello: And how long did you operate off Kaneohe, then?

Robinson: Well, I came back in 1943. I don't even remember when

that was. I went on what they called "survivors leave. I think I was over there twenty-two months. Well, I could count it up and tell you when it was, but I was over there twenty-two months. I wasn't on Kaneoche all this time. That was my base, was Kaneoche. They changed that thing around, and they'd name it this and they'd name it that. I couldn't keep up with all of it. Well, what it was, they just put a bunch of the ground crew together instead of having a squadron here and a group of ground crew over here and a group of ground crew over here with another squadron. They just put us together, and we did all the planes--which was the sensible thing.

Marcello: But you still continued to do the patrolling and so on over there at Kaneoche?

Robinson: Right, right. And I went to aerial gunner's school at Kaneoche while I was still Ford Island, and you go into a flight crew. We didn't fly. I don't know why, but the metalsmiths didn't fly as much as the "mechs" (mechanics) or the radiomen or ordnancemen. Why, I don't know, but we didn't. But we'd get on a flight crew, and we'd fly several weeks at that position. According to what your rate was, you'd draw maybe half of what they call "flight skin" or a full set of "skins.

Marcello: What does that mean?

Robinson: Well, a full set of "skins" would be half of your pay

for flying, and half a set would be one-fourth of your bonus.

Marcello: Did all of this take place, however, after the Pearl Harbor attack and so on?

Robinson: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: Okay. Is there anything else relative to the Pearl Harbor attack that we haven't covered, Mr. Robinson, that you think that we need to get as part of the record?

Robinson: Not that I know of. Like I told you, my story would be boring. However, I've told it so many times that I ought to have it pretty good (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, well, I want to thank you very much for having participated. You said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments very valuable.

Robinson: Well, I hope so. I hope so.