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Interview with  
JOSEPH MCKINLEY  
April 23, 1988

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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(Signature)  
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Oral History Collection

Joseph McKinley

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

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Joseph McKinley 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. McKinley in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the destroyer USS Cassin during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. McKinley, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--that sort of thing.

Mr. McKinley: I was born in Temple, Texas, on June 13, 1920.

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

Mr. McKinley: I just have a high school education. I finished in 1938.

Dr. Marcello: When did you join the service?

McKinley: September 10, 1938, in Houston, Texas.

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

McKinley: I had some hometown friends that had been in the Navy, and I just liked it. I never had talked to anybody in the Army, and the Navy sounded like an ideal place to go, and employment was scarce for an eighteen-year-old then. So I just chose to go in there, and I figured I could get an education there.

Marcello: I was going to ask you why you decided to join the service, and I think you at least in part answered the question. Evidently, it was an economic decision for the most part.

McKinley: For the most part.

Marcello: That's a standard reason that a lot of people of your generation give for having entered the service. You weren't going to make a lot of money in the service, but there was a certain amount of security there and some opportunities for advancement.

McKinley: Well, I did have an idea that I'd put four years in there and save my money and come out and go to college, but the war began four months before my enlistment was up, so I stayed (chuckle).

Marcello: And, of course, what that meant was that you were in for the duration.

McKinley: Yes, for the duration. I came out in 1945.

Marcello: So you actually put--what--seven years in the Navy?

McKinley: Six years, eleven months, and seventeen days exactly.

Marcello: Okay, where did you take your boot camp?

McKinley: San Diego, California.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record, or was it the normal Navy boot camp?

McKinley: Well, it was normal to this extent. When they first began examining, I'd developed a sore throat on the way out. Well, they put me over in the dispensary, and after three days I wasn't improved, so they sent me to the naval hospital in Balboa. Me being a boot, those nurses and the people that were interning down there really pumped me up, and I was scared to death. They kept telling me they were going to send me home, and I didn't want to go home. But I finally got back to the station, and I started out a month behind the men that I had gone out there with.

Marcello: How long did boot camp last at that time?

McKinley: Ninety days. Three months.

Marcello: Okay, where did you go from San Diego?

McKinley: Well, from boot camp I went aboard the USS Cassin on December 31, 1938.

Marcello; And where did you pick up the Cassin?

McKinley: In San Diego.

Marcello: Was your assignment there something that you had asked

for, or were you simply placed aboard the Cassin?

McKinley: We had three choices of duty. Well, I had a buddy and we'd put in for a battleship, aircraft carrier, or air station, and they sent me to a destroyer. Now he went to a battleship, the Arizona. But I wound up aboard this destroyer, which, as it turned out, wasn't so bad.

Marcello: What was your reaction at that time to being assigned to a destroyer?

McKinley: Well, not too much, because, well, I was fresh; I was ready for anything. It wasn't exactly what I asked for, but the longer I stayed, I decided it was about the best thing.

Marcello: Describe what the Cassin was like. That's a rather broad question. Was it a new vessel or an old vessel?

McKinley: She was commissioned in 1936, so she was relatively new. The ship had been commissioned on the East Coast and hadn't been in San Diego too long. Well, the big story when I first went aboard was that they had had an explosion in the fire room before they came around, and several guys got killed. It was quite a story, and everybody was kind of in awe of what could happen because most of us was so young that anything excited us.

Well, of course, I went in to the deck force as soon as I went aboard. That's where everybody goes. But I immediately put in for the Engineering Department, which

within six months after I went aboard, I went to Engineering and remained there.

Marcello: Once you went into the Engineering Department, what particular rating were you striking for?

McKinley: Machinist's mate.

Marcello: How would you describe the on-the-job training that you received aboard the Cassin as you were striking toward machinist's mate? Was it good training?

McKinley: I think it was very good. As I said, all of us was so young, and a man that would be in his middle twenties or so, we'd consider him an old man. But they'd been in the Navy, say, five or six years. There were some that were running through that had in ten or twelve years, and they were "old salts"; and everything they said or told us about engineering, we believed it. Of course, we had the books to go by and on-the-job training. They had all kinds of drills in darkness and everything because many times you could get caught in total darkness; and in the middle of a ship, in total darkness you can't see nothing (chuckle). So most of the training pertained to such as that--starting the equipment and stopping it in darkness.

Marcello: Why did you decide to strike for machinist's mate?

McKinley: Well, as a deck hand or being in the deck force, that would be all seamanship, and I figured that in machinery, whatever I learned there, I could use after I

got out. Of course, most of it was steam locomotive-type engineering, but it would be beneficial, which it was when I went out and went into an oil refinery. It was very beneficial.

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

McKinley: Very slow. I can't remember the exact dates, but in engineering you went to fireman first class, which was the first engineering rating, but then a second class. They didn't have a third class machinist's mate, so then you went to second class. I was a second class when the war started. I had been in close to three years before I made second class.

Marcello: This was second class.

McKinley: .machinist's mate.

Marcello: Is it not true that at that time, in addition to having time in rank, you also had to pass the fleet-wide examinations, and then there had to be an opening for you?

McKinley: Oh, yes. They were competitive examinations--written. Of course, besides needing time in rank, they would have only so many ratings that were going to be let out, and you had to be in a certain category or grade to get it.

Marcello: Describe what the food was like aboard the Cassin during the pre-Pearl Harbor period.

McKinley: Oh, before Pearl Harbor it was great. Of course, a lot



of cooks took pride in their food, and they would cook it for everybody to eat; but some of them fed you any way they fixed it, and when you got hungry enough, you'd eat it. But most of the cooks had a lot of pride in their cooking. And there was plenty of it, and I thought it was very good.

Marcello: How were the meals served aboard the Cassin? Was it cafeteria-style or family-style in that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

McKinley: Before Pearl Harbor it was family-style. You went down to the mess deck and sat at a table, and they brought it down in what they call tureens. They were pots and they stacked one on another, and they had a rack so that when you was moving around, if the ship rolled, they wouldn't spill the beans all over the place.

Marcello: Did you take a tour of mess cooking?

McKinley: I did. That was the first thing that happened to you when you went aboard ship, was the tour of mess duty.

Marcello: I understand that on a lot of ships, though, mess cooking was also an opportunity to get a little bit of extra income because the people that you served would tip you on payday.

McKinley: That's true. I'd completely forgot about that, but the mess cook did get tips. The first time it happened to me, I said, "Shoot, I don't need that. I said, "I'm supposed to do this. And this guy, who was a first

class machinist's mate, looked at me like I was some kind of an idiot. I really began to learn then because I was green. When I went in the Navy, I was so green I had sprouts all over me (chuckle). I learned pretty quick, though, to take anything they gave me (chuckle).

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

McKinley: They were rather close. We had three bunks in a tier. I guess there was about twenty-four inches of space between the bunks. Of course, the top bunk had a little bit more space, but it had some superstructure to go across the top of it. But it wasn't bad.

Marcello: When did the Cassin move to Pearl Harbor on a more or less permanent basis? Now at the time you went aboard, it still may have been operating out of San Diego.

McKinley: Yes. In March of 1940, we went out there for fleet maneuvers, but then we stayed from then on.

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

McKinley: I loved it (chuckle). It was so good. .when we first went out there, my Lord, the businesses were very small, and Pearl Harbor then seemed to be a long way from town. There was a lot of open space between there and Honolulu, but since then it's grown up. But as the fleet stayed there and more and more servicemen became, you might say, temporary residents out there, that place really flourished.

Marcello: In general, as you look back upon life on the Cassin before the attack, how would you describe the morale? In other words, was the Cassin a happy ship?

McKinley: Very.

Marcello: What do you think was responsible for that?

McKinley: Well, congeniality. The people all liked and respected each other, and our commander was good. I think that had a lot to do with morale. Whatever the commander was, that's the way the ship was. If he was a sourpuss, well, he could cause a lot of sourpussing throughout the crew.

Marcello: Were you glad you joined the Navy at that point?

McKinley: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, now that the Cassin is out at Pearl Harbor, what I want you to do is take me on a typical training exercise that the Cassin would undertake while it was there. For instance, was there a particular day of the week when the Cassin would go out, or could that vary?

McKinley: I think it might have varied, but most of the time when we went out, we'd go on Monday.

Marcello: And how long would you normally stay out? Obviously, you would be working with other ships.

McKinley: Three to five days. We'd be in by Friday.

Marcello: That was pretty routine?

McKinley: Yes.

Marcello: I'm asking you that for a specific reason. In other

words, if there were people out of the Japanese consulate in Hawaii who wanted to know about the comings and goings of the fleet, they'd probably pretty soon be able to see some sort of a pattern.

McKinley: I think so. And I think they did (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, now normally when you went on these maneuvers, these training exercises, what would you be doing? What would the Cassin be doing?

McKinley: Well, we had torpedo runs, practices, and we'd practice a lot of anti-aircraft firing. Planes would drag a sleeve up there, and they'd fire at it. And we'd have depth charge runs where we'd operate with submarines.

Marcello: Destroyers do a little bit of everything, don't they?

McKinley: A little bit of everything.

Marcello: They are the workhorses of the Navy, I guess.

McKinley: Well, on a destroyer a machinist's mate's duties covered a lot of things. We took care of the steering engine, refrigeration, everything; and whereas on the larger ships, they could be more specialized and do just one thing and stay on that one thing. But that's what I learned to like about the destroyer duty, was that you knew a little bit about everything.

Marcello: Where was your battle station?

McKinley: It was in the engine room on the throttles.

Marcello: One of the things that's always kind of been a curiosity of mine is the so called "E" for efficiency. Did they

have that sort of thing when you were in the Navy?

McKinley: Yes.

Marcello: How did that operate for the engine room? How could the engine room get the "E" for efficiency?

McKinley: Well, say, for instance, you're talking about speed. You might wheel that throttle all the way open and zoom everything up a big shot of steam from the boiler room; and then you'd pinch back down to where you wanted it. Well, you didn't do that. When we were working for "E's, we eased up very slowly so we didn't rock the whole system and waste steam and the energy that came from it.

Marcello: Who would determine how you got the "E" or who got the "E"?

McKinley: Well, let's see. You went by squadrons, so I guess someone higher up in the squadron would look at your records. Every once in a while they'd have a group coming around from...it was made up of men from all the ships, and they would go to one and evaluate your operation.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about antiaircraft practice. What kind of antiaircraft armament did the Cassin have before Pearl Harbor?

McKinley: She had five 5-inch/.38-caliber guns, and they had four .50-caliber machine guns, and that was all.

Marcello: How did it change after Pearl Harbor?

McKinley: Well, I don't know how the Cassin would have changed because she got destroyed that day, but on all the ships they began taking all that old stuff off and putting 20-millimeters and 40-millimeters on there.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, could you detect any changes at all in your training routine? Now, obviously, as one gets close to december 7, conditions between the United States and Japan are getting worse. Was that worsening of relations reflected in your training that you could tell at that time?

McKinley: Not too much. The only thing is that when you were at sea at night, you were on a darkened ship, whereas before the national emergency we had everything going.

Marcello: Did you seem to be more alert for submarines or anything of that nature?

McKinley: I don't know exactly, but it seemed like we had more submarine contacts and submarine drills.

Marcello: Were there any rumors going around as to whose nation those submarines belonged to? Did you talk much about that?

McKinley: No.

Marcello: When the Cassin came in, where did it normally tie up?

McKinley: They had buoys and what they called "destroyer rows" out there, and you'd tie a buoy on each end. Your ships would be bow-to-stern to one another. It was like one

big happy family. All the destroyermen in that division knew each other, and you could step from one ship to another during the time that you were tied up.

Marcello: What was the liberty routine like for the Cassin when it was in Pearl? How did the liberty routine operate? Do you remember?

McKinley: Yes. Well, before the national emergency, we could go and stay overnight and had weekends off. But after the war started, liberty would be in the afternoons. Liberty was up to 5:00. You had to be back aboard, or if you had friends in the city, if you had an address and a phone, you could stay over. But you couldn't be out on the street because they had a curfew.

Marcello: But before the war, you could actually stay overnight?

McKinley: Yes.

Marcello: And on a weekend, what percentage of the crew might be ashore, and what percentage would be back on the ship?

McKinley: I'd say a little bit better than 50 percent would leave. Of course, to come back to economics again, a guy would make one fast liberty, and he might not be able to make one for a while until he saves up some money.

Marcello: Would you have perhaps every other weekend ashore or something along those lines, or how did that operate? Again, I am referring to that period before Pearl Harbor.

McKinley: Yes. You'd have one weekend out of three when you had

the duty.

Marcello: Normally, when you went ashore, what would you do? What was your liberty routine?

McKinley: I'd hang around on Waikiki Beach, or we used to go to a lot of movies. Of course, we drank some, too, at some of the beer joints. The Royal Hawaiian Hotel was a swanky one that every once in a while you could make a liberty in there and be first class for a while.

Marcello: Do you recall what the only two hotels on Waikiki Beach were at that time?

McKinley: Yes. Well, there was the Royal Hawaiian and the one across the street. I forget the name of it.

Marcello: The Moana, wasn't it?

McKinley: Moana, yes. Then the Royal Hawaiian Theatre was right across the street, too.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of a place called the Black Cat Cafe?

McKinley: I don't believe so.

Marcello: Well, the only reason I bring it up is because it was evidently the first establishment that one would see when one got off the taxi or the bus right across from the YMCA.

McKinley: Okay, okay. By George, I got off of that taxi many a time right there at that ol' Army/Navy YMCA, but I just don't remember the name of it. But what I do remember. .well, I was engaged to this girl, Maggie, back home, and there was a little bar right over there



called Maggie's Bar (laughter). I'd hang out there a lot and reminisce. And it must have went out of business because we were back over there in 1985--the first time I've been back since 1943--and I hunted all around for Maggie's Bar. I asked a few taxi drivers, and they never had heard of it, so I figured that must have been a different era.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about that weekend of December 7, 1941. Of course, we want to go into as much detail as we can. First of all, describe for me what your routine was. Well, first of all, let me ask you this. Where was the Cassin during that weekend of December 7, 1941? We probably need to establish that, first of all.

McKinley: Okay, we were in the Navy Yard for repairs. We were in the dry dock at the time, Number One Dry Dock. We had both of our propeller shafts out and all the way up to reduction gears, so we had those two big holes in the back end of the ship where the shafts went through, so that was open. There was two destroyers, the Cassin and Downes, and the Pennsylvania was in the stern end of the dry dock.

Marcello: How long had the Cassin been in that dry dock?

McKinley: Offhand, I can't remember, but it must have been. We'd been in the States. We left the States on November 12, came back, and we hadn't been back too long. We'd made one training trip out to sea because at that time, while

we were out on that particular trip, we got a submarine contact. Well, first we went to general quarters, and we didn't know what it was. We stayed at general quarters until daylight, and then we secured. Well, nobody could find out what happened or what it was all about. But I did find out from. .well, the Pennsylvania was out on that trip, too, because on the night of December 6, I was talking to this friend from Nederland who was on the Pennsylvania, and he said, "You know that contact we had last time we was at sea?" And I said, "Yes. He said, "I caused it. He was a radar operator, and he said he got a blip, and he said, "But it disappeared. And he said, "In a minute I got it again. He said the officers came in and got to looking at it, and that's when they put everybody at quarter quarters, because they figured it had to be a Japanese sub or somebody's besides ours. We didn't have any submarines out there. That was between November 12 and December 7, because we hadn't been in the yard too many days before they yanked those props out when we first went in the dry dock.

Marcello: Was your going into the yards more or less a routine kind of maintenance?

McKinley: Oh, it was routine.

Marcello: And obviously, while you were in the yard and in that condition, you're not in fighting trim at all.

McKinley: No. All of our 5-inch guns had parts up in the ordnance shops, and they were inoperable.

Marcello: Was the same true of the Downes, also?

McKinley: Yes. As far as I know, she was inoperable.

Marcello: Okay, what did you personally do that Saturday of December 7, 1941? What was your routine that day?

McKinley: Okay, on Saturday I think liberty started about 11:00 in the morning or 12:00, something like that. Anyway, I went ashore, and this fellow from the Pennsylvania was in the group, and there were three or four off the Cassin. We just spent the evening together. I don't remember all the places we went to, but I did a lot of Christmas shopping. I knew it was going to be close to Christmas, and I didn't want to wait until the last minute, so I bought a gift for my girlfriend and had it mailed home. They would do that from the stores. You didn't have to do it yourself. I'd bought a bunch of Christmas cards; and I bought some dungarees and some whites (the non-regulation type), and I had all them in a big package. Oh, I guess we must have got back to the ship around 11:00 or 12:00.

And then I got up the next morning, and I was going to go to the Arizona. J.D. Naylor, a friend from De Ridder, Louisiana, and I had enlisted together and had gone through boot camp together, and he was the one that got to go to the battleship, and I went to the

destroyer. But he'd sent me a guard mail letter to come over to see him. He said, "I need to talk to you. I didn't know why he couldn't come to me as well as I could go over there, but we were going to go over to the Arizona. Another Cassin buddy, Bill Meehan, was going to go with me. We were going to go see what J.D. had on his mind. We were going to go on to town from there.

But we were up in the mess hall that morning eating. We had our whites on, getting ready to go. We was going to wait until after Colors and then take off. Of course, it was during that time we was in the mess hall that we began hearing some sudden noises. Well, it sounded like underground explosions from where we were. And we got to wondering. It just kept being so persistent, so we went up to see what it was.

When we came out the mess hall, which was below decks, we came up on the main deck, and there was just a deafening roar. We wondered, "What in the world is going on up here?" Well, the carriers, when they were coming in, they'd send out planes on ahead of them, and they'd cut and dive and act like fools before they would land over at Ford Island. We thought that was the carriers coming in. Boy, there was planes all over the sky.

As we got to about the quarterdeck, I looked up, and there was a plane coming over. I could see that big ol'

red dot on the side, and the plane was sort of a green color; and the cowling was pulled back and the dadgummed pilot was waving to us as he came across. Well, we still didn't know what was coming off, and then we saw him swoop down. Well, the California was across the bay from us, and from where we were, we couldn't see exactly what happened. We could see him go right down the water, and, boy, in a minute there was a geyser of water that went up Lord-knows-how-high from the California.

And about that time I saw a string of dive-bombers coming down on the airfield. I saw them little black dots come out from the bottom of them, and they started pulling away. I thought, "Dadgum, them son-of-a-guns are dropping water bombs or something. I was still thinking that it was our planes. Of course, that red dot there, I hadn't realized yet that it was Japanese. When those little black dots came down, they hit in a hangar over there at the airfield. It just looked like that thing exploded. I said, "Man, this isn't play!" I said, "Somebody's trying to kill us! And then we realized they was Japanese. And I told ol' Bill. .we was standing right between the torpedo tubes. I said, "We're fixing to get killed!" I said, "We might as well light up a cigarette and enjoy it. (chuckle)

We stood there a minute, and I said, "Wait a minute!" I had two friends from Nederland that were

down below decks, J.P. Clark and J.W. Roberts. Well, I graduated from high school with J.P., and J.W. was a year behind us. But those fellows came in together a year after I did. I said, "I better go down and wake them up. They had been ashore the night before, also, and came back pretty well steamed up. Well, I ran down to the engineering sleeping quarters, and I started. .down there was so quiet with all those mattresses and everything, acoustics. They hadn't heard anything yet because all the main explosions was over at the airfield and Battleship Row. I started screaming, "The Japs are bombing us!" And I ran over there, and J.W. was on a top bunk, and I said, "Come on, boy! Get your clothes on, and let's get out of here! The Japs are bombing us!"

Well, they thought I'd come in drunk from (chuckle) town, and they was slinging their shoes at me and raising Cain. They said, "Shut up and get out of here and let us sleep!" Well, I said, "I'm not kidding!" Well, all the time I was pulling off my white uniform and putting on dungarees because I knew we was going to have to go to work. And it wasn't but just a few seconds or so after I got down there and had my big feud with them that a bomb hit.

But before that, though, there was a chief electrician that had come aboard to visit. He had been

transferred off a ship and came back to visit some of the men that were there, and he was in our quarters when I went down. He came running over there, and he said, "Mac, are you drunk?" I said, "No, sir, I'm not. I said, "The Japanese are bombing us!" I said, "If you can hear those sounds right now, they're blowing them battleships up out there! And, boy, he took off.

Well, in the meantime, Roberts and Clark figured I must be telling the truth, and then a bomb hit in the dry dock. Boy, it really shattered everything around there, and they didn't argue anymore. They started getting dressed quick.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. You mentioned that these guys were still in the sack yet. On a Sunday morning, if one didn't have the duty, could one remain in bed?

McKinley: Oh, yes. You could stay in bed all day if he wanted to. This being Sunday morning, that's the reason they were there. By the time I got dressed, Roberts and Clark were also dressed. We all ran down to the engine room. All three of us had a battle station in the engine room. We got down there, and that bomb had ruptured some fuel tanks. We had violated almost every rule in the book. We had fuel in our tanks and had ammunition aboard when we went in this dry dock. They didn't think we was going to be in there very long. But by the time we got down there, and this dry dock had begun burning. Fuel

oil was spurting out, and cinders were falling in there, also. And smoke and fire was coming up through those holes in the bottom of the ship.

Well, there was a chief machinist's mate down there, and he said, "Fellows, we can't do anything down here. Go up and do anything you can. Help the repair parties or help the gunner's mates. So we went running back up, and there was a gunner's mate hunting somebody with a key to the lockers where they kept our .50-calibers, which were down in the ammunition lockers. So we ran up to the machine shop and got a bolt cutter, and we was cutting the bolts off. There were several gunner's mates aboard, and they dragged those .50-calibers up on stands. Well, we was helping. We was dragging ammunition up there, and Roberts and Clark and I started belting ammunition while the gunner's mates was getting the guns put together. They were water-cooled guns, and we didn't have any water in the tanks. By the time they started firing them, they just didn't take but a few rounds before they started smoking and getting red hot.

And while we were belting, there was a tremendous crash. This machine gun platform...I guess it was about twenty feet-by-twelve or something like that. It had these two .50-calibers on it, and on the other end it had a rack for the belted ammunition. There was a bomb that came down through that deck. There was a



hole. .Lord, it looked like it was thirty-six inches, but it might not have been that big. But it had gone through the deck and went all the way to the bottom of the dry dock because it was armor-piercing, and a destroyer didn't have any armor. When it exploded on the bottom of the dry dock, all that concussion came up around the sides of the ship, and there was fire. It felt like it was something hot speckly hitting you in the face. Well, I thought I was dead then. Here again, I was getting ready to die (chuckle)

So after that, the chief boatswain's mate was on the deck below, and he hollered, "You guys come down here!" So we went with him up forward because they still had the idea of saving the ship and setting watertight integrity. So there was a ventilator that had been put all the way down the forward hatches. They'd been doing some work on the interior there. He wanted to pull that out so we could shut those hatches. Well, while we were pulling that ventilator up, it was...I guess it was about thirty-six inches around, and it had veins coming out from each compartment. Well, Roberts and Clark got down axes, and they was chopping the veins off, and Stratton and I were pulling the thing up. T.J. Stratton was a chief boatswain's mate. We had that thing almost all the way out, and a bomb hit not too far behind us and went all the way through the deck

again.

And by that time, we felt the ship tilt. It felt like it was going to go over, but it tilted toward the Downes. Stratton looked around, and he started hollering, "Abandon ship!" Boy, I guarantee you, they didn't have to tell me again. Off I went. Of course, we had to crawl up another deck to get to the gangway. It was a good ways over. By that time, that gangway was a sheet of fire--it was coming up from the bottom of the dry dock--so we all ran through that fire and got over to the edge of the dry dock. There was a concrete ramp right by the railroad track. It was a loading platform for boxcars, and we ran under there for a few minutes, and it felt like you was in a popcorn pan or something. It was just a constant crackle and pop all around you.

In a few minutes, we jumped out of there, and we started up toward the Marine barracks. They had somebody pass the word to go to the Marine armory and get a rifle and stand by to repel landing forces. So we got up there, and they was dragging those rifles out in these boxes. They were coated with cosmoline and everything. They had rigged a couple of temporary vats over there of diesel oil, I guess, to get that stuff off with. We'd shake them in there a couple of times and wipe it off with an ol' oily rag, stick a clip in there, and fire it up. I don't know why they didn't

blow up. They must not have had too much in the barrel.

But then we ran back down toward the dry docks where it seemed like all the planes were, and we got to fire real good at several dive-bombers that would come out. Their belly was exposed right to us, and I feel like I got somebody in the butt--at least one (chuckle).

Marcello: Now were these the Springfield bolt-action rifles?

McKinley: The '03 Springfields.

Marcello: How did you go about firing at these planes? In other words, was there an organized skirmish line, or was it simply every man firing for himself?

McKinley: Well, the Marines were trying to organize a rifle squad. They was hollering, "Hey, you guys, come here! Let's get all together!" They was trying to get us in groups, and when a plane come out, we were to fire at him in groups. But one wouldn't pull out exactly where you were everytime, and you didn't want to keep standing there because you might not get another shot. So we just kind of scattered. I got back down by the dry dock, and it seemed like a covey of quail. I'd be with a group of guys here one time, and next thing you'd find yourself with another group of guys. But they were all guys that I knew from the ship that I just left. We did that until it appeared that they weren't going come back anymore.

Marcello: How low were those planes coming in that you were firing

at?

McKinley: Oh, these were coming down, and they were so doggone close you could dang near smell his exhaust. Of course, he'd already dropped his bomb. He was just coming out, and most of them would come out strafing. If he hit you at that right angle coming out, he'd just. .because we had. there was one plane that came right down the middle of the road, and there was a commissary steward off that ship--he was a big, fat fellow--and he had fell down and began rolling. We didn't know that he'd been hit. When we got over to him, blood was running down in his shoes and squashing around, so we knew that he'd been hit pretty bad. We were not too far from the hospital, so there were corpsmen working out of the hospital. They came over and got him. His name was Brizetti. They took Brizetti to the hospital, and that's the last I ever saw of him.

Marcello: When those bombs were hitting the Cassin, do you think they were intended for the Cassin, or were they really trying to get the Pennsylvania?

McKinley: I think they were shooting at the Pennsylvania. We feel like we just got undershot and overshot a couple of times (chuckle). There were. .I counted two holes. I got back there on December 16 to salvage what I could from my locker, and I walked right in through a bomb hole in the bottom. But there were two holes, one

forward and one aft. Somebody said there was another one farther aft, but I never did see it.

Marcello: How many shots do you figure you fired that day?

McKinley: At the planes?

Marcello: Yes.

McKinley: Well, when we left the Marine barracks, they had bandoleers of ammunition out there. I picked up five of them. I had two hanging around one side of my neck and three on the other, and that thing was squinching my neck. I fired about half a bandoleer before I started dumping those things. They were strangling me because they were so dadgummed heavy, and I was running all at the same time and looking up. I guess I must have shot about ten or so clips before we gave up shooting at them.

But they had said to stand by to repel landing forces. We were waiting for somebody to tell us how to get down to where they might be landing, so we hadn't moved toward the channel any.

Marcello: So the rumors started pretty fast about the possible landings and so on.

McKinley: Yes.

Marcello: Did you believe those rumors?

McKinley: Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: You had no reason not to, considering what had happened.

McKinley: Considering what had happened so far, I would have believed anything they told me then.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you didn't get back over to that area where the Cassin and the Downes and the Pennsylvania were for the rest of that day? Did you get back over there?

McKinley: I went back over there and looked and saw the devastation.

Marcello: Describe what you saw--the devastation that you saw.

McKinley: Well, they had put the fire out in the dry dock. Of course, the Cassin was laying over on her starboard side. She would have been laying flat, but the Downes had her propped up to where she couldn't go any farther. The Downes was just sitting still, but she was just submerged. I don't guess there was any watertight integrity that held up on her. But the stern of the Cassin had kind of floated up; it didn't sink all the way down. But then there was the gangways and a lot of wood and debris floating all around; there was thick fuel all around because it was just gummy as could be. It was a terrible-looking sight, and sickening, too. I didn't see any bodies in there because I think most everybody got off of the Cassin--I know. But I don't know if everybody got off the Downes or not because she got hit.

Marcello: Was there any difficulty in getting off the Cassin, since you mentioned it had listed so much?

McKinley: Well, I think that's what the boatswain's mate thought,

that if it tilted anymore and if that bow fell down, we wasn't going to have any way to get off except crawl on lines. And that would have been pretty difficult with fire coming up the way it was. So I would say it was sometime during the latter part of the second attack that we left the Cassin.

Marcello: What did you see around the Pennsylvania?

McKinley: The same thing as the Cassin--just that thick fuel oil in there and all kinds of trash floating around. You could see powder cases and everything else floating around in there.

Marcello: What did you do the rest of that afternoon?

McKinley: Well, the rest of the afternoon...I think it was around 1:00 or 2:00 when they passed the word that if anybody wanted to eat, they were serving dinner over at the Marine kitchen. So we went over there and ate. I think the rest of the afternoon, they passed the word for all the refugees to gather up at the receiving station. They had a receiving barracks there not too far from the main gate. So we all went up there, and they were trying to get us categorized as to what ship men were from and trying to keep you all in one bunch.

Then, of course, it seemed like it got dark awful early that night. They were going to bed us down in the receiving barracks. Well, we got in there, and I was still dragging that rifle. I think I had about three

bandoleers still left with me. I laid down in a bunk and couldn't sleep because I was laying with that rifle laying right along aside of me. I didn't want that thing to get loose--in no way.

And it was about 9:00 that night when all heck broke loose. The story I got is that there was three Enterprise planes that came in, and they got the heck shot out of them because everybody was trigger-happy, anyhow. They told us, "Don't get out of these barracks for nothing because everybody is shooting anything that moves out there. Of course, they were starting kind of late, but that's the way it was then. Anyway, it took quite awhile for us to settle down after that night attack. We all got back in the barracks, but we couldn't do anything. We just sat around in groups and talked about what doom might be in store tomorrow. We didn't know what they might come back in the next morning.

Marcello: In the meantime, had you eaten at all?

McKinley: Yes. Around Sunday afternoon, as I said, they passed the word that they were serving over in the Marine barracks. So we went over to the Marine kitchen and ate and had a pretty good meal. Then that's when we went back over, and they was trying to get all the refugees. I didn't like that doggone name they stuck on us--"refugees. But that's how we spent the rest of Sunday



afternoon, and, as I told you, Sunday night.

Well, Monday morning it was almost the same thing. They wanted to try to keep all of us together, so they said, "Stay close to the receiving barracks, because when ships came in, they were going to assign us to them. All the ships in those days had skeleton crews, just enough to operate the machinery and part of the ordnance. I don't recall exactly, but we were busy all day. Then about 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon, they began passing the word that destroyers were coming in that needed men. Well, the first thing they called for, they said, "The USS Balch is over here at the fuel dock, and they want three machinist's mates.

Marcello: Which ship was that?

McKinley: The USS Balch. That's another destroyer. There was two others. There was two first class machinist's mates and myself. We'd been kind of sticking together there, and I said, "I'm ready to get out of this place. Stillings and DeLuca were the other two machinist's mates. They said, "Me, too. So we held up our hands. Well, there were twenty-five Cassin men, twenty-four besides myself, and we went to the Balch. Of course, right away she left the fuel dock and went out in the line and stayed tied up, and it wasn't very long because at 2:00 we shoved off.

But when we first got to the Balch, here again that

"refugee" label was on us. They put us in a fifty-foot motor launch, and we went out to the ol' Dobbin to get some clothes because we didn't have anything except what was on our backs. I'd left my billfold--everything--in my locker because I didn't know we was going to wind up the way we did. I didn't have a cent. We went aboard. We went out to the Dobbin. or it might have been the Whitney. I don't know. It was one of the destroyer tenders. Right after we got there, they went darkened ship. Well, she wasn't rigged for darkened ship, because when she went darkened ship, every light in there went off; and the storage room was as dark as pitch, so they sent us back to the Balch, and we left the next morning at 2:00 with still just what we had on our backs.

Well, some of the guys on the Balch were pretty generous. They let us have a change of clothes. But they talked to you like you weren't even American, like, "I wonder what that guy's doing here, when we just about got our tails shot off the day before. About the second day out, one of our men was standing watch on the bridge with Commander Brady, who was the division engineering officer. He said, "Jones, you stink!" He said, "I'm going to relieve you, and you take a bath and change clothes before you come back up here on this bridge. Jones said, "Sir, this is all I got--what I

got on. He said, "I'm off of the Cassin. He said, "I haven't been issued anything. Commander Brady said, "You mean you fellows have been aboard this ship two days and haven't been issued any help and comfort?" He said, "No, sir. So Mr. Brady broke out the small stores down there and gave us as much clothes as they had. I wound up with a suit of dungarees. They wanted us to pay for them, and we didn't have money. Mr. Brady said, "Give them credit. Mr. Brady is a famous man in my book (chuckle) because he took care of the situation.

We got back into Pearl on the 16th. They passed the word that none of the refugees could be granted any liberty until they paid their ship's service bill (chuckle). But Mr. Brady took care of that again. He said, "You leave them alone. They let us go back over to the Cassin and salvage our lockers, and I got my billfold and some other hard money. I had a dime bank and a quarter bank that I picked up.

But it took us about four months after the war to get a new bag of clothes. They issued you that according to when you went in the Navy. Now this fellow Stillings had gone in the Navy. Well, he had around fourteen years in. I think he wound up getting around eighty-something dollars for his bag. I got ninety-six dollars because I'd gone through in 1938. So that's the way it went, but it didn't anywhere near replace what

you had lost.

Marcello: Were you able to salvage things, then, out of your locker?

McKinley: Oh, no, no clothing because it was just completely sopped with fuel oil.

Marcello: How about your wallet and things of that nature?

McKinley: Well, the wallet wasn't any good, but I did take the money out, and I kept a black ten-dollar bill that I took out of that wallet as a souvenir and also a silver dollar.

But while I'm talking, I also want to mention that we shot up a ship out at Wake Island. We brought four Japanese prisoners aboard, and they hadn't been aboard ship. .of course, they stripped them nude when they came aboard in case they had any weapons of any kind.

Marcello: Just a second. You need to back up here for a minute. You mentioned that you. .I'm assuming that when the Balch went out, it went toward Wake Island?

McKinley: This was sometime later. This is just an incident.

Marcello: Oh, okay. But this really has nothing to do with the immediate thing--with Pearl Harbor?

McKinley: No.

Marcello: Oh, okay. Go ahead. That's all right.

McKinley: I'm talking about these fellows. They hadn't been aboard that ship fifteen minutes, and they had already made them up a toilet gear set, clean clothes, and

everything, and they was the damned Japs that had just tried to kill us! And we was "refugees, and we had to get a division engineering officer to get us a little bit of clothes or something. But, I mean, that's just an incident that happened. It kind of gets you the wrong way.

Well, let's see. .until the Balch goes on to other duties, we did get over, like I say, and got this stuff out of our lockers. I cleaned up my billfold.

Marcello: So then you do get back over to the Balch again, and does the Balch then leave for other duties?

McKinley: Yes. We went back out. That was our duty station then. She went on out, and she was operating with the Enterprise task group, Task Group 16. And I had a colorful career from then on.

Marcello: Would you mention briefly some of the other battles that the Balch had participated in after Pearl?

McKinley: Okay. The first trip out with the Enterprise that we took any offense was in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. They divided the two task groups into three groups each and hit six islands. We hit the island of Wotje. The heavy cruiser Chester and the Balch. I forgot that other destroyer's name. Anyway, there were two destroyers and a heavy cruiser that hit Wotje. We were just supposed to bombard and knock down a radio tower. That was the main objective. Since the last

reconnaissance, the Japs had put an air strip in there, and they had a bunch of airplanes come out and chase us out. We didn't get hit, but at that time for antiaircraft guns the Balch only had two quadruplet 1.1s--four barrels aft and four forward. The 5-inch guns on there were 5-inch/.38-calibers, but they were not dual-purpose. They were just surface guns. So the only thing they had was those 1.1s. Oh, they did have two .50-calibers. And we ran out from under one plane there. It did not keep coming down, so we figured then that they do get chicken sometimes and don't come all the way down because he veered away from us. One of our guns began jamming, and if he'd come on down, he wouldn't have had a single shot fired at him.

Marcello: What were some of the other. . .just mention some of the other battles that the Balch participated in.

McKinley: Well, we went to Wake Island after that. I don't know all the dates on this. We bombarded Wake Island. That was after the Japanese had taken it.

Then we went down to Coral Sea and rummaged down there awhile. We weren't in the task group when the Lexington was sunk, but we weren't far away.

Then we went back up for the Battle of Midway. After the initial attack, the Yorktown got found and got pretty well blowed up. Well, they detached...I think it was six destroyers that they detached from the

Enterprise task group, and we went back over to assist the Yorktown. By the time we got there, the second attack on her was just fixing to start. That's when we got in there. If the torpedo bombers hadn't come in...well, then she had started gaining headway, but the torpedo bombers stopped her. She listed pretty heavy, so they started abandoning ship. We picked up between 400 and 500 men on our deck. We was almost top heavy. They was trying to make all the guys go down below. We stayed with the Yorktown. After we picked up the survivors, we kept moving around. The next morning a heavy cruiser took them from us and went back to Pearl. So we just stayed with the Yorktown, circling her. There was a salvage crew that went back aboard. They was cutting all the guns off. She was listing to port, and they was cutting all the guns and everything off. They were cutting everything off on the starboard side and trying to right her a little bit so they could tow her back in. There was some tugboats coming out to drag her back to shallow water because she was in the deep part of the ocean.

That was on June 4 that she got hit, and I think it was the afternoon of the 7th when we had just gone alongside the Hammann. She was tied up alongside of her. We went along up close to the Hammann, and they came out, and they took all of our oxygen and acetylene

and all the hose that we had for them to use. They had a bunch of cargo nets strung along the side of the ship for the men to go up and down on. Just as we got steamed away from her and got opposite, everybody was out on topside looking, and I just wondered what was going to happen next. Just before we ever heard the explosion, we saw this big geyser of water go up, and then we began hearing explosions. This submarine--Lord knows how far out he was--laid. One torpedo hit the Hammann, and, boy, she was sunk in just a matter of seconds. Then the Yorktown. It seemed like she righted herself a little bit. She went back over and was sitting almost...by nightfall it looked like she was level, but she was way down. So we just kept going around and around. Of course, somebody went out and chased down that torpedo wake, but they never did get the submarine.

Then the next morning, we were fixing to go alongside and take the place of the Hammann, but just as it got daylight enough where you could see, well, she was heeled all the way up on her side, and her island was almost horizontal to the surface of the ocean. She just settled down and sank. That's all there was to her. Then we went back to the Enterprise.

After the Midway Battle, we chased around quite a bit. We went back down to the Coral Sea on a few



occasions, and I don't know the sequence of this. We went up to Adak, and we were in on some operations up there trying to keep the Japanese from building up there. That was bombardment that we did up there. Then we went down to New Guinea. We were in the. .I forget the name of that place. It was right past Hollandia. We were there on an invasion--supported the landing forces.

Then in 1943, we went to the States for a major overhaul at Hunter's Point in San Francisco. We got there on June 29, and we were worked on.

Then we left there about the middle of September and went back to the South Pacific. We hadn't been there very long. .well, in the bombardment the rifles of our guns were sticking out an inch-and-a-half or so, and we were going back to the Navy Yard in Brooklyn to be re-fitted with new guns of a different type. By the time we got around, the kamikazes had started hitting the carriers, and so they canceled our availability in the Navy Yard.

Then we started running convoys to the Mediterranean. I think we ran about six convoys while waiting for availability. Finally, we went in the Cramp Shipbuilding Yard in Philadelphia for a major overhaul and to rebuild the superstructure and such as that.

But when we came to the States in 1943, that's when

this Maggie came out to California. We were married, so when I went back to sea the next time, I went back as a married man (chuckle), and I was a little bit more cautious. I didn't surely want to get killed then.

Now we had some pretty good scrapes with those convoys. The first convoy we ran was about September of 1944, and they were still pecking away at them out there with their submarines, the Germans were. Our convoy didn't get hit, but just before we entered the Mediterranean, we ran across where one had been hit that it was ahead of us. Man, it looked like a vegetable garden. It must have been all supply ships that had nothing but reefer stuff in there. Well, as far as you could see, the sea was just strewn with fuel oil and vegetables and all kinds of trash that was floating around.

Marcello: So after you came back from that re-outfitting and so on, then you had duty in either the Atlantic or the Mediterranean.

McKinley: Atlantic, yes, and the Mediterranean. On our first trip in the Mediterranean, we ran aground in Oran and bent both of our props. We got back down to Bizerte, where they had a floating dry dock, and we went in there. They didn't have any spare propellers in that type over there to replace ours at that time, so they just had to make a temporary repair on it--beat them back in shape

as well as they could. Then we shook all the way back across the Atlantic until we went in the Brooklyn Navy Yard for new props and some more work. But the Balch wasn't very good for antiaircraft fire. They put the 40-millimeters on her, but her 5-inch guns were still surface guns.

Marcello: Did you stay on the Balch for the entire war?

McKinley: Yes, from December 8, I stayed aboard until I got out in August 27, 1945.

Marcello: Well, I think that pretty well..

McKinley: I would like this on record, though. I had a nickname, of "Maggie. When I was in boot camp, my wife now was my girlfriend then, and her return address was always bigger. Well, the mail orderly would call out the mail, and he'd call me out at first, but after about the first week, he'd just holler "Maggie. Well, they'd hand it to me. Well, the guys in the company started calling me "Maggie. And there was a whole bunch of us out of that company went aboard the Cassin, and that name went on. And when I went aboard the Balch, there were twenty-five of us, so the name went on. I carried that name even. .the Balch has a reunion every year, and when we go in and they start talking to "Maggie, my wife would turn around. I said, "They're talking to me, Maggie.  
(laughter)

Marcello: Well, that's probably a pretty good place to end this

interview. Mr. McKinley, I want to thank you very much for having spoken with me. You said a lot of important and interesting things, and I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments most valuable. You're the first Cassin sailor that I've interviewed after all of the hundreds of interviews that I've done, so I'm especially appreciative of that.