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J. M. MYERS

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Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

J.M. Myers

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

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing J.M. Myers 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. Myers in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the light cruiser USS Honolulu during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Myers, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born and where you were born.

Mr. Myers: I was born on May 16, 1920, in Coke County, Texas, in the little hamlet of Tennyson, Texas, named after Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Dr. Marcello: Okay, when did you join the service?

Mr. Myers: March 13 or 15, 1940, for a six-year enlistment.

Dr. Marcello: And why did you decide to join the service?

Myers: I think the Bible is against it, but this fortune teller said we're going to be in war--that fortune teller by the name of Rufus Baker there at Tennyson. I knew that they were starting conscription, and I felt like, well, I would be gone. They wouldn't get to tell me I had to go. I thought that, well, maybe I could work my way up a little bit, you know. Then I'm a pretty smart calculator, but I miscalculated. After the war started, people that went to school came aboard the ship with higher rates than what we had that wasn't drafted. Of course, they didn't volunteer. They said they had to go.

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

Myers: It paid \$36 a month against the Army's \$21.

Marcello: What was the extent of your education at the time that you entered the service?

Myers: I want to try to be a little humorous. I kind of wanted to be like my cousin. They wanted to know what grade he was in, and he said he thought he was in the tenth grade because he wore out ten primers (chuckle). Anyway, I was in the eighth grade. I'm still there. I may get out some day. I don't know.

Marcello: How difficult or easy was it to get into the Navy at the time that you entered in 1940?

Myers: I nearly feel like it was wide-open because I'm flat-

footed and they accepted me.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Myers: San Diego.

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

Myers: Three months.

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?

Myers: Well, I don't know. I probably wouldn't know what normal was. But our CPO was named Hogan, as I best remember, and he always kind of reminded me of a frog. Of course, I don't know what I reminded him of, you know. But I guess the saddest thing is that my nose blistered real bad. And people would put their clothes in to soak. That's what we had to do--wash the clothes every night. We had to. They'd go to the movie and come back sleepy and forget the laundry, and that little chief was there the next morning seeing, you know, clothes still in the laundry. They had their name stenciled on there, and they'd have to take clothes stops and make them little hanger belts and wear those clothes and that bucket all day around their necks and in all their drilling. And all those clothes would fall out on that black grinder, and they were a mess by the time we were secured.

Marcello: Where did you go from San Diego?

Myers: I went to Long Beach.

Marcello: And where did you pick up the Honolulu?

Myers: On the 1st of July, as I remember, there at Long Beach. We went up to San Francisco for the Fourth of July. Of course, I was fresh out of the cotton patch. Well, I'd been through years in the Civilian Conservation Corps at Lake Brownwood. I hadn't been assigned no division. We were going under the Golden Gate Bridge, and I was in the flag detail aft. I looked up, and I thought we wasn't going to make it under that bridge. I was standing on the main deck and watching the foremast, main mast, the stacks; and I about panicked, and I thought, "Well, there's somebody up there on the bow that's surely watching, the lookout and the crow's nest and all that stuff. And I didn't want to show myself, you know, I guess, to be panicky. I didn't go up and tell them, and we got under the bridge all right. Then they said we had a twenty-one-gun salute before and after we went under the bridge. My brother was in the Army there at Fort Roscrans, if I think right, and I got to see him very briefly. That was in 1940, and I didn't see him any more until after he was discharged in 1945. He was in the Battle of the Bulge in Germany and nearly froze to death. Then we went on to the Puget Sound, Bremerton Navy Yard, for nearly three months of overhaul.

Marcello: Did you volunteer for duty aboard a cruiser, or is that simply where you were sent?

Myers: To my knowledge, I was just sent there.

Marcello: And once you went aboard the Honolulu, what was to be your function or responsibility? Did they put you initially in the deck crew?

Myers: No, we were allowed the luxury of requesting what division, I guess, and someone told me to ask for B Division, which was the "black gang," and bilge diver, which is a watertender with his brains baked out. Some "tin can" sailor told me, "They let the firemen out of the fire room on groundhog day." (chuckle) But I requested to the engineers force, whatever, anyway, below decks on the account of my complexion. I was real red-headed at the time, and thin-skinned in more ways than one. So they assigned me to the B Division.

Marcello: And what were you striking for there?

Myers: Well, I guess you can strike for anything that's open in any divisions, and I think you may use the terminology that I'd be striking for fireman first class.

Marcello: I'm assuming, therefore, that all of your training for fireman was on-the-job training.

Myers: Right.

Marcello: As you look back on that training that you received from the senior people aboard the Honolulu, how would you consider that training? Did they seem to go out of

their way to help you and train you well and so on?
Were they cooperative?

Myers: Well, I wouldn't say so. The best I can understand is that it was kind of the old Navy, and they just--to me--didn't teach you like I felt like you ought to be taught. Of course, the larger the ship, the less responsibility you've got.

I may ought to say this here. I went on the USS Taylor later. Benjamin Katz, a Jew, was skipper. A second class watertender stood top watch on the destroyer--same responsibility. But you take a light cruiser, and the chief on this stood the top watch, or maybe a first class watertender. So you get second class watertender, first class, and chief. You got more or less two rates below those on a cruiser with the same responsibility.

Marcello: And what was this ship you went on after the Honolulu?

Myers: USS Taylor, DD-468. Of course, I was on four ships altogether. We may get to that later.

Marcello: Coming from the country, more or less, what was your opinion of the food aboard the Honolulu?

Myers: Well, I might back up a little bit. My dad asked me not to go in the service, but it seemed like I might ought to. Then there wasn't many jobs, and I wasn't very well-equipped for any trade. I don't know. I guess maybe I was getting homesick before we got to San Diego,

and I had been kind of wondering if Dad wasn't right. So we got there Saturday morning, and they had beans and cornbread for breakfast, and I thought, "Well, I guess maybe he knows more about this stuff that I gave him credit for." But the food overall was good. The recruiting officer said you'd get a balanced ration. Of course, I was pretty well up on everything [facetious comment], and I imagine I knew about as much about a balanced ration as Daddy's mules did. But it was chow. Of course, the Navy said you can fatten a pig on slop, you know. Of course, it wasn't that bad, but I wouldn't say it was outstanding.

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

Myers: Well, they were close and confined. Of course, you had no separate compartments, and you just had a bunk with a little bitty thin mattress there and two blankets that they issued, G.I.-issue, I guess. When they allowed you to sleep, why, you thrashed the bunk down. They were held up by three-inch aluminum stanchions, and they were usually three or four bunks deep, just enough for a person to get out from between them. Of course, the sweetest thing about the Navy is when reveille blowed every morning at 5:00 or 6:00, whatever, the Navy looked in the eyes of the situation that everybody has had a nice eight-hour sleep; and you hit the deck, and you

keep hitting the deck. It didn't seem to be any leeway, any consideration, if you'd been up four hours or forty hours or forty days if you could live that long without sleep. I wished they would have considered it like we did. We stood four hours on and four hours off in Condition B. Well, there was General Quarters in the early part of the night, and you had the twelve o'clock to four o'clock watch, and when you came off, if you went straight to sleep, you got maybe two hours rest. And the Navy says, "Well, you know Myers. He's had eight hours as far as the Navy is concerned." And it could have been a lot more fun if they'd have looked at it that way.

Marcello: As you look back upon life aboard the Honolulu in that period before the attack at Pearl Harbor, would you consider it a happy ship? In other words, what was morale like aboard that ship?

Myers: Well, I would say it was less than medium because I put it this way. Everybody's dream, I guess, is the Honolulu. I mean, it seemed like it--the pressure of it, the idea and the attitude. But the Honolulu had already been to its home port before I went aboard on 1 July 1940, and, you know, it'd done been wrote off. You went there with the idea of not wanting to go. I'll put it that way. Of course, Diamond Head is a dull piece of real estate there (chuckle).

Marcello: Are you saying that you didn't necessarily like the Hawaiian Islands or that you weren't too thrilled to be there?

Myers: No, but I don't want to get too far ahead. If I can, I'd like to work up to that. Of course, I don't guess it don't make any difference. But anything in that business there was military men. Well, I was just reading here that there were 52,000 people there when they bombed on December 7. But, you know, we had a little "goody" along the way, but my buddy and I, H.C. Swink from Pasadena...he was a seaman. Our time there in Puget Sound was getting the ship ready for war, as I look back at it. Of course, whatever its worth or not worth, I ate my first tuna sandwich there, and it was delicious.

But they found out some things from the British already. They found out that insulation on the bulkheads and the overhead and the inlaid linoleum was lethal as far as fire. They found that out from the British. All right, they found out from the British that with a direct hit, you'd lose the whole division. Well, what if you lost all the quartermasters? If you lost all the firemen, I guess you wouldn't have no steam, no power. So they had integration, and they sent me portside forward up in the gunner's mates' department. I slept right next to a bunkhead. One of

our destroyers had run into one of our other ships in the maneuvers at night, and you wouldn't believe how much stuff that hull of that ship was hitting in the sea out there at night. I suppose it was logs, debris, and anything that would pollute the water eventually. It was just a little bit queasy, you know, nerve-racking. It wasn't hitting the hull of the ship all the time, but you could hear it. We slept evidently just about at the waterline, second deck.

I don't know whether I ought to mention this or not, but we had a gunnery officer on there...and maybe I ought not be a name-caller, but he'd come down and hold inspection after working hours. He was a terror--come down there just ranting and raving. Of course, I guess he had the authority if he wanted to, but it was more or less against the setup of the ship.

But, anyway, we were there the three months, and if my mind will look back, the Navy was getting that ship as totally ready for war in 1940 as anybody knew how to get it ready. And that's the reason this surprise attack just galls me; I mean, it totally galls me. I guess I was one little ignorant cotton chopper. I went to my first reunion of the USS Honolulu in Jacksonville, Florida, at Lawrence Park, and there was an Italian there from Syracuse. I think he came aboard as a gunnery officer after Pearl Harbor. He was asking me,

"Well, did you see anything?" And I related to him what I've been saying to you. I says, "In my mind we were about the most ignorant citizens of the world was out there." And I says, "This is one thing I could see even then. Why would we go to all that preparation in 1940 and about a couple of years before it all started? I don't know what our intelligence had, but if you hadn't read the 'Seaman Z' in the Pearl Harbor Gram, you ought to read it. The War Department knew all along that this thing was 500 miles from Japan."

Marcello: Okay, now we're getting a little bit off your story of what happened at Pearl Harbor, so let's kind of get back on track here a little bit. Let us assume that the Honolulu is now at Pearl, and you're operating out of Pearl. Take me on one of the typical training exercises in which the Honolulu would engage at that time. First of all, when would you normally go out on a routine exercise?

Myers: We were scheduled so that we was in a week and at sea a week.

Marcello: Would you normally go out on a Monday?

Myers: As I recall, yes, but I really don't know. But it was whatever they called a week. I remember that anytime the Navy got underway, it was on maneuvers, so I remember the week before Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: I don't want to get to that point yet. Let me follow up

on what I just said. So, in other words, if anybody were tracking the movement of the Honolulu and the ships that operated with the Honolulu, they would very shortly be able to detect a certain pattern.

Myers: Right.

Marcello: In a week, out a week; in a week, out a week.

Myers: Yes, that's my memory of it.

Marcello: Okay, what would you normally be doing on those maneuvers once you were out there, or on those battle exercises, during one of those weeks that you were out at sea. This is before Pearl Harbor, and we'll talk about that week before Pearl Harbor in just a moment. Let's just say, you know, several months before Pearl Harbor. What would you be doing out there on those maneuvers?

Myers: Well, I really couldn't say with no authority because I was always below decks and wasn't ever on the gun station. But we was always maneuvering, getting certain speeds on the indicator down there. It was very uncomfortable. At least it was for me. Of course, they had night battle practice and all that stuff and gunnery practice. Of course, I was always on the twelve to four watch, which I hated. But it seemed like we probably secured under normal conditions around 10:00 at night or midnight, but I'm going to say 10:00. I have a faint memory of that, but I can't remember being in the battle

station all night on maneuvers.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7--and I'll let you talk about what you were going to mention awhile ago--let's say even that week before the attack took place, could you, even in your position as a member of the black gang, detect any changes in the training exercises or training patterns of the Honolulu?

Myers: There could have been. Of course, I should have said awhile ago that my battle station was normally in the number three fire room. But this week before Pearl Harbor, I must have been changed around. My battle station was on the second deck there in fire control. Of course, all ventilation was shut off, and it's hot out there normally even if you got ventilation going. If we was dragging that fire hose around, we was almost wringing wet with sweat. Sometimes we'd get in games, and the heavier ones would win. They perspired more than us smaller ones, and as the ship rolls from port to starboard, well, our sweat would start a race across the deck, you know (chuckle). And we kind of amused ourselves that way.

Marcello: Did you detect any changes in your training as one gets closer and closer to December 7 and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to get worse?

Myers: Well, I wasn't really aware of any of that, but I'm sure

there could have been some. When you get ready, I'm going to say that at least the night before we came in for our week in port, there was a change then.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, did you perhaps have more general quarters drills?

Myers: There was always too many whatever they were, but most likely there was because I would suppose that intelligence and Admiral Kimmel...and I should mention that he was aboard our ship when I went aboard--Admiral Kimmel was--and he was a very nice admiral. I was such a good sailor that it didn't take him long to make commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you perhaps also detect that there were more times when the ship was sailing under blackout conditions as one gets closer and closer to December 7? Were you able to notice that?

Myers: Well, not being on the gun station, I wouldn't be very aware of it because I was below decks most of the time. But I'm going to say we didn't. I don't think we did.

Marcello: Normally, when the Honolulu came in, where would it tie up?

Myers: Again, not being on the deck force, I was never aware where we tied up, but I think they said it was Pier Ten-Ten. The Saint Louis was, I guess, normally tied up starboard to us. We would tie up to the dock.

Marcello: Describe how liberty was organized aboard the Honolulu

once you came into port.

Myers: I don't know who had preference. If it was like I think, you had four different liberties. Of course, later it was port and starboard, I think, or vice-versa. But let's go this way. If port had liberty the last time we was in port, well, I'm sure starboard had liberty the next time we entered. I just never did notice no pattern that way.

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

Myers: Well, I had to see a little scenery, and I drank some beer. I couldn't drink very much. But, anyway, this guy, H.C. Swink from Pasadena, we used to go to a little place there south of Aiea Park there in Honolulu. He was a mischievous little fellow. Evidently, a Chinaman owned it or had it rented, and they had a bartender there named Emily, a native Hawaiian, and she got to liking us pretty good. We had opportunities along the way, which we could see. She invited us to a luau, but my buddy didn't want to go. We didn't go, but I still think what a mistake we made not going because that would give us a chance of...everybody didn't have that luxury of being invited to a luau. But, anyway, we set at a table kind of like this that had braces under it, and my little buddy would get them cans of sardines and stuff and kind of slip over and hide them under that

table, and that Chinaman would look back. It wasn't fun to him, but it was fun to Swink. But we'd feel something bumping our legs, and he'd be in there counting how much money Swink owed him, you know, sardines or whatever, and he'd go over there and tell Emily how much money Swink owed him, and he'd pay her. But, you know, I guess it kind of broke the monotony of things, and I still regret we never did get on a luau. We just missed a golden opportunity.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into those days just prior to the attack. Let's talk about that weekend of December 7, Mr. Myers. When did the Honolulu come in?

Myers: As I recall, my last time at sea, or our last time, as I say, my battle station was in fire control or whatever. Somehow I just got the "jibbies," I suppose, as I look back on it, and I probably broke regulations. I went on topside, and the good Lord let me see a little bit of the picture of our strength, I guess, naval strength. During this night battle practice, I know they did a lot of firing, and a lot of times, if they fired into the wind just right, we had a forced draft fire room, and it pulled all the air from the fire room. The blowers couldn't put the air down in there, and the fire would jump out of the fire box, so we'd tend to stand away from there as much as possible. Of course, we had eight burners. But as I went on topside...and I can't

remember this target out there. A tug was towing a target at about twelve or fifteen miles out there. And as I looked, we'd fire fifteen of those 6-inch projectiles at a time. They was hitting that target, and I remember that. It was fluorescent, and you could see the "boogers" flying through the air. It was a beautiful sight. It was like, I say again, I can't remember a searchlight being there. About that time the secondary battery turned loose, and, of course, all those guys do everything by training because you can't see nothing up there where they're firing. I mean, it's just blinds you.

As I get the story--of course, I went back down to my battle station--a submarine surfaced right in front of that target. This is what was told to me. For about two hours that submarine stayed right in front of that target. Let's come back to the searchlight again. Maybe it was on it. I don't think we had radar at the time that would pick that up. Anyway, whatever, we didn't fire on it. The Good Lord blessed us or punished us not to fire on that submarine. Finally, after around two hours, that submarine commander, sitting there waiting for a fifteen-round salvo to hit him, maybe he just gave up. I don't know (chuckle). But that's not supposed to be the way they think. My thinking is that I shouldn't add no thoughts to this, I guess, but I

believe it would have saved Pearl Harbor had we have fired on that submarine. I think that the military would have been more alert. But this is my thinking for whatever they wanted to prove: "U.S. Warships Fire on Japanese Submarine in Neutral Waters."

Marcello: Did this occur in that week before the attack?

Myers: That was Friday, in my memory, before December 7.

Marcello: Okay, so when did the Honolulu come in? Did it come in on that Friday or Saturday?

Myers: Okay, my recollection is that we came in on Saturday afternoon, and we was almost coming in the harbor, and we turned around and went back. The "old salts" on there...things were going wild. I guess the USS Worden was out there. But everything was going wild, as I said, looking for submarines. Of course, I ought to have a higher thought than this, but I think they got hold of the War Department in Washington, which said, "Friend, anybody can make a mistake. Go in, tie up, and go ashore." That was my thinking, and maybe I shouldn't add that.

Marcello: So when did the Honolulu come in? On Friday or Saturday?

Myers: Saturday by my thinking.

Marcello: How did you spend Saturday?

Myers: Well, the routine to working in the fire room was to do whatever needed to be done--maybe cleaning bilges down

there right in the bottom of the ship. There was some oil in there, but they kept the bilges very clean. You understand that. You'd polish brass, whatever.

Marcello: Did you go ashore that evening?

Myers: I went ashore.

Marcello: Do you recall what you did?

Myers: I was several places around Honolulu, and somewhere I ran into a Coast Guardsman. I've had a hard time figuring out what kind of guy he was. But everywhere we went that night, he was telling about submarines. Now I really thought he was a smart-alec at first, just wanting everybody to know that he knew. But the last few years, I've named him the Paul Revere (chuckle) of Honolulu. But I felt like he wanted to get the message out, and he kept saying, "We know, we know, we know the submarines are out here, and they're not ours." The Coast Guard knew that. Surely somebody with more authority or rate than a seaman passed that on out the line, somewhere. You know, how could they ignore it? It was evidently ignored.

Marcello: So what time did you get back aboard ship that night?

Myers: Well, I'm sure we had what they called "Cinderella liberty." We had to be back at midnight. I might go into the inspection. I don't know. It's going to break this, but, anyway, I was laundry petty officer from being put up there. That didn't give me no extra

prestige and probably laid it on me. I was laundry petty officer, and I had dropped the laundry. The next morning, on December 7, about 8:00...

Marcello: You had dropped the laundry where?

Myers: At the front of the laundry. That was across the way from the "gedunk" stand.

Marcello: In other words, you would be collecting everybody's laundry in ditty bags or whatever?

Myers: Well, it was a mattress cover, as I remember, you know, whatever width and length the mattress cover is. I did it for that compartment, and that was all. And you done that on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Marcello: So relate to me, then, your procedure on Sunday, December 7, from the time you got up until all the activity took place.

Myers: Well, I dropped the laundry, and the bugler was in the process of blowing General Quarters with the bugle. But it seemed to be, well, that he wasn't in tune, I guess, because I said in my own mind, "Well, he's a new bugler out of school, and he just came on board ship, and he's nervous." Well, as soon as he shut down that bugle...I don't know the name of the officer-of-the-day or the officer-of-the-deck, but he came over that PA system screaming. He said, "This is an air raid! It's not a drill!" I guess from zero to ten, the Navy on any other day except a holiday or Sunday was probably real fast;

but on Sundays and holidays, they were very slow getting to their battle stations. Of course, I understand the Japanese embassy had a party that night for all the officers, and, of course, that was sweet because they knew how the officers were going to feel the next day.

From the time I was telling you about--the submarine there--well, my battle station then had been changed. I don't remember who changed it. I guess the chief changed it. But I went down to the number three fire room and put on JV phones, and that's connected with all engineering spaces--four fire rooms and both forward and after engine rooms and the smoke watch. The smoke watches in peacetime were important because, if you were underway, the Navy wanted the efficient use of fuel. The Navy didn't waste nothing. It was very, very, very close with its funds. There just wasn't no waste. But in wartime, if you were at sea, they wanted a clear stack on account of maybe a lonely freighters way over there might give a message to the enemy somewhere, submarine or something. So, anyway, I went in there and put on JV phones, and the smoke watch happened to be on topside. One of them was. I guess there was four of them. He related everything pretty quick because I couldn't hear anything. He told me like this: the Arizona had been hit, California, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and, I believe, the Nevada. I believe there

was seven battleships hit.

Marcello: What was your reaction or feelings when you heard this?

Myers: Well, I don't remember being upset or pressured at all.

Marcello: In the meantime, is the Honolulu trying to get up enough steam to get underway?

Myers: I'm sure. Somewhere along the way, of course, I was down there where all that goes on. At that particular point, we wasn't underway, but as soon as everything got organized, we got in motion. That's what you do. That's what you're trained to do; that's what you're going to do. And you normally do it with your eyes shut. But they said a two-hundred-pound bomb went through the dock, and I'm sure it exploded there in magazine or powder room port side forward, not far from where we slept. Of course, I didn't know it at the time. I guess they gave word. The bomb hit the ship, and surely it shuddered and shook and quivered and all that stuff.

But in the meantime, a very slow machinist's mate came down in the fire room, and his battle station was there. I told him...and he was not a smart-alec or nothing. I guess that's just the American way of thinking. I told him about what I just stated, and he just waved me off, you know. So I'm going to say, whatever I was showing, maybe he didn't look me in the face; maybe I wasn't giving off anything at that point.

But, you know, he didn't believe it, so he went over there and sat down.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago about the bomb that slammed into the pier next to the Honolulu and exploded. We do know that it punctured your oil tanks and pushed in some of the armor plate, and evidently it was almost impossible for the Honolulu to get out of there. Do you remember the Honolulu losing any of its lights or electrical gear during this period of the attack?

Myers: Well, they may have that on fail safety, but I don't remember the lights going out below decks in the number three fire room. Now they could have gone out if they had it sectionized where maybe it had a breaker there that went out.

Marcello: Did you remain down at the number three fire room all during the attack?

Myers: Oh, yes.

Marcello: And essentially you were standing by there. What were your other buddies talking about down there? I'm assuming there are other people there besides you. What was the tenor of the conversation?

Myers: Well, as I mentioned, this machinist's mate went and sat down, and pretty quick our secondary battery began to fire. See, we hadn't really seen anything out of the ordinary. But being tied up to the dock in port...of course, I wasn't no "salt," just a boot, but this guy

had at least two or three hash marks, which means he had probably eighteen years in the Navy, a nice fellow. So when we began to fire our secondary battery in port, his battle station was to start the two air compressors that we had down there. He got up and started both of them, and that gives air so the fire control guys understood and put their gear on automatic so they could track the planes a lot faster. So that was his job. Well, finally somebody came down...I like to think it was a guy named Miller, a nice fellow. He says, "We're being bombed!" So then that really confirmed what the smoke watch said. He said, "We're being bombed!"

We had a chief...I was in the Navy six years, and I've only seen one guy that gave me a hard time, and that was our Chief Watertender Gibbons. He didn't mind laying it on you. He was a very, very overbearing person. He had as bad an attitude toward me as I had about him, but I wasn't the only one. Of course, that don't make me righteous or anything. But he told Steve Bernhardt...Steve Bernhardt, I think, was a second class watertender. This don't add up. Taylor was the chief watertender in charge of the number three fire room.

So, as I say, I had on the phones there until people got to coming down there because I was just a little ol' bitty fireman, and I just hadn't had my brains baked out yet from being a watertender. But, anyway, I know

surely I didn't have on the phones; Bernhardt wouldn't have on the phones; and surely Taylor, the chief, had them on. The chief says, "Bernhardt, start the fire room bilge pump." We don't have one in the fire room, but we had to call the number four fire room to open the bulkhead valves, start the fire room bilge pump. Water collects in there--some condensation, this, that, and another--now and then.

They sent down sandwiches sometime after 12:00, I'm sure, and I don't know what they were. We didn't get underway because we were too badly hit, but the Saint Louis did. But we were taking steam from the dock. We didn't even have the auxiliary boilers lit off. Of course, you're supposed to take about four hours, I think, to warm up the boilers if you're going to go by the book.

Marcello: Well, I think this is what happened to cause you to lose your power. Evidently, they were chopping the lines and so on, and somebody chopped the hose, in essence, that was supplying you with...connected you with power ashore.

Myers: With the dock.

Marcello: What did you do that evening?

Myers: You mean after the battle?

Marcello: Yes.

Myers: I don't have no idea, except I suppose we must have got

some rest. But the next day we was down in the fire room. We didn't have any damage there that I recall. Of course, where I slept--with the gunner's mates--this three-inch stanchion held our bunks up--four of them. They was kind of made into an "S" from that concussion. Those eight-inch I-beams along the bunkhead there was bent. I don't know how far that was from our compartment--where it went off.

But, anyway, the next day this chief...and I'm not mad at him about this. But he says, "Myers, you was really scared yesterday, wasn't you?" All I could say--I think even to this day--is that I was concerned. But, anyway, the chief said the day of the bombing, "Well, you boys are veterans of foreign wars now."

There was a destroyer that some guys abandoned. Maybe it was the Downes. The Pennsylvania was in the dry dock, and a destroyer was in there. I don't know how many days before, but we went in this dry dock watch up on the Navy Yard ground, and we had the 12:00-4:00 watch. It got tense. I don't remember too many times I ever felt really pressured. For a little bit, it was tense. We kept hearing a noise, and finally we looked back east, you know, just at sunup or daylight. This could be an exaggeration, but the air had a lot of planes in it, and there just wasn't nowhere for bomb protection (chuckle), and I probably stood there froze.

They just went on over and didn't drop any bombs. I understand the Enterprise, as best as I recall, brought planes in from stateside.

Marcello: When did the Honolulu finally get out of Pearl?

Myers: Well, I need to go back a little bit to the submarines. Evidently, see, they had a screen that was supposed to keep the submarines out, but during December 7, well, our Navy sunk two Japanese suicide submarines. Evidently, they didn't get to no ship. When they raised those submarines up...Love's made little soup crackers over there, and the Navy, when they had beans on Wednesday and Saturday, they'd have those crackers with beans; and I got to where I liked the beans pretty good for breakfast, and soup was good for lunch. These were aboard one or both submarines, so my mind says, "Well, they had to have a fake Navy Yard pass, or they had a buddy bringing it to them." And they had some other evidence there that they had contacts outside the Navy Yard.

Marcello: Now these were what kind of soup crackers?

Myers: Love's, a little ol' round cracker made in Honolulu. I hope they're still in business.

Marcello: How long did you stay with the Honolulu?

Myers: Oh, I haven't ever really figured it too close, but I left. It's a long ways up to there if you want me to keep going.

Marcello: Well, we don't want to talk that much about the time after Pearl Harbor. I'm trying to wind it down now and get some sort of an idea as to what your Navy career was.

Myers: Well, there was a little thought there hanging in my mind awhile ago that I wanted to bring up. I don't know how many days it was, so I may have to back up some. In December we came to Hunter's Point to get some of the British pom-poms. I don't think we went back in dry dock at Hunter's Point. The Navy didn't have no antiaircraft guns for the planes that were being built at that time. We got the British pom-poms, they tell me. I remember seeing them, and they had four barrels, and they'd fire two and recoil two. Now this is not my word. The gunnery department said they'd get hot and jam. I guess about the time you got right on that plane or whatever they was tracking, it would jam. Of course, I went on the USS Taylor. Is there anything else you want to know about this?

Marcello: Well, when you transferred over to the Taylor, did you remain on it, then, for the rest of the war?

Myers: No, no. We took a convoy--the USS Honolulu did--and I want to mention this little beautiful island. Whoever's listening here, if you ever get a chance, go see it--Bora Bora Island. It's somewhere between here and Australia. We took a convoy to Melbourne. That was

what I was wanting to say about how much time. I believe in March we left for Melbourne, so from December 7, we were in the dry dock at Hunter's Point leaving San Diego.

Marcello: Mr. Myers, that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you for taking time to give me your comments relative to the attack at Pearl Harbor. I'm sure that students and researchers will find your comments valuable when they go to write about Pearl Harbor.

Myers: Well, I went on from Honolulu to Boston in 1942 and went aboard the USS Taylor. It was commissioned in 1942, and Benjamin Katz was the skipper there--Jewish. Captain Katz, being a Jew, was like old King David. He was smart, and he was brave, and he wasn't afraid to die.

Marcello: Where did the Taylor operate?

Myers: Mainly around Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. But, anyway, we hadn't been out there long, and we get out there in March of 1943. They gave me the word that I had the eight to twelve watch, and during this time a man fell overboard. The captain's got to make a decision in enemy waters, submarine waters. There's nearly 300 of us on the crew. I've been told that the Navy didn't ask him to pick that kid up, but he did. And so my heart goes out to him.

Then I went from there in August of 1944 to the

Admiralty Islands. We then went from Los Negros to Honolulu, and I went on the USS Saint Paul in Quincy Navy Yard there out of Boston.

Marcello: And did you finish the war on the Saint Paul?

Myers: Well, almost. In August, July, somewhere in there, we knew we was going to Japan, and I certainly didn't feel comfortable about it because I had seen a little bit of what they had done down there. I seen the old Chicago after it had been hit. Of course, they eventually sunk it the next day. But I knew they were capable of death and destruction, and I didn't feel very comfortable when we operated sixty miles off the coast of Japan. I had a shipmate there that did a lot of reading, Superman and Buck Rogers and all that stuff, and I didn't think much of it. But I was in the repair party then--battle station--and Brooks projected real well. There was an ensign there and a petty officer, enlisted men, and Brooks was telling them all about this bomb. I have to think, as I think back on it, it really was an atomic bomb. But I thought, "Now he's really got him a Buck Rogers thing going here," and, I mean, he was getting their attention. I thought to myself, you know, "Well, he's really got the thing going there now." So I missed out on a bunch of stuff by not listening because I thought it was all fiction. But that had to be early in August of 1945 because I believe they dropped the bomb

on the 7th or 8th on Hiroshima. I told my children--we have three girls and a boy--"If somebody's telling something and you heard it a thousand times and you might not think he is going to pass on anything, listen, one day he's going to make you smarter--this other person is." So the day they dropped the bomb, I was starboard side aft. Admiral Halsey came on the phone--TBS system, very brief--and announced they had dropped the bomb. I guess I felt like a drowning man. I have heard that your whole life flashes in front of you, and as I stated before, things were hard. I guess maybe we didn't have the government to tell us we was poor, but I guess we had a suspicious feeling we was poor. I said, "Do I go back home and chop cotton for a dollar a day," for whatever that season. I realized I wasn't trained for anything except stationary boiler firing or something like that," which is, I guess, reasonable for a person without training. "Or do I stay in the Navy and have a menu and an inner-spring mattress?" Of course, I wasn't chief then, but I was close to it. They gave it to me, and I gave it back because I was afraid I would come back in the Navy. I didn't want to be where I didn't want to be and go where I didn't want to go. Of course, you know, that's what you signed up to do--to serve your country.

Marcello: So did you get out of the Navy then?

Myers: Yes, we went on to...I'm going to say Yokohama Naval Base--very, very beautiful. But, anyway, a Japanese destroyer was in front of us flying a huge black flag of surrender, and the Taylor, the second ship I was on, was behind it, and that made me feel good. The Taylor went through all the war--Korean, Vietnam--and never lost a man. They decommissioned it and gave it to Italy. And we was behind the Taylor, and we went in and dropped anchor. And I think I see this in my mind. It could have been in Honolulu, but I think I see this in my mind--big ol' shore batteries, about a twenty-inch gun, looking down at you. Somebody said the war is over, and I didn't feel that secure. I says, "There's nobody here but us, and they just said they wasn't going to fire on us." And praise God they didn't. We woke up the next morning and saw the Japanese going across that swinging bridge. Mount Fujiyama was to the west if I'm straight. The sun came up at 3:30 in the morning. It came up in the west and set in the west, so I can't be certain. But, anyway, I felt like in most cases my directions were straight except there. Then we went into Tokyo Bay, which is huge, the hugest harbor I've ever been in. We came in there and anchored, and it was hazy. The guys on the bridge, I'm sure, was looking for beautiful ladies. But I got to see this with my own eyes with the binoculars. As my mind goes, we were headed south, and

you looked over there, and there was a long warehouse on the dock. This made me feel comfortable, and I still feel comfortable with it. And I thank the Japanese people for it and whoever put it up there. But, anyway, in white paint, huge, as big as a man could reach (or it might have been a lady), they had painted, "Welcome, Yanks." And that made me feel comfortable and still does. I didn't have enough points. The Saint Paul stayed there, and I didn't have enough points to be discharged, but I had enough points to come back. So I came back, and they assigned me to the USS Amsterdam to come back. We picked up a thousand Seabees in Okinawa. I don't know if you're familiar with dysentery or not, but you can imagine a thousand Seabees on there with about 1,500 hundred of us. We had dysentery. I got it out of the harbor, coming out of Honolulu. What we were doing was going back to Portland, Oregon, for Navy Day. When we got to Astoria, Oregon, we had twenty-one stretcher cases of guys with dysentery. I took dysentery, also, coming out of Honolulu, if I didn't say it awhile ago. Bless you. Thank you.

Marcello: Okay, and once more, I want to thank you very much for having spoken with me. You said a lot of interesting and important things.

Myers: Well, thank you. I needed to do this. Of course, you know, we can live without it, but I want the four

children to have a tape of this.

Marcello: Okay.