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Interview with  
KENNETH K. ANDERSON  
September 16, 1988

Place of Interview: Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved:

Kenneth K. Anderson  
(Signature)

Date:

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Oral History Collection

Kenneth K. Anderson

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello            Date: September 16, 1988

Place of Interview: Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Dr. Marcello: This Ron Marcello interviewing Kenneth Anderson for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 16, 1988, in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. I am interviewing Mr. Anderson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was stationed at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack there on December 7, 1941. More specifically, Mr. Anderson was stationed at Ford Island as a member of VP-24, which was a Navy PBY patrol squadron.

Mr. Anderson, 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--that sort of thing.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I was born on April 16, 1921, at Custer, South Dakota, and I spent most of my younger years in South Dakota. I graduated from high school in Huron, South Dakota. I also went to school in

Pierre, South Dakota. Then I attended about five quarters at South Dakota State College at Brookings. Do you want to go into the enlistment dates and things like that?

Marcello: Yes. When did you go into the service?

Anderson: I enlisted in the Regular Navy on November 13, 1940.

Marcello: And why did you decide to enter the Navy?

Anderson: Because (chuckle) my buddy came over from Huron one day and said, "Hell, let's join the Navy." It was getting tough in college, and so I said, "Fine, let's go." (chuckle)

Marcello: Was there any other reason why you selected the Navy as opposed to some other branch of the service?

Anderson: I was always fascinated with the Navy, and I was always interested in aircraft, in flying. I had already taken some civilian pilot training in Brookings under the CPTP program, Civilian Pilot Training Program, and got my private license. But as it turned out, I didn't end up as a pilot of an airplane; I turned out as a radioman on an airplane.

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

Anderson: It wasn't difficult at all. I enlisted at Omaha with my friend, and I was sent back because I had an ingrown toenail. They told me to go get that fixed and come back, which I did. I went back a little later.

Consequently, I never did see my buddy. He went to the East Coast, and I went to the West Coast.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Anderson: My boot camp was at Great Lakes Training Station. That's near Chicago. Then when I got out of boot camp, I put in for and received the Aviation Radio School at San Diego on North Island.

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

Anderson: Boot camp, as I recall...it seems to me like it was around six weeks. I could be mistaken, but it seems to me like it was around six weeks.

Marcello: So they had cut down considerably the amount of time that one spent in boot camp over what it had been normally.

Anderson: I'm sure they did. Of course, I went through there right in the middle of winter, which was tough. I'm not real sure about that time, but I'm quite sure that's pretty close, six weeks.

Marcello: And what school did you apply for and receive?

Anderson: The Aviation Radio School at North Island, San Diego.

Marcello: How difficult or easy was it to get into one of those schools during this period?

Anderson: It didn't seem to be difficult. I think it was more or less based on how well you were doing in boot camp. If I recall, we took some kind of a general test to get into there--it seems like that--but, like I say, there

didn't seem to be any problem of getting into the school.

Marcello: How long did that school last?

Anderson: That school lasted, as I recall...I'm a little hazy on these details, but it seems to me like it was around three months.

Marcello: What rank would you have had when you came out of Aviation Radio School?

Anderson: As I recall, I was a second class seaman when I got out of school.

Marcello: In essence, what kind of specialty would you be trained in? What would you be doing as a result of having gone to that school?

Anderson: Well, we were trained in aviation radio operation, and, of course, at that time we had to maintain our own equipment. So we were taught not only the operational end but also the technical end of the radio operation.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got from San Diego in the Aviation Radio School out to Pearl Harbor. How did that come about?

Anderson: From the Aviation Radio School...I'm not sure exactly how we were assigned. I can't recall putting in for any particular squadron, but I was assigned to VP-12, which was based at San Diego on North Island. We were flying Consolidated flying boats. At that time they were PBV-3's. After a certain amount of training at San Diego and patrolling out of San Diego, we received new

airplanes, which were PBY-5's. Then later on we received the PBY-5A, which was the amphibian and which we flew for the remainder of my time in the Navy. The PBY-3 and the PBY-5 were strictly flying boats. They were unable to land on land.

Now we transferred our PBY-3's to Corpus Christi, Texas--this was prior to going to Pearl Harbor--and then we received the new aircraft. Our squadron was split into VP-24 and, I think, VP-44, which went to Alaska. Fortunately--as it turned out, it was fortunate--we went to Pearl Harbor. They lost quite a few aircraft in Alaska due to weather. So we went to Pearl Harbor, and I think it was in August of 1941.

Marcello: What were your reactions, as a person who had been brought up in South Dakota, to being assigned to the Hawaiian Islands?

Anderson: It was beautiful. It was just like paradise. Before the war the normal working day in the Hawaiian Islands...and it was called the tropics. We'd muster about 9:00 in the morning and secure about 1:00 in the afternoon. Of course, we'd have some earlier patrols. Our patrols lasted about three hours probably on the average, and we'd catch these probably about every third day. The rest of the time we were pulling maintenance on the aircraft, and then we spent a whole lot of time on the beach.

Marcello: How many of the PBY's were there at Ford Island during this period? You'd probably have to estimate this.

Anderson: I really don't know. I think we had about fifteen aircraft. I'm not real sure how many other squadrons were there--probably about two or three. So I would estimate we had somewhere in the vicinity of forty-five to fifty, maybe, in total. This may be off some, but that should be fairly close.

Marcello: Obviously there were other PBY squadrons on the island other than those there at Ford Island.

Anderson: Yes.

Marcello: For instance, there were some over at Kaneohe.

Anderson: Right.

Marcello: Were there ever enough PBY's for a 360-degree surveillance of the island--to your knowledge? I'm asking you a question that you may not be able to answer, since you were a rather low-ranking enlisted man at that time.

Anderson: Right. I feel that there was, but as I said before, our patrols didn't last very long. We didn't go out very far. We didn't patrol out very far at all. This, of course, changed drastically after the war started. Our patrols went from an average of maybe three hours to twelve hours, so we would go out to, oh, 600 or 700 miles. It wouldn't be unusual to go out that far, our patrols would last, like I say, about twelve hours long.



Marcello: I'm assuming that when you went on one of these patrols during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, it would be more or less like a pie-shaped sector that you would be patrolling.

Anderson: Exactly. Exactly.

Marcello: And about how far out would you be going?

Anderson: Oh, probably 150 miles, something like that.

Marcello: I'm assuming that these patrols were going out on a daily basis, seven days a week.

Anderson: That I can't answer. I don't know. I doubt it.

Marcello: Well, let me ask you this. Do you recall picking up any Saturday or Sunday patrols while you were there before the war? All these questions I'm asking you now would take place before the war.

Anderson: I can't recall. No, it doesn't seem like we did.

Marcello: So I guess what you're saying, in effect, then, is that on a weekend the number of planes going out would perhaps be limited?

Anderson: Yes. Well, now I take that back. On December 7 we did launch three aircraft on patrol that morning prior to the attack.

Marcello: They evidently didn't go north.

Anderson: They went down around Hilo (chuckle).

Marcello: When you went on one of these routine patrols, what would you usually be doing. I'm referring to you personally.

Anderson: Well, on a normal cruise there was a first radioman and a second radioman. Of course, the radioman was manning the radio position or manning the .50-caliber machine gun position--which we had two, one on the port side and one on the starboard side--and they would actually be looking out for ships or anything unusual. The radio operator would be maintaining contact with the base, which was done by CW at that time.

Marcello: Is there a lot of slow time on one of these flights?

Anderson: Slow time?

Marcello: Yes.

Anderson: Oh, yes. You mean boring time?

Marcello: Exactly!

Anderson: Oh, you bet. I mean, one wave looks just like another, and (chuckle) after several hours of this, why, it gets pretty boring, naturally. Many times you don't see anything at all.

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as relations between the two countries obviously continued to get worse, could you even in your position detect any changes at all in the training routine?

Anderson: No, I couldn't. Now I may be out of line to say this because I was a lowly enlisted man. However, everybody seemed to know that there was a great deal of stress building up and that that could erupt in some form or another, but we didn't know exactly when, where, or

anything else, obviously. But there didn't seem to be any change in the daily routine. The daily routine seemed to go along as usual. It didn't seem like that patrols were stepped up, lengthened, or anything like this.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about life on Ford Island and Honolulu itself. Describe what your living conditions or quarters were like there at Ford Island.

Anderson: Oh, they were very satisfactory. They were barracks-type. Of course, in Honolulu you don't need air-conditioning, and you don't need heat or anything else. It's just an ideal climate, period. So our living conditions were very adequate. They were permanent-type barracks that had been there for some time. Well, it was just a dream world, really, to be in that location. It was beautiful.

Marcello: Especially for a boy from South Dakota.

Anderson: Oh, fantastic! After putting in those winters in South Dakota, I couldn't believe such a place even existed (chuckle).

Marcello: What was the food like there at Ford Island?

Anderson: The food was good. However, I think most Navy people will tell you this, that the larger the base the worse the food. It was adequate. Let's put it that way. It was not exceptional.

Marcello: In general, as you look back on that period during the

pre-Pearl Harbor time, how would you describe the morale of you and your shipmates at Ford Island?

Anderson: I would say the morale was excellent. Like I say, what more could you want, you know? Well, it was just the living conditions, the climate. Everything was just ideal, and so the morale was real good, very good.

Marcello: At that point had you thought you made a good decision?

Anderson: Oh, yes. I was in love with the Navy. I fully intended to make it a career. I would have gone twenty or thirty years. Unfortunately, I was discharged on a medical discharge.

Marcello: How slow or rapid was advancement in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Anderson: It was fairly rapid in the aviation branch. In fact, like I say, I was not a reserve. I was in the Regular Navy, so I went every step right up from seaman (\$21 a month) and right on up. I can't remember having to wait for a rate. I mean, there was a certain waiting period, but I can't ever remember having to go longer than that.

Marcello: That rating as an aviation radioman, I'm assuming, was a good rating to be striking for insofar as advancement was concerned.

Anderson: Oh, yes, very good. Like I say, if a person did his job...and you had to study a little because they would give you an examination for the new rating. When you had spent the required amount of time in your present

rating, then you would take the examination for the new rating, and normally there would be a position open for it. Now this wasn't so on shipboard and things like this. The rates on those were a lot slower.

Marcello: What was your rank at the time of the attack? Do you recall?

Anderson: Let's see. I was aviation radioman...it was either third or second class.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about your liberty routine. You mentioned that being at Ford Island meant that you had pretty good liberty. What kind of liberty would you be able to get?

Anderson: What do you mean exactly?

Marcello: Okay, what kind of time would you have off, let's say, to go on liberty?

Anderson: Oh, well, we'd usually secure about 1:00 in the afternoon, and we'd be free until probably 8:00 or 9:00; except if we had an early morning flight for something like this, we'd have to be back at a certain time. Otherwise, I'm sure some of the guys lived on the beach. I never did. If they were married, they had a lot of time with their families and so forth.

Marcello: If you so desired, could you have stayed overnight when you went on liberty?

Anderson: I'm sure you could, yes. Well, I know you could because I inadvertently did several times (laughter).

Marcello: I'm assuming, however, that you couldn't do this too often, given the pay that you were receiving.

Anderson: Well, this is true. Of course, the living costs in Honolulu at the time was nothing like it is now. It wasn't really too bad at that time. In fact, it would probably compare favorably to the West Coast.

Marcello: What would you do when you went ashore?

Anderson: (Chuckle) We did a lot of touring of the islands, and we did a lot of drinking. In fact, one of the favorite spots was Trader Vic's, and so we'd have a ball there. Like I say, we'd tour the islands and ride around in taxicabs and things like this.

Marcello: Did every unit seem to have its favorite watering hole?

Anderson: They certainly did. They certainly did. A story comes to mind. For some reason the submariners and the "airedales" (which we were called "airedales") never seemed to get along too good. Why, I never could figure out. I think it was just tradition. But, anyway, we had a little spot there. I can't even remember the name of it--a little beer joint that we used favor. One day the submariners came in, and they were going to move us out of there. We had an aviation mechanic, and he broke a beer bottle over the counter, and he stuck it up about two inches in front of the face of this submariner, and he said, "There isn't anybody gonna start any trouble, in here, is he?" He was from Texas. And they slowly

walked out the door (laughter).

Marcello: Of what significance were Hotel and Canal Streets?

Anderson: Well, to tell you truthfully, I never did get down there too much.

Marcello: Evidently, there were all sorts of joints down there designed to take the sailors' money, is that correct, whether we are talking about prostitution or tattoo parlors or curio shops?

Anderson: Yes, I'm sure of that. How I ever escaped, I don't know; but I never did get a tattoo. I've got drunk enough, too, (chuckle) but I never did end up with a tattoo. And I guess I was always scared of catching disease from the prostitutes, so--I don't know--I guess I was just chicken.

Marcello: At that time, when you and your buddies sat around and talked in bull sessions, did conversation ever turn to the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

Anderson: You know...I can't...I think so. My memory is a little hazy there, but as I mentioned before, we in the ranks had talked about and mentioned several times about the growing tension between these countries and the war situation in Europe, of course, and everything. I'm sure that it was brought up that the possibility existed, and this was why we often wondered at times why there wasn't more precautions taken. I may be clear out in left field on this thing. I hope I don't end up

being investigated (chuckle) or something. But to my best recollection, this was the case, that we wondered at times why there wasn't more precautions or beefing up the long-range patrols and security measures and things like this.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what kind of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Anderson: Actually, I never thought too much about the Japanese one way or another, really. They were there, and to me they were just like the Hawaiians or anything else. They were there; they were residents. I never thought too much about them one way or another.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and obviously we want to talk about it in a little bit more detail. Before I get to that point, however, let me ask you this question. Again, this is perhaps an unfair question, but I'll ask it, anyhow. What opportunities did you have to observe the comings and goings of the battleships and the other ships in the fleet?

Anderson: Oh, all kinds of opportunity. In fact, the battleships were all tied up right around Ford Island, and from our position you could see almost every ship in the harbor.

Marcello: Could you detect any pattern as to when they would come and when they would go and this sort of thing?



Anderson: Not really. I never paid too much attention to it other than the fact that we thought it was strange that the battleships were tied up to the dock, two abreast, right around the island. It seemed a little unusual because the ship on the outside, of course, blocks the one on the inside, and they can't get underway without a lot of preparation.

Marcello: Normally, when the battleships came into Pearl, is that the way they were tied up--two abreast?

Anderson: I never recall them ever being that many tied up like that before. Usually, at least one of them would be anchored out in the harbor or something like this.

Marcello: Okay, now this brings us into that weekend of December 7. What did you do that Saturday, December 6?

Anderson: To tell you the truth, I can't remember. I think that I stayed on Ford Island because we had those early morning flights on Sunday--those three flights to launch--and we had to do this early. I forget now exactly the time, but it seems to me like they went out about 6:30 or something like that, or 6:00.

Marcello: Were you on one of those flights or not?

Anderson: No, I was not. But we would help them launch the aircraft.

Marcello: Suppose you didn't have any kind of a duty on that Sunday morning. Could you stay in the sack indefinitely on a Sunday?

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Marcello: It was holiday routine.

Anderson: Right.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about that Sunday morning, then, from the time you got up until all hell breaks loose.

Anderson: Okay.

Marcello: I'll let you pick up the details.

Anderson: Like I said, we were at our hangar, and we launched, as I recall, three aircraft. They were going on patrol down in the neighborhood of Hilo, Hawaii. We were sitting in the radio shack. Some of us were playing cards when the first bomb hit. I would probably estimate that it hit fifty yards or maybe a hundred yards from our hangar, and we thought at the time that possibly a gas tank blew up or something.

Marcello: So you gave no thought at all to the airplane itself that had dropped the bomb?

Anderson: Oh, heavens, no! We couldn't even conceive of an attack or anything else. We thought a gas tank blew. So we all ran out of the hangar door to see what was happening and see if we could help, and this was the first time we ever saw the aircraft. They were dive-bombing and strafing the area. Well, I can't describe it. We were stunned. It was a tremendous shock. We couldn't believe what was happening. We stood there probably with our mouths open, and we thought, "Well, gee, there

must be some kind of an exercise." But then when the planes pulled over us right at treetop level and we saw those red "meatballs" on the wings and the buildings blowing up and tracer bullets going all around us, we knew that somebody was playing for keeps. So this kind of mobilized us into action, but we really didn't know what to do. There was no place to go.

Marcello: Is anybody giving any orders?

Anderson: No orders! None! I can't remember of having any orders at all. At this time some of the guys remembered--well, I did, too--that they were digging a pipeline. It must have been a waterline ditch, and it was just a short way...and I've talked to some of our members [Pearl Harbor Survivor's Association], and it must have went quite a way along the island because they jumped in there, too. It was just about, oh, I'd say, thirty to forty yards from our hangar, and it was five to six feet deep. So our first thought, of course, was self-preservation, so we ran and jumped in that ditch.

The low-level aircraft saw us in the ditch, and they tried to strafe the ditch. Luckily, they strattled it. There were bullets going on both sides of us. There were guys in there who were really scared. Like I say, it was such a tremendous shock. One of the really physically big men of our squadron--I think he was a mechanic or something--who looked like a football player

broke down, was crying. There were all types of emotion in there. Let me tell you that we were scared to death. There were no heroes or anything like that. We were just plumb scared. We weren't prepared for anything like this, and all at once here is somebody trying to blow your head off. So it wasn't very pleasant.

So, finally, after the initial attack...of course, the initial attack was all low-level planes--strafing, dive-bombing, and torpedoing the ships. The ships really caught it at this first stage of the attack because they were completely unprepared, of course, and it was a complete surprise to everybody.

Marcello: So you really didn't wait around too long before you and your buddies headed for that ditch.

Anderson: That's right, as soon as we realized what was happening. It seemed like a long time. It probably was just a matter of seconds maybe, but somebody had the idea of jumping in that ditch.

Marcello: While you were in that ditch--and I realize that there was strafing and all that sort of thing--did you ever have an opportunity to look out and see what was being done over at Ford Island or among the battleships?

Anderson: Well, like I say, we were on Ford Island.

Marcello: Yes, I know you were, but what kind of damage was really taking place there?

Anderson: Well, we saw it all.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

Anderson: Well, as I was going to say, later on we got out of the ditch after the initial shock wore off. We got out of the ditch and started mounting aircraft machine guns out of our armory on parked airplanes. We didn't have any *ground mounts--any tripod mounts--or anything*. There were parked aircraft there, and we mounted the machine guns in the parked aircraft and started shooting back at them, which gave us something to do and just took the edge off of the thing.

Marcello: You mentioned that these were parked aircraft.

Anderson: Right.

Marcello: Undamaged or damaged?

Anderson: Well, some of them were damaged, and some of them were undamaged. Of course, naturally, they weren't destroyed or anything like this, but a lot of them had bullet holes in them.

Marcello: In essence, these machine guns are being fired by men inside the planes.

Anderson: Well, inside or standing outside. Some of the aircraft were a smaller-type aircraft which you could fire from outside the aircraft.

Marcello: Okay.

Anderson: Also, I would like to mention this. I saw a couple of guys who took rags, and they held onto the barrel. One guy would hold onto the barrel of the machine gun, and

the other guy would fire it. This was an aircraft-type machine gun, of course, and it didn't have any provision to hand-hold the thing. But this way the guy held the barrel with rags to keep him from burning, and they shot back at them that way.

Marcello: How long would you estimate that you were in that ditch before you started being active again?

Anderson: Well, time is pretty hard to estimate at this time because, like I say, our emotions were so high that what seemed like maybe an hour was maybe just a matter of minutes or something like that until somebody starting getting the idea of mounting these machine guns.

Marcello: Did anybody in the ditch give orders or...

Anderson: No.

Marcello: ...make a suggestion that you were to go over there?

Anderson: Well, actually, I think it was one of the ordnancemen-- he was an enlisted man--that got the idea of mounting these machine guns. As far as getting any direct orders from any commissioned officer, I can't remember getting any.

Marcello: So you actually went over there to perform this function while the attack was still going on at full pitch?

Anderson: Oh, yes, very definitely.

Marcello: Okay, what were you personally doing?

Anderson: Well, I carried out ammunition. Like I say, some of the other guys were already manning the machine guns, so I

carried out some ammunition. I was about ready to step out of the hangar when a chunk of shrapnel about five feet wide fell right down in front of me. If I'd have been a second sooner, it would've cut me right in two. By this time, of course, there was a tremendous amount of antiaircraft guns being fired from the ships. Of course, that shrapnel goes up, and it's got to come down. So it was raining shrapnel, too.

I remember very vividly standing there...I think it was the destroyer Shaw that was in dry dock almost directly across from where our hangars were, and a dive-bomber put a bomb right down the stack. It must have hit the magazine because that thing blew up and just blew almost right in two. There's some very famous pictures of that. It looks almost like a mushroom cloud when that thing blew. I was standing over there watching that whole thing.

Marcello: What do you remember from that? Describe what you saw in terms of the noise, the explosions, the smoke--everything.

Anderson: The noise was tremendous; and the fire and smoke from the battleships...well, just about every battleship was on fire. The harbor was on fire. This was probably the greatest amount of casualties, were burn casualties, because the ships were on fire, and these poor guys would jump in the harbor, and the harbor was on fire.

So it's just like jumping from a frying pan into the fire. Of course, that oil lasted in Pearl Harbor there for years--years--afterwards. Of course, all the fuel tanks and everything from those battleships were ruptured, and they spilled the oil out on the surface.

Marcello: What do you remember specifically about the Shaw when it exploded, since it was pretty close by? I've seen those spectacular photographs, also.

Anderson: Just a tremendous explosion, more like a concussion, you might say; you know, not a sharp crack but just a "WHOOSH" or something like this. Of course, you could feel the air blast clear across the harbor from it.

Also, there's another thing. Before I forget it, I'd like to bring out that one of our ordnancemen did shoot down one of the dive-bombers. In fact, I was standing right behind him bringing ammunition out, and I saw the tracers. He made his correction--he was shooting a little behind him--and those tracers went right in the wing, and the wing came off just like you'd cut it with a pair of scissors. Of course, it went into the harbor. Later on, after the attack, they pulled some of these Japanese aircraft out of the harbor that were shot down. I saw the instrument panel of one of these aircraft, and on this instrument panel was a detailed diagram of the harbor and where every ship was in that harbor. There was hardly any mistake at all,



except they intended to catch the carrier in there, and, of course, the carrier went out several days before. In its place was, I believe, a minelayer. Some pretty inoffensive ship was in her berth, and I think they put about seven torpedoes in that poor ship. It went down just like a rock because they had this diagram marked on there, the Japanese, primary target, secondary, so forth. The primary target was the carrier. They came in there, and they dropped their torpedoes on that poor ship, and down it went.

Marcello: When you witnessed that Japanese plane having its wings sliced off and it plunging to earth, what kind of feeling or reaction did you have?

Anderson: (Chuckle) I felt great! If I remember right, we all cheered.

Marcello: In the meantime, what is the atmosphere around there in terms of smoke and all that sort of thing?

Anderson: Smoke, fire, and confusion. Like I say, I can't remember of having any direct orders. Now I may be mistaken. My memory banks aren't too great, but I can't recall having any direct orders at this time.

Oh, the thing I think that we were more worried about than anything else...rumors start flying thick and fast in a condition like this, and the rumor was that the Japanese had a landing force. We knew we couldn't stop them. In no way could we stop them. I dreaded the

thought of spending the whole danged war in a Japanese prison camp. I spent most of the day trying to find a .45 pistol, and then I spent another half a day trying to find a clip of ammunition for it. I thought, "Boy, I'm going to go down fighting. I don't want to spend any time in a Japanese prison camp." As it turned out, of course, the Japanese had no intention of landing there. To this day I don't know why, because they could have taken those islands in my estimation, and I believe anybody that was there knew that we could not stop a landing force of their magnitude.

Marcello: Awhile ago we were talking about Battleship Row and what was going on over there. Did you perchance witness the Arizona blowing up?

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe what you saw over there.

Anderson: From where we were, you see, these battleships were tied up very close to where our permanent barracks were. We weren't in our permanent barracks. We were down on the front line--down at our hangars. However, the real sinking feeling was that you could watch these huge columns of black smoke coming up, and flames and explosions, and then you would see the superstructure of these magnificent ships starting to tilt. We knew that they were sinking, and that really gave you a sinking feeling. I don't know. It was just a real depressed

feeling or pessimistic feeling or something, that here is our pride and joy, our Navy, and it's going down.

Marcello: How about the California? Did you see it when it sunk?

Anderson: Yes. From where we were, you could see the superstructures of most of these ships. We could see the superstructures start tilting. We didn't get over actually to where we could get a good view of the ships until later on.

Marcello: When is it that somebody finally begins to take charge and give some definite orders?

Anderson: You know, I can't recall. To the best of my recollection, it was probably that evening. We started setting up watches. We set up bunks down in the hangar, and we slept down there and stood machine gun watches on these machine guns that we had mounted on these aircraft. Assembly and Repair stayed up all night making tripod mounts for these guns, so later on we could mount the machine guns on tripod mounts. Then, of course, they started bringing in sand bags, and we sandbagged the machine gun positions and things like this.

I can remember that evening. I was assigned to a machine gun. It was a .50-caliber machine gun. I was asleep in the hangar, or I was laying down on the bunk and was probably half asleep, when all at once it sounded like the whole island opened up. I mean, guns

started shooting all over the place. I went out, and the sky was full of tracers--just full of tracers. It looked like the Fourth of July. This little guy he had the trigger down on that .50-caliber, and it was just shaking the living daylights out of him because that's a heavy gun. I ran up, and I pounded him on the back, and he quit firing. I said, "What in the hell are you shooting at?" He said, "Hell, I don't know, but everybody else is shooting!" Boy, he gave her some more, see (chuckle). They were just spraying the air. There probably wasn't a Japanese within a thousand miles. Probably what happened was that somebody got a misfire or something, and everybody was on edge, and, man, they'd shoot at anything that moved.

Marcello: Well, of course, that evening there were planes off the Enterprise flying in, and quite possibly this could have been the firing at those planes.

Anderson: No, this was later.

Marcello: I see.

Anderson: This was about probably, oh, 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. But I did see--and, boy, this was real bad to watch--the carrier planes being shot down. Of course, when the carriers were in, the planes would land at Ford Island. There were three planes, and I think it was SBD's. They looked a little bit like Japanese planes, I guess. It was dusk, and they were in the traffic

pattern, and our own people shot them down.

Marcello: And I guess the sky lit up when that took place, too.

Anderson: We just stood there and hollered and everything else, but because of the tension factor there, like I say, they'd shoot at anything without recognizing what it was. If it looked anything at all like a Japanese plane, they shot at it.

Marcello: You were mentioning rumors a moment ago. Is it safe to say that, considering what happened, you had a tendency to believe those rumors?

Anderson: The rumors of the landing?

Marcello: Yes.

Anderson: Oh, yes, because I couldn't believe why they would attack us like that if they didn't intend to take the islands. It didn't make sense. I couldn't understand, and to this day I don't understand it.

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

Anderson: I can't even remember eating anything. I probably did (chuckle), but I sure didn't think about getting hungry.

Marcello: How much sleep did you get that night?

Anderson: Very little, very little. Of course, we were standing watches on the machine guns, I think, four hours on and four off or something like that.

Marcello: What did you guys talk about?

Anderson: Oh, we talked about what we thought maybe the Japanese were doing. We thought maybe they were regrouping out

there, and maybe they did have a landing force someplace. We thought that we hadn't seen the end of them yet, that we were going to get hit again. We were all real apprehensive about what could happen because, like I say, we knew we couldn't defend those islands. They had coastal guns there, I guess, that were dated back to World War I and that would only depress so far. All they had to do was get in under those guns, and they couldn't even shoot at them. So the probability of them coming back seemed very strong at that time.

Marcello: What were you doing in the days immediately following the attack?

Anderson: Well, of course, immediately then they revised our patrol schedules, and our patrols went to probably ten to twelve hours average. We would patrol, oh, several days without any time off or anything else. So we were flying most of the time with very little time off.

Marcello: During that whole time before the war when you went out on patrols, did any of your PBY's to your knowledge ever take any of the sectors to the northern area?

Anderson: I'm sure we did, but, like I say, we didn't go out far enough to really intercept a fleet that was in-bound. You know, if we did they'd be too close because they would've been within carrier range.

Marcello: When you had a chance to look around at the damage that had been done at Ford Island, describe for me what you

saw. I'm referring maybe to the next day or the next couple of days.

Anderson: Of course, it was very depressing because the damage was tremendous to our aircraft, to our hangars, our runways. It was hard to believe that our hangar only sustained very minor damage--maybe a few machine gun holes, no bomb hits whatsoever. We had very few aircraft inside of our hangar for some reason. I can't recall why that was. The hangar right next to ours was full of aircraft, full of PBY's, and they practically leveled that hangar. Now whether that was coincidence or whether they had the intelligence that gave them that information, I don't know. It seems strange that they would concentrate on this one hangar and then leave ours alone. But that's what happened. Like I say, our squadron and our airplanes, luckily, sustained very minor damage during the attack for some reason. Of course, the aircraft that were out on patrol heard what was going on, and so they...I don't know whether they landed down at Hilo, but they stayed clear of the area until the attack was over.

Marcello: What were your feelings toward the Japanese in the immediate aftermath of the attack?

Anderson: Well, I didn't have a very high opinion of them (chuckle). We really didn't have real close contact with the Japanese in our everyday life or anything like

this. I never did, anyway. But the surprise attack, of course, seemed like this was...I know that during a war, there aren't any rules. You can't play by rules. However, we had a pretty low opinion of the Japanese at that time because of the sneaky way that they came in there and the amount of lives and ships our fleet and everything else that was lost.

Marcello: As you look back, can you think of any one person whose actions stand out in terms of something heroic that he may have done that day? Did you see a lot of heroism, or did you simply see a lot of people doing their job?

Anderson: Well, I'd rather say that. Like I say, I thought that the people that...and I give a lot of credit to our ordnancemen. These are enlisted people that thought of the idea of mounting the machine guns and holding the machine guns by hand--.30-caliber machine guns--that weren't designed to do this. They got out there and tried to fight back with what we had, and I thought that basically we were doing the best we could with what we had. I can't think of any one individual that you might say stood out in terms of heroism or anything like that.

Marcello: What did you do in the days immediately following the attack?

Anderson: Like I say, we spent most of our time in the air. We were patrolling almost constantly.

Marcello: Other people were taking care of the clean up and all



that sort of thing?

Anderson: Yes, that's correct. Of course, still at that time we had to maintain our own radio equipment and generators and everything like this. In the amount of time that was being put on the aircraft, this increases your maintenance, so just about all the time we were on that ground we were pulling maintenance on the radio equipment and things like this.

Marcello: You mentioned that ditch several times in the interview, and I've heard of it on many occasions from people that I've interviewed. I think half of Pearl Harbor must have been in that ditch, so it must have been as large as what you said it was.

Anderson: You know, I was really surprised when I heard even some of our own members talking about it, and they were clear on the other end of the island jumping in that ditch (chuckle). That kind of surprised me.

Marcello: When you had a chance to look at the ships that had been sunk, what did you see out there? Describe what you saw there in the aftermath.

Anderson: Well, like I say, the ships were all either sunk or partially sunk. The smoke, of course, kept coming from the ships for a long time afterwards. I can't remember how long. It almost made you cry to look at these magnificent ships. Well, basically, your main part of the Pacific Fleet was gone outside of our carriers,

which we were very fortunate that we didn't lose any carriers.

Marcello: What was the condition or state of the survivors that came ashore at Ford Island from the ships?

Anderson: They were badly burned. They had very serious burns. Of course, some of them had been hit by machine guns and things like this, but I would say--this is just my own estimation--that by far the biggest percentage of the casualties were burn casualties. As I said before, the ships were on fire; the decks were red hot. Then they jumped in the water, and the water was on fire. So they took over our barracks, as I recall, for emergencies--to treat the casualties. Like I say, many of them were very serious burn casualties.

Marcello: I guess all those guys were probably covered with that thick oil and so on, too, were they not?

Anderson: Yes, this is true. And this is what made it doubly bad, because that just kept burning.

Marcello: When was it that you finally got out of Pearl or away from the Hawaiian Islands? Maybe I should rephrase my question. How long did you remain there in the Hawaiian Islands?

Anderson: Well, we moved. I can't recall the dates now, but later on we moved to Kaneohe. We flew patrols out of Kaneohe. Then I participated in the Battle of Midway, which I gave you the article on. That was the turning point of

the war in the Pacific. Then from Midway we went down to the Solomon Islands, and we patrolled out of Tulagi carrying wounded Marines back from New Georgia when our forces were landing in New Georgia. We were bringing the wounded Marines back to base hospitals.

Also, our patrols would overlap the Japanese down there. They were flying Betty's--what we called Betty bombers--on their patrols, which looked very much like our B-26. They were land-based bombers. They could fly rings around our PBV's. They were probably two or three times as fast. But the Japanese at that time didn't have anything like our .50-caliber machine guns. They had a cannon, and they had that lighter machine gun that was a little smaller than a .30-caliber. Many times we'd see the Japanese on patrol, also, and they'd circle way behind us, and they'd try to sneak up when they'd think we couldn't see them. We were watching them, and we'd tell the pilot, "Hey, we got one coming up behind us." He'd say, "Well, when he's in range of your .50's, why, let me know, and I'll bank around and give you a shot." So pretty soon we'd holler at him, and he'd bank around, and we'd blast away with our .50's, and he'd take off. The Japanese would take off. They didn't want to mess with us, not unless they could surprise us (chuckle).

Marcello: That PBV was a very, very versatile airplane, was it

not, and it's one that the taxpayers really got their money's worth from?

Anderson: Tremendous. Like I say, it was very slow, extremely slow. It had to be built like a tank because there's nothing rougher than an open sea landing. Normally, we carried about four depth charges on patrol in case we saw a submarine. But you could mount bombs and torpedoes. We carried a torpedo which weighed 2,000 pounds in the Battle of Midway. With extra tanks on there, we could fly for, oh, fifteen or twenty hours--with extra tanks.

Marcello: I realize this is outside the scope of our interview. We're concentrating on Pearl Harbor. Nevertheless, when you participated in the Battle of Midway, from where were you flying? Were you still flying out of Pearl Harbor?

Anderson: We left Pearl Harbor and flew to Midway. At this time, of course, we knew the Japanese were coming. We knew of the impending battle. We thought...and I don't know whether this was confined to the enlisted men or not. Anyway, of course, we were flying PBY-5A's--amphibians. We thought we were going to Midway to pick up survivors after the battle. We landed on the strip, taxied up into our place where they guided us to; and as soon as we shut the engines down, here comes an ordnance truck with a torpedo. We looked at that thing, and I was back

on the waist .50-caliber and said, "Hey, buster, the torpedo planes are down there!" He says, "Is this VP-24?" "Yes." "Put it on." That is the first that I had any idea of what we were going to do. When we took off that night, of course, we all knew that a torpedo attack is practically suicide because you're flying right down the barrel of every gun, no deflection or anything else --slingshots on up to 16-inch cannons.

Marcello: And you have to get through their combat air patrol.

Anderson: Of course, you're down low. So when I left Midway, I thought, "This is the end." I thought I was never coming back. My main thought, I can remember, was that I wished I could have called home. I'd like to have called home and talked to my dad because I knew we weren't coming back.

The only thing that saved us, of course, was that it was night. We silhouetted the ships between us and the moon. This little guy that was my pilot, Doug Davis, started a run on one of the ships, and we hit the landing force, not the attacking force--luckily. We got halfway in, and he said, "God, there's one that looks like a carrier!" He says, "As long as we're out here, we might as well make it good." I thought, "Well, why, you dumb SOB!" Anyway, we broke it off, and he started making a run on this ship. Well, luckily, it wasn't a carrier. It was a great, big troop transport that had a

flat deck for some reason, and the silhouette did look a little bit like a carrier. So he kept coming in and coming in on this thing. I was back on the waist .50-caliber, and I thought, "Oh, my God, turn the thing loose!" He kept coming, and I thought he was going to put the thing right on the deck of that ship.

Finally, he dropped it, and we pulled up just over the fantail of that ship, and then they opened up on us. They couldn't see us. We were right down on the water, probably just a few feet from the water, and when we pulled up, of course, they opened up on us. We got about maybe...I don't know how many holes in the aircraft, none in the vital spot. We had some in the hull. A shell came in the bow and exploded and tore the goggles right off the face of our naval air pilot but didn't even scratch him. I had one just come a few inches from the .50-caliber machine gun positioned back there.

So then he wanted to see what we did, so he flew back. In doing so he flew over the destroyer escort, and they started shooting everything they had at us. It looked like the Fourth of July. So he said, "We better get out of here."

So we headed back toward Midway, and when we got back there, they were under attack. Just huge columns of smoke were coming up. We knew we couldn't go in

there because we were sitting ducks. So we headed for Laysan. It's just a spot in the ocean. It's just a spot in the ocean out there where the Navy had taken over some tuna boats and put some drums of aviation gas on there in case something like this happened. Well, this naval air pilot--enlisted pilot--was the navigator, also, and how in the hell he did it, I don't know. He navigated by dead reckoning, by celestial, "by guessing, by God"; and pretty soon one of the crew who's monitoring the fuel gauges calls down and says, "I can't read them anymore." So we thought, "Well, we're going down in the open sea." Of course, there's a little fuel left, just like in your car, and pretty soon here is Laysan right on the nose.

We land on the open sea, and we cut up signal flags and everything we could get our hands on to plug up the holes in the hull so we wouldn't sink. Then we stayed all night. A couple of us stayed on board the aircraft to run the bilge pumps to keep it from sinking. The next day we pumped enough gas by crank, hand crank, into the airplane, and we flew it back to Pearl.

Marcello: Well, that's a pretty good place to end this interview, I think, Mr. Anderson. I want to thank you very much for your comments relative to the attack at Pearl Harbor and then the added information relative to Midway. I'm sure that researchers and scholars will find your

comments most valuable.

Anderson: I'd like to just make one more comment--kind of a strange thing here for people that don't know PBY's. Of course, an open sea landing is the roughest landing you can make because you have to land cross-wells full stall, and that hull comes down with a tremendous force. All of the PBY's that I know of--all of them in our squadron--carried a bag of golf tees. Everybody looks at me kind of funny and thinks I'm pulling their leg, but this is true. When we'd make an open sea landing those rivets would come out just like popcorn, and it looked like a sprinkler system in there. Those golf tees just fit those rivet holes. We'd plug them up to keep from sinking.

Marcello: I'd never heard that before.

Anderson: That's the absolute truth.

Marcello: Well, once more (chuckle) I want to thank you for your comments.

Anderson: Okay.