

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER

784

Interview with  
MARLER W. OWEN  
September 29, 1989

Place of Interview: Richardson, Texas  
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello  
Terms of Use: OPEN  
Approved: Marler Owen  
(Signature)  
Date: 29 Sept. 1989

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Oral History Collection

Marler W. Owen

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello                      Date: September 29, 1989

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Marler Owen for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 29, 1989, in Richardson, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Owen in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the destroyer tender USS Dobbin during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Owen, to begin this interview, I need to get some biographical information. Would you please tell me where you were born and when you were born?

Mr. Owen: I was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1915.

Dr. Marcello: What was the exact date?

Mr. Owen: (Chuckle) I don't remember the exact date, but it had to be July 11 because that was my birthday. So I would (chuckle) imagine that's the date.

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

Mr. Owen: My education was grammar school at South Hi Mount in

Fort Worth. Then I went to W. C. Stripling Junior High School for what they call, I believe, nowadays the classes from sixth, seventh, and eighth. Then I left there and went to Jennings Avenue High School and left there and went to Central High School--all these in Fort Worth. My parents were then divorced, and my mother had a little trouble with a person who had seemingly individual ideas, so she decided that the best thing for me was to be put in the Navy

Marcello: When did you go in the Navy?

Owen: I went in the Navy on June 9, 1932.

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

Owen: I think the main reason was my mother (chuckle). My parents, as I said, having been divorced, my mother didn't feel that she could control me. I wasn't that wild a kid, but I just did what the normal boys were doing in high school. I dropped out in the tenth grade. I was in the tenth grade when I dropped out.

Marcello: How difficult or easy was it to get into the Navy in 1932?

Owen: We had a little help (chuckle). It was a tough situation to get in in 1932. But my parents had been in Dallas, where I was born, and there was a Navy man who was on recruiting duty at that time and lived next door to us. My mother just fortunately ran across him

again, and he was a chief petty officer. She said that she was trying to get me in, and the chief said, "Well, I'll take care of that. So I went to Fort Worth and took my tests and all and wound up being in the Navy. I can't say I was shanghai'd, because I wasn't. But the Navy was very good to me, as I think we'll find out.

Marcello: When you enlisted in 1932, what was the standard term of enlistment at that time?

Owen: Four years.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Owen: San Diego, California.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp, or was it the normal Navy boot camp for that period?

Owen: Just the normal Navy boot camp. There were tents for the first month of the boot camp, which lasted three months, and then we moved to the barracks, which we thought was a much better life. But it was just I guess I could say, an uneventful boot camp time.

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

Owen: Three months.

Marcello: Very briefly, describe for me some of the various duty stations or ships to which you were assigned prior to going over to the Hawaiian Islands on a permanent basis.

Owen: Well, I served the first four years on the USS New York. I went on board the Saratoga and was transported up to Long Beach, California, on the Saratoga and got as sick

as dog. Of course, I was down in the gasoline alley, but I didn't throw up. Then I went to Long Beach, and I was transferred to the New York there. Then the second ship that I served on was the USS Ramapo for two years, wherein we went back and forth across the Pacific carrying oil to the Philippines to, I believe, Sangley Point. Sangley Point was over there. If we didn't get rid of all the oil there, why, we would offload the rest of it to the USS Pecos. And if we didn't get rid of that there, why, at that time, why, we'd go up to Tsingtao, China, and offload. Well, we went there because we had diesel for the submarines, which laid off of the port up there.

Then my next ship was the USS Dobbin. I had made third class. Interestingly enough, I had been a seaman first all my first cruise on the USS New York, and the second cruise, on the Ramapo, I kind of woke up to the fact that, "Hey, your friends and your buddies are all getting rates, and they're advancing in the Navy, and you're just standing still, so you better wake up and see what it's all about. So I got third class and then transferred, as I said, to the Dobbin as a third class petty officer. Then when the next time came around--eligibility--I made second class. The next time around, I got first class. After the required waiting time, I had one crack at chief before Pearl Harbor. So I was a

first class petty officer at Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Let me go back and fill in with some questions on the basis of what you said. I'm assuming that when you went aboard the New York, perhaps even while you were on the Saratoga and the Ramapo, that you were in the deck force?

Owen: I was in the deck force, yes. On the Ramapo, though, I went aboard there, and there was a . . . I don't remember the actual category. There were eight of us, and we were comprised of some shipfitter strikers and some carpenter's mates that were responsible for loading oil aboard ship. Everytime that we'd leave port, why, we had to be responsible for the filling of the tanks. I remember one of them was "Pudgey" . . . I don't remember "Pudgey's" last name, though, but he was a first class carpenter's mate that was in charge of the gang. I had not become a shipfitter at the time because I was a shipfitter striker. Then on the Dobbin, of course, why, it was a matter of just being on the . . . well, we'll get to that later, I guess.

Marcello: I gather from what you said, then, that you eventually did strike for the shipfitter rating.

Owen: Yes.

Marcello: What exactly does a shipfitter do? Tell me for those who listen to this tape and perhaps don't know.

Owen: The shipfitter was a person who was responsible for

being able to make repairs to the ship as it pertained to the hull of the ship or to any other part of the ship. He also had to handle the sheet metal work, so he did that work. He handled plate steel. He could weld up ports. I was also a second class diver after the Dobbin experience for about, oh, I guess, just about a year. Then they found out that my health wasn't what it should be, so they had me discontinue being a diver. I still liked it, but they wouldn't let me continue.

Marcello: How fast or how slow was promotion in the Navy during that time before Pearl Harbor--before the war started?

Owen: Before the war started, you were required to be in your rate one year before you were eligible to go to the next one. I made a rate or advancement or promotion every year after I woke up to the fact that you better get your act together because you're going to have to do some studying and remember things you need to remember to get ahead.

Marcello: I'm assuming that most of your training was on-the-job-training.

Owen: Every bit of it was on-the-job-training.

Marcello: As you look back on that on-the-job-training, how would you rate it in terms of its quality and what you learned and the willingness of the petty officers to teach you and so on?

Owen: I guess maybe you could say that I had some tremendous



experiences from the ones that were the leaders, I guess you might say, and that I emulated and wanted to follow. They were exceptional teachers. I remember one incident. (Chuckle) It'll be a little crude, I think, but this is a fact. There were heads on the after part of the ship, and there was a chief petty officer by the name of Smith. He told me to go down and unstop the drain line to the head. I went down, I dropped the pipe, and I looked up in there, and I saw what it was. I came back up and told the chief, "I can't do it. He says, "Why not?" I said, "Well, it's shitty! It's full of. He said, "I know what it's full of! He said, "Reach your hand up! I said, "I can't do that! He said, "The hell you can't! He took me down. He rammed his hand up that open pipe and pulled out a handful of shit (chuckle) I said, "If that chief can do that [it made such an impression on my mind] that I can do it, too. Well, unfortunately or fortunately, about three months later it stopped up again, and he told me that I was to go down and unstop it. And I did. I took my hand and pulled that out and unstopped it and bolted it all back up. Then, of course, we went up to sickbay to be disinfected afterwards. He said, "Did you learn anything?" I said, "Yep. I learned that I could do it without any reservation or any hesitation. He said, "Well, I'm glad you learned a lesson because that's what

it takes to be a plumber. (chuckle)

Marcello: How slow or fast was promotion in the shipfitter rating?

Owen: I would say.

Marcello: I realize that depended on a lot of factors such as openings and all that sort of thing.

Owen: Well, yes. This is the main key. In the shipfitter branch, probably the Bureau of Naval Personnel would come out, and they would have allocations for maybe about forty people to be promoted. There was probably about, say, 125 of us second class that were going up for those forty rates. The highest scores were the ones that were promoted.

Marcello: I gather that you must have liked the Navy because you shipped over, did you not?

Owen: Yes, I did ship over. I shipped over the first time for two years, the second time for four years, and then from there on it just went on. I enlisted as an apprentice seaman. I retired thirty years later as a lieutenant commander, having held every rate and every rank from apprentice seaman to lieutenant commander. The highest rank that you could go out at at that time when Forrestal was Secretary of the Navy was as a full commander. I went back and got my education by taking a GED test and going to night school in San Diego, California, and I graduated from Memorial High in San Diego. I realized that if you don't have an education

and you're not one who is, say, on-the-spot, then you need to look at where your spot or your slot can be or should be.

Marcello: So it was fairly late in life, then, that you got your GED and so on.

Owen: Yes. Well, I can almost tell you when I got it. The GED test that I took was when I was officer in charge of the patternmaker and molder school as an ensign in San Diego, and that was after the war, of course. It was in 1950. Then my record was pretty good--well enough to get the selections--and I was recommended by my officers. I was a repair officer, which I was always wanting to be, finally obtaining it on the USS Grand Canyon, which there were many ships in between the Grand Canyon and back down (chuckle) I was inspector of naval material in Dallas when I retired in 1962.

Marcello: Why did you decide to ship over?

Owen: The reason that I decided to ship over was because during the war years, everytime that I thought about leaving the service, I was eligible for another promotion. Of course, when I became an officer, well, I said, "Well, if I'm going to be selected for lieutenant or for lieutenant (JG), I'll just see how the selection goes. If it doesn't, I'll just get out. Then I got selected. Well, I knew that I had performed the necessary requirements of studies and had the education.

Then after lieutenant comes lieutenant commander. Of course, you had to be a lieutenant commander for four years at that time. I got stuck when I got appointment as an ensign. I'd been recommended for lieutenant (JG), but I got stuck as an ensign for three years, and that kept me from being selected as lieutenant commander for the simple reason, you might say, time in grade.

Marcello: How about during the 1930s? You obviously shipped over at least once and possibly twice there. Why did you decide to ship over during that period? Did economics have anything to do with it?

Owen: Yes, because I went out after 1936 and stayed out three months and was lucky to get back in in the time that was required. I went to see an uncle to see if he could give me some help in 1936 about getting a job. He told me a place, National Tank Company, that I could apply to, but there were too many senior people looking for jobs and work. My uncle would not say a good word. He just said, "You get it on your own. I had no fault or anything with him because maybe it was a good thing that he made me get everything on my own. He told me where a job was, and I'd go apply for it, and it was up to me to get it. So far as I know, he didn't put any good word in for me. That was in 1938 because I had extended for two years. Then from 1938, since I had made the other promotions, I was coming up to second class, so I

shipped over for four, and that put me into World War II and the Pearl Harbor incident.

Marcello: Okay, let me ask you this. I'm curious. You mentioned that you had spent some time over in the Philippines and China and so on during a part of that pre-Pearl Harbor period. Were you a part of the Asiatic Fleet?

Owen: Yes. Everytime we went over, in 1936 to 1938, why, we were assigned to the Asiatic Fleet.

Marcello: I've always been fascinated by the Asiatic sailors. I've heard all sorts of stories about those guys. What was a typical Asiatic sailor like? I'm referring to one of those who had perhaps spent years over there on that Asiatic Station, which a lot of them did.

Owen: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what those guys were like.

Owen: I guess you could say that they epitomized the strength of foreign duty and the exposure to the foreign service. One of the people that I had on the New York--he was a gunner's mate--talked about being an Asiatic sailor. To me it represented a type or kind of world of experiences that I thought that I wanted to experience. One of the things, oddly enough, over that period of time. .you've given me just a little bit of an idea now about one of the things I wanted to express. One of the admirals who was definitely responsible for China being a country was Admiral Yarnell, who felt that America was turning their

back on China when we as a nation had an opportunity to accept them. Because China was fed up with the French; they were fed up with the British; and they had opened their doors to Americans. We were looked upon as kind of a savior nation. But people in Washington turned their backs on everything that Yarnell was trying to accomplish with the Chinese nation, and I feel like that some of the things that happened would not have happened. I realize that Chiang Kai-shek was what he was and that the warlords were what they were--they weren't perfect people--but they were a nation that was trying to be consolidated. Now there may have been factors that Americans would not expect or accept because we ran, you might say, an extremely tight ship. I remember going back into Tsingtao, which is where we normally went to for that load of oil, that is, to take and offload it. There was a ricksha boy that I had everytime for the two years during the trips that we made. When we came in port, he would always come to the landing, and he'd wait until I came ashore and take me wherever I wanted to go.

Marcello: I understand a lot of those Asiatic sailors were good seamen, too.

Owen: Exceptionally good seamen. They knew how to treat people. They knew people. It was like a people to people thing. When the sampans came out to bargain,

they would do their best to get their best buy or bargain and respond with the money that it required. They treated them not like a low-class of people. Their treatment of them was on an equal basis. The boss sampan man would come aboard to paint the ship, and he would have his crew, so to speak, but the crew was respected as much as the boss sampan man. I felt that that sort of rapport with them was the basic opportunity to gain China as an ally. Well, we were looking always to the West and Europe. Maybe it's because I had too much time in the Orient. I don't know.

Marcello: I understand a lot of those Asiatic sailors had lots of tattoos.

Owen: Yes, they did. It seemed to be the thing to do. I never did get one, but I don't know how I escaped it (chuckle).

Marcello: And I understand a lot of those guys that had been over in the Asiatic area for an extended period of time really had no family or home back in the States on a lot of occasions.

Owen: That's true. Primarily, they kind of disassociated the relationship of what family they might have had or did have to their duty in the Orient.

Marcello: The Navy had more or less become their home.

Owen: Yes, the Navy was home to them.

Marcello: When was it that you went aboard the Dobbin?

Owen: I went aboard the Dobbin in July of 1938.

Marcello: Describe for me some of the various kinds of functions that the Dobbin could perform as a destroyer tender. Those kinds of ships fascinate me because of all the various skilled personnel aboard. What were some of the functions, some of the things, that personnel on the Dobbin could do in terms of tending to destroyers? What were some of the skills you had on board?

Owen: Everything. You name it and we had it; you name it and we did it. The optical shop handled binoculars, clocks, watches; plumbing; machine shops; boat repairs; dental work; doctor work. There wasn't any kind of function except maybe those of a large magnitude that we couldn't do, but to the degree that we were able to do them, we were able to do everything.

Marcello: There was even a foundry aboard, was there not?

Owen: There was a foundry aboard. There was a blacksmith's shop. You bent the steel that you needed to bend--had the furnaces for it. We had a bake shop. I can't think of a thing that we weren't able to do.

Marcello: When people think of.

Owen: Even photography. We had photography shops.

Marcello: When people think of such a ship, I don't think they get a very glamorous impression, but it would seem to me that the destruction of such a ship and the personnel aboard would be a very, very grievous loss, considering



all the skilled people aboard.

Owen: It would have been. Once you break up more or less a team, which they have become even though they may have served on the ship even for only two years. that particular unit of shipfitters, pipefitters, foundrymen, blacksmiths, welders, bake shops, storerooms, and torpedo shops all becomes so integrated that you work as a team. Even though what you had in the torpedo shop you may have thought didn't fit in the shipfitter's shop, because of the relationship of some things, they needed to come to the shipfitter's shop, and we did them. We worked as a harmonious team. Teamwork--we had it. We installed guns that were added in the 1940s, before Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: When was it that the Dobbin went to Pearl Harbor on a more or less permanent basis?

Owen: She went on a permanent basis in October of 1938.

Marcello: She was out at Pearl Harbor or in that area from 1938 certainly on up through the attack?

Owen: Yes, until February of 1942. We were talking about it the other day. I only recall two trips to sea after we got out there. They established the Hawaiian Detachment, and the Hawaiian Detachment was comprised of all the ships of the fleet that operated out of Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: You mentioned that you didn't leave Pearl very much

after you got out there. I assume, then, that the destroyers that needed any sorts of repairs or servicing would simply tie up to the Dobbin, and most of the work would be done there.

Owen: It would all be done there unless it was some sort of major type that was beyond our capability. Then they would go into the Navy yard.

Marcello: And where was it that the Dobbin normally tied up when it was there at Pearl? Was there a place where it generally always tied up?

Owen: Yes. We had, I might say, a permanent berth at the north end of Ford Island. The planes would just take off and fly almost directly over us. On night operations, why, they'd also fly over us.

Marcello: Was your assignment to the Dobbin one that you requested, or were you simply sent there within the normal routine of the assignments?

Owen: No, it was just the normal routine of the assignments. I was just lucky to get the Dobbin. I could have been sent to another ship. They sent me there, I guess, to have me later transferred to a destroyer because I was in the ship's company and I was eligible for transfer to a destroyer from the ship's company. But with the work and performance and my efforts there, why, I managed to get transferred from the ship's company down to the Repair Department. I guess Chief Bates, who was the

leading chief of the shipfitters, liked the work that I did well enough to let me stay on and didn't transfer me.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. During this period, had you married?

Owen: Yes.

Marcello: In what year was that?

Owen: In 1942.

Marcello: Okay, so it was after the war started that you married?

Owen: Yes.

Marcello: Okay. I was just wondering if it had been before or after the war. So I'm assuming, then, since you were single at the time of the attack, that you essentially stayed aboard the Dobbin.

Owen: Yes. Well, the day of the attack, I was more concerned about an automobile--a 1938 Chevrolet, two-door--that I had taken aboard the Dobbin to Pearl and was wondering what had happened to it because I didn't know what happened on shore.

Marcello: Let me back up a minute because I don't want to get to the Pearl Harbor attack yet, but I'm assuming that somewhere in here you had enough rank that you were able to take a car that you had perhaps purchased on the West Coast.

Owen: .I was a second class. I got the car from my mother and bought another car for her.

Marcello: And then you were able to get that car on the Dobbin?

Owen: Yes, loaded on the Dobbin. If I recall correctly, there were eleven cars that went over on the deck of the Dobbin when we came back for a sort of a short period of about three weeks, I believe it was. I was able to get leave and go home. Maybe it was a month, but that was all. I was able to get permission, when I came back, to bring the car because we knew we were going back to Pearl. I had some friends kind of helping me: "Get your car, and then we can use it. (chuckle)"

Marcello: Was there very much red tape involved in getting the car transported from the West Coast over to Hawaii?

Owen: No, just some papers that we had to fill out. It was just routine paperwork, such as, if the car is damaged the Navy wouldn't have any responsibility; if they had to push it overboard, they'd have to push it overboard. Just that sort of standard bit.

Marcello: Did you have to be a particular rank before you were eligible to take your car over there?

Owen: Yes, a second class petty officer and above, and I happened to be a second class (chuckle).

Marcello: And where did you keep that car once you got it over to Pearl?

Owen: Well, that was my problem there. There was a parking area near the landing at Merry's Point that you could park your cars in and leave them there, and then when

you went back ashore, why, you went ahead and used them.

Marcello: Was Merry's Point pretty close to the Fleet Landing or anything of that nature?

Owen: Yes, the Fleet Landing was right there.

Marcello: We'll come back and pick up on your car in a moment. What was your impressions about being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands?

Owen: I loved it! I thought it was fabulous! I guess I'd have to say that I'm proud of the fact that I was able to see Hawaii as it was.

Marcello: I've seen some of those photographs of Hawaii during that period, and to my recollection there were only two hotels on Waikiki Beach. Is that correct?

Owen: Yes, the Moana and the Royal Hawaiian. That's right. And they always had the .oh, I'm wanting to say "Sweet Lalani. They had the broadcast of some music that was always sent to the States. Of course, the radios and the programs in the States picked it up. Oh, I don't remember the band leader's name at the moment. They had it from the lanai of the Moana Hotel. I'm want to say Harry Owens, but I don't think that's right. But I do remember the tenor singer, and I fell in love with his voice. He really had a tremendous voice.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work for you aboard the Dobbin while you were there at Pearl? What kind of liberty did you get?

Owen: Well, I got three out of four, and generally I was standing by for some of the married men who had their wives there. So I took stand-by duty. But when I wanted to go ashore, why, I went. I generally ran out of money, so I stayed on board ship (chuckle).

Marcello: When you went on liberty, what was your normal routine? What did you do?

Owen: Well, just to be frank about it all, one of the things that I would do would be to go one of the "houses" on Hotel Street. There was a bar that I frequented almost permanently--the White House--and "Pete" Peterson was the owner of that bar. Backtracking, if you want to, we had our boilers replaced on the Ramapo. It took them five months to do it, and I was in a bar almost every night on Vallejo Street.

Marcello: I guess there was all sorts of activities on Hotel and Canal Streets. In addition to the houses of prostitution, I understand that the tattoo parlors were there and the curio shops and all that sort of thing--everything to take the sailor's money.

Owen: That's right. I bought a radio there, which was an export model--it was never sold in the United States--and I took it to my friends, Mickey Stone and Ed Barron. They lived in Pearl City. I don't know what happened to Mickey Stone.

Marcello: Were these civilians, or were these all Navy personnel?

Owen: All Navy personnel. Ed Barron and his wife and Mickey lived across from one another. They came back to Graham, Texas. He retired as a lieutenant commander, such as myself, after thirty years, also. But I've lost track of him.

Marcello: Was this one of the favorite pastimes, that is, listening to the radio and that sort of thing?

Owen: Yes. Very seldom could you get a radio unless it was a short-wave, but you could get a radio that would pick up stations in the States--West Coast stations.

Marcello: And did you keep this radio aboard ship, or was it with those people?

Owen: No, it was at Barron's and Stone's.

Marcello: You were talking about the houses of prostitution awhile ago. I gather that on weekends or when the fleet was in, there would be lines outside and around a corner to get into those places.

Owen: I guess I'm like everyone else, being single and free-lancing and everything. I finally got a very steady date between two ladies that were there, and it was about the whole time of my four years over there. They were over there, too.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan were obviously getting worse, could you in your position detect any change or changes in the routine of the

Dobbin--in the kind of work you were doing or anything of that nature?

Owen: I don't know about changes, but I do know that every one of us was saying, "Why was the Battle Fleet in this two weeks? Why was the Carrier Force in this other two weeks?" Then they'd flip-flop: "Why was it back up and why. ?" They just rotated. I might say that one of my skippers on the New York was Admiral Kimmel. He was my skipper aboard the New York. I was bow hook in his gig. I never did understand. .and I felt that if that man had been given the information that he and Short should have been given, Pearl Harbor would never have happened, or we wouldn't have been at the mercy of the Japanese like we were.

Marcello: What do you remember about Admiral Kimmel? You mentioned that you were his bow hook aboard the New York. Just give me your impressions or description of the man as you remember him when you were a young sailor.

Owen: Well, he was an officer that we heard many things about. He was being selected as a rear admiral, which he had become, because he went on to take one of the divisions of the battle group. I did not go with him there. I stayed with the New York. But he was a man of drive, a very forthright individual, and was always a person that was considerate of his crew or his men. I guess that



Captain Neal, who was before him, was about the only other individual that would have been a more compassionate man. Captain Neal was more compassionate than Captain Kimmel. I remember that we came into Santa Barbara Harbor one night in a deep fog, and I was up on bow as a lookout. He'd just creep the ship in. On dead reckoning, he anchored the ship within 100 yards of where it was supposed to be, in Santa Barbara Harbor.

Marcello: This was Admiral Kimmel who did this?

Owen: No, that was Captain Neal. That was Captain Neal. Captain Kimmel was, I feel, unjustly treated as was General Short. They were unjustly crucified. They had to have a fall guy, and they are the two that got it. This is not to take away from Admiral Nimitz anything whatsoever. He was brilliant. The way that he got his forces together, like Eisenhower got forces together, he did things and caused things to happen that, so far as I knew, were beautifully executed because of the way things came out.

Marcello: In talking to some of the other sailors who had been aboard the Dobbin. I've heard that some of those destroyers that tied up to the ship during those weeks immediately prior to the attack had actually expended their depth charges on submarines or whatever outside the entrance to Pearl Harbor. Do you know anything about that?

Owen: No, I really don't, except that when they came alongside, I knew that they didn't have any depth charges. The basic thing that I have recollection of. .we had all of the portholes open, and the welders had to cut out all of the plates. We took them down, and the welders had to tack them up. We worked around the clock from the day after Pearl Harbor, getting those ships together so that they could go to sea and getting those portholes welded up. We felt like we were dogs, but we weren't dogs because we were just so damned tired. To put it bluntly, we were scared.

Marcello: We'll talk about this in a moment. When you and your shipmates sat around in "bull" sessions, did anybody ever discuss the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, or did most of you feel pretty safe there, given the distance between Pearl Harbor and Japan?

Owen: Yes, we talked about it off and on on occasion. Our skipper used to go ashore every evening to take a walk up into the hills behind Pearl City, and one time he didn't come back. He was waylaid up in the mountains, and they never found his body.

Marcello: I'd heard that story before. Do you know anything else about that? Did a party from the Dobbin go out and search those hills or anything of that nature?

Owen: Yes, we did. I think it was five days, and then they finally tapered off, except we had search parties go up

into the hills. They combed them as far down into the ravines as they could.

Later, I ran into our former executive officer, Captain Womble (later admiral). When I went to the BUPERS (Bureau of Personnel) and talked to him, I said, "Whatever happened to our skipper?" He says, "We really don't know, even at this date. And that's almost two years later. I believe that would have been 1943. And he said, "We really don't know. We feel for certain that there were some Japanese, from a place up there, and he had caught them taking pictures. They were probably responsible for his death.

Marcello: Do you recall approximately when all this took place, that is, his disappearance and so on? Was it pretty close to the time of the attack?

Owen: It was about a week before the attack.

Marcello: And what were the rumors going around at that time?

Owen: Well, we knew that the Japanese were up there. They had homes and houses, and they had fields. It was just a perfect spot to spy on the ships and all. Some comments that we had heard from. I was a first class by that time, and we heard comments that the captain had noticed Japanese activity up there. Womble had told him--this was later, as he told me--that someone needed to go with him, and not to be going alone. He said, "Oh, no, no problem. No problem.

Marcello: This brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and, of course, we want to go into as much detail as you can remember. Let's start with that Saturday--December 6. Do you recall what your routine was on that day?

Owen: Yes, I was ashore.

Marcello: Do you recall what you did?

Owen: The usual (chuckle) Go to "Pete" Peterson's bar and drink, then go down to see my girl, and then take the car. Since I did some Shore Patrol duty, I didn't get into any trouble, so I went out and parked on the point. We had just the usual affair. Then I drove the car back that morning, oh, I guess, about 6:00 or 6:30, to the base. I parked in the parking lot.

Like I said, I came down to get the boat to come back--that was Sunday, of course. I actually got in another boat. They were making drop-offs. They had the omnibus boat duty, and they'd drop people off at different ships. I was in that boat, and it didn't shove off until, I think, about 7:40 or 7:30, thereabouts. We were going across the open water to the. .I believe it was the Oklahoma. I don't know.

The attack came in, and all of a sudden there was (weeps). there seemed to be bodies everywhere. We were pulling as many out as we could (still weeping) I didn't get back to the ship until. .until the second. .the first wave had been over.

Marcello: What kind of a morning was it in terms of weather and climate? Do you remember?

Owen: It was a beautiful morning. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining. It wasn't too hot--it hadn't gotten hot. The weather was just perfect. There were ideal, perfect conditions. That was it.

Marcello: Approximately how large was this launch that you were taking?

Owen: Forty-foot. It was a forty-foot launch.

Marcello: And it had about how many sailors in it that morning? You'd have to estimate that probably

Owen: Well, I'd have to estimate. I think there was probably about, oh, somewhere between fifteen and twenty of us to be dropped off.

Marcello: As a first class petty officer at this time, you could actually stay ashore all night if you wanted. Is that correct?

Owen: Yes. Oh, yes.

Marcello: That was a privilege of being a first class petty officer, wasn't it?

Owen: Yes, yes. Yes, I could stay all night. I had no restrictions, of course, until after the war. Then they gave restrictions and wouldn't let us stay ashore.

Marcello: What kind of shape were you in that morning when you went aboard the launch to go back?

Owen: I was sober by that time (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so I gather, then, that you're heading toward the Dobbin, or eventually you're going to be heading toward the Dobbin.

Owen: Well, we were headed toward the Oklahoma, where it was. Then they had some people to put off at the Tennessee, as I recall. All of them sang out their ship's names as the boat pulled away from the landing: "Let me off at the Vestal! "Let me off at the Tennessee! "Let me off. !" All of them were down at Battleship Row. I remember saying, "Well, the farthest one out, the Dobbin! That coxswain did a beautiful job.

Marcello: So you are actually out in the harbor itself when the attack took place?

Owen: Yes. We were just moving out to the harbor, and it was all ahead. It was going on in front of us. When the Japs came over and came down that slip, I looked up. I had seen Japanese planes before because when I was on the Ramapo I had see the Japanese planes and the insignia when they bombed the Great Wall in Shanghai. We were setting there, and there was a Japanese destroyer right astern of us. We were all scared and afraid they were going to get us, but they didn't. Anyway, I said, "Oh, my God! They came so fast, and so almost instantaneously we heard explosions from those torpedoes. The people that were topside, you know, just on the rail, they just were blown off.

Marcello: How low were those planes coming in? Do you remember?  
I'm referring to the torpedo planes.

Owen: I don't know for certain, but I'd estimate that they  
must have been about 500 feet high.

Marcello: Off the water?

Owen: Yes. Maybe they were 700 feet, but they were very low.

Marcello: From what you mentioned a moment ago, your launch was  
heading more or less for the Oklahoma. It was in front  
of you.

Owen: Yes. Yes.

Marcello: Describe what you saw there. Now, of course, we know  
that the Oklahoma actually turned over after taking  
several torpedoes in very short succession.

Owen: Yes.

Marcello: Describe the Oklahoma turning over if, in fact, you saw  
that.

Owen: I saw it listing. That's as much as I saw because by  
that time we were just reaching over to pick up bodies,  
not knowing what their conditions were. If there was a  
hand, we grabbed it. Some bodies weren't there. I did  
not see the actual rolling over of the Oklahoma. We  
were too busy looking in the water and picking up  
whatever flotsam or whatever was available to be picked  
up.

Marcello: So your rescue efforts started almost as soon as the  
bombing and the torpedoing commenced.

Owen: Yes. Yes.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago the seamanship of that coxswain.

Owen: Yes.

Marcello: Could you elaborate on that? You seem to have complimented him on his performance that day.

Owen: Yes. He and his engineer worked like a team. Of course, he rang the bells for the signals, but he'd stick that nose of that boat almost either alongside or right at the bow to a ship so you could get around to pick up the body. There was many of them alive, but they were injured. I don't know how many people we pulled up. We threw the thwarts over so we could lay people out. The way that that man responded and knew or was able to anticipate the maneuver that he needed to for the position that he needed with that engine, whether it was forward or back, was amazing. My picture of him is that he was handling his throttles, and then he was looking at the coxswain. As the bells rang, he could almost anticipate what he had to do. Of course, the bow hooks were up fishing out bodies. There was a coxswain and the .and I don't know what rate. He may have been a seaman; he may have been a third class. I don't know. I think the engineer was a third class petty officer. I remember him being a third class petty officer.



Marcello: During that period when you're out on the water, do you recall whether or not your launch came under any strafing or anything of that nature?

Owen: There was some strafing, yes, but just splashes in the water. You know, you don't think about your own life. You're trying to save somebody else. I guess a current day expression would be that it didn't compute. It just didn't register.

Marcello: After the initial attack, what did the surface of the water look like?

Owen: It looked like a tugboat had been by and churned it up, that is, the waves. So many waves were slapping and going in different directions. That was why the coxswain. .he was able to maneuver the boat back to where it didn't get caught on anything. Of course, we later took some people to the hospital, and we offloaded them there in front of the hospital. When that first attack was over, well, then they went ahead and took me to the ship. First off, I thought that he wasn't going to take me to the ship.

Marcello: Was the surface of the water covered with oil? Was there a lot of oil and debris in the water?

Owen: There was oil and debris in the water, yes.

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you get back to the Dobbin? What do you do?

Owen: Well, the first thing that they told me to do was to

report to my repair station, so I went forward and reported to my repair station and finished buttoning up the ship and sealing the ship up.

Marcello: By the time you get back aboard the ship, how was business being conducted there? Was it organized and professional, or was there confusion and chaos?

Owen: Well, the chaos, as I understand, came before. First, they sounded Fire and Rescue Party, and then they sounded--this is what I was told later--and then they sounded General Quarters. Well, everyone knew what to do and went to it, and, of course, they were already at General Quarters when I got back to the ship.

Marcello: And once again describe for me what you were doing, then, once you had gotten back aboard ship.

Owen: Well, as I said, when I got back aboard ship, they told me to report to my repair station because we all knew one another. I didn't ask what had happened. Hell, I'd already seen what had happened. I proceeded down to my repair station, which was in the bow section of the ship, that is, back to that first bulkheads, below the torpedo room. The berthing space was up there in the bow of the ship and came back to about as far as the bridge.

Marcello: And what kind work were you doing then?

Owen: Damage control work.

Marcello: Which consisted of what? What sort of things were you

doing?

Owen: Buttoning up. Buttoning up the ship, which is dogging the hatches down, sort of making sure that all ports were closed, making sure that no tanks were open of any kind. We kind of just circulated around, checking on various parts of the ship.

Marcello: So you were doing the normal things that you would do when General Quarters sounded.

Owen: Right.

Marcello: What do you recall about the second wave that came over?

Owen: I don't recall anything because I was down below. I couldn't see anything.

Marcello: What kind of a feeling does that give you to be down below and not be able to see something, but at the same time know that there is all sorts of activity taking place outside?

Owen: The 20-millimeter guns were being fired on our ship. We had either three or four casualties that were from strafing. I guess I'd have to say that I sat there in fear, wondering when we were going to get it, because the Dobbin had no watertight control to speak of. One "fish" in the engineering spaces, and we were sunk.

Marcello: What did you do that evening?

Owen: Prayed that they didn't come back. Yet we heard all kinds of reports: "They got torpedo boats in the harbor! "The Nevada has been beached! All sorts of

rumors were circulating up on deck. We all went up on deck for the night. Of course, it was a complete blackout. It was an eerie feeling, one that you just wondered how you got spared.

Marcello: Given what happened that day, I would think that all of those rumors sounded quite plausible at the time.

Owen: They were very plausible--the rumors that we were hearing about and the things that were being said among ourselves: "The midget submarines are getting in, and they're going to get us because they hadn't gotten us yet! They got all the other ships and did the damage that they needed to do. We thought they'd come in to finish us off.

One of the biggest concerns that we had was that. .like I said, Admiral Kimmel and Short would not have done this. Saturday night at midnight they called off the alert that we had been under for thirty days. Now you can't tell me that a general and an admiral would call off an alert at midnight if they knew something was going to happen out of Washington or had some indication that something was happening in Washington. And Washington had the information even three days before. But I felt that with that being called off that everything was secure, but much to my surprise all hell broke loose the next morning.

Marcello: Do you recall the planes from the Enterprise coming in

that Saturday evening--the ones that were shot at?

Owen: No.

Marcello: What did you do in the days immediately following the attack? What sort of work were you doing then?

Owen: Well, immediately following it, we were taking care of the destroyers alongside and working our fannies off to get them ready to go to sea.

Marcello: And did you mention, among other things, that you were welding up the ports and things of that nature?

Owen: Well, the welders were welding up the ports. We had cut out the portholes, and we went down. .of course, we had the steel, and as a shipfitter, why, I would hold up the steel plate, and he'd tack them in certain spots. We'd go to the next porthole and get those, and then we'd go up and leave the welders to their job. But they'd tack them in place for us.

Marcello: And how long did this kind of activity take place for you personally?

Owen: Well, about four days, as I recall. Maybe three days is all.

Marcello: And these are full days that we're talking about.

Owen: Yes. On the morning of the 8th we started. I'd had a night's sleep. I remember it was about almost fifty-six hours that I managed to stay with it, and then I just passed out. I mean, I was so damned sleepy and *groggy* that I just couldn't stay awake with it. Some of the

welders even went as long as seventy-two hours. They were slaves. They did a fantastic job.

Marcello: How long did you remain with the Dobbin?

Owen: I got off of the Dobbin in .let's see. .we left Pearl on February 22 and went south. I guess it was April, because we left and went to Samoa. We stayed in Samoa for almost six weeks, I believe it was, and all the while we were hoping that the Salt Lake City was going to come in to give us some fresh provisions. But they never did come in. I think it was finally the Portland that came in. The potatoes that we'd been having on board--fresh potatoes--had all rotted so that they stunk up the ship. They finally threw them overboard. But we had dried potatoes in the meantime, and the fresh potatoes were up on deck.

Then after Samoa, we left and went to Tongatapu in the Friendly Islands. I don't know how long we stayed there, but it was only about two weeks because the Battle of the Coral Sea went on. The destroyers came back, and we patched them up or whatever they needed.

Then we went on from there and came to the Fijis, and from the Fijis we went down to Noumea. Noumea was where I got off. The Dobbin stayed there only two days, I believe, and they went on to Brisbane. I got off because I came back to be on a precommissioning detail. They were having to pull several of us off, some

pipefitters, some copper shop people, and foundrymen-- just a scattering--and we were all selected to come on back to the States.

Marcello: And did you pick up new construction?

Owen: I picked up new construction, yes.

Marcello: And approximately when was that?

Owen: About April, 1942.

Marcello: And what new construction did you pick up?

Owen: The first one I picked up was an APH, which was the USS Pinckney. I didn't get to serve aboard her very long because I made chief petty officer. The ship's complement had already been filled for chief petty officers, so I went onto the Puget Sound, and unbeknownst to me. I was a chief petty officer, of course, and then I made a trip on the Prince William (CVE) when we took the first load of Corsair fighter planes to Guadalcanal. Butch O'Hare was the one who was in charge of all the planes.

Marcello: And then did you finish out the rest of the war on the Prince William?

Owen: No, I got the Prince William and then, strangely enough, was sent to the USS Core in the Atlantic.

Marcello: And what kind of a ship was it?

Owen: CVE, another flattop (chuckle).

Marcello: And did you finish your World War II career on it?

Owen: (Chuckle) No. From the Core I went to the damage

control school in San Francisco, and I taught as a chief carpenter. I taught damage control, the elementary elements of damage control, and how to number compartments and all. For nine months I was there. From there (chuckle) I went back to the Alaska that was put into commission, which was a CV1. I finished the war on the Alaska.

Marcello: Mr. Owen, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview, then. I want to thank you very much for your taking time to speak with me about your reminiscences of Pearl Harbor. I realize that some of that was pretty hard for you to talk about, and I'm most appreciative that you hung in there and that we were able to get this information. I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments very useful and valuable when this material is used.

Owen: (Weeps) As far as I'm concerned, they gave Admiral Kimmel a raw deal, because he was as fine an officer as was ever a naval officer. And I think General Short got the short end of the stick, also.

Marcello: Well, I'm glad we have that on the record, and that's probably a good place to end this interview.