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Interview with

D. D. HILL

October 1, 1989

Place of Interview: Richardson, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: *D. D. Hill*  
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

D. D. Hill

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello                      Date: October 1, 1989

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing D. D. Hill for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 1, 1989, in Richardson, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Hill in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the destroyer USS Dewey during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

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

Mr. Hill: I was born on December 20, 1921, in Pharr, Texas. It's right down on the Rio Grande river in the Rio Grande Valley, just four miles from Mexico. I was born south of Pharr on a dairy farm. I attended public schools in Pharr, San Juan, and Alamo until I reached the seventh grade. Then we moved to the Edinburg School District, and I completed my

education in Edinburg.

Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Hill: Shortly after I graduated from high school in Edinburg, that same summer, I went to Harlingen and volunteered for the Navy.

Marcello: And what year was that?

Hill: 1940.

Marcello: Why was it that you decided to enter the service in 1940?

Hill: Well, there were two reasons. One of them, I suspect, was the major reason. I was anxious to get away from that hoe handle. Farming was a pretty harsh way of life and long hours and strenuous work. They had told me at graduation that I had something to offer in the way of brain power, and I didn't know how to extricate myself from the drudgery of farming and the disappointment that farming affords other than just to get out of that particular environment. I had seen some movies about the Navy, and I always loved the water, so I thought that might be an answer to my needs. Another thing was that we had had in our school some relief programs in regard to the Finnish relief. The Russians had jumped on Finland, and I felt like that this was somewhat bad for the "big Russian bear" to be jumping on the "little ol' Finns. World War II really was cranking up about this time, and my father cautioned me about my actions,

and I said, "Well, if we do get into it, I'll be drafted anyway. So my reasoning appealed to him, and he said, "If you don't want to be on the farm, you're not going to be much good to me here. So we came to a meeting of the minds, and I joined the Navy.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Hill: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp when you went through, or was it the normal Navy boot camp?

Hill: I think that it was pretty normal. We had one young man that jumped ship in South Unit. I happened to be standing on guard duty at the north gate when he was returned by his parents. He had caught a freight train to get home. Of course, we all knew that he was missing. When he got out of the car, I couldn't believe that this was one of our well-scrubbed sailors. He was very dirty. They had old coal-burning engines on those trains, and he was trying to get home that way. He had apparently ridden outside or in boxcars. He was limping badly. When he jumped off the train near his home, he'd hit a switch with his knee, and it was hurt. It was my duty to take him to the sickbay, and the doctor was not very sympathetic with his cause. When he felt one of his knees and the boy raised up off the table, the doctor back-handed him and told him to lay down, that

he'd tell him when he wanted him to get up. That was the way things were back in those days, and I could sympathize with both parties. Anyway, that was one event.

Another time, when Company 43 was at parade rest waiting for chow call, one of the members had moved, so Company 43 was last to go in to chow hall. This was in August in San Diego. I was used to the heat, having been in South Texas, and it didn't bother me, but some of those Yankees and what-have-you who had gone in the Navy weren't used to it. This one person fell forward without ever getting his hands from behind his back, and as he splattered on the concrete, knocking out some teeth and things, people picked him up, and there was blood running out of him. Another guy rolled his eyes, and I caught him. About half the company was carrying the other half off the grinder. We had to race to the chow hall because they were closing the doors (chuckle). They were unsympathetic with our cause, and we just left our shipmates out under a palm tree while we ran to get to the chow hall.

Of course, I saw a lot of things and heard different languages--I mean by that brogues--from the different parts of the United States. That was new to me. I heard language that I never had introduced to me before, having grown up in a Christian home and being rather

sheltered, I suspect. I really wasn't quite ready for some of the terms that were used in the Navy.

Marcello: How long was your enlistment for?

Hill: Six years.

Marcello: At that time they had initiated the six-year enlistment?

Hill: That was the minimum enlistment unless you were in on the minority cruise.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got aboard the destroyer Dewey. How did that take place?

Hill: We had a choice--first and second choice--of what ship we wanted on, and I had determined that I wanted on a small ship because I had heard through the grapevine that it wasn't quite so regulation. I never did--the entire time I was in the military--appreciate being scrutinized as to dress and what-have-you. I felt like I was capable of dressing myself, and, of course, they tried to prove that I wasn't. So I avoided it all. I even stood watch on occasions to avoid inspections. Of course, I conformed enough that I avoided any or many reprimands because I didn't like that either. So I conformed and learned how to roll my clothes and pack my seabag and make my bed. I conformed to that degree. But I did want on a "tin can, so they assigned me to the USS Dewey. It was in the harbor in San Diego. I went aboard there right after boot camp.

Marcello: Describe your first impressions of the Dewey.

Hill: Well, I was, of course, very young. We only had eleven grades in school at that time, and you graduated young. I was, I guess, flexible enough at that young age that I excepted pretty much the routine. I grew up with a very strong work ethic and tried to please and got along very well. I didn't mind the work because I was used to hard work.

So there was several things that impressed me. Out on the farm in South Texas, we had no electricity. We didn't have running water, except for a windmill, and none in the house; we had to go out with a bucket and get it. Of course, the stock had running water out to their tank, but we didn't have it in the house. So there were some nice things about it. Certainly, the food was good. I heard a lot of gripes from some of those little boys from the South who grew up on chitlins and cornbread and sourbelly that didn't feel like the Navy food was good, but I found it to be very palatable and good.

Marcello: When had the Dewey been commissioned? How old a ship was it?

Hill: I hate to give dates because I'm not completely sure of them, but in 1934, 1935, or 1936, someplace along in there, Franklin Roosevelt, who had once been the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, had seen a need for a defense profile that we didn't have. Being a Navy man,

when he was President, he saw to it that even though we were in the throes of the Depression, that we had money to expand the Navy. He found it someplace. He had the Monaghan class built. I believe that's correct--Hull, Monaghan, Phelps, and Dewey class destroyers. That squadron was created by Franklin Roosevelt. It was a rather new ship for its time. It was a two-stacker destroyer. I was privileged to get on it. Versus the ol' four-stacker, it was quite modern.

Marcello: When you initially went aboard the Dewey, what was your function?

Hill: I was an apprentice seaman. Of course, when you are an apprentice seaman, this entitles you, so to speak, to about a twelve- or fourteen-hour day. You get up early in the morning for chow, and then you have duty all day and then a watch; or you set up the movies and take down for the movies; or you are in the whaleboats for the liberty parties. If you don't go ashore, you're on duty. Of course, like I say, I didn't mind. I was learning a whole lot.

There was one instance I might tell you, if you have time, that occurred. We had a coxswain by the name of White. Of course, he had seniority on me, and he (chuckle) had some rating that I didn't have as an apprentice seaman. I drew the duty to be a bowhook in the gig, so after the movie was over we loaded the

ladies aboard the gig and were taking them back to the landing. The tides were running pretty swift, and the wind was up, and the harbor was a little rough. We had a guy by the name of Corwin, who was an engineer. Corwin was sort of a fractious-type individual, I found out later, and he could lead you down the primrose path pretty fast because he liked contention of any kind. So as we approached the landing, I got up from my position back there. The coxswain had the rudder, and the engineer was doing his job. Of course, I moved up to take the bow hook and pull the gig in and tie it up, and White said, "Sit down and don't get up until I tell you to!" So I sat down. Ol' Corwin looked at me and said, "You going to let him get away with that?" in a low voice. I didn't say anything. So White, the coxswain, gave some bells astern, and Corwin answered them slowly and intentionally, and the gig hit the piling and bounced off, and the women screeched, and I just sat there. I continued to sit there. I never did get the order to get up. White jumped over me and ran up to the bow and jumped over onto the pier and pulled the boat in and tied it up and helped the ladies off. They went on their way. He got back in the boat and looked at me and said, "You're a smart little S.O.B., aren't you?" I said, "I'll tell you one thing: I'm smart enough to take care of that pee-winey job you gave me. I said,

"I'm not a S.O.B., and I want you to know that. So we let it go at that, and all the time ol' Corwin's saying, "Tell him, Hill. Tell him, Hill. So we got underway to go a day or two later to go out to the Hawaiian Detachment for patrol. When we got out to sea, guess who's watch I was in. I was in Coxswain White's watch! So I was on the wing of the bridge at night and in the crow's nest in the daytime and a real seasick sailor (chuckle). We had rough seas, and for seven days I never held a thing in my stomach. I ate one apple, and that didn't stay down. Of course, that was the wrong thing to eat, but it's the only thing that appealed to me. But, anyway, we got out to Pearl Harbor, and the water got still, and I got over that. I had no seasickness after that.

Marcello: In essence, then, were you in the deck force when you initially went aboard the Dewey?

Hill: Yes.

Marcello: And how long did you stay in the deck force?

Hill: As short a time as possible. I petitioned for the "black gang. My ambition during high school was quite diverse. I wanted to either be in the Navy, be a mechanic, or be a veterinarian. Of course, that's quite a diverse ambition, but, you know, on the farm we had machinery, and I always enjoyed working on cars and had taken auto mechanics in high school. I was quite

skilled with machinery, and I just didn't chose to be a "deck ape. Of course, I thought some of the boatswain's mates were quite obnoxious (chuckle), but they did their job. But I wanted a left arm rate.

Marcello: So you did get down into the black gang then?

Hill: Yes, right away.

Marcello: And what was your function there?

Hill: Well, at first I was in the fire room, and that wasn't my choice either. I wanted to be back with the engines and work on those. I had thought about diesel mechanic school, and the war sort of changed that. I was sort of willy-nilly about the whole thing. I did want to go up in rates, and I had in my scrapbook the various scores that I made as I progressed up. In fact, the Day of Infamy was. I was down in the IC room studying for first class machinist. I had my second class machinist rating already and had little time in the Navy.

Marcello: Yes, I picked up on that. That was rather unusual because from everything that I have read and heard, promotion in the Navy before the Pearl Harbor attack normally went very, very slowly, did it not?

Hill: Well, you had fleet competition for rates. Of course, the story was that if you knew of a shipmate who died or got killed while ashore, why, you rushed back to try to fill his position by taking the exam. It was quite competitive (chuckle). In fact, little appropriation

was made for the armed services. Our whole country was in a profile of isolationism and noninvolvement, and Roosevelt ran on that ticket. In fact, you know, the draft was sustained by only one vote in 1941 by the Senate. So we weren't anxious to get involved in a world war. We were doing everything short of that by supplying and servicing ships of other nations that were involved. But the League of Nations didn't function right, and we didn't even join it (chuckle). The European countries avoided it until Hitler just about had everything his way. The whole situation was a downplay--anything that we might involve ourselves in. The fact that we had to join for six years...I had a friend that joined a year later, in the late spring of 1941, and he joined with a four-year enlistment. So the difference was that they could see that we were edging closer to it, and I have some comments that I'd like to make in regard to Pearl Harbor. I may make it at this time, if it's all right.

Marcello: Why don't we just wait until we get into the attack, and then we'll deal with those.

Hill: All right.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. As a young lad fresh from South Texas and boot camp, what were your impressions about being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands on a more or less permanent basis?

Hill: Well, I was used to a tropical or sub-tropical climate, having been in South Texas--we have few freezes down there in the citrus industry--and it was to my liking. I was used to that climate. I had never seen snow. In fact, the first snow I saw was in the spring of 1942 when we went to serve nine months in the Aleutians in Cold Bay, Alaska. I saw snow for the first time. The Dewey was sent up there to secure the Aleutian Island chain. Of course, that was a new pilgrimage, as far as I was concerned, into the cold. Going back to the islands, it was good duty. I was young and vigorous, and when the ship was in, I'd get up early in the morning and go on over to the sub base and take a plunge in the pool and work out. So I felt good, and I had good health, and I enjoyed it. In fact, I had a locker at the YMCA, and I'd go over there and change clothes--put on civvies--and hobnob around the island. I didn't stay in the beer joints--I was never that kind of sailor--but I'd go out to Waikiki Beach and surf. I enjoyed life out there. It was really good.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work for you aboard the Dewey after it got out to Pearl Harbor? Was it a port-and-starboard liberty? How did it work?

Hill: Two-thirds off and one-third on--two-thirds of us ashore.

Marcello: So you would have two out of every three days then.

Hill: Right, right.

Marcello: When you had liberty, when did it commence and when did you have to be back aboard ship? Do you recall that?

Hill: Well, some people stayed overnight. Those that were married had those privileges. I think, as I recall, liberty was over with at midnight. But I was used to going to bed early, and I never did extend it that much. I always had the theory that if you couldn't accomplish what you had in mind before midnight, well, it wasn't worth working for (chuckle), so I always got back to the ship in plenty of time. Then I felt refreshed in the morning. I was never much in sympathy with those who over-indulged.

Marcello: When did the Dewey move out to Pearl Harbor on a more or less permanent basis? I know that a great percentage of the fleet went out there after the spring maneuvers in 1941. Was the Dewey out there before that time?

Hill: The Dewey's home port was San Diego, but the Dewey was assigned to the Hawaiian Detachment. I got aboard in late August or September, and we sailed right on out there. We were there for a year, and then we came back, and you were extended a seven-day leave. Well, it was either seven or ten. No, it was a seven-day leave. I didn't go on leave. I didn't feel like it was long enough for me to make it to South Texas and back. As a result of this, I'd been in the Navy for two-and-a-half

years before I got my first leave, and that was for ten days. The war had begun, of course. That was from San Francisco. I got aboard a train, and it took me two-and-a-half days to get home. Of course, that was five days of my ten days just in travel. I tried to leave in plenty of time to get back, but the traffic was congested, and I got back to the ship an hour late. I was restricted aboard ship for a week because I was an hour late. The ship was changing berths, and I was supposed to help with that. I accepted that; somebody else had to pull my duty. I was still riding high for having gotten home. In two-and-a-half years, that was a real experience to get home.

What exactly was the Dewey's function when it moved out to Pearl Harbor as part of the Hawaiian Detachment? What were its responsibilities and so on in general?

We did a lot of patrol--just a lot of patrol. Then we had a lot of maneuvering that was done out there. We had night maneuvers; we had boarding parties. I recall that all those that could speak a foreign language were asked to report, and I reported as I could converse in Spanish--Tex-Mex, anyway. You could just about talk Italian or Mexican or Spanish if you knew that language. Having grown up in South Texas, I knew that. So we boarded ships and ordered people around in a foreign language. I recall one of our mess attendants could

speak French--I guess he was from the Dominican Republic. So he was on the boarding party as we went aboard, and he talked in French. I thought that was interesting.

Marcello: When you say you conducted these boarding parties, would these be simulated, or would you actually be going aboard various vessels while you were out on your patrol to see what they were doing?

Hill: We stopped at sea and boarded ships. Of course, it was in conjunction with the maneuvers out there, and we'd fire at sleeves and do all kinds of things. I recall one of the impressions that I had. At the time I left home, I was working for ten cents an hour, and this was right alongside of grown men who supported families at ten cents an hour. The standard day was ten hours, so you made a dollar a day. And you worked half a day on Saturday. So, really, the Navy wasn't as harsh an environment as I had been used to, even though we stood watches and also worked. You know, you'd work an eight-hour day and then stand a four-hour watch. If you happened to be on the graveyard or midnight shift, you still stood your watch plus worked. That wasn't too bad.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, could you, even in your position, detect any

change or changes in the routine of the Dewey?

I sensed...of course, you had more and more ships coming in. You had foreign ships--the French ships and British ships. We saw these and we mingled with some of the sailors ashore. We saw a little more...and, of course, I think money was what restricted us primarily from having more practice. But I recall on that ship inquiring about how much a 5-inch projectile and the powder cost. It seems to me like the projectile was \$45 or it was \$60 and \$50, something like that. It was a little over \$100 when you fired a 5-inch gun. Well, here I left that farm at ten cents an hour, and with rapid-fire 5-inch guns aboard, I multiplied those out, and when you fired 300 rounds and the money that was going out the barrel of that gun, I just didn't know how we could afford it. It was just a mystery to me. It concerned me and it concerns me to this day.

Later on, toward the end of the war, I boarded a DC-3--two-engine aircraft--out in Seattle. I was coming home on leave by aircraft. We could finally get on those things to come home. We stopped in Vegas and picked up a guy by the name of Magnuson. He was Representative Magnuson from the state of Washington, and he'd been in Vegas doing some gambling. He gave me a silver dollar that I still have. He sat down beside me, and I expressed my concern in regard to the

destruction and the cost of a war. He said, "Oh, don't worry about that, sailor. He said, "All we have to do is increase wages and take it back in income taxes. This same individual--Magnuson--was later Senator Magnuson. He was very powerful in Washington. He was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and carried lots of weight. I can't get these things out of my mind--how we resolve problems and just pass them off as non-important. I was reared that we paid our debts, and we didn't run up bills that we couldn't afford. And here we're right now in trillions of dollars in debt. It still bothers me.

Marcello: In talking to some of the people off the Dobbin, they remarked that, as one gets closer to December 7, and as the destroyers would come in to get replenished and resupplied, in some cases those destroyers had expended their depth charges on their various patrols and so on and so forth. Now, again, they didn't know whether these depth charges had been expended simply in training or whether they had detected alleged or imagined submarines out there or whatever the case. Do you know anything about that?

Hill: I think this was training, because even after the war began...we had more ships in the Navy at the end of the war than we had personnel at the beginning. As we got these men aboard, they were poorly trained. I made

chief in two-and-a-half years--chief petty officer--but that was unheard of. It usually takes sixteen years to make chief petty officer. So I was a little ol' fuzzy-faced kid and the chief petty officer in charge of the engineering department aboard a "tin can. Everybody in my gang was older because they were draft age and what-have-you, and that was a precarious position to be in. But, anyway, we had officers that were coming in poorly trained. We had one who'd drop a can off the fantail--order it to be dropped--and then give the "turns ahead" to get away from it instead of making a run at it. Those depth charges would go off and would trip our pumps and our generators and everything else and damage the ship because we weren't far enough away from the charge. Well, we needed the training. There's another factor, I think, knowing the way the government works in the services. You use up all your money, or you don't get your appropriations. So they were just out there not only practicing, but they were out there doing a thing which probably was essential in order to get them accustomed to the sounds and the fury of conflict.

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

Hill: Not at Pearl Harbor, but the conversations. We had one shipmate aboard who was off of the Panay. The Panay

was sunk up the Yangtze River. His opinion of the Oriental was pretty low, having served aboard a ship for a number of years and using the coolie labor to do all his menial tasks and having seen the cheapness of life and that kind of thing. His comment was, "We can take care of those people in three weeks. No problem!" Well, it was a long three weeks! That leads to complacency, and I firmly believe that complacency was instituted for a cause, and I'll get to that whenever you want me to.

Marcello: You mentioned that this person had served on the Panay, so he had been over on the Asiatic Station and was a part of the old Asiatic Fleet at one time.

Hill: Yes, and he was "Asiatic, too (chuckle).

Marcello: What do you mean by that? Again, that's something that we talk about, and we need to get it on the record.

Hill: That's a term used with people who have served overseas and have become pretty much accustomed to the situation as it exists and is a little less concerned about life than the normal American is concerned about and more or less accepts other cultures. I recall that we were down in Guadalcanal, and Eleanor Roosevelt came down there with a fifteen-fighter escort. We had just been dive-bombed and torpedo-planed in a synchronized attack, and here she came in with a fifteen-fighter escort to check on the troops and see how we were doing. When she

appeared in public, the troops jeered her because we felt like that she was in the way. She was a busybody, and we didn't much care for her. She made the comment that every serviceman ought to go through rehabilitation before they were turned loose on society back in the States. Of course, that didn't set good with the troops. But when you talk about people being "Asiatic, you do have a tendency to let your hair down.

I recall one time when we were coming back to the States, and in order not to slip and use the wrong kind of language, we had a kitty that we put money into--twenty-five cents everytime you slipped and said something you wouldn't want to say in front of your sisters and mother--and the deal was that you had to play all the way back to the United States. If you quit playing, you couldn't go to the party on this kitty. So some of the men used such vulgar language that they quit playing; it cost them too much. But we had a nice party when we got back to the States on the funds that we raised, and all of those of us who played could then go home and feel secure in talking without a Freudian slip (chuckle).

Marcello: I understand those Asiatic sailors--many of them--were tattooed and all this sort of thing.

Hill: Well, those things were easy to come by in the Orient. It was cheap and it was part of that culture over there

to use a lot of tattoos. I never felt like I wanted any of that on me, and I'm glad I didn't.

Marcello: I've also heard that a lot of those Asiatic sailors were pretty good seamen.

Hill: Well, they'd had a lot of experience. You know, when the Depression was going on, these people felt grateful for being in the Navy. Actually, the pay was pretty good for what you had to do in peacetime. The United States was looked up to. It seemed like, even in those days, we had goodwill tours around the world. It was a growing country, and it was a new country, and a lot of good things were being said about it. We weren't "the dirty Americans" then. So an American sailor in foreign ports was a...and still is. I mean, even during the war, the British sailors and soldiers just hated the Americans because we had more money to spend on the girls than they did.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into those days immediately prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, Mr. Hill, and, of course, we want to go into this in as much detail as you can remember. During that weekend or week, when did the Dewey come in and tie up to the Dobbin?

Hill: We had come in for minor repairs and tied up there, I think, probably a week ahead of that, just roughly. We had just stowed all our ammunition below decks because we were going to have welding and things going on on

topside. We were in there for minor overhaul and had many of our valves and motors and things over on the Dobbin being repaired. Topside was pretty much in disarray because of the need for overhaul. So we were completely down and dependent on the Dobbin for electricity and water.

Marcello: Just for the record, where was the Dobbin and its group of destroyers during that weekend of December 7? Pinpoint the location as best you can.

Hill: Well, as I recall the direction, it was just north of Ford Island. A nest of destroyers was out here alongside the Dobbin. We had a pretty good vantage point to see what was going on in the whole thing. We could watch the planes as they dove on Ford Island and the havoc that was being wrought there in the harbor.

Marcello: Given the overhaul and repairs that were being undertaken relative to the Dewey, how long would it take to get the ship seaworthy again?

Hill: Well, after the attack, we worked until midnight. We got underway, and no sooner had we gotten underway and our condenser pump. .because if you don't have enough forward motion of the ship for the scoop to bring the water through the condenser, you have to run a circulating pump; and our circulating pump had drawn in one of the powder cases, and it was hitting on the pump. We had to stop and drain that condenser and take off the

manhole to get in there and extricate that thing, so we got underway sometime in the wee hours of the morning.

So it would take some time, then, before the Dewey would be in condition to go to sea?

By the time we got all those valves back and everything to go out on patrol, it was in the wee hours of the morning. I never will forget the groans and the kinds of sounds down in the compartment where the men had worked heartily all day long. Of course, with the excitement and the adrenalin flowing, when it's over with, you are much more tired than you would have been otherwise. It was a very fitful sleep. You could tell that the men were restless as we finally got underway. I was able to go down in the compartment and try to get a little bit of sleep.

Then we went out on patrol that night, and, of course, everytime we got a sonar reading, we threw depth charges at it. Those black whales and schools of fish really got a headache that night. Of course, that went on all night, and you were down there trying to get a little bit of rest and wondering if the enemy was out there. Of course, they were, in limited numbers as we know now; but we didn't know then. So we expended our full complement of "ash cans" in limited time. That's depth charges that I am talking about. We had to come back in for resupplying those because we didn't want the

midget submarines to get in, and we didn't want the full-size submarines to get in, and we didn't want the full-size submarines to be lurking around either. Our carrier task force was out, and they were coming back in, and we wanted to clean up the area.

Marcello: What did you do during that Saturday of December 6, 1941? Do you remember what your personal routine was that day?

Hill: Well, Saturdays weren't too busy, except for watch. I don't recall; I don't believe I went ashore. In the first place, it was limited money. I had an allotment going home for my parents. My dad was living on a rented farm, and I wanted Dad to have something, so I made out an allotment to him. And I didn't need for much. I'd go ashore once in a while, but really there was so much offered aboard ship in the way of movies, and I could read; and there's always the good sea stories going on, so I was pretty content. Of course, on Sunday I was there, also, and wasn't ashore.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened aboard the Dewey that evening? Do you recall?

Hill: Not that I recall.

Marcello: A pretty normal night, in other words.

Hill: Just routine.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, and what I want you to do at this point is

to relate for me, in as much detail as you can remember, events as they unfolded from the time you woke up until the attack actually started. Then we'll go beyond that point.

Well, I always was an early riser, so I got up and had breakfast. I was working on my first class machinist's mate rating; I was studying for it. We had fleet competition, as I mentioned, and I wanted to do well on my exam. In fact, I have in my scrapbook that I brought up here the ratings and everything that I have put in that scrapbook.

But, anyway, I went down to the IC room--Internal Communication room--down in the lower deck. There was a comfortable chair down there that the man on watch underway would sit in. This is where they throw the switches and what-have-you. I'd confiscate that chair at every opportunity. I was going to read the manual and study for my next rating. I was comfortable and relaxed.

The alarm went off, and I thought, "What idiot would turn on the General Quarters alarm on Sunday morning at this hour?" I had heard, before the alarm went off, some dull thuds that I read as being dynamiting in the harbor, because that goes on, also. I couldn't figure why they were doing it on Sunday morning, but I reasoned that, well, maybe that was the only opportunity they

had. So I really didn't think much of it.

So when the alarm went off, I got up and started to move out--not in any real hurry--but one of my shipmates, a guy by the name of Louis Roberts, an electrician, came hurtling down the ladder. He said, "It's the real thing!" Well, he just about bowled me over. I had just started up the ladder. So I hastened on topside because I had to get on the next deck and through the mess hall and end up on the boat deck for my battle station.

Marcello: I was going to ask you where your battle station was located.

Hill: It was on a 5-inch gun on the boat deck. When I got up on topside, I looked over there, and I believe it was the Utah that was rotating--was turning over--and the men were running down the side. They looked like very small characters, but you could see that there were men running down the side trying to stay on topside as it rotated. Of course, I went right to my gun station--no ammunition. Then they later threw all of the firepower on when they tripped the generators over in the Dobbin because we were in darkness. We got our lanterns and went down in the magazine, and we were down there with the attack going on. Before I even went down there, the battleships were. .the smoke was billowing up out of them, and they were under attack over there in the first

attack. Well, by the time the second attack came on, we had got ammunition up to our gun stations.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Can you recall where the Dewey was tied up in relation to the Dobbin and the other destroyers?

Hill: I think we were the third ship inboard. In other words, there were two ships on either side of us.

Marcello: What kind of a range of fire did you have in that position with your guns?

Hill: Well, of course, you couldn't slew that gun around forward because it was restricted mechanically where you couldn't, because you would shoot your own mast off (chuckle) and that kind of thing. We had a range of, oh, I guess, 180 degrees. Of course, without power, it was all by hand in everything you did--hand power.

Marcello: So during the first attack, then, you were actually down in the magazines handling the ammunition and getting it up to the guns.

Hill: Right. Right. Of course, we were cranking it up by hand in the elevators and handling it. Then, when we got that, we only had two people on the gun station. There was a normal complement of a minimum of five and usually seven. Of course, you have to have one as a pointer and an another as a trainer, and you are both in the seats trying to crank that gun around to aim it at the target. The range-finder was inoperative, and all

of our electronic equipment wasn't functioning. This was all manual. We'd put a projectile in and set the fuse for a certain distance, and then we'd put the ammunition in the gun--throw it in by hand. Then we'd try to find a plane that matched that fuse setting, which was completely backwards. Of course, our accuracy was. I doubt whether we even came close to a plane, but we were doing exactly what our executive officer had told us to do. He was standing on the bridge in his underwear yelling. Up on that gun turret on the boat deck I could hear him yelling, "Shoot! Fire! Make noise! Do something!" He was one of these that had been out in the Asian Theater, and his mind was a little rattled. He'd had syphilis several times, and it had really affected him. I probably shouldn't have put that on tape, but it's a fact. It shows you some of the things you put up with.

Anyway, the gun had only the two of us, and I recall we were tracking a plane diving on Ford Island. We were madly cranking trying to catch up with the plane, and just as we caught up with the plane--we didn't know it because we were looking through the eye piece--when I pulled the trigger, the barrel was right out over the Worden--right out over their gun emplacement in a similar location. I doubt if any of those guys can hear to this day, because all of that concussion went right

out. It took their shirts off of them, their hats off of them, and they weren't too happy about that; but in the confusion you don't expect a ship to be that close to you. It wouldn't be out at sea. You wouldn't have the proximity that you had while you were alongside.

Marcello: You mentioned that the 5-inch gun did not have its full complement there. Was this because some of those people had been ashore and were unable to get back to the ship?

Hill: Yes. It just happened that that particular gun couldn't be manned because the complement was ashore. Only two of us were aboard for that gun crew. The bright thing to have done would have been to cut off all circuits and let the outboard ship do the firing, except maybe for machine guns and things like that, and let the Dobbin start its generators and have some power. We'd have done far better that way than all this confusion. But we were like those Japanese pilots were. The Japanese pilots were given a target, and they hit that target; and even though those battleships were sitting on bottom, they were still hitting them. I don't think our nest or group was ever targeted. I doubt that when they sent in the map of the harbor, which I'm convinced was sent in, there probably wasn't anything tied to that buoy. And the Dobbin came in and tied up to it, and we came alongside it, and here we are. They only dropped one bomb at us, and it was late in the action. I

suspect that this guy just decided he'd better head on back, but he had this one little ol' bomb left, and he wanted to get rid of it. Their carriers were steaming at flank speed away so they wouldn't be caught. They anticipated that we would be after them. Of course, they didn't know that we would be so unprepared to meet them. But, anyway, this bomb hit the water astern of us and never did any damage.

Marcello: I think it hit near the buoy, did it not, where the Dobbin was tied up?

Hill: As I recall, it hit astern.

Marcello: Astern?

Hill: Yes, and we were swinging on the buoy. That's my recollection of it.

Marcello: How many rounds would you estimate your gun expended during the attack?

Hill: (Laughter) That'd be a wild guess. I would say probably no more than twenty, because by the time we'd set those fuses and got the powder and the shell in there and then tried to track down a plane to match that setting, it was few and far between.

Marcello: Like you pointed out, you really didn't get that gun in operation until the second wave.

Hill: That's right. That's right. I think that probably it would be. .twenty would be an exaggeration.

Marcello: As you look back, how would you say you and your buddy

were conducting yourselves there at that gun? Were you acting in an excited manner? Do you think you were acting with a certain amount of coolness and professionalism?

Hill: I think it was both. By just getting rounds off we had to have drawn from our training; and to go down to the magazine and get those up there was the determination to fight back. But there was an awful lot of hysteria but not wringing of hands. You worked off this hysteria by action, and I can't to this day recall the name of the guy that was on there with me. I don't know him. We were just up there doing our duty and doing what we were expected to do--to shoot back. I know with bursts up there from this gun, it probably was some distraction to the Japanese action. But to say we had a hit would be absolutely remiss. I doubt where we even got close.

Marcello: Describe some of the specific pieces of destruction that you saw taking place over at Battleship Row. For instance, did you perchance witness the Arizona when it blew up? And, if so, what did you see?

Hill: No, I was so busy with my gun station and doing what I was expected to do. All I knew was when I came to topside and saw the Utah rolling over and saw those battleships in flames. From that moment on I was so busy I didn't take time to do anything but look for planes. They were coming over us so close that I could

see the pilots.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

Hill: Of course, you couldn't see facial features, but you could see the rising sun on the wings. I had it so ingrained in my mind about the sounds of those planes that right today, when we have the Confederate Air Force do their thing, I can recognize the planes from the sounds of the engines. In fact, when we were down there in the Coral Sea Battle, we and the Japanese were only thirty-four miles apart, and dusk had fallen. It was one of those battles down there--I think it was Coral Sea--where the Japanese tried to land some planes on our carrier. It was dusk. At that time I was not in charge of the engineering, and I was on a gun station. When these planes made the landing circle, I said, "Those are not our planes!" And about that time, somebody else had evidently called attention to the fact that they weren't our planes. You couldn't see them. It was just a silhouette of a plane coming around, but you can identify it by the sound of the engine. Then we were ordered to open fire on them, and, of course, they got down low in the water, and they were dodging and everything. As far as we know, we never even scratched them because they got out of there. We were trying to splash water on them or anything else; we were just shooting into the water trying to get a geyser to come

up there for them to run in to, because they were down on those whitecaps. They were getting out of there. That was a funny thing in a sense. We were fighting an air war.

Marcello: What did you do in the aftermath of the attack? Let's assume, now, that the attack is over. What were you personally doing at that point?

Hill: You mean, after...

Marcello: After the Pearl Harbor attack was over.

Hill: We went to work immediately. We even had food brought into the engine room so we could get the engines and the valves and everything back so we could get out to sea. We were so determined to make our presence known and to vacate the harbor because we didn't really know whether they might come back.

Marcello: Speaking of vacating the harbor, did you witness the Nevada when it tried to get out?

Hill: Well, we saw it. Now I say I didn't notice anything. I recollect just looking up and seeing that ship going toward the channel. Then after that I didn't know. I know that they put it aground, and that the quartermaster that did it on his own received a battlefield commission for his grounding it, which was a smart move, instead of letting it be sunk out there in the channel.

Marcello: But you actually did not see the grounding of the

Nevada?

Hill: No, I was so busy. Everybody. .we were doing our thing for our ship, and that, I think, is pretty much what everybody should have been doing.

Marcello: Okay, so you're down in that engine room now, and you're trying to get your ship prepared for sea. What's the scuttlebutt going around? What's the conversation? What are the rumors?

Hill: There was not much visiting. We were individually working and getting that ship ready, although there was excitement. There was no talking in the engine room. Of course, you don't have many people around. There was no time to sit around and visit. Not until we got out on patrol were we able to sit around--the next day, on patrol--and start talking about this thing. Then we began to tell stories and reflect: "What did you see?" Well, there was not many people that saw anything because they were so busy, as far as our crew was concerned.

We came back in after we had expended our depth charges, and we took on some survivors off of those ships. I recall one guy who was so addled that the boy was never right after that. I don't know what happened to him, whether it was concussion or whether when he jumped in the water there was a concussion there from nearby that got him, but his mind was gone. He went

home on leave, and his girlfriend even quit him; he was such a changed person. Of course, that didn't help his mental condition, and he was later given a medical discharge. The guy couldn't function. Either he just snapped--his mind snapped or something, but people who knew him, who came aboard, said, "He's just not there."

Marcello: How long did you remain at sea before you came back?

Hill: Well, I think it was three or four days. We'd expended our depth charges, and we came back in and got some, and we went right back out.

Marcello: When you came back into the harbor, did you get a chance then to perhaps look around and see the damage that had been done?

Hill: Oh, the devastation was. .yes. Of course, there was oil on the water, and when you saw the mess to clean up, you just wanted to say, "Maybe we just ought to just abandon it and go someplace else!" It was terrible--nasty!

Marcello: I've heard people say that before December 7, Pearl Harbor was actually fairly clean--the water and so forth.

Hill: Well, the tides and things and the rivers running into it kept pretty clean, yes. The water was nice. In fact, you weren't supposed to jump over the side, but some people did (chuckle). Some of them got court-martialed for doing it, because your waste goes right into the water. But sailors are going to do what they

think they can get away with. This guy Corbin that I told you about, he did that--jumped over the side and swam--and got court-martialed for it. He was going to do anything to get attention that he could do.

Marcello: Were there still smoking hulks and so on in the harbor when you came back in?

Hill: Well, it seems to me that there was some fires still going on in the hulls of those ships on Battleship Row and, of course, the oil leakage is still coming out. The Arizona, underneath the monument, still has a little oil coming out of it. There was no opportunity yet to clean up anything.

Marcello: What were your thoughts and feelings when you saw this?

Hill: Well, I was angry. I was disappointed. I was angry because I felt like this shouldn't have happened. We had PBYS out on patrol; we had a screen around the islands.

This brings me to my conjecture that this attack was allowed. I don't whether the senior officers, Kimmel and Short, were the patches on it, because they got their discharge shortly after that and there was never a hearing or anything. But I suspect. .now with Churchill coming over here--he was related sort of distantly to Franklin Roosevelt--and Franklin, I know, felt like he ought to help the Europeans, that is, the English and French. He felt that he ought to be opposed to the

Axis, because that's where our direction had gone. We were repairing their ships; we were sending supplies over there.

But in our nation of passivity, we seem like we have to get hit on the head before we are going to do anything. I know that a nation, to be effective, needs a rallying cry. We know that to be very true when we had this disaster that we had in Vietnam. There was nothing there for us to rally the people for a cause. In Texas here we have, "Remember Goliad!" and "Remember the Alamo!" and the flag that says, "Don't tread on me!" and that sort of thing. I suspect, because we had trailed that Japanese fleet until we lost them in a storm--the submarines had trailed them--that we knew they were up to no good or at best, "What were they doing over this way?" and that kind of stuff. It's my personal opinion that the attack was allowed in order to excite the American people into a determination to fight. Then our whole heart would be into it, and we could do something with it.

Now Tojo and the warlords of Japan--in retrospect, we can get their opinion--said, "You better not awake a sleeping giant. But, you see, when we cut off our scrap iron and our oil supply to Japan--they had neither over there--they had to do something. They sent their envoys to Washington as a decoy. Those envoys, I'm

convinced, didn't know that the warlords were going to do this. This was an action they took to try to paralyze us, and they did a pretty good job. But they missed the carriers. Our fight wasn't ship to ship very often; it was an air war.

I'm not at all sure but what that carrier task force was encouraged to be out during this dastardly attack. You'll never know unless somebody uncovers some evidence. I know that in the Gram there's a retired admiral that came out with an article--I don't know whether you get the Gram or not--and I had his opinion way years ago. The United States wouldn't even let a radar station be put up on a mountain over there because the Parks Department didn't want it on the top peak, and so the radar station was poorly manned. There was also indifference toward their report and indifference toward the station when they reported planes coming in: "Oh, it's just planes that got lost coming over here from the States. What navigator are you going to have that gets lost and have to come in from the wrong direction? Well, as we put all these things together. .this is no indictment against sailors, but a lot of sailors just accept everything as they are and just go along with their daily routine. They play their acey-deucey and do their thing. But if you get in a serious discussion with some of them who were concerned, as I was, about

debt, about position, and about preparedness, then from any of them you get this feedback: "Was this planned?" I have a tendency to feel like it was. I think Roosevelt, in his wisdom. I have a high regard for Franklin Roosevelt. .of course, it cost lives, but on the other hand, it rallied the nation.

They may have thought that the Japanese would go into the Philippines first, but the Japanese wanted to give a knockout punch to us, and the Philippines wasn't the place to do it. The Philippines was close enough that they could get them later. They picked a Sunday, and they picked our indifference toward them as a nation--our feeling of "They can't do much to us"--and our complacency. I think that the "powers that be" just said, "Well, let's just back off and see what they'll do, and if they do it, why, it will give us an excuse to declare war.

Marcello: How long did you stay with the Dewey after Pearl Harbor?

Hill: Oh, I was on that ship five years. I didn't get off until after the war. The Dewey came back to San Diego, and I was discharged. I was given leave. The Dewey went on around through the Panama Canal and was decommissioned in New York. I knew every rivet on that thing.

Marcello: So you were on the Dewey, then, when it participated in all those various campaigns in the Pacific?

Hill: Oh, it was very active. We did, like I said, nine months in the Aleutians; we were in on the occupation of the Marshall and Gilbert Islands; we bombarded the beaches at Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, and Tulagi; we were in the Coral Sea Battle; we were in on the occupation of the Philippines. We were in Okinawa when the war ended. The Dewey was active. I've forgotten now how many major engagements we were in, but it was out there with it.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. You were evidently aboard the Dewey when it went through that typhoon?

Hill: Yes, sir.

Marcello: I've got to get that on a record. I've talked to a guy several years ago. You probably know him, Steve.

Hill: ..Yorden.

Marcello: He comments some on that. Even though it has nothing to do with Pearl Harbor, describe the Dewey going through that typhoon.

Hill: Well, we were in Admiral Halsey's group. We were due to fuel, and we tried to fuel that night. The seas were high, and they decided to delay fueling until the next day and to try to run from the storm and get to calmer waters. The meteorologist messed up some way, and instead of running away from it, we ran. .or it changed course, and we got into it.

I had the 4:00-8:00 watch in the morning in the engine room. I was in charge of the engineering

department--chief-in-charge. My relief came down right after he'd had breakfast, as they would do. At 6:30 you went to breakfast, and then you came back. It was so rough at that time as we were trying to fuel, and our hoses would part, and so we just gave up on that.

It was so rough that my relief said, "Don't bother to come back, because the decks were awash, and on a "tin can" that's bad. The decks were awash so bad that you didn't even have a lee side to go down! The ships were trying to go into the seas so it wouldn't wash over them so bad.

So I went down to the chiefs' quarters and got me some food and tried to hold on to my chair and tried to hold on to the food and finally gave up. I got in my bunk, and a big wave hit the bow of that ship and unhooked my bunk and dumped me right out in the hallway. I thought we'd hit something; I thought we'd hit another ship. I came out of there.

I came up to topside just as my relief was coming down the deck to get me. They were losing oil pressure in the main engines. Our ship was listing dangerously at that time. The oil would run out of the sump, and the oil pump would lose suction. So I ran down to the engine room--I don't know why he didn't do it--to the reserve tank there, and we ran a bunch of oil down just to overfill the sump so we wouldn't lose oil suction.

Well, we got the main engines going again, and just as we got underway to head into the storm. We'd gone dead in the water because of the lack of oil suction, and we did not want to burn up the bearings. So we'd gotten underway, and we were steaming out of the two big boilers in the forward fire room, and a tidal wave came over that ship. Even at that time, we were listing to where the port wing of the bridge was dipping blue water. You'd be standing on the floor plates, and pretty soon you'd be hanging from a stanchion because it was listing that far.

Well, I was watching the inclinometer down in the engine room, and it was hitting the peg at seventy-two degrees. The ship was not supposed to survive much more of a list than that. If you read the annals of the Dewey, you know it was doing worse than that. Well, just as we got underway, and we got crosswise of the wave to try to catch up with the fleet, a wave came over us and took off the forward funnel. It broke the steam lines to the whistle and siren, and that steam was coming out of there. Of course, our steam pressure went to nothing. They had to secure the fire room because they didn't want a flashback. Of course, with having a fire without the funnel going up there, the smoke couldn't get out of there, so they had to abandon the fire room.

Now we lost power--electrical power and steam power --and we were dead in the water. The fleet was still moving through us. This storm. .by then the wind was just blowing the spume off of the waves, and you couldn't see very far in front of you. You also didn't have radar now. Radar in that kind of storm is practically nil anyhow. That whole task force went through us with us dead in the water. Of course, we weren't the only ones. There were other ships floundering. We lost three destroyers and only saved twenty-eight lives off of the three destroyers.

Well, we were low on fuel. I tried to get the bridge on the sound-power phones. I was down in the engine room, and the only station I could get was the after steering station. They were steering that thing by hand. They were ready; they were at their stations. They were concerned because of the list and whether the ship was going over. They're down in the hold, and there was no way of getting out of there in time if it went over. And I was concerned about it.

I went up to the bridge, and here's the executive officer and the skipper hanging on up there in the bridge and dipping green water, and I said, "What are you guys going to do about it?" "What can we do about it?" I said, "Well, at least you can man your sound-power phones so we can communicate with you!" "Okay,

but I don't know what good that'll do. I said, "Well, I'd like to try to light off the rear fire room and see if we can't get underway on the ship. At least if we head into it, we won't be wallowing in these waves. Oh, it was treacherous!

So I went back, and they manned the sound-power phones. We got the rear boiler lit off and got steam up. It got worse and worse. So I ordered them to open up the sea cocks in the engine room and get ballast on that ship because we were riding high and we were low on fuel. We pumped all the boiler water down into the reserve tanks, and we gave as much ballast as we could without flooding the pumps. With that stack off, we began to straighten up some.

I know somebody else got credit for this, but Captain Calhoun did. I got the Navy-Marine Corps Medal because he recognized Charlie Ross and some of us for having done something in regard to saving the ship. Charlie Ross fought that electricity back there, and it's a wonder he wasn't electrocuted trying to keep power on, because those bulkheads were sweating. When we did have the generators running, they were shorting out and everything. We had thirty-two electric motors burned out; our blowers were out; we had that forward stack gone.

We know we rolled ninety degrees. The reason we

know that is because we had a main armature for the generator--you know how heavy those are--in a wooden box back in the shaft alley--that's where we had a raised compartment--and the generator shifted from this compartment over here (gestures) to the one on the port side and never got down in the well between. So you know it had to be at a vertical drop for that heavy a thing to get down. We also found materials that we had in the channel iron in the engine room that had rolled out of the channel iron and fell vertically into the blower system. So we knew we survived a ninety-degree roll.

Marcello: At least ninety degrees, is that correct?

Hill: Yes. It could have pitched it a little bit, but not much. That heavy a stuff is not going to be pitched; it's going to have to drop. We have a little picture of the Dewey with an angel pulling the yardarm back up, and we call it the "Ninety Degree Roller Club" or something like that.

It was a real bad storm, and we had to rig scuppers to feed fresh air into the engine room because our blowers were burned up. We could stand only ten minutes watch at a time. Your sweat would be sloshing in your shoes, and you'd have to come to topside to dry off. We had ten-minute watches all the way back to Eniwetok, where we had a new funnel built.

Let me ask you one last question. Was this the most frightening experience that you went through during the war?

No. I always felt like I could swim as far as the next guy. I was, again, more angry at some of the. .I know the book was written about it, and that gives a version of it, but I have my own version of it. Nobody gave me any orders to do those things; I did them on my own. Had the ship gone down, they could have gotten me for scuttling the ship. I let water into it--because you need ballast--without orders. We weren't getting anything. I'm not trying to detract from anybody else, but everybody that writes a book or has something to say about it is not going to pen himself into a corner. I'm not trying to aggrandize myself. I just did what I felt was necessary, and I did get credit for it--Reader's Digest had an article. There were some men that did the right things and saved the ship. There were three ships that the right thing wasn't done to. They were part of the same task force.

Okay. Well, Mr. Hill, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for your comments. You've said a lot of very interesting and new things relative to Pearl Harbor and beyond the attack itself. I'm sure that students and researchers are going to find your comments most

valuable when the interview is processed and they have a chance to take a look at them.