

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

782

Interview with  
KINGSLEY MATTHEWS  
September 30, 1989

Place of Interview: Richardson, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: K.A. Matthews  
(Signature)

Date: 9/30/89

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Oral History Collection

Kingsley Matthews

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello                      Date: September 30, 1989

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Kingsley Matthews for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 30, 1989, in Richardson, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Matthews in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the destroyer tender USS Dobbin during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Matthews, to begin this interview, let's get some biographical information. First of all, tell me when you were born and where you were born.

Mr. Matthews: I was born in Los Angeles on August 19, 1922.

Dr. Marcello: So you are a native Californian?

Mr. Matthews: One of the few left.

Dr. Marcello: (Chuckle) That's correct. Tell me a little bit about your educational background.

Mr. Matthews: Well, I did not graduate from high school at this particular time. I joined the Navy in December--the

early part of December, I guess it was--1940 due to financial difficulties that my mother had supporting us two children. That's when I joined the Navy, and from there I went through boot camp at San Diego.

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

Matthews: Well, a friend of mine was joining--a very close friend of mine--and he gave me the details that he was given. I thought, "Well, I have to do something now," so this is the route I went.

Marcello: And you mentioned that you took your boot training at San Diego?

Matthews: Yes.

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

Matthews: Well, now you're asking me a very difficult question. At that time I knew, but right now it seems like an awful long time.

Marcello: It was normally twelve weeks, I think, and then I believe they cut it back as one got closer and closer to the coming of war.

Matthews: Well, I don't know about that. Of course, I was in there a year before the war started, so I think it was probably close to twelve weeks that I put in there.

Marcello: Now was your enlistment for four or six years?

Matthews: It was a six-year hitch.

Marcello: You would not have gone in under the minority cruise

since I guess you were probably eighteen.

Matthews: Correct.

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

Matthews: It was normal, but I qualified for additional training at the Henry Ford Trade School in Detroit, Michigan. They found out that I'd done some drafting in high school, and they gave me an examination. Fortunately, I came out very high on the exam, and they said, "Okay, we're going to send you to patternmaker school." I didn't even know what a patternmaker was at that time, so I thought, "What the heck. I'll get an education out of it." So I went for it. I went back there and was back there for about three months, I guess.

Marcello: And what rank would you have once you got out of that trade school?

Matthews: Well, I was still seaman "deuce," and I didn't get my seaman first class until shortly before the attack.

Marcello: How would you describe the training you received there at the Henry Ford Trade School to be a patternmaker?

Matthews: (Chuckle) Well, basically this was the first time that they had a trade school back there. When we got there, oh, there was about maybe eighty guys on the train from various parts of the country and everything. There was only four buildings there at the time, which consisted

of a mess hall, a couple of sleeping barracks, and a recreation hall, I guess. Nobody there knew what to do with us, so they said, "Well, we're gonna send you over to the pattern shop over there."

So we went over to the pattern shop. We were supposed to work with all the patternmakers in there. They didn't know what to do with us, but they were kind enough to let us shellac patterns and sand down different patterns and stuff, and we got an idea of what patterns actually were and what the trade actually consisted of. It was good in that respect because that's where we got our feet wet, so to speak, and learned the trade there as best we could under the conditions. This is at Dearborn, Michigan, by the way, River Rouge plant.

From there we went back to Great Lakes for transfer to wherever they wanted to send us after this training was up. This is an aside. I don't know whether you'd be interested in this or not, but in this particular place they had twelve-foot jackstays, and that was about four or five hammocks high. This is our first experience at sleeping in hammocks.

Marcello: Describe what that was like.

Matthews: It was hairy, especially if you were in the top hammock. You have to step on each one of the ends of the hammocks to get up to your own hammock. Then, of course, through

trial-and-error you learned how to turn over in a hammock by shifting your butt. All that first night you'd hear, "Ooohh!" when somebody'd hit the deck, you know (chuckle), and pulling out guys as you went down. So we learned the hard way how to sleep in a hammock, but that's just another story.

Anyway, from there we got sent out to various ships, wherever it was--either on the East Coast or the West Coast. Of course, I was very happy to be sent over to Pearl from there.

Marcello: So you were sent from Great Lakes to Pearl, and that's where you picked up the Dobbin.

Matthews: Yes. First of all, I think the Dixie was out there at that time, and that's where we went on board. There was maybe eight or ten of us that went on board there for various crafts, and within two days time we were scattered out to various repair ships in the harbor there.

Marcello: Describe for me what kind of functions or skills one would find aboard the Dobbin during that period. Those tenders and repair ships fascinate me because of all the skilled people aboard. What were some of the various skills that one would find aboard the Dobbin during that period?

Matthews: Well, just about anything. It's like a miniature city. We had just about everything that one would need for

maintenance and repair of ships--ships of the line, whatever. We could manufacture anything. We had a carpenter shop; we had a pattern shop; we had a machine shop; we had a boiler shop; we had watertenders; we had the foundry and shipfitters. God, we had a post office; we had yeomen's offices that took care of all, you know, the writing and stuff like that. We had a terrific machine shop there that was just completely staffed with about every conceivable type of heavy-duty machinery for machine work.

The pattern shop was very small. It was just adjacent to the machine shop at that particular time--well, the whole time, as a matter of fact, the whole time I was on board. It was very small but big enough to hold a table saw and a lathe and a band saw, plus three work benches. There was a great, big blower system that came right on through one corner of the shop there, and we stored stuff behind that blower system. Of course, we "crapped out" there sometimes when we came in from a drunk (chuckle). But we had the equipment to manufacture patterns. Of course, you have the equipment, but then you've got to have the know-how--what's involved in making patterns--and that's where I learned basically the beginning of pattern work.

Marcello: So you acquired that skill, in essence, through on-the-job training there aboard the Dobbin.



Matthews: Right.

Marcello: Describe the quality of the training you received to be a patternmaker there aboard the Dobbin.

Matthews: Well, I was very fortunate. There was two men on there that had been in the craft. One was a boat builder in Louisiana. His name was Charlie Olmstead. He's here at the reunion. What he didn't know about boats you could have stuck in the eye of a fly. Harold Bliefnick--a very good and close friend who just passed away here last year--what he didn't know about pattern work, you know, was insignificant.

Marcello: Had both these guys been in the Navy for some time and in that work for some time?

Matthews: Yes. From what I understand, I think "Blief" had been in, oh, a good year-and-a-half before I got there, and Charlie was in there several years before. Anyway, I was a seaman "deuce" when I went on board there, and immediately they said, "Okay, you're going to make seaman first." They piled all this stuff on me. They were encouraging me to make my rate, and the first step was making seaman first. There's a time element involved between one step and the other. It's a progressive thing, but you can't get it until after you've served so much time. So, like I say, it was shortly before the attack that I made seaman first. But they were very, very helpful. I mean, they would throw

questions at me while we were working on a job or something like that, you know, about seamanship. They'd go through the Blue Jacket's Manual, and they'd pick out stuff that seamen are supposed to understand. Like I say, if it wasn't for those two fellows, I really would not have had a craft, which has helped me all through the years.

Marcello: What were some of the kinds of specific jobs that you were undertaking there in the pattern shop during that period?

Matthews: Well, basically the small stuff was turning out billets out of wood, which were usually cast iron or brass. The pattern, of course, was made out of wood, which had to be molded, and, here again, you get your basics of draft angles and that sort of stuff, which carries right on through all fields of patternmaking. That's what we were doing. Then we got some nice work in there, too--making different parts of boat equipment. We had all different types of anchors and small stuff. Oh, impellers were about the most close tolerance hard job you could find, which was very interesting but, in itself, required experience in order to have to build the core boxes and everything. I generally just helped on these jobs so that I could gain this experience. I got very interested in it as time progressed, so it got to the point of where, "Well, one of these days I'm

going to be a good patternmaker because of these two fellows." It was my main trade after I got out. There was no school, per se, when I went into it. In later years I had heard that they really had a good program going there for a trade school.

Marcello: Was patternmaking a specific rating in the Navy at that time?

Matthews: Definitely. It was.

Marcello: How fast or slow was promotion?

Matthews: It was pretty slow in the regular Navy as opposed to the reserves.

Marcello: I'm sure it was particularly slow during that period before we got into war.

Matthews: Yes, it was because it was a fleet examination-type thing, and there were only so many openings allowed. Like I say, I had just made seamen first, and I was making a little bit more money. Most of it was going home to my mother, but I still had a few bucks left over for at least one liberty once a month.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work aboard the Dobbin?

Matthews: I think it was once every four days. Yes, it was once every four days. We'd get off the ship in the afternoon, after so-called "working hours," and then we'd have up until midnight. We had to be back by midnight.

Marcello: That's interesting because the person that I interviewed

before you came in mentioned that when he first went aboard the Dobbin, they could get overnight liberty, but then as more and more people from the fleet came out there--and I think this is where you would come in--then it was cut back to midnight liberty.

Matthews: That's probably what had happened. I never had any overnight liberty when I was there.

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

Matthews: Well, with the money that we had...I had a buddy of mine that we went through boot camp together. He got transferred over to the Rigel. This is at the same time because he came out when I did. At that particular time she was opened up from double-bottoms right on up the main deck; they were reconditioning the whole thing. If memory serves me right, I think she was a hull repair ship. They were reconditioning her, and that's what he was doing. Anyway, he and I managed to get the same liberties, so he and I spent liberties together.

Marcello: What did you normally do on liberty?

Matthews: Well, like I say, we'd go ashore and wander around town, and we hit all the cathouses, for one thing. We'd go from one to the other and check things out, and, of course, the girls would check us out, which is a lot of fun, too. We wouldn't have to pay anything, you know. That evening we'd go down to the service center or

whatever the hell it was down there--I think it was on Hotel Street--and have a couple of beers at Navy prices, and that would be the extent of our money, as far as drinking was concerned. Then we'd go to some Kanaka place someplace and have something to eat. That would be the usual routine, as far as liberty is concerned.

They did have swimming parties over at the Aiea when I first joined the Navy. When I was in high school, I was in training for the Olympics on the three-meter board, so I'd go over to Aiea quite a bit during the week to swim and dive. I enjoyed that very much. Other than going into town--I didn't know anybody ashore--this is a normal, "swabby" liberty-type thing.

Marcello: As you look back upon that period prior to the war, how much of a problem was heavy drinking and drunkenness and so on, let's say, when sailors would come back on a Saturday night aboard ship?

Matthews: Well, I wasn't into drinking that much. A couple of beers would be plenty for me. One time I probably maybe had a bit more, and I got a tattoo. This fellow on the Rigel got one, and he said, "Come on, 'King,' you got to get one, too." So I thought, "Oh, what the hell! So I still got it, right there (points).

Marcello: Tattoo on your...

Matthews: Right shoulder.

Marcello: ...on your right shoulder.

Matthews: "U.S. Navy" with the eagle and flag. Well, that's one of the most stupid things I ever did in my life, but, nevertheless, it hasn't hurt me any (chuckle).

Marcello: (Chuckle).

Matthews: But as far as me personally coming back "sloshed," well, I wasn't that way.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as relations between the United States and Japan continued to get worse, could you in your position detect any changes in the routine of the Dobbin? For instance, how about in the types of jobs that you were doing in the pattern shop and so on? Could you detect any changes at all in the routine?

Matthews: None whatsoever at all.

Marcello: So it was business as usual right up to the attack?

Matthews: Right. Right up to the very end.

Marcello: I have heard some people mention that when destroyers would tie up next to the Dobbin during that period, they would have to have their depth charges replaced and so on. Evidently, they had been dropping them outside the mouth of the harbor...

Matthews: That's possible.

Marcello: ...at alleged or real submarines or whatever. I didn't know if you knew anything about that or not.

Matthews: Well, I wasn't involved that much, although the torpedo...well, we called it the torpedo room. It was

right next to the pattern storage, which was next to our shop on the same level. They would overhaul these...I guess they call them detonators, you know, and change the alcohol in them. Of course, in later days this is where we'd get our alcohol (chuckle) when we were out there on the rocks.

Anyway, I didn't notice anything unusual. I mean, the catacombs are right there, too, and, I mean, they were hauling "fish" in and out and depth charges in and out all the time. Like I say, it was just normal routine from what I could see.

Marcello: There's something else that I want to talk about relative to that pre-Pearl Harbor period. Somewhere along in here, your skipper disappeared. What do you know about that?

Matthews: The only thing that I know about that is what I read, and that was after the war. I had absolutely no idea what had happened. To my knowledge, even today, there wasn't anything said on board.

Marcello: So you did not even know about it at the time he disappeared?

Matthews: Nope. No, no, I didn't. It came as a complete surprise to me after I read about it after I was home and out of the Navy. So they must have kept it pretty quiet.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into those days immediately prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, and obviously we want to go

into this in as much detail as you can remember. Let's talk about that Saturday, December 6, 1941. Do you recall what your routine was on Saturday?

Matthews: Well, I guess it was what I told you. We had liberty. At least I did. Bob and I went ashore, and what I had outlined here previously is exactly what we did. However, this place where we ate was a Kanaka shop, and the owner was of Hawaiian-Japanese descent. The whole family actually ran this place, from what I can remember. You've got to understand that these things are still on the hazy side here. Anyway, we had dinner there, and it was just the same old stuff, I guess.

However, they did something to that food. Bob and I hadn't had more than two beers, so we couldn't have gotten drunk, and we couldn't have suffered any hangovers the next day. But it made me very, very sick on December 7. When I first woke up, I had the dry heaves. I felt like I had a hangover. The symptoms were all there for a hangover. I was deathly sick, let me put it that way, and I came to find out that Bob was the same way. So I think they spiked it with something. I don't know how many people were in that position from eating in that place or whether there were other places like that. But I lay it right at their hands, right there.

Marcello: Were there a lot of other sailors in the place that



night when you were there?

Matthews: There were but I don't remember any from our ship.

Marcello: But you really didn't feel the effects of whatever happened there until the next morning.

Matthews: That's right. I went back to the ship, and normal procedure is that the guys that are on duty will set up the cots for the guys that are on liberty so that when they come back to the ship all they have to do is climb on the cot, you know, or fall into it if your "skunked up" (chuckle). But, anyway, I managed to get to bed all right with no problem whatsoever at all.

Marcello: Did you get out of the sack the next morning before the attack started, or was it when the attack started?

Matthews: Oh, it was way before the attack started because it was a reveille call, you know, and so it was just normal procedure, although on Sundays they usually let you take your own sweet time about getting up.

Marcello: But you woke up with all the symptoms of a hangover that you should not have had.

Matthews: Oh, yes! Right! Oh, boy, I've been sick, but (chuckle) it was one of the worst times I'd ever been sick.

Marcello: In addition to the dry heaves and so on, did you have a headache or anything of that nature?

Matthews: Oh, yes, my head was pounding something fierce. It really was.

Marcello: Okay, so describe what happens then. Reveille sounds;

you get up; you're not feeling well. What's your routine from that point?

Matthews: Well, from that routine I go on to the "john" and take care of my business there. My head was swimming around, so I stuck my head underneath the cold shower, and that kind of helped a bit, you know, to cut down that heat in the head. I came back in the shop, and some of the guys were still asleep. There weren't too many men in the shop at that time--about five, I think, or something like that. So I folded up my cot and put it away, and I rolled up my bedding and put it away. I was just beginning to get to get dressed. All I had on was my skivvies. You know, that's a T-shirt and shorts.

I had just gotten into my shoes and socks and heard the call for Away All Boats--Fire and Rescue. Well, I had a Fire and Rescue station in one of the motor launches, so I went over to the cargo port to see if a motor launch was on fire or something like that.

That's when I just about creamed in my britches because I saw the smoke coming up over there on the Battleship Row. As I looked, here comes one of those Jap planes, and I could see the "meatballs." It looked like two great, big red eyes coming right for us. I thought, "Oh, shit Magee! What happens now?"

Almost as soon as I said that, it came General Quarters. The first thing we have to do in the shop is

close the port, so I slammed it down. Then I went to my GQ station.

Marcello: Which was where?

Matthews: Second powderman on a 5-inch/.51, which is doing nothing if you're in the harbor. You know, you go up there, and then you get further orders. I didn't even put on any trousers. I didn't put on anything else except my life jacket. I went on up there, and the gun captain was up there at that time, and we were just standing there, waiting for something to happen, you know, and all hell was breaking loose all around there.

Marcello: Describe what you were seeing while you were standing by.

Matthews: Well, I could see a few planes around, but I guess it was probably the remnants of the first attack. And, Christ, there was smoke all over the place. We couldn't have been up there more than ten minutes at the most. We were just standing there, you know, waiting for further orders, and we're all ready to go. But what are you going to do with a 5-inch/.51 in the middle of Pearl Harbor?

Marcello: And is this a gun for horizontal firing?

Matthews: Yes, right.

Marcello: It was not designed to fire at airplanes?

Matthews: No, it was not an antiaircraft gun, not by a long shot (chuckle). So we got the word somehow to report back

down below, you know, go to our shop, so that's what I did. I won't say it was disorganized confusion, but a lot of the guys were in the same boat, you know, because General Quarters for in harbor was just not done. I mean, this isn't according to the rules of the road or whatever you want to call it. But a lot of the guys were in the same position that I was.

So I finally got the word from somebody, some petty officer, to report to the forward magazine, that we were going to start bringing up ammo. Well, I went up there, and that was only a hop, skip, and a jump from shop; and the cotton-picking thing was bolted down. It was all dogged down with a great, big ol' padlock on it, and so we stood around there. About five or six of us stood there waiting for somebody to come along and unlock the damned thing, and nobody did. So one of the guys went over to the toollocker, you know, where you get your tools, and he got one these great, big bolt cutters and finally came over and cut the lock and opened up the hatch so we could get down in there.

Marcello: Was this ammunition going to be hauled up for your weapons or for the destroyers?

Matthews: Well, I think it was more or less for the machine guns that were being mounted on the deck. At that time, I didn't know what it was. I don't think anybody else did, either, but we were told to go down below and start

hauling up these cases of .50-caliber and .30-caliber belted ammunition. So this is what we did, and, of course, those ladders are almost vertical. When you haul up a case of .50-calibers, there's a lot of weight involved there. The .30-caliber is bad enough, but .50-caliber is twice as bad. However, we managed to send it up from one to the other, and we did that for I don't know how long, but it seemed like an awful long time.

Then they spelled us, and we went up on the deck and...this is the machine shop deck, you know, which is the one right below the main deck. So they started bringing up .30-caliber ammunition. Well, I guess it had to be the gunner's mate that had the machine gun set up, and from what I understand they really threw up a wall of lead there that really deterred the Japs from doing any damage, although we did have an near hit and lost three men on the fantail.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. You may not have seen this, but it seems to me that I've heard that the mounts for those machine guns were actually welded on there while the attack was taking place. Was that correct?

Matthews: Yes, they sure as hell were. But they needed the ammo, so I got started running the .30-caliber ammo up to the main deck. I would be able to get up to the top of the main deck ladder, which is the midships, and I'd carry a case up and set it down there, and somebody would take

it from there. Then I'd go back down.

One of the humorous things (chuckle)...as I went past the cargo port door, where the "cans" were tied alongside there, it was open, and there was this great, big black man--he had to be bigger than Jim Brown, the football player--and his eyeballs were sticking out about an inch-and-a-half. He was just in his skivvies, and he was manning that one 3-inch antiaircraft gun. He was picking up a shell and throwing in the breech, closing it, and firing. He wasn't looking where he was shooting. He was the only one on that gun, but I could see him from where I was as I went past. He was just picking up a shell in one hand, throwing it in the breech, closing it, and firing. I kept going back and forth I don't know how long, carrying these cases of .30-caliber ammunition, and he was still doing it. Sweat was just pouring off of him. I don't know where the shells went (chuckle) or whether they were fixed for timing or anything else, but he was getting lead up there, brother, (chuckle) and that was it.

Marcello: While all of this was taking place--obviously you're doing a great deal of physical work--do you really have time to contemplate or mull what's happening?

Matthews: I was ignorant of political happenings in that day. I was nineteen years old. I mean, what the hell does a nineteen-year-old man know about the differences between

two nations. I was practically just out of high school. So, anyway, no, we were too busy. We were very busy.

Marcello: So would you say, then, that initially aboard the Dobbin there's a certain amount of chaos and confusion, but pretty shortly thereafter things get organized, and professionalism and guidance take over.

Matthews: Yes, definitely. I attribute a lot of this to our executive officer. I didn't like him for shit. Nevertheless, he was out there in just his bathrobe when GQ sounded.

Marcello: What was his name?

Matthews: Don't hold me to this, but I think it was Skinner. I'm not sure. But he's the one, I'm positive, that got things organized down there during this whole thing.

Marcello: And you say he was out there in his bathrobe during the attack?

Matthews: Right. He didn't mess around. He got the petty officers to do things. He'd pick out one here and pick out one there, from what I could see, you know, while I was doing all this other stuff, and he was telling them what to do--dog down the cargo ports and getting guys to do these things and where these different things had to go. He was getting word, I guess, from his office as to what had to be done and so on and so forth. But these are things that I had absolutely no contact with.

Marcello: So how long were you hauling ammunition then?

Matthews: Well, actually, I was spelled, and I did different things. Being a seaman, they could pick a seaman up and put him here and throw him over there.

Marcello: And what were some of the things you were doing?

Matthews: Well, one of the things...later on, in early evening, we were running out of .50-caliber ammunition. Of course, a lot of this stuff went to the "cans," too, you know. We were running out of belted ammunition, so they sent up some of these little finger belter's machines. So they put me on that, and I was belting on that, I think, for about a half an hour, and I smashed one of my fingers in the cotton-picking machine. So they took me off and put a couple of Band-Aids around my finger, and they said, "Okay, you can carry shells."

It was getting dark then, so everything was blue light and closed portholes and all the rest of that jazz. They had our motor launches coming alongside of the port gangway, and we were carrying ammunition, I mean, 5-inch projectiles, on our shoulders, one per man. We came from down below and up the ladder and then down the ladder to the motor launch and back up. That routine went on for God-knows-how-long.

Marcello: There must have been a bunch of guys doing this.

Matthews: Oh, jeez, you wouldn't believe it! You wouldn't believe it. But I'll tell you one thing. Aside from being tired, exhausted, and hungry--we got some sandwiches



once in a while--we just kept at it. We knew we had to, and that came through loud and clear.

Another thing, that night--I don't know what time it was--we were still carrying 5-inch projectiles down to the motor launches, and all of a sudden up in the cane fields somebody had doused the cane fields in the shape of an arrow, pointing right toward Ford Island. Well, we were right alongside of it, so we figured it was pointing right at us.

Marcello: Did you actually see this arrow when it was burning?

Matthews: All of a sudden, it went up in flames, you know, and you could see it. Everything was black out there. Once in a while you would see a little light here and there, but that would be the extent of it. Of course, we were working in blue lights, and the petty officers had flashlights with blue cellophane over the ends of them, and they were the ones directing us where to go and so forth. But that happened.

Marcello: Do you remember when the aircraft off the carrier Enterprise came in that night and were fired on? Do you remember that?

Matthews: No. I was below decks. If that happened, I had absolutely no consciousness of it.

Marcello: So from what you said, then, you were hauling those 5-inch projectiles well into the evening.

Matthews: Oh, yes, definitely, definitely. I can't even remember

if we had any watches. I do know that somebody said, "Okay, 'crap out,'" and I "crapped out"--I died.

But then we got up the next day or whenever the hell it was. I don't know. I mean, time is insignificant in something like this. I just goes on. A lot of things happened that day, too.

Marcello: That evening, do you remember any rumors that were floating around as to what was happening next or what the Japanese had allegedly had done or were going to do or anything of that nature?

Matthews: No, I didn't hear anything. If I did, I've forgotten it or put it back in my mind someplace.

Marcello: What was your routine the next day, December 8?

Matthews: Well, we were trying to get things squared away. There was an awful lot of work to do. They brought a barge alongside, if I'm not mistaken, and, of course, we went back to the routine of hauling ammo. That consisted of not only 5-inch ammunition but also powder--cans of powder--and anything that involved ammunition for the "cans" especially. We hauled it up and set it on the barge or on motor launches, whatever the case may be.

Then they had a search and rescue type of thing. I got on one of the motor launches, and we had to go out into the harbor and see what we could find--if we could find any bodies or any fellows that were still hanging onto stuff, you know. And we did. We found, I think,

about five or six guys that were still hanging onto stuff out there. They had their whites on, and they were just absolutely a mess. They were alive, but they had so damned much saltwater in them and oil and everything that they were a mess. So they bring them back on board, and we did that several times. That was an experience in itself. That kind of shook me up more, I think, than just about anything that I can think of. That night we had over 400 survivors on there.

Marcello: These were casualties from other ships and so on?

Matthews: Right. Some guys had no ship to go back to from liberty, so we had them on there for temporary duty. Of course, we had the bodies. The sailmaker had to make up...they didn't have body bags as such in those days--just canvas bags--and he was working overtime, plus his striker. They had bodies on the fantail that were stacked up like cordwood.

Marcello: I'm sure that had an effect on a nineteen-year-old.

Matthews: Yes.

Marcello: That day, when you were in the launch in the harbor and looking for survivors and so on, describe what the surface of the water looked like.

Matthews: Well, it was a little choppy and had a brown, dirty scum. A lot of flotsam was around, an awful lot of it, and we could have missed bodies very, very easy.

Marcello: I'm sure that the water was also coated with oil, was it

not?

Matthews: Oh, yes, definitely. Yes, it was terrible.

Marcello: Describe the destruction you saw in the harbor as you were going around in this launch.

Matthews: Actually, we patrolled and did this work just this side of Battleship Row. We didn't go over around there because they were too concerned over there. They got pretty well tied up over there with search and rescue and trying to get things under control. We were at the end of Ford Island and just kind of circling around out there to see what the heck we could find and pick up, and that was the extent of it. What we could see as we were traveling around out there, that was pretty messy.

Marcello: Were there still fires going and smoke billowing out of ships and so on?

Matthews: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Sure. All over the place.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to glance over and take a look at what was happening to the Arizona?

Matthews: It was just one great, big mess of smoke. Their forward conning tower was kind of bent like that (gestures), you know. Actually, it didn't set in. "How could this happen?" "How could the Oklahoma turn turtle?" "How could the Arizona be sitting so cotton-picking low in the water, with just their conning tower staying up there?" Of course, it's hard sometimes to separate fact from fantasy over fifty years. Of course, over all of

these years, we've been inundated with all types of pictures and things like this, and you kind of relate to them. None of that really got to me until after the war, until I was home; and I'd see these things, and I'd still get shook.

Marcello: As a nineteen-year-old at that time, in your wildest dreams, did you ever envision one of these massive battleships being destroyed such as you saw there at Pearl that day?

Matthews: They couldn't be. They were the United States Navy-- invincible. This was not happening.

Marcello: In my own mind, had I been there, I would have been more in awe at the Oklahoma, perhaps, turning completely over.

Matthews: It was just like a beached whale, and all you could see was the bottom. That's what we saw whenever we went ashore.

Marcello: In those days immediately after the attack, how would you describe your own emotions or feelings--not only in terms of the destruction you saw, but, let's say, toward the Japanese as well?

Matthews: Well, it's hard to say. I was more concerned at that time to try to save what we had; to try to get the sailors back that we could; if there was any wounded, to get them back. I didn't have time for emotions. It was a job that had to be done, so you did it--that attitude.

I think that prevailed through most of the people at that particular time. As far as animosity toward the Japanese, what the hell! I had no animosity toward the Japanese. I had no animosity toward them until I saw what happened, what they did, and I couldn't understand why they did it. But at that particular time, that was of no concern to me. It was a matter of getting out there, and if people needed help, get them back.

Marcello: What kind of work were you doing in the pattern shop during that period after the attack?

Matthews: Belting ammunition.

Marcello: You really weren't performing your functions as a patternmaker.

Matthews: No, nobody was, except if they had to do some welding or emergency stuff like that, see; but as far as pattern work was concerned, no, that didn't even enter into it.

Marcello: When did you have a chance to get word back to your mother that you were okay and things of that nature?

Matthews: Well, they had V-Mail, but that came afterwards. I got a letter off to her there. At one time--I don't know exactly when it was--they had these booths that you could send a letter home on a record, you know. I guess it was a small record like that (gesture). It wasn't a "forty-five" with a big hole, but a small hole. So Bob and I were over there, and he sent a letter home by that to his folks, and then I sent one like that home to my

mother.

At the time of the attack, at that particular time, my young brother, who was...gosh, he was nine years younger than me, so I guess he was about nine or ten then. He was working on a picture in Hollywood there-- he was an extra--and that's how they made some extra money. They were working on "King's Row," and she got word at the studio that Pearl Harbor was under attack, and she collapsed because she knew I was up there. She didn't know whether I was alive or dead, oh, for several weeks. But the first thing she got was that short V-Mail thing or whatever it was that they had at the time. We were only allowed to write so much. That was sent to her immediately. It was sent over to the States on microfilm and reprocessed, and then it was sent out.

Marcello: How long did you remain aboard the Dobbin?

Matthews: Too long. I put her out of commission.

Marcello: So you were on the Dobbin for the rest of the war then.

Matthews: The whole shot. The whole shot. I didn't get back to the States for the whole time.

Marcello: Where were some of the places that the Dobbin went after it left Pearl Harbor?

Matthews: Well, I'll tell you. I kept a log of every stop we made in all of those years. As a matter of fact, I kept a log of the whole thing since I joined the Navy practically. I made 150 copies and they're upstairs, so

pick up one.

Marcello: Okay.

Matthews: So rather than going through all this detail of telling you that, pick up one of them, and you'll have it.

Marcello: But it did serve throughout the Pacific during the entire war, isn't that correct?

Matthews: Oh, yes, sure. Yes, every cotton-picking rock that was out there, I believe, we stopped at--just about. It was a very long, monotonous tour of duty, and I tried to get out so many times for new construction, whatever. At that time I was a second class, and I finally got up to first class. But they wouldn't let me off.

Marcello: I guess on a ship of that nature, with so many skilled personnel aboard, your superiors guarded those people like a dog with a bone.

Matthews: That's exactly what the story was. I didn't realize that at the time, but that's the way it went. We had an excellent duty in Sydney. I mean, we went from Hell to Heaven in a short period of time. I dated a girl down there steady, the whole thirteen months we were down there, and I finally went back and married her. On my first thirty-day leave I ever had in the Navy, I went back down and got married, which was an unfortunate thing because she never came over the the States so I eventually divorced her.

It's hard to go from this, which was the whole



Goddamned world turned upside down, to down here where you're treated like royalty and all the women that you could grab hold of (chuckle) and all the beer you could drink.

Marcello: When did you get out of the Navy?

Matthews: When did I get out of the Navy? It was November, 1946, I guess.

Marcello: And from what you mentioned...

Matthews: That was the first time I got out.

Marcello: Okay. So you get out, and then you went back in the Navy again?

Matthews: I got a good song and dance about "if the war ever so happens again, you might as well go back into the reserves and come back in at your old rate." I said, "Well, yeah, that's all right. It's the inactive reserves. I don't have to go to any meetings or anything. For four years, what could happen?" (Laughter) Sucker!

Marcello: So you evidently got called back in for the Korean War.

Matthews: In 1950--first shot out of the barrel. First shot! The day I got my orders, my second son was born, and we had just bought a new house. That was really something. I was working for Douglas Aircraft at the time, and I had letters up the "kazoo" from all hands at Douglas to keep me there because they were working on Navy fighters. It didn't do any good.

Marcello: So did you serve for the duration of the Korean War then?

Matthews: Yes. Sure as hell did.

Marcello: Then did you get out of the Navy, or did you decide to stay in reserves and pick up twenty years or whatever?

Matthews: (Chuckle) I told them to "stick it" after that (chuckle). No, I had too much going for me on the outside.

Marcello: That's the point I was going to make a moment ago. You mentioned that you did use your patternmaker training and so on in your job career after that.

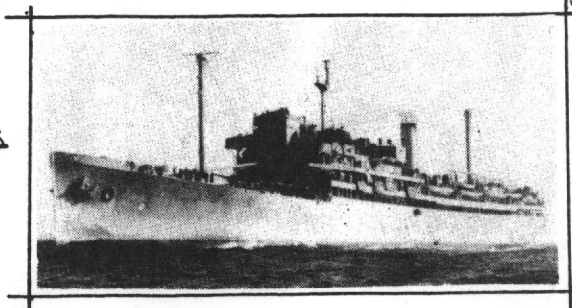
Matthews: That's right. I don't know whether you want to get into that or not. It's fairly diversified, but I used my basic skills of patternmaking to carry me on through.

Marcello: Well, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview, then, Mr. Matthews. I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk to me. You said a lot of interesting things relative to the Japanese attack, and, of course, this is what we're looking for. I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments very valuable when they get a chance to look at them.

Matthews: Well, I hope so.

A P P E N D I X

LAUNCHED 5 MAY 1921  
 COMMISSIONED 23 JULY 1924  
 RECOMMISSIONED 27 SEPT. 1946  
 DISPOSED BY MARITIME COM. 24 DEC. 1946



WORLD WAR II CRUISE  
 LOG OF  
 U.S.S. DOBBIN AD-3

LOCATION AND EVENTS

ARRIVED

LEFT

DAY OF INFAMY" PEARL HARBOR CROSSED EQUATOR PAGO PAGO, AMERICAN SAMOA TONGA, FRIENDLY ISLANDS SUVA, FIJI ISLANDS NOUMÉA, NEW CALEDONIA SYDNEY, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA JAP MIDGET SUBS ATTACK	7 DECEMBER 1941	22 FEBRUARY 1942 28 FEBRUARY 1942 15 APRIL 1942 20 MAY 1942 21 MAY 1942 25 MAY 1942
SYDNEY, U.S.W., AUSTRALIA BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA MACKAY, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA TOWNSVILLE, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA MILNE BAY, NEW GUINEA	27 JUNE 1943 14 JULY 1943 25 SEPTEMBER 1943 30 SEPTEMBER 1943	25 JUNE 1943 12 JULY 1943 24 SEPTEMBER 1943 28 SEPTEMBER 1943
MILNE BAY NEW GUINEA MACKAY QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA RAN AGROUND INSIDE GREAT BARRIER REEF, AUSTRALIA SYDNEY, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA MILNE BAY, NEW GUINEA BUNA, NEW GUINEA ORO BAY, NEW GUINEA MOROBE, NEW GUINEA ORO BAY, NEW GUINEA MOROBE, NEW GUINEA SEADLER, ADMIRALTY ISLANDS MADANG NEW GUINEA HOLLANDIA, DUTCH NEW GUINEA	30 JANUARY 1944 1 FEBRUARY 1944 3 FEBRUARY 1944 22 FEBRUARY 1944 27 FEBRUARY 1944 5 MARCH 1944 10 MARCH 1944 19 APRIL 1944 19 APRIL 1944 5 MAY 1944 21 MAY 1944 8 JUNE 1944 16 JULY 1944 5 AUGUST 1944	27 JANUARY 1944 30 JANUARY 1944 1 FEBRUARY 1944 20 FEBRUARY 1944 23 FEBRUARY 1944 4 MARCH 1944 10 MARCH 1944 19 APRIL 1944 4 MAY 1944 20 MAY 1944 6 JUNE 1944 15 JULY 1944 3 AUGUST 1944
HOLLANDIA, DUTCH NEW GUINEA RE-CROSSED EQUATOR LEYTE, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS SUBIC BAY, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS MANILA, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS SUBIC BAY, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS "JAPS SURRENDER" "V-J DAY OFFICIALLY" SUBIC BAY, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS MANILLA, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS SUBIC BAY, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS SAMAR PHILIPPINE ISLANDS SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A	16 FEBRUARY 1945 20 FEBRUARY 1945 24 FEBRUARY 1945 23 MAY 1945 28 MAY 1945 15 AUGUST 1945 2 SEPTEMBER 1945 28 SEPTEMBER 1945 5 OCTOBER 1945 6 NOVEMBER 1945 7 DECEMBER 1945	14 FEBRUARY 1945 16 FEBRUARY 1945 21 FEBRUARY 1945 23 MAY 1945 28 MAY 1945 28 SEPTEMBER 1945 5 OCTOBER 1945 3 NOVEMBER 1945 14 NOVEMBER 1945

COMPILED, WITH MY COMPLIMENTS FOR  
 ALL MY SHIPMATES OF THAT CRUISE.  
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