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Interview with
George E. Waller
August 5, 1978

Place of Interview: Little Rock, Arkansas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: George E. Waller
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

George Waller

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Little Rock, Arkansas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing George Waller for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on August 5, 1978, in Little Rock, Arkansas. I'm interviewing Mr. Waller in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS Maryland during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Waller, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Waller: Okay. I was born on September 18, 1919, in Keo, Arkansas. I went to high school in Keo, and I graduated from Keo High School. I joined the Navy on October 7, 1937.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy in 1937?

Mr. Waller: I didn't want to be a farmer, and I didn't want to work for the local people there. I wanted to get away and do something on my own.

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

Waller: I liked the uniform, and that's just about it because that's about all I knew about it. And some people from home had been in the Navy, and I liked what I saw.

Marcello: Did the economics play any part in your decision to join the Navy? In other words, had Keo felt the effects of the Depression?

Waller: Absolutely! Absolutely! My parents weren't hurt real bad by the Depression. They were . . . everybody was poor, so to speak, but we weren't hurt too bad. My dad worked and my mother did, too, but I couldn't see any future in Keo at all. I just couldn't see anything, so I joined the Navy.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Waller: San Diego.

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

Waller: The boot camp in those days was quite a bit rougher than it is now, and if somebody told you to do something, you didn't question his authority for giving an order--you did it.

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

Waller: Three months or approximately three months, I got out of boot camp in December, and I went to the USS Maryland. I was assigned to it in December, 1937.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going aboard a battleship?

Waller: I had no idea even what it looked like. I didn't have any idea at all. I had seen some smaller ships in the harbor there--you know, from the boot camp--but I had no idea what a battleship looked like.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get when you went aboard the Maryland? After all, you were still a "boot," so to speak, so far as the "old salts" aboard the Maryland were concerned.

Waller: I think the looks . . . I remember people looking at us. There was about nineteen of us, as well as I remember, that went aboard, and people looked at you like, you know, "Here comes some more that we can put to work!" They were anxious to get us. We were put into X Division, you know, what they called X Division, and the different divisions then would come down and pick out people that they wanted. The department heads, I think it was, would pick out people, and we were approximately about a week in the X Division before we were assigned to a division.

Marcello: And, where were you assigned?

Waller: To the Fourth Division.

Marcello: And what was the function of the Fourth Division?

Waller: Well, it was the quarter-deck. We were on the port side aft; our quarters and everything were on the after end of the main deck, and we worked around the quarter-deck, and we had the

third deck spaces and, of course, turret four,

Marcello: In other words, you were in the deck force,

Waller: Deck force, in the beginning.

Marcello: You say you were in the deck force in the beginning. Did you eventually get out of the deck force?

Waller: Yes, I got out of the deck force just as soon as I possibly could--after I had done my mess cooking like most everyone else.

Marcello: How long did you remain in the deck force altogether?

Waller: It seems like to me about six months in the deck force.

Marcello: I guess it was almost standard operating procedure to put new people into the deck force, was it not?

Waller: It was; it was.

Marcello: I assume you didn't like the deck force,

Waller: Not really. I didn't like the hours. It was from "can to can,"

Marcello: When you say it was from "can to can," what do you mean?

Waller: Well, from 5:30 in the morning or five o'clock in the morning when you got up until you went to bed at night, You were always sweeping down--something going on in the deck force all the time.

Marcello: While you were in the deck force, did you ever take part in a process called holystoning the deck?

Waller: I sure did (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe holystoning because I think that is part of the Navy

that is no longer in existence.

Waller: Well, we had teakwood decks, and to keep them pretty and white--you know, bleach them out in the sun--usually about twice a month, as well as I remember . . . I don't remember exactly about that either, but it seemed like it was about twice a month. They put sand on the deck, and then we would get a little holystone, which was four or five inches square with a little hole rounded out in the middle. A stick would fit down into that little hole, and you'd move that back and forth over the deck to holystone it.

Marcello: Were you using salt-water mixed with that sand?

Waller: Oh, yes. In fact, that's all you use on the decks, would be salt-water.

Marcello: And then after you had finished holystoning the deck, it was washed down with salt-water again?

Waller: Oh, absolutely, and squeegeed dry.

Marcello: You also mentioned awhile ago that you did your tour of mess cooking, which again was standard operating procedure for a new man.

Waller: Standard procedure.

Marcello: How did mess cooking work at that time?

Waller: Well, we had tables that we set up in each one of the compartments. You had tureens . . . oh, each mess cook would have, say, three or four tureens according to whatever number that

you needed to serve the meal with, and everybody--all the mess cooks--would go to the galley and get in line and have their tureens filled. You would bring them back, set them on the table, and then, of course, the people that had been there the longest--had been on the trip the longest--set at the head of the table, and you worked right on down to the ones that sat at the end of the table that didn't get a whole lot to eat in the beginning (chuckle). They had to wait for seconds sometimes before they would get any.

Marcello: So at the time you went aboard then, food was being served family-style.

Waller: Family-style. That's correct. We slept in hammocks. The real new people slept in hammocks.

Marcello: Some people actually enjoyed mess cooking because it gave them extra liberty, I think.

Waller: Extra money.

Marcello: Of course, they got the tips come payday.

Waller: That's right. They got tips on payday, and you got five dollars a month extra for being a mess cook. And, of course, twenty-one dollars a month wasn't a whole lot of money, either.

Marcello: On the other hand, I guess you didn't want to stay in mess cooking too long, though, because there was really no future in it in terms of advancement and things of that sort.

Waller: Well, no, but, you know, a lot of people did stay in it. I

was just trying to think . . . it seemed like to me that one fellow--I can't recall his name right now--was in it for over a year that I know of, and he kept wanting to stay in mess cooking all the time. You had every-night liberty; you weren't in sections like everyone else.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Maryland?

Waller: Very good--good food. Oh, we had . . . I can't think of anything in particular that we had, other than beans on Saturday morning and ham on Wednesday.

I remember one incident (chuckle). "Shady" Lane was the guy's name. He was always going to a captain's mast about something. He went to a mast this particular time, and Captain Glassford was the commanding officer. "Shady" Lane was what everybody called him. In fact, he just died last April--had an accident and was killed. He went ashore on Wednesday and didn't come back for two days. Captain Glassford said that if anybody could tell him a new story that he'd never heard, he wouldn't be punished. "Shady" told him that we didn't have ham on Wednesday; we had beans on Wednesday, so he just thought it was Saturday, so he stayed. Of course, on "Rope Yarn Sunday"--it was actually on Wednesday--there was noontime liberty; so he stayed two days, and Captain Glassford excused him (chuckle), because he'd checked with the cook and we did have beans on Wednesday.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you slept in hammocks. How did you like sleeping in a hammock?

Waller: I liked it--after you get used to it and you learned how to sleep in one. It is kind of risky in the beginning. You put a stick at each end to spread it out, and it makes it a little flat, and it doesn't fold up around you then and get real hot. But after you learn how to do it, it is comfortable--real nice--but you have to pull it real tight, though,

Marcello: Now, I assume that the hammocks were taken down in the daytime,

Waller: They were taken down and put in the hammock netting every day and put up . . . it seems to me it was after seven o'clock in the evening or eight o'clock . . . anyway, there was a special time when you could start putting your hammock up. But, of course, you graduated out of that after you've been in the division long enough, and then you got a space on deck where you can set up a cot that you had to buy yourself,

Marcello: Oh, you had to buy the cot yourself?

Waller: Oh, absolutely,

Marcello: I had never realized that,

Waller: Yes. You could keep on sleeping in the hammock if you wanted to, but if you wanted to sleep in a cot, well, you'd buy your own cot; and if space became available--somebody got transferred, and you were next in line--then you could buy your own cot and set it up.

Marcello: But during this period, there really weren't too many bunks, as we know them, aboard the Maryland,

Waller: There wasn't any. I don't remember . . . well, of course, the officers in their rooms had bunks. Some of them had, you know, two bunks to a room, but it seems like to me the junior officers' quarters had bunks in it. But there were no other bunks on the ship.

Marcello: In general, did you find your quarters comfortable?

Waller: Oh, very comfortable. I stayed on there for four years, so I enjoyed it. I liked it.

Marcello: Did you have enough space for your clothing and other personal belongings and things like that?

Waller: Well, you never really have enough space, but as you're on there longer and longer, you get more lockers. One locker was assigned to you, and then, of course, after you have been on there a little longer, you find out there are spare lockers on the ship. You eventually get to know where they are, and you put a lock on that one, and you've got an extra locker there that you can keep things in.

Marcello: I guess after awhile you learn how to stow your gear in a more efficient manner.

Waller: Yes, you learn quickly. You scrubbed your own clothes every night. The laundry was too expensive, so you didn't use that-- most people didn't.

Marcello: In general, how would you rate the morale aboard the Maryland

during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Waller: Extremely high until . . . it seemed like to me in March of 1939 the reserves were being called into the Navy, and morale started sinking a little bit when the reserves were called in.

Marcello: How come the morale started to go down when the reserves came in?

Waller: Well, for example, a person that has never been to sea gets in the reserves and makes third class or second class. He picks up a slot for a third or second class, and the people know that he can't do the job. It is a little perturbing if you've been on a ship for three or four years, and you're taking your exam and you can't get rated because there is already somebody in that particular job. He can't do it anyway, so it is a little bit perturbing.

Marcello: I would assume that there may have been more griping on the part of the reserves, also. They weren't necessarily there because they wanted to be there.

Waller: Some of them were. Of course, back in 1939, there was still a lot of people that didn't have jobs, and they were looking for anything. Of course, the reserves did help us some, too. I'm sure that they brought about the pay increases by more people coming into the service, and they knew more of the civilian population than the military did. So they did help some.

Marcello: What do you think attributed to the high morale aboard the Maryland prior to the coming of these reserves?

Waller: The leadership. I think that's the main thing. Most of the senior officers that I've known during my Navy career--and I was in the Navy for thirty-one years--showed strong, very strong, leadership, but they were the same every day. If there was a type of a person that was a leader that . . . when he said that he wanted something done, you know, he would pass the word on down through the chain of command that you were required to do certain things, and if you don't, you'll be in trouble. Military people like that. They hate a person that is wishy-washy all the time. Most of your old-time Navy leaders were strong personalities--very strong.

Marcello: And most of those officers were Academy graduates, weren't they?

Waller: I didn't know there was any other kind at that particular time before the war.

Marcello: What part did sports and athletic competition play in the life of that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy aboard the Maryland?

Waller: Well, we had a football team, pulling whaleboat crews, and all of this kind of stuff. Everyone enjoyed it, but I don't think it played the important part as it does today--I don't believe it did--although they did have a special mess to eat on, and they were served steaks more often and . . . you know, they got better food because of their hard work.

Marcello: Okay, now, you mentioned that you were in the deck force for about six months, and then you got out of there. Where did you go from the deck force?

Waller: Turret four, I went into turret four, I started at the bottom just like everyone else. Okay, I started at the bottom like everyone else--down at the lower handling room--and, of course, you had to keep the decks shined. There wasn't any idea that war was going to come, so everything was pretty; you know, you're trying to keep everything looking nice all the time--painting and shining the steel decks.

Marcello: In other words, when you start out in one of the turrets, as you mentioned, you were down in the lower handling room where you're really doing nothing but stoop labor, so to speak.

Waller: That's right; that's right. And you work your way up, You go up to the upper handling room and then into the pits and then into the . . . of course, it takes a long time to get up there, you know.

Marcello: Now, what are the pits?

Waller: Well, that's where the guns . . . when the guns are elevated and depressed, the pits are the area where the breech of the gun goes into when it is elevated.

Marcello: Now, what were you striking for at this particular time?

Waller: Gunner's mate . . . third class gunner's mate.

Marcello: How would you describe the training, the on-the-job training,

that you received to become a third class gunner's mate during that period?

Waller: Well, the training, I would say, is better today than it was then, because now you have some semi-classroom instruction, and in those days it was more up to you. If you didn't study and you didn't put courses in . . . you know, you had certain courses that you had to put in, and if you didn't study and you didn't put the courses in, you just didn't make the rate. And nobody really seemed to care except you. I was fortunate. I was a high school graduate, and one of the very few in my division. There wasn't too many. In fact, at one time, I think there was only . . . I believe I was the only one at one time.

Marcello: Out of how many people?

Waller: Well, it seemed like . . . what did we have? A hundred . . . you know, I don't remember, but it seemed like it was over a hundred people. In the early days, you know, people would go in the Navy to keep from going to jail (chuckle); but, of course, that ceased, too.

Marcello: Did you have a lot of experienced petty officers in turret four?

Waller: Absolutely! We had some of the best--sure did. I remember . . . I believe he was a third class at the time. "Dutch" Leasburg was his name. He could close the plug without air . . . well, with very little air.

Marcello: Now, what do you mean when you're talking about closing the plug?

Waller: Well, that plug weighs close to a ton, I expect, and, of course, it is balanced good. But the plug is the after end of the gun, you know. When you close the plug, you close the breech so that you can fire it. He was one of the people . . . he was so strong that when the powder car came up and he unloaded the powder in and the rammerman shoved the powder in behind the bullet and closed the plug . . . you used air to close the plug, you know. You tripped the plug so it would release, and then when it released, well, you hit it with a little bit of air. The air and you together could get the swing to close the plug, and "Dutch" could close it just by tripping . . . he could trip the release and grab the plug and swing it closed, and not too many people could do that.

Finley J. Longton was the turret captain. We had a chief in there, but he didn't do a whole lot. Finley ran everything; he was a first class.

Marcello: How rapid or slow was making rank or a rating during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Waller: Again, it was kind of up to the individual. I made third class in--it seemed like to me--three years; and another person that made third class the same time I did had fourteen years in, so it was kind of up to the individual. If you studied and put

- your courses in--it was strictly up to you--you could do it.
- Marcello: But rank moved a lot slower in pre-Pearl Harbor period than after Pearl Harbor?
- Waller: Much, much slower. Much slower. You had to get eligible and be recommended, and that was the hard part, because it was very difficult to recommend a young man, you know, with no time in the service at all, to speak of. You'd recommend somebody that had ten, twelve, fourteen years in. There was just too much difference, you know, and they was afraid that you'd beat them anyway on an exam.
- Marcello: And, then, of course, there had to be openings, also.
- Waller: Oh, yes, yes. Of course, not on that particular ship, but in the battle fleet--the fleet that you were competing for--there had to be openings.
- Marcello: Was the gunner's mate rating a fast-moving rate in comparison to the others at that time?
- Waller: I think gunner's mate . . . I would say it was in the medium range. The faster ratings were the specialties, such as electricians, and certain types of communication peoples. The old five right arm rates were a little bit on the slow side, but they were senior rates--called it senior rates--at the time.
- Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned that the Navy attracted some of the undesirable elements during an earlier period. When you mentioned this, the first thing I thought of were the old Asiatic sailors,

that is, those that served on the Asiatic Station. Did you have very many of those people aboard the Maryland?

Waller: In my division we had three, I believe--that I remember--that were old Asiatic sailors. They were a little different.

Marcello: I'm sure they were rather fascinating characters for a person such as yourself who has just come out of boot camp,

Waller: It sure was. They could tell stories that would just hold your attention for hours on end--listen to them tell stories--if they didn't drink too much. Of course, I was young--real young--and I enjoyed a drink like most people, but to sit around and listen to a bunch of drunks . . . I didn't particularly relish that type.

Marcello: I guess most of those Asiatic sailors had a tremendous number of tattoos, did they not?

Waller: Most of them did, yes. Most did,

Marcello: I guess most of them probably wanted to go back to the Asiatic Station.

Waller: They all did. I don't know of any that didn't want to go back. I heard some of the stories. I remember one--his name was Lee. I don't remember his last name, but his first name was Lee. He was a seaman. In fact, he was our leading seaman and had about twelve, fourteen years in then. And he was on . . . what was that little ship that was sunk by the Japanese?

Marcello: The Panay.

Waller: The Panay. He was aboard the Panay, and he used to tell us some stories about that. He said that you hired the Chinese to do your work. You didn't do your own work; you was hiring somebody to do it--come aboard ship and do your work.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that they really didn't want those Asiatic sailors around too long. In other words, if there was an opportunity to transfer them off the ship, they were usually gotten rid of pretty fast.

Waller: Some were, but not all. Some were extremely good sailors. Some weren't too good for the Navy image, either.

Marcello: You mentioned that this Lee had over twelve years in and was only a seaman. Evidently, he had been busted quite a few times or perhaps had not even bothered to try to advance.

Waller: He wouldn't talk about that, so we assumed that he had been busted several times. He had been coxswain of a boat . . . he had done everything that you could think of, so we assumed that he had been busted quite a number of times. But he wouldn't talk about it.

Marcello: When did the Maryland move out to the Hawaiian Islands on a more or less permanent basis?

Waller: We went with what they called the Pineapple Fleet in 1939, I believe. It seemed like to me it was late 1939.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands on a more or less permanent basis?

- Waller: At first, I was enthused about it like most everyone else, but after awhile, hearing the music they had constantly, it kind of gets on your nerves, you know, and you get fed up with it.
- Marcello: I have heard it said that after you're in the Hawaiian Islands for a while, the area becomes rather confining, since it is very small.
- Waller: Very confining. It sure does.
- Marcello: You have seen everything in a relatively short amount of time.
- Waller: It doesn't take long, although we had a good recreation area set up. Nanakuli Beach, I believe, was the name of it. We could go over there and stay for a week at a time if you wanted, you know--if you could get off the ship for that long or get a leave. It was real enjoyable. And, of course, it was fun riding a train into Honolulu from Pearl.
- Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the training routine that the Maryland engaged in when it was out at Pearl Harbor on a permanent basis. For instance, when would the Maryland normally go out on a training exercise? What day of the week?
- Waller: Now, I can't answer that. I don't remember. I do remember this-- ten days at a time were all we were staying in. We'd come in and stay ten days at a time.
- Marcello: How long would you usually stay out?
- Waller: Well, we would stay out until the other ships that were in had

completed their ten days. In other words, we were rotating with other ships in the harbor, because a certain number of ships was all that Admiral Richardson would allow in the harbor at one time. I guess he was probably thinking of pollution. And, of course, fresh water . . . , we could only stay as long as our fresh water would last, too,

Marcello: And congestion. After all, Pearl Harbor was not a very big harbor to have all those ships in there at one time.

Waller: No, it isn't, but we have had a lot of ships in there, too. I remember, after Admiral Richardson was relieved and Admiral Kimmel took over, the ten-day business was suspended. We could stay in longer than ten days. Or at least that is my recollection of it--we were staying in longer.

Marcello: What would you normally do when you went out on these exercises? Again, I am referring to you and your shipmates who were in the number four turret.

Waller: Well, I wasn't in the number four turret all that time. I got transferred from there. Like you said a while ago, it was slow in moving--everything was slow. We had another division on there called a "V" or Victor Division where the rates were a little bit more open and you could move a little bit faster. So I stayed in turret four and moved up to the shell deck and, I guess, eventually would have gone to gun captain, you know. Instead of going to gunner's mate, I would have gone to turret

captain. But it was just too blooming slow, so I got transferred to the V Division and spent . . . I was in V Division when the war started. I hadn't been in there too long.

Marcello: Well, now, V Division has to do with launching of the float planes and so on.

Waller: Yes, that is correct--that and the magazines. The magazines themselves . . . the V Division sailors took care of those and took the temperatures every day and took care of the firing of the catapults--the V Division people. In fact, I worked on the after catapult for quite a long time.

Marcello: When did you get into the V Division, that is, how far before Pearl Harbor?

Waller: I don't remember. I just don't remember.

Marcello: Was it a matter of weeks or months?

Waller: It must have been months, because I worked on the catapults and got to where, you know, firing the catapults was fun. Then I was making the floats so they could get the wind direction, you know--throw the floats over the side so they could get the wind direction and know how to turn the ship so the planes could land. But I just don't remember how long it was.

Marcello: That's another interesting part of the Navy that's no longer in existence. I am referring to the launching of those float planes and so on. That evidently must have been a rather interesting procedure.

Waller: Oh, yes, it was, because you'd have to shoot on the roll, you know. Before the ship gets to the top of the roll, you'd have to fire, and hopefully you could shoot them . . . just as the plane was leaving the end of the catapult, you hoped you would be right at the last part of the roll. That would help to give the pitch to get the plane up a little higher.

I know one time I fired when the gun boss told me to (chuckle), and I should have known better. I almost put one in the drink, because it wasn't at the right place. I knew it wasn't at the right place. But he never bothered me after that. He would give this hand-down--you know, the hand signal to go ahead and fire--but it means fire when you're ready, you know, when you know it is the right time.

Marcello: And I guess it is a rather intricate procedure in retrieving one of those planes, isn't it?

Waller: Oh, yes. We had to put the sled over the side and, of course, that had the netting, you know, in the back of the sled. Then when you'd turn, it would make the sled go out so that the wings wouldn't touch the side of the plane, and you'd be in the turn, and, of course, you would make a slick at the same time, you know, so the plane would have a slick to land on. You'd rev up and get up on the sled and hook on with this little hook on the netting that is behind the sled and wind that sled up a little closer and bring it into the side of the ship,

pick it up with a crane, and set it back on the catapult.

Marcello: A lot of times, wasn't this a function of a gunner's mate or something like that? Or did it vary who they had? I was going to say, you were still a gunner's mate.

Waller: Yes, I was a gunner's mate, too. I sure was.

Marcello: What normally would you do when you went out on these training exercises?

Waller: Well, we would launch aircraft, you know, spotter aircraft, and the ship would do some shooting. And then we would have . . . I always remember those conditions we would go into--condition watches one, two, and three, I believe. Everybody hated it when we said Condition Zebra, because the ship was sealed, and it was very difficult to move about. If you were topside, you couldn't get down below; and if you were below, you know, you couldn't get topside. We did quite a bit of that. In fact, during most of the training--it seemed like to me--at nighttime, we always had one of the conditions set. It was X-Ray, Yolk, and Zebra. It seemed like to me that Yolk was always set at night, unless we were actually in Condition Three. Then Zebra would be set--modified Zebra--so you could go to the bridge and change watches and such as that.

Marcello: Well, would Condition Zebra be extreme battle conditions?

Waller: That's right--extreme battle conditions. The ship was sealed completely, and everybody was on their station.

- Marcello: How much emphasis was given to antiaircraft practice during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?
- Waller: We used to shoot at sleeves--not too much--but not as much as the main battery, Of course, the main battery was the primary thing for the ship, you know, and, of course, they always figured it'd have big engagements with battleships,
- Marcello: You just mentioned something that I think is a rather important statement. Nobody at that time actually realized--or very few people realized--just how important aircraft carriers were going to be in future wars.
- Waller: They sure didn't, I don't think anyone did.
- Marcello: The battleship was still considered the backbone of the fleet,
- Waller: That was the backbone of the fleet. It sure was. The training usually took place on the battleships, and they always thought that the battleship sailors had better training than anyone else. Then, of course, the battleship sailors were thinking this, too, you know,
- Marcello: And, by contrast, I'm sure that the Maryland had many, many more antiaircraft weapons aboard after Pearl Harbor than before Pearl Harbor.
- Waller: It sure did. In fact, we had four before . . . well, a good little bit before Pearl, we had four,
- Marcello: You had four what?
- Waller: Four 5-inch guns.

Marcello: Five-inch?

Waller: Five-inch .25's. And then we got 1.1's, I don't remember whether it was in 1939 or 1940, but, anyway, we got 1.1's then. I guess I left before they changed those, I think they eventually got 20-millimeters and 40-millimeters. Of course, we had some machine guns on the top,

Marcello: Now, did the training routine change any as one gets closer and closer to December 7th and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate?

Waller: I don't believe there was a whole lot of change. I don't believe so. I think the sailors realized as much as anyone that there was something going to happen. It felt like something was going to happen.

Marcello: Did you have more general quarter drills or anything of that nature?

Waller: Not any more than usual.

Marcello: Did you perhaps sail with darkened ship at night?

Waller: Oh, yes. We did that in 1938, you know, so you can't . . . ever since I was in the Navy, we'd done that--sail at night with darkened ship . . . not all the time, but sometimes.

Marcello: You mentioned that you could feel a certain tenseness, or you could detect some changes taking place. What sort of rumors were floating about the ship? I know that there must have been rumors, like there were on any ship.

Waller: Well, most of the people hung out around the "geedunk" stand on the boat deck, and, of course, there was a radio at the "geedunk" stand, and we would go over there, especially during the noon hour and in the evenings, to listen to the radio, and we could hear Hitler speaking. Of course, he was stirring up things, and we could hear Mussolini philosophising and about the Japanese envoys coming to the United States, you know, because we weren't selling them, you know, tin cans anymore--our old metal--and they were upset. The scuttlebutt was that if the Japanese attacked, they would never attack Pearl because they just didn't have enough to do it. They would never attack Pearl, and if they did, they wouldn't last three weeks because we could beat them in three weeks' time. That was the scuttlebutt.

Marcello: You have said a lot of interesting things here. First, you and your shipmates evidently did feel secure at Pearl Harbor,

Waller: We felt very secure.

Marcello: Was this mainly because of the distance Pearl Harbor was from Japan, or was it this confidence in your abilities to defeat the Japanese that also brought about this attitude?

Waller: I think it was confidence in our ability to defeat them more than anything else. I don't think most of the people realized the difference--the distance. I don't think we even thought about that. But, again, we didn't put that much emphasis on

the aircraft, either.

Marcello: When you thought of an individual Japanese at that time, what sort of a person did you conjure up in your mind? Now, again, I am referring to that period prior to the Pearl Harbor attack,

Waller: A very small, slant-eyed individual that anybody could take if he wanted to, you know. You felt like you could take three or four of them at a time, if necessary. That was the image that most people had, and one that I had, too,

Marcello: I guess you probably bumped into quite a few Japanese when you went ashore, because there were quite a few in the islands.

Waller: Yes. Over in the Navy yard you would bump into them. Bear in mind, it is a long ways from Pearl Harbor to Honolulu, and we didn't get to Honolulu too often, because you had to ride the train. You couldn't afford a taxi, and you had to go through fields, and I'm sure you know all of that story. But you would see a lot of Japanese over at the Navy yard, and we did a lot of business . . . after you got to be third class or second class or above, you would go ashore "on business," you know (chuckle). You'd go over to Ten-Ten Dock and have a beer, and then you could . . . you would see a lot of Japanese around, though . . . and they would give you that impression, too. Most that we saw were small, and they kind of bowed down a little bit, and it made you have that impression, I guess--kind of forced it on you.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about your liberty routine. Was there any particular time when the Maryland would come in off these exercises?

Waller: Yes, It seemed like to me it was on Friday when we'd come in-- Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. I know the Oklahoma came in on Saturday morning, on the 6th. So it was Thursday, Friday, or Saturday, but most of the time it was on Friday, as well as I remember, when we'd come in.

Marcello: And what would be your routine when the Maryland came in?

Waller: As soon as we would tie up, everybody would do their job as fast as they could. We'd tie up at one of the Fox piers and go ashore as soon as you could--just over to the Ten-Ten Dock or over to the submarine base to the exchange over here. There was always something to do--a lot of pretty women around--and, of course, everybody was looking (chuckle).

Marcello: Now, would liberty commence on that Friday, or would it normally commence at Saturday noon--whenever the inspection was through?

Waller: Oh, no, it would commence as soon as you'd get in.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work? Was there port and starboard liberty?

Waller: Port and starboard most of the time, unless there was too many ships in. When there was too many ships in, then they'd cut down . . . maybe put it on four-section liberty. Once every four days you could go. One section a day could go. According

to what high rating you were, you could go to shore a little more often.

Marcello: With the port and starboard liberty, you could go every other day.

Waller: Every other day.

Marcello: In other words, when you would come in on a weekend, the port section might have Saturday off and the starboard section might have Sunday.

Waller: No, on weekends usually, say, if the port watch had the duty, the second section and the fourth section would be port watch, The first and third would be starboard, and the second section had the duty on Saturday, and the fourth section had it on Sunday, but the second section had a stand-by on Sunday, So the whole port watch would be aboard for the weekend, Then it would rotate during the week, The weekends worked kind of like that, I had forgotten about that.

Marcello: Now, also, you probably had the Cinderella liberty, did you not? In other words, you had to be back at twelve o'clock.

Waller: Oh, yes, unless you were second class and above. Third class could stay out until one o'clock, I believe, and second class until a little later on, and then first class could stay out all night.

Marcello: The exception was if you lived ashore or if you had at least some place to stay ashore.

Waller: Yes, that was the exception.

Marcello: Now, on a weekend I would assume that most of the officers and so on were ashore.

Waller: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do when you went on liberty?

Waller: (Chuckle) Oh, for a long time there was three of us that ran around together, or four of us, and we went sight-seeing most of the time, I have a lot of pictures that I took during those days. We saw the king's palace and everything that you could think of that didn't take much money to do, because we didn't make very much money. I know after I made third class, I was only making sixty dollars a month, I believe, as a third class. So we weren't making very much money.

Marcello: And after you had visited all of the tourist places, what would you normally do when you went ashore?

Waller: There was a lot of whorehouses there, and, of course, the people frequented whorehouses occasionally.

Marcello: In other words, a great deal of the activity took place down around Hotel and Canal and Beretania Streets?

Waller: Oh, yes, that is correct. The YMCA was a good place to go ashore; there was always something going on at the YMCA. Oh, another place was called The Breakers. It was a place operated for the military, I believe, and it had bingo--all kinds of games, you know--and it was enjoyable there--very enjoyable.

Marcello: And then I think you mentioned Nanakuli Beach awhile ago.

- Waller: Nanakuli Beach, yes. That was excellent--very good. I love to swim anyway, so I spent most of the time at Nanakuli there as I possibly could.
- Marcello: I would assume that if you got to go to Nanakuli, you could probably get that overnight liberty.
- Waller: Oh, yes, you could.
- Marcello: Did they have tents and so on set up there? Didn't they have sleeping quarters set up?
- Waller: Oh, yes. There was places where you could sleep. It seems like to me it was four bunks to a little shed--a little hut, like--with screens around it, you know, and then four bunks in there. Of course, it rained so blooming much in Honolulu. But even then, you still enjoyed it. You'd stay in bathing trunks most of the time. They fed us in chow hall fashion. In fact, it was good to get duty over there. Different ships would have the duty every so often, and you could go over on duty to Nanakuli.
- Marcello: I would assume that as the build-up of personnel continued to increase during that immediate pre-Pearl Harbor period, downtown Honolulu was overrun with servicemen.
- Waller: It was. It was a mess, and it got to where you didn't want to go ashore at all. In fact, it was bad.
- Marcello: I gather there were lines for everything, whether it was getting into a bar or whorehouse, or whatever it might have been.

Waller: Yes, there were long lines wherever you went. Even in the parks, there was lines waiting to sit down; you couldn't get a place to sit. There was a park there, I believe, just off of Beretania Street. There was a little park, and we used to go out there. I got picked up there one time. I don't know why; I wasn't doing anything. In fact, the four of us were picked up.

Marcello: Was the Shore Patrol rather strict at that particular time?

Waller: Well, before that--earlier, when I first made third class--we were the patrol. You know, different ships were the patrol, and you let people do a lot of things that the HASP--I believe is what they called themselves later on--didn't do. I believe that was what they called themselves. They were called HASP; I'm pretty sure. This is the first time I've even said their name in years. Anyway, they were horrible. God! They were terrible! They made life miserable for people.

Marcello: Now, were these the local police, or were these military people?

Waller: They were military people. You see, they were ex-cops who had come in the Navy, and they'd come in as specialists. They would be put on Shore Patrol, and they were miserable. They didn't know the military, and their prime purpose in life was to arrest probably as many as they could. Instead of looking after you, they were arresting people. The Shore Patrol was supposed to look after people instead of putting them in jail.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, so let's go into this period in as much detail as we can. Did the Maryland come in that Friday? Do you recall when the Maryland came in, or was it in at that time?

Waller: It seems like to me that we had been in for a while--five or six days. I'm not real positive, but it seemed like we had.

Marcello: Where did you tie up?

Waller: I believe it was called Fox Five.

Marcello: And what ship were you tied up with?

Waller: We were inboard. We were tied up to the pier itself, and no one was alongside us until Saturday morning. On Saturday morning the Oklahoma came in, and she tied up alongside of us.

Marcello: I heard that there was some griping when the Oklahoma came in and tied up beside the Maryland, because it cut off some of the breezes.

Waller: Oh, I'll have to tell you! There's always griping when ships come in and tie up alongside of you. You always wanted a Fox pier by yourself because, you know, you could get the breeze all the way across, and you could sleep topside. You know, everything was just much nicer, and there is always that griping (chuckle). We were glad, I guess, after December 7th.

Marcello: Did you have the liberty that Saturday?

Waller: I sure did. I had been ashore.

Marcello: Had there been any sort of inspection on Saturday? Is there always a Saturday morning inspection?

Waller: Always. I'm sure there had been an inspection. There had to be.

Marcello: Was this a personnel inspection?

Waller: Personnel. You usually had personnel and main decks, and then third deck inspection was on a Friday. You usually had lower deck inspection on Friday and personnel on Saturday.

Marcello: And you did say that you did go ashore on Saturday?

Waller: Yes, I had been ashore on Saturday.

Marcello: Do you remember what you did that Saturday when you went ashore?

Waller: No, I really don't . I know that I had had a few beers, but to remember what I did, I don't. I just don't remember.

Marcello: Do you recall when you came back that Saturday evening?

Waller: It seemed like it was about midnight or around that time when I came back.

Marcello: Generally speaking, when sailors came back off liberty on a Saturday evening, what sort of condition were they in? I want you to think about your answer before you give it to me. I have an important reason for asking that question,

Waller: I would say that the majority of the sailors were pretty well "oiled"--pretty well so.

Marcello: But would that have affected their ability to function the next day?

Waller: Not a bit; not a bit. Everything was automatic. When you trained as much as we did . . . we did do a lot of training, and

every time the ship goes to sea, you would train, you know, and you did things automatically. You go to your station automatically. If you are on the gun, you set it up. Everything was just automatic. You don't even think about what you are doing. I think on the sustained thing it might have a bearing, because you get tired quicker; but just for something as quick as that happened, I don't think that it had an effect at all. I had had a few to drink--a few beers and maybe a little whiskey. I don't know . . . and I slept on the boat deck that night.

Marcello: Why did you sleep on the boat deck that night?

Waller: It was cooler (chuckle). It is always cooler up there, and, of course, that's where you used to gather at night. Of course, we had cook friends, and we would get sausages and crackers and everything from the galley. We would sit up there a lot of times and eat--all hours--as long as the officers couldn't catch us (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you notice anything out of the ordinary happening that night? Or was it a normal Saturday night, as far as you were concerned?

Waller: As far as I was concerned, it was a normal Saturday night--nothing really out of the ordinary. We knew that the envoys had reached Honolulu--the Japanese envoys.

Marcello: In fact, I guess, by December 6th, they had already left Honolulu, and they were in Washington.

Waller: Yes, they were in D.C. at the time. In fact, they were in Hull's

office when the attack occurred, weren't they? We knew that they had been in Honolulu and knew that there had been some big parties that a lot of the senior officers had been invited to. There was rumors--I don't know how true it is, but there was rumors--that Admiral Kidd wasn't invited to some of them, I don't know how true that is, but there was that kind of rumors. Of course, all the sailors liked Admiral Kidd.

Marcello: Now, were these rumors floating around after the attack, or were these some of the things that you heard before the actual attack?

Waller: These are some of the things before the attack.

Marcello: Now, supposedly, were the Japanese giving these parties for the officers or what?

Waller: I don't know; I don't know. It seemed like to me, though, that one of the American admirals had given a party. This would be hearsay; I don't know. I might be confusing things after with things before. I'm not real sure. It's been so long. I didn't talk about any of this for a long, long time--even to my wife.

Marcello: I understand that Battleship Row was a rather pretty sight at night because they had all the lights on and so on and so forth.

Waller: It was a beautiful sight at night . . . daytime, too. I liked it. Everybody liked it, I guess. I'm sure Hawaii liked it, because it meant a lot of money for the islands.

Marcello: What time did you turn in that Saturday evening? Do you remember?

- Waller: It seemed like to me it was around midnight or a little after, It seemed like to me I had something to eat up on the boat deck. They had a little game going up there, and I believe I had something to eat up there before I went on the other side--the port side--and laid down near a locker there--pyrotechnic locker--and went to sleep,
- Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and I'll let you pick up the story at this point. Again, go into as much detail as you can remember. Did you awaken at a relatively early hour?
- Waller: No, I didn't. If I had, I may not be here. I slept later than I normally do and, it seemed like to me sweepers might have caused me to wake up--you know, making noise on the boat deck while they were sweeping down--because they always pipe the sweepers at six o'clock in the morning. I believe I got up and went across the way on the boat deck and had a cup of coffee.
- Marcello: What time was this, approximately?
- Waller: It was after six o'clock on Sunday morning.
- Marcello: Now, on Sundays one could sleep in if one did not have the duty, isn't that correct?
- Waller: Yes, they sure could . . . sure could. But sweepers still swept down. I'm really not sure about the time. It seemed like to me that I did have a cup of coffee and went back over by the pyrotechnic locker and was laying down again. I had laid down;

in fact, I might have gone to sleep, I don't know.

Of course, I heard a lot of commotion; I could hear planes. I awaked and I could see a plane--it looked like it was only fifty feet off the water--coming from Merry's Point landing and directly over our ship. When it, of course, got up pretty close, I could see this big meatball underneath the wings, and I wondered what in the world it was. Then I could see machine guns, you know, see a machine gun shooting.

Marcello: Did you immediately recognize it as a Japanese plane? In other words, did the rising sun insignia mean anything to you at that point?

Waller: Yes, it did. It sure did. But I couldn't . . . I guess it just wouldn't register that they had the guts to do something like that, but I jumped up like everyone else. There was quite a bit of confusion, I guess. Within a very short time . . . of course, we didn't have . . . our ammunition lockers was locked. Everything was locked up. I don't remember how we got those locks off. I know we got keys later on and opened all the magazines and kept them open from then on.

Marcello: Okay, so this Japanese plane is coming over . . .

Waller: They just kept coming after that.

Marcello: How shortly thereafter does general quarters sound?

Waller: I'm not sure if it ever sounded. It may have, but I'm not sure if it ever did or not. It seemed like to me it did on the

California, I believe. She was ahead of us, and the Neosho--the tanker--was directly ahead of us. We were anxious and ready to get out of there, because it was loaded with high octane gas.

Marcello: Now, by this time, has the Oklahoma taken the three torpedoes?

Waller: I thought she took more than that, but maybe it didn't. I thought it took more than that. The first one came over, and I believe we got the first . . . I believe it dropped the torpedo, and I believe we got it in our bow because it missed the Oklahoma--the first one. Then the next one came over, and I believe that's the first one the Oklahoma got--the second one.

All hell had been broken loose by that time, and, you know, something that really sticks in my mind was the Oklahoma beginning to roll. She had another explosion, and a hatch came off and went up in the air, and I can still see that hatch in the air, it seemed like, and somebody coming out of the hold coming up and the hatch coming back down. I don't know whether it got them or not, but I would have thought it would.

Marcello: That hatch would have been a lethal weapon,

Waller: Oh, yes, because it was all steel, so it would be pretty heavy.

Marcello: Could you feel the effects of those torpedoes when they punched the Oklahoma?

Waller: Every one of them.

Marcello: What does it feel like? Were you on that side of the ship that was

nearer to the Oklahoma?

Waller: Yes, I was on the side next to the Oklahoma, I think the explosion was more than the feel itself. You know, the reverberation of the explosions was more than the actual feel of it, and I'm not sure whether I could actually feel it or not. I don't remember that. I did remember the explosion,

Marcello: Did you feel more distinctly the torpedo that missed the Oklahoma and which you said hit the Maryland?

Waller: I'm sure I felt that because that was right in the beginning when we got that. That shook the ship pretty bad, and she started going . . . she went down by the bow,

Marcello: The Maryland went down by the bow?

Waller: Yes, we went down to the bow, because we had a pretty sizable hole in the side there.

Marcello: Okay, so the Japanese planes are coming over, and all hell has broken loose. Where is your battle station?

Waller: My battle station is right there on the boat deck. Of course, I used to be on the catapult, and then I would get those flares out for the planes coming in. But there wasn't anything for me to do right there, so I was helping on the 5-inch gun and finally went up on the 1.1 to help up there, too.

Marcello: Since you knew you were of no use on the boat deck, did you independently decide to go help on the five-inch gun, or were you ordered to go there?

Waller: Oh, no, I did that on my own.

Marcello: Was anybody giving orders?

Waller: No, just the gun captains were about all. In fact, I don't remember anybody giving any orders. I don't even remember hearing . . . I don't believe general quarters ever sounded.

Marcello: Did you almost . . .

Waller: This is automatic, see. We have done this before. I'd helped on all the guns before.

Marcello: Did you more or less automatically go directly to the 5-inch gun?

Waller: There was one right there by my section, see, so I automatically went to that one after I realized what was taking place and I saw where I could do some good. I helped them there.

Marcello: What did you do on that 5-inch gun?

Waller: I helped with the ammunition there. I'd get the ammunition to the . . . I don't remember who was the first loader. I handed him the ammunition there in the beginning, and then when he got his whole crew there, well, I moved to the 1,1 battery.

Marcello: This 5-inch gun could be used for antiaircraft purposes? It could be elevated to that point?

Waller: Oh, yes, that's what it was. It was an antiaircraft gun--those 5-inch .25's. That is all manual stuff. You couldn't hit a moving plane to save your life (chuckle).

Marcello: Especially not in a confined harbor like that. Those planes

were flying so low to begin with,

Waller: Whew! You could see the pilot!

Marcello: What did the pilots look like?

Waller: Well, you've seen the old pictures of our pilots with their helmets on and their glasses. That's just the way they looked, That's the way the first one looked-- the way when we first saw him, I remember him looking out like that (gesture), and there was this helmet--kind of a brownish-black helmet--pulled over with his goggles on.

Marcello: In other words, he was peering out over the cockpit.

Waller: Over the cockpit and kind of looking down at us, because he was real low.

Marcello: Did the Japanese planes seem to be performing in a more or less leisurely manner, so to speak?

Waller: They seemed to; they sure did. Just one right after another just kept on coming like that. We were shooting very quick.

Marcello: Now, were you on this 5-inch gun that was also on the side closest to the Oklahoma?

Waller: Yes, that's correct.

Marcello: Then you could probably see the Oklahoma going over.

Waller: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe this incident. It must have been rather sickening.

Waller: You don't believe it. We had been told all our lives that you can't sink a battleship, and then to see one go upside down

. . . it just . . . it is heartbreaking, I guess, because you knew how many people were on there. You had a lot of shipmates there--not real shipmates but people you went ashore with--and you know they are inside, and all this goes through your mind when it was going over, because there was no way they can get out. Our ship was fantastic, though, because the Oklahoma--before it was all the way over--we had people on the side trying to cut holes in it to get the people out.

Marcello: Now, in the meantime, even before the Oklahoma turned over, were people coming across to the Maryland?

Waller: Yes, before she got all the way over.

Marcello: In other words, there were lines between the Oklahoma and the Maryland.

Waller: There were lines, but they broke real quick. Of course, you've got a tremendous amount of weight there, and it didn't take them too long to break. There wasn't too many people, as well as I remember, that crossed over either before she . . . of course, they've got battle stations to man, too.

Marcello: How long did it take the Oklahoma to turn over? In other words, were you watching it actually turn over?

Waller: Yes, but you look at it, and it is going over slow; and then all of a sudden, you look back and it is over. The span of time, I wouldn't have any idea how long that was. In fact, it seemed like to me it got dark rather early that day, and I know it was

just because time was flying (chuckle),

Marcello: I assume that in a situation like that, you don't have a chance to see the so-called "big picture."

Waller: No.

Marcello: You have a job to do, and you are hoping that the guy next to you is doing his job, too.

Waller: You know he will. You know he will then. In those days you didn't worry about the person standing alongside you. You knew that he knew what he was supposed to do and that he would do it, and that's why you had so much confidence. That's what we don't have today.

Marcello: Did you do very much firing at that 5-inch gun?

Waller: I don't remember how many rounds we fired. We did fire some. We did fire a whole lot up on the 1.1, though.

Marcello: Was there already ammunition at the 5-inch gun by the time you got there?

Waller: No, the ammunition wasn't there when I was there. We had to get it out of the ready boxes. There was two ready boxes there by that particular gun, I believe.

Marcello: Even when the Maryland was in the harbor, there was always ammunition at the ready boxes.

Waller: Always in the ready boxes, yes. We used to have to . . . you know, you can't let the temperature get too hot on the ammunition, because it changes the ballistics of it. We used to put

mattresses--anything we could--on top of the ready boxes and soak them, you know, put water on them, to help keep the temperature down. We always had ammunition up there.

Marcello: How long were you at that 5-inch gun before you shifted to one of the 1.1's?

Waller: Not very long because their crew was there pretty fast.

Marcello: What did you do when you go to the 1.1 gun?

Waller: I helped on the ammunition with their crew--get the ammunition going. It seemed like to me their pointer was slow on getting there. I don't remember what all I did up there. I know one time I was bleeding across the eye, and I don't know how that happened. And I hurt my back, but I never did go to sickbay. It was just one of those things, you know. You get over it after awhile when you're young.

Marcello: How did you hurt your back?

Waller: I believe, when I came out of the gun tub--the 1.1 gun tub-- I fell down to the boat deck.

Marcello: Now, when you say you fell down to the boat deck, was this because of a bomb hit that the Maryland took or what?

Waller: It must have been when we got that hit in the forward bow, you know, from the bow.

Marcello: Okay, describe this particular event. I do know that during this period the Maryland also caught a couple bombs. One, I think, was a fifteen-inch armor-piercing shell that had been

fitted with fins and had been dropped from, I guess, one of the dive bombers. This was the one that landed just off the port bow. Is this the one that you are referring to?

Waller: I don't know; I don't know. We got a small bomb in the forward head, and I don't even remember how much damage it did. I know we didn't have many frames left in the forward part of the ship, and we had trouble getting back to the States because of that.

Marcello: Well, describe either one of these two bomb hits, as best as you can remember them.

Waller: Well, (chuckle) I guess that must be when I went out of the gun tub and fell down to the boat deck, but I don't remember which way it was. I just don't remember, but I know it hurt my back.

Marcello: About how far of a fall was this?

Waller: Twelve feet, I guess. Twelve, fifteen feet--you know, from the gun tub up here down to the boat deck. Of course, that is a teakwood deck, and that isn't quite as hard as hardwood.

Marcello: Now, could you actually see that plane coming in that dropped the bomb?

Waller: I don't know; I don't know. Now, the ones that came over--the big bombers that came over--I remember seeing those, but I don't know whether we got hit from those or not. That's when the West Virginia and the Tennessee and the Arizona got hit--I know. I

don't know whether we got one of those or not, but evidently somebody said we got one of those big ones. We must have been hit close by. The span of time, again, I just don't remember. It seemed like it was dusk-dark. We were firing away, and the next thing I know, it is dusk-dark.

Marcello: In the meantime, had your 1,1 bagged any planes?

Waller: Well, we think we did. We're not sure. Everybody was shooting, you know.

Marcello: So the concussion or the blast from this bomb does hurl you or throw you out of this gun tub?

Waller: I don't know . . .yes. I don't remember whether I was leaning against the railing up there or what, but the next thing I know, I'm down on the boat deck again.

Marcello: So what happens at that point?

Waller: Well, most of it is over with then. Then you start wandering around to see what everybody else is doing--to see what is going on--because there is not a whole lot going on then,

Marcello: So your injuries were such that you still could actually walk around.

Waller: Oh, yes. I got up and you know how you will hurt your back and you don't think much about it. Of course, I do now, but I didn't then.

Marcello: So what did you do when you got to your feet again?

Waller: Well, I went back over to the pyrotechnic locker and sat around

there a little bit. You know, people are milling around--a lot of people on deck--and it seemed like to me there was some Oklahoma people up there, too. Of course, I had some food in (chuckle) the pyrotechnic locker, and I ate a little bit more.

Marcello: Could you actually detect a lull between the two attacks?

Waller: Oh, yes, you sure could.

Marcello: What happened during the lull?

Waller: I guess that's when we were . . . of course, you're scared to death. Everybody that I know of was just scared to death. It might be your time, you know; you didn't know.

Marcello: Now, my records indicate that the Maryland's band actually played during the lull between the two attacks as a type of morale booster. Do you remember this?

Waller: No, I don't. I sure don't.

Marcello: What was the situation around the Maryland? In other words, were there a lot of fires or anything of that nature?

Waller: Oh, yes, that's right. It seemed like the ocean was burning on the other side of the Oklahoma, and, of course, it was coming toward us from the bow and the stern because we were a little larger than the Oklahoma. I believe this was during the attack that the boats were called away. I'm glad you mentioned that. The boats were called away. It seemed like to me they were put with the bows in toward the side of the ship and turning the

screws over to push the fire away from it.

Marcello: Well, I guess all the ships around the Maryland would have been afire. The West Virginia was close by, and the Arizona wasn't that far away, was it?

Waller: No, it was just two ships down--right behind the West Virginia.

Marcello: Do you remember the Arizona blowing up?

Waller: I sure do.

Marcello: Describe that incident.

Waller: Well, that was from the big bombers--when the big bombers came over--and, of course, that's when the fifteen-inch shell or whatever it was hit. I thought they were larger shells than that--some that they couldn't use that they put fins on. Anyway, it seemed like that all of a sudden that the bay kind of made a little hop like. The water started moving into the place, and then there was a real big one after that--maybe a small one and then a big one. So evidently there must have been two explosions instead of one. At least, that is my recollection of it. Of course, I didn't know the Arizona had blown up at that time, but then you could see all this black smoke. We knew that the West Virginia and the Tennessee--both--were burning. The Arizona was right behind them. The Nevada had gotten underway and had moved past us going on out into the harbor.

Marcello: Were you able to view the Nevada going out? Describe this incident.

- Waller: That was during the actual attack, but she just steamed right on through. I don't believe she got any hits until after she had passed beyond us--before she got any hits--and it seemed like to me she was shooting as she was going by.
- Marcello: And I guess there were all sorts of Japanese planes swarming on the Nevada when it was going out.
- Waller: It didn't seem to change too much of their strategy, or at least it didn't seem that way to me. It seemed like they just kept coming in over us, you know. Of course, that's one person's opinion (chuckle). I guess a minute seemed like an hour, maybe. How long the attack lasted, I have no idea.
- Marcello: Now, you mentioned that even while the Oklahoma was turning over that rescue efforts were being made by people from the Maryland. Do you remember those rescue efforts? And, if so, describe them.
- Waller: I remember one man in particular--Frankie, I don't know whether that was his last name or his first name, Frankie was what everybody called him. He was a little bitty short fellow--first class. He was going over and taking hoses and starting to try to burn some holes in the bottom. I believe the planes were still attacking. It seemed like to me when the planes would come, he'd have to get down below--back down on the side of the ship a little ways--so they couldn't hit him. Then he'd go back up and start burning again.

Marcello: Now, when you say he was taking over the hoses, these would have been the hoses for the cutting torches,

Waller: Yes. I'm sure there was others, but I remember Frankie in particular. Now, why, I don't know.

Marcello: Do you remember the subsequent efforts that took place to rescue people aboard the Oklahoma?

Waller: That went on as long as we were there. It just kept on. They were doing everything trying to get the people out, because you could hear them hitting the ship, you know.

Marcello: Could you, yourself, actually hear them?

Waller: Yes, I could. Then we got word back one time . . . we could hear somebody tapping--just like they were hitting every once in awhile like that--and we got word back on that one that they were cutting into this area, and they ran into cork; and cork smokes a lot when it starts burning. It had suffocated them before . . . you know, the cutting torch had suffocated the people before they could get them out.

Marcello: Now, what did you do in the aftermath of the attack? You mentioned you went back up to the pyrotechnic locker, and you got something to eat.

Waller: Yes, I circulated around.

Marcello: Do you recall what you ate?

Waller: Yes, I remember some crackers--eating some crackers and spam or some kind of canned meat. I don't remember exactly what the

canned meat was, but there was some sailors that came over and had it with me, you know, some sailors that were stationed up on the boat deck (chuckle). But I don't even remember who they were. It seemed like to me that one of them was an Oklahoma sailor, though.

Marcello: But nobody was giving you orders at this point?

Waller: No. In those days, you didn't have people standing over your shoulder telling you what to do. Like I told you, you were trained to do certain things, and you do them automatically. The senior petty officers were there--you know, the first class, second class, first class were there--and, sure, they're holler-ing, "Hey, let's get this!" or "Let's do that!" But as far as giving orders--you know, some senior officers walking around giving orders--that never did occur before World War II.

Marcello: So what did you do that afternoon?

Waller: I stayed on my battle station or up in that general area. In fact, I stayed there, I guess, until we got back to San Francisco.

Marcello: I guess the harbor must have been one big mess.

Waller: Oh, it was. My God, it was a mess! The bodies were stacked up on Aiea Landing--you know, getting them out of the bay. I wish I had taken a picture, but I didn't. I had a camera, too, and I didn't use it.

Marcello: I assume that the water was covered with that thick bunker oil.

Waller: It sure was. There was oil everywhere. The oil was on the sides

of the ship. Even on the Oklahoma, if you got down too close or the waves splashed up too high, it would put that old heavy oil up on the sides. The people that were working on the sides of the Oklahoma were getting filthy, you know, with the oil. The ships were a mess--everything was. We got out in six days or seven days--something like that. We got out.

Marcello: What was the extent of damage aboard the Maryland?

Waller: The main thing was the bow--the big hole on the port side in the bow. Of course, we had some damage from the hit in the number one head. I guess that was the main damage we had, was right there. As well as I remember, we only lost two people, I believe. We lost one man in the ice machines, and it seemed like to me we lost an ensign in the foretops. I'm not real positive, but it seems to ring a bell.

Marcello: What happened that night? Do you recall anything out of the ordinary happening that night?

Waller: Yes. We fired again that night, because some planes came in. We didn't know that they were our planes, and we cut loose on them (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you go to one of the guns again?

Waller: Oh, yes, I sure did.

Marcello: Where did you go? Back to the 5-inch?

Waller: Back to the 5-inch.

Marcello: Did the 5-inch let go with a couple rounds?

Waller: I don't remember how many rounds we fired, but we fired until we got the word to cease fire (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume nobody ever gave you the word to fire. Somebody fired, and then everybody else simply followed?

Waller: That's right. I believe we might have been the first ship to fire--I believe.

Marcello: Evidently, the sky was just lit up with tracers and so on.

Waller: It sure was. It was a horrible sight but, I guess, now, looking back on it, it was probably the best thing that happened to the United States. It got us out of being passive, you know. It got the people off their "cans" and got them to thinking about it.

Marcello: Could you sleep very well that night?

Waller: I didn't sleep at all. Catnap maybe, but no sleep.

Marcello: Did you hear sporadic firing taking place all night?

Waller: I sure did. On the beach--rifle fire,

Marcello: What sort of rumors did you hear in the aftermath of the attack?

Waller: I heard that they were killing Japanese over on . . . (chuckle) anybody that looked like a Japanese didn't have a chance at the Navy yard. They would kill them.

Marcello: Were you fully expecting the Japanese to invade?

Waller: Not in the beginning, but I would say by that night, yes. Everybody was.

Marcello: Did you believe every rumor that you heard?

Waller: No.

Marcello: Not even at that time, you didn't?

Waller: No. I don't believe any of the older men did, I was considered one of the older people then, because I had been on the ship over four years.

Marcello: Were you issued any side arms or anything of that nature at this point?

Waller: Just the officers, and I believe a few of the petty officers had side arms, too, but that's all.

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

Waller: Well, it was just standard routine. As well as I remember, we stayed in Condition Three most of the time. We stayed on our gun stations, and instead of going down to sleep, I stayed up on my battle station--it was easier if you stayed up there. And, of course, we were happy when we got out so we could head for home again. We had to go to Bremerton Navy Yard to get a new bow put on.

Marcello: Well, I guess you couldn't get out of there until the Oklahoma had been pulled away, could you?

Waller: Well, as well as I remember, she was blasted . . . the bow was blasted away from us, because she was laying against us. She was blasted away, and there was enough room with the Neosho gone so that we could pull out right in front with tugs and under our own power, too.

Marcello: I guess you were kind of glad to get out of Pearl Harbor,

Waller: Oh, tickled to death! Tickled to death to get out of there!

Marcello: What was the morale like in the aftermath of the attack?

Waller: I think it was probably higher than it was before.

Marcello: Why was that?

Waller: I believe it was, "Let's go get them!"

Marcello: In other words, the attitude was perhaps one of anger or revenge?

Waller: I think it was both--anger and revenge. "Let's go do this job! We can do it! Now, let's go do it and get it over with!"

Marcello: Did you ever have a chance to be scared or experience fear during the attack?

Waller: Absolutely.

Marcello: Yet a lot of people say that while things are happening so quickly, you really don't have a chance to be scared or to experience fear. But that wasn't your case?

Waller: No. And I don't know of anyone that didn't have that same experience--the ones that I knew. We talked about it a little bit--after it was all over with--and we said, "Boy, that scared the living so-and-so out of me!" Of course, after you settle down and know what you're doing, you're still afraid, but you've got a job to do, too.

Marcello: Well, I've exhausted my list of questions, Mr. Waller. Is there anything else that you think we need to talk about to get as part of the record?

Waller: I can't think of a thing that would go along with that. I can't think of a thing . . . I can think of one thing, Roosevelt--President Roosevelt--was a fantastic figure, and I think he is the reason we finally did come through because of his speaking. I think we need the same thing today. We need a speaker.

Marcello: Did you have a chance to hear the speech that he gave to Congress following the Pearl Harbor attack?

Waller: I sure did.

Marcello: Was that piped throughout the ship?

Waller: Piped everywhere. It sure was.

Marcello: Was it rather inspiring, so far as you were concerned?

Waller: Very inspiring, very inspiring.

Marcello: Well, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having participated. You said a lot of very interesting and important things, and you did go into a great deal of detail, which is, of course, what we wanted. I'm sure that scholars will find your comments most valuable when they use them to write about Pearl Harbor.

Waller: Well, thank you very much. I've enjoyed it. I didn't realize it would be like this (chuckle). I've certainly enjoyed it, and it has been a pleasure.