

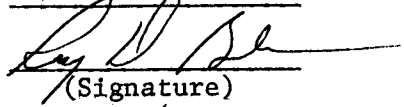
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Interview with
ROY D. BLAIR
June 6, 1980

Place of Interview; Arlington, Texas

Interviewer; Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Roy D. Blair

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Arlington, Texas

Date: June 6, 1980

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Roy Blair for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 6, 1980, in Arlington, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Blair in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS California during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Blair, 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. Blair: I'm fifty-nine years old. I was born May 5, 1921, in Lipan, Texas, in Hood County.

Dr. Marcello: Did you go to school there?

Mr. Blair: I went through high school there. I graduated and then went into the Navy.

Dr. Marcello: When did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Blair: 1939.

Dr. Marcello: And did you go directly into the Navy?

Blair: I graduated in May and went in the Navy on December 14th.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the Navy?

Blair: Travel, romance, adventure, education--the whole trip.

Marcello: Is this what made you select the Navy over either the Army or the Marine Corps or one of those branches?

Blair: Well, I'm still partial to Navy, I guess. I didn't want to go in any of those other than the Air Force, which I might've tried.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Blair: San Diego.

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

Blair: As far as I know, it was a Navy boot camp--just like they all are.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast with current events and world affairs and things of that nature at the time that you entered the service?

Blair: Not really that close. I always had a feeling that we were fixing to get into war--like everybody else did.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say, however, that at that time, that is, at that time that you went into the Navy, that your eyes were turned more toward Europe than they were toward the Far East?

Blair: Really, I couldn't say. I figured it would be a war all over.

Marcello: Where did you go after you got out of boot camp?

Blair: I went directly to the USS California.

Marcello: Now was this voluntary, or were you simply assigned to the California? I guess what I'm saying, in effect, is, did you have your choice of a battleship, a cruiser, submarine, or anything of that nature?

Blair: I believe at the time that I did have a choice. A kid who went in the Navy with me had a brother that had served on the California.

Marcello: I guess at that time the battleships were still considered the glamour ships of the fleet, were they not?

Blair: Probably those or the carriers.

Marcello: Describe what sort of a reception you received when you went aboard the California. After all, you were still basically a "boot" so far as the "old salts" aboard the ship were concerned. Can you describe that early initiation, shall we say?

Blair: Well, I don't think I got a very good reception initially. They brought me on and fed me whatever they was feeding and put me to work.

Marcello: As with most "boots," I assume you were put directly into the deck force.

Blair: Yes, I went into the 2nd Division. I stayed there for about three or four months and went into the Electrical Division.

Marcello: You mentioned that you went into the Electrical Division. How did this process take place?

Blair: Well, you apply for it and talk to the people that's in it and

see if someone would put in a good word for you, the best I can remember.

Marcello: By going into the Electrical Division would you, in effect, be striking for electrician's mate?

Blair: Right.

Marcello: And I assume in your particular case, then, it would've been on-the-job training plus whatever correspondence courses that you had to take.

Blair: Well, I didn't take any correspondence courses then. It was just strictly learning out of the books and practical experience.

Marcello: Describe what this on-the-job training was like in order to be an electrician's mate. Do you feel, in other words, that it was thorough training and so on?

Blair: Well, I think I got a very good background in it--theory and practice. They had some pretty sharp petty officers. Of course, you studied your books and took exams and tried for your ratings.

Marcello: How fast or slow was promotion as an electrician's mate? Now, of course, I know that there had to be openings, and you had to take the fleet-wide examinations and so on.

Blair: I made every promotion as I became eligible, so I can't knock that.

Marcello: So evidently it must have been a fast-moving rate, then.

Blair: I'd say it was good, yes, if you could get the promotions

whenever you were eligible.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were being trained on-the-job by your petty officers and senior petty officers. Is it not true that most of those people had quite a few years in the Navy?

Blair: Really, with the people that I was working under, I don't think any of them ever had over ten or twelve years--I mean, directly over me. Of course, the chiefs . . . some of them had sixteen or twenty years in. Really, the people I was training under hadn't been in for very many more years than I had. I think they had a good training system then.

Marcello: As an electrician's mate, what or where was your battle station?

Blair: My battle station had just been changed to number two turret. I was a turret electrician on number two.

Marcello: And what kind of work would you do in turret two as an electrician?

Blair: I was supposed to keep everything running--all motors, driving hoists, lights, and everything that needed to be operated by electricity in the turret.

Marcello: Describe what your quarters were like aboard the California.

Blair: You mean where I . . .

Marcello: Where you slept and where you spent your time when you were aboard ship.

Blair: Well, it was just like all the rest of those ships. There'd

probably be 150, 200 people in a compartment. That's one thing I didn't ever appreciate very much. The air got pretty stale in there. I understand they got it a lot better now.

Marcello: When you went aboard the California, were they still sleeping in the hammocks?

Blair: I had to sleep in one for a few days until I got a bunk. That's something I never could sleep in, either.

Marcello: I've heard stories both ways with regard to hammocks. Some people said they liked to sleep in those hammocks, and other people said that they hated those things.

Blair: I would get up in the morning feeling worse than I did when I went to sleep when I used the hammock.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago, with regard to your quarters, that they were evidently quite cramped and crowded with 150 to 200 men in each section. Were your quarters basically the same when you were a part of the deck force as when you went into the Electrician Division?

Blair: No, I think they were separated--partially, anyway. Well, really not that much. The best I can remember, you'll have a certain number of people for a shower and washroom. I can't believe that the deck hands . . . they had different compartments that you slept in, whatever deck you was on.

Marcello: Well, I would assume that the Electrician Division would've been smaller than any of the Deck Divisions, wouldn't it have

been?

Blair: I don't know. Probably not because it was a big ship with a lot of equipment on that thing. Of course, you got two deck divisions--the 1st and 2nd or port and starboard.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the California?

Blair: I'd say it was fair, nothing extra-good. Of course, I wasn't a gourmet then, anyway, so it don't make a difference. Not that I am a gourmet now, either.

Marcello: I know a lot of people have described the Navy chow as being very good, especially compared to what they'd had in civilian life, since many of them had been products of the Depression, so to speak.

Blair: Well, I'm part of the Depression, but we did eat pretty good. I guess there's things I didn't get used to too good--beans for Sunday morning breakfast and things like that. I was never crazy about the way they cooked fish and things . . . mutton and stuff like that.

Marcello: Did you take a try at mess cooking?

Blair: I guess everybody did.

Marcello: Describe how the mess cooking procedure worked.

Blair: Well, I don't guess there's too much to describe. You either peeled potatoes or scrubbed the pots and pans or whatever you're cooking in.

Marcello: Did you have to set up the tables and things of that nature?

Blair: I have done that, yes.

Marcello: I guess at the time that you went aboard the California, people were still being served family-style, were they not, rather than cafeteria-style?

Blair: Well, they always gave me a tray just like I had in boot camp and everyplace I was ever in in the Navy except maybe . . . I went to gyro compass school in Norfolk, Virginia, one time, and they had a cook and baker school there, which set up pretty good with plates and the whole bit. Very seldom did you get silver knives and forks. Most the time there was trays, and you'd go by the cafeteria and pick out what you wanted, or they'll slap it on the tray, and you go sit down and eat.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how would you describe the morale aboard the California in that period before Pearl Harbor, that is, in the peacetime Navy?

Blair: I would say it was very good. I could remember a lot of friendships. I don't remember much animosity. It's all good.

Marcello: How do you explain the high state of morale?

Blair: Training, I guess. It certainly wasn't the liberty or the fringe benefits. We knew we had a job to do, and we were fixing to get in war, so you might as well be prepared.

Marcello: Do you remember what your pay was when you went aboard the California?

Blair: I went in the Navy at \$21 a month and went to \$36 after I'd

been in for two months, I guess. I guess I made about \$36 a month.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that training was perhaps responsible for the high morale. Could you elaborate on that? What do you mean when you say that training was responsible for the morale?

Blair: They were pretty strict--firm. And as far as I was concerned, they were fair. I think good training and strict training is something that you got to have. I'm not for today's training methods--you can see that.

Marcello: Do you recall the circumstances under which the California ultimately ended up in the Hawaiian Islands on a permanent basis? When you went aboard the California, I guess its home base was still San Diego, is this correct?

Blair: I have no idea. It probably was, but when I went aboard we went straight to the islands. We operated out of there. We went over there about February or March or something, and we stayed in the islands, in and out of the islands, from there to Bremerton, Washington, and to Long Beach, California. Long Beach may have been its home base.

Marcello: And this was in 1940?

Blair: 1940, yes.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands?

Blair: Well, actually we were just operating out of there. I don't

know if you could consider that we were stationed there. Of course, we were in and out of Pearl Harbor all the time. Of course, I would've liked to have been somewhere else. I really wanted to go to some other country rather than be in the same place all the time.

Marcello: Ultimately, it is true, however, is it not, that the California did have a permanent station, I guess you would say, there in the Hawaiian Islands around Pearl Harbor? Does this occur sometime in 1941?

Blair: You know, I really don't know. We were there all the time and operated with the rest of the ships. Of course, the fleet was out there on maneuvers and having their exercises . . . firing. I remember a searchlight exercise they had one time. It was a very pretty nighttime deal.

Marcello: Describe it.

Blair: Well, all the ships in the fleet had their searchlights, and I guess they were using different codes. They would turn them different directions. It was a beautiful sight, I remember.

Marcello: According to the research that I've done, I think it was in the summer of 1941 that the fleet was engaged in some sort of annual maneuvers, and rather than return to the West Coast, as had usually been the custom, the Pacific Fleet was based in the Hawaiian Islands, more specifically, at Pearl Harbor. Evidently, this was done to serve as a warning to the

Japanese when things began to heat up in the Pacific.

Blair: I don't remember. I know we were on maneuvers out in there. I'm sure that had something to do with it, but it certainly didn't have much effect on the Japanese.

Marcello: Describe what your training routine was like, then, after you got to the Hawaiian Islands and to Pearl Harbor. In other words, describe a typical training exercise in that pre-Pearl Harbor period in which the California would engage.

Blair: Well, we'd go out for a couple of weeks for whatever maneuvers they were on. Some of them were firing at targets or whatever we were doing. Of course, I was below decks most the time and didn't pay a heck of a lot of attention. I had my own problems. I'm sure that you could get a lot more information on that from a quartermaster than you could from an electrician.

Marcello: You mentioned that the California would go out for a couple of weeks. Most of these training exercises would be . . .

Blair: Short term. I wouldn't say two weeks. We were in and out, I know, all the time. I know we pulled into Lahaina Roads there on one trip and spent a couple of days. Other than that, the rest of the time, I guess, we were around the islands.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to worsen, could you detect any changes in your training routine?

Blair: If anything, maybe things got just a little more intense.

Marcello: Did there seem to be more general quarters drills, or were

you sailing more under blackout conditions and things of that nature?

Blair: Well, they had tried to take . . . I guess they had taken away all radios and all sorts of communication that you could work from. Yes, we were under blackout conditions. It was strictly training supposedly before combat. That is the way I remember it.

Marcello: When you and your buddies sat around in your bull sessions and discussed things, was there ever any talk about the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor? Again, this would've been scuttlebutt and things of that nature.

Blair: We all expected Russia . . . then we expected to fight Russia, and I've thought it ever since.

Marcello: At Pearl Harbor?

Blair: Even before Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: What I'm saying is, did you ever discuss the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

Blair: Before it happened, yes.

Marcello: What made you think that perhaps the Japanese would or could even hit Pearl Harbor? After all, it is a long way from Japan.

Blair: Well, as far as I'm concerned, they could have hit anything they wanted to. We didn't have a heck of a lot back then to keep them from it. They'd done a pretty good job where they were fighting over in their area. We knew they had a lot

of warships.

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

Blair: Just like I do now--a small, cunning person.

Marcello: I guess you would have come in contact with quite a few of them in the Hawaiian Islands. You couldn't help it when you went ashore because there was a large Japanese population on the islands.

Blair: True.

Marcello: Getting back to the training routine again, would it follow a usual pattern? In other words, if anybody were observing the actions of the fleet, would it normally go out on the same day and return on the same day or things of that nature?

Blair: No, I don't think so. I think maybe they'd take off whenever they wanted. It wasn't a come-in-on-Friday-and-leave-on-Monday thing.

Marcello: It was not that sort of a routine.

Blair: No, no.

Marcello: Generally speaking, which ships would the California be working with on its maneuvers? I'm referring to other battleships.

Blair: I don't really remember. Part of the ones that was in there . . . of course, some of them would go back to the States for various reasons, and some of them would come back and take its place. We went up to Bremerton a couple of times for repair work.

Marcello: So you could be working in your training exercises with any of the battleships that might have been at Pearl Harbor at the time.

Blair: West Virginia or Oklahoma or . . .

Marcello: . . . Tennessee or any of those ships.

Blair: Yes.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the liberty routine of the California when it was at Pearl Harbor. How did the liberty routine work for you? Do you recall?

Blair: The best I recall, I'd get off about every second or third day that we were in there.

Marcello: Is it not true that when you had liberty, you had to be back aboard ship at midnight unless you had someplace to stay ashore?

Blair: Right. Eleven o'clock, midnight, or something. I don't remember what the time was, but I remember we had to be back at a certain time.

Marcello: I guess there really wasn't anyplace to stay ashore, was there? There weren't too many hotels and so on at that time.

Blair: YMCA or something is probably all. I never did stay ashore.

Marcello: I hear people talking about the Royal Hawaiian and the Ala Moana Hotel, but I guess, given the pay you were getting, you couldn't afford to stay there even if you'd wanted to at that time.

Blair: I'm sure at that time it would've taken a month's pay to

spend the night.

Marcello: What did you usually do when you went on liberty--you personally?

Blair: Hit the bars and chase the "sweeties," just like all the rest of them did. What else was there to do? You go around the island once, and you see the shows, and that's about it.

Marcello: Did you spend a lot of time down on Hotel Street?

Blair: I knew where it was at, yes . . . River Street (chuckle).

Marcello: In going through my research, I've run across several of the establishments in that area that were evidently popular.

It seems to me that one of the favorite "watering holes" was the Black Cat Cafe. Do you remember it?

Blair: Black Cat, yes, I remember it.

Marcello: What was so popular about the Black Cat Cafe?

Blair: It was just big and handy. When you got off the bus, it was close--one of the first places you could run into, I guess.

Marcello: Generally speaking, when a person went on liberty in Honolulu on a weekend, would there be a lot of drinking, or would this obviously depend upon the person involved?

Blair: It depends on the person. Once you go out on the island and look the town over . . . of course, it's completely different now. It don't take long to see the sights there.

Marcello: I guess what I'm trying to say is this, and I'm trying to get this for the historical record . . .

Blair: There wasn't a heck of a lot of entertainment facilities there for the servicemen.

- Marcello: But on the other hand, this is not to say that everybody would be coming back aboard the California from a Saturday night liberty knee-walking drunk.
- Blair: No, no, certainly not.
- Marcello: This is the popular impression that a lot of people would like to believe, however. I think it's probably safe to say that the Navy at that time was a mirror civilian life in many ways in terms of what people would do on a weekend or when they had free time.
- Blair: Oh, well, they'd have dances, and, of course, they'd have shows. Nanakuli Beach is a place that we used to go a lot for swimming, surfing--the whole bit--but you'd get enough of that, too.
- Marcello: What role did sports play in the life of the pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?
- Blair: Well, we had our rowing teams, softball teams, and, of course, swimming. Some of them played golf, and some of them would take flying lessons and whatever they could get into.
- Marcello: I gather that every ship was proud of its band, too, at that time.
- Blair: Sure. They had good bands. We had a good boxing team. Anything we had we was proud of, I guess.
- Marcello: And I think this goes hand-in-hand with the morale factor that we were talking about awhile ago. Your ship was pretty important to you at that time.

Blair: As far as I know, every person would take up for his ship.

Marcello: In other words, a lot of fights would start when somebody else bad-mouthed somebody else's ship.

Blair: They didn't like it, let's put it that way.

Marcello: I think this brings us up to those days immediately prior to the Japanese attack, so let's take a look at that weekend of December 7th with a great deal of detail. First of all, do you recall when the California came in for that weekend? Had it been in for a while, or did it come in on that Friday or something of that nature? Do you recall?

Blair: It came in on a Thursday or Friday, I think. I don't think we'd been in there but a day or two.

Marcello: And where did it tie up?

Blair: We were the first pier at Ford Island.

Marcello: And as I recall, you were tied up by yourself, or was somebody beside you?

Blair: We were by ourself. We were at the forward pier.

Marcello: Which ships were behind you? Do you recall?

Blair: Oh, West Virginia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Nevada, Arizona.

Marcello: But the Tennessee and the West Virginia were right behind you.

Blair: Right behind me, I believe.

Marcello: So you came in on either a Thursday or a Friday, like you mentioned. What did you do, personally, from that point on? Again, I'm referring to that period up to the time of the actual attack. Do you recall what you did?

- Blair: I didn't get a liberty until that Saturday night. It seems to me like this was on a Friday when we came in. I know on Saturday we had admiral's inspection, supposedly. All the peak tanks, the voids . . . the whole ship had been opened completely up for inspection. We waited all day, and nobody showed up. For some unknown reason--I still don't know why--whether that was the only ship in the fleet that had that or not, they didn't dog our . . . they didn't have watertight integrity that night, which is a very important thing. I believe that after four or five o'clock in the afternoon they were supposed to have watertight integrity.
- Marcello: Where would watertight integrity occur? Obviously, when you're in port like that, it wouldn't occur all over the ship, would it, because there would be movement from compartment to compartment?
- Blair: Well, you talk about peak tanks and voids. There are void spaces down in the outer part of your hull.
- Marcello: Normally, those are dogged.
- Blair: Right. Dogged, bolted down.
- Marcello: But even those were not dogged and bolted down that day?
- Blair: No, I don't think so. I think that's the reason that our ship went down so fast and got so many people.
- Marcello: So what time did you finally have liberty?
- Blair: Probably six or seven o'clock or something. I don't remember.
- Marcello: Do you recall what you did in Honolulu that evening?

- Blair: I went over and . . . I went to a party someplace. I know we drank some, and I know I came back before liberty time was up. I know I didn't want to get up the next morning early, so I went down and slept behind the after distribution board. That had been my battle station, and I had a little place I could sleep down there a little late so I wouldn't go to breakfast.
- Marcello: And this was where? Down at the after distribution board?
- Blair: Yes, electrical board.
- Marcello: This wasn't in the turret? You had a new battle station?
- Blair: Right. But I could always go down there and sleep behind the board.
- Marcello: Well, is it not true, however, that Sunday was a day of leisure if one didn't have the duty?
- Blair: It didn't make any difference. You're supposed to get up and go to breakfast.
- Marcello: When you were on liberty that evening, or even after you'd come back aboard ship, did you notice anything out of the routine?
- Blair: No, really, I didn't.
- Marcello: This brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and what I want you to do at this point is to describe, in as much detail as you can remember, the events as they unfolded that day. I'll let you pick up the story at this point.
- Blair: Of course, I was asleep at the after distribution board, and

I believe general quarters rang. I ran to my battle station in the number two turret. I went down in the magazine. You would normally stay away from everybody unless they needed you for something. I hadn't been there long until torpedoes hit between the number one and two turrets, and that shook me up. I hooked "em" out of there and got to the top of the turret.

There wasn't anything they could do, so I messed around there with them. They had swung the turret out. This was a period of an hour or two or whatever it took to do this before they abandoned ship. They had swung the turret out, and I didn't realize it. I was involved with first one thing and then another. But they gave the word to abandon ship, and I happened to be where the hatch was to go out the back of the turret.

There's a ladder, I think, about five feet long. You crawl down and normally you was about a foot from the . . . eighteen inches or something from the deck. I wasn't paying any attention. I was coming out of that thing pretty fast, and I got to the bottom, and there wasn't nothing but a hole. I slipped off that thing. There was about eight feet to the deck--at least. We stayed out on deck a little while we were trying to decide what to do.

They finally gave us the word to go ashore--abandon ship. I went off the forward part of the ship and swam to the island.

Of course, they assembled all of us, took our names. They had some clothes didn't have oil on it; they opened up a laundry or something, I guess. They gave me an old sweatshirt and an old pair of blue jeans.

There wasn't a heck of a lot I could do sitting in the number two turret. They'd already blasted a big hole out of it.

Marcello: Let's just go back and fill in some of the more detailed events that occurred. You mentioned that you're asleep at the after distribution board when general quarters sounded. Obviously, when general quarters sounds, you're supposed to instantly get to your battle station.

Blair: Right.

Marcello: Did you think there was anything unusual about a general quarters on Sunday morning? Had this in itself been unusual?

Blair: Sure, but you knew to go. There was nothing in my way to get there, so I made it right quick.

Marcello: About how far were you from your battle station?

Blair: Probably 600 feet.

Marcello: So you would've had to go through a couple of compartments and things of that nature to get to your battle station.

Blair: Yes, several compartments.

Marcello: Did you have to go down any more decks?

Blair: I had to come up before I went down--come up and then go down.

Marcello: So how long would it have taken you to get to your battle

station? You would have to estimate the time, of course.

Blair: Well, it didn't take very long--as fast as I could run down there.

Marcello: Less than two minutes?

Blair: Well, yes, I'd say less than a minute.

Marcello: According to the record, the California took two torpedoes around 8:05. So general quarters obviously would've sounded somewhere between eight o'clock probably and 8:05. Were you at your battle station?

Blair: Yes.

Marcello: When the torpedoes hit?

Blair: I was down in the magazine right beside where it hit.

Marcello: It caught its first torpedo at 8:05, like I mentioned, and then it took another one farther aft. Do you recall those torpedoes slamming into the California, and, if so, describe the sensation and the feeling and so on.

Blair: Well, it was just like a bomb went off right beside of you. It really shook things up. That's when I got out of there.

Marcello: Was it a loud noise?

Blair: Sure, it was a loud noise! Just like a blast going off in the next room.

Marcello: Was the impact and the concussion enough to knock you over where you were or anything?

Blair: Well, I don't remember it knocking me down, but it knocked me around.

Marcello: Now did the California still have lights and power at this stage?

Blair: Yes, we had lights down there. We had lights for a good while. Of course, some of it may have been emergency lighting, too.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, the California was wide open at that time. The covers had been taken off some of the manholes leading to the double bottom, so obviously water was pouring into that ship as soon as those two torpedoes slammed into it. According to the record, when the water swept into those fuel tanks, it contaminated the oil, and ultimately the power was knocked out almost right away.

Blair: Probably our emergency lighting is what I was worried about.

Marcello: You mentioned now that the torpedoes slammed into the California; you're thrown around; there's a terrific noise. Now you're trying to get out of your battle station. Why was it that you decided to leave your battle station?

Blair: This is not really my battle station. The whole turret is my battle station. I could be in any part of it.

Marcello: I see. Describe again what happens then when the torpedoes slam into the hull.

Blair: The torpedoes hit, and then we got straightened up. I went up to the top of the thing and decided that wasn't a good place to be. Anywhere in that turret was my station. All I was to do was to keep the electricity on.

Marcello: Do you remember any fumes from the ruptured fuel tanks and

so on?

Blair: I'm sure there was odor. We were really sealed off. It didn't get into the magazine. There was another bulkhead there, I guess, that stopped it. Had it got in there, it would have blowed us up. The best I can remember, it went between the number one and number two turrets. Of course, the magazine took up nearly all the space under the turrets.

Marcello: When you went up farther into the turret, what did you do at that point? Was there anything you could do in terms of carrying out your functions?

Blair: There wasn't anything, as far as I was supposed to do, in the firing of the turret. I was just to see that everything run electrically.

Marcello: Well, obviously, the number two turret couldn't do anything to get to those airplanes, anyway.

Blair: No, nothing in the world. All they did when they turned the turret out was try to counterbalance the ship.

Marcello: I assume that all the other men in that turret were simply standing-by. There wasn't too much else that they could do.

Blair: There wasn't anything to do in the turret because what good would a 16-inch shell do?

Marcello: There's no way it could be used, obviously, against airplanes. The ship took another bad hit at about 8:25 a.m., and this one caused fires and so on. Do you recall that hit? This would be about twenty minutes later.

Blair: I'm sure it didn't affect me as much, but, sure, you feel every hit that you take. When you get a torpedo or a bomb, you're going to find it out; or if you have a tank blowing up, you're going to find it out. I know I was on the Lexington later, and that thing started going off forward, and it darn near raised the forward end of that ship up when they blow up a tank. I was in the motor room in the rear, but you feel every one of them.

Marcello: This was when you were aboard the Lexington.

Blair: Yes.

Marcello: You mentioned that you're in this turret, and the abandon ship order is given. About what time does this occur? Do you recall?

Blair: Probably somewhere close to ten o'clock. I don't know.

Marcello: You mentioned that you backed out of the turret.

Blair: It's the only way you could get out of it, really. There's a little manhole there that you open up and go down a little ladder, a steel ladder, and hop off.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you thought that it was only about eighteen inches down to the deck.

Blair: Normally, when you back out of that turret, you are right on that deck, on the upper deck.

Marcello: What happened that morning?

Blair: I came out on the main deck--the deck below.

Marcello: Is this because the turret had been turned?

Blair: Right.

Marcello: I see. I was wondering if this was the reason or rather it was because of some damage that had been aboard the ship.

Blair: No, the deck itself was in fine shape.

Marcello: What was the water like by this time? Describe the condition of the water around the California after you get out on the open deck.

Blair: Well, of course, the oil was burning all the way up to the bow, really, it seems to me like. There was oil all the way up; it wasn't burning all the way up there, but it was oil up there.

Marcello: Did you have any hesitations at all about getting in the water?

Blair: Not a bit. Never have I ever feared getting in the water off a ship.

Marcello: And where did you say that you got off that ship?

Blair: At Ford Island. We were tied up to Ford Island Naval Air Station.

Marcello: About how far were you from Ford Island in terms of distance?

Blair: Oh, I'd say . . . I don't remember now, but I'd say it was fifty yards probably--not very far.

Marcello: Were you fully clothed when you went into the water?

Blair: Sure.

Marcello: Shoes and all?

Blair: Sure.

Marcello: Was the water burning and so on where you went in?

Blair: It wasn't burning, no, not when I went in.

Marcello: Was it oil there, however?

Blair: It was a little oily, I think, but it didn't bother me that much.

Marcello: When we talk about the water and the surface being oily, can you describe what it's like?

Blair: Of course, that was thick oil. Back where it was coming out, it was thick. Anybody would've been stupid to get in it there. As far as I'm concerned, I wanted to go forward and get out of it.

Marcello: Did you dive or jump into the water?

Blair: It seems like I went down the ropes tied to the quay.

Marcello: And then you just simply dropped into the water?

Blair: Dropped off the quay into the water, yes.

Marcello: So you would not have had that long a swim to get ashore.

Blair: No, I didn't have that long a swim.

Marcello: Was it a difficult swim or relatively easy?

Blair: Easy, as far as I'm concerned. I made it as fast as I could-- very good,

Marcello: Is it not true that sometime during all this period that people were called back aboard the California again to try and save it?

Blair: After I was on shore, they did call some back--certain divisions, I think. They didn't call me back. They gave me a .30-06 and a bandoleer of shells.

Marcello: Again, describe what happened when you get ashore. You get

ashore, and I'm sure other people were also coming in. You must have been one hell of a mess, to put it mildly, since you'd been in this water and so on and so forth.

Blair: No, I wasn't in bad shape--just nasty. I remember they gave us . . . they opened up a laundry, and they gave me a sweat-shirt and a pair of blue jeans. That's all I had for two months.. My shoes wasn't any good for some reason. I found a pair of wedgies. They were an odd-looking shoe--brown--and I was wearing those. I wore those for two months before I ever got issued clothes.

Marcello: When you got ashore, I assume that nothing was organized. It was more or less mass confusion of sorts?

Blair: Very unorganized, yes.

Marcello: What did you do as soon as you got ashore?

Blair: Well, we went over, and I remember they were checking to see who was wounded. I was in good shape, fortunately.

Marcello: Was this a mixed group that you were with, that is, were there crews from other ships as well as the California?

Blair: Yes, everybody was mixed together. Ford Island was not a very big place; it's a little bitty island. In the area that we were in, you'd have to be jammed up.

Marcello: During this period when all these things are taking place, did you have any time to observe any of the action that was taking place around you?

Blair: Well, I saw a bunch of nuts running around firing guns every

now and then.

Marcello: When you say you saw these people firing guns, were they firing rifles at Japanese planes and this sort of thing?

Blair: No. This is about over with when I got out. I think a flight or two came over after we got out, but not much.

Marcello: Obviously, you would not then have been in a position to have seen what had been taking place aboard the West Virginia, which was hit hard . . .

Blair: Certainly not.

Marcello: . . . or the Oklahoma turning over or the Arizona blowing up.

Blair: I knew it was happening because you could hear too much, but as far as being out and seeing it, no, I did not.

Marcello: How would you describe your own emotions at that time while all these things are taking place?

Blair: I was a little scared. You'd always like to be in another place.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that after you got ashore and things kind of got a little organized, you were given a rifle and some ammunition. What was your assignment?

Blair: They sent me and about four more people to the other end of the island, which would be the east end down by the officers' quarters, and we set up a little station down there, a little group of us, to wait for something to happen. All the rest of them had rifles and ammunition, too.

Marcello: What did you talk about while you were waiting for things to happen?

Blair: We wondered what was going to happen next.

Marcello: By this time, are there already rumors floating about?

Blair: Oh, yes. Everybody was talking about the Japanese invading some part of the island or something like this. That's one thing you can get started easy, is rumors.

Marcello: Especially in a situation like that.

Blair: Yes.

Marcello: What do you do that evening? Did you still continue to remain there at that station?

Blair: We stayed around there and also that night, too. Then the next day, of course, I went back up and got some food. They had an air raid alert. Pretty soon after that, they decided to put me on the Lexington.

Marcello: That night of December 7th, I guess about the safest thing you could do would be to stay right there where you were at that station. I gather there were a lot of trigger-happy people around that night.

Blair: Yes. I wouldn't want to run around that island very much. People were crazy.

Marcello: Could you hear sporadic shooting all night?

Blair: Sure.

Marcello: Were you a witness to the firing on the Enterprise airplanes that came in that evening? Do you recall that incident?

Blair: No, I don't.

Marcello: Did you get very much sleep that night?

Blair: Yes, I slept. I know I'd wake up every now and then when

somebody would fire off a round or two.

Marcello: Describe the damage and so on that you saw . . .

Blair: We had a little deal that some stayed awake and some slept. They were supposed to wake the rest of us up. We had a little off-on watch.

Marcello: Describe the damage that you were able to observe the next day, after things had calmed down just a little bit.

Blair: You mean on the California or on the others?

Marcello: Let's start with the California, first of all. Did you go back aboard the California the next day?

Blair: No, I never did.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to see the California as it had settled in the water?

Blair: Oh, yes, you could see it from the bank over there.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that most people had a fondness for their ship. How did it affect you when you saw your ship sitting on the bottom?

Blair: Well, of course, you're disappointed. I know the thing needed a lot of work done on it. It needed remodeling. All of them needed modernizing. That might have been the best thing that happened, but it sure was a hard way to do it.

Marcello: What other damage were you able to see as you surveyed the harbor?

Blair: Of course, you could see all the ships in that oil. There was oil everywhere, and stuff was floating all over the harbor.

The ships really had either turned over or settled down and were tilted to the side.

Marcello: The harbor is relatively shallow, is it not? I think at that time it was somewhere around forty feet.

Blair: Yes, it's shallow. The ships just sank right there in the mud.

Marcello: What sort of assignments did you have the next day, that is, on the Monday of December 8th?

Blair: I'm sitting here trying to think when I went aboard the Lexington. It wasn't long after that.

Marcello: Were you helping to clean up any of the damage and so on and so forth?

Blair: I don't remember going aboard the ship and cleaning up anything. I keep thinking it was a week before I went on the Lexington, but I can't think what in the world I did for that week. We were right there on Ford Island. I know we were sleeping in a hangar. It seems like I slept there one night, and I slept down on my station at least one night. I don't know when I went on the Lexington. I didn't do much around the island then, I know, because they gave me that gun; and then when they put me on the ship, they took the gun and the ammunition away from me. I never fired a round while I had it. I know there was mass confusion.

Marcello: Mr. Blair, I have one last question to ask: Why is it that almost forty years after the Pearl Harbor attack that you are a member of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association? Why did

you join the organization?

Blair: I joined it several years ago. I belong to the VFW; I belong to the American Legion; and I belong to the California Association. I hope that through some of them I could try to convince some people that we're fixing to get another war, and we are going to in the next year or two.

Roosevelt, as far as I'm concerned, is the one that tried to get all of us killed. I don't know whether it was his bid for glory or what the deal was, but he knew they were fixing to hit us. The code had been broken. He knew they were fixing to bomb our ships at Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Okay, Mr. Blair, I think this is probably a good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having participated. You've said a lot of interesting and important things, and I think scholars will find your comments very valuable someday when using them to study Pearl Harbor.

Blair: Well, I didn't have funny stories or nothing new to tell you, but, anyway, you got my little bit of it.

Marcello: Well, thank you very much.

Blair: It's a pleasure to talk to you and try to help you in any way I could.