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Interview with  
Joseph H. Strittmatter  
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Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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Oral History Collection

Joseph Strittmatter

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas Date: June 8, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Joseph Strittmatter for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 8, 1974, in Fort Worth, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Strittmatter in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Ford Island during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Strittmatter, to begin this interview would you 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 this nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Strittmatter: I was born in Pilot Point, Texas, October 24, 1919. I attended school a couple of years in Pilot Point and then Northside School here in

Fort Worth, and I joined the Navy in February, 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Strittmatter: Well, it was kind of hard times at that time, and I couldn't get a regular job.

Marcello: You know, this is the reason that I would say 90 per cent of the people give for entering the service at that particular time. Why did you decide upon the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Strittmatter: I didn't want to walk (chuckle).

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Strittmatter: San Diego, California.

Marcello: During your boot camp days at San Diego, was there anything that happened there that you think we ought to talk about as being a part of the record?

Strittmatter: No, there wasn't nothing particular that happened in boot camp there. It was the normal boot camp there.

Marcello: Did you go directly from San Diego to the Hawaiian Islands?

Strittmatter: No, I went through North Island there in San Diego first.

Marcello: Why did you go there?

Strittmatter: When they was sending people out of boot camp, my name showed up on a draft going to North Island, so I went over yonder and joined a Navy patrol squadron.

Marcello: What exactly did you do over there at North Island?

Strittmatter: First, I was on a beach crew--beaching crew, beaching the PBY's when they come in. Then later on, I got on a plane crew as a gunner and a mechanic.

Marcello: Was this relatively common in those days? Did you usually start out on the beach crew and then work your way into the plane itself?

Strittmatter: That's right. At that time you did. Very few men got to go to school or anything at that time.

Marcello: What exactly was your rating at that time?

Strittmatter: They called it ADR3 . . . I mean . . . when I went through North Island, I was a seaman second class, and then I was striking for a navigation mechanic, is what they called it.

Marcello: And this was known as an ADR3?

Strittmatter: ADR3, yes.

Marcello: When did you go over to the Hawaiian Islands?

Strittmatter: In October of 1940.

Marcello: In other words, you were over in Hawaii for almost a year before the war started?

Strittmatter: No, that's wrong. I went over in October of 1941.

Marcello: I see. In other words, you were there about a month before war actually started?

Strittmatter: Before war started, yes.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the service, did you think about the possibility of the country entering war?

Strittmatter: Yes, I did. I could see . . . they were talking about the draft already, and the war over in Europe was then going. So I figured sooner or later we would be in it.

Marcello: Did you usually think in terms of Europe, however, when you thought of American entry into the war?

Strittmatter: Yes, I did.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you were assigned to the Hawaiian Islands in October of 1941.

Was this a voluntary assignment, or were you simply sent there?

Strittmatter: We were just sent. The squadron was transferred from San Diego to the Hawaiian Islands.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Strittmatter: At that time I was all for it (chuckle).

Marcello: Why?

Strittmatter: I was young. I was wanting to go (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you conjure up visions of a tropical paradise and this sort of thing?

Strittmatter: Oh, yes. Oh, yes (chuckle).

Marcello: When did you actually land in the Hawaiian Islands?

Strittmatter: I don't remember just the date. I know it was . . . we left San Diego in October of 1941. That's all I can remember on that part.

Marcello: And did you get there in October of 1941?

Strittmatter: Yes, it was in October of 1941.

Marcello: Okay, so describe what Ford Island was like at that particular time just from a physical standpoint.

Strittmatter: Ford Island is a small island inside of Pearl Harbor, and it was known as the Naval Air

Station, Ford Island. It had . . . when the carriers come in, they landed there. It had seaplanes on there, and that's what I was in-- seaplanes. It had some hangars, and then it had repair shops and a bunch of barracks and a sick bay. That's about all that was on that island.

Marcello: About how many people were stationed there altogether? You would have to estimate this, of course.

Strittmatter: Yes. Oh, at the time I would say, not counting the carriers when they're not in, I'd say permanently about . . . oh, it must have been 5,000 or 6,000 people.

Marcello: And I would gather that the bulk of these were Naval personnel.

Strittmatter: Yes, they were Naval personnel, yes.

Marcello: Okay, so what sort of job did you have when you got here to Ford Island?

Strittmatter: I was on a plane crew at that time. They called it a mechanic and a gunner.

Marcello: I think we need to talk about your activities during this pre-Pearl Harbor period because I think it's rather important. I would assume



that these PBY's were used for patrol purposes.

Strittmatter: That's right.

Marcello: Describe what this patrol routine was like.

Strittmatter: Well, it had two squadrons there of PBY's, so every other day we had to patrol.

Marcello: How many planes were there altogether? You mentioned there were two squadrons.

Strittmatter: There was six planes in each squadron. That's what we had at the time.

Marcello: So in other words, every day there would be six of these PBY's on patrol.

Strittmatter: No, just five of them would go on patrol. The sixth one was always a standby plane. We used five.

Marcello: I see. Pick it up from that point then. So every other day, your particular squad drew a patrol duty.

Strittmatter: That's right.

Marcello: Describe what one of these patrols was like.

Strittmatter: We'd get up about three o'clock in the morning and go down and get our planes ready and take off just as it was getting daylight. We'd go out and patrol out there in a certain

direction. Each morning the direction we went out changed, so . . . there were five planes of us. They would last anywhere from five to six hour patrols, is what they was. I think we went out about 250 to 300 miles from the island.

Marcello: Did you usually have a pie-shaped patrol sector that you had to cover?

Strittmatter: Yes, it was something like that

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that five of these planes would be sent out every day. Did they patrol in a 360-degree circle?

Strittmatter: Oh, no. No, they had . . . for sure just how they went, I don't know, but I know they . . . we always went out in a different direction. Every day was a different direction we went out into.

Marcello: But you never did patrol in a complete 360-degree circle, that is, all the planes together did not do this?

Strittmatter: No, no.

Marcello: Why was this? Doesn't it seem logical that if you're going to go on patrol that they

would have patrolled in a 360-degree circle?

Strittmatter: I think what they were trying to do was fool the Japs at the time because we'd go in a different direction each morning, and if the Japs did come, they didn't know which direction we was going every morning. So it'd be kind of hard for them to figure out which way we went.

Marcello: Did you have enough planes to patrol in a 360-degree circle?

Strittmatter: No. No, we didn't have enough planes out there at the time.

Marcello: Were you crying for planes? Were you requesting more planes and this sort of thing?

Strittmatter: Well, that I don't know. I wasn't high enough at the time to know.

Marcello: But was it a common complaint, let's say, among the officers and men that you came in contact with that there were not enough PBY's there for a maximum patrol?

Strittmatter: Oh, we knew that. We were actually supposed to be a fifteen-plane squadron, but we just had six planes. That's all we had.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer and closer to Pearl Harbor, did the tempo of these patrols

pick up? Did they become more serious or anything of this nature?

Strittmatter: Yes, they always had some ships right outside the harbor patrolling. That was in close, so it wasn't out far. That's about the only thing I remember on that part of it.

Marcello: In other words, as one gets closer to Pearl Harbor, your routine really didn't vary that much?

Strittmatter: No.

Marcello: It was the same sort of patrols as usual.

Strittmatter: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Now you were a young sailor at the time. What was the social life like on the Hawaiian Islands?

Strittmatter: Well, when the fleet was in, I stayed aboard. When the fleet was out, I went ashore (chuckle).

Marcello: Why was that?

Strittmatter: There were too many sailors there when the fleet was in (chuckle).

Marcello: Usually, when was the fleet in?

Strittmatter: They'd usually come in about every two weeks on the weekend, and then they'd go back out.

Then during the week, the ones that were stationed there permanently . . . then we would go to shore. The social life was alright. We had places to go and things to see, dances and stuff like that.

Marcello: What were some of the specific activities or places that you frequented when you had liberty or leave? As a sailor did you hit Hotel Street?

Strittmatter: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. The streets over in Honolulu. The little while I was there before it started, we were just more or less sightseeing until Pearl Harbor started.

Marcello: How often did you usually get liberty?

Strittmatter: We got liberty three out of four days before it started.

Marcello: Now in other words, even when you went on patrol, when it was your day to go on patrol, there was still a chance that you could get liberty during the evenings when you came in.

Strittmatter: It's possible but not very likely. Usually, the day when we went on patrol, why, we had the duty that day. Like I said, you would

either get liberty . . . it could happen that way, but usually we had liberty three out of four days after we got through work and off working hours.

Marcello: How did liberty or leave usually work on the weekends?

Strittmatter: You'd have weekends off unless you had . . . on either Saturday or Sunday, you had to patrol one of these days.

Marcello: In other words, you would have one day out of the weekend off altogether.

Strittmatter: That's right.

Marcello: And here again, I assume that this routine didn't change any either right up until Pearl Harbor itself.

Strittmatter: No, it didn't, no. The only . . . we had short working hours. We went to work at seven o'clock and got off at two o'clock.

Marcello: This was when you had the duty on the weekend?

Strittmatter: No, it was the regular working hours. Regular working hours.

Marcello: I see.

Strittmatter: Now on a weekend after a patrol, after you come in, then you was through for that day.

Marcello: In your spare time or in your bull sessions, did you or your buddies ever talk about the possibility of a Japanese attack taking place there?

Strittmatter: No, I can't remember ever talking about that.

Marcello: Did you feel as though you were rather secure there?

Strittmatter: Yes, we did. We knew we had no occasion . . . nobody told us that there was a possibility of an attack.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person usually came to mind?

Strittmatter: A little, slant-eyed person. We referred to them that way.

Marcello: Now Ford Island, of course, was right in the harbor itself, and I assume that from time to time you did have a chance to observe the fleet in operation, at least coming or going. Describe what that fleet activity was like in the days or weeks immediately before Pearl Harbor.

Strittmatter: The only time I would see the fleet was when the ships come in through Pearl Harbor. There

was just a channel all the way around it, and the ships would come. A lot of them would tie up at Pearl Harbor. They had docks there for them to tie up to. They would just sit there until they went out again. I would see them go out. That's about the only time I observed the ships.

Marcello: What ships besides the aircraft carriers would tie up at Ford Island?

Strittmatter: Battleships, mostly.

Marcello: Battleship Row was located there at Ford Island, was it not?

Strittmatter: They were tied up at Ford Island, yes.

Marcello: Describe what Battleship Row looked like. I assume it was rather an impressive sight.

Strittmatter: It was. Usually, at each dock you'd have one battleship next to the dock and then one next to it. Then it would be two abreast like that for about, oh, you could have . . . you could have as many as six of them tied up there real close to one another.

Marcello: Why was it that they tied those battleships up two-by-two?



Strittmatter: They didn't have enough room there to put them anyplace else. They nearly had to tie them up that way.

Marcello: I assume that that harbor was very crowded when the ships were in.

Strittmatter: It was real crowded. When the fleet come in, the harbor was crowded. It wasn't big enough.

Marcello: I assume that those battleships were rather an impressive sight.

Strittmatter: They were. They surely were.

Marcello: What impressed you most about them?

Strittmatter: Just the bigness of them. They were so big, and to see something that big come floating in there was impressive.

Marcello: This, I think, more or less brings us up to the actual attack on Pearl Harbor itself, and what I want you to do at this point now is to describe in as much detail as you can what you did on Saturday, December 6, 1941. Then from that point we'll swing into the day of the attack itself, but let's start with that Saturday. Describe your routine from the time you got up in the morning until you turned in that night.

Strittmatter: That's kind of hard to do for the day before. I don't remember much of what happened the day before. If it was a regular working day, we would have got up and went down to the hangar, and maybe we had a hop or something. We would fly that day just on a training hop, training pilots if nothing else. Sometimes we'd have a gunnery hop, where you'd drop some bombs or stuff like that.

Marcello: Do you remember if you had the duty on that Saturday?

Strittmatter: No, I don't remember. I don't remember that.

Marcello: Incidentally, where would these PBY's be parked when they were at Ford Island?

Strittmatter: They would be up on a concrete ramp between two hangars there.

Marcello: In other words, you would come into this ramp, and then the planes would be towed out of the water?

Strittmatter: Well, you would come up to a beaching ramp, and the beaching crew would put wheels on the planes, and then a tractor would pull it up onto the ramp.

Marcello: How were these planes usually parked? Were they parked in rows, or were they scattered out or how?

Strittmatter: No, they were in rows just as close as you could get them because you didn't have enough room to park very many. Besides that, we had some Australian planes in there, too.

Marcello: What were the Australian planes doing in there?

Strittmatter: They was ferrying them from the West Coast to Australia.

Marcello: I would assume that since these planes were bunched together, they made a very inviting target for any attacker who managed to come along.

Strittmatter: Yes, they did. A bunch of them burned up that morning.

Marcello: How close were they parked together?

Strittmatter: I'd say five or ten feet apart on the wing tips, just as close as you could get them because we was pressed for room.

Marcello: Incidentally, on a Sunday did the patrols continue?

Strittmatter: Oh, yes.

Marcello: But there were always six planes parked there at one time.

Strittmatter: Well, six planes and plus whatever was going through there.

Marcello: Okay, it sounds like for the most part that the Saturday of December 6 was a rather routine day for you. Let me ask you this question. Normally speaking, when the personnel came back into the barracks on a Saturday evening after being ashore on liberty, what was their general condition?

Strittmatter: It depended on . . . some of them would be drinking. Some of them wouldn't. We had some of every kind there. Some of them would never come back if they had weekend liberty. Once in awhile, you'd get something like that. Not very often.

Marcello: On a weekend approximately what percentage of the personnel would be ashore on a given day?

Strittmatter: I said you'd have liberty three out of four days, so the squadron was fixed into four duty sections. So three sections would have

liberty, and the fourth section would be on duty, and that's like it was that morning when we had to patrol, and then the whole squadron was there that morning.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that those people who came in drunk on a Saturday night would be the exception rather than the rule?

Strittmatter: I would say yes, yes.

Marcello: I think this is an important point to get into the record because I think a lot of people assume that everybody went out on a binge on a Saturday night.

Strittmatter: No, no, they didn't do that, no. That was more of the exception. You had all kinds in there.

Marcello: Incidentally, when was payday? Do you remember when you got paid at that time?

Strittmatter: We got paid twice a month. It seemed to me like it was on the 5th and 20th, I believe, somewhere around there when we got paid.

Marcello: In other words, you would have gotten paid just prior to Pearl Harbor, prior to the Japanese attack.

Strittmatter: Yes, we could have, yes. We probably did.

Marcello: It seems rather odd to be paid on the 5th and the 20th.

Strittmatter: (chuckle) Yes.

Marcello: Was there any particular reason why it was done that way?

Strittmatter: No, that was just the way the Navy had it set up to pay. In fact, if I remember right, I even had a money order in my pocket that I had bought, and I was going to send it home, and I hadn't sent it yet. It must have been just a few days after payday (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, well, this kind of brings us up then to that Sunday of December 7, 1941, and here again, I want you to describe your routine from the time you got up until that day was finished, and, of course, the attack itself would have taken place in between there.

Strittmatter: To begin with, we got up about three o'clock that morning and went down and had chow. By the way, the chow was in the barracks, so we didn't have far to go there (chuckle). We went down to the hangar and got our planes

ready. I happened to be on the standby plane that morning, and the other five took off, and I stayed there. So I didn't have to go. The standby plane was in case one of the planes had trouble. So we just . . .

Marcello: Normally what would you do when the other five took off and the standby plane remained? What would the standby . . . what would the crew of the standby plane do?

Strittmatter: Well, if they had any maintenance to do on a normal working day, they would do that or go to class, but being Sunday, we didn't have no class, so we was just sitting around there waiting on the other planes to come back. Then we would be secured for the day.

Marcello: And normally when would those planes come back?

Strittmatter: Oh, around nine or ten o'clock in the morning. In fact, myself and another guy was asleep in an airplane when it started--in a PBY (chuckle).

Marcello: Pick it up from this point then. You were asleep in this PBY. Where was it parked?

Strittmatter: It was parked at the head of the launching ramp.

Marcello: Outside one of the hangars.

Strittmatter: Outside of the hangars. That's right. They had lined up all six airplanes in a line to launch them that morning, and mine was the last one, so it was still sitting there. We hadn't parked it yet.

Like I said, another man and myself was in there asleep, and we heard a big explosion that shook the airplane pretty good. At first we thought it would be a . . . sounded more like a plane crash because they had been testing some engines over yonder on an airplane, and they had one to crash a few days before.

By that time there was another explosion, and then this guy got up and looked outside. He said, "Hey, there's airplanes out here that's got red dots on their wings!" I told him he was full of baloney. By that time we had another explosion, so I got up and looked (chuckle), and sure enough, there was. By that time, we both decided it was Japanese airplanes.

Marcello: So what did you do . . . what were your first thoughts when you finally discovered that the base was under attack?



Strittmatter: It was to get away from where we was at right there because they had done hit the hangar that was about a hundred feet from where we was at.

Marcello: That's where the explosions had been occurring?

Strittmatter: Yes, in this hangar, and it was burning. So the first thing we done was run to a ditch that they were digging to lay a water line in and got in there. Everybody else was going there, too. We were in there awhile and gathering our wits about us.

Marcello: How would you describe your first reactions? Was it one of panic or perplexity or fear or what?

Strittmatter: It was fear. You didn't know what to do right at first except to try to protect yourself. By the time we got into the ditch and was in there awhile, then we gathered our wits about us a little bit and went back to our airplane and got our machine guns ready. We had guns and ammunition in the airplane. By that time, we was waiting for more Jap airplanes to come.

Marcello: In other words, by the time you get back to your airplane, the first attack had already passed by.

Strittmatter: That's right. By the time we got back, the first attack was over with.

Marcello: How much time are we talking about here? First of all, from the time you heard the first explosion till you got into the ditch, how much time had elapsed?

Strittmatter: That wasn't very long (chuckle). It was less than . . . oh, I'd say three or four minutes at the most.

Marcello: Okay, and how long were you in the ditch altogether, would you estimate?

Strittmatter: We was in there about, I'd say, five minutes anyway, if not longer. We was in the ditch.

Marcello: And while you were in the ditch, was Ford Island itself under a direct attack?

Strittmatter: We could see more planes going over, and we could hear more explosions. It sounded like it was coming from where the battleships were over yonder and the Navy Yard. The Navy Yard was across the channel from us there.

Marcello: Did you have a good view of Battleship Row from this ditch that you were in?

Strittmatter: No, no. We couldn't even see it because the barracks and other buildings were between where I was at and the battleships. We could see smoke rising from over yonder, but we couldn't see the ships at all.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that you were in this ditch for about ten minutes or something of that nature, and then you went back to your plane.

Strittmatter: That's right.

Marcello: The plane had not been touched at all?

Strittmatter: No, at that time the plane had not been touched. The hangar over yonder was burning, and the planes around it was burning, but our plane was sitting out there in the middle and at that time had not been touched.

Marcello: We got out of our ditch and went back to the airplane and got our guns out--we had them tied down--and got them ready to fire. We sat there awhile waiting for any plane to come by so we could shoot at it.

Marcello: Where did you set up your guns?

Strittmatter: They was in the airplane. We left them in the airplane in a blister. You could swing the guns around a little bit.

Marcello: In other words, you were sitting in the airplane . . .

Strittmatter: That's right.

Marcello: . . . by your guns, waiting for the next attack if it came.

Strittmatter: Yes, if it came. We was sitting there awhile, and then the . . . I guess it was fighter planes that come over strafing, and we would shoot at them. At the same time, they were shooting at us, and then they set our airplane on fire then.

Marcello: Describe this . . . what happened? This sounds like a pretty exciting story.

Strittmatter: The fighter planes was coming over strafing anything that was on the ground. They strafed the landing field over yonder where they had a few carrier-based planes, not many. There weren't many there that morning, but there was one PBY, and one of them made a pass at

it. We were shooting at it. We didn't knock it down that we know of, but it hit us and set our mid-section on the wing of the PBY afire.

So when we seen that, we grabbed a fire extinguisher and went up and put out the fire. Then we stood by our guns some more, but no more planes come over where we could shoot at them because we was in a confined area with, you might say, a building on each side of us. So unless he come right straight over us or right between the buildings, we couldn't shoot at him.

Marcello: What does it feel like to be strafed by fighters?

Strittmatter: Oh, I don't know. I didn't think much about that. I was just trying to shoot back at him (chuckle). So by that time I think we . . . other men were beginning to set up guns on tripods and stuff, and they wanted somebody to help belt the ammunition, so we just got out of the airplane and went to help belt the ammunition because we wasn't doing no good there.

Marcello: Where were you belting the ammunition?

Strittmatter: In the hangar.

Marcello: Was this one of the hangars that was still intact yet, or was this the one that was hit?

Strittmatter: Yes, this one was intact. It was the hangar we was using at the time. It was sitting, oh, about a block away from the sea wall, and they never hit it. They hit the one right next to the sea wall where all the airplanes were parked in around there.

Marcello: During this second attack, that is, during the period that you were under the strafing, how long did this attack last? Did they simply make one pass, or did they make several passes?

Strittmatter: The best I remember, they made a couple of passes, and that was all because they was just fighter planes. They wasn't dropping bombs or nothing the second time.

Marcello: Okay, so what happened from that point? After this second attack had taken place, you were then belting ammunition.

Strittmatter: Well, we belted ammunition for a long time.

The best I remember, we done that awhile.  
Then our airplanes come back from patrol.  
We met them and asked them if they had seen  
anything out there. They said no. They  
hadn't even seen as much as one airplane.

Marcello: Had they been patrolling to the north of the  
islands?

Strittmatter: I don't know . . .

Marcello: Of course, the Japanese planes came in from  
the north.

Strittmatter: I don't know. I don't remember which direction  
they went that morning. I sure don't, but  
wherever they went, they just said they hadn't  
seen a thing. All five airplanes hadn't seen  
a thing.

Marcello: Incidentally, from the standpoint of climate  
what was that day like?

Strittmatter: Oh, it was typical a day in Hawaii. They  
are all warm. It was clear. I remember that.  
It was a clear morning. It wasn't cloudy  
or raining. It was kind of warm.

Marcello: Great visibility for an attack, in other words.

Strittmatter: Oh, yes. Great visibility. It wasn't no  
clouds or anything to stop it.

Marcello: So here come these five planes off patrol.  
What do you do with them at this point?

Strittmatter: Well, we were waiting on them. We pulled them up and put landing gear on them and pulled them up on a beach and parked them, only we scattered them out a little more. We didn't bunch them up this time.

Marcello: What did the base look like after these two attacks had occurred? Describe the damage that was done.

Strittmatter: The damage right where I was at was just mostly to that one hangar, and it burned plumb up along with all the airplanes around it. Then an oil storage tank across the runway from us, they had hit. And that's about all the damage I could see on Ford Island itself.

Now we could . . . for a long time they wouldn't even let us leave the hangar. They told us to stay right there, and then later on we got to go around a little bit. Then we seen the ships sunk over yonder, and they had a fire over in the Navy Yard. We seen a battleship that tried to get out, and it run aground in the channel.



Marcello: This was the Nevada.

Strittmatter: Is that what it was?

Marcello: How long was it before you got a chance to see the actual damage that had been done to the ships themselves?

Strittmatter: It was that afternoon before we got around there because they wouldn't let us go to chow. They made us stay there and belt ammunition, and we was setting up guns on anything that you could set a gun on.

Marcello: I'm sure that must have been a rather sickening sight to see what damage had been done to the fleet.

Strittmatter: It was. You could see them battleships. Actually Pearl Harbor is not . . . it's just barely deep enough for the battleships to come in, so they just kind of settled down on the bottom, is what they done. You could see that their main deck was awash, and that was about it.

Marcello: I'm sure that the water was covered with oil and this sort of thing.

Strittmatter: Oh, yes. It was covered with oil. Oil was all over the place. Every once in awhile you could hear a depth charge go off. They

was looking for them two-man submarines that they thought they had in there. Those PT boats was running around and setting off depth charges when they thought they found one.

Marcello: How come that you were down at the harbor at this time? Were you on one of the rescue parties or anything of this nature?

Strittmatter: No, we finally got a break, and they let us go, and we just went around there to take a look because it was just a little walk around there. In fact, we could see Battleship Row from our barracks. It was just a little ways over there to it.

Marcello: How would you describe--and you would have to speak in general terms about this--but how would you describe the conduct or the reaction of the men at Ford Island while the attack was taking place? Did most of them act with a certain amount of professionalism, or was there panic or fear? I'm sure at first there was a little bit of panic or perplexity, but . . .

Strittmatter: It was right at first. Like I said, we went to this ditch, and after just a little while, we got our wits gathered about us. We went back to the airplane. The other men got out and went to the armory where we had the guns, the extra guns and ammunition stored, and started getting them out. Right at first, like you said, it was mostly panic, but it didn't last long.

Marcello: Then would it be safe to say that after the panic subsided that your training and professionalism took over?

Strittmatter: Oh, yes. It did because later on we know that they shot down some airplanes, and I seen one that they did shoot down because it went into the channel there, and they pulled it up and brought it over there right behind my hangar where I was at, and I seen it.

Marcello: This sounds like an interesting story, and I think it's something that perhaps we need to talk about. I think what you're referring to is the fact that that night in the aftermath of the attack, there were a lot of trigger-happy men around.

Strittmatter: There sure were.

Marcello: Can you describe this particular incident where this American plane got shot down?

Strittmatter: Yes, they come by and told us that there was some airplanes coming in from a carrier someplace and for us not to shoot at them because we had been shooting at every sound. When we heard a sound and everybody would cut loose and shoot. So we was out there watching them. We could see them. They had their lights on. They was making a circle around that island to land there on Ford Island. Then for some reason or another they either turned their lights out, or they went behind a cloud or something. Anyway, their lights blinked or something. Every gun opened up.

Marcello: What did it look like?

Strittmatter: It just looked like a sheet of fire going up with all the tracer bullets going up, and since every fourth bullet was a tracer, you can figure out how many bullets was going up (chuckle).

Marcello: Were you still at your gun at this time?

Strittmatter: No, we had took my airplane around . . . in fact, they had put it in the hangar, is what they had done, and was fixing to try to repair it.

Marcello: But you were an eyewitness to this . . .

Strittmatter: Oh, yes. I was an eyewitness. I was outside watching these airplanes circle up yonder. I seen that.

Marcello: And you actually saw the airplane fall out of the sky?

Strittmatter: That's right, yes. No airplane could fly through that that night. That's all there was to it (chuckle).

Marcello: Did this airplane crash in the harbor itself?

Strittmatter: No. As best as I remember, it crashed in the cane field, not in the water. It crashed in a cane field. I think the pilot did live a little while as best as I remember. I'm not for sure on this.

Marcello: You know, awhile ago we talked about the coolness or the professionalism with which most of the men reacted after the initial shock of the attack wore off. How would you describe the training that you received in the Navy during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? Was it good

training? Was it thorough?

Strittmatter: Yes, in a way. I wasn't trained so much to fight on the ground as I was in an airplane because most of ours would have been in an airplane. We had had quite a bit of bombing practice and a few torpedo runs and some practice with the machine gun--fire at a target. Not a lot, but we had some. We knew how to fire it. We'd had enough that we knew how the machine gun worked. We knew how to tear one apart and put it back together and all that.

Marcello: What was the morale like in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Strittmatter: In my squadron at the time, it was high right there at the time because we had a pretty good squadron.

Marcello: How do you describe . . . how do you account for the high morale?

Strittmatter: Well, for one thing, most of us had been together for some time, and we had a good skipper. I don't know. It was just that the people all liked one another. It was

still a small squadron--just a six-plane squadron--  
and everybody knew each other.

Marcello: Also, I think we're talking about strictly  
volunteers here.

Strittmatter: Yes, they was all volunteers. We didn't  
have no draftees at that time at all, no.

Marcello: In other words, everybody was there because  
they wanted to be there.

Strittmatter: They wanted to be there. That's right.

Marcello: I'm sure this probably had something to do  
with the high morale, also.

Strittmatter: It did, yes. I believe it did.

Marcello: Okay, now what was the morale like . . .  
compare what the morale was like then after  
the Japanese attack took place. In other  
words, what were your feelings in the immediate  
aftermath of that attack?

Strittmatter: The only thing we could think of was  
wondering if they was going to . . . if the  
Japs had a landing party and was going to come  
ashore, and then what we would do to them if  
they did come ashore.

Marcello: In other words, are you saying that there

were all sorts of rumors floating around, among which was one that the Japanese were going to invade the island?

Strittmatter: Oh, yes. That's right. That rumor was going around. It sure was. We'd heard that more than once. Then the first . . . that night and the next day. After that then them rumors died down. We knew better.

Marcello: Did you hear any other rumors?

Strittmatter: Yes, we heard one rumor that they even attacked the West Coast.

Marcello: And I'm sure that you believed every one of those rumors that you heard.

Strittmatter: (chuckle) At the time we probably did.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that you did not receive very much sleep that night?

Strittmatter: No, that's right. We didn't. In fact, we didn't even get to go to the barracks that night. They even brought sandwiches down to us. We couldn't even go to the barracks. They was using . . . actually, they was using the mess hall as a sick bay for the men off of them battleships out there that was hurt



and wounded. So all they done was just send us down some sandwiches down to the hangar.

Marcello: How did your attitude toward the Japanese change now?

Strittmatter: Well, the best I can remember, we didn't have much use for them by that time (chuckle) because they snuck in on us.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Strittmatter: The next day . . .

Marcello: This would be the Monday of December 8.

Strittmatter: The Monday? The best I could remember then was working on that airplane to see how much damage had been done and whether we could repair it or not.

Marcello: In other words, you did not take part in any of these search and rescue parties that were sent out into the harbor and this sort of thing.

Strittmatter: No, no, I did not, no.

Marcello: As you look back on the attack, why do you feel the Japanese were so successful?

Strittmatter: Well, I feel now that on the basis of the stuff I've found out since then that they knew we just had a small force there. There

were just four or five or six airplanes going out each morning. I think they even knew which direction we was going. They knew that after eight or nine o'clock in the morning everything was practically shut down, of course, as far as radar and stuff like that, which I didn't know at the time, but they knew it.

Marcello: Did you have radar at Ford Island at that time?

Strittmatter: They had it there, but what they used it for, I don't know.

Marcello: And I'm sure that it was a very primitive-type radar because radar was really in its beginning stages.

Strittmatter: It was. It was. In fact, we didn't have any on our airplanes at the time. We got some later on, but we didn't have any then.

Marcello: Did you have any Japanese civilians working on the base?

Strittmatter: I think there was some who worked in the overhaul and repair shop over there, which I didn't have nothing to do with at that time.

Marcello: In other words, you never thought of those people in terms of being saboteurs or being engaged in fifth columnist activities or anything of that nature?

Strittmatter: No. The best I can remember, no. We would see them ashore when we'd go ashore. We talked to them if they could talk English, but otherwise I wasn't down there long enough to really get to know any of them.

Marcello: During the attack itself, were there any funny incidents that occurred that you can think of?

Strittmatter: Yes, one thing was my leading chief of the squadron. He was a short, heavy-set guy. I didn't think he could move that fast (chuckle). He moved then.

Marcello: How long was it after the attack before you were able to get into Honolulu again?

Strittmatter: We didn't get to go ashore there for at least a week, the best I remember. We had to stay right there on the base. They wouldn't let us go to town at all.

Marcello: Did you ever point to any individuals as being

responsible for what happened? In other words, did you ever try to find any scape-goats?

Strittmatter: No, I never did. The best I remember, we talked about it at times among ourselves, but we always wondered who should have known about it that didn't, and at the time there was a lot of stuff we did not know. Some of it, I didn't find out until after I got out of the Navy.