

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER  
451

Interview with  
Angelo H. Belotti  
August 5, 1978

Place of Interview: Little Rock, Arkansas  
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello  
Terms of Use: OPEN  
Approved: Angelo H. Belotti  
(Signature)  
Date: 8-5-78

COPYRIGHT © 1979 THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE  
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203

Oral History Collection

Angelo Belotti

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Little Rock, Arkansas

Date: August 5, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Angelo Belotti 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. Belotti 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. Belotti, 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. Belotti: Okay, I was born on November 7, 1919, in Bigelow, Arkansas; it was about thirty miles northwest of Little Rock. I was raised up there on a farm. I went to school . . . finished high school at Joe T. Robinson High School on Highway 10. We kicked the rocks around up on the mountain there; we

had a grape vineyard. On my eighteenth birthday--November 7, 1938--I went into the Navy.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy in 1938?

Belotti: Well, things got rough on the farm. The grape crops were going bad, and there wasn't any work to speak of or jobs to be found. There were three of us the same age that ran together. This Navy recruiter, we run onto him and so we . . . he said, "Well, come on down, We'll sign you up in the Navy." Two of us made it, and the other one--the one we thought was the healthiest one of the three--he's the one that failed. Me and Sutherland went in at the same time. Later on, the third one made it in the Marine Corps. We went through boot training at Norfolk, Virginia.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches? Was it simply this chance meeting with the Navy recruiter, or was there other reasons involved?

Belotti: Well, that was one thing--meeting this chief Navy recruiter. You might say I had a little background in the Navy. My oldest brother was in the Navy back in World War I and was injured and eventually never did actually return home. He was in the hospital at New London, Connecticut.

Naturally, this recruiter put the story on about the travel, the country, and see the world and what-have-you, so we just decided we'd go into the Navy.

Marcello: How hard was it to get into the Navy at that time?

Belotti: We went through--what I'd call--a real physical examination and everything. The best I remember, we took an aptitude test. I don't think they were taking too many in at that time.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that economic reasons played a part in your decision to enter the Navy. That's a reason that a great many people of your generation give for having entered the service at that time. We were still more or less in the midst of the Depression, and the service did offer a certain amount of security.

Belotti: That's right. They'd furnish you clothes, feed you, give you a place to sleep and an opportunity to learn a trade and what-have-you . . . and travel at the same time, so that was one of the reasons why I decided to go into the Navy.

Marcello: You mentioned that you took your boot training at Norfolk, Virginia.

Belotti: That's right.

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

Belotti: Three months.

Marcello: Three months.

Belotti: Three months. Naturally, you went in as an apprentice seaman. Then after boot camp, depending on how good the company was and how many stars you made and got in your flag and what-have-you,

that gave you extra days' leave--if the company got a star in their flag. It seems like to me--the best I can remember-- I think we wound up with twenty-one days' leave, I believe it was. I returned home on leave and then went back. Shortly after I returned back to the Norfolk base, why, then I went aboard the transport Chaumont, and then it took us down to the Caribbean. They were on maneuvers down there-- the fleet was--and that's where I went aboard the Maryland.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going aboard a battleship? Were you kind of looking forward to it?

Belotti: I didn't really have any idea of just what type of ship it was, but I was glad that I did get to go aboard the battleship because it was one of the largest ships--besides the carriers. Naturally, it wasn't near as rough . . . when you got into rough seas, wasn't near as bad as it was on some of the "tin cans" or small destroyers or some cruisers. I was glad to get to go aboard the Maryland.

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

Belotti: That's right. Surprisingly . . . I don't know why, but I call myself, I guess, being fortunate. I don't know whether I just looked like I was lost or something. From things that I found out later and what-have-you, I actually got better

treatment than most of them did, because I didn't have to stay in the deck division very long before going in some other division. I went into the shipfitter shop, which was the R Division. I had only been aboard there just about three weeks or so, and I wasn't actually wasn't assigned to any deck division; I was just more-or-less learning my way around the ship. The chief master-at-arms, who was kind of looking after the new recruits when they come aboard, asked me if I would like to go in the shipfitter's ship. He told me what . . . I didn't know the first thing (chuckle) about it, because I was a raw "boot" right off the farm; I mean, it was all new to me. But he told me . . . he explained to me that they did metal work and plumbing work and welding and so forth. So I thought that would be a good place to maybe learn a trade. I kind of thought maybe I'd like to learn welding and pipefitting and such . . . metal work. Naturally, you take a certain amount of ribbing, I mean, you know, as a new recruit. There was some fine fellows on there that had been in the Navy for quite some time.

Marcello: Did you find that most of these senior petty officers in the R Division gave you some personal attention and saw to it that you were thoroughly trained to become a shipfitter?

Belotti: Yes, they did. There was several of them on there--first and second class and third class petty officers--that was very nice.

As a matter of fact, there was one that was from Arkansas. He was a first class petty officer--Robert Newton McKinney, from Paris, Arkansas. Later on, after the attack and what-have-you and later on--not getting ahead--I lost contact with him, and I've tried to find him ever since, but I never have. But he was very nice.

Shortly after we got back from down there on maneuvers--we came back through the Panama Canal and came back to Long Beach and operated out of Long Beach, California--my mother got sick; and naturally, me just being a raw recruit and not getting very much money or anything, why, I wanted to go home to see about Mother. Naturally, my folks . . . like I said, things were kind of rough on the farm, and they didn't have much. So Robert loaned me the money to get me a ticket home, and naturally I paid him back. It wasn't a loan shark thing; it was just a good personal friend trying to help somebody.

Like I say, most of them . . . from most of the stories you hear, you're afraid of the "old salts" and what-have-you, but we had a real fine crew on that.

Marcello: I would assume that most of those senior petty officers had had quite a few years experience in the Navy.

Belotti: Yes. Well, like I said, McKinney, I believe . . . it seems like to me that at that time he had in about fourteen years. Most of the rates weren't too quick to come by at that time.



Most of the first class and second class petty officers and the chiefs had anywhere from ten to twelve to fourteen years in the service,

Marcello: And that wasn't unusual.

Belotti: No, it wasn't. They were very good in trying to teach you the trade and what to do and everything and things about the ship and what-have-you.

Marcello: What were your quarters like aboard the Maryland? Describe them.

Belotti: Well, the shop--the shipfitter shop--where we actually worked, and part of them slept, was on the main deck between the number one and number two gun turrets. Naturally, the older sailors had first choice; they had folding cots. But us new recruits, to begin with, had to sleep in hammocks, and they were swung up next to the overhead.

Marcello: What was it like sleeping in a hammock?

Belotti: It was quite an experience (chuckle), but I soon learned how to handle it. In boot camp, well, we had bunks, and also when we went aboard this transport, the Chaumont, surprisingly enough we had bunks on it.

You tied your hammock up, and they showed me right quick how to get in a hammock. It seemed like you're trying to swing up and drop in a canoe or something (chuckle), but there's a . . . I guess you would call it an art. You'd think you would

just fall right out, but once you got in there, it was good sleeping. Naturally, as the ship rocked back and forth and what-have-you, so did the hammock. You had to watch because there was other fellows that spread their cots below you and slept in cots--the older ones--and it was quite an experience.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, you did not get a cot until you had some seniority and somebody who had a cot moved out.

Belotti: That's right. Naturally, later on, then I got . . . like you say, after I got seniority and some of the others moved on, why, I got a cot. I slept right alongside the workbench. Naturally, you had to wait until after seven o'clock before you could spread your cot. Naturally, in the morning, right after reveille, why, you had to fold it up and roll your mattress and everything. You had a canvas bag to put your bed in and another canvas bag to put your folding cot in. Along the bulkheads, they had bedding lockers--a place fixed along in there where you just dropped your cot and your bedding.

Marcello: What sort of locker space did you have for the rest of your gear?

Belotti: We had two . . . we had a small--what you might call a personal locker, and then we had a larger locker to put your other stuff in. Naturally, your smaller locker was for your toilet articles, your shaving gear, and what-have-you . . . maybe a change or two of skivvies and so forth. You had a regular locker to keep your dungarees and your uniforms in--work uniform and dress

blues and what-have-you.

Marcello: And then, of course, you also had a sea bag locker to stow gear in there.

Belotti: Yes. Naturally, being in the shipfitter's shop, we also had the opportunity of having a little extra space where we had bins and things in the shop there where we could put our personal belongings in there. Naturally, we had it a little better than a deck hand would.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Maryland?

Belotti: Most of the time it was very good. Most of the time it was very good. We had one or two old cooks on there, and it seemed like they took pride in fixing their food. Once in a while, naturally, you'd get bad stuff or something--you know, something that wasn't as good as it ought to be--and then if you were out at sea and it got real rough, you couldn't cook anything much, so you would have cold cuts and a cup of coffee or sandwiches or something like that. I guess it was good because I did gain weight (chuckle).

Marcello: I gather that all the bread and pastries and so on were baked right aboard ship.

Belotti: That's right. Everything was baked aboard ship. Everything was cooked aboard ship. Naturally, your meats and things like that--your supplies--were brought aboard; then you had refrigerators--reefers they called them--and storerooms and what-have-you to

keep them in. Like I say, we had some good cooks, and the chief commissary steward was a good fellow.

Marcello: How was the food served aboard the Maryland when you went aboard--family-style or cafeteria-style?

Belotti: Family-style. We had a table and two benches, and we had one of the crew members assigned to the job of mess cooking, they called it. You had these metal trays, and they were stacked on top of one another, and he would go up and get the food at the galley and bring it down and put it on the table. Then everybody would eat, and then we would clean up everything. Naturally, you cleaned up your tray and everything.

Most of the time we had what we called a mess captain, and he made sure that everything went fairly straight there at the table and that everything was handled like it should be, and it worked out pretty good. Once in awhile you would get maybe a "chow hound" or something that you might have to push him back a little bit or something, but otherwise, most of the time, it was pretty good.

Marcello: Did you pull mess cooking duty?

Belotti: Yes, I did (chuckle). I wasn't on it too long. I don't know whether I wasn't too good at it or whether they felt sorry for me or what. But the best I remember, it seems like to me it was about . . . I believe I kept it about three months, I believe.

Marcello: Sometimes there could be rewards to be had on mess cooking, couldn't there?

Belotti: Oh, yes. I mean, the fellows would maybe give you a little extra or something--I mean, put a little bit in the pot, Naturally, if you had a connection with the fellows up there in the galley and you got something a little better for your table or something, why, then the fellows at the table would reward you for getting it. We had a pretty good . . . being in the shipfitter's shop, we had pretty good working relations with all the other departments if we wanted something. Actually, they wanted special things and favors from us, and in turn, why, we'd get little goodies and what-have-you on the side (chuckle).

Marcello: Was the shipfitter's shop in a position to do certain favors for them?

Belotti: Oh, yes. We always managed . . . if nothing else . . . if it need be, we did it after regular work hours. I mean, if we had too much other work lined up for the regular work schedule and everything, or if it was something that maybe the chief didn't really approve of . . . but yet he wouldn't . . . instead of sending it through the channels to get a work order made on it or what-have-you, why, we'd make it up and slip it in there for them on the side, see. Naturally, we'd get . . . if they were baking fresh cinnamon rolls or sweet rolls or if we wanted

a sandwich after hours or something, why, we always managed to get it.

Marcello: How would you describe the morale aboard the Maryland before the war?

Belotti: It was very good. I don't know . . . it seemed like the fellows were in good spirit. All in all, we had a real good crew. The morale seemed to be real good,

Marcello: At that time, all of you were volunteers, too, weren't you?

Belotti: That's right. Everybody was a volunteer.

Marcello: That probably would have contributed to the high morale. Everybody was there because they wanted to be there.

Belotti: That's right. It seemed like that they took pride in their ship and everything, because you'd naturally try to make your ship a little bit better than the other one. Naturally, the old hands or what-have-you, why, they kind of took the new recruits and kind of more-or-less worked it in to them. Oh, I guess you would say they taught them to really carry the ship's pride and try to be neat-appearing and what-have-you. Like one time there, we had an admiral's inspection . . . and the skipper we had was very good. He didn't . . . as long as you had a neat haircut, that's all. That one time the admiral said something about that the ship was fine and great; the men all looked great except he thought every man needed a haircut. The captain told him no; he begged to differ with him because he said he

didn't see a man that needed a haircut that morning--everyone was neatly trimmed. He said he had such a good-looking bunch of men that he thought he could even pick them out on the beach from the other sailors because they were neat. Like I say, the morale was good.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that there was very little theft aboard the ships during that pre-Pearl Harbor period.

Belotti: That's right. I don't know whether it was some sort of code or what, but there was very, very little theft. I mean, if you wanted something or needed something, why, if you would go ask your buddy or ask somebody about it, why, they'd give it, or they would manage some way to get whatever you might need or what-have-you. You didn't have to go do a lot thieving or what-have-you. Some of them called it "midnight stores." We didn't really have to do anything like that because, like I say, the chow was good most of the time, and you didn't have to go down and try to break into the locker after hours to get maybe cans of peaches or this or that or something special. Most of the time the mess was real good.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about training exercises that the Maryland would engage in. When did the Maryland move to Pearl Harbor on a permanent basis?

Belotti: It was in 1940, I believe it was.

Marcello: Was this when Fleet Problem 20 occurred or something of that

nature, and fleet maneuvers were held in Hawaiian waters, and they then kept the fleet out there?

Belotti: I believe that's when it was. I believe that's what . . . I didn't know the name of the problem or anything. I believe that was about the time . . . I believe it was when they . . . it was about that time. Like I said before, we operated out of Long Beach, and then we went to Bremerton Navy Yard, and then we went to Pearl.

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

Belotti: Well, it didn't bother me too much. Naturally, being single, it didn't bother me too much where we were. The only thing was that we operated two weeks in and two weeks out.

Marcello: While you were at Pearl?

Belotti: That's right.

Marcello: Normally, when would the Maryland go out on an exercise? What day of the week?

Belotti: We would go out on Friday.

Marcello: You would go out on a Friday?

Belotti: Go out on a Friday and we would come in on Friday. You would go out on Friday, and you would stay out two weeks, and then you would come in on a Friday. You would usually go out on a Friday morning, and you would come in on a Friday afternoon. Because that would give the other half of the fleet time to get



out before you came in and tied up.

Naturally, we had different training maneuvers. We had gunnery practice. We had our seaplanes aboard there; we had spotters and we had three planes--I believe it was three--that we had at that time. And we would catapult aircraft off and recover aircraft and what-have-you.

Naturally, the shipfitter's shop--R Division--had what we called the anchor detail. When we came into anchor, we had to man the anchor windlasses. Then if we had to hook up any kind of hoses or anything like that, that would be our job . . . except fueling. We didn't bother with the fueling. Like I say, we operated two weeks in and two weeks out.

Marcello: What would the shipfitters do when you were out at sea?

Belotti: Well, we would be working on different jobs, but then when they had the regular--what we called--general quarters battle stations . . . now my battle station was on the third deck about amidships next to the print shop. We naturally had intercom headphones, and different ones would wear the headphones. It wasn't just one person.

Then we would have mock drills. For example, they would say that we took a hit--either a bomb hit or a torpedo hit--at certain, certain location. "What would you do?" Naturally, that was all a part of the training as to what section you would try to close off or seal off, and if it needed shoring or what-

have-you, why, you'd break out your shoring and the material you had and everything and set it up just like as if it was the real thing. Then you would take it down and store it back in its proper location, and that material was not used for anything else except that it was there for that purpose; that was what it was kept there for.

Marcello: In other words, shipfitters were a part of damage control.

Belotti: That's right. That was our primary purpose, was damage control. Like I say, when we wasn't in an exercise like that or training or something, well, then we went about our regular routine work. If somebody had a stopped-up drain or something like that or needed some welding done at a certain place or some metal work done or something, well, we would naturally go about our routine duties.

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

Belotti: That's one thing that has always . . . I never tried to get the answer to it, and it has bugged me for a long time, but I tried to not let it bother me. That's something that I have never been able to understand. We had been . . . like I say, we were operating two weeks in and two weeks out, and we were operating with everything live. I mean, we had live ammunition and everything and all this. The two weeks that we were in port, we were not

given overnight liberty unless you were married and lived on the beach or if you were an officer or a chief petty officer. Otherwise, we were given what we called "two-section liberty." Like I say, if you didn't live on the beach or you weren't married, why, then you had to be back . . . I believe it was about midnight or two o'clock. I believe that was the time you had to be back aboard ship.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had two-section liberty. In other words, it was port and starboard liberty.

Belotti: Yes. Half the crew, you know, could have liberty.

Marcello: Well, right on down until December 7th, are you saying in effect that it was business as usual? There were very few changes?

Belotti: Very few changes up until that weekend.

Marcello: Did you seem to have more general quarters drills perhaps as one gets closer and closer to December 7th?

Belotti: No, it didn't seem like it was any more to me, you know, than we'd been having. That weekend--that Friday morning--we wondered what was taking place, because the first thing you naturally looked at . . . we knew we had been in for two weeks, and we were due to go out. It was just a routine thing that you got into the habit of, and the first thing you looked for was what we called the morning orders. That sheet was passed around, and it naturally had everything broke down to the time and everything for you to make preparations for getting underway

at, say, 0600 or 0700 or whatever time that you were due to pull out.

But that morning--that Friday morning--nothing was said, and they talked about securing and everything and getting everything cleaned up and put away to get ready for inspection for Saturday morning. We thought, "What in the world is taking place?" Pretty soon somebody came down from topside and said, "Hey! Did you know the other half of the fleet's coming in?" We said, "No, you're mistaken!" "No, they're coming."

We were tied up alongside of Ford Island, and they started doubling us up, you see--tying up another ship alongside of us. Naturally, we said, "Yes, they're going to cut off what little air we got coming in the portholes, and it's going to make it that much more hotter."

Marcello: In other words, you were griping when you found out the Oklahoma would be tying up outboard of you.

Belotti: That's right. But that's one thing I've never been able to understand--what happened that weekend that they brought us all in. To the best of my recollection, they even gave weekend liberty, and they changed it to three-section liberty.

Marcello: Now, when they changed to three-section liberty, does that mean two sections go ashore and one stays aboard?

Belotti: Three sections could go on the beach, and one section would remain aboard.

Marcello: I see.

Belotti: One-fourth of the crew would remain aboard; they would have the duty. The rest--three-fourths--could go ashore if they wanted to.

Marcello: What sort of speculation did this cause among the crew when you found out that all the ships were going to be in or that you in effect would not be going out that Friday?

Belotti: We didn't really know what was taking place. We thought that things must be looking good, or they were getting better or something because they were giving us more liberty. Everybody was going in . . . everybody was coming in and tying up. Really, we didn't have too much time, you might say, to discuss it too much, because it all happened that following Sunday morning.

Marcello: I guess that you didn't gripe too much, though, because it meant that you wouldn't have to go out for two weeks.

Belotti: That's right. We were happy because that they gave us some more liberty time, I mean.

Marcello: Did you find that you were perhaps sailing more under darkened ship as one gets closer and closer to December 7th?

Belotti: Like I say, I never did really pay too much attention to it; but since you mentioned it, I believe we did. It seemed like we were getting tighter and tighter, and then all of a sudden on this weekend we did an about face. We didn't really know just what had happened.

Marcello: Did you seem to be getting any new or additional equipment aboard the Maryland?

Belotti: No, not to my knowledge, I mean, that I could tell. Like I say, we had been to Bremerton Navy Yard for an overhaul and everything just prior to going out there. We didn't seem to be getting anything . . . if they did, I didn't know anything about it.

Marcello: So as far as you were concerned, you could see very little change in the ship's routine right on down to December 7th.

Belotti: That's right.

Marcello: Let me ask this question. How closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs during that period just prior to the actual coming of hostilities?

Belotti: Really, not any, I don't suppose. Other than maybe somebody making some remark or something, I never bothered to hardly ever look at a newspaper or anything like that. I mean, if somebody mentioned something, that would be about the only thing. Then I didn't really realize that there was any chance of any attack, because I more-or-less felt like, as strong as we were and everything, why, I didn't expect anybody to really try to push us around too much. I guess, like I say, I was mistaken, but I really didn't think too much about what was happening.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person

crossed your mind during that period prior to the coming of war? Did you perhaps have a particular stereotype of the typical Japanese?

Belotti: No. When I would go on the beach there and run across or talk to some of them or meet up with some of them or something, why, I didn't really think too much different about them than I did a Hawaiian or any of the others, I mean, or anything. They were just a passing fancy, you might say. I talked to them. I never really had too much to say to them, either. Most of the time, with what little liberty we had and being single, why, three or four of us would tear off over to town, and naturally we'd head for a bar or someplace like that, you know, looking for a woman (chuckle). That was usually the number one thing. Like I say, I never had too much contact with them.

Marcello: You were talking about the liberty routine awhile ago, and you just brought up the subject of liberty one more time. What did you normally do when you went on liberty?

Belotti: Like I say, we was about like all the rest of them; I mean, there were certain spots downtown that everybody (chuckle) went by, you know. And then we would maybe go out on the beach there and swim some.

Marcello: Did you spend some time down on Hotel or Canal or Beretania Streets?

- Belotti: Oh, yes. Yes, we usually spent part of our time down there, There was certain places down there that there where there was a line probably about a block long (laughter),
- Marcello: In other words, there were lines to get in both the bars and the whorehouses?
- Belotti: Right (laughter). There sure was.
- Marcello: I guess as one gets closer and closer to December 7th, and as the build-up continued at an accelerated pace, downtown Honolulu was virtually wall-to-wall bodies?
- Belotti: Yes. If anything, I guess it seemed like to me that the natives and some of the Japanese and what-have-you . . . it seemed like it even got to the point where they were even friendlier and trying to be nicer to the servicemen instead of giving him a hard time. But I never had any problem with them--I mean in that respect--but as I say, it did seem like that as you got closer, they did try to be nicer. I don't know whether they were trying to cover up things or what. I suppose that we were just asleep.
- Marcello: I think this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, Mr. Belotti, and at this stage let's go into as much detail as you can remember concerning that weekend. Now, you mentioned that the Maryland had been in for two weeks and that it was not going to go out on that Friday.
- Belotti: That's right.
- Marcello: When did liberty commence for you? When did you have liberty



that weekend?

Belotti: Actually, I wound up with the duty that weekend. That was my weekend. Even though they gave three-section liberty, it just so happened that I had the duty. I didn't go on the beach; I didn't have liberty.

Marcello: What did you do aboard the ship that Saturday?

Belotti: Naturally, we cleaned everything and got everything ready and had inspection--captain's inspection--and everything, and it was just a regular routine day. It was no different. It seemed like . . . I believe we had a movie aboard ship that Saturday night. You just more-or-less took it easy. The only time you done anything is if maybe a drain stopped up or something, you know, that you had to do.

Otherwise, there was no routine work. You just relaxed and maybe played acey-deucey or cribbage or read a book or maybe scrubbed some clothes or whatever--things that you wanted to do for yourself--or maybe you had a little--what we called--a little project going, like maybe making you a knife out of a file or something like that. Maybe it was putting pieces of bakelite on and making a bakelite handle and different things. We used to get these little practice smoke bombs, and we'd make . . . they made real nice table lamps--small table lamps. You'd get somebody in the carpenter shop to turn you out a wood base for it, and you would go down and bum a little wire from the electrician

or what-have-you; or maybe you'd go over on the beach and buy a light socket, you know, to fit up on top of it where the bulb fit in or something like that. That's about all we did,

Marcello: Do you remember what you specifically did that Saturday night of December 6th?

Belotti: I don't remember for sure whether . . . , I believe I took in the movie, but I don't remember what it was,

Marcello: Do you remember anything eventful happening that Saturday night or was it rather routine?

Belotti: It was just routine. Like I say, there was more of them gone on liberty than usual. I didn't know anything about it. Naturally, I was a seaman first class striking for shipfitter third class. I heard some of them say that they were throwing a big party over on the beach for the officers that wanted to attend and what-have-you; they were going to have a big party over at the . . . I think . . . I believe, if I'm mistaken, it was at the Royal Hawaiian or somewhere over there. The Japs was putting on a big party for them over there.

Marcello: Did this cause many eyebrows to be raised, or was there any speculation about this?

Belotti: No. I didn't hear anybody speculate or anything about it, other than they said something about it being a big party. Everybody was naturally a little bit kind of uneasy or you might say dumb-founded or thinking what had happened all of a sudden that we

didn't go out. They were given overnight three-section liberty. It was a regular peacetime schedule, you know. It was hard for everyone to kind of understand just what was taking place.

Marcello: On a Saturday night, did you have very many drunks coming in?

Belotti: We had a few. Yes, some of the fellows came back that were kind of "loaded." Most of them just stayed over on the beach, because there was a lot of them that it was their first overnight liberty, and they just stayed over on the beach.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. Sunday was normally a day of leisure, was it not?

Belotti: That's right--a day of leisure. You could go to church regardless if you had duty or not. You could go to church. That's what I was doing that morning--that Sunday morning--when it happened. I was shining my shoes, getting ready. I was down in the shop there--shining my shoes there in the shop and getting ready to go over . . . they was having church services on the Oklahoma, and me and another fellow was getting ready to go to church. As the old saying goes, you know, "If that fellow goes to church, the church would fall in on him." Well, it almost happened to me that morning, because the Oklahoma took most of the blunt of the attack and capsized. That's what I was doing when this first happened.

Marcello: Okay, so you're down in your quarters shining your shoes and getting ready to go to church, Pick up the story at that point.

Belotti: Naturally, there was all these explosions and what-have-you. Somebody stuck their head up . . . I hadn't started up topside just yet, and one of the other fellows stuck his head up out of the hatch, and he said something about being bombed.

Marcello: Now, general quarters had not sounded or anything?

Belotti: It had not sounded at that time.

Marcello: All you had heard were some noises that sounded like explosions outside.

Belotti: And they said, "My goodness, everything is on fire!" About that time general quarters sounded.

Marcello: How did general quarters sound?

Belotti: A bugle. Then the boatswain's mate blew his whistle, and then they passed the word over the speakers to everybody. Naturally, I took off for my battle station which was on the third deck. Then after I got down to my battle station, we got our phones in our area. Then they said that we had been hit, but it was up forward. Naturally, that was not really an area for my battle station, but then they brought us on up topside to help fight the fire and what-have-you.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that the Maryland had been hit up forward. This was evidently when it had been hit by that 15-inch armor-piercing shell that was outfitted with fins. Could you feel the effects of that bomb hit?

Belotti: Everything happened so fast and all that I really didn't pay too

much attention to it. Naturally, things were shaking and jarring and everything, I mean, with everything going on; but I never really thought too much about it. I didn't even think that we were even hit until they passed the word and said that we had been hit.

Marcello: Could you feel any of the effects of the torpedoes that slammed into the Oklahoma?

Belotti: Nothing other than the jarring, and that's about all.

Marcello: I assume that this was not a big enough jar that it knocked you off your feet or anything of that sort.

Belotti: No, no. Where I was down there on the third deck . . . I mean, in other words, it never really shook us too much. Like I say, we were tied up against the pier and Ford Island, so we didn't really have too much place for it to shake you too much.

Marcello: Another bomb hit up on the forecastle. Do you remember that one hitting?

Belotti: Yes.

Marcello: Now, this must have occurred sometime later.

Belotti: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, so you're back at your battle station, and how long did you remain back there approximately before you were told to move?

Belotti: Well, it seemed like to me that it was . . . I would say probably around twenty or thirty minutes or something like that.

Marcello: And for the most part, you just stood there.

Belotti: Stood there listening to them. I had the earphones on listening to everybody trying to talk and what-have-you. It was quite a state of confusion and all this.

Marcello: What sort of thoughts were going through your mind?

Belotti: Really, I would say it was more-or-less a blank. I was more-or-less a blank at that time, because here I didn't really realize what was happening, because I hadn't had the opportunity to get up topside yet to see all the damage and what-have-you. Really, you might say that I just more-or-less sat there sort of in a daze, waiting for somebody to tell me something or say something. You could hear them talking about this was burning and that was burning and all that, you know; and this being bombed and that being hit. They said the Oklahoma was capsizing, and they were talking about the other ships, you know, and what-have-you.

I was more or less in the state of shock and dumbfounded, wondering what had happened. It came back to you as to why did we stay in this weekend, why did they give all this liberty and what-have-you. I mean, then here you turn around and get the hell knocked out of you. I didn't really realize that we were actually being hit as hard as we were until I had an opportunity . . . until they said for us to come up and help fight the fires.

I just couldn't believe what I saw when I stuck my head out

the hatch. It was just one big blazing flame on the water and all over, and you seen all these other ships, you know, burning and tore up. I looked over on Ford Island over there, and there ain't nothing . . . buildings burning and planes scattered all over. I just couldn't believe what had really actually happened.

Marcello: While you were down there at your battle station in the third deck, were you ever worrying about the fact that you were in the third deck and all this action was taking place above you?

Belotti: Really, it seemed like that . . . I felt like that I was more or less in the storm cellar and a storm was coming, and I just felt sort of safe-like being down there. I don't know why, but it just seemed like . . . well, I thought that I'm way down here about amidships, and if anything hits on that side, the Oklahoma is going to get it--if they're going to drop any "fish" or anything. The Oklahoma will catch it on that side, and the only thing for us . . . it would have to be something coming directly down from up above. When they said we were hit up forward, see . . . well, I thought, well, they hadn't bothered us. Like I say, I just felt kind of like being in the storm cellar during a storm. I just felt kind of safe in there.

Marcello: Were there any other people down there at that battle station with you?

Belotti: Yes, there was some of the others. We had, I think . . . there

was either . . . I think there was three or four others down there that morning, because we had more people than that assigned to that battle station. Like I say, being on liberty, why, that cut it short. It seemed like to me there was either three or four of us.

Marcello: What did you talk about?

Belotti: Just wondering what was happening and wondering how soon we get to go topside, you know. Naturally, everything happened about that quick, and it wasn't but about, I'd say, probably thirty minutes at the most before they just said for us to leave one person on the earphones, you know, have a person man the phones, and the rest of us were to come topside and help fight fires.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that you saw this blazing scene when you emerged from below decks. Did you get a chance to catch a glimpse of the Oklahoma?

Belotti: Yes, I did.

Marcello: That must have been a sickening sight.

Belotti: It was.

Marcello: What did it look like?

Belotti: It was hard to think that something that big could just roll over in the water, and you're looking at the bottom side, you know. I just couldn't quite picture how something like that could happen. Then I looked to the stern--back behind us--and



I see these others back there with just a mast sticking up, some of them laid over, some burning and everything . . . all blown up. Somebody hollered that the California had beached over there . . .

Marcello: The Nevada?

Belotti: The Nevada and everything, I mean. We was trying to get all the fire hoses we could and get the fires put out. After we got the fires put out and what-have-you, well, then they got us together and said we had to go to work on the Oklahoma.

Marcello: Well, now, in the meantime another bomb hit up on the forecastle of the Maryland. Do you remember that?

Belotti: Yes. Like I say, after we got all that squared away, I mean, the fires and everything put out, we really wasn't hurt all that bad.

Marcello: Well, let's go back, however, and talk about this second bomb hit up on the forecastle. Describe that incident. Do you remember it?

Belotti: Not too much because I was back on the fantail helping fight fire back there, and really I didn't see too much. Somebody hollered . . . I mean, planes were coming over and everything, and somebody hollered that one had hit up on the forecastle.

Marcello: But again, you were at the opposite end of the ship.

Belotti: I was at the opposite end, and we were fighting fire back there. They said there wasn't too much damage, and they had it under

control. We stayed back there fighting the fire, That oil was burning and coming right up next to the ship, and we was trying to . . .

Marcello: Were you using the water hoses to keep the fire away from the ship rather than actually fighting the fire on the ship itself?

Belotti: Yes. There wasn't actually any fire on the ship--on the fantail. It was the oil and stuff burning on the water, and we were, you know, keeping it pushed away from the ship and trying to keep it from catching the ship on fire.

Marcello: Did you observe the small boats that were put down by the Maryland to keep the oil and so on away? I understand that several of the motor launches were put over the side, and, of course, they used these small motor launches to keep the oil away from the ship.

Belotti: Like I say, I didn't get in on that or notice that too much. Like I say, we was busy with the hoses and stuff, and naturally you had other people who were assigned to the boat crews and what-have-you that were assigned to that duty. We didn't really have anything to do with that end of it.

Marcello: Now, while you were fighting those fires, the attack was still going on. Were you cognizant or aware of the attacking airplanes overhead?

Belotti: Yes. We were sitting ducks, and you might say we had nothing to shoot at them with and nothing to send back to them, because

all the aircraft was knocked out there on Ford Island, But everything happened so fast and everything, so really you didn't . . . you were scared, and yet we felt we had this job to do; I mean, you got to try to keep the fire back and what-have-you. But it was over within just a short period of time. By the time I got up there and started helping them fight the fire, like I say, most of the attack was over with.

Marcello: Did you come under any strafing while you were out there fighting those fires?

Belotti: No. There was some forward of us and some behind us, but where I was we didn't get any in there.

Marcello: Do you remember the Maryland's band playing during the lull between the two attacks? The records that I have researched indicate the Maryland's band was playing during the lull as a morale booster, I suppose. Do you remember that?

Belotti: Not really. I've heard that, and I've heard somebody talk about that. But I wondered about that when they said it. The band was also assigned to battle stations. So I don't know. Like I say, I don't really remember actually them playing. Now, they could have.

Marcello: Did you mention after you were finished fighting the fires that you then took part in the rescue efforts aboard the Oklahoma?

Belotti: Yes.

Marcello: Describe this.

Belotti: We went over on there, and we pecked along on the bottom.

Marcello: Was it hard climbing on the bottom of the Oklahoma?

Belotti: Yes, it was.

Marcello: It was slick and slimey and so on, wasn't it?

Belotti: Wet, slippery, and slimey and what-have-you.

Marcello: How did you get on board the Oklahoma? Did you simply jump over from your ship?

Belotti: We put a ladder over and went over on that. We took and run some lines over there--some air lines and air hoses and what-have-you--and got our air guns, and we got our cutting torches and what-have-you over there. The way it was laying, some parts of it was fairly flat, and we'd go along there tapping and listening to see if we would get an answer back.

Marcello: What would you use to tap with?

Belotti: We had a little metal object, you know, like a rod or something--kind of pecking along. Then when we would get a response, why, we would go to work on it. Actually, you couldn't burn all the way through with a torch because, if you did, you put fire inside where the men were, and you would put that smoke and stuff in there where the men were. So we had these air guns--air chisels--and we used those in cutting into that steel to cut a hole in there.

Marcello: Now, were you having to cut through double bottoms?

Belotti: Yes.

Marcello: How long would it take you to cut a hole big enough so that those men could escape?

Belotti: Gosh, it seemed like to me . . . the main thing . . . we first tried to get a hole big enough to get an air hose to them, you know, get some air in there. It seemed like to me it took us . . . it took us, I believe, somewhere around about six to eight hours to get a hole big enough to get them out.

Marcello: Now, are you cutting through armor plating?

Belotti: Yes, cutting through there. Naturally, you'd take the cutting torch and cut through part of it, but then, like I say, when you get down close, why, you knew about how much you could cut away. And then you would start with the air guns and air chisels and cut in there.

Marcello: How thick was that armor plating? You might have to estimate this, of course.

Belotti: Yes, and I don't remember now exactly. But it seemed like to me that it was . . . where we were cutting there. . . at one place I worked, I believe it was about somewhere around eight to ten inches or something like that. I believe that was what it was.

Marcello: What did those men look like when they came out of the Oklahoma?

Belotti: Well, naturally, they were very happy. I mean, you know . . . but they were dirty and filthy and what-have-you, but they were happy. I didn't really think that we would ever get any of

them out--that's truthfully. When we were working there trying to get the thing cut or get to them, we were kidding and what-have-you, just trying to, you might say, pacify one another, and we would say, "I don't think we will ever make it; I don't think we'll ever make it." But we just kept steady at it. I worked on it forty-eight hours and just knocked off long enough to go back aboard to get some chow and get some coffee and maybe wash a little bit and get another set of clothes on or something and come back. We were just more-or-less just kind of like a bunch of ants, you might say. Naturally, by that time, the fellows that were on the beach got back, I mean, shortly after it all happened. They got back, and we had more-or-less practically all our crew. I didn't hit the sack for forty-eight hours.

Marcello: I assume the harbor was a helluva mess in the aftermath of the attack.

Belotti: It was. It was just unbelievable. I just really couldn't realize or visualize that things as big as those ships were and everything . . . there ain't no little old airplanes that could come in there and never . . . naturally, like I say, being a country boy from up on the farm and what-have-you, I never did realize that they could tear those big things up like that and cause that much damage. But it was something to behold.

Naturally, if you looked over toward the Navy yard over

there, where the Pennsylvania and some of the others were in dry dock over there, and to see that stuff all tore up and everything . . . and like I say, to look at this big thing like the Oklahoma--it's the same size as we are--and you look over there, and you're looking at its bottom, and it's capsized and laid over . . . it's just hard to realize that something that big could sink or capsize.

Marcello: I guess the water was just one mass of oil?

Belotti: It was just a slick. Motor launches were coming and going, and they just kind of spread it out and opened it up, and then it would come right back and seal itself right back over again. It was a mess.

Marcello: Now, were you working on general clean-up and repair and so on in the ensuing weeks thereafter?

Belotti: We went to work and fixed up where we'd been hit. We patched it up and got everything in shape and what-have-you. They said that they were going to try to get us out of there, because we were about the only major ship was able to get underway. It just so happened that they started working with tugs and one thing or another with us and eased us on out.

Marcello: How did they get the Oklahoma away from you?

Belotti: Well, see, when it rolled over, it rolled over enough that it left a little space in there. It didn't have us really squeezed in; it wasn't right up against us. But, like I say, they got

some tugs, and after we got our damage patched up and everything, why, they got some tugs, and they worked the bow over just a little bit on the Oklahoma; but then they just kept easing us up until we finally eased on out of there. I wondered about that same thing myself after looking at the Oklahoma and wondering if the water was deep enough for us to continue on up alongside Ford Island to get out from there. I believe the California was tied up just ahead of us--I believe that was it--and if they had not have tried to move or get underway and beached, well, then they would have had us hemmed in sure enough, then.

Marcello: That was the Nevada, right?

Belotti: Right. They tried to get underway, and then they got hit. Naturally, they had to beach it, but they moved it far enough forward, when they got underway, that they gave us an opening to get out from there. Otherwise, they would have had us bottled in there, too, until they would have got one of them out.

Marcello: What sort of rumors were floating around in the aftermath of the attack? I'm sure that the ship must have been one big rumor mill.

Belotti: Well, you heard so many different stories that you didn't know what really to believe.

Marcello: What were some of the stories you heard?

Belotti: That there was . . . somebody would say that there was so many men killed . . . and some would say that there was so many killed,



and some would say, "No, there wasn't that many."

Marcello: Did you hear the rumor that the Japanese had made a landing?

Belotti: Yes, we had heard that.

Marcello: Did you believe it?

Belotti: Well, we thought it was very possible. Somebody would come back with the story that you could go out there and look in the canefields and what-have-you, and you could see all these arrows out in the canefields. Naturally, I never did get the opportunity to go over there, but stories like that . . . just different things that they claimed . . . that Japanese on the beach had pointed out different things. They said that they had pictures of all the ships--just exactly where they were tied up and everything and all this. It was hard to believe, but some of the rumors were true; I mean, that . . . but that was the only thing . . . that's where they made their only mistake, was that they did not bring a landing force with them.

Marcello: I guess there were a lot of trigger-happy servicemen around that night?

Belotti: Yes, yes. One of the aircraft carriers . . . some of their planes were coming in. We were over on the Oklahoma working, and, man, all of a sudden, they heard these planes. Somebody said, "Well, they're coming back!" Well, by that time, naturally, we got the guns ready and everything.

Marcello: What did you do over on the Oklahoma? Did you head for cover?

Belotti: I laid flat. We just laid flat on the deck where we were working. We just cut off everything and just laid flat. We didn't have time to crawl back aboard and get back over on the Maryland. Somebody just said, "Lay flat!" We put out everything--the lights and everything that we had--and just darkened everything. Man, you could see them tracers and what-have-you! Then somebody said that they were our planes and not enemy planes, and so after they got that . . . it took them about thirty minutes, I think, to get everybody convinced to the fact they were our planes and not enemy planes. So then we went back to work then.

Like I say, then later on in the night, somebody else thought they'd heard something and they cut loose; I mean, there was some trigger-happy fellows around.

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

Belotti: To me it seemed like it was actually there for a while . . . naturally, everybody was sort of dumbfounded, you know, kind of dazed. Like I say, after it was all over and we got settled back down and everything, why, to me it seemed like everybody was just real high. They were ready to go with whatever we could get . . . and get our hands on. If they could get something to fight with, why, "Let's get it and get on back and get at them!"

Marcello: Was the attitude one more of anger?

Belotti: I would say it would probably be more of anger than anything. A lot of it was wondering why--you might say--the officials or the heads, the admirals and what-have-you--the heads of the government or one thing or another and your senior officers that we had in charge and everything--why could such a thing happen to us. I mean, it was just unbelievable that we just let somebody come in and kick us around like that. Like I say, it was more like mad or angered, but yet wondering what did happen that things turned out the way they did and that we let them come in and knock the fire out of us.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Belotti, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that the scholars will find your comments quite valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.

Belotti: I certainly thank you, and I enjoyed it, and I hope that it will be of some good to someone down the line. Maybe it will keep things alert and never let it happen to us again.