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Interview with
Joseph Bolen
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Joseph Bolen

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Date: October 11, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Joseph Bolen for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 11, 1976, in Denton, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Bolen in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS California during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Bolen, 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 that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Bolen: Well, I was born on November 23, 1920, in Jackson, Alabama. I grew up and went through high school. I finished high school there and went to the Navy. During my time in the Navy, they sent me out, then, to Texas Christian University and the University of Texas.

Dr. Marcello: When did you join the Navy?

Mr. Bolen: In August of 1940.

Marcello: Why did you join the Navy?

Bolen: Well, at this particular time, the world situation being what it was, and the different people that I talked to, it was apparent at that time that sooner or later we were going to be into that war. I had several of my bandmasters that had talked with me and had recommended that I try to get into the Navy School of Music. And so looking at the situation, and if I was going to have to get in there, I might as well get into something I wanted to.

Marcello: You mentioned that the Navy was recommended to you by certain bandmasters. I assume that you had an interest in music and so on at that particular time.

Bolen: Oh, yes. I had been studying music ever since I was six years old. It was a big part of my life.

Marcello: What sort of music were you proficient in or interested in?

Bolen: Well, of course, we played . . . my studies, of course, were in classics. Of course, all of us that had that kind of interest were interested in playing with dance bands and popular music, also.

Marcello: What sort of musical instrument did you play?

Bolen: I was majored in French horn, with a minor in trumpet and banjo.

Marcello: How much time did you spend at T.C.U. and at the University of Texas?

- Bolen: I came to T.C.U. and passed the examination and came back into the Navy's V-12 program at T.C.U. in May of 1943. I finished one year at T.C.U., and on re-examination and so forth, they decided that I should go into the Navy ROTC in engineering, and I transferred then to the University of Texas in March of 1944. Then I stayed there until November of 1944.
- Marcello: So all of your experiences at T.C.U. and the University of Texas, then, occurred after Pearl Harbor?
- Bolen: After Pearl Harbor, yes.
- Marcello: Okay, where did you take your boot camp when you entered the Navy in 1940?
- Boldn: Well, musicians don't take boot camp, thank goodness (chuckle). Musicians are handled different.

Let me explain it to you as best I can. You apply to the Navy School of Music, and you have to have recommendations from your bandmasters, from your high school principal, and all of this. This is all sent to Washington. Then at that point, if they think you're what they're looking for, then they send you orders back. In my case, I went to Mobile to pass a physical examination. Then I came back home. That was sent back to Washington, and then they sent back in orders and transportation and all of that. Then I went to Birmingham and took another physical examination plus a written examination that the regular Navy people have to take. Then upon

passing that, they sent me to Washington, D.C., down to the Navy School of Music, and I had to then take a musical examination on my horn and written examination. Then when I passed that, they sent me up to the Navy Recruiting Station in Washington, D.C.

At that point, I was sworn into the Navy. Then they send all of the musicians down to Norfolk for three weeks --strictly to get your shots. So you go down, and you spend three weeks, and then you come back to the Navy School of Music. So you really say that musicians doesn't really have boot camp.

Marcello: How long did this process take, that is, from the time that you went to the recruiting office until you finally got back to the Navy School of Music again?

Bolen: Oh, the first things were sent in in applying for the Navy School of Music around June of 1940. And all of this process took from then until. . . I was sworn in the Navy. . . I believe it was on August 11.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were keeping more or less abreast with world affairs at that particular time in that so far as you were concerned, it did look as though the country were going to get into war. Were your eyes turned primarily toward Europe or toward Asia or toward both places?

Bolen: Well, at that particular time, it was Europe. I don't think anybody had any thoughts of anything in the Pacific.

Marcello: So describe the process by which you eventually ended up aboard the battleship USS California.

Bolen: Well, of course, I went into the Navy School of Music, and this is supposed to be an eighteen-month school. But in the process of recruiting musicians across the United States, they, of course, get musicians in the school who are far advanced than, say, somebody who still needs some more studies. I luckily fell into that category.

So shortly after I got into the Navy School of Music, one of the boys got sick who was with the Navy Band at the World's Fair in New York. And they needed a replacement on the French horn for him, so I was sent up to the World's Fair. The Navy School of Music furnished the band at the World's Fair. Then I went up there for a tour of duty.

Of course, then, the fair closed, and I came back to music school, and then you'd have all of your musical courses. You're required to practice at least two hours a day plus all of your various music courses and classes that you'd have to attend.

And then, also, the Navy School of Music furnishes a band for all funerals and cemeteries. And, of course, I was assigned to what we called the "Cemetery Band".

Marcello: Now is this the Arlington National Cemetery?

Bolen: Arlington National Cemetery. Most of the time, you had several funerals a week that you'd have to attend.

Along with that and the Navy School of Music then, in January or February of 1941, these bands were being put together to be shipped out of there. Band Twenty was short of people. It didn't have enough in music school to fill it out with people that had had the eighteen months in there. And there were three of us that had come into the Navy at the same time that they needed to fill those slots. In fact, one of them's brother was assigned to that band already. So we three volunteered because we saw that we wasn't going to learn anything more for us to learn there, so we might as well get out of there. We volunteered then and were lucky enough to be assigned to Band Twenty, which left Washington in March of 1941 and was transferred across the country and on out to the Pacific Fleet and assigned to the California.

Marcello: Where did you pick up the California?

Bolen: In Pearl. We went from San Diego to Pearl. They had a new aircraft tender, the USS Curtiss. It was on its way to the Pacific Fleet, so they put us aboard the Curtiss for transportation to Pearl.

Marcello: Just for my own knowledge--and this will show my ignorance on the subject--let's talk a little bit more about the Navy School of Music and so on. I assume there is such a thing as the United States Navy Band.

Bolen: That's right.

Marcello: And I assume that's the best.

Bolen: That is what we call "The Big Band." Now the big band is comprised. . . they strictly. . . all they do. . . their function is to play for official functions in Washington, of course, and make tours of the country. Most of the musicians in that band are old-timers, all chiefs, who have been in the Navy or are far advanced. Occasionally, you will get somebody into the School of Music that is far enough advanced and can qualify and play with "The Big Band."

Marcello: But, in other words, to get into "The Big Band," you have to have talent, plus time in the Navy?

Bolen: Right. And I mean. . . when I say talent, it's extraordinary talent that you wouldn't find out of your everyday musicians.

Marcello: Okay, now ascending from the United States Navy Band would be these other Navy bands. Was there more prestige in being with a band aboard battleship, let's say, than some other craft? Of course, I assume destroyers and so on wouldn't have a band.

Bolen: Well, of course, the only ships that had bands assigned to them would be your battleships, your carriers, and some of your heavy cruisers. And, of course, various bands would be stationed at Naval bases around the country.

Well, I don't know that there's any more prestige. I think personally maybe we felt like it because we were the

admiral's men for Battle Division Four. As a consequence, wherever the admiral went, that's where we went. We really were on the California, but we were only there because that was Admiral Pye's flagship.

Marcello: Okay, so you picked up the California in Hawaii. What did you think about the idea of having duty in the Hawaiian Islands?

Bolen: I loved it.

Marcello: Why was that?

Bolen: Well, for one thing the climate was more like, I'd say, like where I was raised. You didn't have all of the cold and ice and everything, which I hated while I was in Washington, D. C. I'm just a warm-blooded person. I don't like the snow and ice.

Marcello: Now as a musician aboard the California, did you have to perform any other functions aboard that ship?

Bolen: None other than battle stations. In those situations, then, everybody, of course, has an assigned duty. When you're in a battle, there's not much use for a musician blowing a horn. The musicians on the California were assigned to different or various repair parties to handle communications and first aid.

Marcello: I know a lot of them were used as ammunition handlers, too, were they not?

Bolen: Yes, and in some cases, it would vary from ship-to-ship. And in our particular instance on the California, we were communications

and first aid men, except one musician. We had one musician that insisted he wanted to be an ammunition handler. In fact, he worked on the three-inch gun.

Marcello: Where was your particular battle station aboard the California?

Bolen: I was with the repair party down on the third deck at the shipfitter's shop.

Marcello: What did you do during a routine day while you were aboard the California? In other words, obviously, you weren't practicing with the band all day. What sort of a routine did you generally fall into aboard the California?

Bolen: Well, usually, our routine would be. . . well, it depends on whether you were in port or at sea. It would vary according to whether or not you were at sea. After breakfast, and as soon as the mess hall on the main deck was cleaned up, usually we would practice in the morning as long as the bandmaster thought we ought to practice and rehearse. If we knew when we got back in that we had a certain dance to play for, a church, or one thing another, we would rehearse on what we were going to play for that. Then it was the same thing in the afternoon. It was really up to the bandmaster whether or not if he wanted to call rehearsal. If he didn't want to call rehearsal, then we'd go back into our compartment and maybe study music, practice on our own, or read. This was pretty much our routine at sea.

Marcello: I gather, then, that you more or less had your own little world aboard the California.

Bolen: This is right. We had our own little world with all twenty musicians--all in one little, small space.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what sort of practice facilities and what-have-you that you had aboard the California?

Bolen: Well, it's kind of . . . if you wanted to do some practicing on your own, you'd try to find you someplace on the ship that you could get off and away from everybody and not disturb anybody. Of course, the acoustics were not the best in the world. In fact, there were several of us that used to go down below decks to the aft end of the ship in a compartment back there. All there was back there was the shaft to the screws. It was running through that compartment. That's about all there was in there. You certainly weren't bothered down there.

But you were asking about a daily routine. Now our routine in port is different. You were anchored; you were tied up in port. Then in the morning, you have exercise. The crew would . . . and sometimes, you would do this at sea, if it was in calm seas. You have people with the exercise routine that's leading that. We'd split the band up, and half would go forward and half on the quarter-deck, and we would play music for them to do the exercises by.

Marcello: What sort of comments and so on did you get about that?

Bolen: Well, they didn't particularly care for it (chuckle). And then we may rehearse in port, and maybe not. Every morning, we had colors to play, which you don't have at sea. And then if the chiefs had a dance or wanted to be somewhere, we'd play for the chiefs' dance; if the officers were having a dance, we'd play for their dances; if the admiral had a social function, we'd have a small group that would set up and play for that. Then, of course, they had movies every night on the quarter-deck when you're in port. Well, a certain amount of the musicians--the least we could get by with . . . would have to play at a concert before the movie.

Marcello: So in other words, there were a lot of functions that took place when you were in port whereby you as a musician were kept fairly busy.

Bolen: That's right. We had more leisure time at sea than we did in port.

Marcello: Before we leave this routine, there's something else that I want to talk about here. There was a great deal of inter-ship competition among the bands, was there not?

Bolen: Yes.

Marcello: You might describe this because I think it plays a kind of important role when we get up to the day immediately prior

to the attack--a "Battle of the Bands" and so on.

Bolen: It was in the fall before the Pearl Harbor attack. Somebody got the idea of having what they referred to as the "Battle of the Bands" over at the Recreation Center there in Pearl Harbor. The Navy just had a big recreation center there, where they held fights, which was another rivalry between ship--boxing matches. Then they had this "Battle of the Bands." It was more or less an elimination contest. You would play and another band would play, and then the winner of that was selected, and it worked on down in eliminations.

Marcello: How would the winner be determined?

Bolen: The winner would be determined by the applause from the people who attended these concerts. And they were pretty full concerts. Primarily, the concerts were based not on classical music, but on what we called the "dance bands." This was the contest that was going on. In fact, I was trying to remember when . . . I can't remember when the contest really wound up, but it was shortly before Pearl that the contest wound up.

Marcello: This was the Big Band Era, so I think it's probably logical that the emphasis would have been on the dance band and so on.

Bolen: It was. The emphasis was more on the dance band. Actually, aboard ship we played very little classical music. I guess

the nearest thing, you might say, to classical music we played was for the church services.

Marcello: Did you detect that the ship's captain took a great deal of pride in the quality of the band aboard the California? In other words, did he encourage the band in most ways possible in terms of seeing that you did have facilities for practice, times for practice, and things of that nature?

Bolen: Well, I can't credit that to the captain. I can credit our executive officer. See, the band, we came under the "exec." This was one of his assigned duties, and we had an executive officer that was very much interested in the band and did everything that he possibly could to help us improve. Anything that we requested in the way of music or anything, we pretty much got what we wanted. Commander Stone was real sharp on this band, and Admiral Pye was, also.

Marcello: I think the band, sports, inspections, and so on and so forth were all part of this inter-ship competition and rivalry that existed at this time.

Bolen: Very much so. There was a big competition. I know, within the Battle Division Four, which we were in, there was quite a bit of competition. It carried through, like you say, from the boxing . . . whether we were out at sea on maneuvers, if we were out firing, all of this entered into the competition.

Marcello: And there was some sort of a trophy that the top ship received as a result of winning that inter-ship competition, was there not?

Bolen: Well, of course, it varied from whether it was a boxing match or the band or on your firing. All of them had an award of some kind.

Marcello: Did you fly a particular pennant or something if you were a winner?

Bolen: That's right. As far as the efficiency of the ship as a whole, you had pennants on battleships, your guns, your main batteries. Which in our case, we had four fourteen-inch batteries. They are rated as to how they hit the targets, what the closeness is . . . and I don't know just the details, but if they are a real sharp bunch, there will be competition between those four gun turrets on the same ship. And if they do score a certain number of points, then that gun turret gets a big "E" painted on that gun turret. And that "E" stays on that gun turret until the next competition.

Marcello: What did that big "E" stand for?

Bolen: Efficiency or expert. I don't know which one they called it.

Marcello: I think I've heard efficiency used for it.

Bolen: Efficiency or expert--either one--was the way that they rated these guns.

Marcello: What was the morale like aboard the California during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? I'm referring now to the ship in general.

Bolen: Oh, I think the morale was great.

Marcello: To what do you attribute the high morale? I think you probably hit on one of the things--inter-ship competition.

Bolen: Well, it was inter-ship competition. We felt. . . everybody . . . and I think this carried throughout the ship from your deck hands to the top. This competition was it, plus the fact that I think generally you had a feeling that we were going to be fighting somebody. And you wanted to be ready when it happened.

Marcello: Now at this time, I assume that everybody aboard the California was a volunteer.

Bolen: Yes.

Marcello: Which also might have had something to do with the high morale.

Bolen: I feel like it did. We were there because we chose to be there. I definitely think that makes the difference.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the California during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Bolen: Well, it wasn't like Mama's cooking, but I'd say that the food was excellent. I personally always felt like that on the California we had the best cooks and bakers in the Navy. I always thought the food was good. I didn't have many

objections to it. I didn't like beans and cornbread for breakfast, but. . .

Marcello: How often would you have beans and cornbread?

Bolen: Wednesdays and Saturday mornings.

Marcello: You remember that quite well.

Bolen: Very well, I remember that!

Marcello: How about your living quarters? What were they like aboard the California?

Bolen: Well, our living quarters were around the number two gun turret on the main deck. An area around this turret was assigned to the band, and I'd say we had as much or more room than the other divisions. At the time, we had actually more men on board than the complement called for because there were not as much ships training people; and as a consequence, on the main deck, in the area where they set up mess tables, we had a lot of people aboard the ship who were sleeping in hammocks. They'd have to swing their hammocks at night after the last chow and everything was cleaned up. Then this was their sleeping quarters in hammocks in this area.

Marcello: But I assume that your particular section had bunks.

Bolen: Yes, sir! Sure did! Nice, warm bunks!

Marcello: Well, you know, I think you've just mentioned a lot of things that would have contributed to that high morale aboard the California. We're talking about volunteers. The food in your

opinion was excellent. The living quarters were pretty good, comparatively speaking. And there was this inter-ship competition. I think all of these things played a part in making for a high morale.

Bolen: I think it all had a lot to do with it.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk just a little bit more about the training exercises in which the California engaged during the pre-Pearl Harbor period. Describe what a routine training exercise would be like. In other words, when did the California go out, how long did it stay out, what did it do when it was out there, and when did it come back?

Bolen: Well, of course, we had certain training exercises, I assume that the orders came out of Washington for them. Then they were passed on to the admirals and down through the various ship captains. Then, of course, in a battle division, you've got so many battleships, so many cruisers, carriers, destroyers, destroyer escorts, and supply ships.

I've never paid a whole lot of attention with what frequency they were, but anytime that we were at sea on routine patrol, you might say, you were subject anytime. I mean, they might call certain conditions of battle readiness on a ship. Look-outs were posted twenty-four hours a day. Normally, at sea you were on a routine of eight hours on and sixteen hours off, unless, of course, there was a readiness situation. Then you would go

eight hours on and eight hours off. All of these routines we went through. Of course, on a general quarters situation, which was a battle station, you were there until it was called off.

And you'd go through all of these exercises of . . . you never knew. You'd be in a normal day's routine, and the word is passed that they're going into condition red. Well, everybody's got a certain thing to do. You drop what you're doing, and you're on your way to your station for that particular maneuver. These things went on all of the time. At night it was completely darkened ship. We were sailing at night under darkened ship.

Marcello: Now normally, how long would one of these training exercises last? I'm speaking now in terms of days, weeks, or whatever.

Bolen: Well, of course, I don't think that I ever thought of them in terms of how many days of this or how many of that or that I can even remember. They came, we did them, and we went on to something else. I don't really remember anything of any particular days. When we went to sea, sooner or later we were going to go through these conditions and practice.

Marcello: Did you have a particular day when you went out and a particular day when you came back, or did this vary, also?

Bolen: This could vary. The captain and admiral might have known, but we didn't.

Marcello: In other words, you weren't sure of being in port every weekend or something of this nature?

Bolen: Oh, no, we sure weren't. When we went out, we never knew when we'd be back. Of course, it was always scuttlebutt about, you know, when we were and when we weren't.

Marcello: When you went on these training exercises, was there very much emphasis given to antiaircraft practice?

Bolen: Well, we didn't have any antiaircraft guns (chuckle). We had some three-inch guns. Yes, we did some . . . they did some antiaircraft shooting at a plane towing a target. We would launch one of our planes. Or if we were close enough into some islands where they had a plane that could tow a target, then your three-inch. . . ours were three-inch guns, hand-loaded. They would go through those firing exercises.

Marcello: Well, I asked this question for a particular reason. What I was trying to establish is that there wasn't very much emphasis placed upon antiaircraft practice at that time, which seems to indicate that nobody really knew just how important airplanes were going to be in a future war.

Bolen: This, I feel like, is true. We certainly didn't think of it from that standpoint. I don't think the government did. We only had two carriers in the whole Pacific and none were being built, so I don't think anybody thought that might be the case at that time.

Marcello: In other words, that California had a halluva lot more anti-aircraft weapons on it after Pearl Harbor than it did before Pearl Harbor.

Bolen: I'm sure it did. I never did see it, other than seeing in pictures of how it was armed after Pearl. Believe me, it did have a lot more antiaircraft armament on one.

Marcello: In that sense, I guess the Japanese did teach us a very valuable, but expensive, lesson at Pearl Harbor.

Bolen: I think so. I think there were some people that were beginning to think along those lines because we did have one battleship that they had put 20-millimeter antiaircraft guns on. But it was the first one. And radar was also at this time. . . radar was something that was not being used like it was later on.

Marcello: Did the California have radar installed in this period before Pearl Harbor?

Bolen: I don't think we did.

Marcello: I was under the impression that there weren't too many ships that did have it. I think they were in the process of installing it on a lot of ships.

Bolen: My recollection is that we didn't. The Maryland had been equipped with the radar, and they also had been equipped with 20-millimeter antiaircraft batteries. But as I remember, that was the only battleship that we had at that time--that I'm aware of--that had radar.

The California was back in the States for some refitting and painting of the bottom. We scraped and painted the bottom at Mare Island in October of 1941. But whether or not they put a radar on it at that time, I don't really know, because I left the ship while it was in dry dock at Mare Island and went home on emergency leave and then came back to the ship in Long Beach. So I don't know that at that time I was paying too much attention to whether it had radar or not.

Marcello: I have one last question concerning the training routine. In general, would it be your opinion that most of the crew felt that they were about as well-trained as what they ever could be and that they were ready for any enemy, whomever it might be?

Bolen: Yes, I think so. I think the proof of that is the fact that . . . and I'll speak for the California, which I'm more familiar with. I think that very much attributes to the fact that we only lost somewhere around 300 men off of the California, even with the extensive damage that we had. I think that that's proof that they were well-trained.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about another subject--your liberty routine. How did it work when you were in Pearl?

Bolen: Well, musicians' liberty was a little. . . let's say it was different. In fact, it had to be different than the rest of the crew. Our liberty situations depended on what social functions

lined up by the admiral or the captain or the chiefs or anybody that was qualified to have the use of the band. Ours would depend on what their plans were, and then our liberties were accordingly. If we had nothing to play for, then the only requirement was that there had to be enough musicians aboard in the morning and in the afternoon for colors. In other words, you could be aboard to play colors in the morning, go on liberty all day, and then be back in time for colors that afternoon. Then you could go back on liberty. But musicians had a lot of advantages.

Marcello: I know as one gets closer and closer to Pearl, if one did have liberty, normally he had to be back aboard ship at midnight. Was this routine aboard the California?

Bolen: Right. This was the routine, that liberty expired at midnight unless you had a special pass. And I was fortunate enough to get those when we were in port. I had a cousin of mine that lived. . . in fact, he was in the Navy over at the hospital, and he had his family out there. So when we came in, I always managed to get me a pass and stay overnight.

Marcello: I think this is basically the reason why liberty expired at midnight. It was a case of there not being enough room ashore for all of those sailors.

Bolen: This is very true.

Marcello: They don't want these guys sleeping in the parks and on the beaches and things of that nature.

- Bolen: That's right. This is very true. In downtown Honolulu, of course, in a very small space, you had a tremendous amount of Navy, and the Army had quite a few bases in there. It was a job to clear the streets for the Shore Patrol and the MP's
- Marcello: In other words, on the weekend, when the fleet was in, there were wall-to-wall bodies in downtown Honolulu.
- Bolen: I'll guarantee you that there was wall-to-wall soldiers and sailors.
- Marcello: This is kind of a personal question, but I'll ask it anyhow. Did you spend much time on Hotel Street and River Street and Water Street or in this particular area?
- Bolen: Oh, I know all about Hotel Street and River Street and Water Street. I'm very familiar with a lot of those places down there. And after the war started, there was a certain part of my work that occasioned me to be down there.
- Marcello: Did the liberty routine change any as conditions between the United States and Japan were obviously deteriorating, that is, as one gets closer and closer to December 7, did the liberty routine change any?
- Bolen: No, I do not recall that there was any change in the thing. It was the same routine. In fact, with us, we had been out on patrol, and scuttlebutt was that the admiral had decided that rather than to stay another. . . if we stayed out a couple of more weeks, we had the fuel and supplies to do . . .

if we stayed out a couple of more weeks, then we would come back in to resupply and refuel, then we would have been at sea on Christmas. And so he chose to come into port for just a short rest period, you might say, and refuel and resupply, go back to sea, and then be back in port for Christmas. This was the scuttlebutt. . . was the reason. . . because it was unexpected as far as the ship's crew. It was unexpected for us to come back into port like we did because we had expected to be at sea quite a bit longer than we actually were. See, actually, we came back into port on the morning of December 6.

Marcello: Okay, we'll talk about that routine in just a minute, but I have one more general question concerning liberty and so on. I think it's an important question, and I want you to be careful how you answer it. Most people assert that if an enemy were going to attack the Naval installation at Pearl Harbor, the best time to have done so would have been on a Sunday morning. The reason for this assertion is that many people assume that Saturday nights were a time for drunken debaucheries and brawling and so on and that the fleet wouldn't be ready to fight on a Sunday morning. How would you answer that particular assertion?

Bolen: Well, I don't believe it. I mean, sure, a man--I don't care whether you're a sailor or a salesman on a convention or what--has been hemmed in on a ship, and he's going to go ashore,

and he's going to let his hair down. If he drinks, he's going to drink. When you get that many people together--I don't care whether it's sailors or you name it--yes, you're going to have a certain percentage of them that are going to go through this routine, and they're going to get drunk, and they're going to pass out. But those things are handled. You've got plenty of Shore Patrol and MP's. They had a place in downtown Honolulu, and they hauled you off to a jail just like anybody else over there. They'd take the paddy wagons, and they'd haul you back to the fleet landing. They'd put you in a boat, and you were hauled back aboard ship, and you suffered the consequences according to what you've been charged with. But as a whole, no, I don't believe it.

Marcello: Well, this is the opinion of just about everybody that I've interviewed, but, nevertheless, I did want to get your particular opinions on the record. I think it's probably more accurate to say, is it not, that Sunday was a good time mainly because it was a day of leisure.

Bolen: This is right. You have a Sunday routine, which at that time you have a minimum--the very bare minimum--of men assigned to certain duties which are necessary for the ship to function. It's just like a city government. It would be the same thing. In other words, to me a battleship is a city within itself, and it would operate the same way. So on a Sunday morning, if you had emergency right here in Denton, the city is operating

with a bare minimum to keep everything going. The same thing would apply aboard a ship.

Marcello: And at the same time, on a Sunday one could stay in bed usually as long as he wanted. Wasn't that the case if you didn't have duty?

Bolen: Well, in some cases. Of course, you've got certain areas on the ship where you've got to be up and out of the way. But as a whole, a man could sleep in if his particular division didn't have duty or anything. In other words, on a Sunday routine. . . on the day's orders, you might have a routine where ordinarily you'd see that bunks should be up at five o'clock. You could have a Sunday routine where bunks don't have to be up until seven or eight o'clock. And in the Navy, this is sleeping in.

Marcello: I have a few more general questions yet before we get to the actual attack. When you thought of a typical Japanese in those pre-Pearl Harbor days, what sort of a person or individual did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Bolen: Oh, he's a cane cutter or pineapple picker. Now this is usually as a whole. Of course, the Island of Oahu, and in particular Honolulu, had a high concentration of Japanese. The Japanese had been imported in there by the sugar companies and the pineapple companies as laborers in the cane fields and in the pineapple fields. And, of course, you had the professionals, which they had a lot of businesses there.

I'd say that probably the Japanese owned and operated more businesses in Honolulu than Hawaiians did.

Marcello: Was there ever very much scuttlebutt about these Japanese being a potential source of fifth columnist activity in case war did break out between the two countries?

Bolen: Never. As far as the average run-of-the-mill sailor, I don't think it had ever crossed our minds.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any of the old salts talk about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy? I would assume that on a ship as large as the California that some of the crew had served over in the Asiatic Fleet at one time or another and may have had some sort of contact with the Japanese.

Bolen: Well, actually, no. I only knew one person that I can recall that had any experience--I guess if you'd call it that--and he had been aboard the Panay, which the Japanese had sunk in the Yangtze, I think, back in 1935, somewhere along back in there. He was the only person that I ever knew. . . and actually, other than the fact that he hated them, he had no personal contact with them. Of course, the way they were isolated, we never saw any Japanese ships other than the merchant ships that would come into Honolulu, and we didn't pay a lot of attention to those. (tape turned off)

Marcello: Mr. Bolen, before we get to the attack itself, there are just a couple of loose ends that I want you to clear up. First of all, let's get back to that "Battle of the Bands" once

again that you were talking about earlier. You mentioned that the winner of that contest would be determined by the amount of applause. Just exactly how does this work? In other words, did each ship try and stack the audience with some crew members?

Bolen: Absolutely! They'd post it on the daily orders that our band was playing, and the orders of the day was that everybody that was on liberty would be at the Recreation Center at such-and-such an hour. And, of course, the crew had a big interest in it. I don't know. . . I feel like. . . from knowing different crew members on the ship, we felt like we had the best band in the fleet, and we had very good backing as far as our crew was concerned. And the other ships did, too. This was a new Recreation Center that was not too old, and they pretty well filled this thing up. Of course, you have to remember that you've got sailors drawing twenty-one dollars a month, and in a high-priced town like Honolulu, twenty-one dollars a month don't go very far. And if he's interested in going to the Recreation Center, I think beer was a nickel or a dime. And there were a lot of activities. We had baseball fields over there, and the baseball competition between the ships and things. So it was a place where a man, you might say, could live within his means.

Marcello: I think you just brought up another point that we need to talk about very briefly--payday. When was payday aboard the California?

Bolen: Payday was the fifth and twentieth.

Marcello: Which meant that at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, the crew members might have had about as much money as they were ever going to have on payday.

Bolen: This is right because we were paid on the fifth. And, of course, at sea all you've got to spend your money for is that stuff at the "geedunk" stand for ice cream, shaving gear, and stuff like this. This is all you'd have to spend your money on.

Marcello: I have another general question. I'm asking this one because I've never interviewed a person before who was a member of a ship's band. How tough was it to get a promotion during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Bolen: It was very tough. Of course, with musicians you get a complement of so many musicians aboard ship, and you had to spend so many months in grade, and then you had to take a competitive examination, musical examination. Just like for any other rates in the Navy, it was competitive. After you had spent so much time in grade, and if the band master, which usually was a chief. . . once in awhile you'd have a first class who was bandmaster. And if he recommended you for this exam, then you took these competitive exams, and they were all sent back to Washington to be graded. And then you waited on the promotion list from then on. I mean, this was true throughout the Navy, regardless of whether it was a

musician, a seaman, machinist, pharmacist's mate, whatever you were. It was on a very highly competitive situation because there was very few advancement rates and a lot of people trying to get them.

Marcello: And as we were talking in our conversation off of the tape, there really weren't that many people in the Navy at that time.

Bolen: No, there weren't. At the time I was down in Norfolk, I remember this chief's words, I've never looked it up to verify it, but he had one remark to make to the boots down there--that there was one thing that they should remember. This was to not do anything that would make people frown on the Navy, and that was that when they went out as a civilian, they were one in seventy-five or eighty million. But now that they were in the Navy, they were one in 125,000. So they stood out, particularly since they were wearing a different set of clothes than everybody else. This was one of his points that he always made to the recruits down there--that you're just one in 125,000 here.

Marcello: Now was the band aboard the California a young man's band?

Bolen: Yes, sir. We didn't have. . . I guess the oldest man in that band was at that time about twenty-one or twenty-two years old. Ray Carroll was probably the oldest member of that band. His youngest brother Bob and I were the same age, and we were nineteen.

Marcello: Okay, I think this completes all of the miscellaneous or general questions that I have. I think we're about ready to talk about the actual attack itself. So what I want you to do at this point is to describe to me in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941, from the time you got up until the time you went to bed that night. Let's start with the sixth, and then we'll talk about December 7th.

Bolen: On Saturday, December 6th, we were at sea and had been at sea for sometime. I don't recall how long. And the word was passed that we would be going back into Pearl for refueling and supplies for just a short period. And then we would go back to sea on patrol until sometime before Christmas and that the ship would then be back in Pearl for Christmas. Other than that, it was a normally routine day.

We came in and, of course, being a flagship, we were the last ship to enter. And as I recall, we cleared the entrance buoy into Pearl around one o'clock that afternoon. Or was it. . . I can't remember. It could have been ten o'clock, and we anchored at one o'clock. I'm not sure about which one, but it was either late morning or early afternoon that we came in and anchored. Then, of course, they immediately . . . those that . . . the off-watches then were notified that liberty would start at such-and-such a time, and the liberty boats would be alongside. Liberty would expire at

midnight. And from then on, it was a normal routine. Of course, I went on liberty, myself.

Marcello: Now is it not true that the California was also getting ready for some sort of an inspection on a Monday morning?

Bolen: Yes, we were. I don't know whether it was quarterly inspection, admiral's inspection. . . we did have an inspection due on Monday morning.

Marcello: What significance would this scheduled inspection have upon the readiness of the ship to engage in combat?

Bolen: Well, for one thing, you would have fewer people on liberty because you would have to have. . . even though it was a Saturday or Sunday, with an inspection on Monday morning, you would have more men to have the ship in readiness, to be sure that everything was in shipshape for the inspection.

Marcello: What would be the status of the covers, the hatches, and things of this nature? I'm referring to watertight integrity.

Bolen: They would be . . . in a situation like that, everything. . . and all live ammunition goes below decks and is stored. This is in port, unless your ship has the watch. Then everything is stowed away and secured. And as far as the ship being in readiness, other than the power and steam necessary for the operation of the ship, you had just a minimum of what is required there. You are not in any kind of battle readiness whatsoever.

Marcello: In other words, there wasn't even any ready ammunition at the guns at that time?

Bolen: No, all ammunition goes below and is stored.

Marcello: Okay, where did the California anchor when it came in that Saturday?

Bolen: We anchored at Fox Five.

Marcello: Where would this have been in relation to the other ships on Battleship Row?

Bolen: Well, we were the forward ship. When we anchored at Pearl, which would be, say, the east side of Ford Island, we would be the forward ship, and we also anchored with our bow headed for the channel. In other words, coming into Pearl, you've got a channel that's just a manmade channel into Pearl. It's a landlocked port. And, of course, we were forward. The only thing that would have tied up forward of us was the Saratoga and the Lexington. The two docks ahead of us were reserved for the carriers.

Marcello: Did you feel pretty safe and secure in anchorage there at Pearl Harbor?

Bolen: Oh, yes! We always had!

Marcello: In other words, even if war did come between the United States and Japan, is it safe to say, without putting words in your mouth, that the likelihood of an attack at Pearl Harbor was virtually out of the question so far as the individual sailors were concerned.

Bolen: Well, to the average sailor, it never crossed your mind that this is where it's going to start. At sea, we wouldn't have been surprised to have been, say, attacked by a submarine or anything. We knew that we were under darkened ship at night, and you don't sail at sea with a darkened ship unless you're in readiness for something. We were sailing in a readiness condition all of the time, but not in Pearl.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that liberty did start that afternoon after the California had come in on the sixth. Describe your liberty routine that afternoon and follow it right on through for the evening.

Bolen: Well, I left the ship. . . I had to stay aboard and play colors. And after we played colors, then I went on liberty. I was going over to my cousin's house there in Navy housing, which is right inside the main entrance gate to Pearl. This was the only time that I can recall that I didn't have an overnight pass.

Marcello: How come you didn't have one this time?

Bolen: They wouldn't give me one. They wouldn't issue me an overnight pass.

Marcello: There was no reason given for this?

Bolen: None that I know of. The chief went up and asked for an overnight pass for me, and he came back and he said, "It's not granted. You'll have to be back at midnight."

Marcello: Was this the answer they were giving to everybody that applied for overnight passes?

Bolen: As far as I know. And, of course, I went on over to my cousin's. We sat around and played bridge, had supper, and just generally visited. Then I came back. I was back on the fleet landing at midnight, and back aboard. I mean, this was. . . as far as I was concerned, it was nothing out of the ordinary. I just figured, "Well, when they didn't give an overnight pass with the inspection coming up, they wanted everybody aboard ship to 'turn to' first thing in the morning."

Marcello: Did you notice anything eventful that happened that night? For example, were there just the normal, regular, loud, noisy, sometimes drunk sailors that came aboard?

Bolen: It was the normal deal at the fleet landing. You'd come down the fleet landing, and you'd have laid out all of the drunks who had passed out, and they laid them. . . at the fleet landing, there's part of the landing along there where you've got a certain area for the boats to come alongside from certain ships. Well, of course, a lot of these guys would get back on their own. They'd come back in a cab, and you've got Shore Patrol there. Of course, it's obvious he's drunk, but he still manages to make it under his own power. So they merely ask him what ship he's off of. They'd

know what ship he was off of, and they'd take him down to where that ship was. He'd sit down on a bench, or lay down, and the first thing you'd know, he was asleep. So they were sorted out according to ships. It was the normal. . . I didn't think it was anything unusual. It's normally that way. You don't have that certain number of them that's going to be in that condition. So it was just a normal night as far as I was concerned.

Marcello: What time did you turn in that evening?

Bolen: Oh, as soon as I got back aboard ship.

Marcello: So was it sometime between twelve and one o'clock.

Bolen: Yes, between twelve and one, depending on how long you had to wait on the boat to take you back to the ship.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into the morning of December 7th. And what I want you to do is to describe your routine on the morning of the seventh from the time you get up until all hell broke loose.

Bolen: Well, it was just a normal Sunday morning. We got up in the normal manner, and, of course, we were prepared. The canvas had been spread up on the forecastle for church services. We had had our rehearsal for church services prior to coming back into port. And we had breakfast as usual, and we were sitting around in the band compartment waiting on first call. Then, of course, first call sounded.

We all picked up our horns and went back to the quarter-deck. Then we were ready to play colors.

Marcello: What time was this?

Bolen: Well, first call was about, I'd say. . . I don't remember the normal routine, but I'd say it was ten or fifteen minutes before eight. And, of course, colors were at eight o'clock. So we were all ready standing there to play colors when. . . this is when all hell broke loose-- while we were standing there waiting to play colors.

Marcello: How many of you were there?

Bolen: I don't know how many members of the band were out there that particular morning. Normally, we wouldn't have a full complement, and I'm sure we didn't that morning. Certainly, it would be more than half the band, and it could have been the whole band that morning. These things, you don't really remember who was standing around at that time.

Marcello: What was the weather like?

Bolen: Oh, it was beautiful, beautiful! About like we've been having here the last couple of days.

Marcello: In other words, just partly cloudy at most, clear?

Bolen: High, fleecy clouds, clear, bright and nice sunshiney morning with the sun shining right in our eyes.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from that point.

Bolen: Well, of course, we were standing there waiting to play colors. And, of course, we were facing back to the east,

right into the sun. Of course, we could see these planes coming in, and we don't think anything about it at that time because. . .

Marcello: Are you at attention in getting ready to begin playing?

Bolen: Well, you might say semi-attention. The call for colors had not sounded. Of course, at that point you're just kind of standing there waiting.

We saw these planes, and we didn't think a lot about it because it had been the routine in the past that the Army for one of their exercises would practice a bomb run on Pearl. We thought it was a little unusual on Sunday morning, but we didn't pay that much attention to it.

Then, of course, the planes kept coming in, and then they started dropping their bombs, and that's about the time somebody started hollering, "Jap!" Of course, people didn't see the insignias on those Jap planes, so they didn't pay a lot of that much close attention to them in Pearl. If you'd been at sea, you probably would have. At that time, the Army had an insignia that was almost identical to the rising sun on the Jap planes.

Marcello: In other words, it was that big, red ball inside that star, was there not, on the U.S. Army planes?

Bolen: That's right. There was so much similarity that in Pearl you wouldn't think that. . . nobody thought the Japs would come in there.

Marcello: So you're at semi-attention, and it's near eight o'clock in the morning. You see these planes coming in. What happens at this point?

Bolen: Well, the general quarters alarm sounds.

Marcello: Now is this before the California had taken its first torpedo?

Bolen: Yes. General quarters had sounded. Of course, I didn't have a watch, and if I had, I wouldn't have looked at it. They say it was around 7:55. Of course, we did see a bomb dropped over on Ford Island, over at the PBY hangar. This was the first bomb, as far as I know, that was dropped.

Marcello: Now approximately how long would this have been before the California took its first torpedo? According to the records, the first torpedo hit the California around 8:05.

Bolen: This would have been . . . I would agree with that because as the events. . . because when general quarters sounded, and you're on the quarter-deck, for me to get to my general quarters station, I'd go back down forward on the main deck and into the band compartment, throw my horn down, then go down a ladder going aft down to the second deck a short distance, and down another ladder and down to the third deck into the shipfitter's shop.

Well, as soon as the whole repair crew had reported in that compartment, all the hatches were "dogged." At that point, we had watertight integrity within that compartment.

Marcello: Now by the time you got to your battle station, had the first torpedo hit yet?

Bolen: No.

Marcello: In other words, you got to that battle station in a hurry?

Bolen: The first torpedo hit after I was on the battle station because I felt the shock of it.

Marcello: In other words, we're talking about a time lapse of less than ten minutes, or no more than ten minutes at the very most.

Bolen: Less than ten minutes would be correct because actually I felt all three of torpedoes that hit the ship.

Marcello: Now when the general quarters sounded, did everybody seem to be acting in a professional manner?

Bolen: You better believe it! It was just like you had gone through it in training and everything. It was the same routine. You didn't see anybody running over everybody. Everybody was moving, but there was no confusion that I saw.

Marcello: You know, this is an advantage, I think, that the Navy had over the Army or the Air Corps people because evidently when the attack hit Schofield Barracks and Hickam Field and those places, those guys didn't know what to do. They didn't have a battle station as such.

Bolen: Well, to me this is part of the training. When you hear that gong sounding and they holler "general quarters,"

you've been trained to this routine that you go through. And, of course, in this particular case, some of those of us that were topside had seen this, we knew it was for real. This wasn't play this time.

And, of course, when we got to general quarters down there. . . and, of course, I was on the communications line--myself and Frank Wanat. He was a trombone player. Frank and I were assigned to that particular repair party, and we were handling communications. Well, of course, we grabbed the earphones and plugged in and before we even really got any communications or anything, of course, these torpedoes just knocked out all of the power.

Marcello: Describe the sensation or the shock or whatever that you felt when that first torpedo hit the California at approximately 8:05.

Bolen: Well, the first one. . . I don't know what sequence these torpedoes hit in, but I get the impression that the first torpedo that hit the ship was the torpedo that hit in a close proximity to where we were. When it hit, it was, you might say, kind of like a thump. You could feel the ship maybe rise or tremor or give, and all of the lights went out.

Marcello: Did it knock you off balance or anything of this nature?

Bolen: No, I was sitting down.

Marcello: How did you know it was a torpedo?

Bolen: Well, I didn't. I just knew we had been hit. I didn't know it was a torpedo. You knew you'd been hit, and the fact that it had knocked all of the power. . . all of the electricity was off, the phones were dead, and we were in total darkness.

Marcello: Now is everybody still acting in a professional manner?

Bolen: Everybody at this point and throughout.

Marcello: There's no panic or anything of that nature?

Bolen: No, there was no panic. Of course, we tried to get through on communications, and here we were in this compartment in total darkness. We had no idea of what was going on outside of that, and shortly then. . . when the other torpedoes hit along in here, I don't have recollection.

Marcello: But you could feel them?

Bolen: I guess I did. I really can't say that I had an experience. The only one that I really had was the one that hit in our proximity, when it knocked all of the lights out. And, of course, shortly after this. . . well, I don't know whether it hit below us, but anyhow, it had ruptured some fuel tanks or something because our compartment then began to fill with oil and gas fumes. Well, I'd say oil fumes. It wasn't gas. It was more or less oil. And it went on . . . and we had guys in there that began to get sick and pass out.

Marcello: Were there any rumors that it might possibly have been some sort of a gas attack, or were you sure that it was coming from the oil fumes?

Bolen: Well, it had the smell of oil. I mean, we felt like . . . it didn't smell like any of the gases or stuff that we had been trained to detect in times of the past. It definitely had the oil smell to it. Then these guys began to get sick and began to pass out. There was a big fellow . . . I think he was a shipfitter because the shipfitter's shop was right next to this compartment. And myself and some other fellows decided . . . we didn't know what was on the other side of the bulkhead, and we didn't know whether it was water or what.

Marcello: In other words, all of the hatches and doors are "dogged" down?

Bolen: That's right. And this fellow said, "Well, I know that at this after hatch back here there's a shaft that goes from it up to the quarter-deck. So if we're not sunk to where the quarter-deck's under water, we're alright." So the three of us got over there and "undogged" this door. Timewise, I have no idea what time had gone on here. When we "undogged" the door, sitting down right there outside of the door at the base of this shaft was four or five Filipino mess boys. They were down there hiding, getting

away from everything. And so we got them up and got them to go back in the compartment. That give us enough light then. And we dragged all of the ones who were not able to get themselves out and got them out to the bottom of this shaft to get them out into some fresh air. Then from there, we got them on up the shaft and up to the quarter-deck and took them into the barber shop on the main deck and laid them out there. They had a corpsman there. A pharmacist's mate was in there helping them.

Marcello: What sort of a scene did you see before you when you got outside?

Bolen: Well . . .

Marcello: I'm referring to the California in particular, of course.

Bolen: Of course, when we came out on the quarter-deck there, there was no . . . back there, there was no evidence of any damage other than where some machine gun bullets. . . where they had done some strafing. And at that point, I don't even remember that the ship had begun to list. Of course, at that point then, alongside were these fire boats trying to put a fire out.

Marcello: In other words, the water was on fire at this time from the ruptured oil tanks.

Bolen: Well, yes, from the. . . well, at that point, the fire really was up the harbor from us. The wind had not blown

it down the harbor to us at that time. Now that fire came, of course, from the Arizona.

Of course, you glanced at all of these other things, and you could see all of the fire and the smoke on the other ships and everything; but at the same time, you have been trained to do a certain job, and you're trying to take care of these wounded people and everything.

We got these guys into the barber shop, and somebody said, "We've got a bunch of men that's down out on the quarter-deck that's been strafed." So we went back--those of us that could. I don't know who all it was. We went back and started getting these men off of the quarter-deck and bringing them into the library. When we were bringing them back into the library, the Japs came in with another strafing run, and at that point, I headed for anyplace I could find and dove head first down this hatch to get out of that.

Then, of course, that was over. We came back up and finished getting people into the library, and then other people--crew members--were bringing men into the library from outside the ship's store on the main deck where we had taken a bomb hit. They had a fire in there, and all of these men were burned. We had them all out in there and were trying to smear butter or grease and anything we could on their burns, and, of course, we gave them morphine until we ran out.

Marcello: Now was it one of the torpedoes or was it a bomb that hit the ammunition locker? Didn't one of them hit the . . .

Bolen: The ammunition. . . not on the California. The ammunition locker that was hit was on the Arizona. The Arizona is the one that took a direct hit into their ammunition locker.

The only bomb hit that we took hit right outside of the ship's store, which was on the main deck of the ship. However, in the process of the bomb hitting, they had a bunch of men that were manually bringing up five-inch ammunition up on the ladders that came up out of the ammunition room and up through the machine shop, which was on the second deck. All of these men were on these ladders carrying five-inch shells up to the guns. When this bomb hit, then, of course, the fire and explosion knocked all of these fellows off of the ladder and with the shells and back into the machine shop. And I'm sure that a lot of the shells exploded in the machine shop, creating more problems.

Marcello: I think this was what I was referring to. This also brings up an interesting point. Of course, the power had been lost aboard the ship, and these guys were hand-carrying this five-inch ammunition up to the guns. This was no easy job.

Bolen: No, it isn't. Somewhere in this process--and I don't know where it comes in--I helped carry some three-inch shells that were hung on the side of the ladder, vertical ladder.

They were passing these three-inch shells. This is the only way they were getting them out. You just hooked your foot inside a rung on this ladder, and you just hung on the side of it. They'd hand you a shell, and you would pass it up to the next man. I did that somewhere in there until I gave out. Nobody could stand there and pass those shells forever. They were rotating these people. Somewhere between getting out of the compartment and this other stuff, I was in this and it's just something that you remember doing.

Marcello: Do you mean between the time you got out of the compartment and were taking care of the casualties?

Bolen: Yes, up on the quarter-deck. Somewhere in there, we were passing some ammunition.

Marcello: In the meantime, what sort of resistance is the California putting up?

Bolen: Well, of course, about the only thing. . . of course, the Marines had the five-inch batteries. And, of course, the five-inch batteries on the California were not designed, nor were they capable, to shoot at airplanes. However, some of the Marines on the starboard side did load their guns and were shooting at torpedo planes until they got ordered to stop because when they depressed their guns down low enough to shoot at the torpedo planes, they were shooting the ships that were tied up over at Ten-Ten Dock (chuckle).

So they got ordered to stop firing the five-inch guns. Other than that, of course, was the little three-inch antiaircraft guns that we had. This was our total firepower.

Marcello: Now, ultimately, as you mentioned earlier, the burning oil on the water resulting from the Arizona being hit began to drift to the California and actually began to engulf the California. Is this the next thing we need to talk about?

Bolen: Well, I don't know what statements or comments I could make, but it did come on down because we had canvas spread up on the forecastle for church services. Well, of course, this fire came on down, and all of this canvas caught on fire. Like you can see there (pointing to photograph), there's the California with the canvas spread before the fire got there. Now this fire came on down.

Of course, we had fires on the ship, too. We had a tremendous fire from this bomb outside the ship's store that was inside the ship. This was a tremendous fire. Of course, I don't think that fire ever spread up to the forecastle because it was a deck below the forecastle. But then these oil fires did come on down then.

Marcello: And I think they more or less engulfed the stern of the ship, which, of course, was where that canvas was spread.

Bolen: No, the canvas was on the bow.

Marcello: Oh, yes it is.

Bolen: And, of course, the fire boats. . . anybody that had any

water pressure and could get water, they were using this water to keep the fire pushed out into the harbor and away from the ships as it came down Battleship Row. The Arizona was next to last in Battleship Row, and it was coming down, and all of the ships that had any water pressure were pushing this oil out. And any fire boats or anything that they had in the harbor were used to push this oil out, this burning oil, and away from the ship.

Marcello: In the meantime, what were you doing while this process was taking place?

Bolen: Well, we were trying to take care of the wounded and everything there in the library. And, in fact, at that point in time, I didn't go forward back into the ship or anything. I was working in the library with the wounded, and, of course, at this point in time, the Japs had gone. So we were taking care of them. And, of course, at this time, the ship had begun to go on over because, of course, we had the three torpedoes all in one side.

Marcello: In other words, it began to list.

Bolen: It was beginning to list on us. Then, of course, we had all of the water that we were pumping inside to put out the fire inside. Of course, with a little list to starboard, well, then that water was going over to that side of the ship and adding to the holes already in the ship.

And as it began to take on a list, well, then we

began to get some boats alongside. We were taking the wounded off in those boats and transporting them. . . at that time, we were still transporting them over to the Navy Hospital. Then we got word that the hospital could not take any more wounded, and we were to take them over to Ford Island. So we were loading and getting off all of the wounded.

And about the time that we got all of the wounded off and everything, well, then it had to put a bad list on her. So somebody passed orders to abandon ship. And at this time, of course, all of us were back working on the quarter-deck, on the stern back there. We all went over the side. They didn't have to tell us twice! So we sailed off there.

Marcello: Okay, describe this because I think it's probably an interesting story about abandoning ship.

Bolen: (Chuckle) Well, of course, the list was to starboard, which, of course, was on the off side from Ford Island, which, in turn caused the port side of the ship to come out of the water farther. Of course, normally, when you used to be on the quarter-deck, you'd be ten feet above the water, and you didn't give it a second thought. When they said, "abandon ship," you just sailed out over the side, and naturally you go over to Ford Island. That's the shortest distance to land, and we all sailed over the to port side. My recollection of it is that I said, "God, almighty! Where is the water?"

It seemed like you were in the air for an hour before you finally hit the water.

Marcello: Now by this time, was there oil and so on in the water where you hit?

Bolen: The oil all over the place. Of course, I went to the bottom, I guess. I come up for air and got a mouthful or stomachful of fuel oil or whatever. I swallowed a bunch of that. We were just . . . by the time we got over to Ford Island and got out of the water over there, you were just covered in fuel oil.

Marcello: Now about how far were you from Ford Island?

Bolen: Oh, 100 or 150 feet, I guess. That would be just about what I remember. Not any big distance or anything.

Marcello: So what happened at that point?

Bolen: Well, of course, we didn't know whether the Japs. . . somebody hollered, "Here the Japs come again!" Of course, that didn't help your nerves at that point any, either. Of course, we started running for the building. Of course, the first thing. . . the closest building they had there was the mess hall there on Ford Island. And on that end of the building, there was double doors in there. For some unknown reason, there wasn't but one of those doors open. When everybody packed up against it, nobody could open the other door, and there was just a whole crowd

there. And, of course, you were hearing all of these people hollering to get out of the way because the Japs are coming.

Myself and two or three other fellows, we noticed there to the right that there was an opening in the foundation of the building. Well, we didn't look back to see whether anything was coming or not. We all sailed in that hole up under that building (chuckle). When we came out of that place with all of that dried dust that was under there, and that fuel oil, we were some pretty good-looking sights.

And, of course, from there, we got on into the building, and we found a shower in there and got some stuff and cleaned off pretty good.

Then we went to work then, working with the wounded. There were barracks and the mess hall in this building. And all of the extra mattresses we could get our hands on, we laid them on top of the mess tables. We could get at least one man on top of the table, and we had them bulks and on top of the tables. There wasn't a whole lot that you could do for them at that point unless you happened to catch a medic with some morphine. We went to the galley and got all of the butter. We smeared butter on the burns. Then we broke into the ship's store, which was locked up.

We broke into it and got all of the cigarettes and chewing gum that we could pass out among them, and this was generally about all you could do for the wounded at this time.

Marcello: Now I know that after the abandon ship order was given aboard the California, the captain later on decided that it possibly could be saved. And, of course, the call went out to bring the crew back again.

Bolen: That's right.

Marcello: Now, I assume that you did not go back aboard the California.

Bolen: Yes, we did.

Marcello: You did?

Bolen: We did go back that afternoon.

Marcello: Now is this next in the sequence of events?

Bolen: Yes. This goes on up into the afternoon. We did go back aboard. The chief got hold of us and said, "Let's go back aboard and see what is left in the band compartment." The band compartment was . . .there was a bulkhead. Let's say this was the gun turret, and then there was the bulkhead. Then you come through this hatch right here, and on the other side of this bulkhead was the ship's store out here. Then there was the dining area and then the ladders going down on into the machine shop. This fire was right on the other side of this bulkhead from the band compartment, so we didn't know whether we had anything left or not. And so we went back aboard.

Marcello: How did you get back aboard the California?

Bolen: By that time, they had put a walkway--a gangplank--that ran from Ford Island to the piers. See, we didn't actually tie up to a dock. These were piers out in the water. They had run a gangplank out to that and then a gangplank from that to the ship. And, of course, they had two of those--forward and aft.

And we went in the band compartment, and fortunately we had some stuff that the fire hadn't affected. I had a record collection that had been, oh, in an area where the fire had got hot enough and had melted all of my records together. But we managed to get a bunch of music and horns--some of us. There was a lot of music. This was . . . primarily what we was trying to get was our horns and our music. And we got all of that then and took it out and piled it on top of this pier. And they told us just to pile it out there and leave it. Well, during the process, while this was going on, one of the lines that they were using to try to keep the ships from going on over broke. And when it broke and whipped around, it took everything off of the top of that pier. So at that point, we lost horns, music, and everything.

Marcello: Did you actually see this happen?

Bolen: No, I didn't see it happen.

Marcello: I guess if you were that close to see it happen, you were in a certain amount of danger.

Bolen: They said we were lucky. It killed one man. This line killed one man, is what I was told. I thought I was very lucky that I wasn't there when the thing did break.

That was the last time, then, that day that we were aboard ship. Of course, after that we went back again over to the mess hall over on Ford Island for further assignment. They were trying to get all of the crew together that they could and everything.

This is all that. . . during the day, up until night, we finally found a place near a hangar out there where they had gotten a bunch of cots in there. We were in there helping them set up the cots and everything where people could sleep. That's where we were, then, that night when the planes from the carrier came in.

Marcello: Okay, now before we get to that point, describe in general the scene that you saw before you in the harbor itself, that is, in terms of the damage that was done and this sort of thing.

Bolen: Well, of course, one of the first things that I saw from my standpoint, being back on the quarter-deck back there, was the Oklahoma--the hull of the Oklahoma. Because the Oklahoma had completely capsized. All that was left was her hull, and, of course, she was right astern of us there. And, of course, with her rolled over and with the Maryland inboard, the Maryland was pinned in. You couldn't see a

whole lot of damage to the Maryland, but then as you went down Battleship Row, all of the . . . see, after the California, everything was tied up in pairs. And all of the outboard ships, of course--the Oklahoma, the West Virginia, and . . .

Marcello: The Tennessee?

Bolen: Well, the Tennessee was inboard from the West Virginia, so she wasn't damaged as much as the West Virginia. You could see a lot of damage to them, and fires. Of course, on the Arizona, you couldn't see anything on her. And, of course, the Nevada had got underway. She was the watch ship and had steam up, and they had gotten her underway and had already come down the harbor and had been run aground down at the mouth of the channel, so you didn't know what kind of damage. . . of course, I don't believe that we knew. Again during all of this battle, running back and forth there, we had seen her go by us. And, of course, the Japs had laid off of us and were laying it heavy on her to try to sink her right there in the harbor.

Marcello: What did the surface of the water look like?

Bolen: Well, it was practically either black oil or fire--one of the two. I mean, the whole harbor was either oil or fire. There just wasn't any water to see.

Marcello: What sort of emotions or feelings did you experience when you were able to perhaps look at the damage and the casualties

and so on with a little bit of perspective?

Bolen: Well, I don't think it really hit me until the next day. The next day is really, as far as I can remember of anything, when it hit me.

Marcello: In the meantime, did you have much of an appetite or thirst or anything of this nature?

Bolen: I don't remember eating a bite or drinking anything until the next day sometime. If I did, I'm not conscious that I ever did.

Marcello: Well, describe what sort of feelings and so on that you had the next day when you had a chance to think about the damage that had been done.

Bolen: Well, you look at it. . . of course, one of the first things, I guess, that crossed my mind is, "Thank God, I lived through it!" When I saw what had happened, you don't know how you did survive. But you're thankful when you see all of that. With all of the dead bodies, the critically burned. . . the burned casualties stick in my mind because we had so many men on the California that was burned so bad. You realize how lucky you are to come out of this thing with. . . all I had out of it was a sore shoulder where I dove down the hatch, and I didn't realize that until the next day, and I didn't pay a lot of attention to it then. You look at it and say, "This couldn't happen to us!" You still couldn't

believe it. And, of course, there was a "jillion and one" rumors going around.

Marcello: I'm sure that the whole area must have been one rumor mill, especially that night.

Bolen: Oh, that night, there was . . . of course, the planes came in off of the carriers to land, and, of course, the story goes that they didn't give the right recognition signals. Whether it was that or somebody scared and trigger-happy that fired the first shot. . . but when the first one was fired, there was nothing but an umbrella of red all over Pearl Harbor. I don't think there was . . . it wasn't a gun that could fire that wasn't being fired. In fact, one of the planes was shot down and crashed and burned on Ford Island.

Marcello: Did you actually witness this event taking place, that is, the actual firing at these planes?

Bolen: Yes, I sure did. I was laying down on a cot, the first time I'd . . . I don't know what time of the night it was, but I was laying down. And, of course, when they were firing, I come off of that cot, and I found myself a pair of tennis shoes, sneakers, those old Navy sneakers, that I put on. I don't know how nor what, but when they started firing, of course, everybody bailed out of this hangar because it wasn't anything but just a tin hangar and they were hunting someplace. Of course, the immediate

thought was that the Japs were back again. And when I found myself outside somewhere, I looked down and I didn't have any shoes on. I had absolutely got out of there so fast that my shoes stayed there and I left.

Then about that time, of course, the plane was shot down. I saw it crash over there on the runway. And, of course, everybody immediately ran over to that and came back. Then, oh, I guess around midnight things settled down to where you got a little sleep.

Of course, there was all of the usual rumors. Japanese paratroopers were supposed to be being dropped up in the mountains, and we were to be prepared for that. I don't know what we were to be prepared for because, hell, you hadn't even got a rifle or anything else. So what are you going to prepare for? That was the big rumor that night, that I remember--the paratroopers.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Bolen: Well, the next day we rounded up what we could and went back to the ship then. By that time, the situation on the ship had stabilized. They had gotten anchor chains out and had anchored the California where they definitely knew that it wasn't going over. And, of course, there was a lot of water on the ship, but then we went back aboard and we started getting the dead bodies off of the main deck outside of the ship's store. The next day was--I'd

say from everybody's standpoint--devoted to getting the dead bodies, identifying them, and hauling them up to where they had made a temporary cemetery with just bulldozers up there and a place to bury all of these bodies. The thing was to get them identified, to know who they were, and then get the bodies up on there for a mass burial in these ditches they had dug up there.

Marcello: What sort of attitude did you have toward the Japanese in the aftermath of the attack? You mentioned that you hadn't given them very much thought before the attack.

Bolen: Hate! Pure hate! I guess that if there is such a thing, this is what I felt.

Marcello: Did any of the members of the band suffer any casualties during the attack?

Bolen: The only one was a boy named Shelly. He was a saxophone player, and he also was our arranger. Shelly was assigned to the repair crew in the machine shop, along with . . . I don't remember who was with Shelly and assigned with him in the repair shop, but he was killed.

And this was one of the things. . . you was talking about the hate. . . one of the things that the musicians went back aboard for was to see if we could find Shelly amongst all of these dead. We couldn't find him, couldn't account for him. And to this day, we have never been able

to find him or find his body. You have to remember that there were a lot of bodies in there, or actually pieces of bodies, let's say. There would be a head here, an arm there, or a leg, a piece of torso. They were just blown to bits. But we never did find anything that we could identify.

Marcello: Mr. Bolen, I have one last question. What sort of lasting impressions has the Pearl Harbor attack had upon you? Maybe that's kind of a hard question to answer.

Bolen: Well, of course, my answer would be as a result of things that I found out later on, that went on prior to December 7th. I feel like that our government did not make the Army and the Navy commanders aware of what was going on in Washington. Like I say, this is stuff that I have learned and have gone to some trouble to study. I feel like, in my personal opinion on the thing, that Pearl Harbor could have been avoided had our commanders been made aware of what was going on in Washington between the government and Japan. I do believe that. I think the men's lives were a waste and could have been avoided. I guess you might say I'm as bitter toward our government in respect to this as I am toward the Japs.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Bolen, I don't have any further questions. We've covered the subject pretty thoroughly. Is there anything

else that you would like to add and get as a part of the record?

Bolen: No, not that I can think of.

Marcello: I do have one last question. Did you see any specific events aboard the California or actions by individuals aboard the California that stand out in your mind as being something rather heroic? Did you see any examples of heroism that particularly stand out in your mind? Now I'm sure there are a lot of heroic things that took place.

Bolen: Not that I can think, I mean, that I personally witnessed.

Marcello: In a situation like that, are you more or less in your own little world? In other words, you know what you have to do . . .

Bolen: You know what you have to do, and you go ahead and do it. You don't look around and see what somebody else is doing. You know you've got a job to do, and you know that everybody else has got a job to do. And you don't think as to whether he's doing his job and everything. You concentrate, if it's possible to concentrate. . . you think about nothing but "this is what I've got to do." And you really . . . from that standpoint, you know what everybody else is doing. You're working together, but yet you're working separate, if you understand what I'm talking about.

Marcello: Okay, well, Mr. Bolen, I want to thank you for taking time to come up here to North Texas and talk with me. You've

said a lot of really interesting things and went into a great deal of detail, which, of course, is what we want. I'm sure, of course, historians are going to find this material very valuable someday when they use it to write about Pearl Harbor.