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Dan Wentrcek
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Dan Wentrcek

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Dan Wentrcek for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 14, 1976, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Wentrcek in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS Nevada during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Wentrcek, 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. Wentrcek: Well, I was born down in Granger, Texas--down in central Texas north of Austin--and attended high school at Liberty Hill High School and graduated from there in 1939. That's about it. I kicked around and decided to go into the Navy, then, in 1941. Jobs were, you know, pretty scarce, so I went in the Navy in July of 1941.

Marcello: You mentioned a motivating factor that was responsible for getting a lot of people in the service. Even as late as 1941, jobs were still scarce. And I would assume that the service, therefore, represented a certain amount of security--steady pay, good food, good quarters, things of that nature. I said steady pay not an abundance of pay.

Wentrcek: True (chuckle). Twenty-one dollars a month back then. Of course, that. . . I had several relatives who had made careers in the Marines or Navy. I had an uncle--a very close uncle--who was a career man in the Marines and a couple of them that had served in the Navy, and neighbors who had served time in the Navy, and one very close neighbor who was a retired chief warrant officer from the Navy, and that influenced me quite a bit to go into the Navy.

Marcello: I was going to ask you why you had decided to enter the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service, and I think you have pretty well answered my question. At the time that you enlisted in the Navy, were you keeping very closely abreast of current events and world affairs?

Wentrcek: Yes, I think so for someone my age--just a young guy like that. Of course, the draft was in effect, and we discussed it amongst ourselves--several of us young guys--that something was brewing. Of course, through the news media and

that, why, we figured we were in for some pretty hot times--the way things were going in Europe and the Far East. I think one thing that motivated me was to thinking that if we were going to have some type of a war or conflict, if a person got in there and got some decent training before this might take place, he was going to be better off. He was going to have the breaks, also. Because I went into the Navy with the intention of making it a career. A few of these things. . . it sounded pretty good to me. Like I say, I thought the more training a person had, the better off he was going to be if we were actually to get into a war.

Marcello: And I assume that you believed that the Navy offered the type of training that you wanted more so than the Army or one of the other branches.

Wentrcek: Yes, very much so. Because living close to San Antonio --we weren't too far from San Antonio--I had a lot of contacts with Army personnel, and that just didn't appeal to me too much. I knew. . . like I say, having pretty well been indoctrined as to what the Navy had to offer, it looked a lot better to me.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were keeping abreast of current events. Would it be safe to say, however, that for the

most part your attention was turned toward Europe rather than toward the Far East?

Wentrcek: Oh, yes. I believe so. Right. I believe we weren't . . . naturally, all the news we were getting and everything was from the European theatre. I don't think we . . . I think this is one reason we were so surprised when the war finally did break out--to be struck like we were from the Far East. Until after I was in the service--now this was prior to going into the service--after I was in the service and in boot camp in San Diego, then we were getting quite a bit of talk, I guess you'd say, from our training officers that things didn't look good over there in the Far East. That was the first I remember of really being aware of becoming aware and giving it some thought that maybe there was something else going on, also.

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

Wentrcek: Not too difficult. We had to pass a rather rigid physical. I know one thing. . . (chuckle) in fact, I had a tooth that needed filling, and I had to have that filled before they would accept me. They were rather that strict. They were more so, I think, than the Army was at that time. I don't . . . of the group that went from. . . well, there were two of us that went in through Austin. We went to Houston

to be sworn in. Out of that group down there--their final checkout--they kicked back three or four for various medical reasons out of about twenty people, I'd say, who had enlisted from the State of Texas. They gathered us up and sent us out to San Diego to start our training.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about boot camp. How long was boot camp at that particular time?

Wentrcek: It was nine weeks.

Marcello: Now it had obviously abbreviated or shortened quite a bit.

Wentrcek: I think so. Shortly before I went into the service, I think it had been cut back quite a bit. Now we spent three weeks. . . our first three weeks, of course, were in what we called detention or quarantine. You got all your shots and everything, and you weren't allowed off the base or even into the other units with the people who had finished that period. Then we had a six-weeks' training period, then, in the other unit after getting out of detention. We were allowed liberty on Sundays. If you wanted to go into town, you could tell them that you wanted to attend church in town, and that was a good excuse to get off base, see.

I know up at the YMCA they had what they called a "Java Club." Various churches put this on; it was like

a Sunday school class. It was real good to get off the base early on Sunday morning (chuckle) to attend that. Then if you wanted to, they would take you on to one of the churches.

But after that six-weeks' period of time, then if you had signed up for school--a trade school of some type --or wanted to go to sea or whatever, usually that had already been approved, and you were given a seven-day leave at the end of that six-weeks' period of time. Well, seven days coming here back to Texas didn't sound like very much to me, and I said, "No, I want to go to sea."

Our company commander--chief petty officer--had told us that there was some of the battlewagons in Long Beach, and they were taking on some crews. He said, "Now if you want to get on a big ship, now's your time to do it." So I think that kind of enticed me. I sure didn't want to get on a destroyer or anything, and I didn't prefer an aircraft carrier. I'd been on the old Saratoga--it was in harbor. It operated out of San Diego harbor quite a bit at the time, and they would be in on weekends. I took a tour through that thing, and that looked like something I didn't want. It was too big a target, and that looked like something I didn't want. It was too big a target (chuckle). So that's when I applied for battleship duty.

I didn't have any preference, but I stated I would like to be on the battleship or a heavy cruiser.

Marcello: Why did you particularly want to be on a battleship?

Wentrcek: I just thought there was just a little more security there --protection. I don't know. . . I just liked the sight of them, the literature on them, and everything that we had--all the information that was given us on the various types of ships.

Marcello: Was there a certain amount of prestige involved in being a battleship sailor as opposed to being on a cruiser or destroyer or some other vessel?

Wentrcek: Very much so--like being on a destroyer or a supply ship or minesweeper or something of this type--yes. I think so. I think that if you're a battleship sailor, why, you're considered a little above average, you know. Of course, I think that was true with the carrier sailors and submarine sailors. Of course, I always envied them. In fact, I tried to get into Submarine Service later on after the war started. But they wanted to keep me where I was at, so I didn't get in there.

Marcello: Let's back up to boot camp once more. Since the training period had been cut short, did you detect a certain urgency in your boot training? In other words, did they seem to

want to get you out of there and into the fleet as quickly as possible?

Wentrcek: Well, I don't know as if we really realized that there might be an urgency. Of course, I can think back now, and it seemed like there were an awful lot of recruits coming through. They were beginning to bring them through and forming new companies just every day, it seemed like. It seems like in the period of the nine weeks' time I was there at the training station, it seemed like we could see the place getting more crowded than when we first came in there. But I don't think we really realized that they were pushing forward groups at that time.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there was talk about the possibility of some sort of conflict with Japan and the Far East. Could you possibly elaborate on this any? I'm referring to that period when you were in boot camp.

Wentrcek: We had a company commander, Chief Sullivan. He was an old salt and had about thirty-five years in the Navy. He had spent the biggest part of that in Asiatic duty or out in the Pacific. We'd get together, and he was, I thought, a wonderful man. We all just loved the guy. For a company commander, that was something. He would sit down with us, and we would have a little training session maybe after we got over into what we called the North Unit--got out of detention.

I'll back up a little bit here. In the South Unit, most of your training down there was out on a grinder every day packing a rifle and learning to march and do semaphores and this. Well, he had told us, he said, "Now you guys get in there and work, and in the first parade. . . ." We had a parade every Saturday, He said, "Now in that first parade, if you guys take the pennant, we're through. We're not going to march. We'll learn to be sailors." And we did. We took the pennant in the first parade we were in on Saturday in North Unit, so that stopped all the grinder work.

So from there on, we'd go down an area set up like a boatswain's locker. They were tying knots and all this stuff--teach you seamanship. He would sit down with us while some guys may be over using the swimming pool. A lot of them had to learn to swim and things like this. Maybe he'd have a group of about twenty-five or thirty of us at a time. He'd kind of break us up, and he would tell us some salty tales and that. Then he would kind of give us a little history of the Far East and the Japanese.

I remember one thing . . . of course, we used to talk about this at home. They were buying up scrap metal. Everybody'd go out and pick up scrap metal. They used to

say, "That's going to Japan, and they're going to be shooting it back at us someday." He'd always bring it up. He'd say, "What your folks told you back home about this scrap metal is true. Now one of these days, it's bound to break loose over there." He kind of stressed that very much.

I know the day that I left to go to Long Beach from San Diego. . . there was eight or ten of us--eight of us, I believe--that had orders to go to the different battleships. Two of us went on the Nevada. But he told us, "Now whatever you do, on the train there may be people trying to pump you as to where you're going and so on." He said, "Keep your mouth shut. You don't know anything. You're going up there; you're going on the battleships. And more than likely those ships are going to be pulling out right away. It may be quite a while before you're back in the States." He warned us to that effect.

So that's, I guess, where I . . . it'll always stick with me--some of the things that he told us about the Far East and that there was a very good chance of conflict. I remember him saying very definitely. He said, "I don't think those people in Washington are going to get anything accomplished. They're trying, but I don't think they will." He said, "Someday we're probably going to get in a scrap with them."

Marcello: Evidently, those old sailors from the Asiatic Fleet were something else again.

Wentrcek: (Chuckle) They sure were, I'll tell you. They were. . . well, I wouldn't say gung-ho. They were just old salts, you know. They were just people that were different from anybody else (chuckle). They'd been out there so long and stuck back away from nowhere, I guess, was the reason. But I knew several of them--met them during my time in the service--and there's not a one of them I didn't like. They were Navy. Oh, you bet they were! Of course, I think. . . I appreciated the fact, because I considered myself Navy. I was going to stay in the Navy, see. So I tried to pick up all this that I could. I kind of admired them, in fact--some of them. A lot of guys would cuss them and everything, you know. "You Asiatic so-and-so! You've been over there too long!" and so on.

Marcello: I guess there was a type of hero worship involved here, since you were a young boot, and like you mentioned, you were planning to make the Navy your career. Obviously those Asiatic sailors--to use the Navy expression--had wrung more salt water out of their socks than what you sailed on.

Wentrcek: That's about right. They used that expression a lot. "I've worn out more sea bags than you have socks," and all this stuff, you know. I guess that's true. I was probably envious of them.

- Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your mind? Or maybe I should ask this question later on when we actually get you over to Pearl Harbor and into the Hawaiian Islands.
- Wentrcek: Yes, because I don't think I could . . . heck at that time, I had no . . . they were Orientals, and that's about it.
- Marcello: Okay, well, let's defer that question, then, until we do get you over into the Hawaiian Islands. When did the Nevada leave for its permanent station in the Hawaiian Islands?
- Wentrcek: I went aboard on September 10th, and we pulled out that night. We left for Pearl Harbor that night. Long Beach had been more or less their. . . well, they considered it a home port at that time. They were moving them out, and they were going to be operating out of Pearl hereafter. So that was on September 10th that we pulled out and went out there.
- Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your trip from the Pacific Coast over to the Hawaiian Islands. First, what did you think about the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?
- Wentrcek: I thought that was great! That was something! I was a farm boy down off the farm in Texas. I thought that was really great. "Now this is all right--me going out there first thing right out of the hat--to get to go to Hawaii." It was something you just. . . I know the old expression back there. I

used to say, well, that's one reason I was going into the Navy--so I could see the world. But here it was--it was hitting me in the face. I was actually starting out just right off, you know, like this. I was thrilled by this--very thrilled.

Marcello: Did you have visions of a tropical paradise and all the trimmings?

Wentrcek: I think so. I'm sure I did, yes. Of course, the going aboard a ship like that--that was something else.

Marcello: You might talk about your impressions of the Nevada, since I assume that you really had had no experience with battleships and things of that nature.

Wentrcek: Of course, the first thing is that you're lost constantly (chuckle). You're brought aboard, and naturally all the salts. . . the guy that hadn't been on there a month prior to you, but he's an old salt considered to be a boot, see, coming aboard. "Hey, Mack, you're a boot!" you know. They would give you kind of a rough time. Of course, later on I did the same thing. That's typical Navy. Man, I tell you, to go aboard that thing. . . and, of course, we had been told about the layout of the ship, and the frames and bulkheads and all this are numbered, and compartments and so on. We had been indoctrinated some into that, but after you really get aboard that ship. . . and, of course, they take you down

and show you where you're going to bunk for a while and dump your gear and put it away. Of course, everybody's breathing right down your neck, you know, because you're a boot.

It was very confusing. I'll honestly say it was confusing as the the devil there for practically all the trip across. We couldn't find. . . we'd get lost. We tried to stay together as much as we could, you know. If one couldn't figure out something, maybe the other one could (chuckle).

But I can think back now. . . I know one little thing. Of course, in the Navy you do your own laundry. We couldn't figure out--the other fellow and I, in particular. . . there were other guys that went aboard this ship from other companies, but there were two of us from the company that I was in--Company 92--back in boot camp, so we stuck together pretty well. The other guy. . . we couldn't figure out where in the world we were going to hang clothes when we washed them and stuff like that.

Some kid who had been aboard this ship for a month or so, he saw his chance to make him some money. So he said, "I'll do your laundry for a buck." Maybe you had a towel or two and a pair of shorts (chuckle) or something. Well, we needed the laundry done, and he did it for us, and he was cleaning up there on the trip over until we kind of got adjusted to the thing and were assigned quarters.

Like I say, when we first went aboard, we were just herded aboard, stayed in the group, until, I think, the day before. . . well, I don't remember how many days it took us to make the trip, but I know the day before we arrived in Pearl Harbor, they assigned us to our divisions. I was assigned to the engineering division. The other fellow out of my company--he was the other one that went into engineering, but he went into the electrician's gang, and I went into the boiler gang myself. All the other fellows went to the deck force, which I was really always thankful that I was in the engineering department. Of course, after that then we were assigned our quarters in the division. Each division had their own quarters aboard ship and their bunks and their lockers and your own shower. That was the nice thing about the engineering department. We had our own showers, our own mess area, and it was all right at our own compartment and everything and near our work spaces in the engineering department. So then I started getting acclimated to ship life a little more.

Marcello: How would you describe the on-the-job training that you received aboard the Nevada down in the engineering division?

Wentrcek: Well, I think back now, and I guess it was pretty good. We had. . . the ship consisted of six boiler rooms, and I was assigned. . . each boiler room had so many in their crew that

could stand watches--twenty-four hours a day, of course. We stood four-hour watches. So I was assigned. There were three crew members down there on watch at a time in each boiler room. The guy that I was assigned to--stood watches with--I think he was a watertender second class. He was very helpful. Right off, he pointed out things to me.

Of course, what I did was fire the boiler. He sat back over there under the blower and stayed cool and would tell us what to do. Of course, it was, I think, a fairly simple operation. Those boilers were simple to fire--more so than others I had afterwards. We had, of course, our work to do and our watches to stand down there. While we were on watch, it was expected of the head man down there--the petty officer in charge--to instruct his recruits as to how to go about firing these boilers and so on.

Marcello: What is exactly involved in firing the boilers?

Wentrcek: Well, these particular boilers had six burners. They were oil burners. When you were underway, usually. . .

Marcello: In other words, you had six boilers, and each boiler had six oil burners.

Wentrcek: Each boiler had six oil burners. Your main control up in your engine room would call for whatever steam they wanted. They watched it up there, also. They had what was called an enunciator. If they needed a little more steam, they'd ring

up, "We need more steam. Cut into more burners," or something like this. Say, if you were operating on three, and they wanted to pick up speed a little bit, they'd ring down, "Give me four burners. . .or five." So that was about it. You had to. . .your water control of your boilers. . .one of the other men. . .the one with a little more seniority than the fireman down there. . .he was probably a fireman, also, because I was a fireman third class, and really he was a fireman second or first class. He was to control the flow of water through a throttle valve and stand down there and watch the guage glass and control the water in the boilers. Why I say that I think he instructed you pretty well. . . Manguin was the guy's name--we called him "Maggie"--he was the guy I stood my watches with. We stood auxiliary watches together, too. That's when he would really. . .if we were in port, that's when he would really instruct me. But when the attack started, we went to. . .our battle stations were down there. We got that ship underway. I know that when he told me, "Do this," and I did it. I knew how to do it. So I was always appreciative of that.

Marcello: Under normal circumstances, when the Nevada was in port, how many boilers would actually be operating?

Wentrcek: Just one. We'd call it auxiliary. We'd have an auxiliary watch, and just one boiler would operate. That would generate

enough steam for the turbines, for electricity, hot water, steam for the galleys, and so on.

Marcello: As a follow-up question, when the Nevada was in port and had the one boiler operating, how much time would be required under normal circumstances to get the ship moving?

Wentrcek: Well, to do it safely and everything, it should take a good hour or hour and a half to bring those boilers up and bring them up properly.

Marcello: In other words, it's just like starting a car on a cold morning, isn't that correct?

Wentrcek: Right. All your steam lines and everything. . .your boiler, after it has cooled down, takes on a lot of air, which you have to start generating your steam to expel all that air out of your boilers. Then you have to warm up all your steam lines and everything to get all the water--condensation--out of them because if you hit a turbine with a charge of water, it can tear the heck out of things. So an hour to an hour and a half is the normal operation to bring them up, to warm them up properly, and what we called "cutting them in on the line" and be ready to go.

Of course, we beat that quite a bit. We did it in fourteen minutes when the attack started. We got the ship underway in fourteen minutes. Like I say, I think--myself, for my own self--the prior training that old "Maggie" had

given me was of great benefit. Because I know they rang down and said, "Give us all the steam. . . "

Of course, I was fortunate in another way. When the attack started, the number one boiler room, which had been our auxiliary boiler while we were in port, was my battle station. So it was warmed up. So it was just a matter of changing what we called "changing tips" on our burners whenever they said, "Give us all the steam you can."

Whenever we were in port, we had a top on our burner--very small orifice to burn a small amount of fuel--which we didn't need much fuel going through there. I believe we had three or four different sizes that we used for more capacity or consumption. I know they said we were to put in the biggest one that we had to get all the steam we could immediately.

I know I had to do that. Things were popping, and I was right over in front of that boiler where I had to do this--put these things in, take them out. They were hot with hot oil and everything, and I put them in a vice, unscrewed the tip, put a new burner tip in that thing, and put them back in there and lit it off. Of course, it lit off from your others that were burning, see. I guess I did it all right.

Marcello: This is getting a little bit ahead of the story, and we'll pick this up later on. How would you describe the morale aboard the Nevada in that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Wentrcek: Why, I think it was great! I do! I think the. . .I'm sure it was good. Sure, you'd hear some of the guys gripe. I know one in particular. He was one of the Patton brothers. I stood some watches with him. Now the Patton brothers. . . there were seven of them, I believe. Shortly before I went aboard this ship, they even enlisted their father. But one of them took his discharge. They'd spent a lot of time in the Navy. This one, though, he used to gripe--this is before the war started--"Why didn't I take my discharge instead of shipping over?" But he was the only guy that I can remember that felt that about it. Most of them were guys like me or old-timers who were making it a career, and I didn't hear much complaining or anything. They were a pretty, I thought, happy sort of crew on that ship.

Marcello: What do you think accounted for the high morale?

Wentrcek: Oh, I don't know. I think we had a good commanding officer. I think that's it. Of course, I wasn't on there really that long to. . . and it was all so new to me, but thinking back now, I would suspect that that was a lot of it.

We were given all the benefits and everything that possibly could be given. I know our food was always good and

stuff like that. I think the Nevada. . . I believe they were known for good food. Some ships had a bad name for their food. But, of course, that went up to whoever ran your commissary--chief commissary, stewards, and those guys who were planning it. I can't think back on any reason why the morale wasn't that good.

Marcello: Were they still serving the food family-style at that time, or had they already installed the cafeteria?

Wentrcek: No, it was the family-style. We had two--if I remember right--two of our crew that. . . this was passed around to the youngest recruits usually as mess cooks, we called them. They would go get the food--the tureens, we called them, of food--and bring it down to the table, and you had a place where you would sit. In our division we had, I think, about four or five tables there. Of course, they set up the tables before food time and set the tables and so on. Then we had one guy who was master-at-arms of our division, and we had to stay back out of the way. We couldn't get around in the eating area until he said we could (chuckle). He'd give the word, and everybody'd dash for their place, you know. Food was passed down the table, you know.

We always had ample food. Of course, there again, I liked the Navy food. I don't think I ever ran across any Navy food that I didn't like. Cornbread and beans on

Wednesdays and Saturday mornings for breakfast--I enjoyed it! A lot of people wouldn't eat, so I really got to eat then (chcukle)!

Marcello: I gather there were even some financial advantages at being a mess cook. Is it not true that on paydays, if the mess cook had performed his job especially well, that the rest of the crew would reward him?

Wentrcek: They would chip in, right--chip in and tip him. We sure would.

Marcello: What were the living quarters like aboard the Nevada? Describe them.

Wentrcek: Well, our compartment was up in the very forward end of the crew's area. In fact, to go through the next passageway--bulkhead--you went into the officers' quarters. So I think we were very fortunate to be where we were. We were pretty much separated from all the other. . . the deck force and that because they were scattered all over the ship. They were more to the aft end of the ship. I think our compartment. . . of course, that's the nice thing, too, about the battleships at that time--we weren't that crowded. We were fairly well-spaced. I think our bunks at that time were only three-tiered. Of course, later on, they put them five and six. Boy, they really put the crews on! We had . . . like I say, right at our compartment, just aft of it, there

was a large. . . our dining area was there. Then we had our own shower and restrooms right there at our compartment, which was very. . . the deck force or none of the others were allowed to come into our compartment to use our facilities, which made it real nice. We weren't crowded. Sometimes back with the deck crews--in their quarters--they'd have to stand in line to take a shower and things like that, where we didn't have that problem.

So I think that's typical. In all my experiences all through--while I was in the Navy--the engineering force had it maybe just a little bit better. It wasn't quite as crowded. We had a little better facilities because we weren't so crowded.

Marcello: From what you've said, I gather that you missed out on having to sleep in the old hammocks.

Wentrcek: Never did have to sleep in one. I don't think I missed anything (chuckle).

Marcello: I think you've actually mentioned a lot of things that would have been responsible for the high morale aboard the Nevada. You mentioned that the food was good so far as you were concerned, and, also, you seemed to be pretty much pleased with the quarters that you had aboard the Nevada.

Wentrcek: Yes, I think that accounted for a lot of it. I never did participate in any of the recreation. We had a couple of pretty good boxers in our division. In fact, one of them, I think, at one time--a guy by the name of Noble--I believe he was a fleet lightweight champion at one time. He was, I believe, a watertender first class, if I remember right. He'd been in the service for a number of years. We had a wrestling team. Like I say, I just wasn't there long enough to participate in any of this because I never was a boxer or a wrestler.

But we always had some activities. We'd watch them. They had a lot of spectators, you know. They'd put on or have a bout lots of times in the afternoons or something. We had one chief--I believe he was chief machinist's mate, but I couldn't tell you what his name is--and I think he had been fleet champion wrestler. He was a big bruiser. It wasn't this TV wrestling like we see now. It was real wrestling, you know.

Marcello: I gather that sports and athletic competition in general played a very important part in the day-to-day activities of the peacetime Navy.

Wentrcek: I think so, yes.

Marcello: There was a lot of competition between ships and so on and so forth.

Wentrcek: Very much so, right. They had the softball team. We even had a golf team. We would come into port, and, boy, these guys were up there with their golf bags, you know, to get over and start practicing and stuff like that. I think the . . . like boxing, wrestling, all this--this was a fleet participation. There was a lot of competition--keen competition--there, and I think it helped the morale. Of course, naturally, after the war started, this had to cease. We didn't have time for such as that.

Marcello: Okay, let us assume that you've now gotten to the Hawaiian Islands, and your permanent station is at Pearl Harbor. Describe what the routine training exercises would be like for the Nevada during those months before the actual Japanese attack. In other words, you might describe the training routine in terms of when you went out, what you did when you went out, when you would come back in--things of that nature.

Wentrcek: Well, we would go out, as a rule, about two weeks at a time on maneuvers. We'd go out but I don't know just where we were from Pearl. They called it the gunnery range. We'd go out. And I know the old Utah was a target ship, and they used to tow targets, and we would--our ship--fire at them with their 14-inch guns. And, also, we had 5-inch broadsides, of course, on the battleship. Of course, planes

would tow or they'd send drones up or tow targets for anti-aircraft practice. Of course, our armament--as far as antiaircraft armament--that was something else. We just didn't have it. We had a few .50-caliber machine guns; we had some 5-inch guns; and we had a few 20-millimeters.

Marcello: I think they were just being installed, were they not?

Wentrcek: Right. They had just. . . in fact, I believe. . . it seems like those were installed out at Pearl after we got out there. I believe they were.

Marcello: That wouldn't surprise me.

Wentrcek: I remember two in particular just coming up topside from down in our quarters. We'd come up and there was one on each side--on the port and starboard side. There was one each--20-millimeters. I used to think, "Boy, now those are something else," you know, and they'd take off with those and start firing them. But most of our antiaircraft armament was .50-caliber machine guns and, like I say, the 5-inch.

Marcello: I gather that at that time nobody had really yet realized that potential of airplanes.

Wentrcek: I don't think so, no. Well, surely they didn't. They didn't visualize what an aircraft was going to do, what part it was going to play in the Navy. And therefore. . . now we were slated to . . . now this is what we called

scuttlebutt. Whether it was actually true or not, I assume it was. We were to come back, I believe, to Bremerton, Washington. They was going to send us back for Christmas, and then they said we were going to get some new armament. Of course, we never did make the trip. But this was talk aboard ship, that we would get some more antiaircraft--I think 20-milimeters. I don't believe they had come out with the 40-millimeter at that time; they had the 20-millimeters. I just imagine they were going to load us up with them--which were a lot better than a .50-caliber.

Marcello: Would the Nevada usually go out on a specific day and come back on a specific day or would this routine vary?

Wentrcek: Well, I guess pretty much so. Usually, we wouldn't go out on a weekend. We'd go out on a Monday or a Tuesday or something like this, you know, after the weekend, and then we'd go out on a maneuvers. The best I can remember, we'd usually come in on a Thursday or Friday--at the end of the week--so we'd be in port for the weekend.

Marcello: And normally these training exercises did last about two weeks?

Wentrcek: Right. We'd go out for a couple of weeks and then come in for a week or so or maybe a couple of weeks.

Marcello: As you look back--and this is one of the few times I'll give you the benefit of hindsight--do you feel that the Nevada

did have a battle-worthy crew at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack? In other words, do you feel that that crew was well-trained?

Wentrcek: With the armament we had, I think so. I really do. I think we made a good showing that day. I believe we did. I used to. . . it was really something. I sneaked up and watched them when we were out on gunnery range then. That was always fascinating to me. Boy, they'd lay them in there, you know, and do pretty good with what they had--with the armament they had. I think that if we'd had more armament, we could have made a lot better showing.

Marcello: How often would general quarters sound on one of these two-week training exercises?

Wentrcek: Oh, usually a couple of times a day. Now prior to coming in on our last cruise out--last maneuvers--I think we had general quarters several times in the morning before daylight. Under wartime conditions, you have general quarters an hour before daylight--you go to general quarters regardless. When you're out at sea, you go to general quarters an hour before daylight. We were doing that when we were out.

And I can't recall going to general quarters in the evenings. We probably did at different times--not during the night after everything was turned in and secured. But

I mean late in the evenings sometime, I imagine we did. But I know we had gone to general quarters some in the mornings.

Marcello: If I am interpreting correctly what you're saying, your training routine in terms of going to general quarters did intensify somewhat as relations between the United States and Japan continued to worsen.

Wentrcek: That's right. Like I say, particularly on our last maneuvers. Now we were told--this was common knowledge aboard ship--by guys that had come down from the bridge and that would pass word around that they were out there watching us. They had picked up subs or spotted subs and this, and they were watching our maneuvers. One of the jobs when you were standing watch at night down in the boiler room on the twelve to four o'clock watch--midnight to four o'clock in the morning watch--was to dump the garbage out of the boiler room. We had a trash bucket there, and coffee grounds and this type of stuff, and we'd throw it in there, see, and maybe rags that we'd wiped up spilled oil and stuff like this. So being that I was the low man on the totem pole, that was my job to carry this out. We had what we called a "slop chute" on the port side of the ship, and you'd dump this stuff in there. I know they . . . we were running blacked out--totally blacked out.

I know it was a eerie weird feeling to go up there when everything was blacked out, you know. Of course, I smoked cigarettes then, and they stressed very much--said, "Don't you ever stop and light a cigarette up there or expose any kind of light!" We had our blackout curtains over our hatches and so on. They said, "Now we're operating. Now this is what it will actually be like if we are actually in war." They said, "This is the way our ship will run topside at night. There will be no exposed lights or anything." Like I say, this was the information we got--that subs were out there running along with us and watching our maneuvers and so on.

Marcello: Now this was another one of those conditions, that is, the blackout conditions, that did change as one gets closer and closer to December 7th.

Wentrcek: Right. Right. Sure did. Prior to that, we had movies up topside in the evenings. Even out at sea, we'd have movies, see, on topside and stuff like that. That all ceased the last two weeks that we were out. Like I say, we were operating under the same conditions then, I mean, as far as a state of readiness, I guess you'd say, as you would be in wartime.

Marcello: When you sat around in your bull sessions and had additional opportunities to converse with the old salts, did

you ever talk much about the fighting prowess of the Japanese Navy? Was this ever a matter of discussion?

Wentrcek: No, I can't say it really was. One salt--Brigham Young --he was an old Asiatic sailor. He'd been busted more times that he had hash marks. He could speak Japanese, in fact. He used to . . . I remember once in awhile . . . he was so interesting, if you could get him talking. He usually didn't talk much, but once in awhile you'd get him to talking. He usually didn't talk much, but he'd say . . . I know he'd always. . . not in exactly the same words, but he'd say, "Don't ever sell that Japanese Navy short." Because he had seen them. He had spent I don't know how many years over there in the Far East. He's about the only fellow that I can recall ever mentioning the Japanese Navy or anything, and then he wouldn't elaborate on it. He'd just, you know, say that they were good.

I know that on the morning of the attack, somebody said something to him. They passed word wanting to know if there was anyone aboard that could interpret Japanese. It came over our speaker system, and somebody said, "Brigham, you better go up there." "Oh, hell. I told you guys this was gonna happen," or something like that.

Now I don't know. I can't ever recall him saying that we were actually going to have war with Japan or anything,

but that's the way he was. He was just very subtle, dry, quiet sort of a guy, you know.

But I don't think we . . . I think we were too much of a kind of happy-go-lucky bunch of people to really, you know, think too much about it. When we were out on our last maneuvers, I think that kind of shook us up a little bit. Things got a little hushed, it seems like, you know, and maybe got quite a few of us to thinking whenever we could get off of our mind what we was going to do when we got into port as soon as the maneuvers was over with. But, of course, as soon as we started coming in on Friday, we forgot all about it--just like everybody else did, I think. But I can remember, myself, I was . . . it kind of. . . it was spooky; it bugged me when we were out there operating like that.

Marcello: I'll ask the question at this point that I'd asked you earlier. After you had been to the Hawaiian Islands for a little while--as short as it was--were you now beginning to form any opinions of the Japanese in general? In other words, when you thought of an individual Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Wentrcek: Of course, out there with the mixture--the Japanese, the Chinese, the Hawaiians, and everything--I always thought

they were just all a big, wonderful bunch of people. I sure did. I had never had any direct dealings--very little direct dealings--with a person that I knew was a full-blooded Japanese. Out there there was no inkling. . . I know the Japanese ran the restaurants, concessions, and all this in downtown Honolulu where we went, but there was nothing to say that they were mad at us or anything like that. So therefore, I don't think I had any thoughts or feelings towards them anymore than anybody else out there. I've always. . . it seems like I liked their attitude--them and the Chinese--the way they used to, you know, treat us--the nice guy and all this stuff. I didn't . . . no prejudice there, I don't think.

The only Japanese person. . . I think back now, and it makes me mad sometimes when I think about him. We were down in Georgetown--down where my home is--and this Japanese was a professor at Southwestern in Georgetown. He lived just behind my sister in Georgetown. She lived there at the time. The day I left on a Sunday afternoon to go into the service, that was my last stop. I stopped over at my sister's, and my mother and brother was all there, and he had married a woman from that area--and she was telling me goodbye. My sister had told them. . . they

visited over the backyard, and she told them I was going in the Navy. He come out there and said, "Hmm, you'll be sorry!" That's all he said. Then within the month's time he was gone back to Japan. I can't even tell you what his name is now. But afterwards I talked to . . . "why, that son-of-a-gun! He knew all along what was going to take place!" (laughter) But that has stuck with me ever since. That's all he said. He didn't tell me goodbye, good luck, or anything else. He said, "You'll be sorry." Now he was one of these guys that we think. . . so many of the Japanese are harsh, quick, you know, kind of "better-than-you" attitude or something like that. Now that's the only Japanese that I can think of that I've ever run across that was like that.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the liberty routine that the Nevada would undergo when it came back into port off these maneuvers. Now how would the liberty routine work?

Wentrcek: Well, we were usually. . . I think we were split up into the different divisions aboard ship depending on what they had to do--if they had a bunch of work to do or something like that. Our division, we split up fifty-fifty. Say you had the duty today for twenty-four hours--you came into port, and you had duty for twenty-four hours--then you

could go ashore then after you put in your duty at your time. After liberty call--it'd always be usually at one o'clock in the afternoon--and you'd be back. . . I think most of us had to be back by twelve o'clock. The people that were married and had families over there and that, of course, they had overnight passes. This would be our officers and the more senior petty officers.

Marcello: In other words, very rarely did a member of the crew get a full weekend liberty.

Wentrcek: That's right. If you were a petty officer, you could. You could put in a request for it and get a full weekend liberty, yes.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that when one did have liberty, he had to be back aboard by midnight. Why was this?

Wentrcek: Well, that I can't really answer why it might be back then. Some of the watches might have taken place starting at midnight--from midnight-to-midnight. Now we didn't work that way. We would start ours in the engineering department. . . we started on duty like the eight o'clock watch in the morning. Then we would start ours until eight o'clock the next morning--that's the way we were. But I think on some of your deck forces they worked the same day. So we were pretty much granted the same. So like I say, our liberty would start about one o'clock in the

afternoon, and then we'd be back at midnight. That was about the gist of it there.

Marcello: What would you usually do when you went on liberty?

Wentrcek: There was so much to see over there, and being, like I said earlier, an old country boy, it was just so fascinating. I'd go to the Fleet Landing, and, of course, there at the Fleet Landing--bowling alley, restaurants, tennis courts, all this. But I would always first go into Honolulu. We'd catch a cab--I think it was about fifty cents --and the whole group would load up a cab, you know; they'd just run one right after the other. Or we'd ride a bus and go into Honolulu, and we then went down to the YMCA. That was the turning point. From there you'd just look the town over. I mean, there was just everything--so much. It was all fascinating to me. I guess I've been in every shop, every store in Honolulu. Or we'd go out to Waikiki Beach and things like that.

Then later on, I'd always. . . I never was one to be late. I could come back out to Fleet Landing, and then I'd stop out there and maybe run into some of the guys I knew or something or maybe bowl a game or two or just goof around, you know. Of course, they had movie theatres out there, and I'd go to the show. I know we'd go out there. Of course, we had plenty of movies aboard ship, so usually

we didn't waste that time, when you'd get ashore, going to movies or anything like that.

Quite often they'd have some of the native entertainment going on out there--putting on programs and stuff like that. Of course, more of that came after the war, I think, than before the war.

It was just. . . I don't know. It seemed like there was just so much to be seen out there. I never did get over the whole thing to really see it all.

Marcello: I gather that after the fleet moved out to Pearl Harbor from the Pacific Coast that downtown Honolulu on a weekend was wall-to-wall sailors.

Wentrcek: It was. It sure was. It was wall-to-wall sailors. That's right. It was just something to see. The tattoo shops, boy, they did a thriving business, I tell you! They just ganged up out there putting on a big show, see. Guys ganged around just watching some sucker getting a tattoo (laughter). Just like that--there was so much to go on. I think back now, and probably it would be very boring to me now to have to do something like that. But at that time, boy, it was so new to me that. . .

Marcello: I'm sure that a great many of the fleet frequented Hotel and Canal Streets.

Wentrcek: That's right. That's right. They sure did. And, of course, every other building or doorway was a bar or something like

that. That was before my time of starting to imbibe any (chuckle), so I bypassed those places. I, you know, was always picking up souvenirs, this and that. When I did come back to the States, everyone I'd think about back home, you know, when I'd see something, I'd say, "Well, they would like that." I had a locker full of that stuff that went "down the drink" whenever we went down out there--that I had accumulated to bring back with me.

Marcello: Now when was payday during that period?

Wentrcek: We got paid twice a month. I guess it was on the . . . I can't even recall now whether . . . I believe it was around the first and the fifteenth.

Marcello: Would you have had much money, then, during the weekend of December 7th?

Wentrcek: Yes, because I was one that. . . even though I was drawing twenty-one dollars a month, I'd leave a few bucks on the books for the day that we were going to come back to the States. I had a few bucks there, and I probably didn't have maybe ten or fifteen dollars in cash with me at the time. I even lost that, darn it. I lost everything that was in my locker.

But I had gone ashore on the Friday night prior to the coming in, and I had bought a bunch of souvenirs and stuff like that--photographs of Waikiki Beach and all that sort of thing, you know, one of those spread-out group photographs of Waikiki

Beach. I was going to bring that home, you know; we'd been told we were going to come back to the States, and I'd started accumulating then.

But I didn't have a lot of money. That's why I had to spend my time window shopping and this type of thing. I didn't have the money to imbibe. I'd go over and eat, you know, or something like that. It was something to eat a different meal. I didn't go out and eat prime rib or anything like that, but I'd get a hamburger or something, you know. That's what we had to do on twenty-one dollars a month.

Marcello: Now when the crew would be out for two weeks and come back from liberty, what would be the general condition of the crew when they would come in at night after being on liberty and after having been out two weeks prior to being on liberty?

Wentrcek: Well, they'd usually be a pretty happy lot. Most of them had gone over and had themselves a ball, you know. They'd be broke--a lot of them would. They'd go over there and have a one-night fling, you know. As soon as we came in, the first liberty they had, they'd blow it all. And, of course, then from then on there was always guys among the old-timers who were always lending money. They had money to lend, see. Five dollars for eight or five dollars for ten--something like that. Some guy met him a nice little "Kanaky"--a little girl over there--we called them "Kanakies"--and he just had to go back

the next night, see, the next liberty. So he may pay ten for five just to get over there and buy her a drink or two. She was some gal that worked over in the bar probably, and maybe he seen her and maybe (chuckle) he didn't. So that's the way it was. That was just. . . I'm not saying that was all the guys that did that because there was a lot of wonderful guys . . . there was a lot of guys in the service who never drank a drop all the time they was in there or caroused around or anything. But sailors are noted for going out and hanging one on, so a lot of them did, yes.

Marcello: This more or less leads into my next question then. Many people assume that if the Japanese were going to attack Pearl Harbor, the best time to have done so would have been on a Sunday morning. What these people are implying is that Saturday nights were a time of drunkenness and this sort of thing, and consequently, the crew would not be in good shape to fight the next morning. How would you reply to that particular assumption?

Wentrcek: I think that's true because here again. . . a large number of --I wouldn't have no idea of the percentage, but quite a few-- people just in our division had their families over there, and, of course, like that on weekends they were gone. They were over with their families. And then, true, Saturday night's the night to whoop it up, and those that could get liberty were

gone. And then they'd come in, and, of course, on Sunday morning we just didn't hold a regular reveille. We'd wait until. . . you know, we'd roll out whenever you had the duty or were out at sea or anything. And that was something else. On Sunday morning we were permitted to sack out. So, no, I think--myself--I think that was darn good planning on the Japanese part.

Marcello: So there would be some people that were hungover, but probably the major reason why the Sunday would have been such a good time would have been because it was generally a day of leisure if one didn't have duty.

Wentrcek: I think that's probably it as much as anything, right. Like I say, these people that had a family, they were ashore. Of course, most of our crew--our regular crew--they were back. Possibly we didn't have the leadership that we would have had ordinarily aboard ship at some other date or something because of this. The old-timers were ashore. Now I know a large portion of our officers. . . now a lot of this is just hearsay, but I do know--we all know--that they were ashore. Our captain was ashore, which is expected, I guess, of him.

Marcello: I would assume that if he wanted to maintain his happy home after being out at sea for two weeks, he'd better be ashore.

Wentrcek: Why, sure. And the officer of the deck was probably some ensign or JG or maybe a lieutenant. Now this, like I started to say,

is just hearsay, and I have every reason to believe it. Our chief quartermaster got us underway.

Marcello: And I do know for a fact that the officer of the deck on December 7th was an ensign.

Wentrcek: Yes. Well, that's usually what it was, see. They rated the crummy duty like that. So I think that's the way it had been going--routine--so why change it. I think what burns me about the whole situation when I think about it is the letdown. . . or letting down our guard when we came in on Friday. After being out there and operating like we had been under those conditions, knowing that it looked like something was brewing, and then we come in--"Forget it;"

Marcello: Okay, let's start our narrative concerning the actual attack itself at this point. Why don't you pick up the story from the time that the Nevada docked on that Friday.

Wentrcek: Well, we came in on Friday morning, and, in fact, we tied up alongside. . . normally we rode out there. We were the last in line, and the Arizona would be ahead of us. Why, I don't know, but we tied up alongside the Arizona and when we first came in. When we would do that--tie up alongside another ship--you had visiting privileges back and forth, and I know some of the guys were over on the Arizona that night, and we had a movie together and everything--showed it on our ship. This is something else. This movie--I'll never forget it. I

was checking here on my daughter's report, and "One Foot in Heaven" was the name of the movie we had on a Friday night. Anyway, we stayed alongside them.

Then on Saturday, they backed us off. Now why this was done, I have no idea. We came in on Friday, we tied up alongside the Arizona, and word was passed to clean up the ship, which was your normal procedure coming into port--to clean up ship and then declare it a holiday routine. And after the ship was cleaned and holiday routine was declared, then those that had liberty could take off and go ashore, which I did. I went ashore.

Marcello: Now you mentioned a lack of security precautions when the Nevada came in on that Friday. Can you elaborate on this?

Wentrcek: Well, what I'm referring to is . . . coming into port, they opened up. . . they had the sub nets out there at the harbor entrance, and they just opened them up, let us come in. And there again, they secured everything as much as possible--the guns and that--and no extra watches were taken or anything else. Of course, we all know subs came in with us as we were coming in, and no precautions were taken--I don't think--to guard against that in any way.

So like I say, when we steamed into harbor, boy, it was 'Happy Days are Here Again,' you know, and that was the attitude of everybody. We forgot this out here, which I think was the wrong thing to do, but that's what we were given the

privilege to do. I think right there is where our guard was really let down--the way we went about it.

Marcello: Well, of course, when you're in port, there's no watertight integrity.

Wentrcek: No. No, everything's wide open. Right. Nothing was closed up or shut off or anything like that.

Marcello: How about ammunition and things of that nature? Is there any ammunition in the ready boxes and so on when you're in port under those conditions?

Wentrcek: Really, I couldn't tell you. If so, I think there was very little in the ready boxes. Then on . . . like I say, on Saturday morning we backed off from the Arizona and went back to our quay, which was just aft of the Arizona, and they started unloading all of our big ammunition. They said they were going to take it off, so we wouldn't bring it back to the States with us. There was no use bringing it back for our guns, see. So they were in the process all that Saturday --unloading that ammunition. In fact, the barge, the last barge of it--had just gotten away from there just a little bit before the attack started. I don't know just what time . . . I was on duty and I'd had the auxiliary watch of four to eight o'clock that Sunday morning. Of course, I didn't know, you know, what was going on, but I do know that I was told that barge had just pulled away from there shortly before the attack started.

Marcello: Well, let's describe your routine, then, on Saturday, December 6, 1941, and then we'll move into the 7th. What did you do on the 6th?

Wentrcek: On the 6th, I was aboard ship. I don't guess I did anything--just loafed around, see, on a Saturday like that. I'd gone ashore on a Friday night, and so then I was going to . . . well, our section had the duty then--that's right--on Saturday, and I had the watch--on the four to eight o'clock watch on Sunday morning.

Marcello: What did you do that Saturday night?

Wentrcek: I think I . . . I don't know. I might have sat around and played cards or . . . I can't even remember having even taken in a movie or not.

Marcello: Do you remember anything out of the ordinary happening that night? I'm thinking now in terms of an extraordinary number of drunks coming back aboard or anything of that nature.

Wentrcek: No, I can't recall anything out of the ordinary. I sure can't.

Marcello: Okay, so you mention that you went on watch at four o'clock on Sunday morning.

Wentrcek: Sunday morning, yes.

Marcello: And you had the four o'clock a.m. to eight o'clock a.m. watch.

Wentrcek: Right. I got relieved--it's customary whenever you have a watch light stand that you get relieved earlier--about 7:30

or thereabouts, and you're through. Your relief eats breakfast and comes on down, rather than him coming down and relieving you, letting you go eat, and then you come down for a few minutes and then he has to come down. This was just one of our routines that we had amongst ourselves. So he came down about 7:30 and relieved me while I was going to clean up and go ashore.

I don't know what I had in plan to go ashore for that Sunday, but I wanted to spend the Sunday over on the beach. I was going to get off early that morning and go over and spend the whole day over there. I didn't even stop to eat breakfast. Breakfast aboard ship was something--I don't know --like chipped beef on toast or something like that, but I didn't care too much for that (chuckle). So I just went on in to the shower, left my clothes back on the bunk, took me a clean pair of shorts with me, and my soap and razor and everything, went in to shower, and I was in the shower when the general quarters sounded.

Marcello: How was general quarters sounded? Do you recall?

Wentrcek: Air attack first was sounded. Now there's a difference in the bugle call for air attack than just regular general quarters. But an air attack was the first . . . best I remember. . . I know it was. That was the first alarm. Then he went into general quarters alarm, and I don't know what else.

Marcello: Now was all this coming over the PA system rather than through the bugler?

Wentrcek: Well, the bugler was putting it through the PA system. See, he was up with the officer of the deck, and he had his orders to sound the alarm. He may have been told to sound general quarters, and he sounded air attack or vice versa, or maybe that was what he was told to do.

Marcello: Did the officer of the deck ever come on the PA system and verbally call you to general quarters and that it was an air attack?

Wentrcek: I don't believe so. I can't remember that he did. But the alarm sounded. . . and there were two or three other guys in the shower who said, "Aw, of all the damn times to have a drill!" And then somebody said, "Well, that's a crazy time! A lot of guys are not here," and so on, you know. So we thought, "Well, it's some kind of drill. Some guy with a little authority is pulling something," see. This was just. . . that was our attitude. And rather than running back to my bunk between the shower and our compartments where our bunks were--where I had my clothes laid out--there was a hatch going down to the engineering spaces down to the boiler rooms.

Marcello: In other words, you were one deck above your battle station?

Wentrcek: Right. So I just scooted down there--put my shorts on--and scooted down to my battle station, see. And about that time

. . . well, I know the . . . we had a hit of some kind before we realized that something wasn't kosher.

Marcello: Describe what that hit felt like.

Wentrcek: It just felt like that whole ship was raised up. I don't know whether it was a torpedo, but I guess it must have been. Because it just. . . boy, I was standing there on what we called the floorplates, and they bounced up, you know, and it was a . . . well, if you've ever heard a real hard car crash or something, this is similar to it, but still it isn't near that much metal tearing and that, you know. And so I guess . . . now things were happening.

Marcello: Did it knock you off your feet or anything of that nature?

Wentrcek: No, it didn't. And we thought, "My God, what's going on?"

Marcello: In the meantime, you can actually hear nothing taking place outside.

Wentrcek: No. That's right. That's right. I guess they had already called down, probably before we got this hit, to start cutting in burners--cut in all these burners--and give them everything they had. But I know. . . of course, things happen, like you say, so fast. It seemed to me like it was hours, but it was happening so fast, and all we were doing was trying to give them all the steam we could. And I know that during this process, that's when I had to change these burner tips. And I was so afraid because we'd had another crash of some kind,

you know, a hit of some kind.

And we had always been warned, even when we were firing our big guns, not to stand in front of that boiler. We had what we called a flashback--the flames caused from a vacuum would come out and then back, see, from the concussion, I mean. Here I had to do this right out in front of the boilers over next to the bulkhead and just kind of in front to change these tips. But I got them changed in there and fired up, and I got back away from there. I guess I was moving pretty dadgummed fast.

A kid that had come aboard the ship. . . he was in one of the other boiler rooms. He had gone through training in a different company. He got burnt very badly because he got caught in a flashback. But that flame--when we'd get a hit--it'd come clear back to the bulkhead, see, and behind the boilers.

Marcello: Now you say this flashback would even occur when you were hit by a torpedo or something of this nature?

Wentrcek: Oh, yes. Bombs or a torpedo would cause it. The concussion, see, could cause this. And I remember one very distinct one. Of course, like I say, I got my thing done in front of that boiler, and I'd get off to the side. Of course, there at the last we had everything opened up wide open, and we was just off to the side here. Like I say, it seemed like it was just minutes--very few minutes. But we were underway all this time. We had gotten underway.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, has the ship taken on any list?

Wentrcek: Yes. Yes, we were taking on a list.

Marcello: I think it was as a result of that first torpedo.

Wentrcek: I think so. Evidently it was. But we were listing because I know. . . I remember that very distinctly.

Marcello: How more difficult does this make your job as a fireman when the ship is listing like this?

Wentrcek: It was making the watertender's job real difficult. I remember him saying something like, "Man, I can't see that water gauge," or something like that. It wasn't affecting me--me firing the boiler itself--but the guy that was controlling the water into the boiler, it was for him. I think he probably just opened the thing up (chuckle) to let it go, you know.

But I know we were moving. I remember feeling the motion of the ship moving, and somewhere along in there we got a hit just above us. It was right forward of the stack, and it came down and kind of deflected--I think they said it was a 500-pound bomb that hit--and instead of coming on into the stack, it deflected away from it. Well, when this happened, I think it blew out some tubes in our boilers, and we started filling up with steam and then had a heck of a fire up above us, and our blowers were bringing this smoke and we couldn't see.

And we told them. . . and, of course, our head man down there had his earphones hooked up with central control, and he

said, "We've got to come out of here." They told us, "All right." So we had an emergency valve there. He just pulled it, and that just shut all the fuel off to the boilers.

Marcello: So theoretically the ship is now running on five boilers.

Wentrcek: Right. It was running on four because we had one boiler room being overhauled--torn down for overhaul.

Marcello: And you mentioned that by this time the ship is actually moving.

Wentrcek: Yes. Yes, we were moving then.

Marcello: How long did it take you to get up steam? You may have mentioned this earlier, and I think you did.

Wentrcek: Well, what I've been told, we were underway in fourteen minutes. Normally, it took about four tugs to get us underway, and then we had no tugs to get us underway. We got underway under our own power because we'd sink down in the silt and that, but they got this thing underway.

Marcello: Now what did it feel like to experience one of those bomb hits?

Wentrcek: Now that is a feeling or a sound you'll never forget. I mean, it is just a rending of the metal and that, and the concussion and something that huge--just you might say kind of like it was picking it up out of the water and bobbing it around or something--it just . . . I don't know. I've been on a ship that was torpedoed afterwards, and it's the same thing. So it's just a sensation you can't hardly describe.

Marcello: What sort of emotions or feelings do you have at this point?

Wentrcek: Scared as hell! To be honest about it, we were scared. Then, like I say, I think they passed the word down. . . of course, we couldn't hear down there with no speaker system, but the head man had on his earphones. They said it was a Japanese attack; the planes had Japanese markings on them. I know we got that word.

So then, like I say, we shut off our fires, and we started out of that, and we had to come out at an airtight door here (gesture)--what we call airlocks--and two doors there. It's called the airlock chamber because this was all under pressure. Your boiler room's under pressure.

We got out of there, and we started up the ladder. The deck above us was the armored deck--that's a 3-inch steel deck--and there's a hatch up there. Of course, the repair crews, whenever you go into battle station, they close all these hatches, you know. And we got up there and . . . we still had some light. It was flickering. Of course, we had an electric lantern--we had grabbed off the bulkhead as we started out.

Marcello: Is everybody acting in a professional and orderly manner?

Wentrcek: Very much so, I thought. There was three of us down there.

Marcello: And this was true even when you were trying to get up steam?

Wentrcek: Yes. I think so, yes. We got up there, and a guy by the name of Kelsey was with me. He said, "We gotta close this steam

line off, 'cause those boilers are out, and it's gonna bleed the others!" So there was a big valve there, and we closed it off, and then we . . . this hatch was dogged down, and I remember one of the dadgummed dogs, we couldn't get it open. I think there was about six dogs that held this hatch down.

Marcello: Did you panic?

Wentrcek: We started to. We got all these dogs loose and took this big wrench we used to close this valve off--what we called a "crow's foot"--and he reached down and got that thing, and he hit that dadgummed dog on that hatch. It came open, and we come out of there. Then I had, I think, the eeriest feeling--we had water above us. See, we had listed a lot. This was on the starboard side, and we had water above us. We opened that hatch, and here comes some water. And that is a dadgummed eerie feeling.

Marcello: How much water was pouring down that hatch?

Wentrcek: If I remember right, it was up about ankle deep up in there--in what we called our "uptakes," in the passageways and that. We made it and we thought, "My God, where's everybody at?" Well, they had to go into a passageway, down around a corner another way--probably the length of this house--to where our control station was down there. But there were bulkhead doors closed in this way,

and so we got into the first passageway, and there was some water in there. They opened it and the water come in.

Well, then when we went into the other hallway running fore and aft of the ship, opened that one, and there was no water in there. Well, we felt better then, and we could see the guys down there. So we got down there.

So then as. . . I don't know, but it seemed to me like it wasn't very long that they started taking water in different boiler rooms and were having to shut them down. The number six boiler room, like I said, was being repaired, being overhauled, and they sent some of us down there to put that thing together. I was one of the lucky ones to go down there. I was glad for it gave me something to do.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, I gather that the Arizona has blown.

Wentrcek: I guess so. See, we pulled out and we were beached by then. By this time, see, we were beached. They ran aground. We pulled out and they said after we got underway, then they concentrated on us very heavily. They figured they were trying to sink us in the channel which forks around Ford Island. And they said they sent everything at us. That's when we got the brunt of the attack.

Marcello: Now were you actually below decks when this was taking place?

Wentrcek: Yes.

Marcello: You actually did not see this.

Wentrcek: No, I didn't see it.

Marcello: In fact, you actually didn't see too much of what went on on topside.

Wentrcek: Not at all. Not until sometime that afternoon, I came up to the deck above us just to look around, and there wasn't a soul up there. Everything was just torn up. The bombs had come in, and fires and that were up above us and kind of under the bridge in that area.

So we were huddled down in this area in these passageways for a while. Of course, they were trying to maintain some steam to keep some electric power going because you had to have electricity for the guns. All your broadside stuff and the 5-inch had to have electricity, also the lights and so on. Somebody broke out a . . . they went up somewhere. I don't know where they got it (chuckle), but they got a case of gallon cans of apricots. This must have been sometime by noon or something like that. Like I say, I lost all track of time.

Marcello: Have you been secured from general quarters by this time?

Wentrcek: No. No, we haven't. And we fooled around, and then they said, "Well, let's try to put that one boiler room together."

Marcello: In other words, you never did get it put together when you were originally sent to the number six boiler room.

Wentrcek: Yes, we went down then after fooling around here for a while doing. . . I don't know. . . myself. . . we were praying, I guess, as much as anything. We were sitting around the hull, and nobody had nothing to say. We were wondering what the next move was going to be. And then someone gave the order to go down and put this boiler room together. Well, that's where I was glad to get something to do.

Marcello: And the Nevada was actually trying to clear the harbor when this was taking place.

Wentrcek: Yes. I think by the time we started to putting this boiler room together, we were beached by then. I know we were.

Marcello: Could you tell when the ship actually beached itself?

Wentrcek: No. No, I couldn't. I sure couldn't. They ran it aground purposely, and up on this ledge.

Marcello: They couldn't just swerve over toward Hospital Point?

Wentrcek: Hospital Point, I believe they called that. And they ran a bunch of lines and cables over to the trees over in there to hold it. They said we were up on a ledge, and they didn't want it to slide down off that. And I know they tied up to these trees and that up there. So we worked down there. Somehow, if I remember right, it was about

two o'clock in the morning--that would have been on Monday morning--that we had that boiler room ready to go.

Marcello: Now was this done in record time, also?

Wentrcek: You bet it was! Because it was torn to pieces. They asked, "Are you ready to fire it?" We said, "All right." Well, we had no more. . . we couldn't pump any fresh water because our water was all contaminated with salt water by then. And we fired it up. And you couldn't control it. With salt water you can't control your steam. It foams on you so bad and everything. Man, you can have all the burners going, and then you'll have to shut down to one and stuff like that. We tried that for I don't know how long--for a little while--and they finally said, "It's hopeless. Shut her down."

So we came out of there, and it was morning by then. This was sometime. . . it was daylight, I know. Because I came up--we went up topside, some of us--and looked around.

Of course, I had been up on a Sunday afternoon. I went up to see if I could find me some clothes, and I found an old pair of dungarees somewhere, and I put them on. By then my locker was over on the side that was listed over so bad, and everything was underwater. I found me some clothes over here, and I put them on.

So then on Monday morning, sometime after daylight, why,

I came up to topside to look around. Of course, everything was still burning--a lot of it was still burning--and it was so smokey.

Marcello: What sort of emotions and feelings did you have when you saw this?

Wentrcek: I guess just. . . just sick, you know. You really were. I think it was kind of drizzling a little bit, and that smoke and everything was hanging there, and there was smoke belching out of the Arizona, I think. There was still smoke coming out of it. You could see back . . . see, we could look back kind of over to the harbor, and it was just--I don't know--a very weird feeling to see what was back there.

Marcello: Weren't you later on backed off or towed off of Hospital Point and taken some other place? Or did you stay there at Hospital Point the whole time you were grounded?

Wentrcek: They stayed there. Later on, they were taken off. No, now wait a minute. Well, where we ran aground, they stayed there until they raised the ship. I stayed on . . . and then sometime on Monday, they took us over to the Fleet Landing.

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

Wentrcek: It was covered--oil everywhere, you know--with just debris, oil, and that. I know we went on . . . a boat came along--a crew boat--and took us over, and, of course, we had to go back then back along Battleship Row and back over to the

landing. We had to watch out for the timber, you know, floating pieces, chunks of wood, and all that kind of stuff. And, of course, oil was everywhere floating around. Of course, things were still smoldering everywhere.

I think we stayed over there. They fed us. That's one time I ate chipped beef and toast, and it tasted real good. I've never turned it down since then (chuckle). That's what they served. So then they tried to . . . I think we stayed over there all day. They wanted us to kind of relax. We slept in the bowling alley that night. Have you ever tried to sleep on a bowling lane (laughter)?

Marcello: If you have a bad back, it'll straighten out your backbone, I guess.

Wentrcek: But then we went back out the next day and tried to clean up topside and that. In fact, I have a picture of that. But I think in a couple of days then, they took a group of us for burial details on Aiea Landing. We worked over there as they would pick up bodies and getting them out of the stuff where they were salvaging and going through debris and that. They'd find them floating out in the water, and they'd bring them over, or the pieces, and then they had pharmacist's mates over there who would take fingerprints if they were unidentifiable. So then we would hold a . . .

Marcello: I have just a couple of other questions with regard to the

day or night of the attack. What were some of the rumors that you heard in the aftermath of the attack? I'm sure that the ship must have been one big rumor mill.

Wentrcek: Well, I can't . . . like I said way back there earlier, I know that when they passed the word and they wanted anyone to interpret Japanese, that's when someone told Brigham Young to go up.

Oh, yes! There was something real good. I forgot that. While we were down overhauling this boiler room, somebody came down with the rumor that they had landed. We were where we were tied up there alongside of the cane field. They said there were troops all out in this cane field and said, "They may be aboard just any minute!" That really shook us up then. That was one of the big rumors.

And to top it off, our division officer--I think he was Van Zandt, I believe--he had lost all of his clothes and uniforms and everything, and he had found some sailor's uniform and put it on, and a sailor's hat--just a white hat, didn't have his regular officer's hat. I was working on a valve or something, sitting down at the bottom of the stairway of this boiler room we were overhauling, and I looked up, and I saw him up there. He had kind of an Oriental look--chunky, dark-complected--and I thought, "My God, here they are!" I think that scared me as much as

anything (laughter). I thought, "Lord, they've come aboard!"

But that, I think, was the biggest rumor--that they had invaded and they were coming across this cane field. And here we were right there, see. They could just walk aboard.

Of course, we could hear. . . a guy would say, "Oh, I can hear them firing out in there," you know. There was all kinds of rumors. Even after we went ashore over to the landing--when they took us over there--at night you'd hear rifle fire now and then. Oh, some "happy Joe" . . . because, boy, everything was. . . everybody was trigger-happy, you know, and they had guards everywhere with live ammunition, and you were challenged. If you walked out, boy, you better identify yourself in a hurry, you know, before you went into a doorway. At every doorway there was a guard and everything. I think that was most of the rumors--that the islands had been invaded. I guess that probably shook me up as much as anything--thinking, "Lord, what do we do now? They're in here," you know.

Marcello: Okay, before I interrupted you a little while ago, you were talking about the burial detail over at Aiea, and I think you were to the point where you were talking about the pharmacist's mates identifying the bodies or taking

fingerprints when they were unidentifiable, and then you were talking about the burial itself. I think you had mentioned that they held services for these individuals.

Wentrcek: Yes, every evening they brought the bodies in, and we had a bunch of pine boxes there that'd been made up, and they would put. . . or we did. If they needed some help, why, we'd help them put a body in a box, and they would give it a number. A lot of times they had a bunch of pieces. We'd just have to put them in a box.

Then we loaded them on a truck, and we would take them over to the cemetery--they had bulldozed out trenches there--and we buried them every evening. They had three denominations that would hold services. And we were there and would sound taps, and they'd cover them over and stick up a wooden stake at this number where they thought. . . you know, whatever identity they could give them that corresponded with this number.

I think I worked over there for, well, seven, eight, ten days. About seven or eight days, I guess, I worked on that detail. As ships would come into the harbor, they would take on crews, more people, as they were going, and we were all in a pool over at the Fleet Landing.

Marcello: And what ship did you eventually end up on?

Wentrcek: I wound up on the USS Chester, a heavy cruiser. I stayed on that all during the war, and it had quite a record. It

was one of the Pensacola-class cruisers, and she was a good one.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Wentrcek, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview. Before I shut off the recorder, do you have any other observations or experiences that you think we ought to add as part of the record?

Wentrcek: Well, not that I can think of relating or pertaining to Pearl Harbor out there and the attack on that. I just. . . the only observation. . . I think it was a big goof-up. I think the people were let down. I think we had warning; I think we had ample warning. They just didn't take heed. They were trying to keep from having conflict of some kind, I guess. Of course, that's something that I guess we'll never know. I think we had ample warning; I think we had enough warning ahead of time that more preparedness could have been undertaken. We could have saved, I think, a lot of our fleet rather than marching them in there on that Friday like we did and "just let your hair down and forget it all." I think that was the big blunder right there.

Marcello: Was it normal to have all the battleships in there at one time?

Wentrcek: We usually did. Yes, most of the time they would come in like that, or some of them were in there, and maybe they

didn't all go out. But there was times whenever we'd see them all in--a large portion of them, let's say that.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Wentrcek, I want to thank you very much for taking time to participate in our project. You've said a lot of very interesting and, I think, important things. Scholars are going to find your comments valuable someday when they use this material to write about Pearl Harbor.

Wentrcek: Well, I appreciate having the opportunity to unload on somebody (chuckle). Of course, my family, they know it all. But we seldom discuss it anymore or anything, but they've heard the story. Of course, in a way I'm proud to have been a part of it because I love the Navy and that, and being that's where I had to really start, why, I have no regrets. I don't begrudge any of it or anything. I wouldn't want to do it again, no--go through it again. But that's just part of it. Whenever you sign up with them, why, you take it for better or worse, I guess.

Marcello: Well, again, I want to thank you very much for participating.