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Interview with  
WARREN G. HARDING  
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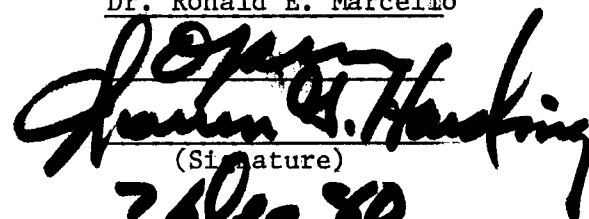
Place of Interview: Orlando, Florida

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Warren G. Harding

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Orlando, Florida ,            Date: December 7, 1980

Dr. Marcello:        This is Ron Marcello interviewing Warren G. Harding for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 7, 1980, in Orlando, Florida. I'm interviewing Mr. Harding in order to get his reminiscences, experiences, and impressions while he was a member of Band Sixteen aboard the battleship USS California during the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Harding, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Harding:        I was born in a little town in Indiana, in Decatur County, Indiana, a little town called Greensburg. I was born on the 6th of March in 1921. I went through grade school there and through high school, and from high school I went direct into the Navy Band.

Marcello: Now when did you begin to get started in a musical career as such?

Harding: When I was about sixteen years old, I started learning to play the trombone, and I played in the high school. We had a little high school band.

In 1939, we were still recovering from the very serious Depression, and there wasn't much work for a young man coming out of high school. And I'd been listening to the Navy School of Music concerts and the Navy Band concerts. My folks had a friend who was the leading trumpet man in the Marine Band at that time. His name was Wendall Kemp, and "Wennie" Kemp was their friend, and he was visiting us one time in the summer after I had graduated. He said to me personally, "Why don't you come into the Navy School of Music?" He said, "I could probably get you in." So he talked to Lieutenant Bantor, who was the man in charge of the Navy Band at that time. He invited me to come to Washington, D.C., to audition, and on the basis of Wendall Kemp's recommendation, I was accepted in the Navy School of Music.

Marcello: So, consequently, it was a combination of economics and interest in music that determined your choice of the Navy as the service that you were going to enter.

Harding: Well, not completely. History will show you that about the time that I was making this decision, Hitler was

moving into Poland, and I had a strong feeling that we would be in war. I had a uncle that had been a Marine in World War I, and my father had been a Navy man--he'd been a boatswain's mate--and they'd both been on the USS Nevada in World War I. And I had also had known some people that were Army people. I was almost convinced that eventually we would be in war, so in the event that we ended up in war, I didn't want to be in the Army. I had this feeling that in case I ever would be hit or injured or even killed, I wouldn't want to be killed in mud (laughter). At least the Navy was a clean place to live and a clean place to die. So I choose the Navy because I figured we'd be in war, and I would rather be in war in the Navy than in the Army.

And the fact that I had the possibility of being a band member appealed to me because I enjoyed my music. I wasn't a good musician--I wasn't an outstanding musician--but I was good enough to enjoy what I was doing. And the fact that I would be in an opportunity where I could learn more about music really did interest me and appeal to me. I was playing in little one-night bandstands around the country, little lake jobs and things like that, and there was no future in that.

**Marcello:** You mentioned awhile ago that you were thinking in terms of what was happening in Europe. Is it safe to say that

the possibility of a war in the Far East had not really been crossing your mind at that time?

Harding: The Far East?

Marcello: Yes.

Harding: I hadn't even thought of the Far East. I was only thinking of Hitler going into Poland and we being drawn into it. I hadn't even considered the Japanese or any of the Orientals.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you had heard the Navy Band and so on while you were still back in Indiana. Now when you mentioned you "heard" them, you mean in terms of phonographs, or you actually heard them in person or over the radio?

Harding: The Navy Band had a weekly concert that they sent over NBC throughout the United States, and it was broadcast throughout the United States. And in those days, that was the days of the "big band" sound, the Glenn Miller's, the Tommy Dorsey's, and all the young musicians in those days were emulating these people. And the concert band of that day was the Navy Band and the Marine Band, which gave nationwide concerts by radio. That was the only thing we musicians had to listen to, that plus the records and any broadcasts that were made by the big bands. So we did our listening and learning by listening to those, and I wouldn't miss one of the Navy Band Concerts. I was impressed by it, and it was really an advantage to me to be able to think that

I might be able to make that scene.

**Marcello:** Awhile ago you mentioned that you were not the greatest of musicians, but evidently this person must have felt that you were at least good enough to encourage you to go to Washington to audition.

**Harding:** Well, I think he had more faith in my ability as a quick study than he had in my current ability at the time (chuckle) because I think when I went through the audition, the man who auditioned me shook his head when he (laughter) . . . he wasn't too impressed by my ability to read music at that time. So Mr. Bentor, who was a friend of "Wenny" Kemp's, said, "Well, he can't read music. We'll teach him how to read music." And that was his reaction: "Bring him in." So I was brought in more under the influence of . . . I was there as a guest of Bentor's more than anything else, I think.

**Marcello:** Now did you have the audition before you actually joined the Navy?

**Harding:** Oh, yes! Yes, indeed! As a matter of fact, the Navy Band, at the cost of the Navy, would bring musicians into Washington for auditions, and in the event that they passed, then they would be brought into the Navy. In the event they didn't pass, they were assured that they would have their travel and expenses back to their home place. As a matter of fact, my cousin, who came in shortly after I

did, came in for an audition as a piano player and didn't make it, and he was a better musician than I was (laughter).

Marcello: So you had the audition. You were accepted. What happened at this point?

Harding: Well, then the regular routine at that point was to send me as a recruit to Norfolk, where we learned the ways of the Navy. We learned how to march, we learned how to take orders, and we learned the ordinary fundamental disciplines of the Navy procedure.

Marcello: So you did go through the regular Navy boot camp in Norfolk?

Harding: Yes, Right. With one exception. Most Navy boot camps were of three-month duration, and some extended beyond that. Our orientation was just an orientation. It was not a serious boot camp recruiting process. We only had two weeks in Norfolk. I went to Norfolk and stayed there two weeks and came back.

Marcello: How many were there of you there at Norfolk going through this two-week boot camp, so to speak?

Harding: As musicians?

Marcello: Yes,

Harding: There was only one with me--just one. His name was Schwartz, and he later ended up on the band on the USS Indianapolis, which was reported to have been the one that carried the atomic bomb that finally ended the war. And then it ended up in a nest of submarines and was torpedoed and sunk, and



it was a big mystery for a long time. But Schwartz was on the Indianapolis, and he went down with the Indianapolis.

Marcello: I should have asked you awhile ago with regard to the audition, what did the audition consist of?

Harding: The audition consisted of me playing a number by memory that I knew to give me a chance to demonstrate the ability that I knew, plus three different reading exercises. There was a simple reading exercise, a medium reading exercise, and a very difficult reading exercise. I never got past the medium (laughter), but the influence maintained it, and I was able to go through the whole thing.

Marcello: Out of curiosity, what was the particular number that you played initially? Do you remember?

Harding: Yes, "Carnival of Venice." It's a typical demonstration piece for brass instruments. Trumpet people play it; baritone people play it; trombone people play it. It's a good theme, and it has variations on the theme, which includes triple timing, but it gives a good overall demonstration of the mechanical ability of the instrument being played.

Marcello: Okay, you're out of boot camp--that two-week stretch. What happens at this point?

Harding: Well, we go back to the Navy School of Music then, and I start going through the routine of the music school.

Marcello: And how long did that last?

Harding: Well, let's see. That was in 1939. We left Washington, and I was placed in Band Sixteen. All the bands were organized in Washington, D.C., and then sent out to assignments on different ships throughout the fleet. I was assigned to Band Sixteen with L.B. Luckenbach and with Joseph Bolen and the other members of the band. I joined the Navy on the 9th of September, 1939, and we left Washington, I believe, in April--April, yes, it was in April. I don't remember the day. It was April, 1941, and we got aboard the California. We went aboard the California on the twenty-third day of June, 1941.

Marcello: How rigorous was that Navy School of Music in Washington, D.C.?

Harding: Oh, it was very rigorous. Bentor was an authoritative figure. He was probably one of the most intimidating men that I've ever known in my life.

Marcello: In what way?

Harding: In his ability to influence people. He had absolute, dictatorship control over everybody in that school and everybody in the Navy Band, and anything that he said would be done. It was a very highly disciplined method of teaching people how to play instruments and live and work together.

Marcello: Could you see yourself becoming a better musician as a result of going through this?

Harding: Oh, yes! Yes, indeed! Yes, indeed!

Marcello: And was this basically the first formal education in music that you'd ever had?

Harding: Yes, yes. This was not true with many of the others, though. I came from a little Indiana town where not much of that was available, and everything that I had learned, I learned by ear from listening to big bands and other musicians whenever I could get to someplace where I could hear them. I stayed glued to radios and everything else just to learn things.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that these bands were formed in Washington, D.C., and then they were sent out to the various units.

Harding: Yes.

Marcello: I'm not quite clear on this. How often would this be done or . . .

Harding: Well, the routine of the school called for eighteen months of education. Then whenever there was a need for a band, Bentor would find the people that were needed. He'd say, "Okay, I need a band on a ship, on a cruiser, at such-and-such a place." So they'd find the people who were in the school that had completed the eighteen months, and they would form bands. Usually, the bands would be formed sometime around the twelfth month, and they'd begin to work together for a period of about six months--together. So whenever Bentor needed a band someplace, to assign somewhere in the fleet, there would be one ready for him.

Marcello: Well, I guess what I don't understand is, what would have happened to the band that was already aboard the California. Wouldn't there have been one there?

Harding: Yes, there was, and I believe it was only a skeleton band, though, because some of them had . . . their time had run out, and the others were requesting duty on different ships, and others were getting out of the music specialty and wanting to do something else. So the band that was on the ship . . . Beckner, I believe, was the name of the bandmaster that had that group, and he had just a skeleton band, just enough to play colors in the morning, and that's about all they did. So they needed a band. They needed a full complement band, and all these people that were in our band all came in about the same time, so they could be counted on for at least . . . and we had to sign up for six years. We had six years of duty, not four, which meant that by the time the war started, I still had time to do; and by the time my time was up, they wouldn't let me out. So I did ten years before I could ever get out (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, so all of Band Sixteen goes aboard the California in approximately mid-1941.

Harding: Yes, exactly on June 23, 1941.

Marcello: What kind of a rating would you have as a member of the band?

Harding: At that time, I had a musician first class rating. Now

that's not first class musician, Musician first class was the same as a second class petty officer. First class musician is the same as a first class petty officer. So there was a little bit of strangeness there in the way the rating structure was established. But I was a musician first class making \$74 a month.

Marcello: What other duties would you have aboard the California other than playing at the various functions that called for the band?

Harding: No other duties except for battle stations during any battle-simulated attack or a real attack, and we were pretty well drilled in that sort of thing.

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

Harding: The identity was known as Repair Fore Port. And my particular job was . . . I was to man the headphones. I had the headphones, and I was communicating with Repair Central--what we call Repair Central. But all the central repair activities were all communicating into one place, and I was the communicating link with our unit into the central repair unit.

Marcello: Describe what a typical day was like for you as a member of the band aboard the California during that pre-Pearl Harbor period. What would your activities consist of with regard to your music career?

Harding: Well, first of all, let me say that that particular part of my life, from June 23 to December 7, 1941, is probably the most enjoyable part of my whole life that I've ever spent, as far as me really enjoying what I was doing. I enjoyed my music. I enjoyed being aboard ship. It was a magnificent, marvelous, new experience for me. I was wide-eyed and just soaking up, drinking up, everything I could possibly learn, and I spent every minute of my extra time, when I wasn't actively rehearsing and playing with the band, just learning more and more about the ship. It was just a great feeling to know that this was a magnificent city within itself that could produce a livelihood for all of its people and everything else and still be an instrument of protection for the United States government. It was almost a fantasy, and I look back on it now after all these years as a kind of fantasy because it was a great life for me at that time. I really enjoyed every bit of it.

As far as our duties are concerned, we'd get up in the morning just like everybody else. Our bandmaster was a very conscientious man, and he had the love and loyalty and dedication of every one of his musicians.

Marcello: And we're talking about Luckenbach now, is that right?

Harding: Luckenbach, absolutely. He was know as "Red" Luckenbach. And he was the kind of guy that could get everybody all

lined up on the fantail and say, "Jump," and everybody would have said, "How quick," or "How high." He was just that way. And he kept the interest up constantly in the band. He kept everybody interested in each other.

We lived very closely together. And there was eighteen of us . . . eighteen? I don't remember, but I believe it was eighteen. No, we had twenty-one pieces in the concert band, and we had an eighteen-piece dance band-- twenty-one of us. And although we all had different personalities and everything else, we lived in a cramped compartment stacked three bunks high and probably not much more than--what--maybe less than two hundred square feet of space. And he was able, all that time and even for years after, to keep all of us functioning together and working together in a very productive way, which speaks very well for this man. He was one of the most extraordinary men in my life, one of the serious influences in my life.

We would get up in the morning, and "Red" would tell us--I can hear his words today--"In case you're going to live aboard this ship, you're going to have to have all these people enjoy having you aboard because you're not going to be doing a lot of the work that they're doing; and in order to keep them from hating you for it, you're going to have to work, too, in your own way." So we would

get up, we would have breakfast, and we did our rehearsals in the main mess hall, which was on the main deck, about midships of the ship.

And as soon as they'd clear the mess hall from breakfast, we would be setting up for our band rehearsals. We would rehearse in the morning all the way until noon, and then we'd break for lunch, and then we'd start rehearsing in the afternoon. We'd rehearse in the morning and the afternoon. And when we weren't rehearsing together, we would be somewhere in the after storage practicing our own instruments and getting our own practice done. So it would be nothing for us to be having that instrument in our hand anywhere from eight to fourteen hours a day.

So everybody on that ship, in order to come back and forth, from front to back or back to front, fore to aft or aft to fore, they would have to go by us, and they'd see us working and rehearsing. And they just admired everybody in the band, and we had some rare relationships with those people because of it. We weren't looked down upon because we weren't scrubbing decks and polishing brightwork and that kind of stuff. So our day was very full, and it didn't make any difference whether we were in port or whether we were at sea--our routine was the same. We would rehearse in the morning and the afternoon, and the evening we'd play concerts (laughter). So the



California ship, itself, had a band playing almost all the time somewhere.

Marcello: And for whom would you be playing the concerts?

Harding: For the whole crew, anybody that was aboard ship at that time, and even for exercise. When they'd get out for exercise, we'd have a band out there playing over the waves, so they would be doing jumping jacks to music.

Marcello: What kind of special functions would you be playing for?

Harding: Oh, we played for chiefs when we were ashore. When we were tied up in the dock, in the evenings, anywhere from three to four times a week, we'd be playing because we had a good band, and everybody at Pearl wanted to hear the California band. We'd be playing for officer's dances; we'd play for chief's dances; we'd play for enlisted men's dances. We did a lot of playing in the evenings. So we were active all the time.

Marcello: What kind of music would you be playing?

Harding: Well, we had a good arranger by the name of Shelley. We affectionately referred to him as "Sig," "Sig" Shelly. And "Sig" was our arranger, and he was a very fine reed man. By "reed man," I mean, he played the saxophone, clarinet, and tenor. He played several different instruments, and he played them well. And he was a fine arranger. He could sit down and take a record, and he could write the music from the record and make that arrangement for all

of the instruments. He would get that all off that record, and then we would sit down and play it. And when you listened to the California band playing "Moonlight Serenade," and you shut your eyes, you thought you were listening to Miller. You didn't know you were listening to eighteen guys that came from all over the different parts of the country. And we had a band that . . . because of his arranging ability and because of Luckenbach's musical ability to put it all together and rehearse it properly, we had an extraordinary group of people.

Marcello: So are the "big band" sounds the most popular kind of music that people wanted to hear?

Harding: They'd shut their eyes, and they could hear . . . one minute they'd be hearing Dorsey, and the next minute they'd be hearing Miller, and the next minute they'd be hearing Charlie Barnett--the whole bunch. We had everything. We did it all.

Marcello: I know from time to time they would also have something ashore called the "Battle of the Bands." Did the California ever get involved in that?

Harding: Right.

Marcello: Describe it.

Harding: They did, and it was held at Bloch Recreation Center, where all of the bands . . . and many of these were bands that had originally come out of the Navy School of Music, and

they were on different ships. We had a band from the West Virginia; we had a band from the Argonne; we had bands on the Oglala; we had a band on the Tennessee. All these bands were on the different ships. And we'd get together and we'd have a play-off. One band would play a number, and then another band would play a number, and then they would have an applause meter register the acceptance. The Arizona band and the California band were the ones that finally emerged as the two final winners, and we had a play-off. We had a play-off the night before the Battle of Pearl Harbor, and the California band won. So the "Battle of the Bands" came out in our favor, and the next day every member of the Arizona band was dead. Every one of them were killed in the explosion when the Arizona blew up.

Marcello: We talk about that "Battle of the Bands." There was a lot of friendly, and sometimes not so friendly, rivalry among the various ships and so on, isn't that true?

Harding: That's true. Right. And it was just like people going to a convention. They all had their rooting section behind each band. We had set up on the basketball floor, and all the bleachers were filled with rooting sections from the crews of the different bands. And then after their bands would be eliminated, then they'd come in and fit in . . . they'd move over to where the other crew

members were backing their band, and they'd fit in behind the band that they thought they liked best, and the applause registered who the winner was.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about life aboard the California as being one of the happiest times of your life. How would you describe the general morale of the people aboard the California in that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Harding: Absolutely tops, as far as I was concerned. Of course, I was dyed-in-the-wool serviceman from the beginning. I had all the mid-western training for being a military man. My mother had married a Navy man--my father was a Navy man--and my uncle was a Marine. All this was background, so I had no problem with the discipline as a result of Navy activity.

A number of the other band members, though, didn't have that same feeling toward it. They had problems with the discipline. It bothered them to have people telling them that they had to get up at eight o'clock in the morning or six o'clock or whenever it happened to be and go to bed at night and report in such-and-such a date. That never did bother me, but it bothered about 60 percent of the others in the band.

I don't know too much about how it affected the other crew members of the California because I never did . . . we in the band didn't . . . it wasn't that we were setting

ourselves apart; it was just that we didn't have anything in common with the other crew members, and there was no relationship that we could establish between us. There was no way I could talk to a boatswain's mate because he's talking about knots, and I'm talking about B flat clarinet and this kind of thing, see, so there was nothing there in common, and none of us ever really got closely involved with any of the other crew members of the California. That's why I don't remember anybody else aboard the California except the master-at-arms by the name "Boots." And that's all. I never did know his name; it was just "Boots." That was his name. That's what we all called him. But the morale of the ship was extraordinary, and I feel that it was extraordinary as a result of our band being as active as we were.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the California?

Harding: Oh, it was great. There was a saying aboard the California, "You can eat all you want, but make sure you eat everything you take." (chuckle) We had good food. It was very, very, good food.

Marcello: And, of course, I think that would have helped contribute to the high morale.

Harding: Yes.

Marcello: Also, at that time, all of you were still volunteers, which probably helped.

Harding: Yes, I'd volunteered. Everybody in the band had, and I think everybody in the Navy at that point had, probably. Yes, of course, they had to. That was an all-volunteer Navy.

Marcello: In other words, you were all there because you wanted to be there?

Harding: There because we wanted to be there. We chose to be there. Right.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your social life in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy. What did you do when the California was tied up in Pearl and when you had liberty.

Harding: This may be a little hard for you to accept, but I didn't do anything. I was so excited about being aboard that ship, every minute of my . . . I didn't go ashore for three months. The time I . . . June, July, August. It was almost the first of September before I ever went ashore. I just stayed right aboard ship. I wanted to learn where every bolt and every hinge and everything else aboard that ship was, and I spent all my time studying that ship. I just never went ashore. Now a lot of other guys did, but I didn't.

It wasn't until about September when I got a letter from my mother, saying that they had some friends that lived in Honolulu, and it might be a good idea for me to look them up. And so I set about finding out where they

were, and finally I made up my mind to go ashore and meet the Miles family. I had written them a letter and told them that I was in Honolulu, and they'd invited me out. So I made plans to go out and meet them. And the name was Hiram Miles. He worked for the Ford agency at that time. He'd been a World War I veteran, and he decided that he . . . he ended up his World War I service in Honolulu, so he just stayed there. He married a Portuguese lady, and they just stayed there.

So I went out and visited them, and they took me in their home, and it was just like my own home from then on. So from then on when we'd be in port and I'd have liberty, I would just go out to the Miles family and just stay there. They'd set a room aside for me, and it was just my room. I was just like one of the family.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work aboard the California?

In other words, when the California was in on a weekend, how much liberty might you expect to get?

Harding: Well, what we did was, we divided the band into a port and starboard watch. We just divided the band into two bands. We'd have one band on duty, and when one band was on duty, the other had liberty. And one day we'd have liberty, and the next day we'd be on band duty; next day we'd have liberty, and the next day we'd be on band duty.

Marcello: Aboard the California, when did liberty expire?

Harding: I'm not sure I remember . . .

Marcello: In that time did it have the "Cinderella" liberty like most of the other battleships?

Harding: I don't know what you call "Cinderella" liberty.

Marcello: You had to be in at twelve o'clock.

Harding: Yes, it was something like that.

Marcello: Be back at twelve o'clock.

Harding: That's right, that's right. Right. Now I remember.

Marcello: Unless, in your case, you may have had an advantage in that you had a place to stay ashore.

Harding: A couple of times I stayed over for a weekend, and I had special . . . you're right, I had a special liberty pass for that.

Marcello: But I think you had to have a place to stay ashore before you could get overnight liberty.

Harding: That's right. That's right.

Marcello: And then I assume you perhaps had to be back at eight o'clock or whenever reveille was.

Harding: And I remember I had to have a letter from the Miles family which made it acceptable.

Marcello: I suppose that was done because there wasn't really that much in the way of hotel accommodations in Honolulu, were there?

Harding: No, the only thing that was available was the YMCA in those days.



Marcello: At the same time none of you had very much money, either.

Harding: There were some other hotels, but they housed the bawdy houses there (chuckle). That wasn't any place where you could stay any longer than maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, and some not that long (laughter).

Marcello: Now was there a particular time when the California would be in port? In other words, could you expect to be in on a weekend all the time?

Harding: Not all the time. Let me see whether I can remember. The routine in those days . . . they used to have what was known as the watch, and they had all of the ships divided up into different battle divisions. And I think, if I remember right, our division was BatDiv Five, and that included the California, the West Virginia, and the Tennessee, and there were a couple of destroyers which I don't remember that was a part of that battle division. And we would be out ten days, and then we would be in for two weeks. We'd be out ten days and in two weeks. This is the way I remember it. I may be off, but that's the way I recall it.

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to get worse, could you, even in your capacity, detect any changes in the ship's routine when you were at sea or when you were at port?

Harding: Well, in October we were sent back to the States for some

overhauling. We were sent back to have the ship overhauled, and we were supposed to go back into dry dock and get all cleaned up. We just went back for a regular routine cleaning-up job. And while we were in San Francisco in dry dock--and I'll never forget that--it was such an amazing thing to see the water drain out of that dry dock and see that ship sitting there with no water around it. It was an extraordinary sight. And a few of us says, in our very young and daring way, said, "Let's go walk under it." (Laughter) And here's this mass of metal and everything! I'll never forget it. And I literally got down in that dry dock and walked under the keel and crawled . . . there was just enough room to crawl under the keel (laughter). And I crawled under the keel of that battleship.

But what was amazing, I thought the battleship would come down into a sharp "V". It doesn't. It comes down and then it flattens out. There's a big flat bottom. And that flat bottom was a . . . I thought I'd never get under that flat bottom to the other side. But that was quite a thrill.

But we were in dry dock, and while we were there getting the ship overhauled, several members of the band took leave because we were supposed to be there for two weeks, and so some of them took leave. Marnett went on leave--Richard A. Marnett was a clarinet player and quite

a personable guy. I think I remember Joe Bolen also went on leave. Everybody didn't go on leave. I didn't want to go on leave. I was having too much fun learning about the Navy and the ship.. It was a marriage between me and this ship (laughter). I really enjoyed that ship, and so I didn't go on leave. I stayed right there and got a chance to see San Francisco and so forth.

And I remember at that particular time that this was when there was a lot of diplomatic activity. I was reading newspapers, and there was a lot of diplomatic activity about exchanges between Japan and the United States and the differences of opinion and how tight and how serious the negotiations were. There were rumors at that time, while we were in dry dock, that by the time we got back, we might be in war. And this was the way the thing was going on.

So by the time we got all refurbished and everything, about the time we put the water back in the dry dock and got the ship floated again, that's about the time that Japan broke off diplomatic relations with the United States. This was probably about the middle of November, sometime around the middle of November, if I remember right. So we got the ship floated, and they called everybody back early from their leave. Marnett was called back, and he sent back a telegram saying his mother was very ill. I

think his mother died at that time, and they gave him special leave to stay, so he didn't go back with us.

And by the time we got back . . . it takes ten days to get from San Francisco to Hawaii by battleship, and it was at least ten days, maybe two weeks. By the time we got back, it was toward the latter part of November. All right, are you getting the picture? Now when we got back, we were getting all these . . . on the way . . . aboard ship they also have the radio, and they would put out a little newsletter in the morning. They'd print the news that they got from the radio the night before. And things were really warming up between the Japanese government and the United States government, and, of course, the war was really heavy in Europe in those days. And when we got back, we figured, "Okay, this is it. We're going back. We're going to war."

And one of the biggest surprises I ever had in my life was when we got back into Pearl Harbor from that overhaul run, and every ship was in the Harbor. And everybody commented on this. They said, "My God! Why have they got everybody all locked up in this harbor for? Why aren't they out dispersed somewhere with all this nervousness going around the country and everything?" We were thinking we're going to be going to war with Japan any minute. "Why in the world are we all hunkered up in here?"

Marcello: This was unusual, that is, for all these ships to be in at one time?

Harding: Right, right. Yes (chuckle). Sure. Because usually you've got two battle divisions out and only one in, see-- two out and one in. So we got in there just long enough to get fit back into the watch, and we went out. The last week of November was our time to be out on our watch, so we went out.

And while we were out . . . let's see . . . let me get the right time now. We're talking about Thursday and then Friday--Thursday the 4th and Friday the 5th. So we were out at sea on December 4, and we got this radio contact and went to General Quarters. We found out that we were in the presence of a Japanese sub, and they actually dropped depth charges, and we knew this on Thursday. This happened to us Thursday, on the 4th of December. And after awhile everybody went to battle stations and everything. We figured we were at battle. We figured we were at war, you know (chuckle), because the word passed that we were dropping depth charges on Japanese subs. That's what General Quarters was. It was for real.

Marcello: But now you were actually in international water, so to speak.

Harding: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: And no declaration of war has been declared.

Harding: No declaration of war, but we were dropping depth charges, anyway, and we were at General Quarters. And General Quarters lasted four hours, and we knew that was serious because most General Quarters routines, practice runs, dummy runs, only lasted about fifteen minutes. You get everybody there, check everybody out, do a muster and secure. This one lasted four hours, and they were serving sandwiches and coffee. So, you know: (laughter), this is something different, and this was on Thursday.

Well, it was time to come in, so we came in on Friday. Again, we looked around, and every ship in the damn fleet was in Pearl Harbor except . . . well, even the Enterprise.

Marcello: The Enterprise was out, wasn't it?

Harding: The Saratoga was tied up. We tied up at Dock Seven right behind the Saratoga--right behind the Saratoga. The Saratoga was headed out. That was the first one on the way out. So we came in Friday, and as we came in that afternoon, the Saratoga left. But that was the only difference. Every other ship in the fleet, as far as we knew, was in the harbor. And this was extraordinary. This was the second time now that we had seen this. And even the lowest seaman aboard ship thought this was stupid, you know; "This is dumb." (laughter) I understand later that the Saratoga was on its way then to Wake Island to deliver some planes, so it was at sea on its

way to Wake, and it left on Friday.

Now on Saturday, there was a seaplane tender that pulled up in the Saratoga location in front of us, and I forget what the name of that one was. The records would show it. I just don't remember the name. But there was a seaplane tender that pulled in after the aircraft carrier Saratoga left. So there was a ship beyond us, and then there was quite a bit of space between us and the Oklahoma, which was behind us--Oklahoma and the Utah, I believe.... , no, the Utah was on the other side of the island. Anyway, we were all very much concerned about this.

Marcello: Now in your bull sessions, was the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl ever discussed, that is, among you enlisted men?

Harding: Up until that time, no, we hadn't talked too much about it. Now the band members had been trained to spot aircraft. That was part of our job, was to be aircraft spotters and especially the ones working above deck. We went through a lot of aircraft identification practice as part of our preparation for doing battle, and so all of us knew what the Zeros looked like, and we knew what all the Bettys looked like. We knew what all the Japanese planes looked like.

Marcello: But I guess what I'm saying is, did you expect a . . . you

may have expected war with Japan, but did you expect that war to come directly at Pearl Harbor?

Harding: Not until this particular time when we came in, and we saw all the ships in the fleet right there in Pearl Harbor. And we said, "Hey, if we're going to go to war . . . and we just had this contact . . . we better get these damn ships out of here because when somebody goes to war, they're all going to be locked up in here, and there's only one way out of Pearl Harbor, and somebody's going to be messed up bad." And that's about all the conversation that went around.

Marcello: Suppose that war did come between the United States and Japan, did you have any doubt about as to the outcome?

Harding: No, nobody ever felt like there was any country in the world that could overcome the United States Navy.

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

Harding: Well, after being in Honolulu for a while . . . see, Honolulu is an international mixing pot, and you don't think too much about race in Honolulu. The Orientals are Orientals, and we'd learned to appreciate the Japanese. The Chinese people were the ones that we worried about in Honolulu because . . . we weren't really worried about them, but they were the only ones that were a subject of any



derogatory conversation because they were the shopkeepers. The Chinese people were the shopkeepers in Honolulu, and they were always the ones that were gigging the sailors and overcharging them and all this kind of stuff. So the word was out that you always got to watch the Chinese. But nobody ever thought too much about the Japanese people. There was no derogatory thought about them whatsoever until after December 7.

Marcello: This brings us up to that weekend of December 7, and let's talk a little bit about your activities on Saturday, December 6. Do you recall what you did on Saturday evening of December 6th?

Harding: December 6th?

Marcello: Yes.

Harding: In the evening?

Marcello: Yes.

Harding: Well, on December 6th . . . let me talk about the day first. This has always been a source of wonderment in my thoughts when I've thought about the whole picture. On Saturday the entire fleet was called into what is known as "fleet landing." Have you had this recorded before?

Marcello: No, I've heard about the inspection and so on, the admiral's inspection.

Harding: Well, it was actually called a "fleet landing." And every Marine that they could get loose and every Navy man that

could be relieved was involved, including the bands, and they had all of the bands together. We went over to Hickam Field and had a big parade (chuckle). And call it inspection or call it whatever you want to, but there must have been . . . there must have been six, seven thousand servicemen over there on that parade ground. That was on Saturday.

Well, on Saturday evening then we went back to Bloch Recreation Center and had this final play-off of the "Battle of the Bands."

Marcello: Describe the "Battle of the Bands" that evening.

Harding: Well, it was the Arizona and the California, and I suppose . . . no, wait a minute, that wasn't the "Battle of the Bands." The "Battle of the Bands" was before that. The "Battle of the Bands" was before we went to . . . we didn't have the "Battle of the Bands" that night, but we did have the band out. We were doing a concert or a dance band play-off or something with the Arizona band the night before.

Marcello: Over in Bloch Arena?

Harding: Yes, but it wasn't the "Battle of the Bands" because that had been done before we went back to the States to get the ship overhauled. But we were over there just on a recreation play-off. And there were probably two or three thousand people at Bloch Recreation Center that night.

So ever since then I've always felt like . . . well, two things happened that day. At no time, it's never been a practice in the Navy to send everybody ashore. They left only skeleton crews on those ships during that day. And then at night, that night, we got orders to open the void spaces in the ship. They open void spaces to get fresh air. The void spaces are the airtight, watertight security spaces where you have to keep them tight that make the ship float. Steel won't float unless you got air in it (chuckle). So these void spaces are supposed to be spaces where you maintain your watertight integrity. And we got orders aboard the California--and we understood that everybody aboard ship in every ship in the harbor had orders--to open our void spaces that night.

And at no time in the history of the Navy, to the best of my knowledge, has anybody ever left void spaces open all night. But these were. That night they were ordered to be left open all night, which explains why the Oklahoma went over in five minutes, why the Utah went over and went down, because all those void spaces were open, and when they got hit there was no watertight integrity. And the Oklahoma, I understand, went over in five minutes. Nobody had a chance to get in or out.

I've always felt like something . . . I don't know

who passed that word, but the word was passed for all the void spaces to be left open that night. And everybody that I talked to . . . I remember talking to people that night, and there was kind of a hushed rumor . . . here we were in a . . . we were thinking about going to war. We'd had this contact at sea three days earlier, and we just couldn't understand why. We thought this was, you know, so stupid that everything . . . here was a series of stupid, dumb things that were happening. I remember thinking and talking about that before Pearl Harbor. This was that night.

Then there's another little thing that I'd like to get on the record that I've always wondered about, too. It's kind of weird. When I was growing up as a kid, I never will forget one time I was out at night with my grandfather. We were out walking in a field on the way home, and I saw this meteor come down. And I said, "Wow, look at that, grandfather!" And he says, "Yes, son, somebody close to us is probably going to die very shortly." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, this is just an old saying." I said, "You mean everytime you see a meteor, somebody close to you is going to die?" He said, "Yes." Well, I remembered that, and that was kind of in part of my early childhood psyche.

So late at night, it was always my practice . . . I

loved that ship, and I loved being out there on it. I would get out at night, when everybody else was secured, and I'd walk out on the fantail. I'd just look at the night, look at the stars. And that night, it was about, oh, I suppose about eleven o'clock, and we were back from playing, and the ship was quiet, and everything was quiet. All you could hear were the sounds of the harbor. And all at once I saw a shower--not just one meteor but a shower of meteors--and it lasted for over five minutes. It was just like it was raining meteors. I thought, "My God! How many people do I know that are going to die soon?" And this was the thing that went through my mind that night before. It was one of the things that occurred to me the next morning when I had time to stop and think for a minute. It's weird.

Marcello: Okay, I think that's a good transition to get us into Sunday morning, December 7. Describe your routine on Sunday when you get up until all hell broke loose. Let's move into Sunday morning.

Harding: I have to bring another little thought into this. I had a friend that I grew up with by the name of Robert Kramer. He was a gunner's mate 3rd class. And Bob was one of the ones that had also been influencing me to get into the Navy because he liked the Navy. I'd been hearing from him; he'd wrote to me and told me he was in the Navy

and that he liked it, and in case I was getting ready to go in the Navy, it'd be all right, that I wouldn't have to worry about it, that I wouldn't get hurt, you know.

He was gunner's mate aboard the Arizona, and he had visited me on my ship, and I had visited him on his ship. And I said, "Look, I have these friends over on the mainland, over in the Kamiki district, and I think we can arrange a Sunday afternoon picnic or something, and maybe we can have a luau. Would you like to go over and meet them?" And I'm talking about the Miles family. He said, "Sure." So we made plans. We had made plans to . . . I had my quartermaster flag his quartermaster (laughter)--we talked through quartermasters, you know, signaling--and made arrangements for Bob to meet me at Fleet Landing over at the receiving station, and we'd have a big party out at the Miles family. They were going to have a big luau, bringing in their friends, and they were going to have a luau for us because we'd been out to sea, and that was the first time I'd had a chance to get back to visit them since I got back from the States.

So we had this Sunday afternoon planned. They were going to take us out to the beach and were going to have a pig in a pit and everything and give Bob a good ol' Hawaiian luau. And he was supposed to meet me. So I

got up and I was getting ready to go ashore.

And I was going to take Frank Wanat with me. Wanat was another trombone player in the band. Frank was first trombone, and I played fourth trombone. Now Frank and I were good buddies, and we made a lot of liberties together, and he was getting ready to go ashore with me. We were supposed to leave at seven o'clock.

Now you got to get a picture of the routine. The ship had a liberty launch that left every hour on the half-hour. So I missed the 6:30 launch, and we were supposed to be ready at seven o'clock so we could be out there and waiting for the launch and catch the liberty launch at 7:30.

Well, Frank always was slow. He never could get anywhere on time. And I was ready at seven o'clock. I was standing out on the quarterdeck leaning on the rail and waiting for Frank. And he wasn't ready at 7:15, and at 7:20 I went back into the band compartment to see what was holding him up, and he was still drying off from the shower. He was still drying off from the shower and hadn't got his clothes on yet.

And I said, "Well, come on, we're going to miss the 7:30 launch!" He said, "Well, we'll miss that one, We'll just catch the next one." I said, "Yes, but that's an hour later, Frank. Come on, get your clothes on!" He said,

"Well, I'll get out if I can." So I went on out, and I figured, "Well, if he doesn't come, why, I'll go ahead and get on it, and I'll meet Bob so that Bob won't be worried. Then we'll just wait for Frank, and then we'll go eat."

Marcello: In the meantime, what kind of a day is this in terms of weather, climate--that sort of thing?

Harding: Beautiful, clear. It was a typical Pearl Harbor morning. It was just quiet, and the air is like pure oxygen out there. It was a nice, beautiful day. It was a nice, beautiful day.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story again.

Harding: So I went back out to the quarterdeck, and I decided to get on the liberty launch and go on alone. I said, "Frank, I'll just go on, and we'll wait for you over on Fleet Landing. I'll catch Bob and make sure that we don't lose him." He said, "All right. You go ahead. I'll meet you there."

So I went out, and as I got out to the quarterdeck, that liberty launch was just pulling away. I'd missed it (laughter). And it's a good thing because I understand that every one of those men were killed. They were strafed and killed--every one of them--because it takes over half an hour to get to Fleet Landing from where the California was.



Marcello: And you were kind of far to the south that morning, weren't you?

Harding: Yes, right.

Marcello: You weren't tied up real close to the battleships, were you?

Harding: No, we were far from the battleships. We were a good way from the battleships. Battleship Row . . . see, we were the head of the battle division. See, Admiral Pye was on our ship.

Marcello: Yes.

Harding: We kept the flagship way up front. We were the flagship.

Anyway, we missed that liberty launch. So I just leaned up against the rail and just waited for Frank to come on out, and I was mentally grouching about him being late and everything. And about fifteen minutes until eight, why, the duty band--what we call the duty band, which is half of the members that was on the watch . . . see, I had liberty that day, and the other half was on duty. Well, they got ready to play colors. And so they went back to the fantail and started forming. And at 7:55 . . . it was five minutes before colors, and the reason I knew it was because the "prep" flag just went up. The "prep" flag is a blue flag with a white square in the middle of it, and that goes up five minutes before colors. So the flagship raised the "prep" flag,

and I saw that and I knew it was 7:55.

I saw the "prep" flag go up, and I looked over to the right about the same time I looked over and saw the "prep" flag go up. I heard this drone, and there was a "ROAR-R-R-R-R." There's a very special sound to airplanes when they're in a dive. I looked over to see what it was, and here was this plane diving. I thought, "My goodness, this is Sunday! Who practices dive-bombing on Sunday?" Dive-bombing was a big thing in those days. I said, "Who practices dive-bombing on Sunday?" And I'm looking up in the air, and as I look, I immediately spotted that red ball. I said, "That's a Zero!" I'd been aircraft indentifying, and, you know, and I knew it immediately. It was a Zero.

And as I saw it and recognized the red ball--the minute recognition hit here (points to head)--it was just like that that I saw the bomb being released. "Oh, my God!" I watched the bomb fall, and it burst on the runway on Ford Island. And I thought, "We got it!" Of course, my mental attitude had already been built up to us being in war for the last four or five weeks, especially the last four days. I thought, "My God, we got it."

And so I headed, just automatically, to my battle station. That's all I thought of--get to my battle station. And I went down below--it was four decks below,

Repair Fore Port--four decks below the main deck, and I grabbed the headphones. And I'm sitting there with the headphones on when we hear the boatswain's mate piping General Quarters. And the Marine bugler was blowing General Quarters, "da-da-da-da-da-da-da," you know. After the master-at-arms had piped the General Quarters and the Marine had blown the General Quarters with the bugle, then the master-at-arms gets on the PA system, and he says, "Everybody get to your battle stations! This is no shit!" And that's exactly the way he said it--those exact words. He said, "They're bombing Ford Island! Get to your battle stations!" And then he blew his pipe again, and the bugler came out with his bugle and sounded battle stations again.

And then it wasn't more than . . . there was a little bit of quiet, just a hair of quiet at that time, and then all at once I heard--"POW"--the first explosion.

Marcello: Now all of this that you have told me up to this point must have taken place within a period of about ten minutes.

Harding: Yes.

Marcello: Because I think as close as we can tell the first bomb hit the California at about 8:05.

Harding: That's probably right. That's probably right because everybody that was in that station, in that Repair Fore Port unit was in place, and the doors were dogged down

before that first bomb hit. I didn't mention that but after I . . . I was the first one on the scene. And I had the earphones on, I was sitting there. And then all the rest of the people that was supposed to be in that group came in there, and they dogged down the doors. So we were all there.

Marcello: Okay, describe the impact when that torpedo slams into the California at 8:05 or around that time.

Harding: Well, it was an extraordinary feeling. Now we had fired the big guns at sea, just for practice firing, and there is an unusual feeling when the big guns are fired because they're usually pointed athwartship, which is not fore and aft. When they're fired, they're fired athwartship. You bring the ship around so that you've got all that foundation for recoil. But were they could fire fore and aft, like they usually carry them, it would destroy that ship. It would break it in the middle (laughter). So the big guns are brought around athwartship, and they're fired broadside, and when you fire broadside on a battleship, even though that's a big battleship, it just feels like that battleship is picked up in the water, and then it kind of shakes and then settles back down.

Well, that's just the way that torpedo felt. And everybody looked at everybody, and, you know, they'd be recovered from this shock. And somebody said, "Why are

they firing broadsides? They're only airplanes! You can't hit an airplane with a broadside!" (Laughter) We thought we were firing broadsides down there where we were and had no way of knowing we had been hit. We didn't even know we'd been hit. (chuckle).

Marcello: Now very shortly afterwards--very shortly--another torpedo crashed into the California farther aft, I think.

Harding: Right. Right. And it was the same as before. It just seemed like it picked that ship up and just shook it, and then it settled back down.

Marcello: Did you lose power or anything like that as a result of these two torpedoes?

Harding: No, no, we didn't. We were never without light, and we were never without air. And that's part of the rest of the story, which I'd be glad to relate.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that the voids were open, and, obviously, water must be pouring into these voids now, since the torpedo slammed into it.

Harding: No, the void spaces are down in after steerage. That's down around the keel, see. That's down around the keel. That's not where we were. We were four decks below the main deck. But when you dog down those doors, you've created again another void. You've created another void space, and they were like small rooms. You dogged the door down over here, and the "dogs" are actually levers,

and they're all around the door. The doors are like ovals; they're not square doors. They're round. When you "dog" those down, why, there's a good seal there, and that gives you watertight integrity.

Marcello: Go ahead.

Harding: Well, okay. Now this was a little bit unusual, the way this happened, and it's strange how people do strange things under traumatic situations. Where we came down, our Repair Fore Port was right at the bottom of the ladder. And we dogged down the hatch where the ladder came down, and we also dogged down the hatch where it went into the fifth deck below deck, because there was supposed to be nobody down below the fourth deck. We were as low as anybody was supposed to be in battle stations.

Marcello: That must have been a great feeling (laughter).

Harding: Well, here we are, and we've got a ladder coming down. You got the picture? And we got a door that's dogged down on one side and a door dogged down on the other side. There were about seven people in there with us, and they were, people like, shipfitters and electricians, and there were two band members, one of which was on the phones, which was me, and the other band member, which was supposed to have been a medic. We had medic training, too, so we could handle first aid and that kind of thing. Manley, the bass horn player, was in there with me. He was

part of the band, and he was the one that was supposed to be working as a stretcher bearer and a medic. We called him "Gus." Actually, he was a great, big man. He was a big man. He was a very big man, and he played a big horn.

Just as an aside, when we first came aboard the California, he walked up the gangplank, and he came aboard, and the OD, the officer-of-the-deck for the day, looked at him and said, "My goodness, man, that sure is a big horn. How low do you think you can get with that?" The OD was worried about whether or not he could get down below decks with it, see. And he said, "How low do you think you can get with that?" And Manley said, "Well, double B flat, probably." (laughter) Manley was a big man. He ate all the time. Anytime he could find something, he would eat, and we couldn't keep him from eating. He just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. I understand now that he can hardly walk around--he's become such a monster of a man. And we called him "JB." That was short for "Jug Butt."

And Manley was in there with me, as well as the others, who were people who were mechanically inclined to be able to repair things. So that was the make-up of that repair station.

Now, what happened after a bit--oh, who knows, after

all these years, how much time passed--we noticed that the watertight door on the aft side of this compartment, which is just beyond the ladder, was sprung a little bit. Now there were ways of testing it without opening the watertight door. We tested that area beyond, and since it was sprung and we were getting oil and some water in that door, we knew that things were in bad shape back there. And we also knew we were in trouble because we developed about a ten, fifteen degree port list. And we tested the airspace in the compartment aft of us, and it tested water and oil, so we knew there was no escape through that area.

And after we got the hit forward--the torpedo that hit forward of us--we were right between the two torpedo hits. When I saw the USS California in dry dock, after they pulled her up out of the mud a couple of years later and brought her into the dry dock, and looked at her, I couldn't believe my eyes. I almost fainted when I saw where we were compared to those explosions. You could have driven a "Mack" truck through either one of those holes, and I was in the place right between them (laughter). I couldn't believe it, you know, because we weren't really in trouble except for the fact that we were getting some water and some oil in the compartment.

Marcello: And you still have power.



Harding: Oh, we still had lights, still had air.

Marcello: Do you know what's going on above, out in the open?

Harding: I did but they didn't. I didn't tell anybody there that they had already abandoned ship.

Marcello: Oh, the abandon ship order had already been given?

Harding: Right. When they said, "Abandon ship," Repair Central notified all repair stations, and, of course, they had a record of who was available and who wasn't. They'd abandoned ship, but they said, "Repair Fore Port, maintain your watertight integrity." That was my order.

Marcello: Even after the abandon ship order had been given?

Harding: Yes.

Marcello: Now, also, by this time, the California, I think, had taken a third hit about 8:25.

Harding: It took a bomb down the midships hatch.

Marcello: Right, a bomb.

Harding: Down the midships hatch, yes.

Marcello: Now did you feel the effects of that?

Harding: Not as much. We knew we'd been hit by something else, but I didn't know what it was.

Marcello: What were your thoughts when you heard this abandon ship order but you were told to maintain your station?

Harding: My thoughts were. . . I hesitate to say mixed. My thoughts were, you know, "Here I am, a Navy man. My orders are to maintain watertight integrity." And we'd been schooled.

We had this discipline, and we were working discipline now. I hadn't really thought about myself yet. I was doing what I was told to do. We were trained, and I was doing what I was trained to do. So they said, "Maintain watertight integrity," and I said, "Maintain watertight intergrity."

Marcello: Are you getting any fumes or anything like that coming through?

Harding: Yes, some. Not serious, but some. So then after awhile, the fumes began to collect a little bit. There was a little bit of smoke in there. So the shipfitter that was in charge of the repair station said, "Let's check the compartment forward and see whether or not there's anything going on up there because we're getting stuff in here." So they checked forward, and there was no problem forward. We still had this list--about a fifteen-degree list,--and in here water's beginning to form, see, and you can see the water in there. People are, you know, (laughter) dodging away from it and sitting on the ladder and stuff.

So they checked forward, and there was no problem. So they opened the forward compartment, and we checked in there. There was no ladder down, but there was--I forget what they call it--an air duct. There's probably a name, but its been many years, and I've forgotten. But

there was an air duct, and they go up to the boat deck, you know, and then they come out in these big, open bells so that they get fresh air from the topside.

Marcello: Wind scoop or something is what they call them.

Harding: Wind scoop. Anyway, that was in that compartment just ahead. So the shipfitter said, "Look, at least we'll have fresh air up here, so let's all move in here." So we moved in there, and I plugged in the headset into the next compartment plug. And lights were on in there, no loss of power.

Oh, power did go off when we got hit, but it came back on immediately. There was a darkness, and then it came back on.

But we went in this compartment forward, and here was an ammunition tray where ammunition would be brought up. What would they call it?

Marcello: Conveyor belt.

Harding: Conveyor belt. It was like a conveyor belt, and it was about, oh, three feet high off the deck. And this ammunition conveyor belt was all along that side wall. Then over in that corner, over in the aft corner of the compartment, was this fresh air duct, and it was probably about, oh, maybe two-and-a-half, three feet in diameter.

Anyway, we got fresh air, and you could look up in there and you could see daylight coming through. You

couldn't see any sky, but you could see daylight up there. So every once in awhile somebody would go over just to look at daylight, so we could see the . . . there was something nice about seeing daylight up there. And there was something great about having that fresh air. We had fresh air--there was no problem--and we had light.

So then by that time, they'd abandoned ship two different times. After the third time they abandoned ship, Repair Central said, "Repair Fore Port, are you still in your repair station?" I said, "We've moved forward one compartment. It's clean and there's fresh air here."

Marcello: They had already abandoned two times?

Harding: Yes, this is the third time. And he's telling me now, he said, "We're preparing to abandon ship, and you're the only ones now that we haven't accounted for, but we know where you are, and we'll come back and get you as soon as we possibly can. But we're abandoning ship now. Stay where you are and maintain watertight integrity." So I never did tell anybody about this. This is something I kept to me all this time, and they didn't know.

But Manley had passed out because of the smoke fumes in that first compartment, and, actually, we carried him into the other one because he was passed out. But there was fresh air back there, and we put him right under the

air scoop so that he . . . and he finally came back to himself a little bit, but he was sick. Oh, was he sick!

Well, after they abandoned ship, there was a terrible quiet, and nobody said anything. Finally, I said, "I don't get anything anymore from Central. I don't get any call signal from Central at all, so apparently they have abandoned ship." That's the first time I'd given them an indication.

And there was something unusual about this particular point. Nobody panicked at that time, and I think the reason nobody panicked was because I don't think we realized the full impact of what had happened. We couldn't believe our ship was sinking, yet we knew it was. We could still breathe good, fresh air, and we could see. The lights were on. There was no real bullets flying around; there was no shrapnel flying around. But the ship just kept sinking down.

And then we started getting some water and oil from up forward because that had leaked and things were coming in up there. And it just kept filling up. And we knew we couldn't get there, and we knew we'd left one that we didn't want to be in (chuckle). So there we were.

Time went on and time went on and time went on. And a couple of things happened during all that time. Some guys went to sleep. The fumes weren't bad enough to put

you out because we had the fresh air. We didn't have any problem with that. Although there were fumes there, we were still getting good oxygen.

There was a guitar under the conveyor belt, and somebody spotted it. And somebody said, "Anybody in here know how to play a guitar?" Well, between the two musicians, one was a bass horn man and the other played trombone, and neither one of us played string instruments. But there was an electrician that knew how to play a guitar, so he took the guitar. He started strumming and started playing, and we started singing songs. And we sang and we sang and we sang. And hours passed. And then finally we run out of songs to sing and just sat there, and he just kept plunking along.

Finally, somebody said, "You know what? I don't think we're going to get out of here." I don't remember who it was that said it, but somebody said, "I don't think we're going to get out of here." And then somebody else said, "Well, in case we don't, it'll probably go easy. I understand that when you get fumes, the carbon monoxide puts you out. You don't feel anything, so we've got nothing to worry about there. We won't feel anything; it won't be painful." And somebody said, "Yes, that's pretty good." And there was a lot of joke telling.

And then finally somebody said, "Well, you know what?

In case we do get caught down here and we don't get out, somebody ought to know about what happened to us." And somebody said, "Well, anybody got a pencil?" And so somebody had a pencil with them. I was dressed in full liberty dress, you know, with neckerchief and everything. I didn't have a pencil, but somebody had a pencil with them. And one by one we wrote our wills on those bulkheads. I didn't have much to leave except my little black book and my trombone (laughter). I left both to my brother who was only . . . let's see, what was he at that time? He was about eight or nine years old, and I figured it would be many years before he would be able to use either one (laughter), presuming he ever could get it.

But we wrote wills all over those bulkheads, and some guys wrote messages to their wives. One guy wrote a message to his wife. A couple wrote letters to their girl friends. We wrote them all over the bulkhead.

Marcello: Approximately how much time has elapsed by now?

Harding: Who knows? I couldn't even begin to say. Maybe three or four hours.

Marcello: We're almost up to noon now, Sunday noon.

Harding: Oh, at least, yes. See, I didn't get out until about three o'clock that afternoon.

Marcello: Okay.

Harding: Well, then finally everybody just got kind of tired doing

things, and still there was no panic. There was still no real trauma. We were just putting up with the thing.

Marcello: Is somebody taking charge, more or less?

Harding: Yes, this shipfitter was in charge. He was a first class shipfitter, and he took care of everything. Everybody kind of looked to him for guidance, and he was a pretty cool fellow. I haven't the least idea what his name was. Like I said in the beginning, the band members never did socialize too much with the other men because they didn't have anything in common, didn't have a reason to. You don't hold battle stations that often that you get acquainted, you know (laughter). So all you do is respect the insignia. You respect the rate, and you do what the rate tells.

So we got kind of tired doing things, and the guys were laying around sleeping. And we were sleeping with water up to here (gesture) you know, because everything's collecting down in this corner of the compartment. You're laying on the deck, and your head's above water, but your feet and your legs are in the water because you can't keep them out of it (laughter). And that's the way it was.

We just kind of laid around and laid around, and finally somebody said, "You think we really ought to try to get out of here?" And I remember saying, "Well, they told us to maintain watertight integrity, so you



know what the orders are. The orders are to maintain watertight integrity."

Marcello: You're still following orders?

Harding: Yes, I'm still following orders. And the shipfitter said, "Well, maybe nobody even knows we're down here." And I said, "Yes, when I talked to Central last, they said that they had a record that we were down here, and in case they could, they'd get somebody to come in and get us out whenever it was logical for the watertight integrity to be relieved."

So the shipfitter said, "Who's the smallest one in here?" And there was a little electrician's mate that probably wasn't more than five-foot-one. He lied about his age and stretched himself to get in the Navy (chuckle). He said, "Well, I guess I'm probably the shortest one or the smallest." The shipfitter said, "Well, do you think that you could get into that air duct and work yourself up to the boat deck and get out and tell somebody that we're aboard and maybe find some way to get us out? At least one of us can get out and let somebody know that we were here and get the word back that this is what happened to us." We were more interested in finding some way to get a message to other people about what had happened to us.

And he said, "Well, I'll try." So he crawled into

that damn thing and literally inched himself up through that duct and got out. And we just laid around and just thought, "Well, at least he got out." He yelled at us from up there. We could hear him.

Marcello: About how wide was the duct?

Harding: Well, it was about two-and-a-half feet wide, maybe three feet.

Marcello: What did he yell back down to you, as you recall?

Harding: He said, "I'm out! I made it! I'll be back as soon as I can!" And that was the last we heard of him. Anyway, everybody kind of settled back down again. There was another long, long wait. And we finally got to the point where I think everybody wanted out. We'd had enough of this,

Marcello: Are tempers getting a little short?

Harding: No. Still nobody was ever unpleasant to anybody else. There were never any arguments or anything. But you just feel that nervous energy building up that we really . . . this was it. We could still breathe. As long as you can get fresh air, as long as you can see each other, for some reason or other this seemed to satisfy that part.

Marcello: You still have power?

Harding: Yes.

Marcello: You have lights?

Harding: Yes, right. Yes. It's incredible, but we did. And I

remember . . . I remember some way . . . I don't know whether you're interested in personal thoughts at this time. I suppose it's all right to put this on record. But I was very young at that time. See, this was 1941. I was twenty years old. I remember that the dominant thought was not so much to get out, but that I hadn't really lived a life yet. My dominant thought was, "Okay, in case we go, it'll probably be easy, so I don't have to worry about that part. But I haven't really lived yet. As a matter of fact, I still haven't made love to a woman." And I made up my mind that in case we ever got out that I'd never pass up a chance (laughter). I've never shared that with anybody else, but I might as well for the record. And I didn't (laughter).

Anyway, that was dominant in my mind. I hadn't fulfilled my purpose as a man, you know. I had lived a pretty clean life, and I was always scared more than anything else, I guess, but after that, it does something for your confidence (laughter). So I think I ran around with a "hard-on" the rest of my life after that (laughter).

But anyway, time's going by, and everybody's kind of relaxed, but we've got this nervous energy building up, and we're wondering whether or not we'll ever get out. And people started talking to each other about, "In case you get out and I don't," you know, this kind of thing.

"In case you get out and I don't, well, you do this," and we started writing things down for them--addresses and how to get to mothers and fathers, loved ones, and things like that.

There was never any over-indulgence in any religious activity. I suppose everybody was mentally praying in their own mind that they would get out, but there was nothing vocal about the whole thing. There were no born-again Christians, hallelujahing or anything like that--nothing like that whatsoever. There was just good, sound thinking and good, sound conversation between each one of us. There's no way to remember all the things that were said, but there was a lot of just laying around and sleeping and dozing off and this kind of thing.

And then about three o'clock that afternoon, we heard a knock. It sounded like a wrench on a piece of steel. And, you know, everybody just sat up because you could hear that immediately. It was just like a . . . there wasn't much sound, and any kind of sound would just be electrifying. You know how something electrifies you and just goes through you when you hear a sound? That's the way it was. And the shipfitter said, "Do you think somebody's come back aboard to get us?" And I said, "Well, I don't know but let's knock back."

So he took a knife out of his pocket, and he hit on

the watertight door and knocked three times on the watertight door and "boom, boom, boom," three times, came back. And then we saw the latches, the dogs, the dog levers, begin to move. And everybody roared, "YEA!!" you know. And we started helping them then, open them up, see. And this was the aft door that we thought we couldn't get into.

And they opened that up, and there was some more water that came in. But there was only about that much water in that compartment (gesture). We could have gone through that anytime. It was just incredible. We could have gone through that door anytime. It tested water and oil, so we didn't go through it. We thought it was full of water and oil.

Marcello: And there was only about a foot-and-a-half of water in there.

Harding: Yes, maybe two feet. Maybe two feet of water and some of that spilled off in ours. And we walked on through. And then that's where the ladder was, of course, so then we walked on up. And we got out.

We carried Manley out. He was still sick, and we carried him. Boy, that wasn't easy because he was a big man! He weighed about 260 pounds. He was heavy. And it took four of us to get him up that ladder. But there wasn't anybody hurt. He was the only one that was infirm

in any way.

I worked myself up to the main deck, and, actually, the explosion had . . . we had to go by the library in order to get to the quarterdeck and the main deck. As soon as we got up one more deck, then we started seeing the mess and destruction, and this horrible smell of burning flesh and burning paint and gunpowder and all that stuff. We got out on the quarterdeck, and I saw all this mess, and I don't think there's any other way of explaining it.

And I guess, for the record, I'll tell you some of the things that I've never told anybody. I walked out on that deck, and it just seemed like every bone in my body just melted. I didn't have any strength. I couldn't believe what I had seen. And right in front of me was the quartermaster that I had known, and both of his legs had been blown off, and you could see where he had dragged himself off under the gun turret; and his stomach had been blown apart, and you could see where he had taken his bowels and, literally, put his bowels back in before he died. And all around me were pieces of flesh and dying people. There was one head all by itself laying over on the side. And smoke was coming up--this big pillar of smoke--from the Arizona, and smoke and fire were still on the water around the California.

And I just . . . I just fell down. I fell right down on the quarterdeck. Of course, the water at that time was about up to here on the quarterdeck (gesture). And I fell here (gesture) and just slipped into that water, but my feet rested against the rail, the degaussing cable. And my feet rested against that, and I just laid there until I got my strength back. I must have laid there for half an hour. I was just looking around, and I couldn't believe what had happened--the dead bodies in the water and bodies hanging over the gun turrets and stuff. It was just something . . . I had nightmares of this for twenty years after that. I'd wake up in the middle of the screaming.

Marcello: Maybe you couldn't observe this under those conditions, but were the rescue efforts and all that sort of thing in the process of taking place?

Harding: Well, these guys had come back aboard. Our little electrician had gone out and got them. He said, "We've got to get these guys out!" So when they got back aboard ship, see-- this was three o'clock in the afternoon--the battle was over, so they weren't afraid to come back aboard. And so they started looking for ways to get back down to us, and they came back the regular way that they normally would go to the battle station because he led them down there. Of course, we grabbed him and nearly destroyed

him for bringing them (laughter), but he brought them back to us.

Marcello: Maybe this is not a good thing to bring up at this point, but did you think of your trombone or your music or anything like that at this point?

Harding: Not at this point. The next day I did, because the next day we came back.

Marcello: What did you do that evening?

Harding: Oh, well, after I got my strength up, I went over to the starboard side and went around the gun turret--went over to the starboard side on the fantail--and I crawled down off the side, and I swam ashore. There was still some smoke and stuff and debris around, but I swam ashore.

Marcello: Which would have been how far?

Harding: Oh, not more than twenty yards. Not more than twenty yards. The big abutments that the ships were tied up to were not far from shore. And I still had on my . . . no, I didn't. I just now remembered. I had on my pants and my skivvy shirt. I had taken off my blouse, and I took off my neckerchief. And I used the neckerchief to tie up a guy's arm. He asked me to help him tie up his arm, and so I took the neckerchief off. I took the blouse off and laid it over a guy that was all burned. And I just couldn't stand to look at him, so I took my blouse off and laid it . . . that's the first time I've remembered that. That's



incredible.

But when I got ashore, I was all oily. There was oil all over me, and I was a mess. But I was alive. And I literally crawled on my hands and knees over to a small building that was up on piers, built on piers, and I crawled under there, and I just laid there--it must have been two, three hours--until it started to get dusk.

And then I heard some noises over on Ford Island. This was on Ford Island. I heard some noises over by the hangar, and I heard a guy yelling out, "Anybody out there, come in and get some clothing." And so I crawled out from under the building, and I went over there. I took off my oil-soaked Navy pants, and I took off my skivvy shirt. I left my shorts on. And they gave me a sheepskin coat. There was a whole pile of sheepskin coats that were flyer's jackets, flyer's sheepskin coats, and there must have been a hundred of them in a big pile there. They just brought a bunch of them in a big pile. They gave me that sheepskin coat, two bandoleers of .30-caliber ammunition and no gun to shoot it with (chuckle). And they said, "We're going to be heading for the hills, so you've got to be ready."

So get me now. I'm standing there in my shorts, sheepskin coat, two bandoleers of .30-caliber ammunition, and somebody handed me two hand grenades. "Put them in

your pocket." I said, "What do I do with them?" (laughter)  
He said, "Never mind what you do with them! Don't pull  
this!" (laughter) And that's all the instruction I had.  
I had two hand grenades in my pocket, two bandoleers of  
.30-caliber ammunition, sheepskin coat, and a pair of  
shorts. And that's the way I lived for three days.

Marcello: Where did you go?

Harding: Well, we went into the hangar. And everybody huddled into  
the corners because they knew, in case we got hit . . .  
everybody bombs in the middle of something, don't they?  
That was the logic, so get over to the edge (laughter).  
Everybody was piled up on each other in the corners and  
on the sides, you know, but nobody was in the middle.  
There wasn't anybody in the middle of that damn building.

So as soon as it got dark, of course, everybody that  
had a gun or anything was trigger-happy. And so they  
passed the word, "Now, stay here, because anybody that's  
going to move out there is going to get shot!" They  
didn't have to tell me twice (laughter), you know.

And then all at once we heard the damndest bunch  
of shooting you ever heard in your life. We crawled over  
to where we could see outside, and it was just like a big  
wall of fire with all the tracer bullets and everything  
else. And all at once I heard, "BANG," on Ford Island. It was  
one of our own planes from the Saratoga. The Saratoga

had gotten word, of course, and they'd said, "Fly the planes back." Well, the planes got back in the evening. I think we shot down . . . I don't know how many we shot down, but I saw at least one of our own planes get shot down.

Marcello: I think these were off the Enterprise, actually, that was returning. The Enterprise was coming back and flying off its planes.

Harding: Was it the Enterprise? Well, you probably know because I don't. All I know it was one of our own.

Marcello: But they did get shot down.

Harding: Yes.. And it's a shame, but that's what happened.

Marcello: How much sleep did you get that night?

Harding: None. Everybody was rubbing up against each other, and there was no sleep. There was no sleep at all.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors going around?

Harding: The rumors? Well, nobody was passing any rumors. Well . . . oh, yes. Okay, rumors. There were rumors. "Don't drink the water," "Don't drink the water, just drink Coca-Cola, because you can open a Coke, and a Coke . . ." And the rumor was that the Japanese had poisoned the water supply, so, "Stay away from water." So nobody drank any water at Pearl Harbor for a couple of weeks. All we drank was Coke. They brought out Cokes by the truckload.

Marcello: What did you do in the following days?

Harding: The next day, the very next day, we went back and started digging bodies out of the California. That was another thing all its own. I'll never forget . . . on the main deck, about midships, right near the mess hall or the place where we had what we called the "geedunk" stand. You know what a "geedunk" stand is. Were you in the Navy, too?

Marcello: I was in the Coast Guard.

Harding: Were you? Anyway, there was a storekeeper there, first class storekeeper, that took care of the "geedunk" stand, and everybody knew him. He was a real good guy. And when we went back aboard that ship, there he was. When the bomb that came down the midships hatch exploded, it sprung the steel deck and blew the rivets out of the steel deck. You know how a steel deck corner is riveted like this (gesture). This steel deck just went like that right up into the overhead, and apparently he was right there at the same time, and it had him caught right here, and we had to cut him out of there. And I held the blanket.

Marcello: The corner of the steel deck had pinned him by the neck.

Harding: Right to the overhead.

Marcello: By the throat, actually.

Harding: And we had to cut him out of there and put him in a . . . I helped put him in a blanket and take him out.

And then the most horrible part of the whole thing

was in the area where the forward torpedo had hit, and it had opened up a lot of the oil supply, and it had literally boiled the oil. And the people that were in there were literally boiled in oil, and we could only get them out in pieces. We'd put a line around their arms like this (gesture), and we'd pull them up, and their bodies were cooked so that the legs and torso just fell loose, and then we'd have to dig back and get little pieces of leg and arms and feet and pack that into blankets and piles. We took it out and wrapped it up, and somebody took it away.

Marcello: That sort of thing must have been more distasteful and worse in many ways than the actual attack itself.

Harding: Yes, it was. And that was when I went . . . I was on a trip back. After I'd helped that last bunch with that bunch that had been cooked in the oil, that's when I slipped off to the side and checked to see whether my trombone was still all right. Now a file cabinet . . . not a file cabinet . . . oh, what did we call the places where we kept our clothes?

Marcello: Footlocker.

Harding: Yes, the lockers. Footlockers, yes. A clothes locker had fallen over on the trombone and had protected it. There was fire all over that locker and everything else, but it hadn't got to the trombone, but there was a dent

in it. I still have the trombone now today, and I haven't played it in almost thirty years, but it's in my bedroom, and it's on a stand. And I keep it shined. I shine it every December 7th, and when I go back tonight, it'll get its shine. It still has the same dent. Crazy!! Things like that will get you emotionally (weeping).

Marcello: Well, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview. Mr. Harding, you've said a lot of really interesting and important things, and I'm positive that scholars will find your comments very valuable when they use them to study and read about Pearl Harbor.

Harding: I have one other thought in closing. I've looked back at it many, many times, many years, and nothing will convince me that we weren't set up for that. I don't know how many others have said this to you, but there's no reason for all of those ships to have been in that harbor at the same time unless it had been planned. There's no reason for all those people to have been on that Fleet Landing out in that open space the day before unless it had been planned; there's no reason for void spaces to be left open overnight in any ship in the United States Navy, and it was done. And there isn't anything in the world that could ever convince me that that whole situation wasn't planned to achieve an end.

Marcello: Upon whom would you place this ultimate responsibility?

Harding: Franklin D. Roosevelt, himself.

Marcello: Okay, again, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview. And I want to thank you very much.

Harding: You're welcome.