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Interview with
LLOYD L. PEARSON
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Oral History Collection

Lloyd Pearson

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Lewisville, Texas

Date: February 21, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Lloyd Pearson for the North Texas State Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 21, 1982, in Lewisville, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Pearson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS West Virginia during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Pearson, 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. Pearson: I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 13, 1923. I left there when I was five or six years old, I guess. I went to Pratt, Kansas, and stayed two or three years in Pratt, Kansas. It was during the Depression, I know. Then we moved to Denver, Colorado, and I stayed in Denver, went to school in Denver, until...I don't remember what year it was that

I went in the CCC camp at Southfork, Colorado, and I was in CCC camp for six months, I got out of there--it was in the month of December--and went back to Denver, and then I joined the Navy on January 10, 1941,

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service in 1941?

Pearson: Well, it was kind of a mixed-up deal, I guess (chuckle). It was me and two friends of mine, Jonny Nichols and Pete Peterson, and we were walking down the street and,,,we weren't at war or anything, but we were walking down the street, and they had all them posters, saying, "Uncle Sam Wants You!" We just jokingly said, "Well, let's go join the war," so we went over to the post office, and we, all three, signed up. But I was the only one that made it right then, and they came in ten days later. We all made it,

Marcello: Why did you decide upon the Navy, rather than upon one of the other branches of the service?

Pearson: Well, my father was in the Navy, and I guess that was...I heard him talking about it. He was in the Navy during World War I. Well, it was just him and my uncle, hearing them talking, and it just seemed to me like,,,I liked their uniforms,,,more glamor, I think. To me it was,

Marcello: What part did economics play in your decision to join the Navy?

Pearson: Really, not much. My father was an automobile mechanic, and, of course, he didn't make much money then, but we had a good home, and there was no reason,,,I didn't have to or anything,

I never had much money to spend, but I had everything that I needed, and there was really no economical thing that came into it.

Marcello: How difficult or easy was it to get into the Navy in January of 1941?

Pearson: It really wasn't all that hard. They didn't have what they call a quota then or anything like that. If you could pass their physical and their mental tests, then that was all that was required. You had to have your parents' signature at the time because I was just seventeen years old.

Marcello: If you were just seventeen years of age when you went into the Navy, does that mean that you signed up for what they called the "minority cruise?" Was that in existence at that time?

Pearson: Right. "Baby cruise" is what we called it. That is what I signed up for under the "baby cruise." Then I extended my enlistment for two years.

Marcello: Under the "minority" or "baby cruise," how many years did you sign up for?

Pearson: You signed up when you were seventeen until you become twenty-one. You got out on your twenty-first birthday.

Marcello: So it was a four-year hitch instead of the usual six-year hitch?

Pearson: Right.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of world events and current affairs at the time that you decided to join the Navy in January

of 1941?

Pearson: Not very much. We were just kids and didn't really give much attention to what was going on. I knew that there was trouble, but I didn't think they would ever pertain to me.

Marcello: Usually, most people never really give patriotic reasons for having entered the service around that time. At the late date that you entered, in some cases some people will say that the alternative was the Army, and they didn't want any part of the Army. Then in other cases, they would mention that it was economic reasons for their having joined the service. That's why I asked you that question awhile ago. Where did you take your boot camp?

Pearson: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that occurred in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record?

Pearson: Nothing but the...the chief petty officer was our commanding officer, and he taught me an awful lot. He had a system where...you know, a lot of times you don't...you're a kid, and you go out, and you don't...well, maybe you'll have a dirty handkerchief and a dirty T-shirt or something like that, so instead of washing it, which we did our own laundry, instead of doing that, you stick it back in your duffle bag or something. Well, he would come around and check, and if he did, he took everything in your duffle bag except your blues and put them out on the floor, which was creosote or something, and then he

marched the whole company over it, and then you went out and washed them. So you learned not to let your clothes go too long.

Marcello: How long was boot camp at that time?

Pearson: Eight weeks.

Marcello: That means that the Navy had already begun to cut down the amount of time one spent in boot camp. I know that before that, it was at least twelve weeks, was it not?

Pearson: I believe so. We were there, I'm saying, eight weeks; I'm pretty sure it was. We had four weeks when you couldn't go out. You couldn't go to town or anything. Then you kind of graduated into the next thing, and then you got your passes on the weekend. You got your liberty on the weekend. So I'm sure it was four weeks---four and four.

Marcello: Where did you go after you got out of boot camp? What happened at that point?

Pearson: Well, while we was in boot camp, they asked us...we got to put down our choice of ships by name and class, and a friend we wanted to go with. Then if that ship or that class wasn't available, they gave you the closest they could to it. I put down that I wanted to go aboard the Colorado because, I guess, I was from Colorado. That was my first choice, and the West Virginia was my second choice. So I got the West Virginia, and they took us down and put us aboard...it was an old oil tanker, The USS Tippecanoe, and that's what we went from there to Pearl

Harbor on, We picked up the West Virginia in Pearl Harbor,

Marcello: You mentioned that your choice were the Colorado and the West Virginia, I assume that you wanted a battleship,

Pearson: I wanted a battleship,

Marcello: Why was that?

Pearson: I couldn't tell you, other than that it was big, I just always wanted to be on a battleship, No real reason, I don't guess,

Marcello: They were rather impressive for their day, were they not?

Pearson: They were big. They were real big, and I guess that what you would more or less say is, awesome, They would more or less take your breath away when you would see them, They were big,

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that you take the Tippecanoe from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, and this is where you pick up the West Virginia, Describe what kind of a reception you got when you initially went aboard the West Virginia? After all, you may have just been out of boot camp, but you were still a "boot" so far as those "old salts" on the West Virginia were concerned,

Pearson: Right, we was that, We had to have our duffle bags, and we had our hammock wrapped around our duffle bag--the way we used to stow them--and you had to carry them, They put us on a motor launch, and they took us out to the ship. Of course, we went aboard, and we were all trained in the way you were supposed to go aboard a ship and so all this, which we, I guess, did, People didn't holler and jeer at you or anything like that, They really

didn't make you all that welcome, but you knew that they had been there awhile and that you had just got there. When we first went aboard, they put us on the quarterdeck and called roll and then told each one of us which division we was going to, and they had a man from that division come and take us and take us down there and how we were to stow our hammock, where our lockers was, and more or less told us what was expected of us during the time we were going to be aboard there.

Marcello: To which division were you assigned?

Pearson: The "F" Division, which was the fire control and damage division.

Marcello: Now were you simply arbitrarily assigned there, or did you have a voice in going in to the "F" Division?

Pearson: No, they just assigned us where they wanted us, where they needed us, I guess, and they just put so many people in each division,

Marcello: Where were the quarters for the "F" Division?

Pearson: They were, the best I can remember now, below decks, about, oh, I would say, just before the midships and about three decks down--the best that I can remember.

Marcello: When you first went into the "F" Division, what kind of work were you doing?

Pearson: Sweeping (chuckle) and polishing brass, scraping paint. That is about all we ever did, really, is clean up the equipment. The first thing is that you got up in the morning,,we slept in hammocks; we didn't have beds. The first thing you did is you

stowed your hammocks, and then you drank coffee, and then you went to work. We worked for about an hour, an hour-and-a-half, I guess, polishing brass. That's what it mostly consisted of then, was brass work. Then we had our breakfast, and then you had your sweep-up. You had your different areas that you had to go to...well, like I say, it was mostly cleaning, painting, and scraping, and then your drills,

Marcello: So you were in one of the deck divisions then?

Pearson: It was a deck division.

Marcello: Essentially, had you kept in that particular slot, you would have been advancing toward boatswain's mate?

Pearson: Yes, that is probably what it would have ended up, or fire control, that is, range-finders and such as that.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about your quarters aboard the West Virginia. Describe what they were like when you went aboard?

Pearson: Well, it was just a big, bare room. Of course, you had your stanchions in there, and you had your things from the overhead where you hung your hammock at night. All of the tables were slung from overhead, your meal tables and everything, but when you ate, the mess cooks brought the tables down and set everything up. We ate all family-style, where the mess cooks brought it all down to you. But it was just a big room. That's all there was there; I mean, there was nothing in it, no furniture or anything. You had your lockers, and then you had your bins alongside where you stowed your hammocks.

Marcello: Describe what it was like sleeping in a hammock.

Pearson: Well, I liked it--after you get used to it--because you don't get no motion of the ship, or if you do you are right with it and everything. I just liked to sleep on it. I still like to sleep in a hammock.

Marcello: Were you sleeping in a hammock in boot camp?

Pearson: No, we slept in a regular bed in boot camp, or double beds.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned mess cooking. Did you come in for your share of mess cooking?

Pearson: Right. It seems to me like it was three months at a time that we got it. Instead of having it like the Army, where you used to get it, like, every other day or on a weekend or something like that, in the Navy you got it for three months at a time. Like I said, we fed family-style. Of course, we was getting \$21 a month, but you got extra for mess cooking on that three months; and then all the people that took care of, . . . like, most people had two tables to take care of--you had about twenty people--and you didn't have to go back and get seconds for anyone, but if they asked you to and you did, then every payday they would tip you. It was just as if you was a waiter. Maybe it'd be 50¢ or something like that. Each man would give you that, so mess cooks made pretty good money (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe what the chow was like aboard the West Virginia.

Pearson: Well, it was good. Of course, we had our share of beans. I love beans, so I could eat them. But I know we had beans

every Wednesday and Saturday morning. We had ham every Saturday, and we had cold cuts on Sunday. But we had a regular staple meal; it was good. The food was good all the time, and you could just eat all you wanted to.

Marcello: Awhile ago, we were talking about some of the various tasks that you had aboard the ship, and the one thing that you didn't mention was holystoning the deck. Did you ever get involved in holystoning?

Pearson: Yes, everybody, I guess, got their share of that.

Marcello: Describe how that worked?

Pearson: Well, it was a porous rock, is what it was, a big porous rock that had a hole in the middle of it for a mop handle, and you would put that mop handle down in that hole, and they would line us up, and you would be all lined up.

Marcello: Keeping in mind, you have teak decks.

Pearson: Right. You had a certain way that you had to get that thing to come up, but everybody in rhythm would go back and forth, back and forth with that, and it was just like sandpapering that whole deck. The decks on the West Virginia, which, I imagine, were the same on most ships that had decks like that, when we were...well, in the summertime, we wear white shorts and a T-shirt. About any time of the day or night, you could go out and lay down about anyplace you wanted to on that deck with whites on, and you would never get them dirty. It was that clean, and that holystoning just brought out the whiteness in that thing and just kept it smooth.

- Marcello: Well, in addition to actually using the porous rock with the hole in it and so on, didn't they also water it down with saltwater or something like that?
- Pearson: Water and saltwater soap, bars of that saltwater soap. Yes, it was wet. The deck was wet when you did it.
- Marcello: The reason that I ask you about hammocks and the holystoning of the deck is because obviously that's a part of the Navy that is no longer existence,
- Pearson: Right. Well, there was not very much of it then. There was some of the battleships that still had hammocks, and some of them didn't. I don't remember which ones didn't, but I know the West Virginia was one of the few that still used the hammocks.
- Marcello: I guess, after the war started, they began to get rid of those teakwood decks, did they not?
- Pearson: I think that they went to about all metal then because of the splinters and the fire hazard and everything else. They were pretty, but they were dangerous, I guess,
- Marcello: At that time, I guess nobody really realized just how important airplanes were going to be in future wars, did they? Otherwise, they probably wouldn't have had those teakwood decks,
- Pearson: That probably had a lot to do with it. Yes, it was funny because you didn't think much about it. Well, they didn't have an air force. They had the Army Air Corps and the Naval Air Arms and stuff like that. Then we had a lot of flying chief petty officers, and I guess master sergeants in the Army were flying,

which they don't have anymore. Now, you have got to be commissioned to fly and everything. At that time the airplane seemed like it was more or less for observation, to show you where they were so you could shoot at them if you had to, instead of them shooting right back at you.

Marcello: Well, I guess aboard the West Virginia you probably had a couple search planes, did you not? They would launch them off the catapults.

Pearson: Those pontoon planes, they had three of them on there. When we was out at sea, they sent them back in to get the mail. We never was very long without the mail. When they would come in, they would land, and they would hook them and bring them back on. They used the catapult to shoot them off the ship.

Marcello: In that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, what role did sports and athletic competition play?

Pearson: I'm not all that sure because I wasn't all that much sports-minded then. We had to take our calisthenics. We had calisthenics. That was a set-up period that you had everyday. The ship had rowing teams, but not with them kind of little boats that they row out there on the lake with. We rowed whaleboats. They had ball clubs, and they took them onto the beach where they could have their sports and everything. Boxing was, I guess, about the biggest sport which we had aboard ship, and they'd have that. Like I say, I wasn't all that sports-minded at that time.

Marcello: You mentioned boxing. I've heard it said that those boxing

smokers, as they were called, were very, very well-attended.

Pearson: Oh, yes, they were always full. You were lucky to get a seat.

Marcello: What kind of gambling would be occurring aboard ship, let's say, during athletic contest or at any other time?

Pearson: Well, we used to gamble quite a bit. But back then, of course, nickle-and-dime stuff is about all we had. Generally, four or five guys would get together--friends--and they would sit around and maybe play poker. But the big thing was acey-deucey. You could go anyplace you wanted, and they weren't playing acey-deucey for money; they would just be playing acey-deucey. We used to play a lot of cribbage, and we played cribbage for a penny a point or a quarter a set and stuff like that. But that was about the biggest form of gambling we had.

Marcello: How important or how much interest was there in the West Virginia's band?

Pearson: Well, when we was at sea, every afternoon during dinner, the band would play, and just about everybody would be up on deck. They had a big kind of awning over where they sat under there, and they would play all types of music--marching music, music of the times, the big band music--and just about everybody aboard would be out there. They would be laying under gun turrets and just everyplace. There was a lot of people doing this walking and jogging and stuff like that. Especially the old-time chiefs and the old-time sailors would be up, and they would just walk around and around the deck. I guess it was for their exercise. But

always during the noon hour, that band played. It was every day when we was at sea. Everybody listened to them.

Marcello: Do you recall the "Battle of the Bands" that would be held ashore from time to time?

Pearson: No, I knew about them, but I never attended any. I knew that it was big competition from ship to ship and the shore bases and stuff like that, but I never attended any of them. But I had heard of them.

Marcello: You mentioned competition with regard to the band. There was also competition among ships in other categories, too, was there not?

Pearson: In about every category that there was. Target practice was one, cleanliness was one, maneuverability. In about everything you used to have competition, and you used to get an "E" if you was the best at it. You would get an "E" and a "well done." A "well done" in the Navy was about the best thing you could get--if somebody gave you a "well done." But just about everything was competition between ships or different things like that. The battleships had their own, and cruisers had theirs.

Marcello: You mentioned that if you were very proficient, you would get the so-called "E." Can you elaborate on that a little bit more? What do you mean when you talk about that?

Pearson: Well, "E" was for excellence. Like I say, if you have been on maneuvers and you got an "Excellent"--they got the "E"--why, they would paint the "E" on the stack of the ship or something

like that, where everybody knew you got it. Minesweepers used to come in and be flying a broom from their yardarm or something, you know, that they had made a clean sweep, that they had either cleared a bunch of mines or that they had sunk a submarine. They'd paint a submarine on the side. Well, that "E" was the same thing. That means that you were good, and you showed it off. The engineering crew on the ship would be a little red "E". They wore a red stripe around their shoulders, it seemed to me like. The deck force wore white around the right shoulder, I think, and the engineering force wore red around the left shoulder. You have got a little "E" if your engine room is efficient, or if your deck forces was efficient, why, you got a little white "E" to put on you. But that just meant that...it was kind of an honor to get it.

Marcello: All in all, as you look back on your experiences aboard the West Virginia in that pre-Pearl Harbor period, that is, before the attack, how would you describe the overall morale aboard that ship?

Pearson: Good. It was very good. Well, of course, there were no draftees at that time; everybody was volunteer. I think they had draftees in the Army at that time, but that they didn't in the Navy. Everybody volunteered to go and...there was a lot of people that didn't like it, and there was a lot of times that everybody didn't like it, I think. But, all in all, I'd say that it was one of the better times of my life that I ever had. I think that every-

body seemed to be in the same situation, Like I say, there was things that you didn't like, We had a commanding officer, and his name was Alexander, and that's all I can remember about him, was Alexander, At that time, there was a popular song, "Alexander the Swoose," and that was barred from the ship, That could not be played on the ship because his name was Alexander, and he didn't like anybody to play it (chuckle). Different things like that would make you mad, but I think getting made every once in a while is part of living, anyway, But overall the morale of everybody was in my estimation excellent.

Marcello: I would also assume that, given everybody's background, you didn't have too many wants or needs, so to speak.

Pearson: No, the biggest one, I guess, is that everybody was lacking money, We never had much money, but we didn't need a whole lot, It seemed like at every payday, which we got paid twice a month, cigarettes was a big thing, Cigarettes ashore cost money, but they could always go out past the three-mile marker and open up the stand, and you could buy cigarettes for 6¢ a pack, buy them by the carton at 6¢ a pack, and at the "geedunks" we could get ice cream sodas and stuff like that, But they did that every payday, so you could get your stuff and bring it back in, Like I said, getting \$21 a month ain't a lot of money, We had our loan sharks, and you borrowed \$5 now and paid them \$10 back on payday, There was several of them aboard, and everybody got to know them, Really, you got your food,,,we had port-and-starboard

liberty, You had every other night liberty, and if you had the money, you didn't have no problems, You could go to town, So, really, there was not wants or anything like that,

Marcello: You talked about liberty just a moment ago, so let's pick up on this, How did the liberty routine work aboard the West Virginia during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Pearson: Well, we had port-and-starboard liberty, You were assigned to either the port or the starboard liberty section, and they had... well, everything was done with a bugle call and boatswain's pipe, and, of course, we always had to go in on a motor launch because we never got in up close to the dock there.

Marcello: The Pennsylvania got that privilege as the admiral's flag, right?

Pearson: Right, Of course, most of the time we was over there, we all stayed out at that quay off Ford Island, and they took us all in on a motor launch. The best I can recall, it was about 4:00 or 4:30 when you could start getting ready to go out on liberty, and then you would have to come up and stand on the quarterdeck, and you got checked by the officer-of-the-deck, The officer-of-the-deck would check you over, and everything had to be right, If everything was right, well, you got on the launch and went on into town. Well, we went over to Pearl Harbor and then generally on buses or taxi cabs to Honolulu or wherever you wanted to go, Honolulu and Pearl City was the two biggest place where everybody went,

Marcello: What did you do when you went on liberty--you personally?

Pearson: Well, personally, I never had a whole lot of money. We used to go to a place called Woo Fat's in Honolulu. It was a dance hall and a bar. Of course, I wasn't old enough really to drink, but we did. We would go over there. Generally, the taxicabs and the buses all went to the "Y." They then went from there, and, of course, you had your buddies that you went with. We would go down to Woo Fat's, and we'd dance down there, and we'd drink. Of course, there was a lot of places that you could go. We went out to Waikiki a couple of times. I didn't like to go out there to swim because you got all cut up on that coral and stuff like that. We didn't do much of that sightseeing (chuckle). We did most of our sightseeing inside--running around and chasing girls. That's what we was doing.

Marcello: Do you remember a place called the Black Cat Cafe?

Pearson: Yes, that was right on Hotel Street.

Marcello: What was so popular about it? I hear a lot of sailors talking about it.

Pearson: Well, the biggest thing, I guess, is because it was right close to the "Y." That's the first place you could go when you got off the bus, was right across the street the Black Cat Cafe. You'd go in there, and, like, if you maybe didn't get on the same bus as your friends, well, everybody would meet there. Then when you came back to get on the taxi or bus at night, that is where you went. Then you would go and get on the bus. I guess that was the biggest thing, but you could drink there and stuff

like that.

Marcello: What did the Black Cat Cafe look like on the inside? Describe it.

Pearson: You know, I couldn't tell you. I couldn't even tell you what Woo Fat's looked like. I can remember that we used to just go in there and dance and drink, and we knew about everybody in there. Of course, I really didn't dance all that much, but I had a good friend that did. I used to go in there, really, to just watch him because he was about half-crazy (chuckle). That's really about all. I can't remember what none of them places looked like on the inside.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned Hotel Street. Describe what Hotel Street was like, as you remember it.

Pearson: Well, Hotel Street was a main business district there. It was a rather small, closed place. It had all of your bars and the "Y," and it was just kind of like a main street of a small town, only more so. All you could see was white hats bobbing up and down the street. There was more sailors over there than anything else. They just was thick walking up and down that street, all the time, about twenty-four hours a day, I would imagine.

Marcello: I gather this is where a lot of houses of prostitution were located.

Pearson: They were on Canal Street. They were pretty thick and had beautiful women (chuckle). They had some of the prettiest girls in the world, I think, over there. Of course, we used to go up there

all the time. You could go up there, and you could sit around in the parlors and everything. You would go with a girl if you wanted to, but you didn't have to go with her if you didn't want to. You could sit up there, and they were friendly. Really, it was kind of like sitting in somebody's house at home, where you could go in and talk to somebody. Most of the girls running around on the streets over there were Polynesian and all like that, and girls in the houses weren't. They were all American girls. I had met one there that I had known when I had gone to school (chuckle). The places were nice--real elaborate places, really--and they treated you friendly.

A lot of the guys, if they got drunk and all this kind of stuff, they would go down, and they would go back there with a girl. They would get back there, and maybe they was too drunk or something like that. Well, they had like a rain check that they would give you. You could come back anytime except, like, on a Saturday or a Sunday or a holiday and use that check, and it was good for that. They had all that stuff, and, I mean, they treated all the guys fair. It wasn't like that after the war started, from the way I understand it.

Marcello: I gather that on a payday weekend or on a weekend around payday, there would simply be long lines outside these houses of prostitution.

Pearson: I've never seen one, but I know there were. I've seen them after Pearl Harbor was attacked, but up until the time Pearl

Harbor was attacked, I had never seen a line in any of them, But like I say, there were a lot of them, There was also a lot of us that didn't have enough money to go in on a weekend, so we would go in through the week at night, But I never did see a line in any of them until after the war started, After the war started, they was lined up, and you'd have to stand in line for I don't know how long to get in,

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that these cat houses were rather elaborate inside, Describe what they were like, that is, the parlor and things like that that you mentioned,

Pearson: Well, they would be like a living room of a home, They'd have couches and chairs, and they'd have a record machine, They'd play records, You would go up there, and you would sit down, Of course, a lot of the guys knew a lot of the girls that was in there, and they would want a certain girl, If not, the girls would come in and talk to you, sit down with you, and they wouldn't talk no price or anything, Of course, everybody knew what the price was, It was \$3.00, It was the set price, They would come in and sit down and talk to you, Actually, it'd be just like going into someone's house and visiting with them, except that they didn't wear much clothes, They did wear clothes but not very much,

Marcello: This prostitution was legal, isn't that correct?

Pearson: It was legal,

Marcello: I also noted that Hotel Street and Canal Street and so on had quite

a few tattoo parlors, Is that where you got yours?

Pearson: That's where I got mine,

Marcello: Did you get them in the pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Pearson: Right, I got them on either the first or second liberty that I went ashore (chuckle),

Marcello: Describe that process,

Pearson: There was several of us that went in and...

Marcello: With the purpose of getting a tattoo?

Pearson: That's what we went in for, was to get tattooed,

Marcello: Stone sober when you did it?

Pearson: When I went in to get it, I was, We got in there, and we got to drinking, so we all went out to get our tattoos. Of course, I was going to get one on my chest, and I had it all stenciled and everything, but I didn't have enough to drink, I don't guess, because I said, "No, I just ain't going to do that!" So I had two small ones put on each wrist, Why, I don't know, But I had them two put on, And this guy...I always called him my "cousin," He wasn't but I always called him my "cousin," Pete Peterson, who was from Denver, He had two put on him, Anyway, it didn't hurt near as bad as I thought it would, When they healed up--I guess it was about three weeks--I went in and got the other one, I got the bigger one with the USS West Virginia and my name on it, I never got any more after that, But I never had no problem with them, Now a lot of guys did, A lot of guys got infections with them, but I never got no problems with them.

They said that they used good ink and everything, and they never faded or anything else. I've wanted to get rid of these two several times, but they don't bother me anymore.

Marcello: I guess at that time you weren't considered to be salty unless you had a couple of tattoos.

Pearson: Yes, you had to have something. There was a famous saying: "The first time you go ashore, you are supposed to get screwed, stewed and tattooed." Then you was a sailor.

Marcello: (Chuckle) I've also heard this expression used when people described the old Asiatic sailors. Did you have any of the Asiatic sailors aboard the West Virginia, when you first went there?

Pearson: Yes, we had several of them, and they were screwed, stewed and tattooed. They had been down in China, and a lot of them had bad diseases when they were down there. They were just about half-crazy.

Marcello: When you say "bad diseases," are you referring to venereal diseases?

Pearson: Well, some of them were venereal diseases, and some of them weren't. But they used to tell us that that was one of your best reasons for not going out and getting it, is listening to one of these guys tell you about how they cured venereal disease. They used to say, "Ten minutes with Venus and ten years with Mercury." They used to use mercury or something, and they would inject it into these guys. It would cure them, but they were never the same after that. I guess that is the reason they call them Asiatic, because they...well, I guess there just wasn't much to do there

besides drink and all that kind of stuff, and they were just a little bit different than everybody else,

But they were also their own breed, If there was two of them, you didn't mess with them because they were their own man. The Asiatic sailors were just pretty much of a class all of their own. They took a lot of pride in being Asiatic sailors,

Marcello: What set them apart?

Pearson: I guess being in China, running on them gunboats and stuff. They was more your old-type sailor. Well, even in 1941, we had all modern stuff from what they had down in the China Sea. They were just a different type of sailor.

Marcello: Have you ever heard of something called the "Asiatic stares?"

Pearson: Yes, but I don't know what it is. It is kind of like talking to them "gooney birds," I think. They just sat and stared off into space, just like they are not even around anything. I've never seen anybody that had them.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that most of those Asiatic sailors were good sailors,

Pearson: They were some of the best. They knew what they was doing. Like I say, I think that is one thing that set them apart. They had to be good in order to get by down there, the way it looked like. They were good sailors,

Marcello: At the same time, I've heard it said that normally a ship commander, a ship captain, didn't want those guys around too long. In other words, if a slot opened up someplace else, and

he had an Asiatic sailor that would fit that slot, off he'd go.

Pearson: They generally would, and why, I don't know. I guess it was because they could...well, they would sit around, and they would tell you stories. Boy, you would...I don't think everybody wanted to go to China because of some of the stories they'd tell. Of course, when I was in there, I'd say probably the majority of the Navy at that time--the ones that I knew--were all young, and most of these Asiatic were not young. I guess they thought they was going to corrupt us kids or something, and that's one reason that they didn't want them around--I imagine.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that some of them also had an earring.

Pearson: Well, that used to be for when they would go around the Horn--go around Cape Horn. They had that initiation, and a lot of them wore earrings in their ears. Of course, that dated back to the old-time sailing days when about all your sailors was wearing earrings. There is still a lot of them, I imagine, because you have your initiation and everything like that. I imagine there is still a lot of them that get earrings when they go around the Horn. I never went around, so I didn't get one.

Marcello: How slow or fast was promotion in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Pearson: Well, that was all competition. You took tests, and I can't even remember what the series of tests was, but you had to take a test to even make seaman 1st class. You automatically went from apprentice seaman to a seaman 2nd class--you automatically

got that--but then for seaman 1st class, you had to take a test, and it was competition. They might have, oh, say, in the "F" Division, like I was in, maybe there were going to be three openings, and there would be fifteen people available. Everybody took the test. Your tests were on seamanship--just on what you was going to take. But in building up to it, they had what they called progressive tests, and on a progressive test, you got it at night, and they gave you these questions. Now all these questions would be on the main test that you were going to get eventually, but you also had the book, and so you could go through your manual, and, really, you could find the answers to them questions. It was just a way of getting you to study, is what it was. In order to find the answer to this question, you might have to read the whole chapter--to find it there. So they had them. Up to seaman 1st class was relatively simple, but from there up it got tough.

Marcello: About how many years might a 1st class petty officer have in the Navy, again, in that pre-Pearl Harbor period? In other words, how long would one normally have to be in the Navy before one got to be a 1st class petty officer?

Pearson: Well, I didn't know many of them. They didn't have many, really, because it took them a long time.

Marcello: I think that kind of answers the question, in a way.

Pearson: That's the reason. We didn't have many because it took a long time. You wouldn't make 1st class on your first enlistment. You

could forget that, In a deck division, you might make 3rd class coxswain or maybe 3rd class gunner's mate or fire controlman or something like that, but you very seldom get above 3rd class on your first enlistment,

Marcello: Even to advance, in addition to passing the tests, there had to be a slot, did there not? There had to be an opening,

Pearson: There had to be a place for you, If there was no place for you,.. you just didn't automatically get it, There had to be a place for you,

Marcello: I would assume that the slots for advancement in the deck division were probably a lot less available than in perhaps one of the other divisions,

Pearson: Well, I guess the engineering division probably had the most, but it would be the same thing in there, Up to fireman 1st class, it was no problem, or seaman 1st class in the deck division, It was just after that, Just about everybody was going to make fireman 1st class or seaman 1st class, Of course, it was strictly up to them, You didn't ever have to make it if they didn't want you to, In a year's time, you'd probably be at least 1st class seaman or something, but from then on you'd take your progress test, If there was an opening, you would go up and you would take your test, and if there was a place for you, you could make it, But like I say, 3rd class on one enlistment was just about tops,

Marcello: This is a question that I should have asked you earlier and I

didn't, so I'll ask it now. Awhile ago, we were talking about port-and-starboard liberty, and you mentioned that there would be a port section and a starboard section. Now essentially would that mean that on a weekend, the port section might have Friday and the starboard section Saturday?

Pearson: The entire weekend.

Marcello: Oh, you got the entire weekend?

Pearson: You'd get one weekend or every other weekend. Through the week, it was a Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday and then every other weekend.

Marcello: Normally, when one went on liberty, what time did one have to be back aboard ship?

Pearson: The next morning. You had to be there for reveille the next morning unless where you was at...like in Honolulu at that time, they wanted you off the streets there by...it seems like it was midnight.

Marcello: Yes, I think they had Cinderella liberties aboard the ships.

Pearson: Yes, then like in the states of something like that, there was no limit. Married men would go home and stay all night and all that. But down there it was be home by midnight.

Marcello: I guess the only way that you could stay in Honolulu overnight was to have some address there, isn't that correct?

Pearson: Yes. Well, if your family was there or you had people there who knew somebody--you had someplace to go--you could stay.

Marcello: Given your pay, I'm sure you didn't have enough money to stay in one of the hotels.

- Pearson: I don't think I ever stayed in a hotel over there. I've been back twice, and I don't think I stayed in a hotel.
- Marcello: I guess there were only two major hotels there at that time-- the Royal Hawaiian and the Ala Moana,
- Pearson: Yes, and then the "Y." You could stay at the "Y." That's where most of your people stayed, was at the "Y." That was another reason you didn't stay overnight, because you couldn't get a room there,
- Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the training routine of the West Virginia. When would the West Virginia normally go out on a training exercise, in other words, what day of the week?
- Pearson: Well, I can't remember. I know we would generally go out for two weeks, and then we would come in for a week. We'd be out, like I say, for a week or ten days, and then we would be in for a week, and then we would go back out again. All you did when you was out was maneuver. You'd have all your drills-- Abandon Ship and your General Quarters. General Quarters you had every morning. It was just automatic. At dawn and dusk, you always had General Quarters because they say that is the hardest time to see a periscope in the water--the way the sun is setting--and so they had General Quarters at dawn and dusk. There would be times when we would go out, and we would have target practice. We did quite a bit of that. The big guns didn't fire too much. As a matter of fact, I think I only seen them fired twice when we went out, and they fired at sleds way off.

That is amazing because you can actually see them 16-inch shells going through the air. You can sit there and watch them going through the air,

Marcello: You mentioned that they didn't fire the 16-inch rifles very often. Why was that? Was it the expense involved?

Pearson: Well, of course, I wasn't on there all that long--a year--but I guess it was a lot to do with the expense and to set up for it and everything. Of course, we were going to go out and fire just before Pearl Harbor was attacked. We were supposed to go out and fire it and come back to the States and go in the yards. I guess it was mainly the expense,

Marcello: Do you recall how many battleship divisions there were there at Pearl?

Pearson: No, I know just what battleships were there, but I don't know what divisions. I don't even know how they broke them down into divisions.

Marcello: Well, I guess what I'm getting at is, would all the battleships go out at one time and come in at the same time?

Pearson: As a rule they wouldn't. That is the first time I've ever seen them all in at one time like that,

Marcello: That is, on that weekend of December 7?

Pearson: Right. That is the first time I had ever seen them all there like that. I didn't think nothing about it at the time, but afterwards you get to thinking about it, and I've heard a lot of them say that they'd never seen them all in like that. Generally,

oh, there might be three or four in, and the rest of them would be out, or you might be passing them going out as you are coming in. But very seldom did you see them all in there like that.

Marcello: Where was your battle station aboard the West Virginia?

Pearson: Well, it was the fire control center, and it was just above what they called the flying bridge. It was up in the air (chuckle), and what it was was a little...it looked like a shed that you sat in, and you had a pointer and a director in there, and you'd get the range. I was the pointer, and you'd point the target and give the range, and then they would send it on down where the guns could control it.

Marcello: What kind of guns were you pointing for?

Pearson: We was pointing for the 5-inch casemate guns for the Marines,

Marcello: How much emphasis was given to antiaircraft practice aboard the West Virginia during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Pearson: Well, we didn't really have all that many antiaircraft guns, so there really wasn't all that much. We had mostly machine guns. Our biggest antiaircraft weapons were the machine guns, and so there really wasn't all that much concern about it.

Marcello: So you didn't have the 20-millimeters and the 40-millimeters yet?

Pearson: No, they came out afterwards. I was one of the first people in the United States to know anything about 20-millimeter Oerlikon guns. I found that out after Pearl Harbor. They taught us,

They took several of us over and gave us instructions on it. But the .50-caliber machine gun was our big antiaircraft weapon,

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, could you detect any changes in your training routine when you were out at sea?

Pearson: Not really all that much. I didn't. Probably I wasn't paying any attention to it because I didn't think it could ever happen. I didn't really think anything about it, but we used to read a lot about the British. They had a pom-pom gun, what they called a pom-pom gun, a 1.1. We used to think that that would be the thing to have, which we later did get, but that was so far away from us, really. We didn't figure anybody would ever really try us. We thought we was the best and that nobody could bother us. That's the whole thing.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what kind of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind. Obviously, there are a lot of Japanese on the Hawaiian Islands, but when you thought of a Japanese, what kind of a person did you think of?

Pearson: A "gook," That's what we would call them, a "gook," I guess we thought he was little, squatty, slant-eyed, and didn't know much. That's what I always thought about them. That's probably about the only thing I ever thought about them. They were different. They didn't have the mentality that most people

would give them credit for, or I didn't think they did,

Marcello: Suppose a showdown ever had occurred between the United States and Japan, Did you ever have any doubts about the outcome at that time before Pearl Harbor attack?

Pearson: No. But I really didn't think that Japan would be our major concern, anyway, I didn't think we would ever go to war with Japan, I figured that if we were going to go to war, it would have been over in Europe. That is where we'd all be going, I didn't think anything about Japan,

Marcello: Did you have more General Quarters drills as one got closer to December 7, 1941?

Pearson: Yes. Instead of having them maybe twice a day, we might have them four times a day, I think that was a bad thing, myself, because when we did need the General Quarters, everybody thought that it was just another drill and wouldn't go. Yes, I think they had them more often, Of course, when I was aboard the West Virginia, it wasn't all that much before Pearl Harbor, and they were more or less, I guess, into their routine, The higher-ups knew what was going on, and they were more or less into that, anyway, I guess it increased some, but not all that much, It was just something that we knew we was going to do, anyway,

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and obviously we want to go into a great deal of detail. Do you remember when the West Virginia came in on that weekend and where it docked when it came in?

Pearson: I don't remember when it came in, but I know we had them quays out there, and we tied up alongside the Tennessee. We were right alongside the Tennessee, and the Arizona was right behind us, and the Oklahoma was right ahead of us. They were both outboard ships, and we were an outboard ship. I don't know who was ahead of the Tennessee, but it seemed like the Maryland was. I guess the Nevada was alongside the Arizona. The Nevada was outboard.

Marcello: Do you recall what you did that Saturday evening of December 6, 1941?

Pearson: Yes, I went to a place where, . . . I had gone for the weekend. I actually went to stay the weekend. It was one of these recreation things that the ship had, where they take you out for the weekend to a beach and places like that, and it was around on the other side of the island. That's where we went Saturday night, and I was still here Sunday morning.

Marcello: Nanakuli, was that it?

Pearson: Yes, that is where it was. We went to Nanakuli. It was me and this friend of mine that now lives down in Diboll. We had went over there with a group. That's where we were when the attack actually took place, and then they brought us back.

Marcello: Why did you decide to go to Nanakuli as opposed to going to Honolulu that weekend?

Pearson: Money (chuckle). It was just a way to get out, and it didn't cost all that much. We didn't have the money to go anyplace, and

everybody that had been there had enjoyed it, so that's the reason we went,

Marcello: What was there to do over in Nanakuli?

Pearson: Mostly just rest, swim, and they had the towns there, too, that you'd go into town. But mostly it was just like kids do--play. That's all we did, was just go over there and play and rest. We had no money and nothing else to do, so that was the big thing to do,

Marcello: What kind of quarters did you have over there?

Pearson: It was about half wood in size and then screened and then tent up to the top of it. It had about six or eight beds in there that the guys slept in. There was a big mess hall out in the middle there where everybody ate.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you spent the evening of December 6 over in Nanakuli. Did you do very much drinking that night?

Pearson: No, We drank some beer, but at that kind of place you didn't get too much to drink. Of course, then four or five beers was quite a bit. I imagine we drank two or three beers apiece.

Marcello: Generally speaking--and let's go back to Pearl Harbor for a moment--when guys would be coming back aboard ship on a Saturday evening after having been on liberty, what kind of shape or condition would they be in?

Pearson: Some of them was pretty bad. Some of them were just real happy, and a lot of them tried to sneak liquor back aboard ship. They had all kinds of ways to do it, but they all got caught (chuckle).

I don't think I actually did see anybody actually drinking on there. Some of them would be just falling-down drunk, but that would be the minority, I would say. You might find out of one whaleboat that came back, or motor launch, there might be one or maybe two that was like that. Most of them had been drinking and everything, but when they came back on, they knew what they had to do. Like you had to salute the flag, and you had to salute the officer-of-the-day and ask permission. You always had to ask permission to come aboard the ship. There was very few that would be in such bad shape that they didn't know what they had to do when they come back. Everybody had a few drinks, or the majority of them did.

Marcello: Of course, at the same time, we have to keep in mind that half the crew was already aboard that ship, anyhow.

Pearson: Right. We always had half aboard.

Marcello: So the ship would have been in fairly decent operating condition the next day.

Pearson: Right. There is no time--ever--that the ship couldn't have been operational and done what it was supposed to have done. That's the reason that they had the port-and-starboard liberties, because there was always somebody to do somebody else's job.

Marcello: Okay, so this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7. I want you to pick up the details from this part as they unfolded.

Pearson: Well, we was over there at Nanakuli, and we weren't scheduled to come back. We heard the noise and could see the smoke, but

nobody knew what it was. Anyway, they put us all aboard these buses and took us back,

Marcello: Did they say anything in the meantime?

Pearson: No, not right then, but there was speculation. Everybody had their own ideas of what was going on--manuevers. We all thought it was just play-acting again, except that you could see the planes flying around and you could see the smoke, and we had never seen that before. Anyway, they got us back,..I guess it took us about forty-five minutes to get back over there.

Marcello: Approximately what time would you say you left Nanakuli?

Pearson: Well, it seemed like it was about six o'clock in the morning, but it wasn't that early,

Marcello: No, it had to have been later than that because the attack..,

Pearson: I know it was later than that. I guess it was pretty close to ..,well it was after the first attack had started, but I don't really know what time the attack started.

Marcello: The attack started around 7:55 or eight o'clock,

Pearson: Right, just before eight o'clock. It had to have been just right shortly after that.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen on that trip from Nanakuli back to the West Virginia? What went on during that trip? Maybe that is a better way to ask the question.

Pearson: Mostly, everybody talked--trying to figure out why. "What are they doing with us?" "What is going on?" Like I say, everybody thought at first that it was manuevers, and then you could see

all the smoke, and then we seen a plane go down, and then we knew that was not part of maneuvers because they don't do that. So that's when everybody started thinking, "Well, what is going going on?"

And we started getting a little bit scared, Of course, when everything got to be,,,cars were going this way and that way, and then when we did get to Pearl Harbor, we were all supposed to go to the ship. Well, we didn't think we could get to the ship. Right then, too, everybody is "gung-ho," ready to do anything you could. Anyway, it was about,,,I don't even remember how,,,I don't know how, but me and Jim Savage did get back aboard ship. I can't even tell you how we got back aboard ship. Evidently, it was by boat--one of them motor launches--because we was plumb way over by Ford Island. They knew then that the "Weevy" had been hit. We got back out there before the Arizona blowed up,

Marcello: Okay, let's just back up a minute. How long would it normally take to go from Nanakuli to Pearl Harbor?

Pearson: Well, where we was at, I would say about an hour. That's the way it was when we went out there. It seemed like about an hour.

Marcello: How long did it take you to get back?

Pearson: About thirty minutes, thirty-five minutes,

Marcello: So you get back a lot quicker?

Pearson: A lot faster. They didn't mess around,

Marcello: So you get over to Pearl Harbor, and you are on the docks trying

to get out to...

Pearson: ...our ships,

Marcello: Okay, what's going on at that point?

Pearson: That's when we seen the planes coming over. Everything was going on--smoke, fires. You'd see these planes coming down, and, I mean, they was coming down low enough that,,well, I don't guess you could actually see that pilot sitting in there. You could see the bombs dropping; you could see the torpedoes dropping and everything. I imagine everybody was like me--so scared you didn't know what was going on. They had it pretty well drummed in your head that the best thing you could do is to get to where you are supposed to be. That's the reason we was trying to get back to that ship. As far as I was concerned, a battleship was indestructible; it was unsinkable. You couldn't sink it, and I figured that was the safest place for me to get was right back on there.

Marcello: You mentioned that you saw these bombs dropping, and you saw the torpedo planes coming in. At this point, how much resistance was being put up?

Pearson: Not very much. There were people shooting. We didn't have much to shoot with. In fact, a lot of them didn't. A lot of them didn't have no ammunition. They might have a gun but not no ammunition. The Japs could do anything they wanted to, I'd say, just about anytime they wanted to. Of course, everybody was always hollering, "Where's the Army? Where is the Marine Corps

that is supposed to take care of us?" and all that kind of stuff,

We seen a ship trying to get out--not the Nevada. I never did see the Nevada try to get underway, but there was a cruiser or...I guess it was a destroyer. It got underway, and it looked more like a motorboat than it did like a big ship going out,

I know we got back aboard ship, but I can't remember how we got out there,

Marcello: Do you recall what the water was like when you were on your way back to the West Virginia? In other words, had the oil and so on already spread?

Pearson: Yes, there was smoke and fire, and you could see that all over the place. Well, it was later, though, that we went back in, and you could see the bodies in the water and everything. That was part of what we did afterwards. We went and picked them up, and we buried them. They dug a big trench, and we buried them all the next day,

Marcello: So you finally make it back to the West Virginia. Did you come under any attack on your way back?

Pearson: No, I don't remember being shot at. So we got back aboard, all right,..no problems.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens when you get back aboard?

Pearson: Well, I was going to go to my battle station, which was up above the flying bridge, but this officer--I don't know which one or who--met us at the flying bridge. There were three of us trying to get up there, and he wouldn't let us go no higher. He said

that we couldn't go any higher, for us to go back down and fight fires,

Marcello: By this time the West Virginia had already been hit?

Pearson: It had been hit by torpedoes and bombs, I ran across another friend of mine that hadn't went, Jeff Nevels, I ran across him, and he told me, "They are carrying these damn maneuvers too far!" Anyway, we picked up the hose--me and him, together-- to try and put this fire out, but we couldn't get no water out of the hose. So he grabbed me and said, "Let's get the hell out of here!"

So we went up forward, and our casemates were firing our 5-inch guns. They aren't antiaircraft guns, You can't even rotate them up in the air. They said they could see them planes close enough that they could shoot at them with those 5-inch casemate guns. But they were using them. Anyway, we went over to the Tennessee. They had abandoned ship, so we went over to the Tennessee, and they called us back. They had a recall, and we came back to fight more fires. Of course, they were shooting then. That's when nobody knows whether you got hurt, whether you didn't. You were so scared that you didn't know what you were doing, anyway. You were just trying to...if you got a sheet and just put a sheet over your head, you would have felt like you had some kind of protection, but you didn't have no kind of protection. You would hide under gun turrets or anything you could. You didn't even know who it was; you didn't know who was

shooting. Anyway, I don't know how long that went on. It seemed like forever, but it wasn't all that long.

Marcello: Now by this time are we talking about the second wave, or is this still during the first wave?

Pearson: It was probably the second wave when that was going on.

Marcello: This is when the high-altitude bombers were coming over?

Pearson: That's right. Anyway, they abandoned ship again, and that's when we decided, well, "We're going to get off now, and we ain't never coming back." So we went over to Ford Island.

Marcello: Okay, before we got to that point, let me ask you a couple more questions here. From what you gather, am I to assume that there was a great deal of confusion during that period?

Pearson: Oh, mass confusion. Like I say, nobody knew what was going on...well, some of them did. There was also a lot of people that were very calm, but I wasn't one of them. I don't guess that you would say that they was calm, either, but they more or less could go about their business a lot better than I could. I was trying to pay attention to me and how I could get out of that thing because they had told me that I couldn't go to my battle station. Like I said, I had always thought that a battleship was indestructible, and here they already got mine about sunk, so I'm beginning to wonder just what it is. At that time, I still didn't know who had attacked us; I didn't know who was even doing all this stuff.

Marcello: You didn't know anybody was even mad at you (chuckle).

Pearson: No. I just couldn't figure out who it was. Somebody said it was the Japanese, but we didn't think the Japanese had that much that they could do all that kind of stuff. It was later...well, it was after we got over onto Ford Island because when we got over on Ford Island, we got with the Marines, and the Marines over there...well, we had to go to this one station, and they gave us an old Springfield rifle, a bayonet, and five rounds of ammunition. There was several of us that came off of the ship that was over there.

Marcello: How did you get from the West Virginia over to Ford Island?

Pearson: I swam. It wasn't but maybe a hundred yards or so, something like that.

Marcello: Describe the abandoning ship.

Pearson: We just jumped off (chuckle).

Marcello: All your clothes on?

Pearson: Yes, we had shorts on. What we wore then was shorts and a T-shirt.

Marcello: No shoes?

Pearson: Yes, I kept my shoes on. But they was going off any way they could. Everybody had their clothes on--that had clothes on. You could go over to the Tennessee if you could, but I had done been over there once, and they made me come back, and I didn't want to do that no more. So we went over the bow.

Marcello: About how far down was it from the bow to the water?

Pearson: Well, at that time the West Virginia was down pretty far, and, oh,

I would say it was maybe twenty-five or thirty feet,

Marcello: Did you jump or dive?

Pearson: I jumped. I still don't dive, I jumped,

Marcello: What was the water like?

Pearson: It was oily, But there was no fire; there was no fire up in there,

Marcello: What is it like to swim through that oil?

Pearson: Well, of course, when you are scared, you do a lot of things that you don't know, but it didn't seem to have bothered anybody, It was on you,

Marcello: It was a rather thick oil, was it not?

Pearson: Yes, it's on you, It was just like motor oil, It is on you, but you don't have no problem getting through it when you are scared, Like I say, it wasn't all that far, anyway, to where we had to go,

Marcello: So you get over to Ford Island, What happens when you hit the beach there at Ford Island?

Pearson: That's where there were Marines,

Marcello: They were right there on the beach?

Pearson: Well, they was there trying to gather people up,

Marcello: I see,

Pearson: They was trying to get,,well, they grouped you. We found out later it was false, but like I say, they gave us a Springfield rifle, five rounds of ammunition, and a bayonet, and they put this,,I don't know whether it was a Marine or a soldier, Anyway,

he was a sergeant, and they put him in charge of us. They had us in groups of maybe five, ten people together, and we were supposed to go out, and they were supposed to be landing paratroopers. Somebody said that Japanese had landed paratroops, and we was going to go out to the cane fields and try to get them out of there.

Marcello: But at this stage, you are still on Ford Island, is that correct?

Pearson: That was on Ford Island. Anyway, they got us in these groups, and they got us back over to Aiea Landing, is where we got to, and that's where they put us out with all these here different things. But we didn't get noplace, really, until they... I don't know if they found out that it wasn't true or what or decided we couldn't handle it, but, anyway, they brought us back and put us all in the big recreation building at Aiea Landing there.

Marcello: Is that the Bloch Recreation Arena?

Pearson: Yes, it was a great, big place. They got us in there, and that's when they got on the big microphone, and that's when they really explain to us what was going on and everything. I don't know how long we ran around that place, but I know I found Johnny Nichols and Pete Peterson and Savage. I guess that's the four of us that all got together, and we were in there together, and that's when they... the guys was going out to go aboard different ships and all this kind of stuff, and this to me is where people really showed what they could do. They knew these ships were going out, and they were going out to fight what was left of the

war we thought we was going to be in or whatever. But these guys were clambering to get aboard them ships. They wanted to go, and there was more then what the ships could take. They would just have to run you off the ship, and you'd go from place to place, trying to get you a ship to go on.

Anyway, this went on, as far as I know, up until we all got into that building that night again. That's when President Roosevelt gave us that big speech and told us that Japan had attacked us and that we had as of, I guess, that morning been in a state of war and different things. Then they had it set up where all of us could go over, and we could send a message to our folks at home and tell them that we are all right and all that and everything.

Marcello: That was strictly a censored message, however, that you could send, wasn't it?

Pearson: Well, mostly everybody knew where we were at, but, yes, you just had so many words that you could say because it went like in a telegram-like deal. You just had like so many words--that you are fine and all that. You couldn't tell where you was at or anything because everything was censored. I don't think anybody needed to say anything, just that "I'm okay." That was the biggest thing that anybody said, was that you're all right.

Marcello: I guess you must have been a hard-looking crew with all that oil and so on you?

Pearson: A mess. You got clothes. Everybody got clothes. When we first

came off, that was bad, but I don't think we really got to clean up, and they issued clothes. We were still a pretty rough-looking bunch because nothing fit. But you got the best that you could; you didn't have anything of your own.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had received word that the Japanese had allegedly landed paratroopers in the cane fields and so on. What other rumors did you hear that day?

Pearson: Oh, that their fleet was out there and that Midway and all these different things,,.well, Pearl Harbor was gone; I mean, on the Island of Hawaii, we could just throw our hands up, The Japanese done had us, and that's the way it was. As a matter of fact, I think if Japan would have known what they did, they could have taken us. I really believe they could have. However, too, I think that if they had brought enough to have done that with, they would have probably been found out a little quicker. But they brought enough. There was rumors that...well, the biggest one was that they had landed troops and that their fleet was out there.

Marcello: Awhile ago you also mentioned, did you not, that you saw the Arizona blow up?

Pearson: I seen the Arizona blow up and the Oklahoma roll over.

Marcello: Okay, let's take them one at a time. I believe the Oklahoma rolled over before the Arizona blew up. Describe the Oklahoma "turning turtle."

Pearson: Well, it was just,,.really, you can't,,.well, there it is. One

minute it is up there...it went slow, real slow. It was no big thing. But you feel just like you were on it when it is making that...and it went over...not like I've seen in pictures. It didn't have all those bubbles and all that kind of stuff--none of that there. But a guy would be crawling down the side actually--just crawling. He could have walked off of it just anyplace you wanted to, and then it went over.

Marcello: I guess it must be quite an awesome sight to see a big battleship turn over?

Pearson: You just can't comprehend it. Well, like I said, I always thought that they was indestructible, anyway, and there it is. It was just like something in slow motion--just going like that--and guys were going over on the side and getting off. Then, of course, you ain't got all that much time to look at it, either, because you are still running--running from one place to the next.

When the Arizona blowed up, really, I didn't think it was hurt, I thought that a bomb had hit,

Marcello: Describe it,

Pearson: Really, it was just a big flash. That's all I've seen, was a flash and the fire and smoke. I couldn't see anybody or anything like that, and, of course, I was about, I guess, about midship on the West Virginia, and it didn't look any worse than...but I wasn't thinking. I didn't know what things like that looked like. It didn't seem like it was hurt all that bad when you

first saw it,

Marcello: You were still seventeen years old, or had you turned eighteen by now?

Pearson: I was eighteen in May. I was eighteen then, and I was still scared,

Marcello: I would assume that you didn't have a whole lot of time to think about things such as the Oklahoma and the Arizona, given what was happening aboard the West Virginia,

Pearson: No, and that's the reason I say that you see it, but you really... well, you're trained to do certain things, but you still are looking out for yourself. You was trying to figure out, "Now what am I going to do? How am I going to get around it?" You've got nothing to fight with, if you was so inclined to fight. Now I'm not sure whether I would have been or not. You've got nothing to do except try to protect yourself, so you try to find a place to hide because you know they're shooting at you. So, really, you are not looking at anything else.

But it's unbelievable, too, that you could see somebody running farther than probably you could normally see, and you could recognize who it is. Like, if it's a friend of yours or somebody in your division or something like that, you could see him running, and you would want to get over where he was because you figured he knows more than you do. You would want to get by somebody. You don't want to be by yourself. I don't know whether that's human nature, but I guess it is.

You want somebody else to be there with you--to give you more protection or something,,,just be together, You want somebody there,and that's about all you really think about,

Marcello: What did you do that night while you were over there in the Bloch Recreation Arena?

Pearson: We just sat around and talked,

Marcello: What did you talk about?

Pearson: I guess a little bit of everything, You talked about friends that you couldn't find, and you wondered if they was alive or if they was dead, You knew these bodies was out there; you knew there was a bunch of them out there, You knew people were dead all over, but you didn't know who they were, You wondered where your friends were; you wondered what people thought was going on; you wondered where the Japanese were, We didn't know whether they was back in the United States, We had been told that they hadn't,but you didn't know because you didn't know who to believe and who not to believe, You just sat around and talked, Of course, they had them big tureens set up with coffee, and you could get coffee, We drank coffee and more or less talked to try to keep from thinking because you knew if you got to thinking that you was scared,

Marcello: Was all this done under blackout conditions?

Pearson: We had lights in the,,but not bright lights, but we had lights, But outside, no,there was no light outside,

Marcello: I guess it wasn't too safe to venture outside at night, was it?

- Pearson: I don't know of anybody that wanted to go out. I think everybody was pretty well scared, Now they had their guards. I guess the Marine Corps and the Army did that. But I don't think anybody wanted to go out. For one thing, I don't think it would have been too safe because I don't think you would have had to have done much to have got shot because everybody was jumpy.
- Marcello: Could you hear sporadic gunfire that night?
- Pearson: I don't remember it. No, I don't remember hearing it. I probably did, but I wasn't thinking too much about it.
- Marcello: Were you witness to the fireworks that went up when those unfortunate Navy planes came in?
- Pearson: No, I didn't see that.
- Marcello: Did you get very much sleep that night?
- Pearson: No, I did sleep, but it would be sleeping like off and on, off and on. You wake yourself up, You'd scared to sleep and scared not to sleep and didn't know what you was going to do and didn't know what they was going to do with you. But there was sleep. There were some, I imagine, that slept all night.
- Marcello: Were you sleeping on the floor, or did you have cots?
- Pearson: They were seats, like bleacher seats. But there was mattresses. Some had mattresses, and some didn't. But there was mattresses around. I guess they had what they could get, what they could put out. They was there.
- Marcello: Did you still have your weapon?

Pearson: No, we gave them back when they brought us back, Like I say, we never did even get to go anyplace, They brought us back, took that and the ammunition and the bayonet away from us,

Marcello: What did you do in the days following the attack? Let's talk about that Monday.

Pearson: Well, we was picking up the bodies out of the water,

Marcello: Describe that detail, if you want to,

Pearson: Well, I don't recall all that much about it, but you try not to think too much about it, You go out, and most of them would be floating, and they're oil-covered,

Marcello: You are in the motor launches, I guess,

Pearson: Yes, the motor launch was picking them up, You try to stay away from them; I mean, I didn't want to get them up. I was in the launch, but I didn't want to get around them.

Marcello: Did they bring them aboard or did they just simply tie a rope to them?

Pearson: Tied them, Anyway, I couldn't take that long, and I got off, I think I was only out there,, we made one round, and I got off, We dug this big ditch, and I helped dig the ditch, I figured I could do that, It was a great, huge ditch,

Marcello: Was this done with shovels or bulldozers?

Pearson: Bulldozers, Then they brought them up, and I guess they embalmed them on the scene or something, I don't know, Anyway, they put them all in the ditch and then covered them over and said they was going to change them later, But they had to do some-

thing with them. They had one mass funeral, and then it was shortly after that that...well, it was that evening...

Marcello: Of December 8?

Pearson: Of December 8 that they asked...well, we was going around trying to get placed someplace. It was an awful feeling not having no place to go. You would go up, and you would want to go...like, PT boats was the big thing. Well, a lot of people tried to go on PT boats. But they had this one, and they wanted people to go to fleet machine gun school. There was three of us that night who got to go over to that, and they sent us over there that night and set us up. Then they had this...well, he was from the Swedish...well, he was from Sweden, anyway. That's when they gave us the instructions on the 20-millimeter Oerlikon machine guns. We got that and the .50-caliber machine gun. That was the only two that we were...but they took us down, and we were going to that school with the idea that we were going to come home. When we finished this school, we was going to come back to San Diego and set up a fleet machine gun school and train people as specialists with a 20-millimeter gun because that was something else. But we never did get there.

Marcello: What happened?

Pearson: We went aboard the USS Rigel to go set this machine gun school up. We don't know where it was set up or what happened, but we never did get there. We went down and we hadn't been at sea but four or five days, and the Coral Sea battle was going on. That was when they were fighting the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Here we are and we ain't got no guns on the ship. It was an old destroyer tender, is what it was, and, anyway, we ended up in Aukland, New Zealand.

So we was there, and there was an ammunition depot there, and so that's where I spent a pretty good time. We would go out...and then there was a New Zealand ship and couple of Austrialian ships, and we used to work on their machine guns for them, their 20-millimeters, because they didn't know nothing about it. We would go down, and we could repair that, and other than that, we was at the ammunition depot loading ammunition on ships.

We got off the Rigel...I don't know how...we was on the Rigel for just three or four days while we were in New Zealand, and then they put us way over on another island where they had the ammunition depot.

Marcello: When did you get out of the Hawaiian Islands? I guess what I'm saying is, how long were you at that machine gun school?

Pearson: About three or four weeks, but I'm not sure just which it was-- about three or four weeks.

Marcello: So you left the Hawaiian Islands, then, within the month after the attack.

Pearson: I wasn't there but about a month until we got aboard the Rigel.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Pearson, I think that is probably a pretty good place to end this interview. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I was really amazed with the amount of detail that you can remember. I want to thank you very much

for having participated.

Pearson: Well, I appreciate the chance to get to participate. Maybe it'll do somebody some good some day.