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Interview with  
Kenneth V. Adams  
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Place of Interview: Mesquite, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: *Kenneth V. Adams*  
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Kenneth Adams

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Mesquite, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Kenneth Adams for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 16, 1976, in Mesquite, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Adams in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the USS Henley, a destroyer, during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Adams, to begin this interview, why don't you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Adams: I was born in Belleville, Illinois, December 22, 1923. And I went into the Navy when I was seventeen years old--just as soon as I could get in.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Mr. Adams: (Chuckle) I didn't have too happy a home life, and I had always admired the Navy. I had planned for many years to get into the Navy as soon as I was of age, and I did just that.

Marcello: Why was it that you liked the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Adams: I have no reason; it just appealed to me--the sea, adventure, and so on.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Adams: San Diego, California.

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

Adams: No, nothing. I got into all kinds of trouble, but they straightened me out right quick (chuckle).

Marcello: When did you get out of boot camp?

Adams: Well, I think I spent ninety days in boot camp. Then I got out . . . well, I went in on January 11, and I spent ninety days, and then I came home. I was home on a thirty-day boot leave and went back.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the Navy, were you looking very closely at world events? Did you see the possibility, perhaps, that the country might sooner or later be getting into war?

Adams: It never occurred to me. I was just out for a good time.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Adams: We were assigned to . . . I believe we were assigned to a destroyer in Seattle, but we were transferred. We took

the USS Neosho up to Seattle or Bremerton. There we boarded . . . I believe it was . . . we got aboard our ship up there, and from there on that was it. I was aboard the USS Henley.

Marcello: Did you volunteer for destroyer duty, or is this simply where you were assigned?

Adams: No, sir. I asked for duty aboard the USS Lexington, a carrier, and I was assigned to Henley, a destroyer.

Marcello: What was it like being a destroyerman in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy? In other words, what was the USS Henley like as a ship? Let's talk about the morale first of all. What was the morale like aboard the ship?

Adams: Morale was like that on any Naval ship, I think, before the war--good. It was just to have a good time and enjoy life and wait for the next liberty. On the ship that I went aboard, they had a bunch of old-timers. For the most part, they were all professional men or career men. They were just a wild bunch of characters. Then I finally fell into the same line. We just lived from day-to-day, and the future didn't mean anything. We never thought about war or anything at all except going ashore and having a good time.

Marcello: How do you explain the high morale aboard the ship?

Adams: Well, I don't have any explanation, really. It was just a lack of concern for anything, period.

Marcello: Some people say, for example, that it was because everyone was a volunteer. In other words, they were in the Navy because they wanted to be there.

Adams: I would wholeheartedly agree with that. At that time that I went into the service, there weren't any draftees. We were all volunteers. And that's a good explanation for it.

Marcello: There was also a certain amount of esprit de corps in being a destroyerman, was there not?

Adams: I would say so, definitely.

Marcello: Why was this? Was it because everybody used to perhaps make derisive remarks about destroyers being small or things of this nature? How do you explain this esprit de corps?

Adams: I don't really know. Destroyers had . . . we were closer to the officers, and the whole crew had a closer association than you would have on a carrier or a large ship. We just kind of lived together, and I guess that's probably the reason.

Marcello: In other words, a destroyer is like a happy family in terms of the size of the ship.

Adams: Definitely. I would say that that's true.

Marcello: Of what vintage was the Henley? It wasn't a four-stacker, was it?

Adams: It was a four-stacker, and there were only about, I think, eight of them made. There was a squadron that

consisted of eight destroyers. There was the Henley, the Helm, Bagley, and the Blue in the Seventh Division. And I think there was an Eighth Division, which was the Helm. . . well, I forget. I think that there was only eight of them made. We weren't a four-stacker; we had only one stack.

Marcello: I was going to say that the four-stackers went back to World War I.

Adams: Yes, they were old. There was only eight of us, I think, and we only had one stack. And we were in a group by ourselves. It was in about the 1,500-ton class, that's what it was.

Marcello: What was the specific mission of the Henley most of the time?

Adams: Well, like any destroyer . . . the mission of a destroyer, I think, was escort duty and . . . well, primarily escort with carriers. Well, we had torpedos. We were a combat ship. I don't know how you would describe that.

Marcello: What were you striking for when you boarded the Henley?

Adams: When I boarded it, I wasn't striking for anything (chuckle).

Marcello: You were just part of the deck crew.

Adams: Right. After I was aboard for quite some time--I would say six or eight months--I started striking for yeoman in the ship's office. Well, I didn't start that. It

came about accidentally. Somebody came to me and approached me, and I took them up. I wound up in the ship's office as a yeoman, and that's where I spent all my time. My career in the Navy was as a yeoman.

Marcello: Did you make third class while you were aboard the Henley?

Adams: I made second class while I was aboard the Henley. As a matter of fact, the chief was promoted to warrant officer and transferred because we didn't have a complement for a warrant officer. The first class yeoman was general court-martialed because of things he did, and I wound up in charge of the ship's office--not by choice, I'll guarantee you.

Marcello: Now did all of this happen prior to Pearl Harbor?

Adams: No, it wasn't. As a matter of fact, most of it was after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: What rank were you at the time of the Japanese attack?

Adams: Third class petty officer.

Marcello: How would you describe the on-the-job training that you received aboard the Henley when you were a yeoman striker? I would assume that all the training you had was on-the-job.

Adams: It was exceptionally good. They put a lot of responsibility on me, and I worked hard. I would say that it is good.



Marcello: When did you get to Pearl Harbor?

Adams: I think that right after I had boot leave I went right straight back and was transferred to Pearl Harbor. I went in the Navy on January of 1941, and then three months in boot camp would be January, February, March, and sometime around April. Then I came home for thirty days in May, and then probably about sometime in May I went to Pearl Harbor. Because as soon as I got back, I was transferred right on over to Pearl. I spent the rest of the time, from May to December 7, in Pearl Harbor when we were attacked.

Marcello: Describe the training routine that the Henley underwent after it arrived at Pearl Harbor?

Adams: That's something else that I have thought on many, many times. Apparently, the country anticipated war because for the many months that I was in Pearl Harbor prior to the attack we steamed constantly under combat conditions. Everything was pointed towards training for combat. We never went out at night unless we were in battle condition with all the lights off and simply battle lights in and out. Everything that we done was for the training of combat. And at the time of the actual attack, that attack was nothing more than we had been doing for many months.

Marcello: What ships did you usually escort when you went on these training missions? Were you working with the carriers most of the time?

Adams: Not necessarily. We went out many times and had target practice. There were towed targets, and we would go out for target practice. We would go out and we would escort carriers, and we would escort various cruisers and different ships. I can't remember the things that we did do, but I know that we were out all the time, and all the time we were out it was under combat conditions.

Marcello: How frequently did these maneuvers take place?

Adams: It wasn't frequently; it was constantly. It was constantly, actually, yes. We would be in maybe for a day or two and head right back out again. My entire time prior to the war was spent actually in just cruising in combat conditions.

Marcello: Normally, would you go out on a Monday and come back on a Friday? Was that the general routine, or would it just vary?

Adams: Well, I can't remember the days, and I don't think that it was on a weekly basis. I think it was on just a cruise basis more than anything else, which would maybe last from one to three or four weeks.

Marcello: You could be out from three or four weeks at times?

Adams: Yes. I don't recall any weekly basis at all.

Marcello: As a young sailor, what did you think of having duty in the Hawaiian Islands? When you were first assigned

there or when you heard that you were going to be assigned there, what did you think about having duty there?

Adams: I don't recall (chuckle) that I thought anything of it, really. While I was there, it was great. Like I said before, it was just one big picnic from morning to night. I never worried about combat or home or anything else. I was too busy having a good time.

Marcello: When the Henley was in port, what sort of liberties did you have?

Adams: Well, that's hard to remember. Maybe it was every other day or every two or three days. We had plenty of liberty. We weren't restricted in too many ways. Now closer to the war, just prior to the attack, we were restricted much more, and our liberties were fewer and fewer. It got to where we were just in much more combat conditions and cruising all the time. The first few months over there, I had a lot of liberty, but later there was very little of it.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if your training routine actually differed any as one got closer and closer to December 7.

Adams: Oh, it definitely did! You could almost see in the handwriting on the wall. As a matter of fact, our conversations aboard and everywhere was leaning towards that end.

Marcello: Did this mainly come through reading the local newspapers as well as the intensified maneuvers?

Adams: I don't think that it was reading the newspaper so much because to my knowledge I don't remember ever seeing or picking up a newspaper on the islands. I think it was just more toward conversation and observation. Like I say, you could almost see it coming, and you didn't have to read a paper or anything. I imagine that we did read some papers or hear it, but we had an idea of what was going on.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during this period, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Adams: I can't say that I ever given that any thought, really. I never did.

Marcello: In any of your bull sessions, did you ever talk very much about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy?

Adams: Oh, definitely!

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about that.

Adams: Well, that was very definitely . . . as a matter of fact, I myself made remarks several times that they had a paper navy and that we could . . . I wished that they would start something, and we would wipe them out in a few days, and that would be the end of it. We always talked about that. And we all had a very, very poor respect for the Japanese Navy.

Marcello: Had you ever come in contact with any of their ships, that is, did any of them ever pay any courtesy calls in the Hawaiian Islands or anything?

Adams: Never.

Marcello: That was probably kind of out of bounds for courtesy calls since there was so much Naval activity going on there.

Adams: You bet! You bet!

Marcello: Did any of the old salts aboard this destroyer . . . you mentioned that there were a lot of old-timers aboard. Did they ever talk about the Japanese Navy? In other words, had any of them ever served in the so-called "Asiatics?"

Adams: Yes. As a matter of fact, we had very few men aboard who had not served in the Asiatic Fleet. But here again, I don't recall them ever saying pro or con about the Japanese Navy. Again, I think that their whole life was devoted to just having a good time (chuckle).

Marcello: When you went on leave--getting back to this liberty again--how did you usually spend your time?

Adams: Well, I'd just rather not discuss that (chuckle). We went ashore and we drank and made merry while we could and that's it.

Marcello: In other words, you spent a lot of time on Hotel Street, perhaps.

Adams: Oh, no doubt. All the time. Right.

Marcello: Now as one got closer and closer to Pearl Harbor, I know that there was a steady influx of reserves that were coming into the Navy. Did the Henley ever take any reserves aboard?

Adams: Yes, we definitely did. We took a number of officers. Our ship's complement doubled up. We were bunking officers two or three to the wardroom instead of one. And we had taken on a number of other . . . well, our ship's complement was crowded, and we did have a large complement of reserve personnel aboard.

Marcello: In other words, by the time of the attack the Henley was certainly up to full strength in terms of personnel.

Adams: Yes, we were certainly well above our complement, our normal complement.

Marcello: Was there ever very much friction between reserves and the regulars aboard the Henley?

Adams: Not really, no.

Marcello: I would assume that most of these reserves had probably been in the Navy at one time anyhow, had they not?

Adams: No, I don't think so. The people that . . . well, that's hard to answer, but the people that we had aboard had not been . . . the reserves had not been in the service before. They were new. I don't remember the draft setup at that time, but these people that

came aboard as reserves were not old people who had been recalled. I think that that happened after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: I would assume that, again, during those months immediately prior to Pearl Harbor that that area was just a beehive of activity. Ships were going in and out all the time. There was a tremendous number of ships in that immediate area.

Adams: I don't think any more than it had ever been. Like I say, for a number of months, well, practically, I guess, the nine months that I was in Pearl prior to the attack, I would say that the activity was normal from the first month to the ninth month. I don't remember it increasing or it being any different nine months later than when I got there. Pearl Harbor had always been a real active place, and I don't recall any more ships going or coming or any activities than we had had before.

Marcello: Describe what Battleship Row looked like so far as you were concerned.

Adams: Battleship Row?

Marcello: Yes. In other words, did it impress you as a young sailor and things of this nature?

Adams: No. When you are in the Navy, a ship is a ship, whether it is a battleship, a destroyer, a carrier,

or what. And Battleship Row was just a bunch of battleships just tied up behind each other. It was no different than any ship. That's all I can say about it. It didn't mean a thing.

Marcello: When the Henley was in port, where was it tied up?

Adams: Well, that would vary. Sometimes we were tied up alongside a hospital ship; sometimes we were anchored out on a buoy by ourselves; other times we would be anchored up in the harbor on a wharf. There wasn't any particular place. I don't know who designated where we went or what, but it varied sometimes from one trip to the next.

Marcello: Where were you tied up on the day of the attack?

Adams: We were tied up alongside the destroyer tender, and after these years I can't remember which one. I've tried to. But we were tied up alongside a destroyer tender, and we were the fourth or fifth or third or fourth ship out. One would tie up next to a tender, and then all the rest would be alongside. And we were well out, about the fifth ship somewhere alongside.

Marcello: What were some of the other ships that were tied up here by the tender? Do you recall what ships they were?

Adams: No, I really can't recall a single ship.



Marcello: Were any of them tied up outboard of you?

Adams: Yes, sir, there was one that I recall, and the reason I recall that one is because he was trying to get underway, and they had awnings over the guns. During the peacetime, there was a common practice to just make yourself comfortable--put awnings over there and get all tied up and get just as secure as you could. And these people were well-secured, and they were trying to get their guns into action. And then they had so much awning and everything over it that they couldn't, and one guy just rammed a shell into the chamber of a gun and blasted the whole awning off. And that's why I remember that ship on the outside of us.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that when you were in port during this peacetime period that you tried to get as comfortable as possible. Obviously, when a ship was in the condition such as the condition that yours was in on December 7, watertight integrity was at an absolute minimum.

Adams: Definitely! You bet! Everything was at a minimum. Whenever you are not thinking about war, well, you just don't take precautions, and we had none whatsoever.

Marcello: What did you think were the possibilities of the Japanese ever having the audacity to mount an attack

on Pearl Harbor? Did you feel pretty safe and secure there?

Adams: It never occurred to me--not one time in my life.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any of your other buddies talk about the possibility of a Japanese attack?

Adams: This was something that was never, never, never mentioned. I just don't think that it ever occurred to anybody. I think that we all considered it to be an impossibility, completely.

Marcello: Do you think that this was mainly because of the tremendous amount of distance involved.

Adams: I think that that had more to do with it than anything else. It was not bravery or anything, but the distance, I think, was the determining reason.

Marcello: This more or less ends my general questions, so I think what we can do at this stage is talk about your activities and so on on the days immediately prior to Pearl Harbor. So at this point why don't you go into as much detail as you can remember and describe what you did on Saturday December 6, 1941. This, of course, would have been the day prior to Pearl Harbor. Describe your routine from the time that you got up in the morning until you went to bed that night.

Adams: Well, that would be hard to do. If I can remember correctly, I had an aunt that was living in Hawaii.

I had contacted her, and I had an invitation to visit her. And I had a very close friend who was going with me, and I spent that day of Saturday ashore buying civilian clothing because I didn't want to go over and visit her in uniform. That was my Saturday, and I don't remember exactly what time I returned to the ship. But I did go ashore, shopped, bought clothing, and made arrangements to meet her on Sunday morning, or go over and spend Sunday with her. And that's all.

Marcello: I think that when one had liberty that he had to be back aboard the ship by midnight. Isn't that the case unless you had housing on shore?

Adams: Well, yes. There was a time . . . I don't remember what time it was that we all had a curfew. We had a time to be back, and you were back at that time.

Marcello: On that particular Saturday night, do you recall anything out of the ordinary?

Adams: Yes, I do. I remember that at a number of places that I stopped and had drinks and ate, I just felt . . . I don't know if it was just myself or the condition of the times that we were in, but I felt that there was a tension in the air. I felt it.

Of course, everywhere you ate and drank there were Japanese. The whole island was Japanese. And I did feel definitely that there was an air of hostility

there. Or just unfamiliarity or the friendliness wasn't there.

Marcello: Generally speaking, when men returned aboard the Henley on a Saturday night, what sort of condition were they in?

Adams: Condition?

Marcello: Yes.

Adams: Well, fortunately, this particular Saturday night I was in good condition. I had not tied one on, as the saying goes. As I said, I had an aunt over there, and I was making preparations to visit. And my interest was more in getting clothes and having a proper appearance for meeting her and everything rather than one of getting drunk in the usual procedure. I would say that I was in excellent condition.

Marcello: In other words, you had not visited your aunt on that particular day. You had simply gone to buy clothing and so on, and you had planned to visit her on that Sunday.

Adams: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: It was kind of unusual to have liberty on both Saturday and Sunday. Or was this usual on a destroyer?

Adams: No, it wasn't unusual. I think we usually had two days off and one on or something. It wasn't unusual at all.

Marcello: When had the Henley come back into port this particular time?

Adams: I don't recall that. I think that we had been in for two or three days, if I remember correctly. I don't remember that at all. But we had been in for two or three days, I know that.

Marcello: When was payday?

Adams: That's something that I really don't remember. I have no idea.

Marcello: Well, if you were buying clothing on that particular Saturday, payday must not have been too far in the immediate past. Considering the wages you got, you at least had enough money to buy some clothing.

Adams: I had a little money to go ashore on. It must not have been very much because it didn't last long (chuckle). When I went into the Navy, I only received \$21 a month. And after four months, I think, I went to \$36 a month. And then having made third class . . . well, that was second class. First class was \$54 a month. And as a third class petty officer, I didn't make sixty to seventy bucks a month. So payday couldn't have been too long before that Saturday.

Marcello: Let's get back to the question I asked awhile ago because I am trying to establish a fairly important point. Would it be safe to say that Saturday night . . . would it be

accurate to say that a Saturday night in Pearl Harbor was one drunken orgy?

Adams: It would be accurate. You bet!

Marcello: In other words, generally speaking, what would the condition of the crew of the Henley be like when they came back on board on a Saturday night? What I am trying to do is establish how well-prepared those crewmen would be on a Sunday to function properly in time of combat.

Adams: I will say that Saturday night aboard our ship wouldn't have been any different than Thursday or Friday or Wednesday. It would have been one drunken brawl. Our crew was just plain old sailors--rough. It doesn't make any difference what night; whenever you went ashore, you just went all the way. And Saturday night would not have been one bit different than Tuesday or any other day.

Marcello: Do you recall the condition of any particular individuals coming aboard on that Saturday night?

Adams: No, I don't really--not any particular individuals. As a matter of fact, most of our crew was still ashore that night. Saturday night . . . I don't remember the regulations or how much liberty we had, but we had overnight liberty. We didn't have to be back at midnight every night, especially before the war. Very, very many of our crewmen were still ashore and still enjoying their liberty, and those . . . I would say that those men that

were aboard ship when we were attacked were in A-1 condition. The ones that weren't aboard were in just a lousy condition, and that's what it amounted to.

Marcello: I would assume that most of the officers probably went ashore on a weekend except perhaps those that had the duty.

Adams: Almost every officer . . . I think we only had . . . at the time we were hit, we didn't have . . . if I can remember, we only had three officers aboard the ship, period. Our captain was ashore, the "exec" was ashore . . . just about every officer aboard ship was ashore because officers, you know, they stay ashore when they get a chance.

Marcello: At what time did you get back aboard the Henley that night? You would have to estimate that probably.

Adams: I have no idea, but it wasn't late, because that particular night I had a good night . . . all of my planning and everything was for Sunday--the next day. It wasn't for Saturday. As young as I was . . . I was seventeen at the time, and while I was still sowing my wild oats, I wasn't as wild as I could have been a little later on. I got aboard fairly early, and I didn't tie one on the night before.

Marcello: Okay, this more or less brings us up to that morning of December 7. And once more I want you to describe

your routine as it took place from the time you woke up in the morning until all hell broke loose.

Adams: Most of that is not too hard to remember. I got up early at six or seven o'clock, whatever it was, and I don't remember now whether I had breakfast or not. I assume that I did have. I went into the shower.

And my whole day was just arranged so that I could get my shower and go ashore and visit. I had to stop by the USS Helena to pick up this buddy of mine that was going ashore with me to visit my aunt. And he was a close friend that had been here in Dallas on leave with me. He was a young boy. We were both seventeen and eighteen years old.

But anyway, I got in the shower, and I was soaped up and just bathing away, and there was a normal procedure at about five minutes to eight for muster or call the ship's crew to quarters. Muster was at about eight o'clock.

Marcello: As I recall, didn't the Henley have a rather peculiar signal or sound to call the crew to quarters?

Adams: Well, I don't know if it was peculiar only to the Henley, or maybe it was standard procedure among all destroyers, but on the destroyer you had two alarm systems on the quarter-deck. And one of them is a constant alarm that will buzz as long as you hold it and release it. And the other one, you pull it one



time, and it automatically beeps about eighty-seven times or something like that.

Marcello: Which one was the call to general quarters?

Adams: Well, the one that . . . to call general quarters you just hold it down for three long beeps . . . no, general quarters is the one that just goes "bong, bong, bong" and just keeps going. The call to muster was three distinct individual buzzers.

So anyway, I was showering, and this general alarm goes out--"bong, bong, bong." Of course, there was the hustling and the bustling and the rustling of feet and everybody running in confusion.

Marcello: Where was your battle station?

Adams: My battle station at that time was aboard the number one gun on the forecastle.

Marcello: Doing what?

Adams: I believe that I was the gun pointer on that gun.

Marcello: So here you are in the shower soaked down, and then the general quarters alarm sounds.

Adams: Right. And before I could even . . . well, it happened so quick that before I could even make a decision of what was going on, the officer of the deck had sent a messenger running through the ship to belay that. It was a mistake. So we settled down, and I merrily went on my way with my shower and everything.

And it wasn't a few minutes later that the same thing happened--"bong, bong, bong." The general alarm went off again. And I said, "Well, how in the hell can anybody be so damn stupid as to do the same thing twice?" And I really ignored it.

Marcello: This is what I was referring to awhile ago in my question. I know that inadvertently general quarters had been sounded aboard the Henley prior to any knowledge of the Japanese attack.

Adams: Right, it had been. And as soon as they got that mistake settled down, why, it happened again. So this time I intended to ignore the thing, and I went on about showering. It didn't take but a few minutes and there was just an extreme amount of confusion and feet running through the deck and hatches slamming and banging. And then some fellow--I don't remember who it was now--but some individual ran through the showers screaming at the top of his lungs, "War! War! War!" about three times.

So I quickly ran over and stuck my head out of the porthole, and it didn't take me too long to discern that he was correct. I saw a lot of planes in the air, and they had strange insignias--which I knew what they were--flying those flaming circles on them. Even so, it took time to really dawn on me.

I saw the old USS Utah. It was tied up close to us. I saw a "fish" hit right in the side, and it didn't take that ship two seconds to just roll upside down.

Marcello: Did you actually see the Japanese plane drop the torpedo?

Adams: No, as a matter of fact, about the time I looked out the porthole was when the explosion took place and it hit. Like I say, almost immediately that ship rolled upside down. There was no watertight integrity or anything. This was an old experimental ship, and she just rolled upside down. Then I figured something was up, so I ran over and just jumped into my shower slippers, and they ran up around my ankles. I grabbed the towel and slapped it around me, and I ran around the deck just as hard as I could go toward my gun. These sandals were just flopping on my feet, and all the time that I was running we were being strafed by planes, and the bullets were just going "ping, ping, ping, ping" off the deck. I knew that I had one place to go, and that was to the gun.

Marcello: Okay, where were the showers located with regard to your battle station?

Adams: The showers were located just about amidship, just practically in amidship. And our gun station was on the forecastle--the number one gun--right up on the bow of the ship. (Recorder turned off at this point)

Marcello: Okay, when we stopped to take our break, you were heading toward your gun mount, all the time being strafed by at least a Japanese plane, perhaps more than one Japanese plane. So why don't you pick up the story at this point.

Adams: We ran to our gun, and we attempted to get the gun into action. Of course, there were very, very few of the gun crew available. I know that each of us tried to fill two or three different positions, and we did the best we could; and there was a period of time--it probably wasn't over a few minutes--that we had all our crew intact. But it seemed like an eternity that there was nobody available.

Marcello: What sort of ready ammunition did you have at this gun mount?

Adams: Well, here again, we don't have any ammunition. We have to depend on the crew in the magazine to get the ammunition up to the gun turret. Even if all of us were available and ready, we couldn't do a thing unless something came up to us.

Marcello: What sort of power was there aboard the ship? I'm sure that you had little more than one boiler lit.

Adams: There was a big problem. I think that when we were secured we had probably one boiler working, and all the rest . . . I don't know how many . . . we had

three or four boilers. But I think that we operated on probably just one for minimum use. There was another thing, but I don't think that this power had anything to do with getting the ammunition to us or anything.

But it wasn't too long, anyway, that we had everybody on the crew--the gun captain and the pointer and director and everybody--and we had ammunition coming. I would say that within probably . . . well, probably within ten minutes we had ammunition going out of the gun. We were firing.

Marcello: Were you inside a turret?

Adams: We were inside a turret. It was the number one gun turret. It was a five-inch .38-caliber. Really, it is an anti-aircraft gun. It was situated on the fore-castle right up on the bow of the ship. And within probably ten minutes we were firing. I can't say that we hit anybody or got anybody down or anything. I don't know. It's vague.

Marcello: If nothing else, you were at least doing something. Under the circumstances, I think this is what counted.

Adams: We were doing everything we could to do something. We were aware right quickly that we were in combat, and we had to do something. We were doing everything we could. We were firing at planes and firing anti-aircraft shells into the air. It was rumored that we had

gotten a plane, but I don't know if that is true or not.

Marcello: It sounds good anyhow.

Adams: It was good to believe. But there were many planes in the air, and there were planes going down around us--not too many. I don't think that . . . I don't even know what the figures are. I don't think that we hit the Japanese very hard at Pearl.

Marcello: They lost a total of twenty-nine planes.

Adams: Is that right?

Marcello: That's all.

Adams: Well, that's more than I would have ever believed. It didn't seem like it.

Marcello: How would you describe the initial reactions of the crew members that you observed? Was it one of professionalism? Panic? Confusion? How would you describe it?

Adams: The word that you said, "professionalism," just hit the nail on the head, and I'm proud to say that of all the training that we had . . . and here I am, a young lad of seventeen years old with somebody trying to knock my tail off, and I had no thought in my mind but to get to my gun and get it going and to shoot them. It was strictly professionalism. I never in one time noted a sound of panic or confusion or scaredness or anything.

It was strictly an organized, trained effort to get to the gun and to get after the enemy, period.

Marcello: Were you able to observe any of the other action around you since you were in that turret?

Adams: No, sir, I could not--not anything at all.

Marcello: What sort of a feeling was this, that is, to hear all of these things happening outside and around you but really not to know what was going on? Or didn't you have time to think about it?

Adams: No, that's the key. There was no time to think, period. My mind was not confused; it wasn't wondering; it wasn't thinking. As a matter of fact, I don't even know if I had a mind. I had a trained spirit to go do what I was supposed to do. As for thinking . . . well, you think when you hear a bullet pinging around you. You got some thoughts (chuckle). As for downright thinking and concentration, no. I didn't think about anything, period.

Marcello: And all of this time you still have just the towel wrapped around you and in your sandals?

Adams: That's all. I can't remember . . . I have tried many times to remember how long, but it was all the day that I stayed up there. When we went to our battle stations, we never left there. I don't remember . . . maybe late in the evening because sandwiches and coffee were

brought to the guns, and we stayed right at our battle station and never left. I would think that it would be safe to assume that I stayed in my towel and sandals for approximately twelve to fifteen hours or something like that.

Marcello: How many shells do you think you fired altogether?

Adams: Whew! Oh, gosh! Well, it would be foolish to even estimate. There is just a . . . well, I don't know. I would just say a bunch, a bunch.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that sandwiches and coffee and so on were brought up to you. How much of an appetite or thirst did you have?

Adams: Not really any at all. I think everyone took them as a matter of course and ate them, and I don't think anyone was hungry or even cared or thought about food. That was the least . . . how can you be concerned about food when such a situation is going on (chuckle)?

Marcello: Incidentally, I would assume there really weren't a whole lot of antiaircraft weapons aboard that ship prior to Pearl Harbor, but I bet the situation changed after Pearl Harbor.

Adams: Well, after Pearl Harbor . . . well, on our ship a five-inch .38 caliber gun is primarily for antiaircraft purposes. It has a fuse setting on it where you can set it for so many seconds for dive bombers or what



have you. After the attack on Pearl, it is true. You're right. We installed 40-millimeters and 20-millimeters were installed, which we never had before. They did really fortify it for antiaircraft purposes.

Marcello: I guess every available space had an antiaircraft weapon on it.

Adams: That is true. There weren't many places where you couldn't find an antiaircraft gun.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that you were in this turret throughout the attack. When did you finally come out?

Adams: Come out of the turret?

Marcello: Out of the turret, yes.

Adams: Well, it was sometime during the day because our captain was ashore during the attack. His name was Robert Hall Smith. He was an older man, grey-headed, very respectable gentleman from Georgia. He was placed aboard another ship. If I remember correctly, it was another destroyer. And he was brought out to rendezvous with us. We were out in the sea somewhere outside Pearl.

Marcello: This is after you had gotten up steam and the attack was over?

Adams: After we had gotten out of the harbor. He was brought out, and they transferred him from that ship to ours

in a life raft. I know that they asked for volunteers to go over and swim out and take a line to him. We finally had somebody take a line, and we pulled him aboard ship. This was sometime in the evening, and I was in the quarter-deck when they pulled him aboard ship. So probably four or five o'clock in the evening-- somewhere in there--we were off of our gun station and free about the ship.

Marcello: What did you do after you got off your gun station? Do you recall what your routine was?

Adams: Not in all these many years have I even given thought to that. I don't have any idea. I imagine the first thing, if I recall, would be probably to go put some clothes on (chuckle).

Then I was aboard ship whenever the skipper was brought back aboard. Now this was in the evening. And I know that we cruised the area there for a day or two. I don't remember any details other than that-- what I did. I may have . . . I had a position in the ship's office, and I probably went in there and worked. I don't remember.

Marcello: When you surveyed the damage that had been done on the outside, what did it look like? Describe what you were able to see, either when they ship went out or when it eventually came back in to Pearl Harbor. What did the damage look like? How would you describe the damage?

Adams: Well, I don't really . . . well, when we came back in the harbor . . . we went out and came back. I guess it was a day or two later. And the only thing that I can remember in my mind was hulls of ships sticking out of the water. Of course, going out was something else. On the way out I remember them burning and turning over--the real heat of the battle. And then coming back in, I remember . . . of course, there was just a devastation and ruins.

Marcello: What sort of thought went through your mind when you saw this damage, either going or coming?

Adams: I don't think that's too hard to remember. All any of us thought was that we just wanted to get hold of a knife or a gun or something and get a hold of a Jap and finish him off. That's the whole thought that was in mind, period. As a matter of fact, we never got anymore liberty in Pearl after that, and the reason for that is that most of our ship's crew had fashioned knives out of files or any piece of steel they could get. There was just too much hatred and bitterness to turn us loose. That's the only thought I had in my mind like anybody else--to kill a bunch of Japs.

Marcello: How long was it after the attack had been completed that the Henley got up enough steam to get out of Pearl?

Adams: During the attack--I think I mentioned before--there was a ship tied on the outside of us that blasted its guns to render all the awnings and make him operational. And he got underway, and we tried to get underway. We had lines--big eight-inch ropes or hawsers as they're called--tied up everywhere, and there was somebody trying to get them loose. And someone else--if I am not mistaken, it was the chief boatswain--said, "Standby! I'll take care of it!" And he just took an ax and swatted them with an ax and cut the lines loose. And we got underway amidst all the strafing and bombing and firing that was going on. I would say that we were underway probably in twenty to thirty minutes after the attack hit.

Time doesn't mean anything during an attack. A minute could be an hour. But trying to be reasonable, I'd say it was maybe twenty or thirty minutes. We had cut the lines and were free and got the boilers going that were all secured, and we were underway. We proceeded out of the harbor. I read a book, The Day of Infamy, and I wholeheartedly disagree with the book in one respect.

Marcello: What is that?

Adams: The book said . . . I forget the ship that they named as number two in going out of the harbor. The Helm maybe? But in my mind I remember that there was an

old four-piper destroyer going out. It was ahead of us, and we were coming out behind this ship through this narrow channel. There were some high altitude bombers that were just bombing the fool out of this little four-piper, and the sprays were just coming up all around this little four-piper. I said, "There is no way you can go through that and get out of it!" And we were coming right behind this four-piper. To my knowledge the four-piper was number one, and we were number two. And there was a thought in my mind that they were trying to sink us--one of us--and bottle this harbor all up--which they would of done. But there was the USS Nevada that had been badly damaged and sinking, and the skipper grounded this ship, and these boys were standing there about waist-deep in water and just cheering us and waving us. We were coming through all of this bombing and crap going on behind us--this four-piper and these high altitude bombers. Somebody may say that I'm incorrect, but in my mind this is the way that it happened. If I remember correctly, we were the second ship to come out of Pearl, and that was the USS Henley.

And we came out of the harbor, and we went on out into the bay or the ocean or whatever it was. There was the USS Saratoga, the carrier, and she was

going around and around in circles--just circling-- because these two-man subs were everywhere. And there were torpedos going "pshew, pshew." Everywhere you looked there was a torpedo zipping through the water. And it was . . . if I had a time to consider to be scared, I guess that was the time then--when I could see what was really going on. But they were . . . the Saratoga . . .

Marcello: It was coming back from Wake or Midway, wasn't it?

Adams: On the way in. Right, right. And she didn't sustain any damage to my knowledge there. Later on, we were screening her when she did get hit with two "fish."

Anyway, these things were going on--torpedos and everything. We made depth charge runs on two submarines right at that time.

Marcello: Now at this are you up in the yeoman's office, or were you still in the turret?

Adams: No, at this time I was still on the gun turret because this was right after the attack. We had gone out of the harbor, and every man was on his battle station. I don't think we had received our skipper back aboard because this was on the way out. During the attack . . . it couldn't have been an hour or two later because I don't even have any idea how long this attack lasted--maybe two hours or an hour . . .

Marcello: About two hours.

Adams: Yes. But the skipper had not been transferred back aboard, and we were leaving the harbor and going out into the bay and running into these two-man subs and dropping our depth charges. At one time there were two of us making a depth charge run on one submarine, and one of us . . . I believe it was we who had to divert our course and let the other man make the run. But there were a lot of submarines and torpedos in the area right following the attack on Pearl, and that's where we were at that time.

Marcello: To your knowledge did you have any experiences with the midget submarines that have managed to penetrate the harbor? I'm referring to when you were going out.

Adams: Not at all. Not that I can recall. The only thing I know about torpedos in the harbor was the ones really that hit the Utah, which I saw when I first looked out. I don't know if that was a submarine or . . . it was probably a torpedo bomber that dropped that one.

Marcello: Actually, those midget submarines didn't do any damage at all inside the harbor, that is, in terms of sinking any ships or hitting any ships.

Adams: I don't really know that.

Marcello: In fact, that phase of their operation was almost a complete fiasco. They never did what they were supposed to do.

Adams: I don't know about that. I really don't.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that on the way out you did manage to get a glimpse of the Nevada, which had grounded itself. Describe what it looked like and what was happening over there.

Adams: Well, it didn't look like anything. The ship didn't even appear . . . you couldn't see any apparent damage. The ship was grounded. It was half-submerged in water up to maybe about deck level. There were sailors all aboard, topside, that were standing there. I have said before that they were in waist-deep water. To my knowledge, I remember . . . it seemed they were partially submerged in water, whether it was knee-deep, waist-deep, or what. But they were cheering us. You couldn't see any apparent damage to the ship because I think the damage was below the hull.

Marcello: It was still firing away, was it not, even when it was grounded?

Adams: Yes, to my knowledge it was. Right.

Marcello: Now in the aftermath of the attack, that is, the immediate aftermath of the attack, what sort of rumors were floating around the ship? I'm sure it was one big rumor mill.

Adams: Oh, yes! Oh, boy! It would be hard to remember. There was . . . well, after the attack, you have time to sit



and feel fear and anxiety and everything else. But the best I can remember, we were all very concerned with the fact that we had lost . . . we felt we had lost our Navy. We felt pretty much alone. We didn't know where we were going or what we were doing, and we talked about . . . well, the biggest apprehension, I guess, was the fact that the Japanese were there and they had hurt us, and they may come in and finish us off.

Marcello: In other words, you were looking toward a possible landing.

Adams: We were definitely looking toward some further activity. The landing didn't concern us and the Navy so much as a further naval activity. We just felt that we were going to have some more problems with them. This was a grave concern. We didn't . . . well, when it was all over, what could we muster but a half-dozen destroyers out here and one or two cruisers and nothing else left of us?

And to make matters even worse than that, they told us that there was a task force east of us, and we were going out and get them. And there was nothing of us. I remember that very definitely. That scared the pants off of me because we didn't seem to have any ships around us at all. We were told that we were going after a task force.

Marcello: Even at seventeen years of age, you knew that a destroyer didn't have much of a chance against cruisers or whatever else the Japanese had out there.

Adams: We sure knew that! You bet (chuckle)! There's one thing that was interesting during this attack that I would like to insert into the record for the humor, if there is any humor in war. That was that our skipper, when he was transferred back aboard our ship . . . well, he was transferred on a life raft. He had removed his trousers and was in his shorts, his skivvies. When they dragged him aboard ship and helped him up the ladder, the first thing he said when he climbed aboard ship--and I'll never forget--his words was, "This is a helluva way to start a war!" I will never, never . . . if I could forget every detail in the war, I'd never forget his statement because it was "a helluva way to start a war."  
(chuckle)

Marcello: Well, Mr. Adams, I can't think of any other questions that we need to cover. I think you've done a very good job in describing the part that you played in the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. Is there anything else that you think we ought to talk about? Is there anything that we missed? In other words, we can just more or less free lance at this stage.

If you don't have anything else, we can close off the interview.

Adams: I don't know of anything else. I think we've pretty well covered it. There was just a lot of confusion and chaos.

The main thing that I would like to leave with the interview is the fact that the Navy during this attack, I don't think, at any one time was really rattled or confused from the very beginning. I think that every man from the very instant the Japs hit us knew where he was going and what he had to do. I think that he moved toward that end. I lost some buddies there that were killed. I think that it's just wonderful and admirable--the way that the Navy conducted itself.

There is only one parting thing I'd like to say. It has nothing to do with the last war. But I keep asking myself time and time again, "If this happened to us today, what would be the result?" That's it.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Adams, I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk with me about your experiences at Pearl Harbor. You've done an excellent job of describing the details. There's no doubt in my mind that historians will find this information most valuable when they use it to write about Pearl Harbor.