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Interview with
Ben Dei Santi
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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(Signature)
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Oral History Collection

Ben Dei Santi

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Ben Dei Santi for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 21, 1978, in San Antonio, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Dei Santi in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the destroyer USS Schley during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941.

Now Mr. Dei Santi, 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. Dei Santi: I was a seventh grade dropout.

Dr. Marcello: When were you born?

Mr. Dei Santi: I was born on October 15, 1922.

Dr. Marcello: Where were you born?

Mr. Dei Santi: St. Louis, Missouri, downtown in what they called the Kerry Patch, which is like the Lower East Side. It was a rough neighborhood. We lived by the rule of "people who

were the strongest got there."

Marcello: I thought maybe you might have been born on Dago Hill if you lived in St. Louis.

Dei Santi: No, Dago Hill . . . those were the west end dagos. I was the Lower East Side (laughter).

Marcello: When did you join the Navy?

Dei Santi: I believe I joined the Navy in August of 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service in 1940?

Dei Santi: Well, my dad was a Navy man, and I guess the only thing I ever thought of was the Navy. That's about it.

Marcello: Had he been in the Navy during World War I?

Dei Santi: He was in the Navy during World War I--in the Italian Navy.

Marcello: Oh, is that right?

Dei Santi: Yes. After he got out, the only thing he ever got out of that country was free passage to this country. That's how he got here. Well, I wanted the Navy; that's all I could think of since I was that big (gesture) and kept growing up.

Marcello: What role did economic factors play in your decision to join the Navy? Did that play a role?

Dei Santi: Yes, that, too. We were eight children in the family, and Dad didn't make too much money (chuckle). So we . . . well, everything I brought home . . . that's why I say I was a seventh grade dropout, and everything I brought home helped to support the rest of them and feed us.

Marcello: The Navy didn't pay very much at that time, but it did offer a certain degree of security, did it not?

Dei Santi: Oh, I was making twenty-one dollars a month (chuckle). Only six dollars of that went for insurance, so I had fifteen dollars to blow (laughter).

Marcello: Where'd you take your boot camp?

Dei Santi: No boot camp.

Marcello: You didn't take any boot camp at all?

Dei Santi: No boot camp.

Marcello: How did that come about?

Dei Santi: Well, I went into the reserve armory, and they just by-passed boot camp. I went straight from St. Louis to the destroyer base at San Diego.

Marcello: How long were you in the reserve unit before you went to San Diego?

Dei Santi: About four months, five months, somewhere in there.

Marcello: What did you do in this reserve unit? Just do close order drill and things of that nature?

Dei Santi: It was more or less a training period. I learned quite a bit. Like I said, then we went out to San Diego. From San Diego, we went to Long Beach and went aboard the old carrier USS Lexington, the old Lexington which was sunk in the Coral Sea. We went across Pearl, and from there I went aboard the USS Schley.

Marcello: What sort of ship was the Schley? Describe what it was like from a physical standpoint.

Dei Santi: (Chuckle) When I first saw it, I had a very bad impression of the Navy. That was just a hunk of iron. Oh, it would look a mess! It had just been re-commissioned; it was a 1918 destroyer that had just been re-commissioned.

Marcello: Was it a four-stacker from World War I?

Dei Santi: Four-stacker from World War I. It needed paint; it needed a little bit of everything. Believe me, it wasn't the Navy you saw in the movies.

Marcello: In other words, you guys were still getting that ship seaworthy when you got there?

Dei Santi: That's what the big item was. We had to get that ship back into shape, and there was four of them in the division. After we got aboard, we had the patrol duty outside Pearl Harbor. There was two patrols out there; one was the in-shore and one was the out-shore. The in-shore was at close quarter at the entrance of Pearl Harbor, and the out-shore was a twenty-mile circle, which was from Barbers Point to Diamond Head.

Marcello: We'll talk about this a little bit later on, but let's go back and talk some more about the Schley. What did you think about the idea of serving on a destroyer?

Dei Santi: That I liked, because I just didn't care for those big ship crowds.

Marcello: "Can" sailors are rather closely knit, too, are they not?

Dei Santi: They're sort of unique (chuckle). They're in a class of their own. They're not the "spit-and-polish" Navy. In other words, everybody had a job to do, and they'd do it and usually wind up doing it pretty well.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get when you first went aboard the Schley? After all, you were really nothing more than a raw "boot" at that particular time.

Dei Santi: Right, that's all I was.

Marcello: Did they let you know very quickly that you were a "boot" when you first went aboard?

Dei Santi: No, we had POR's, which were Petty Officers, Reserve. They were retired Fleet Reserves on this ship that had been to sea, and some had been retired on thirty years, some twenty, some sixteen. They were really easy to work with. I mean, they kind of took us in hand like kids. Most of them were old enough to be my father, and they were as old. I didn't have no problem adjusting there. They were real good to us.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do when you first went aboard the Schley? Were you put in the deck force?

Dei Santi: No, I was put in the fire room. Then the chief commissary steward tried to steal me (chuckle), and I wound up in the engine room. He wanted me in the galley.

Marcello: Why did he want you in the galley?

Dei Santi: Well, I served as mess cook for three months, and I was kind of handy around the food and cooking, which is something I like. He was going to make a cook out of me. The chief machinist's mate wouldn't hold still for it; he wasn't about to turn loose of a man he had . . . not that I was any good. But I was glad that I wound up in the engine room, because I really liked it and enjoy it even to this day. I use everything I learned.

Marcello: At the time, were you torn between whether you wanted to go into the commissary part or stay in the engineering department?

Dei Santi: Yes, I was kind of torn in between, but I'd always played with tools, so I didn't mind too much when the machine shop won out. (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you had three months of mess cooking aboard the Schley. Was this routine?

Dei Santi: That's routine, yes. Most all your recruits, as they went aboard ship at the time, used to wind up with three months in the mess cooking. Then you'd get out, and somebody else takes over.

Marcello: You know, a lot of guys I've talked to actually enjoyed mess cooking.

Dei Santi: It wasn't bad. You eat regular. I enjoyed it. I mean, it wasn't as bad as peeling potatoes all the time. That's, I think, an old wife's tale there (chuckle).

Marcello: This was mainly a matter of serving the food and cleaning off

the dishes and the plates and so on, was it not?

Dei Santi: Yes, and we did eat off of plates at the time.

Marcello: You were served family-style.

Dei Santi: Well, the mess cook peeled potatoes, carrots, and all--got vegetables ready--and helped around cleaning the galley. Then at time to eat, why, they'd fill the tureens with food, and you'd take them down to your particular table.

Marcello: Is it not true that if you did a good job of mess cooking, you might expect to receive some tips come payday?

Dei Santi: Well, that, too. We did receive tips come payday. It was worth about a quarter or fifty cents a man. Then also we had inspections, and the table that was in the best shape in terms of cleanliness and neatness, why, that was worth a little bit, too. Usually, that was worth a couple of cartons of cigarettes, and at the time I smoked so it was all right. Of course, cigarettes were expensive then . . . sixty cents a carton, I believe (facetious remark).

Marcello: Is that right?

Dei Santi: Yes.

Marcello: Now I also gather that on some ships the mess cooks got some extra liberty privileges.

Dei Santi: Yes. We had everynight liberty. Of course, you had to be in early the next morning in time for serving food. But you did have everynight liberty.

Marcello: Whereas, what sort of liberty did the rest of the crew usually get?

Dei Santi: The rest of the crew usually got . . . well, in our particular position there, it was two out of three liberty, which was two nights ashore and one when you had the duty.

Marcello: What were your living quarters like aboard the Schley?

Dei Santi: Well, our living quarters were tight, but they got tighter.

Marcello: You mean as the crew came up to wartime complement?

Dei Santi: When we come up to wartime complement where our bunks were two-decked, they triple-decked them. So we were three high. The whole attitude of the ship changed when we went into wartime complement, because we got strangers aboard, you could say. Whereas, I could formerly leave my uniforms and locker wide open, you couldn't do that anymore. If I needed a uniform and was going ashore and all mine were dirty, I'd say, "Well, my buddy has got clean uniforms." I'd go nail one of his and give it back to him, and he did the same with me or one of the other fellows. We swapped a lot of uniforms.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, that all changed as the influx of additional crew came aboard.

Dei Santi: When we went into wartime complement, that came to a fast halt, because things would start missing.

Marcello: Now getting back to the cramped quarters, I assume that the tables and so on hung from the overhead when they weren't in

use?

Dei Santi: No.

Marcello: Oh, they were permanent.

Dei Santi: They were a permanent fixture. Our tables on that destroyer . . . the sides dropped, and they were permanent. Some of the newer "cans," I believe their legs folded up and they fit into the overhead.

Marcello: What was the chow like aboard the Schley?

Dei Santi: We ate good. I think we ate real good. I mean, it was a different routine than we had. You had to get used to eating beans on Wednesday and Saturday and cold cuts on Sunday. It was, like I said, a different routine than what you had, but the food itself was good. There were certain things I didn't like, and when I don't like something that's bad (chuckle), because I eat everything.

Marcello: In general, as you look back, how would you describe the morale aboard the Schley during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? Was the Schley a happy ship, in other words?

Dei Santi: Yes. Very happy, I'd say.

Marcello: What do you think was responsible for that?

Dei Santi: Well, destroyers, especially in that category . . . we were a small destroyer, small crew. We lived close; we weren't really overcrowded like some of the battleships with a couple thousand men. We had a total of . . . our pre-war complement was about

eighty-eight men, I believe. Then they jumped up to 112, and then from 112, they jumped to 150-some-odd men. In other words, they wound up cramming in about sixty, seventy more men into the quarters, which did cramp us then.

Marcello: Did you have a good skipper?

Dei Santi: Well, going down the line, we started out with a good one; the second one was a dud; the third one was good; then we come to "Iron Mike," who was terrific.

Marcello: Now who was "Iron Mike?"

Dei Santi: "Iron Mike" was a "mustang." He'd come up through the ranks, and he was one of us.

Marcello: Now you must have gotten him after the war started.

Dei Santi: We got him when the war started. I believe if he'd have said, "We're gonna go to hell," the crew would have went with him.

Marcello: What was his last name?

Dei Santi: Mike Myers. Like I say, he was a "mustang," and he was a terrific man.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the training that you received aboard the Schley. You mentioned that you were striking toward machinist's mate, I gather.

Dei Santi: Yes.

Marcello: What sort of on-the-job training did you receive there aboard the Schley?

Dei Santi: Well, I went in the fire rooms; I learned the operations of

pumps, operations of the boilers. I went right into the engine room then, and we went into different phases of different machinery--condensation pumps and water pumps and fire pumps. But this was an old ship, and they were all reciprocating engines, and the main engines were turbines. It was all very interesting, I mean, I loved it (chuckle). I guess it got to be a part of me. At the time we still had torpedoes, so my being in the engine room, I went into auxiliaries, which was all the small machinery from the anchor engine clear back to the steering engine. That would incorporate the whistle and siren and the boat winches, just everything in general, and that was something different. Also, they pushed me into lathe work. I kept going, advancing, and learning more, and to this day all that has proven terrific for me because I use it all.

Marcello: I gather that you consider the on-the-job training that you received aboard the Schley to be excellent.

Dei Santi: I consider it to be so good that at this day I have in my shop at home welding equipment, lathes, machine shop tools, and . . . well, all welding tools and welding equipment, refrigeration. I'm a refrigeration man, which, if you know refrigeration, you don't have to look for work; they come looking for you. I had my own refrigeration business, and I learned all this in the Navy. Then when I got to be district director of the

Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, (chuckle) well, I kind of let it go. But I still get calls for doing small welding jobs. For friends I'll do it; otherwise, I just stay away from it. I don't have time.

Marcello: Did you find that the senior petty officers were more than willing to help a young striker if that young striker was willing to learn?

Dei Santi: Yes. I had a senior petty officer that . . . I was kind of an "eager beaver." Like I say, I was interested in machinery, and I was learning fast. I loved it. Believe me, I tried hard and I worked at it hard. Believe me, the man got me advanced.

See, at that time, the Navy used to . . . in other words, I started out as an apprentice seaman. After approximately three or four months, you automatically went to third class fireman. Then you had to hold third class fireman for, let's see, I believe about four months or six months, and then you'd be eligible for second class fireman.

Each time I was up for an advancement, I took my exams and was recommended for it, and I just . . . well, everytime I had an advancement coming, I got it. I went up to first class. I got up to first class, and then I had "gold in my mouth." I could see the gold braid, and that's what I wanted. I wanted to go to warrant officer. Well, in the machine shop, as a machinist you can skip chief petty officer and go to

warrant officer. I took five examinations, and then our engineering officer told me that I was too young. I told him to, "Go to hell"; I was as old as he was. All he had on me was ninety days of college, and I was as smart as he was. I think I was, too, to this day. He knew what the book said, but I knew what the machinery could do.

Marcello: Now did this occur after Pearl Harbor, or was this before?

Dei Santi: Yes, this went past Pearl Harbor.

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

Dei Santi: At the time of the attack, I was a first class fireman.

Marcello: That was a pretty rapid advancement.

Dei Santi: Yes. Like I say, I made each advancement. As the time period came, I was there.

Marcello: And the fleet openings must have been available, too.

Dei Santi: At the time they were, yes.

Marcello: But that's almost phenomenal, I think, to have advanced that rapidly in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy where rank was very, very slow.

Dei Santi: Well, your advancement was open there at the time, and they were giving them out as fast as you could make them. Like I say, the first one came automatically. After that, why, it was a matter of taking your tests. You'd be second class fireman; and then you'd take another test for first class. Then from first class, you would go up to second class petty officer,

which was after the war started.

Marcello: We were talking about the senior petty officers aboard the Schley. Did you have any old Asiatic sailors aboard the Schley?

Dei Santi: All of them.

Marcello: All of them?

Dei Santi: All of them.

Marcello: That must have given you an education in itself right there.

Dei Santi: That was an education. Like I say, these people were old enough to be my father, and when they told me something, I listened. Like I say, I liked machinery, so I guess that was one of my reasons for learning fast--I listened.

Marcello: But those Asiatic sailors were a different breed altogether, were they not?

Dei Santi: Yes, they were. Their stories were terrific. Like when I went into the auxiliaries, the thing I feared most was the compressors they charged the torpedoes with. They were four-stage Worthington compressors, which pumped up about 3,250 pounds of pressure. This one sailor kept telling me, he said, "I can remember when one of those copper tubings broke and cut a man in half." (Chuckle) And you know something, that stuck with me; I could never forget that.

Marcello: I gather that all of those Asiatic sailors were tattooed and most of them were alcoholics and so on.

Dei Santi: Tattooed out of this world, most of them were. Like I say, most of these fellows were all retired; well, they were Fleet Reserves. Some had their thirty years in, and all got recalled. But they knew what they were doing. Most of them come off of old four-stack cruisers and old four-stack destroyers, so they knew what they were talking about when they were serving.

Marcello: Did they seem to be happy to be back in the service again?

Dei Santi: Oh, yes. They were professional sailors. They were terrific guys.

Marcello: Okay, now let's get back and talk a little bit more about the training routine of the Schley. You mentioned it previously in some of your earlier comments. Now you mentioned that there were basically two different types of patrols that the Schley would undertake.

Dei Santi: Yes.

Marcello: Why don't you talk about those a little bit in terms of how they worked.

Dei Santi: Well, the in-shore patrol was approximately the three-mile circle, I'd say. It was in close, right at the entrance of Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: What would you do on this in-shore patrol?

Dei Santi: All we did was just cruise back and forth, and we'd cruise along, I'd say, at about five or six knots. On the out-shore

patrol, well, you'd cruise about the same speed. It was what we called the twenty-mile circle, which was from Barbers Point to Diamond Head. I don't know whether you've ever been out there. But it was a pleasure cruise. Even at the time, prior to Pearl Harbor, we tracked ships down. There were ships out there that would go into restricted waters, and we'd run them down.

Marcello: What kind of ships were these usually that were drifting into these restricted waters?

Dei Santi: Some of them were Japanese sampans. I wouldn't necessarily say they were from Japan, but they were from the islands there. I believe on some occasions they found camera equipment on some of them. We fired on some of them prior to December 7th; that we did, too.

Marcello: Well, let's talk a little bit more about these patrols. Now I gather that the Schley, then, did not escort the cruisers and battleships and things of that nature.

Dei Santi: No.

Marcello: It was strictly used for this in-shore and off-shore patrol.

Dei Santi: In-shore and off-shore patrol, right.

Marcello: How would it work? In other words, when would you be doing the in-shore patrolling, and when would you be doing the off-shore patrolling?

Dei Santi: Well, it just depended on what they assigned us there. Then

other duties we had there, they also used us for a target ship, which we would run out there and planes would torpedo us. Also, submarines on occasion would torpedo us. They would set their torpedoes deep, and they would fire them at us. We could actually see those torpedoes go under our ship. You would see the wake coming toward you, and you could see them torpedoes shoot under the ship.

Marcello: Given the problems they had with some of those torpedoes at the beginning of the war, that could have been a little harrowing.

Dei Santi: We actually had drills where some of those torpedoes went wild. They would whip out of that water just like a porpoise. They'd come up out of the water and go back down and they'd disappear. God only knows where they would come up, but you always hoped they came up somewhere else. Our luck was that they did come up somewhere else.

Marcello: Did you detect that there were a lot of malfunctioning torpedoes during that particular period? I know they did have trouble with those torpedoes at the beginning of the war.

Dei Santi: Yes. I believe there were . . . oh, maybe three or four different occasions where we had torpedoes malfunction, and they would whip up and end up out of the water. As I said, that was an experience.

Marcello: Now were the other destroyers in your particular group also

engaging on this in-shore and off-shore patrol?

Dei Santi: Yes, We would have possibly two ships out on patrol and two in.

Marcello: When you say two "in," you mean two in port?

Dei Santi: In port, right. Like I say, we would have two days out and three for liberty. If you were in, you rated the liberty. On occasion, they would call us out for torpedo practice or for one thing or another . . . never dive bombing, just torpedoes mostly.

Marcello: Now on this type of duty, would you be coming in every night, or would you be staying out for an extended period of time?

Dei Santi: No, no. We'd be out . . . I believe our tour of duty would last about a week each time, and then we'd come in. Unless we were playing target ship; then we would stay out as long as they needed us and come in.

Marcello: The tour would be the same whether you were engaging in the in-shore or the off-shore patrol?

Dei Santi: Right. Regardless of which it was on.

Marcello: When would you normally go out on one of these patrols? What day of the week?

Dei Santi: Oh, I couldn't say what day off-hand.

Marcello: Would it normally always be the same day, or would this vary some?

Dei Santi: No, I think it varied. We'd be out maybe four or five days,

and then we'd come in.

Marcello: You talked about the restricted water awhile ago. What sort of an area are we talking about when we talk about restricted waters?

Dei Santi: Well, you have a point there where . . . from Barbers Point to Diamond Head, like I say, is a twenty-mile circle. We called it that; now I don't know whether it's actually twenty miles. The area from, say, where the Army comes in there on the beach to Barbers Point was restricted water. Then from Schofield Barracks, I believe, from there towards Diamond Head where your Lurline come in--your bigger ships and other things--why, that wasn't restricted. But from that point where the Army started to Barbers Point, that was restricted water.

Marcello: How far out would those restricted waters extend?

Dei Santi: Well, I imagine that went just past the in-shore patrol, because on the out-shore patrol, we were more or less at sound depth and sonar.

Marcello: You were in open seas, in other words, for the off-shore patrol.

Dei Santi: Well, it wasn't really open seas, but it was just a little farther out. It was still the same area where, if anything did come in, you could hear them.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about the Japanese fishing vessels--let's say the Japanese vessels--that were intercepted. What do you recall from these various episodes?

Dei Santi: Well, on several occasions, we had to shoot at some of them. There was one of them in particular, I know, that tried to get away.

Marcello: This was after repeated warnings from the Schley?

Dei Santi: Right. We'd hail them down. If they didn't stop, then you'd fire on them. Each time, I mean, the skipper would say to "Butch" Horn, "Take some paint off!" "Butch" was from St. Louis. He was a .50-caliber man, and he was pretty good with it. We fired on several of them. Like I said, one of them tried to get away, and we hailed him down. When we finally got hold of him, well, we'd detain him. The Coast Guard would come out and take him off our hands.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that on some occasions you actually did find electronic or photographic gear aboard these vessels?

Dei Santi: They did find photographic equipment on one of them, I know.

Marcello: Did this arouse any suspicions among the crew or the officers and so on?

Dei Santi: Well, the suspicion was there always. You know, at the time, we always had . . . oh, they pumped us with this feeling that the Japanese couldn't see and all that; they all wore thick glasses, and none of them had teeth. But we know that was wrong, because they could see as good as we can and shoot just as straight (chuckle).

Marcello: As I'm sure you found out later.

Dei Santi: Yes (chuckle), which gave us a very high opinion of them. The opinion I have of the whole December 7th deal is that it was also the Japanese's biggest mistake of the war.

Marcello: In what way?

Dei Santi: That they didn't follow up. If they would have followed up, they could have taken all the Hawaiian Islands. I honestly feel that if they'd have landed on the mainland, they could have come pretty far inland, because we weren't prepared for a war.

Marcello: Even though Japan perhaps was looked upon as a potential enemy in those months immediately prior to the war, did you in your wildest dreams ever think that they would have the audacity to try to attack the Hawaiian Islands?

Dei Santi: No, no. We never figured they would try to attack us. Besides, if they'd have attacked, we would have whipped them.

Marcello: Overconfidence.

Dei Santi: Oh, yes, we'd have whipped them! Just like that! But, oh, did they prove us different!

Marcello: Now did your training routine change any as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the two countries continued to deteriorate?

Dei Santi: I'd say we were a little closer in our patrol duty. In other words, we didn't let anybody through.

Marcello: Did you hold more general quarters drills?

- Dei Santi: General quarters were real regular; we always had general quarters at sunup and sundown--always. At the slightest sonar pickup, why, they'd sound general quarters. Before that we had more drills, and the drills wound up being real.
- Marcello: Did you sail with darkened ship as one gets closer and closer to December 7th?
- Dei Santi: Yes.
- Marcello: Was this unusual?
- Dei Santi: No, not for us. We sailed darkened ship anywhere prior to December 7th on that patrol. We were listening . . . I don't know . . . it seemed like we were in the right position to pick anybody off if they came, but (chuckle) doggone it, it still happened.
- Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the liberty routine of the Schley. How did the liberty routine work for the vessel?
- Dei Santi: Well, the liberty routine was two out of three. When we went in, why, we had the first, second, and third liberty sections. The first and second would rate liberty, and they went ashore; the third liberty section stayed aboard ship. When it came to a weekend, two sections had the weekend liberty. If you had the weekend duty, you had the whole weekend duty. But otherwise, during the week, you'd be aboard one night, and two nights you'd be ashore.
- Marcello: What did you normally do when you went on liberty?

Dei Santi: Well, I did a little bit of everything. I like to play around in the water; we used to go out on the beach, and I'd be digging shells. I liked girls. I always chased girls; I guess I always did.

Marcello: Did you frequent Canal Street and Hotel Street and that area?

Dei Santi: Oh, yes. I kind of liked to get away from the downtown Honolulu section. I always kind of tended to go to the north side of the island. There wasn't nearly as many servicemen. The people, I think, had a little bit different attitude about the sailors, too.

Marcello: In what way?

Dei Santi: I don't know. It seemed like you was accepted a little better, and they was friendlier. The girls were friendlier.

Marcello: I gather that on weekends downtown Honolulu was wall-to-wall bodies.

Dei Santi: That was wall-to-wall white uniforms.

Marcello: I understand there were lines for everything.

Dei Santi: Right. But myself, like I say, I had my civilian clothes there, and I would change into civilian clothes. We'd get around. I'd head out for Diamond Head or the opposite side of the island, and I enjoyed that. I mean, the water was rougher on that side of the island. I liked to get in the water and mess around.

Marcello: Now many people like to say that a Sunday was the best time

the Japanese could have possibly selected for an attack.

What people like to assume is that Saturday nights were times of a great deal of heavy drinking and partying and so on and that consequently the personnel would be in no shape to fight on a Sunday morning. How would you answer an assertion of that sort? How would you reply to that?

Dei Santi: Navy-wise and out there? I'd say that is fairly true. Well, I'm going to take myself now. I had the weekend liberty; I didn't have to come back Sunday morning; I could have come back Monday morning. But due to the "large" amount of money we were making (chuckle), you'd sneak back and catch a breakfast and then you'd go back ashore.

Marcello: But you could stay overnight.

Dei Santi: Yes, we had overnight liberty.

Marcello: That was different from the battleship sailors.

Dei Santi: Oh, definitely. They had . . .

Marcello: "Cinderella" liberty.

Dei Santi: They had to be back at midnight, and that was it. But we were considered yard craft; we were attached to Pearl Harbor, in other words. We had the overnight liberty. I don't believe they had weekend liberty. Whereas we would have inspections on Saturday mornings, such as it was, because we were still destroyer sailors--we'd have inspections maybe every two or three weeks--but after inspection on Saturday morning, you

went ashore; you didn't have to come back until either seven or eight o'clock Monday morning. Then you could always sleep at the YMCA or somewhere else, even if it was on the beach (chuckle).

Marcello: Also, is it not true that Sundays were a time of leisure?

Dei Santi: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, even the duty section, after they had perhaps completed their routine duties, could more or less lounge around, write letters, read the Sunday papers, and so on.

Dei Santi: Right. They took it easy on Sunday and more or less . . . well, they'd fish or do just about anything they felt like doing.

Marcello: What sort of officer complement would be aboard on a weekend?

Dei Santi: I'd say we had about six or seven officers aboard ship at the time, and there might possibly be two aboard ship . . . about two, maybe three.

Marcello: During the course of a month, how often would the Schley be in on weekends?

Dei Santi: We'd possibly be in at least two weeks out of the month. I'd say at least two weeks.

Marcello: And then on the other two weekends you may be out on patrol.

Dei Santi: We might be out on patrol, right. And maybe we'd be in three weeks, because there was four of us. Like I say, unless there was some specific duty that popped up in between, we'd be in.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that morning of December 7, 1941. What I want you to do at this point, Mr. Dei Santi, is to talk about your routine on that weekend of December 7th. Let's start with Friday the 5th; was the Schley in at that time?

Dei Santi: The Schley was in; the ship was partially dismantled.

Marcello: Why was that?

Dei Santi: I think it was sort of a semi-annual repair, and we had quite a bit of equipment off the ship. It was major repairs. In fact, at that particular time, they had some of us sleeping at . . . oh, what the hell did they call it? It was the Fleet Landing.

Marcello: They had some barracks-type structures there at the Fleet Landing?

Dei Santi: There was a barracks there, and we had sleeping quarters there.

Marcello: They must have really had the Schley torn apart pretty well then.

Dei Santi: Yes. Like I say, there was only, I'd say, approximately one-third of the crew . . . less than a third, because there was quite a few of them on leave back to the States. So I'd say maybe 25 per cent of the crew was aboard ship.

Marcello: Were you staying in these barracks yourself?

Dei Santi: I was at the barracks, because I reported in to them. All we'd do is more or less report in, because we had the overnight liberty. We'd report in and we'd eat breakfast and head back

for the ship.

Marcello: What did you do that Saturday? Do you recall?

Dei Santi: No, I don't.

Marcello: Did you go into town?

Dei Santi: Oh, yes. I was in town, and I was pretty well "corked up."
Like I say, I got back Sunday morning, and I was doing real
well (chuckle).

Marcello: Do you recall any of the places you visited on Saturday night?

Dei Santi: No, I wouldn't say where I was, because . . . (chuckle) it
could have been anywhere.

Marcello: So you were feeling no pain then when you got back aboard.

Dei Santi: No, I was feeling no pain. I wasn't "loaded" out of this
world, but I was in good shape. But I sobered up very fast.

Marcello: Okay, do you recall what time you got in that Saturday night?

Dei Santi: It was approximately seven o'clock, because I'd just about
walked in the barracks and that's when all hell busted loose.

Marcello: Oh, I see. You stayed in Honolulu all night.

Dei Santi: Oh, I stayed in.

Marcello: Then do you recall where you stayed that night?

Dei Santi: The YMCA.

Marcello: And then you came back into the barracks on Sunday morning.

Dei Santi: We came back Sunday morning. Like I said, we'd come back; we
could eat breakfast and then scoot back out.

Marcello: Is that what you fully planned to do?

Dei Santi: Yes.

Marcello: What'd you have planned for that afternoon?

Dei Santi: We didn't make plans; we just went. That's just like any port we hit. You didn't make plans; you let nature take its course. If it happened, good (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, that gets you back to the barracks, then, on Sunday morning, and as you mentioned, you got back there at seven o'clock. Now pick up the story at this point and go into as much detail as you can remember.

Dei Santi: Well, I can't say whether I had breakfast or not that morning, because I honestly don't remember. But somebody says, "We're being attacked!" We saw the planes.

Marcello: That is, before this person mentioned that the base was being attacked?

Dei Santi: Yes. We saw the planes, so I guess it was after seven o'clock. We didn't really think they were Japanese planes. By God, you could see that big red ball on the wings, because the planes came right overhead there. Somebody says, "Report to your ships," so we just left the barracks and made our way toward the ship.

Marcello: How much time elapsed from the time you first saw the planes until you took off and headed for your ship?

Dei Santi: I wouldn't say it was over four or five minutes at the most.

Marcello: In the meantime, what were you doing--just being spectators, so to speak?

Dei Santi: Just being spectators.

Marcello: What did you see while you were spectating, so to speak?

Dei Santi: It happened fast (chuckle).

Marcello: How were these planes coming in? Were they flying very, very low?

Dei Santi: The planes were flying very low. I mean, they were just more or less gliding in.

Marcello: Could you distinguish the pilot at that point?

Dei Santi: Oh, yes, you could see the pilots. After we left the Fleet Landing there where we were and went towards our ship and went across the golf course there, you could look out and you could see the torpedo planes. Oh, they looked to be maybe twenty-five feet off the water's surface. They'd drop that torpedo, and that's when it went out and got the Oklahoma.

Marcello: Did you see the Oklahoma turn over?

Dei Santi: Yes.

Marcello: Describe this particular incident.

Dei Santi: Well, it just seemed like just big blasts of fire, and just the slow roll was all it really amounted to. It was a slow roll. There were several torpedo planes that came in. I mean, we were watching, I know, because they also tried to strafe. They were also strafing there.

Marcello: Okay, so the word comes that you need to get back to your ship, As you mentioned, you leave the barracks there at the Fleet

Landing, and you mentioned that you had to go across a golf course.

Dei Santi: Right.

Marcello: How far was this ship from the barracks?

Dei Santi: Oh, I'm guessing at a half-mile.

Marcello: How far away were you approximately from the Oklahoma when you saw it turn over?

Dei Santi: Well, I was almost to our ship, which would be right across the bay. I could probably show you easier on a map. I could show you exactly where it was, because we were right by the St. Louis and the Honolulu.

Marcello: Did you have a good view of the Oklahoma as you were crossing the golf course?

Dei Santi: Oh, you could see it, yes.

Marcello: Were you viewing this action while you were on the run?

Dei Santi: We were on the run, yes. I don't even remember who the other guy was with me, but there was another one with me. At one time, we got behind the trees there, because they were shooting.

Marcello: You mean, you were coming under direct strafing yourself?

Dei Santi: Yes. They were strafing. I got behind a tree, but I don't know why. But then we left there, and our next stop was the ship, which we couldn't do anything.

Marcello: What was it like to come under that strafing there on the golf course? I'm sure that must have been a rather harrowing

experience.

Dei Santi: Well (chuckle), you knew somebody was shooting at you, and like I say, we got behind a tree, and that was it. If anything would have hit the tree, I'm sure it could have went through.

Marcello: How many planes were strafing?

Dei Santi: I couldn't say.

Marcello: And did they just make this one pass?

Dei Santi: That's the only pass that I remember, yes. Like I say, from where we were, we were still watching those planes drop the torpedoes, and we could see it hit the water and splash. You could see the pilot clear as day.

Marcello: What did the pilots look like?

Dei Santi: Well, all you could see was just the man . . . open cockpit planes.

Marcello: Did you see the Arizona blow?

Dei Santi: No. Because I was on the dock then, and the St. Louis and the Honolulu were behind us. I saw this one plane drop the bomb that went through the dock, and it sprung some plates on the St. Louis. There was fire, oil, and water going on out there, and somebody says, "Those guys are burning up out there!" So there were some boats tied up there, and we took some of these boats and went out to the Oklahoma and the Arizona, and we pulled guys out of the water.

Marcello: Now you mentioned there was nothing that you could do on the

Schley; the Schley was of no use.

Dei Santi: That was just like tits on a boar hog; that was useless. We couldn't do anything at all there. I don't know whether we had really had munitions aboard or not. But the guns were definitely out of commission--the antiaircraft, which were the .50-caliber. At the time, we had 4-inch guns for our main battery and .50-caliber machine guns for our antiaircraft weapons.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you can't do anything on the Schley, and then you take the small boats, so to speak.

Dei Santi: We took the small boats, and we went out and we pulled these fellows out of the water.

Marcello: Are you being supervised or given any sort of orders, or do you just do this on your own?

Dei Santi: No, you're acting on your own. There was nobody there to give any orders.

Marcello: What made you decide that this was the thing to do?

Dei Santi: I'll be damned if I know (chuckle)!

Marcello: That's probably a pretty good answer to give, really. It was more instinct than anything else?

Dei Santi: It was instinct, because there was guys in the water and the fires caused just a big billow of smoke.

Marcello: Now by the time you hit those small boats, is the water on fire or is there oil in the water and so on?

Dei Santi: Yes, the water was on fire; the oil on the water was burning. Like I say, we carried two boatloads of guys out of there.

Marcello: They must have been sorry-looking sights, I guess, when they came out of that water.

Dei Santi: You couldn't actually grab a man's hand and pull him out. We were hooking elbows; that was about the only way you could grab them out. They'd hook on, and you'd just slide them into the boat.

Marcello: This was because of the oil on them and so on?

Dei Santi: That was the oil on them. They had life jackets on. We didn't, but they did. It was just a mess; that boat was a mess. I'm glad I didn't have to clean it, because it was just a big, greasy, black mess.

Marcello: Were any of these people you were hauling aboard wounded or anything of that sort?

Dei Santi: Not that I noticed. Scared to death, yes. They were probably just as scared as I was; I didn't have good sense to be anything else.

Marcello: That oil is rather thick and gelatinous, isn't it?

Dei Santi: Very thick. It's like Jello. And being mixed with water, I don't think that really helped it any (chuckle).

Marcello: How long were you doing this sort of work?

Dei Santi: I couldn't estimate any time element there.

Marcello: Did you come under any attack at all while you were doing this?

Dei Santi: There were still planes in the area, so it must have been within about that two-hour period, and then we were just pulling them out. Then it was a matter of fighting fires.

Marcello: Now by the time that you were in the water in these boats doing this rescue work, were the only planes coming over the high-level bombers at that point, or were you still getting strafers and dive-bombers and so on?

Dei Santi: I couldn't say there.

Marcello: Do you have time to think about what's happening? What sort of thoughts are going through your mind while you're out in the water rescuing these people?

Dei Santi: All you're thinking of is to get those guys out of the water before the fire gets to them, and you, also, because we were in it. God only knows, there was quite a few of them in the water. We took them back to the landing there.

Marcello: You mention that you took two boatloads. Approximately how many would this have been?

Dei Santi: Oh, I'd say there might have been twenty-five or so on each load. There was other boats out which did the same thing.

Marcello: What did you do after you stopped this type of work? Did you go back to the Schley?

Dei Santi: We went back to the Schley. We were there awhile, and then we went back to the Fleet Landing--dead tired. By then it was evening. Time passed in a hurry. We went into the barracks

and laid down, and I don't know what time it was that evening, but they come in because somebody needed men. So they came down the line and said, "You, you, you, and you go with him," and that was it; I was one of them. So back in the boat we went. This time we went out to the California and started the clean-up detail.

Marcello: What were you doing aboard the California?

Dei Santi: Clean-up detail, pulling bodies out.

Marcello: Now the California had sunk, but, of course, a great deal of the superstructure was still out of the water yet.

Dei Santi: That was all out of the water. Like I say, it was night, and we got away from that stuff. Anyway, I wound up in one of these gun emplacements and tried to sleep. Then a plane came over, and all hell busted loose. It was one of ours.

Marcello: Where was this gun emplacement?

Dei Santi: It was up on one of the upper decks. Oh, the gun emplacement where I was was one of the secondary batteries.

Marcello: Aboard the California?

Dei Santi: Aboard the California. I thought we were alone. There was supposed to be a couple of us, but that thing was full. There must have been a dozen guys in there (chuckle), and they're all trying to get "forty winks."

Marcello: Also, I guess you weren't exactly looking forward to doing that sort of work aboard the California, were you?

Dei Santi: It was a hell of a job to go in there and pull pieces and parts and bodies.

Marcello: And how old were you at this time about?

Dei Santi: At that time, I was nineteen, I believe, or thereabouts. I never did figure it out; I'll have to stop and figure that out sometime.

Marcello: Did you observe the fireworks that took place when that plane came over?

Dei Santi: Yes. Everything lit up, and that's how I found out there were so many guys in that gun emplacement.

Marcello: In other words, there was so much firing going on that it actually lit up the gun emplacement where you could see all these people in there.

Dei Santi: Yes. It was surprising. I don't know, I think everybody was on edge. They'd fire at anything.

Marcello: I'm sure there were a lot of trigger-happy people around that night.

Dei Santi: Well, you couldn't blame them. After you see so much, why, they'd shoot at anything that moved.

Marcello: What were the rumors that were running around that night?

Dei Santi: Oh, there was rumors that they'd made landings.

Marcello: Did you believe these rumors?

Dei Santi: After what happened that day? Yes (chuckle)! But there was nothing we could do about it. Like I say, I was aboard that

California, and I was there to stay.

Marcello: How long did you stay aboard the California?

Dei Santi: Well, I stayed aboard . . . December 8th, most of the day, I'd say.

Marcello: Were you still doing this same sort of distasteful work?

Dei Santi: Yes. You'd take blankets and you'd go in with somebody else, and you'd throw blankets over them and pull them out.

Marcello: Now were you doing this in knee-deep water, so to speak, and so on?

Dei Santi: No, no, it was dry where I was. I don't know about whether the other fellows were in water, but the portion I was in was about the main deck.

Marcello: Did you get very much sleep that night?

Dei Santi: I'd say no. Did you ever sleep with your eyes open (chuckle)? When somebody's after your tail, you don't really sleep.

Marcello: And I guess you were so keyed up from all of the excitement of the day that sleep would have come pretty hard, anyway.

Dei Santi: You know, the thing that gets you most is when you think about this the next day or two or three days later, and you actually start shaking. You start realizing exactly what happened. I mean, at the time that it happened, you were scared but yet there was something to be done and you did it. But when you stopped and relaxed, it caught up with you and you get shaky. I know I did, anyway.

Marcello: What was the morale like now, that is, after December 7th and in those days immediately following the attack when the destruction that was done fully registered on your mind?

Dei Santi: Well, everybody was worried. I mean, just like I say, some of those people figured . . . they were supposed to have landed. We didn't know whether they actually landed; we knew that we were on our knees. If they would have landed, I'm quite certain they would have taken us.

Marcello: I guess that harbor must have looked like hell.

Dei Santi: It was a big, greasy, oily mess. That's about the only way to put it.

Marcello: I'm sure it was a rather sad sight to initially have seen all of those magnificent battleships lined up over at Ford Island on Battleship Row and then to view the contrasting scene on December 8th.

Dei Santi: Nothing could move; even the ones that were in shape couldn't move, because they were hemmed in. Then we were right there at Ford Island, and you could see planes. We knew we had very few that could actually fly.

Marcello: Would you say that you perhaps had to have a certain amount of grudging admiration for the efficiency of the Japanese attack? In other words, they evidently seemed to know what they were doing.

Dei Santi: They definitely knew what they were doing. Well, I'd say it

was the biggest mistake of their lives, though, that they didn't follow through. If they would have followed through, they would have had us. Sure, we could have possibly put up a small battle, but against organized armed forces we wouldn't have stood a chance. They'd have cut us down.

Marcello: Mr. Dei Santi, I have one last question. Why is it that some thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-seven years later you are a member of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association?

Dei Santi: Well, my idea here . . . you know, I had a big interview down here in New Orleans last December 7th, and I was on one of these talk programs on the radio. This one lady called in, and she says, "You guys from Pearl Harbor, why don't you just forget about it and give up and quit?" My answer to her was, "Lady, there was 2,500 men that died in an hour and forty-five minutes." I said, "That comes to about six men a minute dying." I said, "Did you lose any relatives?" and I never did get an answer for that. But that 2,500 men were actually killed, and then there's, I believe, another 1,200 that were wounded, crippled, hurt, and everything else.

That talk program was real interesting; those people can throw some of the damndest questions at you. But, you know, there were six of us there, and one of us had the answer. It was interesting; I enjoyed it. Our main object was to try to tell those people that we didn't want the same thing to happen

again.

I feel today that we are in just as bad a shape as we were then, if not worse. Because everytime you read the paper, they're cutting back on more defense spending or cutting back on everything.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Dei Santi, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars will find your comments very valuable someday when they use them to write about Pearl Harbor.

Dei Santi: I hope I could be useful.