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Interview with
William Cottingham
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Place of Interview: Grandview, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

William Cottingame

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Grandview, Texas

Date: September 13, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing William Cottingame for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 13, 1978, in Grandview, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Cottingame in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the aircraft tender USS Curtiss during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Cottingame, 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.

Mr. Cottingame: I was born in 1919, September 2nd, at Milford, Texas, Ellis County.

Dr. Marcello: Did you have your schooling there in Milford, also?

Mr. Cottingame: I went to school in about five or six different places. I started at Bee Creek; transferred from there to Slay; transferred from there to Files Valley, which is in Hill County;

and transferred from there to Itasca High School. I graduated from high school there and went to Texas A & M and finished fifty-four hours there in petroleum engineering, mechanical engineering.

World War II came along; I signed up for the draft and volunteered for the Navy.

Marcello: When did you enter the Navy?

Cottingame: December 19, 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy at that particular time?

Cottingame: Because of some education that a major at Texas A & M had given me concerning how to kill my fellowman with a bayonet.

Marcello: In other words, you had had the usual military training that one got at Texas A & M at that particular time.

Cottingame: Well, that that particular major gave you. He had come up from a PFC to a major in World War I and was very efficient in the destruction of his fellowman with a bayonet.

Marcello: Why did you select the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Cottingame: Because of the, let's say, adventure involved; because of the opportunities involved; because that if you went into combat in the Navy, you went in with a clean atmosphere. In other words, you didn't have to walk. Really, my purpose was to get in aviation.

Marcello: Had you been in the Corps at A & M?

Cottingame: Yes. Infantry.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs at that particular time?

Cottingame: Very close.

Marcello: When you thought of the country getting into war at that time, is it safe to say that you were thinking more in terms of Europe rather than the Far East?

Cottingame: No. Japan.

Marcello: At that early date, were you already thinking about the possibility of war with Japan?

Cottingame: I knew it. I knew it.

Marcello: How?

Cottingame: Everyone at that time that paid any attention to events knew that everything was coming from . . . in other words, they expected it coming in the Pacific. This was, oh, up in as early as January or February of 1941.

Marcello: That's unusual, that is, your answer, because just about every other person that I've talked to normally thought of war in Europe rather than war in the Far East at that time.

Cottingame: Well, I had the, let's say, advantage of proximity to the USS Curtiss. When it was put into commission . . . it was put into commission with approximately 60 per cent Asiatic Fleet sailors with about 30 per cent or 35 per cent raw recruits. So all of these people were oriented to the Asiatic Fleet. This is

where I picked it up.

Marcello: In other words, you received your information from the . . .

Cottingame: Scuttlebutt aboard ship.

Marcello: . . . the scuttlebutt aboard ship and from the "old salts" that had served in the Asiatic Fleet.

Cottingame: The experience they'd had, yes. See, most of these boys had watched the Chinese and the Japanese in their conflict. Before it started, well, see, as one of my little deals to get into the active part of it, I had made inquiries to go over to the Chinese area to see if I could get in the back seat of an SBD or a dive bomber as a gunner for the Chinese. See, this was one of the things that . . . you know, this was the glamour part of it that kids dreamed about doing, you know, but that never came about.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up a minute, and I'm going to again ask my original question. When you entered the service in 1940, did you, at that time, envision the possibility of war with Japan?

Cottingame: No. No, no. At that time, no. Really, at the time that I did this one, I was a little confused because, let's say, the people in charge of the government of the United States were promising that they were not going to get in the war and make the same mistake that they'd made before. I was naive enough to believe it.

Marcello: How cognizant of the draft were you at the particular time

that you entered the Navy?

Cottingame: Well, see, I joined . . . let me see . . . the draft came, I believe, on the 8th of September. I was twenty-one the 2nd of September, 1940. I had my notice that I would be inducted into the Navy--they drew my name sometime in October--and I was aware that I would be inducted into the Navy or go for my examination on the 19th of December. So I sent them my I.D. card from boot camp. I'm a draft dodger, really (chuckle).

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Cottingame: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record, or was it the normal Navy boot camp at that time?

Cottingame: Oh, at that time, it was the normal Navy boot camp. They had the normal USO. The highlight of our experiences there was probably when Wendell Willke came by and interviewed some of the lads, you know, as far as talking to them. What he was doing was trying to find out what type of an individual was being inducted into the Navy at that time, see. This was in 1941, oh, March, April, and May.

Marcello: In other words, Willke had come to San Diego as a presidential candidate at that time?

Cottingame: No, no. No, see, I believe this was after the election. The

election was in '39.

Marcello: No, the election would have been in '40.

Cottingame: In '40. Okay, the election was in '40. This is after the election, see. At that time, I believe, or shortly thereafter, Roosevelt appointed him to some ambassadorship or as some official in the government at that time. I'm not real sure about that.

Marcello: Did you see Willke while you were there at San Diego?

Cottingame: Got to talk to him, really.

Marcello: What were your impressions of Mr. Willke?

Cottingame: One of the most dynamic people that's ever been in the United States,

Marcello: What was it that impressed you about him?

Cottingame: Forcefulness. Forcefulness.

Marcello: What did he talk about in interviewing some of the young sailors there?

Cottingame: Oh, he was just asking personal questions. You know, this was just a light thing as far as . . . all he was trying to do was get their reaction; he wasn't trying to put anything over as far as they were concerned.

Marcello: How long did boot camp last at that particular time?

Cottingame: Four months.

Marcello: In other words, the Navy had not yet cut back on boot camp in the manner that it was to do later on as things heated up.

Cottingame: No, no. No, no. This was a routine thing. I believe it was sixteen weeks, I believe was what it was.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Cottingame: Into radio communications there in the same base there.

Marcello: In other words, you must have scored fairly high on your aptitude tests in that you were selected to go to one of the Navy schools.

Cottingame: Probably not. But, you know, at that time, the people who were coming in were not . . . you know, you were not picking up the higher echelon of people in the service, so the competition was probably pretty low. Most people were coming in just to get to go to sea or something like that.

Marcello: In other words, what you're saying is that the fifty-four credit hours that you had picked up at Texas A & M probably helped to get you into that school.

Cottingame: I wouldn't think so. I wouldn't think so, no, because this is not . . . you know, the school at that time was not that technical.

Marcello: Was this a voluntary sort of thing, or did you actually choose to go to this particular school?

Cottingame: No, I took an aptitude test at Dallas. They explained to me at Dallas that with this kind of an aptitude test I could pick my school. Then at the time I got ready to go to school, they took one company and faced them left, and they faced the other one right. On the way, they told us we were going to radio communication

school. Because my first choice had been aviation machinist's mate.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how this particular fit in with your aspirations to get into some area of aviation.

Cottingame: Well, it did not at that time, because I used to explain to the man that I could not take code. He said, "There's one out of every 500 people that cannot learn code, and you ain't it." (chuckle).

Marcello: So you did go all the way through radio communications school.

Cottingame: Right.

Marcello: How long did that school last?

Cottingame: I believe it lasted four months.

Marcello: As you look back on your training at that particular Navy school, how would you rate it? Was it excellent? Good? Fair? Poor?

Cottingame: It was excellent for what they were trying to do at that given point in time. By today's standards, it would probably be . . . in other words, taking into consideration the material that they had to work with and what they were trying to do, it was excellent.

Marcello: And you were in essence training to become a radioman.

Cottingame: Right, communications.

Marcello: Okay, when you had finished the Navy school, where did you go from there?

Cottingame: I went to Patron Two, I believe, in San Diego, I think, and then

to the USS Curtiss. At that time, the Curtiss was Admiral Bellinger's flagship; I believe this is correct.

Marcello: Now, was this voluntary duty in being assigned to the Curtiss, or, again, were you simply assigned there arbitrarily?

Cottingame: They told me, "Here's your orders, Report aboard the Curtiss." Well, wait a minute. They did not either. They told me to report to Patron Two, and there they assigned you to the unit that they wanted you to go.

Marcello: When we talk about Patron Two, what do those designations stand for?

Cottingame: Patrol Squadron Number Two; I believe that's correct.

Marcello: Well, at least in an indirect way then, you were getting at least close to your desire to get into the field of aviation by going aboard this aircraft tender.

Cottingame: But this was probably not, you know, to go along with my desires, you know. Really, what I wanted to do was get close enough in that I'd take the examination for pilot training, which I couldn't do. You know, I never did quite pass it.

Marcello: Describe what the Curtiss was like from a physical standpoint. Talk a little bit about the ship itself.

Cottingame: It's been a little while. It was probably ninety-five feet wide; it was probably 400 feet long. I remember they had a sun deck, boat deck, and the main deck. Two decks down was the radio compartment and then where the sleeping quarters were.

We were just under the bridge.

Marcello: What exactly was the function of the Curtiss? In other words, what does an aircraft tender do?

Cottingame: Seaplane tender? Well, at the time we were there--mainly before the war--we were mainly taking supplies out to Midway, to Wake, to Hilo . . . this type thing . . . personnel. After the war, it was used as a headquarters for your admirals in the fleet, setting up advance bases for patrol squadrons. Mainly, if you want to get down to the exact function of it, it would be to set up advance bases for patrolling given areas.

Marcello: But during this period prior to the war, you were in the business of servicing the PBY's and the other seaplanes and so on.

Cottingame: Right. Right. At that time, we never had, because we'd never gone on any operations. I got on in October.

Marcello: Of 1941?

Cottingame: 1941. Of course, we made two trips after I got there. One was out to Midway and Wake, and then the other one was from Hilo to Honolulu to Hilo. So that didn't leave too much time. I believe we were circling around Wake sometime around October 26th. Then we came back in and took liberty and then went back out to Hilo and stayed a week or two. By this time, we'd used up all the time there was, you know, from October until in December. I'd probably been on the Curtiss maybe two months by the time this happened.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get when you went aboard the Curtiss? Now, you were not actually right out of boot camp, so perhaps the "old salts" aboard there wouldn't have considered you a "boot" as such at that time.

Cottingame: Oh, yes.

Marcello: They did?

Cottingame: Oh, yes (chuckle). See, then you were a "boot" until after you had shipped over at least one time, you know. Most of the people aboard, if they were a first class petty officer, they had at least eight, ten, or twelve years in the service. If they were a chief petty officer, they had more than thirteen years in the service, see.

Marcello: Rates moved very, very slowly in the Navy during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, did they not?

Cottingame: Well, at that time, you usually figured that if you had anything on the ball at all and you were real good, you could make chief on the fourth cruise after you had got your twelve years in. From then until the sixteenth year, if you hadn't goofed up too much, you could get to be a chief petty officer.

Marcello: And, of course, we're talking about fleet-wide competition, and there had to be an opening after you took the examinations and so on.

Cottingame: Right, right, right. They, at that time, ran the fleet.

Marcello: By "they," you're referring to the chief petty officers.

Cottingame: They ran the ship. I've got an example of one of them. I decided I wanted to carry out my own little personal project. When I got to this one department, the only man that could help me was the chief. I said, "Where is he?" They said, "Back in the chiefs' quarters." So I go barreling back into the chiefs' quarters, asked one of them, and he growled a little bit, "There he is over there." The man was asleep.

I went over, and he looked at me. He said, "And what is your name?" I told him. He said, "Don't I have any first class petty officers?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Have you spoken with them?" "No, sir." "Then get the hell out of here and leave me alone!"

At that time, a seaman second class didn't approach the chief petty officer unless he wanted him to, you know. I'm talking about your "old salts"; I'm not talking about the new ones that were coming in in the aviation and this part. I meant your shipboard sailors, you know.

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

Cottingame: You had an area, I would say, that was probably . . . I'd guess it was twenty-by-thirty. The bunks were three high. You had a cubicle for your clothing, which was probably eighteen-by-eighteen-by-eighteen roughly, a rough deal, and one mattress. They were adequate for sleeping and nothing more.

Marcello: In other words, as was the case on most ships, the living quarters

were somewhat cramped.

Cottingame: Well, if you want to say that in this area that you had . . . let's see, if I can remember right, you had four . . . you had seven tiers of bunks, three high and four long. They were all utilized.

Marcello: What sort of space was provided for stowing your gear and so on?

Cottingame: The stowing of your gear was in this eighteen-by-eighteen-by-eighteen cubicle (chuckle); you know, this was a locker. This is approximately what it was, you know. It would hold everything that you would carry aboard in a sea bag.

Marcello: Did you have small personal metal lockers or anything of that nature to keep your toilet articles and so on?

Cottingame: This is what we're talking about; this was all of it. This was your personal articles; you did not carry civilian articles aboard the ship. If you wanted civilian articles, you kept them over on the beach in a locker.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Curtiss?

Cottingame: Adequate. It was, you know, good, nutritious food. The average person, if he was a little spoiled, would become . . . let's say, it would be tiresome. But for an adult individual, it was adequate. It was well-prepared.

Marcello: Did you have to serve as a mess cook after you went aboard the Curtiss?

Cottingame: No, once you had finished one of these schools, you went directly to the department that you were supposed to function in.

Marcello: How was the food served aboard the Curtiss? Was it family-style or cafeteria-style at that time?

Cottingame: Cafeteria.

Marcello: It had the cafeteria-type arrangement installed then.

Cottingame: Oh, yes. Yes, no problem at all. You took your tray; you went through the line; and they served your tray. Then you went to sit down.

Marcello: In general, how would you describe the morale aboard the Curtiss during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Cottingame: Excellent.

Marcello: It was a happy ship, in other words.

Cottingame: You bet! You bet! Excellent.

Marcello: To what do you attribute this high state of morale?

Cottingame: Discipline. Discipline.

Marcello: Discipline in what sense? Can you elaborate upon that?

Cottingame: In the sense what discipline doesn't mean . . . I don't mean that you took disciplinary action. What I meant by this one was that you had a well-organized ship. If you had a man that if he was supposed to do his duty, he did it and he was rewarded for it. The camaraderie was there. You didn't have . . . oh, in other words, occasionally you would have the

one out of every 400 or 500 men that required disciplinary action from time to time, and it was always recurring. But the people were fair, and this is what I'm talking about, you know. Those old fellows that were the skippers of the ship and everything, their judgment was always pretty fair across the board. They weren't dishonest in any way.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your activities in the radio shack. How many people would be working there?

Cottingame: Probably, I would say, in this one you'd have four watches, and you'd have probably ten or twelve men to the watch. Before this started, it might not have been quite that many, but I would guess that probably forty people would have caught the entire gang. It might have been forty-four or forty-five.

Marcello: And I'm sure that you did not necessarily stand watch at the same time the whole time you were aboard the Curtiss. In other words, this would have probably changed or alternated from time to time.

Cottingame: Well, see, you're talking about the pre-war deal?

Marcello: Yes, strictly the pre-war deal.

Cottingame: Well, the pre-war deal, my deal consisted in the pre-war deal of sitting on a practice circuit, training programs, keeping the deck swabbed and paintwork cleaned. There was lots of leisure time.

Marcello: In other words, as a new man in the radio shack and as a

non-rated man at that time, you were assigned to tasks other than those that dealt strictly with operations in the radio shack.

Cottingame: Right. If you had a work gang on the ship, if you had to go scrape the sides, you know, if you went into dry dock . . . if you were a seaman second class, you was the work party. You was the first ones (chuckle), and there wasn't any problems with that.

Marcello: The fact that you'd been to radio school meant nothing at all.

Cottingame: Oh, no. No, no. You still had an apprenticeship to work out.

Marcello: On the other hand, from what you've said, I gather that you did receive a certain amount of on-the-job training to become a radioman aboard the Curtiss.

Cottingame: Oh, yes. Right. Right.

Marcello: Describe what that on-the-job training was like there.

Cottingame: On this one, you had Fox schedules that was a continuous running thing. At a certain time of the day, well, it started off slow, and then it built up as the time went on. Then you had areas where you had circuits that you could sit on that these kids from one ship to the other would receive dispatches that they knew were training dispatches. If you made mistakes on them, you know, they was corrected and this type of thing. But you were a messenger, you know. They used you as a messenger for carrying the dispatches around to the officers from the radio

shack. If you had a mimeograph machine to be operated, you learned to do this. They taught you to run your little coding machines that they had, you know, for, let's say, the minimum decoding and stuff like that.

Marcello: Now, when you're talking about these coding machines, what sort of codes are we talking about?

Cottingame: We're just talking about strip codes, you know, where you slide strips in and you line them up according to certain keys, and then you read down the line.

Marcello: How sensitive are these codes that you're talking about here?

Cottingame: None. You're talking about as far as secrecy?

Marcello: Yes.

Cottingame: Nothing. This is just average operations at that time. They had no secrecy, you know. But if you were doing this, and if they had a top priority or a secret dispatch, they didn't let a seaman "deuce" handle it. That's all (chuckle) there was to it, you know. But the others, which was just routine, they let you handle those.

Marcello: Awhile ago you talked about a FOX schedule. What were you referring to?

Cottingame: This was a schedule that went out to the entire fleet, you know, that they was just . . . that came like NERK was "all ships at sea." We copied those, and it came out from Honolulu.

Marcello: What does NERK stand for?

Cottingame: Lord, I don't know. It's been a long time (chuckle). I think that what it was was just a key. I don't think it stood for anything. I just think it was just a key that they used like NPM that they had for a station in Honolulu. I think FOX came from Washington, D. C. Like I say, it's still been a long time (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you find that the senior petty officers in that radio shack showed a propensity to train a young seaman second class if that seaman indicated a willingness to learn?

Cottingame: Oh, yes, they were very interested in helping you. Now, we were fortunate there, because the young fellow that we had was an "old man" of thirty-seven years old (chuckle) and very seasoned. He had a feeling for young people, you know, and did a good training job.

Marcello: So you do fit into the daily routine of life in the radio shack fairly quickly after you go aboard the Curtiss.

Cottingame: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. They utilized you immediately.

Marcello: And I assume that they were always glad to have new people up to a certain number, because in many cases it lessened their workload and so on.

Cottingame: Well, at that time, you know, they were always undermanned. You know, at any given point in time, they were just always undermanned; that's all there is to it.

Marcello: We're talking about a peacetime complement aboard the Curtiss

at that time.

Cottingame: Right, right, right.

Marcello: Now, in your training routine, were there any changes that occurred as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate?

Cottingame: No.

Marcello: Could you, as a youngster aboard the Curtiss, detect any changes at all in your routine?

Cottingame: No, no. Well, there was nothing because we were at peace; we had been led to believe that this was a permanent situation, and no one was rocking the boat.

Marcello: Now, when you picked up the Curtiss, did it go more or less directly to Honolulu or Pearl Harbor?

Cottingame: No, I went aboard the USS Hull from San Diego to Honolulu and transferred over to the Naval air station there, and from the Naval air station I went to the Curtiss.

Marcello: And I assume that your stays aboard the Hull and at the Naval air station were very, very short and very temporary,

Cottingame: Just as short a time as possible.

Marcello: They were transit stations, so to speak,

Cottingame: Right, right, right. I was just getting transportation on the Hull, and I probably spent thirty minutes on the air station before I was transferred over, see.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands on a more or less permanent basis? Were you thrilled with the prospect of going to Hawaii?

Cottingame: Most farm kids would have been (chuckle). Everything's new; everything's new. You bet.

Marcello: Did you have visions of a tropical paradise and the hula girls and all that sort of thing?

Cottingame: No, but I got my opportunity to see my first volcano just when we came in. There was one blowing, and I knew that's what it was. But it turned out they were burning the canefield off (chuckle).

Marcello: So it wasn't a volcano after all.

Cottingame: (Chuckle) No, no.

Marcello: Okay, well, let's describe the pre-war missions that the Curtiss was involved in after you went aboard. As you mentioned earlier in the interview, it really had not been servicing any airplanes as such while you were aboard.

Cottingame: Right. No.

Marcello: Now what sort of missions was the Curtiss undergoing?

Cottingame: Well, now, of course, they really don't tell the seaman second class too much what they're doing, but as best as I can remember, we went to Wake and we left some civilians. We transferred those guys out to Wake, and we left enough beer out there for those lads that they still had plenty left when the Japs got there;

they were not short of beer. And we transferred aviation fuel off at Wake.

When we went to Hilo . . . I really don't know why we went to Hilo except that at this time--it could be--that we went for gunnery practice. In other words, what we would do, we would go out and drag a sled for the high-altitude bombers. We would go out for gunnery practice for the personnel aboard the ship, and a plane from one of the islands, either from Hilo or from Honolulu or from Midway or Wake, would drag a target by for firing. This was the gunnery practice that they went out on.

Marcello: What sort of armament did the Curtiss have aboard?

Cottingame: None. You're talking about . . . now wait a minute . . . guns? Let's see . . . I was thinking in terms of armor as such.

Marcello: I'm referring to the weaponry aboard the Curtiss.

Cottingame: At that time, I believe it was 5-inch guns, 3-inches, and .50-caliber machine guns.

Marcello: Did you have a particular battle station aboard the Curtiss?

Cottingame: Yes, right. I was a messenger in the communications shack.

Marcello: In other words, when general quarters sounded, you would head for the communications shack.

Cottingame: That's right, yes.

Marcello: Did you have very many of these general quarters drills during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Cottingame: Let's say we had some, but I do not remember there being an excessive amount.

Marcello: In other words, you couldn't detect that they were occurring with more frequency as one gets closer to December 7th.

Cottingame: Well, I was not there that long. See, you know, in other words, how can you determine . . . if you're ignorant and you're a seaman second class aboard ship, when you don't know what the schedule is at all and you're trying to keep up with it and not get in trouble, how do you determine whether things are routine or whether they're abnormal? They could have told me anything, and I would have believed them then, see.

Marcello: When the Curtiss came into Pearl Harbor, where did it normally tie up?

Cottingame: Let's see, normally at Fox One. When we pulled in . . . let's see . . . we pulled in there the morning of the sixth, I believe, and there was a dredge at Fox One, so we pulled out at X-Ray Twenty-One and tied up on the opposite side of the island.

Marcello: You were over near Pearl City, then, were you not?

Cottingame: Right. Yes, when you looked across, you could watch the events going on in Pearl City from the ship.

Marcello: Battleship Row would have been on one side of Ford Island, and you would have been somewhere over on the other side.

Cottingame: Right, right. We was on the opposite side. I believe it was the Helena and the . . .

Marcello: Oglala?

Cottingame: No, the Oglala was over by the docks on the other side in the channel with the battleships.

Marcello: On December 7th, the Oglala was tied up alongside the Helena because the Oglala sunk.

Cottingame: Right. Yes, she got the torpedo that came up through the bottom. It porpoised on them, and it missed the Helena, I guess. Now, these are my figures. I'm trying to figure out the ship . . . there was a battlewagon just down the island from us, but I don't even remember which one it was.

Marcello: Were you around some destroyers over there where you were docked? Because I know later on, when we actually get into the battle itself, we have the Monaghan and some others that are somewhere around there.

Cottingame: At that time, now the way I remember it, as far as being tied up there, no. The destroyers were on the other end of the island down there. The first time I saw the Monaghan was when she was standing down the channel, and they were firing at the conning tower of this little two-man submarine.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the liberty routine aboard the Curtiss during that pre-Pearl Harbor period. How did the liberty routine work for you as a young seaman?

Cottingame: Well, my liberty was the same as anyone else as a seaman. You know, I had a watch . . . let's see . . . what did we call the

section? There was two sections that stayed aboard, and two sections was on liberty. The liberty was even or odd days, whichever way it was.

Marcello: In other words, it was a port and starboard liberty?

Cottingame: Right, right, right. Mine was the same as everyone else's.

Marcello: What time did liberty expire if you went ashore in Honolulu?

Cottingame: I really don't know. I believe it was twelve o'clock at night. I just don't remember.

Marcello: That's probably true, because I think that was the case with most of the other ships there in Pearl. In other words, there wasn't enough lodging.

Cottingame: If you were married, then you stayed overnight. If you were not, I believe it was up at twelve o'clock.

Marcello: As I was saying, since there wasn't a great deal of space for lodging in Honolulu, most sailors had to be back aboard at midnight.

Cottingame: Right. Right.

Marcello: Besides, most of you didn't have very much money with which to spend overnight liberty in Honolulu anyways, I'm sure.

Cottingame: You had all the money to last you the rest of your life . . . as long as you died before breakfast (chuckle). No, we were making thirty-six dollars every thirty days.

Marcello: What did you do when you went on liberty in Honolulu? I'm referring to you personally.

- Cottingame: Me personally? I was one of the odd balls. I went on what they called seaman "deuce" liberties. I was a sightseer; I walked a lot and just looked around to find out what was going on. I didn't have enough money to do any drinking and didn't care to do any drinking. Usually, I'd go over to get one good meal every payday, you know. This was the extent of it.
- Marcello: I gather that on the weekends, even in the pre-December 7th period, that downtown Honolulu was pretty crowded with servicemen.
- Cottingame: Right, Right, Now, they had had quite a bit of build-up. In fact, they had an area that they congregated in around over on the beach. I believe the name of the place was The Black Cat. (Chuckle) Everyone showed up and stood in line in front of The Black Cat. I've never been inside of The Black Cat, but, I mean, I was aware that it was there.
- Marcello: I understand that there were lines for everything in downtown Honolulu, especially during the weekends.
- Cottingame: Right, right, at that given time.
- Marcello: How great a problem, from your observation, was excessive drinking on a weekend? In other words, would there be a lot of drunks who would come back aboard the Curtiss after they had been on liberty in Honolulu?
- Cottingame: Not at this time. Now, we never experienced this until after the war. Now, most of the people that we're talking about came in two categories. There were people who were married and who had

their families there, and these people were very settled people. Now, I'm talking about the enlisted personnel, because I was not aware of the officers at that time. Then you had the other ones that was the raw recruit that had been in, say, two years or less. He was a rather naive individual that drank some but not enough for him to be excessive. I believe we had approximately 350 people aboard, and of this 350 people, I would say that you would probably have maybe 10 per cent of them that were heavy drinkers.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there were quite a few of the old Asiatic sailors aboard the Curtiss.

Cottingame: Right. He was a pretty solid individual. You know, most of the time, he had his head on right. He usually knew what was going on.

Marcello: In other words, those guys did not present any disciplinary problems or anything of that nature.

Cottingame: Oh, no. There was probably some of them who did, but, I mean, they would have presented a problem wherever they were--not because they were Asiatic sailors. You know, they were just good personnel.

Marcello: They were a different breed altogether, were they not?

Cottingame: They were a different breed of people,

Marcello: Talk a little bit about those Asiatic sailors, because that's a part of the old Navy that's no longer in existence.

Cottingame: Right. Actually, at that time, it wasn't in existence anymore. You know, we had really passed out of the phase of the old Asiatic sailor. These fellows were the guys that you could talk to that had been into China; they had been up the Yangtze River. They still got a little nostalgic when they remembered that they could have a woman, a cottage, a yard boy, a rickshaw boy, and a cook for forty dollars a month (chuckle). This was the thing, you know, that most of them, if they'd indulged in it, would talk about, because it's a different game.

Marcello: I gather that most of those individuals actually didn't want to be transferred back to the States. They would have preferred to have stayed over there.

Cottingame: Possibly. Now, I would think possibly that most of them who were back did not mind coming back, because the age had changed. In other words, these people that we're talking about that I'm remembering are people who had twelve, fourteen, fifteen years in the Navy. Most of them had indulged in all the activities they cared to indulge in, and they were happy to settle down somewhere else.

Marcello: I'm sure they had all sorts of sea stories that would have impressed a young seaman such as yourself.

Cottingame: Well, most of them, if they were trying to impress you with it . . . of course, now I was twenty-two . . . and you salted most of it down. You know, you could find some . . . the old boy

that had done anything at all sat over by himself and listened, but the man who had his mouth open probably never had done anything. The guy who had done something, he didn't talk about it too much. Because the lad who . . . in other words, most of them were excellent. In other words . . . the ones I . . . see, I came in contact with the people in the radio gang, and these people were participators. In other words, they were people who had participated in the Navy games; they had excelled in it; they could copy that code, you know. It wasn't too unusual to see one of them sitting there with a headset on and talking to someone and copying as fast as fifty words a minute (chuckle), see, and still hearing your conversation and talking to you. But they were good. You know, they were just outstanding people; they were professionals.

Marcello: You had a lot of confidence in being around those people.

Cottingame: Oh, yes. Yes, sir, I sure did. I was embarrassed to be around them; you know, because of my gross ignorance, I was embarrassed to be around them. Because they were the ones . . . if it had not been for those people, we would not have lasted as long as we did. You know, they were the ones that were the backbone of the fleet. In other words, you could not have taken that group of people and set up an organization that we set up in such a short time. You know, when we headed south after the war started, you could not have taken a group of recruits and

said, "Hey, let's go take the South Pacific."

Marcello: In other words, these guys became the cadre for the wartime Navy, so to speak.

Cottingame: They were it; they were it, you know. Anything you learned in the Navy, you learned . . . not necessarily the . . . let's say, let's don't hand the whole ball of wax to the Asiatic man, but he was of that same group. You know, it didn't detract anything from him. But any of your "old salts" served as the backbone.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7th, 1941. What I want you to do at this point, Mr. Cottingame, is to describe events as they unfolded during that weekend in as much detail as you can remember. You mentioned that the Curtiss came in on a Saturday, so I'll let you pick up the story from that point.

Cottingame: We came in Saturday morning. We came in from Hilo. We'd been over there for, I think, for a couple of weeks, I'm not sure.

Marcello: What were you doing over there?

Cottingame: I really don't know. You know, the skipper just didn't call the seamen second class up and explain to them what we were doing over there. I just really don't know, but I'm sure that it was delivering fuel or supplies or something like that. I had no idea at all. But on the morning of December 7th when

we got up, I was down in the chow hall and was just sitting down getting ready to eat.

Marcello: Well, let's back up here a minute and talk a little bit more about that Saturday, because there may be some important things that happened here, too. You mentioned that you came into Honolulu on that Saturday morning, and the Curtiss tied up. Did you have liberty that Saturday?

Cottingame: I don't remember whether I had liberty or not. I did not go on liberty.

Marcello: When would liberty normally commence if one had it on Saturday?

Cottingame: Just as soon as they dropped anchor. In other words, it was ready. I did . . . let's see . . . I did go over on the beach. I went over on Ford Island--I believe that's the name of the island there, isn't it--and we played tennis. I played tennis all that afternoon on December the 6th.

Marcello: When did you come back aboard the Curtiss?

Cottingame: Probably sometime before the evening meals. I probably left after the noon meal and came back, because I was not on the beach at all.

Marcello: Do you recall whether or not you actually were eligible for liberty that Saturday evening?

Cottingame: I don't even remember. I'm sure I was, because if I hadn't, I would not have been playing tennis.

Marcello: What did you do that evening aboard the Curtiss?

Cottingame: I have no idea. I have no idea at all.

Marcello: To your knowledge, was it a rather uneventful evening?

Cottingame: As far as I was concerned, evidently, it was.

Marcello: Do you recall if you perhaps watched a film or anything of that nature?

Cottingame: I haven't the slightest idea.

Marcello: Did they have films aboard the Curtiss on a Saturday evening?

Cottingame: As such, I don't remember. I just don't remember seeing a movie aboard the ship before. I'm sure they did, but I don't remember it.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7th. One of the things we have to remember is that Sundays were normally a day of leisure in the Navy if one did not have the duty.

Cottingame: Right, right.

Marcello: What did a Sunday morning mean to you if you perhaps did not have the duty? In other words, were you able to sleep in, so to speak?

Cottingame: If I did not have the duty?

Marcello: Yes.

Cottingame: Yes. Yes, you slept in and did whatever you wanted to. But this particular morning what we're talking about, I got up and went . . . you know, the first thing I remember what happened in the morning there is sitting at the table eating.

Marcello: I guess you were probably slated for duty on Sunday if you had had liberty on Saturday.

Cottingame: I haven't the slightest idea. I do not know; I do not know.

Marcello: Do you recall what you were eating at breakfast?

Cottingame: Yes, two eggs and an apple (chuckle). I never finished them. I still remember it.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story at that point. So you're eating breakfast on this Sunday morning. About what time was it?

Cottingame: Whatever time the first bomb hit. I don't know what time it was, except that all I remember is I was sitting there with a young fellow by the name of McDowell from Georgia, I believe. The first one I heard dropped on Ford Island or Hickam Field-- I don't know which one it was--but we had a cargo hatch that was like a picture window, you know, that you could look through.

Marcello: In other words, you heard this explosion, and you rushed to this cargo hatch to see what was going on.

Cottingame: No, no. No, no. We were sitting. All you had to do was look out the cargo hatch in the sitting position and see it.

Marcello: Did you have a good view of Ford Island from that position?

Cottingame: Like I say, I don't remember whether it was Ford Island or Hickam Field. I had a view of one of them with a bomb exploding. I heard the noise but was not aware of what it was. But when you looked up, there was the debris and everything.

Marcello: What was your first reaction when you saw this? Did you think

it was some sort of a training exercise or maneuver?

Cottingame: No, because, as I was saying, this young fellow by the name of McDowell, oh, probably had eight or nine years in the Navy. He was supposed to leave the Navy on Monday morning, and he was going to get discharged. His first reaction was, "Those dirty, little, yellow bastards done messed up my leave, recreation, and liberty!" But McDowell was aware of what it was when it happened. As a seaman second class, I would not have been aware of what it was.

Marcello: So McDowell identified the incoming planes as being Japanese.

Cottingame: I think McDowell identified the situation as it was and recognized immediately that no one else could do it, see, and saw some planes coming in. I'm pretty sure this is what he surmised, because I doubt very seriously in the time that he had to do this that he could recognize the plane. I think this was an instinctive thing more than anything else. It was something that he was expecting, you know, at that time.

Marcello: So what happens at that point? What do you personally do?

Cottingame: I followed McDowell.

Marcello: General quarters had not sounded?

Cottingame: No. But we were headed for general quarters.

Marcello: Did everyone else seem to be having the same objective in mind?

Cottingame: I wasn't watching. In other words, McDowell was one of your boys that was there, and, like I say, I was seaman second class,

and he seemed to be aware that he knew what was happening.

I knew where our general quarters stations were, so this is where we headed.

Marcello: So what happens when you get to the radio shack?

Cottingame: Well, in the process, in this interim of time from the time we left until we got there, general quarters was sounding. When we came out on the weather decks, this Japanese plane was flying in and fishtailing and spraying the deck.

We had a lad from Flatbush by the name of Bush that was heading down that deck trying to get inside, and these little slugs were coming in front of him. If he'd been a little faster, he would have made it (chuckle). I mean, he would have gotten cut in two had he been a little faster, because they were just going in front of him all the time.

This is when McDowell decided that he did not need to be out on the weather deck, and he made a dive back down through the conning on this ladder. After the plane went over, then we went into the radio shack, and it was a little confused.

Marcello: Were you scared at the point that strafing took place, or were things happening too fast for you to be scared?

Cottingame: Well, I was never scared. I'll give you a deal . . . throughout the entire day, in my interpretation, there was no fear involved at all. But since I've read a little bit about psychology, it seems a little strange to me that there has been no noise

attached to this at all.

Marcello: When you say "no noise attached to this," what do you mean?

Cottingame: When I watched them shoot this submarine--the conning tower--with the 5-inch gun, there was no noise. I remember no noise. When the plane dropped the shell that gutted the entire part of the ship, there was no noise as far as I'm concerned. When the plane crash-dived on us, I watched the boy fire those .50-calibers into him and watched him . . . you know, after he landed on the deck . . . after he crashed, he still kept firing at him, you know, and there was no noise as far as I'm concerned. So probably I was a little more scared than I thought I was (chuckle), you know. You know, this is one of those things that they tell me, if it's unacceptable, your mind just blanks it out, and that's all. This is what happened to me, I'm pretty sure.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens now when you get to the radio shack?

Cottingame: When I get to the radio shack, most of the professionals are there. You know, let's say there's enough of the people there that they have everything under control as far as they are concerned, you know, as far as the watches . . . setting up their watches and everything.

Marcello: What function were you assigned?

Cottingame: At that minute, nothing. See, we had a regular watch on; they had their regular messenger on. I believe we stayed in there

for a few minutes. In this process and in this interim of time, I couldn't tell you just exactly how these events happened, because, like I say, I wouldn't have known the next day. It's been thirty-some-odd years, so I wouldn't even know how the events happened then. But in that interim of time somewhere, I watched those torpedo planes come in across on Battleship Row. Then I watched the smoke, you know, that was coming up from them. We saw this one.

Marcello: Okay, let's describe this particular incident, since you were in the radio shack at this time and you really weren't performing any functions as such. Describe those torpedo planes coming in and the damage they did.

Cottingame: See, I couldn't describe any damage, because they were on the other side of the island. All I saw was some very, very beautiful operations of planes coming in that separated from a torpedo--you know, they just seemed to come in, float in, separated--and this is all that I could see of it, you know.

Marcello: You mentioned that they were "floating in," to use your term. I assume, therefore, that they were not necessarily coming in at a high rate of speed. Deliberate--is that a good way to put it?

Cottingame: I would think so. I think they realized that they had all the time in the world and knew what they were doing. They had the exact depth on those armor plates that were around those ships;

they had that torpedo set to run at a certain depth; they had to turn it loose at a certain speed; and this is what they were doing. You can say whatever you want to; they did a beautiful, effective job. In other words, anyone would have been proud of the job that they did that day, regardless of what our attitude toward them was at the time. But they were effective people.

Marcello: So actually, then, you could see those planes coming in, and then in some ways you probably could see only the after-effects of the damage that they did. I'm referring to smoke and debris and things of that nature.

Cottingame: Right. This is all, yes.

Marcello: Mainly because Ford Island was between you and the battleships.

Cottingame: Right. Right. No, we didn't have a clear view of the damage. We were aware that it had happened, but as far as how much had happened, you know, to give a detail of what it looked like, there's no way.

Marcello: Incidentally, what sort of a day was this in terms of weather and climate, that is, when the day first started . . . when the attack first started?

Cottingame: To me--the way I remember it--it was a beautiful, clear, balmy, sunny day--one of Honolulu's best, you know.

Marcello: In other words, it was a good day for an air raid.

Cottingame: You bet. Right (chuckle). It sure was.

Marcello: Okay, so you watch the activity over at Battleship Row.

What is the next thing you remember then?

Cottingame: Oh, the next thing . . . it's possibly not the next thing that I remember, but I do remember that when the two-man submarine came up. . . .

Marcello: This would have probably been somewhere around 8:30 a.m., then, according to the records--about a half-hour after the attack actually started.

Cottingame: I haven't the slightest idea.

Marcello: And you were still in the radio shack at that time.

Cottingame: I don't know just exactly how all of this happened, but I moved about the ship. Somewhere in there, I took over the messenger's duty. In doing this, one of the times was when the Enterprise's planes were coming in. I went to the bridge--our phone was out, so we had to hand carry those messages. They were trying to get everyone to cease fire, because these planes from the Enterprise was coming in, and they were shooting at them.

Marcello: Now, this was still during the daylight hours?

Cottingame: Right. Then the other one was when they were shooting at the two-man submarine and the Monaghan was standing down the channel. She came by--rolled by--and dropped two depth charges.

Marcello: Now, in the meantime . . . and we'll come back to this point. I'm getting a little bit ahead of the story here. Maybe you can't answer my next question, but I'll ask it, anyway. Was

the Curtiss in the process of trying to get up steam very shortly after the attack started?

Cottingame: No, the only time that we had any indication that we were supposed to get up steam at all was after it had been hit. In other words, they hit this one with a high-altitude shell, and it gutted the . . . it hit a roll of cable, I believe, down in the inside of the ship, and it blew the inside out. The fire that resulted, well, the fireman in there . . . and this didn't have any watertight integrity in the middle of the ship. When he would get too much water in there, the ship would roll to one side. Then they'd level it up, and the water would roll back to the other side. Most people thought, you know, she'd sink.

Commander Browder at that time decided that he wanted to put it up on the beach. He later became an admiral. One of the fellows, I believe, was a chief . . . let's see . . . he was a . . . what do you call him . . . the highest enlisted personnel on a ship . . . a quartermaster. The quartermaster explained to him that he couldn't do that, because if he beached it over there, he'd cut the telephone cable going to Pearl City, I believe. So he left it where it was, but I don't think we ever got up any steam. Now, maybe we did, but I don't know.

Marcello: Okay, again you mentioned that at the time that the Curtiss spotted the conning tower of the midget submarine, it had not gotten up

steam. Describe events as they unfold after the Curtiss spotted that midget submarine around 8:30. It did begin firing at the midget submarine.

Cottingame: Right. And we put a 5-inch shell through the conning tower. Then, as far as I'm concerned, the warrior of the day was the old boy who was aboard the Monaghan--354, I believe.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up here a minute now. We're still getting ahead of our story. You mentioned that the Curtiss sees the midget submarine, and it does fire at it. Do you recall any of that activity, that is, in terms of the spotting of the midget submarine and the firing and so on and so forth?

Cottingame: When I came out on the bridge, the conning tower and the top of the submarine were in view.

Marcello: You actually did see it.

Cottingame: Right.

Marcello: How far away was it about?

Cottingame: Oh, I would say . . . like I say, this has been a long time, but I would say a couple of hundred yards. Now, you know, that could be . . . I saw me a tornado here a couple of years ago, and it looked like it was right in my face, you know, but I found out that it really was a long way farther than that. So I tend to get excited. It could be 300 yards; it could be a hundred yards. But it had enough room that when the Monaghan came down through there . . .

Marcello: Let's forget about the Monaghan for a minute and talk about the Curtiss. Did you actually see the Curtiss firing upon that midget submarine?

Cottingame: Well, when I was standing there, we were firing and the Curtiss was firing as far as I was concerned. My interpretation is, yes, they were firing at the submarine.

Marcello: And did you see the hit that the Curtiss supposedly got on this midget submarine?

Cottingame: No, no. I saw the hole but not . . . I couldn't tell you who got that hole in there, see, because we're talking about a lad that was running out on the deck, had been down in the communications shack. When I came out, these things were taking place.

Marcello: Were there other ships besides the Curtiss firing at that midget submarine at that time?

Cottingame: I haven't the slightest idea, because when I came up there, it was like a football game. You know, everyone was cheering, "Get that son-of-a-bitch!" When it finally happened, the cheers went up. You know, somebody made a touchdown; that's all there was to it. I just assumed that the Curtiss did it.

Marcello: And I assume that you probably didn't have too much of a concept of what a midget submarine was and all that sort of thing.

Cottingame: I knew that was a midget submarine. A person does not have to be too perceptive, once you see this one on top of the water

and after having seen another submarine, to know this "ain't" the biggest submarine you've ever seen.

Marcello: Also, according to the records, that midget submarine fired a torpedo at the Curtiss which did not hit it. Do you recall that?

Cottingame: I have no idea. You know, what I'm saying is, as soon as I handed Browder the dispatch, I had other places to be. You're not in the position of observing. In other words, it's like the lad who told the general he made a mistake in his recalling the events of the war during a school class. The general said, "Now, son, I just fought the damn war; I didn't major in it." (chuckle) So what I'm saying is, some of this can be confused in my mind, because my deal was that I ran up to the bridge from the radio shack; I took the time to wait until I could get the commander's attention to get him to take the dispatch and to sign for it. When I got this, I had other things to do. See, this was it, and this is as it should be.

Marcello: Now you seem to remember a great deal about what the Monaghan was doing, because it was also involved in this activity with this midget submarine. So describe, in the meantime, what the Monaghan was doing.

Cottingame: The Monaghan was standing down the channel from, I believe, the sea lane; I'm not real sure. When she came by, the submarine rolled up against it. It made contact,

Marcello: That's an excellent point that you make. The Monaghan didn't actually ram the submarine as such. It kind of grazed it, so to speak, did it not?

Cottingame: Right. The best I saw, the Monaghan was coming here (gesture); the submarine was actually at an angle in toward the Curtiss, and she was coming from this side (gesture). What was happening, he was going by him, and what he was going to do--my interpretation--was to throw the stern around where it would be over the submarine. When it slid around, he cut his turn just a little bit short or say "squashed out," and it hit the . . . it looked like to me . . . it looked like it hit about the last quarter of the ship, is where it hit.

When it came by, the old boy . . . and I can still be wrong, but I think it was the chief petty officer. I was watching the hatch, and he pulled these . . . now don't get me to tell what you pull to get a depth charge loose, but he dropped two of them. I saw the results of this one, as far as I'm concerned.

Marcello: By this time, then, the midget submarine was on the surface. It was virtually completely on the surface.

Cottingame: Well, let's say the entire top surface . . . I'd say from remembering that possibly a quarter of the top of the entire depth of the submarine itself was above water. The entire conning was above water. When I saw this one come up . . . now,

I didn't see anything of the submarine after it blew up and the debris settled. Now whether it went down immediately . . . whether I left then or not . . . all I remember was the parts of the submarine going in the air.

Marcello: I gather there would have been all sorts of cheering and so on at this point, too.

Cottingame: Oh, yes. Everyone was rather jubilant, because you've just been handed a reprieve (chuckle).

Marcello: Now, sometime after this, the Curtiss actually shoots down a bomber which crashes into it.

Cottingame: Right.

Marcello: Describe what you remember of this particular affair.

Cottingame: I really couldn't tell you how much I remember of what I saw and how much I remember of what I heard. Once you see these Jap planes going by and you hear about it . . . but what I saw that I know that I saw . . . can remember . . . and I can visualize the other. This fellow came in from the starboard side, and he came in, if I remember right, from over Ford Island. I may be wrong about where he came in from, but he came in from the starboard side, and he was dropping in from, I would say guessing, from about 500 feet.

Marcello: He was definitely dropping in to attack the Curtiss.

Cottingame: Well, no, his problem was . . . he was not trying to attack the Curtiss, because he had already been disabled. If I remember

correctly, they had two men. But the thing that I remember was that the man was moving from side to side, and he had his canopy back. He was consciously flying that plane directly to crash dive on the Curtiss. I mean, you didn't have to ask anyone what he was trying to do. In other words, had he missed, he would have lost his . . . you know, he would have not accomplished what he set out to do. This kid that I was telling you about that was doing the firing was just off the bridge out on the next deck in the right-hand side. He was pumping those .50-calibers into him, but this didn't slow the man down as far as what he was doing.

Marcello: I'm sure all sorts of guns in the vicinity were opening up on that plane.

Cottingame: I was only aware of the kid that I was standing by, you know, the one that was with the twin .50-calibers. As far as what the rest of them were doing, I have no idea.

Marcello: This is a single engine plane that's heading toward the Curtiss.

Cottingame: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Okay, describe the crash itself from what you remember.

Cottingame: All I remember is when it crashed there was a flash, and the kid's still firing, and then, as far as I'm concerned, it left. You know, I had to go somewhere else.

Marcello: Could you feel the shock or the jolt of this plane hitting the Curtiss?

Cottingame: I felt no shock; I heard no noise like I'm telling you. That part I don't remember.

Marcello: Approximately how far from you had that plane hit?

Cottingame: Oh, let's see . . . I would say possibly seventy-five to a hundred feet, but I'm not sure. In other words, you've got the mainmast on the Curtiss, and then you've got the aftermast on that sundeck up there. I was standing on the bridge, and it hit behind the aerographer's shack. In fact, it was quite a bit behind the aerographer's shack. The fact is, I guess, it must have hit almost midship.

Marcello: Were you sprayed or showered with any debris or anything of that sort?

Cottingame: No. No, nothing at all. It just didn't reach that far.

Marcello: Now, in all of this period that we're talking about, you are in essence carrying messages here and there.

Cottingame: Yes. This was my function after it got started.

Marcello: So the radio shack is still your central location. You deliver your messages; you return to the radio shack.

Cottingame: Right. This is my main function, is to get it up there and get back for the next one.

Marcello: Now, I gather that after that plane crashed into the Curtiss, the ship became a target for other Japanese planes. In other words, they evidently could see the fire, and they figured that here was a ship that had been hit, so they might as well try

and finish it off. So other planes are coming in, isn't that correct?

Cottingame: I don't really know. I don't remember any such thing. What I'm saying is, I don't remember the Curtiss as being a central target; I remember the Curtiss as being an afterthought. Because the first place is, we were not where they had designed that we should be. The second place is that this happened late enough . . . I don't even remember . . . the high-altitude shell hit us in there sometime. What the sequence of them is, I don't know.

Marcello: Okay, the sequence is that the Curtiss spotted the midget submarine first and was firing at it. Then the next important event was the Japanese plane crashing into the Curtiss. The third thing of importance is the subsequent attacks that occurred, and on several occasions, there were near misses from bombs. Then finally, of course, this one artillery shell, as you mentioned, does hit the Curtiss and explodes in its innards.

Cottingame: Where I was, see, in other words, I would have not been aware of these near misses or any of this. To get my attention at that time, you had to have something that was there, in other words, because I was well-occupied with what I was doing.

I do remember somewhere in that time--I don't know just exactly where it was--I had to go aft to get a dispatch to one

of the people who were functioning at that time as one of the leading personnel on the ship. In doing this, I had to go around some of this area where this high altitude shell had hit. I do remember that at this time the machine guns on the fantail were firing, but what they were firing at, I did not have time to stop to wait to see, you know, and describe or even make an interpretation of what they were firing at, you know.

Marcello: So to your knowledge, then, you actually can't remember that artillery shell having hit the Curtiss.

Cottingame: Only to this deal when I was going down through the manhole. I got the pressure coming up.

Marcello: Describe that affair.

Cottingame: Well, you know, just filling the manhole when you unlocked it, went down through it, you know, down to the ladder below, well, this rush of air came by. As far as I was concerned, I had no idea what was happening then.

Marcello: Did it knock you down or off the ladder or anything of that sort?

Cottingame: Oh, no. No, no. It was just one of those things, and you found out later that this is what happened, you know. It was one of those things. Because in that same . . . if you can imagine how naive a kid off the farm is . . . and just because that you put a kiddo in that position where bravery is required, where efficiency is required or desirable, it "ain't" necessarily so

that that's the way it is, you know, because he's just a farm kid.

But what I'm bringing up here . . . and I would suspect that this is somewhere about the time that shell hit or sometime after that shell hit. Because after this, I had gone back into the flag plot, and they had three people who were coming up from below decks. One of them had a belt on and some shoes. They asked him, "Do you want me to get you a medic?" He said, "No, give me a cigarette. I'll be dead in just a short while." They asked for volunteers to go down in the handling room. My interpretation was that they wanted volunteers to go down where he came from.

I knew this was going to be rough, so I volunteered. Bravery was not my problem. My problem was I didn't have guts enough to let those people around me know how really scared I really was, you know. So I volunteered, and when I walked through the door, this chief petty officer . . . did I tell you about the nice, solid lad by the name of Stout who was thirty-seven years old? He told them, "You can't take that kid there, because he's my messenger!" Had it not been daylight and the crowd had not been that thick, I would have kissed him right there (chuckle), you know, because I was glad to get out of there. You're talking about what's going on? My interpretation was that I was going back where he came from, and I

knew I didn't want to go back to where he came from. But you volunteered to keep from admitting who you are.

Marcello: So you did continue to stay right there in the radio shack and perform duties there.

Cottingame: Well, I was really around the ship, moving around quite a bit. This was my problem.

Marcello: Did you ever view the aftermath or the destruction that that bomb or artillery shell had caused? Did you ever get in that section of the ship?

Cottingame: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe the damage as best you can remember.

Cottingame: Oh, as best as I can remember on the thing . . . of course, now here's the thing. When I went through there, they were running up and down the area with hoses fighting fire. I was routed around this area, because I would have been detrimental to them. So actually, you couldn't say that I saw anything except when I went through the after repair room towards the radio repair,

This young fellow by the name of Lowry, who was about thirty-eight or thirty-nine years old, one of the Asiatic sailors, had been there with a young man about eighteen or nineteen years old in the radio repair. A piece of this shrapnel from this shell came through the bulkhead, and the kid was standing talking to Lowry. He just changed expressions and fell forward. When he did . . . well, Lowry was explaining

this to me that he was just . . . the hole in his back when it came through.

Then later on, they told me that this kiddo that I'd been playing tennis with the day before by the name of Horich . . . I believe was the kid's name. They had pulled him out of the radio transmitter room. One of the transmitters had turned over, and they had him over by the outer decks there. They were from time to time . . . I'd say it wasn't thirty minutes . . . he wasn't aboard thirty minutes after this thing happened. They would take that tourniquet off and let the blood circulate. But he told me when I went by that they got the one that had the _____ on it. This was the foot that they pulled off when they pulled him out from under the transmitter.

Somewhere in there, Lowry had moved on up to the communications area, because his area evidently was out of action, anyway. He wanted me to go back there to see if Benny Soleck was alive. He was one of the Asiatic lads. On the way back down there, I met the new commanding officer; I don't even remember what his name was now, but he'd just taken over the ship a couple of weeks before. I met him and I asked him if I could have permission to go in, and he said, "Well, you could if you'd get a medic." So the medic was coming up, and he and I and the medic went into the transmitter room, and, sure

enough, Benny was dead, you know. He was burned beyond recognition when we got there. But that's all I remember about any of that.

Marcello: Do these sights, that is, the injuries and so on have any effect on you as a twenty-two-year-old at that time and with all the excitement taking place?

Cottingame: As far as I could tell, no. You know, I think it's just something that . . . I may be wrong, but I think it's just something that if you survive, your mind automatically closes. I don't think it had anything to do with what I wanted to do or what I didn't want to do. But it's just one of those things. It's not whether you're afraid or not; it's just what your mind accepts at that time.

Marcello: What did you do during the aftermath of the attack?

Cottingame: They gave me a . . . well, I don't remember just exactly what it was, but they had some paperwork that I was using in the main office. That was in the afternoon. Somewhere in there, we had the lad by the name of Gonal that was not all that with us. He had had the mid-watch the night before, and as soon as it was over, he went down to his sleeping quarters and went to sleep. Before this . . . the ship I keep trying to remember the name of that was sunk over by the . . . you know, settled in the water over by the island, he wanted to know what had happened to her, you know. I told him they had flooded their

watertight compartments, and this satisfied him, you know. They sent me down to wake him up, and I woke him up. He came back and told this chief by the name of Stout, "Chief, I'll be glad when they get this damn drill over with." He said, "I had the mid-watch and I'm sleepy." This is probably around twelve o'clock, and that man had been through this and he doesn't know yet that it was war. Stout tells him, "Drill hell! This is the real McCoy!" (chuckle) You wouldn't believe that a kid could go through something like this and not be aware that it was not a drill. Because if it had've been, it was the most realistic drill.

You talk about in the aftermath. I really don't remember what happened in the evening, except I went over on the island for something, and we came back aboard ship. I don't even remember what the work party was, but it was some kind of a work party. But we came back that afternoon, and they had passed the word to look out, you know, and be on the watch for ships coming out of the sun, you know. We're talking about the future Japanese ships. Everyone was topside getting their bunks together, you know, and I thought this was a little silly.

Marcello: When you say they were topside getting their bunks together, do you mean they were going to be sleeping on topside?

Cottingame: (Chuckle) They were going to sleep on topside that night, you know. I thought that was a little bit silly, so I decided to

go down and bathe and shave and go to bed. I went down through officers' country, and they had this blue light on. They had these people--I didn't realize what it was--they had these people that were not in the best of condition, and they had a sheet over them. I wondered what that was, and I looked. That bothered me a little bit. I undugged the next door and went through, and it bothered the hair on the back of my neck a little bit more. Every time I'd go through one of those watertight compartments, well, it bothered me a little bit more.

But I finally got down to my--in pretty good shape--got down to my bunk or got down to my locker. What I did, I unlocked my locker and had started to reach in to get me some soap and a towel to go take a shower. I'm aware that I'm the only guy down there. All the sudden the ship creaks a little bit, and I'm topside. You know, this is where I first knew where the panic button was.

Marcello: In other words, when that ship seemed to list a little bit, you got up topside as fast as you could.

Cottingame: (Chuckle) Right. This is the nearest thing to an emotional problem that I had that I recognized.

Marcello: Now, when you were getting to your quarters and you mentioned that officers' country and so on was being used for the casualties, were these the dead that you were viewing?

Cottingame: Right. Right. How many there were, I haven't the slightest idea.

Marcello: What sort of an appetite did you have that day?

Cottingame: Afterwards, I don't remember this one, but I do remember that for, oh, probably four, five, or six months that you'd start with some food, and you'd smell that flesh, and you weren't as hungry as you were.

Marcello: I've heard it said by other people that it took a long time to get rid of that stench of death, so to speak.

Cottingame: Well, what I'm saying is, this was not something that was with me all the time. I couldn't say that I was consciously aware of it, but it was one of those things that, you know, like I said, for six months possibly that occasionally . . . and I think it's all in your imagination; I don't think it's real at all. It's just one of those things that people find repulsive, and once it happens I think that probably it's a contagious thing. You hear somebody talk about it, and maybe it's real and maybe it isn't. But I think it's a psychological thing more than anything else.

Marcello: What sort of rumors did you hear in the aftermath of the attack?

Cottingame: Oh, let's see. They had landing parties coming in; they had people that had already landed; there was Japs in the hills that was saboteurs. All of these things. Man, you had enough scuttlebutt to last for an entire war, but you learned to discard them pretty quick. Scuttlebutt doesn't last as long in the communications gang as long as it does in some other parts of the

ship, because they are fortunate enough that they read some of the dispatches. Under these circumstances, everything was plain language.

Marcello: You mentioned that sometime during the early evening hours or late afternoon hours, you did return to your quarters with the intention of taking a bath. Had you been relieved?

Cottingame: I'm sure I had. I'm sure I had, because, in other words, by this time you had a full complement. I don't think we'd lost . . . I think there were 350 men. I believe we got killed somewhere between thirty or thirty-five. I don't really remember exactly what it was. We probably had another fifty-some-odd either major or minor casualties; some of them were negligible. You know, there was more Purple Hearts passed out that day possibly than there was wounds, you know (chuckle). You know, because this was one of the things; people get very zealous in doing this, you know.

Marcello: Do you remember the firing at the planes coming in from the Enterprise that evening?

Cottingame: I remember sometime during the day . . . I don't remember that evening, but sometime during the day, I remember heading for the bridge with a dispatch concerning to cease fire. There was two of them that day. One of them was for the Curtiss to cease fire, because the duds were going into Wheeler Field barracks, I believe. In other words, there was something about

that fuse or something on a 5-inch shell that they were not doing, and the dud was going through Wheeler Field barracks. I remember that one. Then the other one was that they should cease firing because those were friendly planes coming in. What time of day it was, I haven't the slightest idea, because, as I say, it's been a long time. But I do remember taking the dispatch up to the bridge; that's all I can remember of that.

Marcello: Do you remember what you were doing in the days following the attack on December 7th?

Cottingame: Well, let's see. I believe we pulled up to the dock somewhere. I don't know whether it was X-Ray One or whether we went into dry dock or what we did. But most of the time after this, I was working one of those little switchboards. The fact is, that's one of the duties that I had . . . I'd forgotten that one, but that's one of the duties that I had before the war started, was operating this little switchboard for the communications throughout the ship as far as the telephones were concerned. That was one of the duties that I did in the next four days.

Marcello: Describe the extent of the damage as you observed it at Pearl Harbor in general during those days following the attack. Now, I assume that after awhile, you perhaps had a chance to look at this damage more objectively and could see the so-called big picture. What did the harbor and so on look like in terms

damage?

Cottingame: Well, let's say the damage that I saw was that the entire effectiveness of the fleet had been neutralized. You know, it was just . . . it was rather disappointing. The first place is, I don't know how you would ever describe it or not unless someone had been there. But watching those torpedo planes come in was the first time that I ever realized the stupidity and the futility of war. You know, it's just one of those things that you find out as a kid that there "ain't" but one animal that can kill off another one like a human being, see. You see you're right in the middle of it, and it's the most stupid thing that you've ever encountered in your life. This is reality.

What I saw in this one right here (gesture) was . . . oh, you know, this had changed my entire attitude. Before this, I knew there was somebody up there that was going to take care of me. Then all of a sudden at twenty-two, I realized that boy wasn't as smart as I heard they were; they weren't really going to take care of me. What bothered you was when your superior officers did not make those grand decisions that you expected them to, you know (chuckle). Things were not being taken care of.

Marcello: Let me go back to my question again. What sort of physical damage were you able to observe there in the harbor? What

impressed you in terms of the physical damage that was done?

Cottingame: What do you want me to do--name the ships that I saw?

Marcello: No, not necessarily. Describe what the surface of the water looked like and things of this nature?

Cottingame: As far as I'm concerned, the only thing that would have bothered the water at all immediately around the island was the oil. But as far as any unusual amount of debris, there was not, you know, much on the surface of the water. The fact is, everything looked rather clean after it was all over with, as far as I was concerned, see. But, you know, I'm pretty sure that they sent your liberty parties out in such a way that you did not get a real close view of it and all this type of thing. I'm sure they protected us a little bit under these circumstances.

Marcello: Did you more or less have a sense of anger toward the Japanese?

Cottingame: Oh, no, I didn't. Personally, I did not. You know, it's just one of those things. The only thing that disappointed me more than anything else was the plane when it crashed aboard the ship and when I found out it had a Fairchild radio in it. This disturbed me (chuckle). I was a little angry at the man in the United States that had sold the Japanese a Fairchild radio, you know. This bothered me some. But as far as being angry at the Japs, no.

Marcello: Did the discovery of this Fairchild radio get the same sort of reaction from your shipmates as well?

Cottingame: I haven't the slightest idea. I haven't the slightest idea, because it was not there that long, you know. Oh, I'd say this became somewhat of a bitter joke that you would have Firestone tires and Fairchild radio gear aboard the plane that was shooting at you (chuckle), you know. This was probably just a cynical, bitter approach.

Marcello: I assume that the Curtiss would have remained there at Pearl Harbor for some time after the attack, because it had damage that had to be attended to.

Cottingame: We stayed there possibly . . . I believe we came back the first time out after Pearl Harbor; we went in after some repairs. The first time out after that, we came to San Diego and picked up some . . . I believe it was some SBD's and took them back. We got there, I believe, on New Year's Eve and left New Year's Day; I'm not real sure about that.

Marcello: So you were able to get your repairs made in fairly short order.

Cottingame: Well, see, our repairs were nothing more than internal or superstructure repairs. We didn't have any damage as far as the hull was concerned or the main frame of the ship was concerned; there was none there.

Marcello: Most of the repairs were evidently made right there at Pearl.

Cottingame: Oh, yes. See, we went--if I've got my figures right--we went in and they did all the cutting and everything there. I don't know whether it was at the dock or where it was, you know.

Then we went south after this.

Marcello: How long did you remain aboard the Curtiss altogether?

Cottingame: I think I left there in July . . . no, I left there in September of '43. I stayed for the entire early portion of the war. Of course, she caught another kamikaze later on in the war after I left her.

Marcello: Well, that's probably a good place to end this interview, Mr. Cottingame. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to participate. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things.

Cottingame: I don't know whether they are or not. You know, some of the things that I told you could be erroneous, because there's been lots of water over the dam since then.

Marcello: Well, through cross-checking and so on, we'll probably be able to distinguish these things. But I'm sure that historians will find your comments most valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.

Cottingame: I hope so. I hope so.